



FIVE WINGS OF THE HEART

PRAYER MANDALA WORKBOOK AND JOURNAL

*A five-fold vision of meditation / prayer / blessing / affirmation
centered on gratitude and care for the Earth and all Her creatures*

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July 2021



THE CALLING TO MEND THE WORLD
(FROM A POSTER IN THE 1970S)



FIVE WINGS OF THE HEART

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| Introduction | Reflections on prayer, creative resilience and compassionate resistance |
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| Section Two | Transformational Teams of Two / Companions in Blessing |
| Section Three | Twelve Vows in the Eternal Now |



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Five Wings of the Heart ~~ A Mandala Vision

of Eco-Spirituality, Creative Resilience & Compassionate Resistance – 7/30/2021 Revision

By Dennis Rivers & friends – DeepGreenAwakening.net/library/five-wings-of-the-heart.pdf

PROLOGUE: GLOBAL EMERGENCY AND HUMAN EMERGENCE

The *Five Wings of the Heart* approach to eco-spirituality is a *mandala* teaching, a vision of spiritual life expressed through vivid visual forms. This vision is about saying YES to life in five widening circles, and about nurturing that life under very difficult circumstances.

The *Five Wings* path mirrors the deep journey of human spiritual development, from asking for blessings, to opening to blessings, to becoming a living blessing.

I share it with you as one possible path toward living mindfully, compassionately and creatively in a world facing a set of enormous and overlapping challenges. These include the climate crisis, perpetual war, relentless inequalities, runaway industrial poisoning of the Earth, and global species extinction.

The *Five Wings mandala* series, influenced by both systems theory and ancient wisdom, is an open-ended invitation to, and exploration of, living an eco-spirituality of kindness and clarity, no matter how violent and confused the world around us has become, or may yet become.

In the course of my life I have become convinced that to live for peace, reconciliation with nature, and creative love, in a world as profoundly addicted to war and greed as our is, is the true "Great Work", as Father Thomas Berry named it, the noblest calling of every person in our time.

Inspired by the lives of many eco-saints, the *Five Wings* practices express my desire to begin "living the answer," "being the world I want to see," and personally embodying the reverence-for-life virtues I hope everyone will practice. In my view, two elements make this "living the answer" different today from how it might have unfolded in previous eras.

First, through electronic communication, ***we know much, much more about the unprecedented damage being done, and about the pain being inflicted.*** And thus we have, many of us, a more keenly felt pain for the world, and an unavoidable sense of responsibility to transform the world in which we live, and clean up the toxic messes we have made.

And second, there is a growing mountain of evidence, from all the Earth sciences and from the study of complex systems, ***that everything here on Earth, including us, is deeply interwoven with everything else.*** We are all in the same ecological, climate crisis, nuclear meltdown boat. So the fate of all those "others," way over there, will soon be our fate.

(Many native peoples appear to have known this for a long time. Ecology and systems theory are modern rediscoveries of it.)

This theme of deep connectedness is also at the heart, both uplifting and challenging, of most spiritual traditions across the world. But in our individualistic, short-sighted, take-all-you-can-get culture, so many people do not want to recognize that essential interwovenness. This seems to be true no matter how many regretful and traumatized combat veterans kill themselves, or how many species of plants and animals disappear forever as we humans push them over the cliff of extinction.

It is not at all clear how we humans will survive if we do not develop a more interwoven and cooperative vision of the world and ourselves. The work of the great ecologist, Donella Meadows, on inflection points in complex systems, suggests that creating and living such a vision is the deepest social change work we can do.

More than half a century ago, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., contemplating U.S. preparations for a nuclear war that (we now know) would have killed all of us, warned us in the strongest possible language, that if we did not learn to live together as brothers [and sisters] we would surely perish together as fools. Today, it is clear that learning to live together as sisters and brothers desperately needs to be reaffirmed in relation to all people on Earth, and extended to reach the entire web of life, upon which our lives are utterly and totally dependent.

Please find your way to live that deep green awakening of connectedness and compassion, and to garden it in the garden of human life. May the *Five-Wings-of-the-Heart mandalas* help you on your way.

My notes

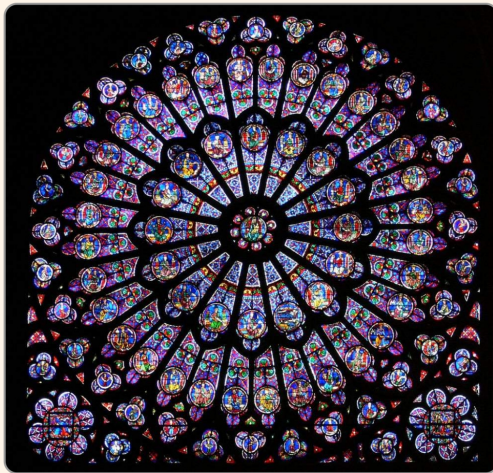
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Five-Wings-of-the-Heart – A Vision of Human Unfolding

I (Dennis Rivers) am a San Francisco Bay area writer, graphic artist, eco-activist, systems analyst and spiritual seeker/student. I developed this *mandala* vision of meditation / prayer / affirmation / action / celebration out of my own decades-long struggles to stay sane in a world that appeared to have gone mad with nuclear weapons and chemical pollution. Along with my own experiences in meditation, dreams and prayer, the *Five Wings* vision draws on inspirations from sacred geometry, Permaculture and the study of natural systems, from authors and teachers such as Joanna Macy, Fritjof Capra, Thomas Berry, Ramon Panikkar, Gandhi, and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and from many other recent ecological and psychological thinkers and writers. My quest has been to translate their beautiful and inspiring ideas into a moment-to-moment life of connectedness, blessing and creative transformation.

The *mandala* form of art has appeared in many widely separated cultures: among the Navajo/Dine as sand paintings, among Tibetan Buddhists as *thanka* paintings, and among European cathedral builders as rose-shaped stained glass windows.

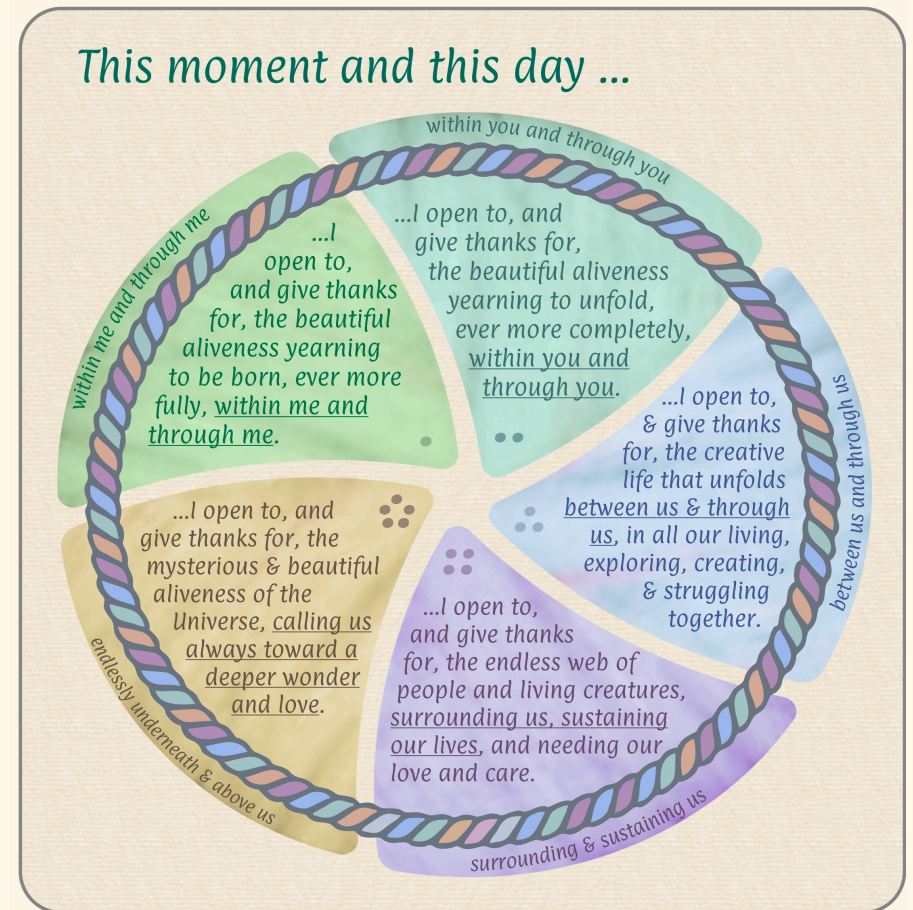


Contemplating Connectedness & “How It All Fits Together”

Photo by Julie Anne Workman. Creative Commons License: CC-BY-SA 3.0

The general intention of *mandala*-making around the world is to explain and express the interwoven life of the universe, all creatures, and the human self. *Mandalas* are not about any one thing, but rather about the ***pattern that connects*** everything to everything in a totally interwoven cosmos.

The image below is the first in the *Five-Wings-of-the-Heart Mandala Series* (featured in the chapters following this Introduction).



Mandala Drawing and Text by Dennis Rivers – Creative Commons

Mandala 1 – An affirmation for the beginning each day

(Each element interweaves with and supports all the other elements.)

My notes

People as gardeners of the Tree of Life and one another

The *Five Wings mandalas* express a “widening circles” vision of, and faith in, the unfolding of life: ***that we are here on Earth to bring out the best in ourselves, to bring out the best in one another, and to nurture the web-of-life-and-people that makes our lives possible.***

The *mandalas* explore these themes in a systematic, visual, five-fold way. The *Five Wings of the Heart* paradigm envisions people as living and growing by bringing a constellation of related virtues (attention, gratitude, compassion, courage, and several more) into the following five fundamental human relationships:

1. my relationship to **my own deepest strengths** and inner resources
2. my relationship to you, and **your unfolding as a person**
3. my/our relationship to, in and with **the life energy that unfolds between us** in all our shared activities
4. my/our relationship to, in and with **the web of life-and-people that surrounds and sustains us**, and needs our love and care
5. my/our relationship to, in and with **the mysterious life of the cosmos**, including all our ancestors from the beginning of time, and all our descendants, all the future generations we influence, plant, animal and human.

These five relationships can be visualized with a wide variety of metaphors: Five Branches on the Tree of Life, Five Fingers on the Hand of Being Human, Five Folds in a Ribbon of Blessing (shown at right), and many more. In addition to the Five Wings mandala diagrams, I include some examples of alternate geometries in this book, and you are welcome to develop your own way of visualizing the five interwoven and mutually enhancing processes in human experience and development explored here. *(Please share your creative explorations with a world in need of inspiration.)*

By naming, embracing, exploring, cultivating and celebrating these five interwoven relationships, we open ourselves to participate in the

mending / blossoming of the world, in widening circles, and in the unfolding of our own personhood. As an open-source, contemporary ecological spiritual path, the Five Wings can be as deeply religious, spiritual, non-theistically reverential, or nature-celebration-oriented as one’s heart directs.



Morning Prayer Mandala
Expressed in an Alternate Five-fold Ribbon Geometry

My notes

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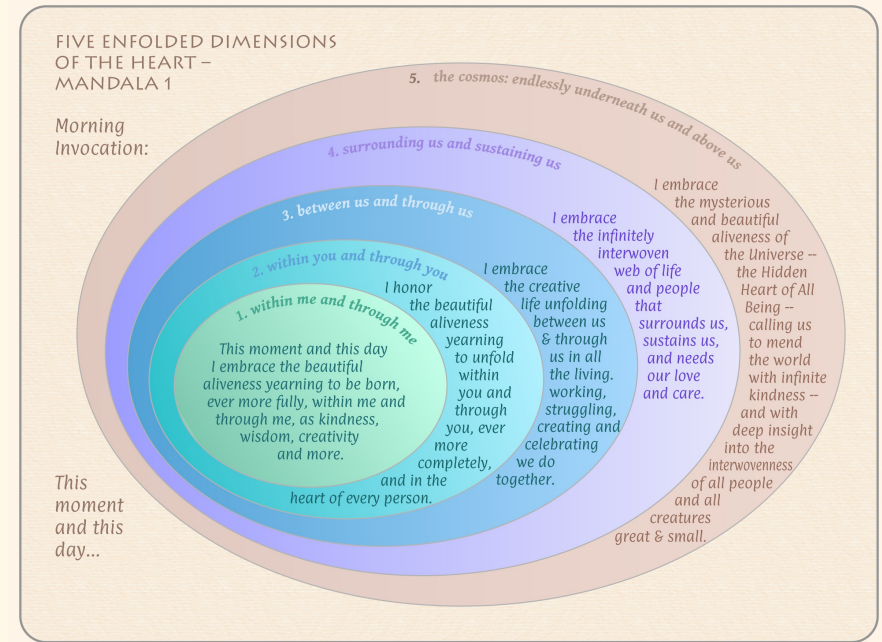
Meditation, prayer and affirmation are some of the central ways in which we mobilize our inner resources in the face of life's great challenges. I began to work on the *Five Wings of the Heart* vision around the year 2000, after approximately thirty-five years of study, prayer, anti-nuclear protests, and nonviolence trainings. During that time, unfortunately, the threat of nuclear war did not diminish at all, and the global loss of species known as the Sixth Great Extinction accelerated. To paraphrase Samuel Johnson, nothing concentrates the mind like the thought of being blown to smithereens in the morning.

Thinking about two famous sayings attributed to Gandhi: ***My life is my message***, and ***Be the change you want to see***, inspired me to start thinking about several related, creative questions: "What sort of a person would I need to become, in order to create more of the world I myself want to live in? And how would I get there?" This is parallel to a saying of the American spiritual teacher, Ram Das, perhaps influenced by both Gandhi and the Golden Rule: ***Work to build the kind of world in which you yourself would like to live.***

How then shall we live? For many years I had been working to make the world a much better, fairer, kinder, wiser place, while sort of imagining that I myself would not necessarily have to become a better, fairer, kinder, wiser person. The recent research on mirror neurons in the human brain suggests that I was mistaken in my absent-mindedly self-serving assumption; the research strongly suggests that, in order to really move other people, we need to embody the behaviors and feelings we want to encourage and evoke in others. Jesus pointed toward this in his famous saying, ***first remove the big plank for your own eye, and then you will be able to see clearly enough to remove the speck from your brother's eye.*** I receive this as one more encouragement and imperative to live, at a very deep level, all the truths, virtues and solutions I want to teach.

That "What sort of person" question can be restated in the plural, which suddenly gives it a very transformational feeling: "What sort of people would WE need to become, in order to create more of the world WE ourselves want to live in? And how would WE get there?" This is a heart-centered, community-oriented, reworking of the longstanding political question, "How then shall we live?" explored by many writers

over the centuries, including very recently, [Dahr Jamail and Barbara Cecil](#) in their writing on global climate chaos.



Mandala drawing and text by Dennis Rivers – Creative Commons

A "Widening Circles" alternative rendering of the Morning Prayer Mandala

The Five-Wings-of-the-Heart meditation and prayer mandalas, and their related documents, are my responses, a few of the infinitely many possible compassionate responses, to these deeply personal questions.

Certainly not the only way, but perhaps one possible path for people inclined to think with diagrams and imagery. Taking a cue from how nature does things suggests that there should be many paths toward compassionate resilience, for the many different kinds of people here on Planet Earth. If we use the wheel and spokes as a model, one might say that there are many (even infinite) angles from which one can approach the hub of the wheel (compassion for all life). There are also many angles from which one could move away from the hub into confusion and numbness. My hope is that each person will find a way, their own authentic way, to deepen their reverence for life and allow it to guide them.

My notes

An inward circle of Earth Saints. In searching to deepen my own reverence for life, I have found that having an inward circle of “Earth Saints” helps me more than any set of abstract ideas I have been able to find. The biographies and/or writings of Jesus, St. Francis of Assisi, Joanna Macy, Thomas Berry, John Muir, Rachel Carson, Ramon Panikkar, Hildegard of Bingen, Gandhi, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador, loom large in my mind and heart. (On the Deep Green Awakening website, I call them “Honorary Mentors.” Click here to see my evolving list.) The more I study their lives, the deeper my inward sense of direction becomes. In my view, none of these people were perfect, and all were headed toward the light in powerful ways, and all inspire me to take my next unique, creative step toward the light. Your inward circle of Earth Saints will almost certainly be different than mine, as it must be to meet your needs. Whose lives inspire you with the strength to continue?

Free of charge. In keeping with several spiritual traditions that have influenced my life and this work, from Jesus and Buddha to Maharaj Charan Singh and Archbishop Romero of El Salvador, I have made the *Five Wings of the Heart* mandalas, and all the other graphic works and articles in the portfolio below, available and copyable free of charge, by placing them in the Creative Commons and distributing them as PDF files and MP3 files. (I realize this favors people who own or have access to cell phones or computers, and I am working to overcome that limitation. I wish I had the funds to give away printed copies of everything, but that is not yet possible.)

Anyone can learn it, do it, teach it, and adapt it. The current circle of *Five Wings of the Heart* participants is a network of overlapping supportive friendships, and we are inspired by the possibility of extending that network to include anyone interested in exploring the *Five Wings* practice and life of compassion and gratitude, through peer-to-peer relationships. In this we are following some of the peer-to-peer aspects of Revaluation Counseling and the Goenka tradition of Buddhist Vipassana meditation. By placing the *Five Wings of the Heart* mandalas and their sister documents into the Creative Commons, we have relinquished control over how they are used. Everyone drawn to this approach is welcome and authorized and blessed to learn, practice, teach

and evolve it, and to use the materials in their schools, organizations, institutions, churches, synagogues, mosques, and so on. May compassion, kindness, courage, truthfulness and creativity be your guides. For the sake of the planet, we hope people will invent more and more inclusive (and less and less monetary) ways of sharing these teaching materials.

Personal variations welcome and essential. In many spiritual traditions there is a strong emphasis on repeating ancient words exactly as they were first written. The *Five-Wings-of-the-Heart* approach explores a different part of the spiritual spectrum, inspired by the variety found everywhere in living nature, and the central role that variation plays in the evolution of life. The structure of the *Five Wings* practice is like the theme and variation structure of a symphony, in which the variations celebrate and bring forth the theme. Once you understand the similar five fundamental dimensions of human relatedness explored by all the mandala drawings, we hope you will feel free to vary the language in ways that more closely express your own experience and culture. And these expressions will probably change from year to year, just as much in nature changes with the cycles of the seasons. I myself rarely ever say any of the *Five Wings* prayers in exactly the same way, nor meditate on the mandalas in exactly the same way. There are many examples of positive variation in life. Very few human babies have exactly the same DNA. No two leaves on a tree have exactly the same shape; they are always variations on a theme. And in the course of a good friendship, two people rarely have exactly the same conversation twice. May these mandalas inspire you to have wonderful new conversations with the Ground of All Being.

Person-to-person Teams-of-Two Facing the great challenges of our time by becoming a new (or significantly improved) person through meditation, prayer and adopting new organizing themes for your life is, well, a very personal process. Therefore, we advocate exploring eco-spirituality and mend-the-world activism with a trusted friend. Our [Teams-of-Two vision document](#) imagines Teams-of-Two working to mend the world by being *three-part learning companions*, a relationship of mutual learning and nurturing among people who may be quite different in their knowledge, talents and temperaments. May it be so for you and your *Five Wings of the Heart* companions in blessing.



SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE FROM MOTHER GALAXY AND PLANET EARTH:

LIFE EVOLVES TOWARD LOVING, NURTURING AND PROTECTING LIFE.
FROM THIS I INFER THE FUNDAMENTAL DIRECTION OF HUMAN LIFE:
THAT WE ARE HERE TO BRING OUT THE BEST IN OURSELVES, IN ONE ANOTHER,
AND IN EVERYONE WE ENCOUNTER IN OUR LIFE JOURNEY

DENNIS RIVERS, PARTICIPANT, FIVE WINGS COMMUNITY WITHOUT WALLS



FIVE WINGS OF THE HEART – MANDALA SERIES

A PATH OF PRAYER / MEDITATION / AFFIRMATION / BLESSING

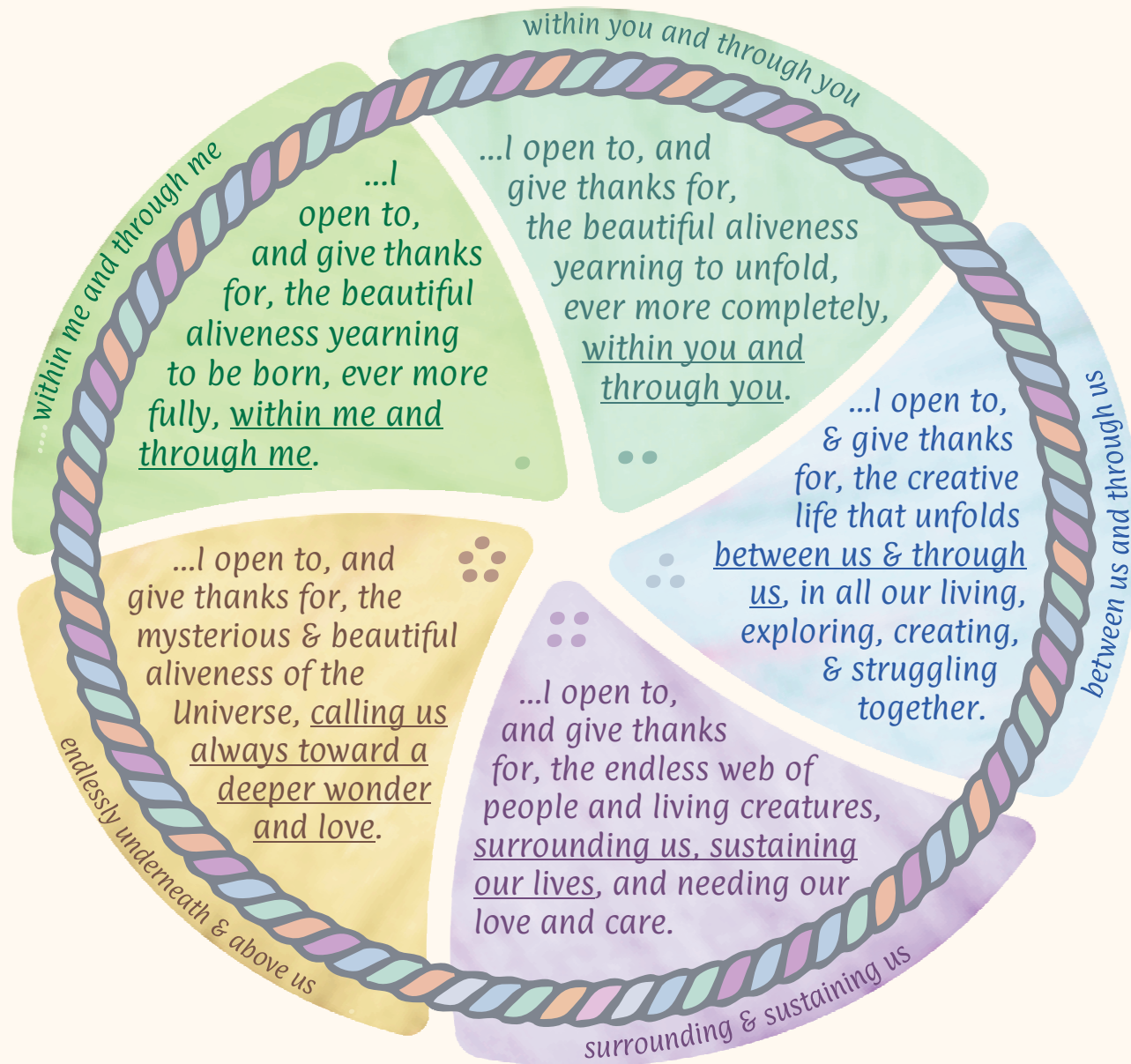
My reflections on, explorations of, and questions about, the themes expressed in this mandala:

My notes

FIVE WINGS OF THE HEART – MANDALA 1

Morning
Blessing:

This
moment
and this
day...



FIVE WINGS OF THE HEART: a five-dimensional vision of nurturing life as a spiritual path

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www.DeepGreenAwakening.net

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My reflections on, explorations of, and questions about, the themes expressed in this mandala:

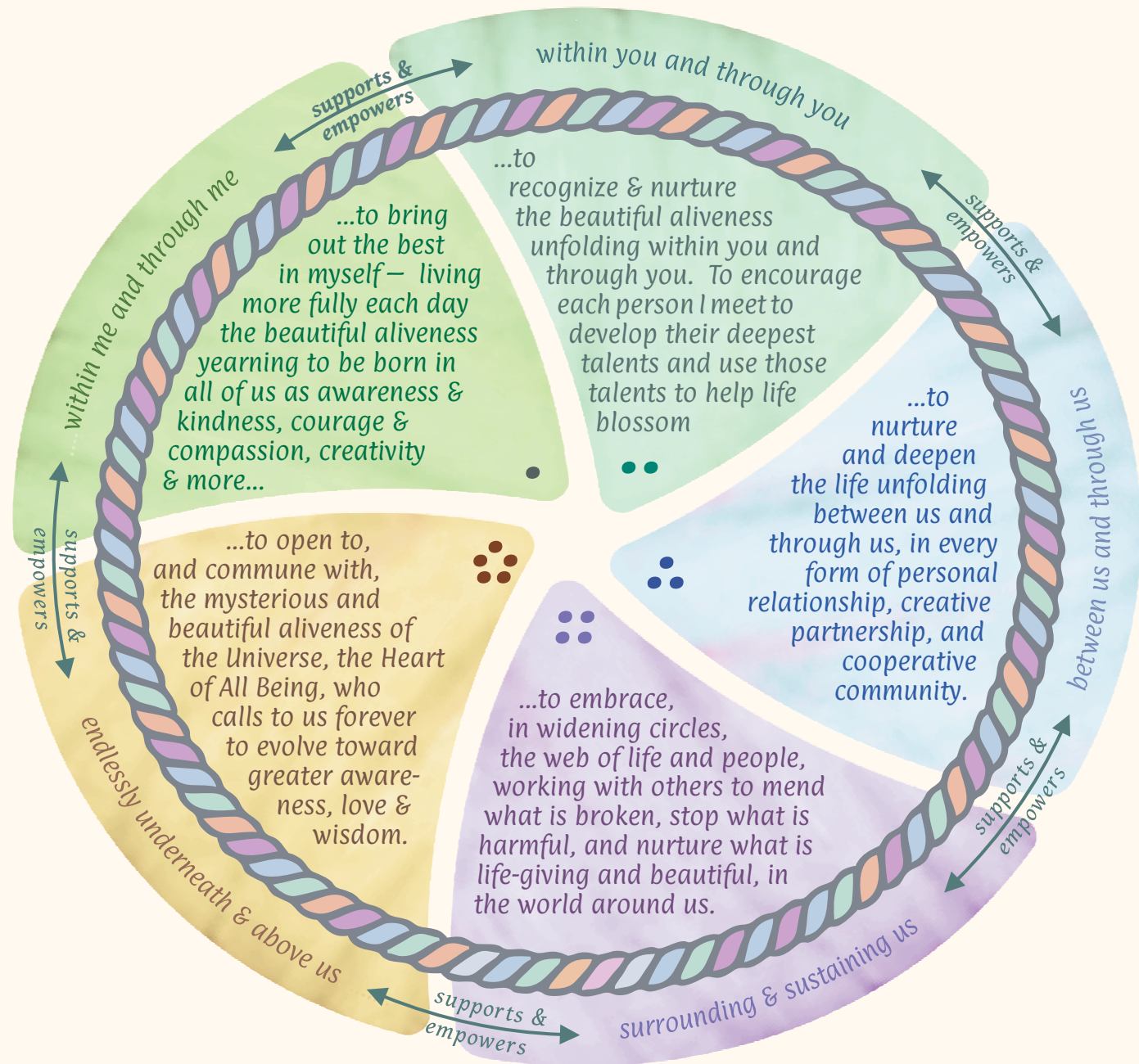
My notes

FIVE WINGS OF THE HEART -- MANDALA 2

Affirmations &
explorations :

I am here
on this
Earth...

I open my life,
this moment
and this day...



FIVE WINGS OF THE HEART: a five-dimensional vision of nurturing life as a spiritual path

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My reflections on, explorations of, and questions about, the themes expressed in this mandala:

My notes

FIVE WINGS OF THE HEART -- MANDALA 3

a devotional
blessing prayer
for the unfolding
of life

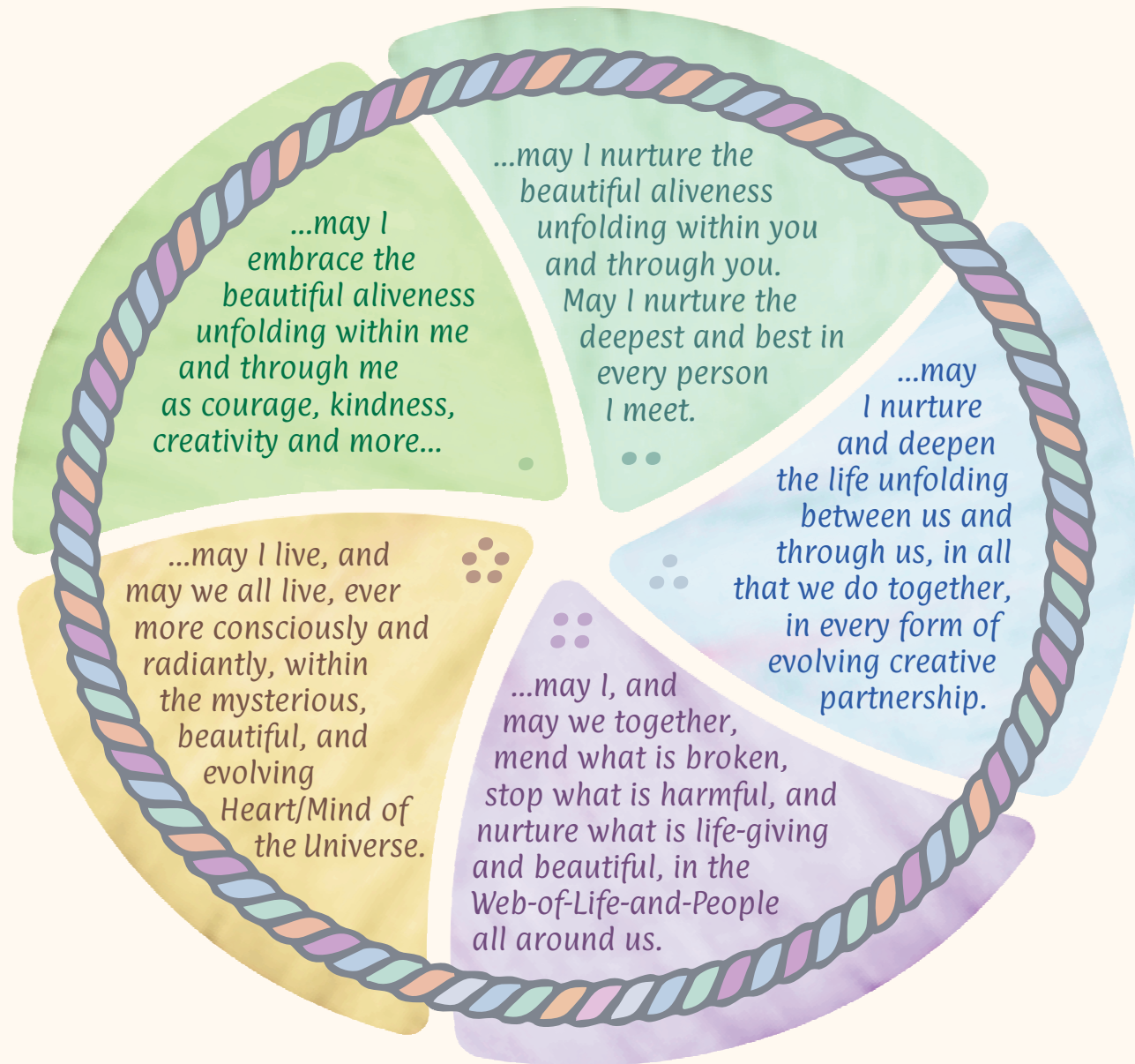
The following phrases can
be used as a preface to
each of the five blessings
in this Mandala:

With every breath...

With every day...

With every dream...

With every lifetime...



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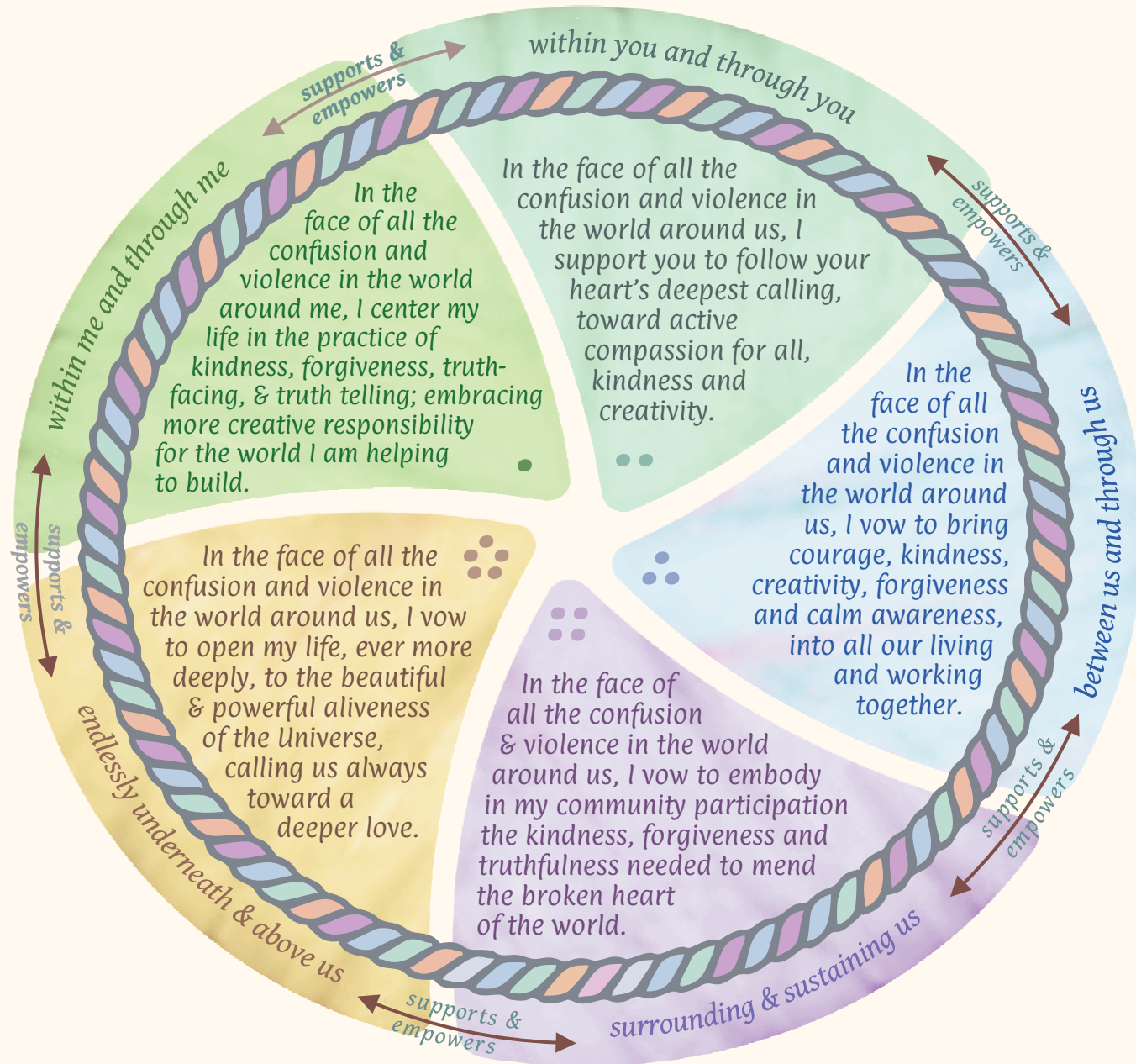
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My reflections on, explorations of, and questions about, the themes expressed in this mandala:

My notes

FIVE WINGS OF THE HEART -- MANDALA 4

Partners on the path:
evolving vows and
practices of
conscious
evolution and
compassionate
resistance
to the culture
of violence.



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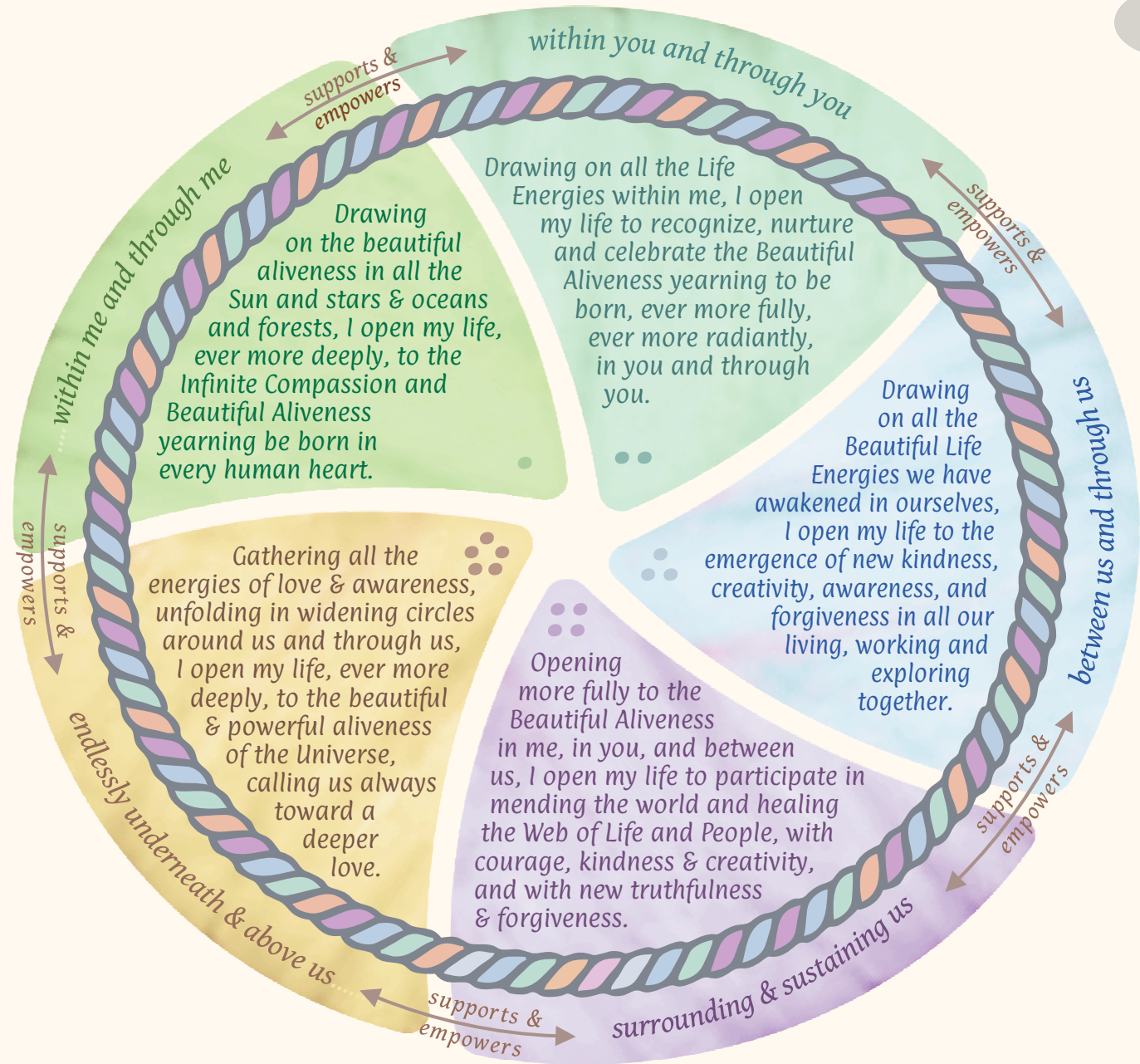
My notes

FIVE WINGS OF THE HEART -- MANDALA 5

Evolving Spiral of
I-and-Thou

Conscious
evolution in
friendship,
partnering,
marriage,
parenting
and working
together.

Each step
carries forward
the unfolding
of all previous
steps – the spiral
always invites the
next steps.



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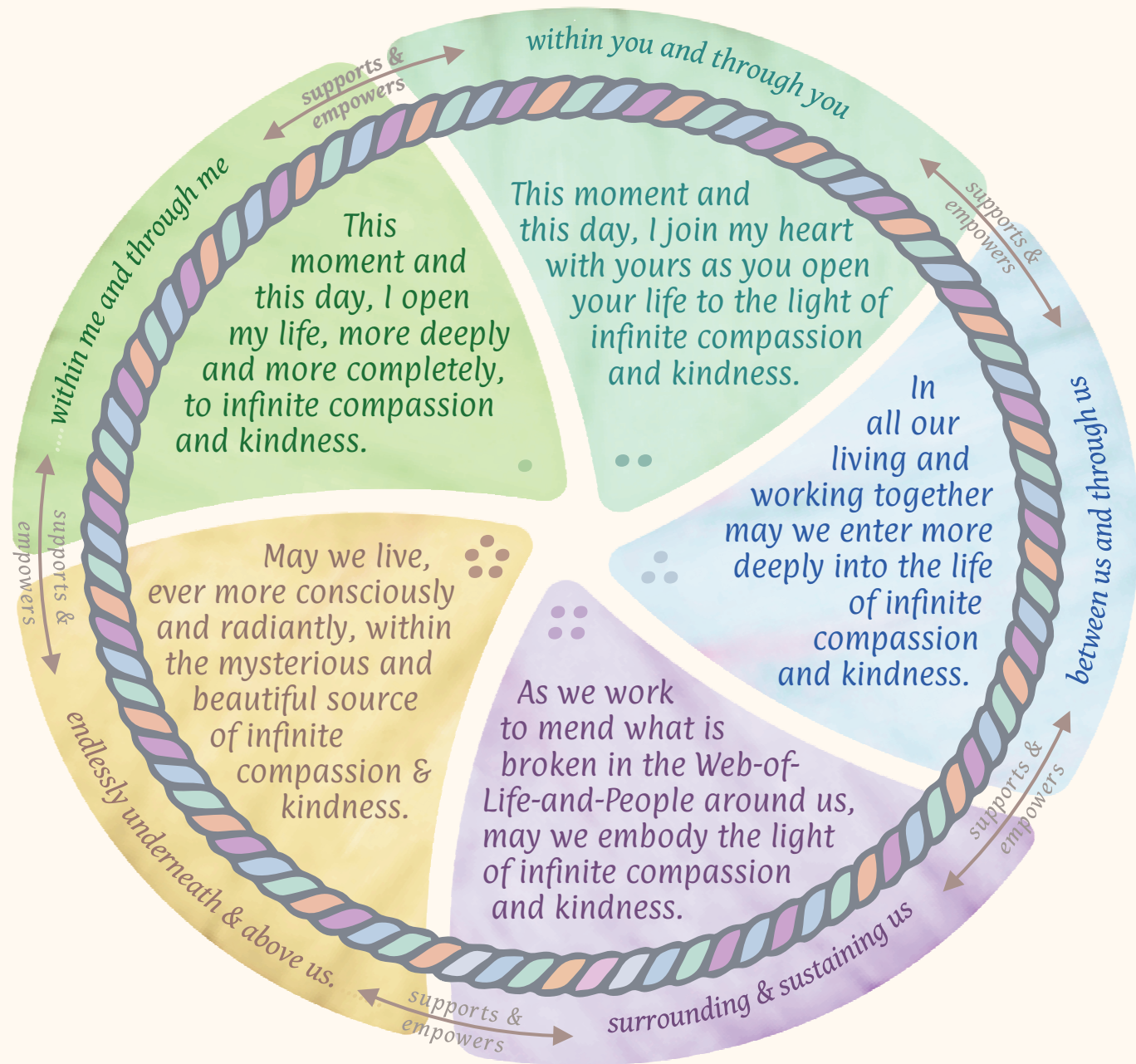
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My reflections on, explorations of, and questions about, the themes expressed in this mandala:

My notes

FIVE WINGS OF THE HEART -- MANDALA 6

infinite
compassion and
kindness
blessing,
prayer,
affirmation,
invocation,
exploration,
dedication,
song,
mantra,
initiation



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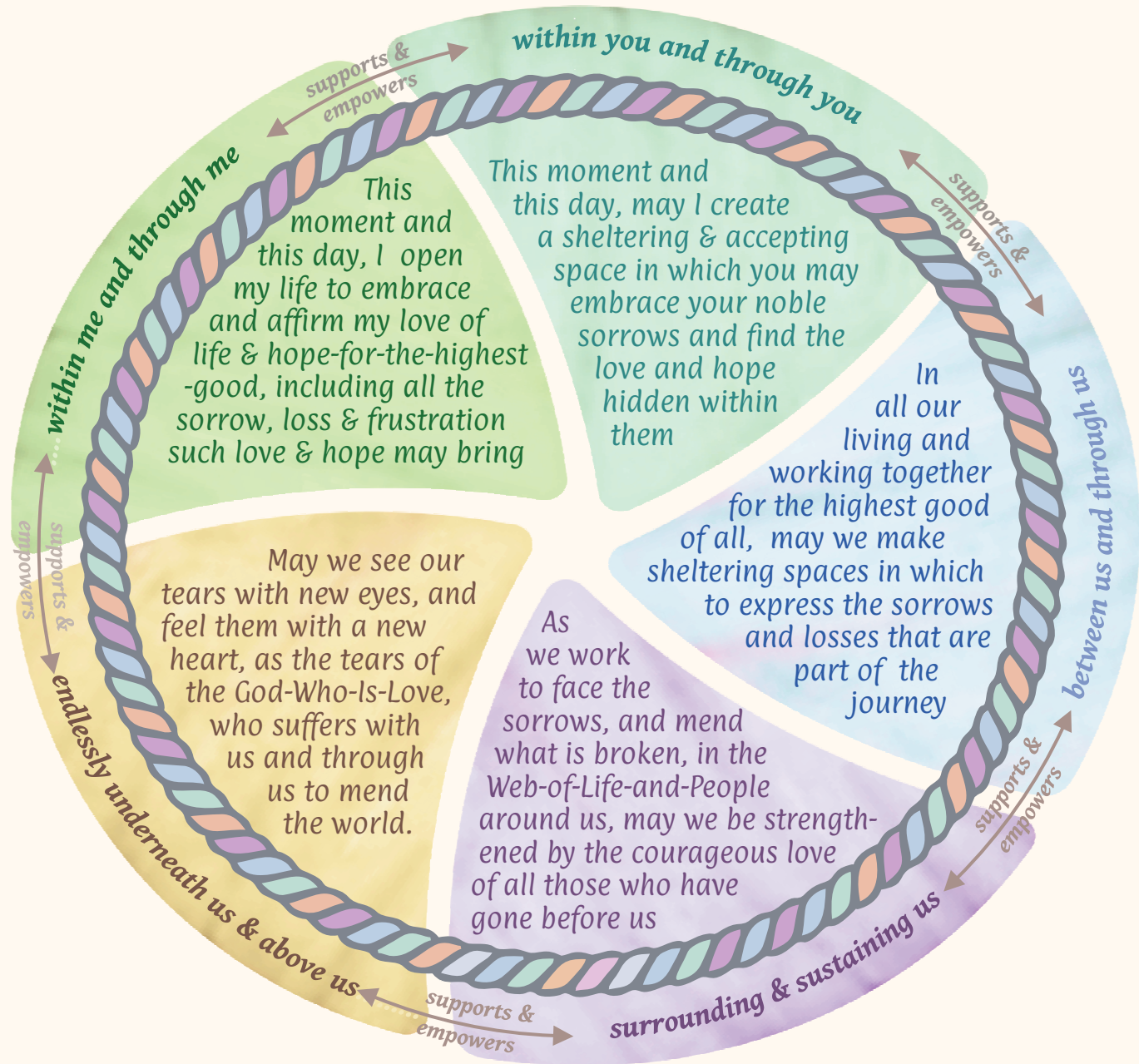
My notes

FIVE WINGS OF THE HEART -- MANDALA 7

OUR TEARS FOR THE WORLD AS OUR PRAYERS FOR THE WORLD

In a connection that is often hidden to us, our pain and anguish over the fate of the Web of Life & All Our Sisters and Brothers arises from our deep love for that very same Web of Life & All Our Sisters and Brothers.

(Many bows of gratitude to Joanna Macy for this beautiful teaching.)



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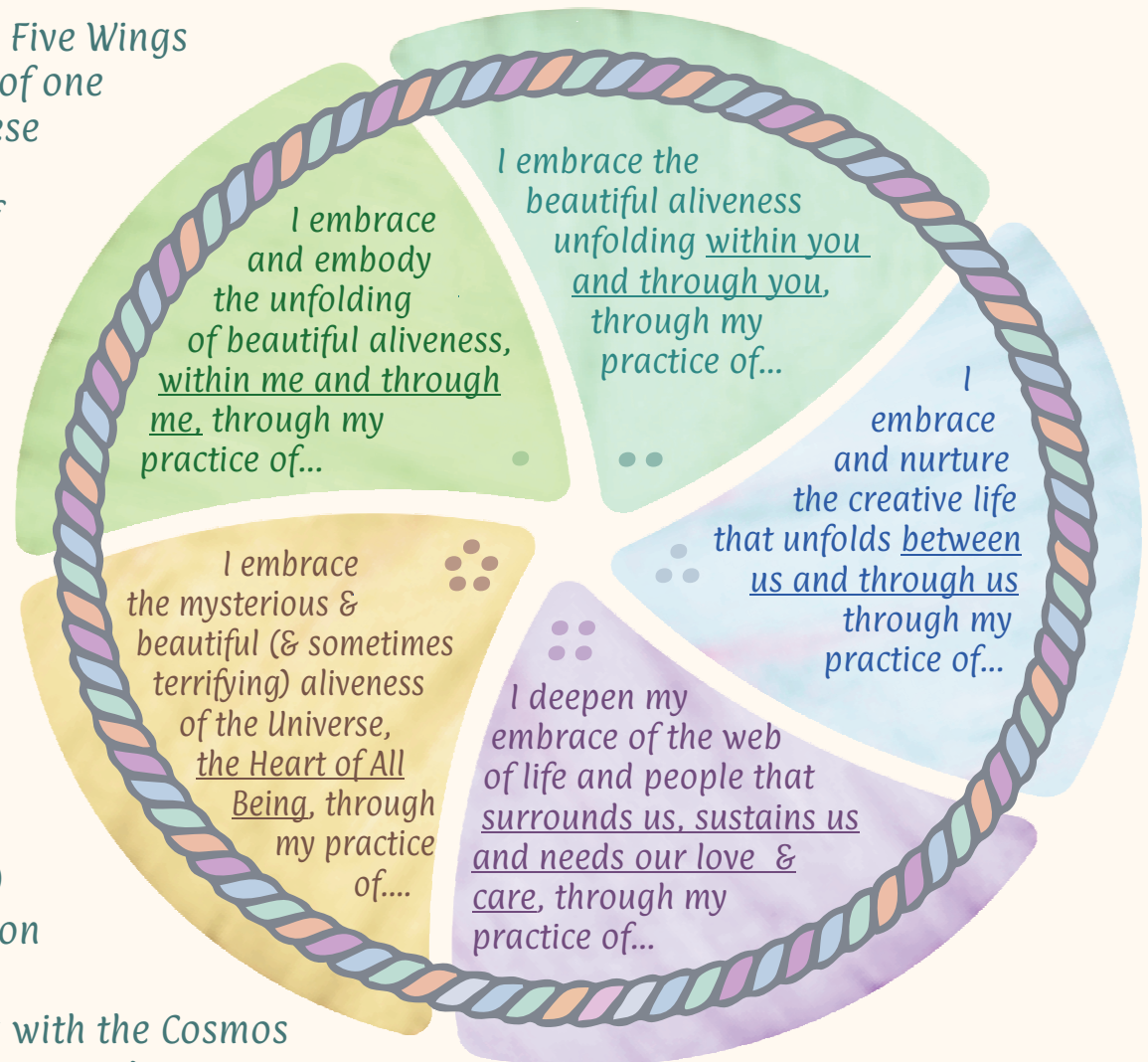
MANDALA 8 – FIVE WINGS / TWELVE STRANDS OF LIVING FROM THE HEART

A VISION OF ECO-SPIRITUAL LIFE AS THE CREATIVE WEAVING TOGETHER OF MULTIPLE STRANDS

You are invited to explore/deepen/live the Five Wings with your own creative weaving together of one or more of the practices listed below. These twelve practices are symbolized by the braided ring connecting the Five Wings of the Mandala.

TWELVE STRANDS OF LIVING FROM/WITH/THROUGH THE HEART:

- ...Meditating (Deep Listening to the Divine Within)
- ...Praying (opening to Grace)
- ...Affirming (opening to new possibilities)
- ...Celebrating (primordial YES to life)
- ...Exploring/Studying/Understanding
- ...Dedicating/Promising (connecting thru time)
- ...Communing / Blessing
- ...Thanking: Journeying into Gratitude
- ...Awakening: Expanding Awareness
- ...Forgiveness (studying, exploring, living)
- ...Loving/Embracing All Life as Kin (Devotion to the Earth and all Her creatures)
- ...Creating / Making Manifest / Cooperating with the Cosmos
(action/work that is nurturing / transformative / courageous)



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My reflections on, explorations of, and questions about, the themes expressed in this mandala:

My notes

FIVE WINGS OF THE HEART -- MANDALA 9

Each day
the Web of Life
invites each of us
to express the
prayer/celebration/
exploration/dedication
of our own hearts
about nurturing
life & mending
the world.

Print several copies of
this page, and use this
mandala to create your
own unique blessings and
meditations, and also to
imagine and evoke your
plans of action for each
of the five dimensions
of your life.



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Tree of Life — Dennis Rivers 2021 — Creative Commons CCO — Public Domain



FIVE WINGS OF THE HEART

RELATED DOCUMENTS ON CREATIVE RESILIENCE,
COMPASSIONATE RESISTANCE, AND REVERENCE FOR LIFE:

SECTION TWO – TRANSFORMATIONAL TEAMS OF TWO

SECTION THREE – TWELVE VOWS IN THE ETERNAL NOW



SACRAMENT OF FRIENDSHIP

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TEAMS-OF-TWO / COMPANIONS IN BLESSING

A NETWORK-OF-OVERLAPPING-FRIENDSHIPS MODEL
FOR THE FIVE WINGS OF THE HEART
PRAYER/MEDITATION/AFFIRMATION COMMUNITY

By Dennis Rivers, MA, and circle of friends in the Five Wings peer encouragement network – July 28, 2021 Revision – For free PDF copies, please click or visit:
<https://DeepGreenAwakening.net/library/transformational-teams-of-two.pdf>

INTRODUCTION

We have been born into troubled times, times that call upon us to mobilize our deepest inner resources of awareness, kindness, creativity and compassion. *The Five Wings of the Heart* is a contemporary vision of meditation, prayer and affirmation arising out of the pain of a world that appears to be racing toward industrial suicide. The *Five Wings* vision was developed by Dennis Rivers in dialogue with teachers and friends, in the course of forty years of campaigning prayerfully against nuclear weapons. It draws on spiritual inspirations from many teachers and traditions.

It is not clear how we will prevail in the face of nuclear weapons, global warming, and the chemical pollution of lands and seas. But it is clear to me that we need to help mobilize the powerful creative energies of people everywhere on behalf of the integrity of life, and on behalf of the cause of kindness. As the Dalai Lama has said, “My religion is kindness.” And in the Christian tradition, Jesus addresses humanity across the centuries saying “Love one another as I have loved you.”

Now that we are impacting the entire Earth in such drastic ways, thoughtful people across the globe (including Pope Francis) have become convinced that we need to expand our vision of kindness to include kindness toward the whole planet, all creatures great and small.

My guiding idea in sharing these prayers of kindness with wider circles of friends is not “the one true practice for the whole wide world,” by rather, “let there be different sized shoes for different sized feet.” The latter approach gives us the freedom to explore and innovate, and allows

us to bless others as they explore and innovate as well. News about the already emerging Sixth Great Extinction of life forms here on Planet Earth reminds us that we need a deeply new civilization, one that is much more web-of-life-friendly. May people everywhere take up the cause of inventing one. Evolution works through variety.

The *Five Wings* vision of eco-spirituality emphasizes self-empowerment, peer support and distributed intelligence (decentralization), so our evolving community is taking shape as a **network of overlapping encouraging friendships**. This means you are invited to be at the center of this particular innovation / exploration process as well as being on the growing edge of it. This chapter explores some of the how’s and why’s of transformational teams-of-two.



HOW NEW THINKING PARTNERS CAN HELP US THINK MUCH-NEEDED NEW THOUGHTS.

I'm sure most of you are familiar with two of Einstein's most famous social commentaries: first, that insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results, and second, that we cannot solve our problems with the same kind of thinking we used when we created them. In spite of the fact that our current system of out-of-control industrialization appears to be killing the planet, there are still loud calls for even less regulation of industrial processes, even less planning for a world in which we and our brother and sister species could survive. In burning even more fossil fuels, we are clearly doing more of the same and hoping (against all logic and experience) for different results. I can't see how this will turn out well for us.

My notes

In order to think new thoughts, we will often need new partners for brainstorming and creative exploration. Although every now and then people can think wonderful new ideas all by themselves, thinking still has a deeply social element in it. Those wonderful ideas will probably not get developed unless there is someone to talk with. We learn to think, early in life, in the company of those from whom we learn to speak. Then we spend ten to twenty years in classrooms and teams where our thinking power unfolds even more in the company of others. In this social view of language and thinking (for which there is a large body of evidence), whatever ideas we hold, we almost always hold in the context of a circle of conversation partners.

In our time, the early decades of the 21st Century, continuous war and out-of-control industrialization are pushing the web of life to the breaking point. Our desperate circumstances are challenging us to think big new thoughts about what sort of social arrangements will allow life to flourish rather than perish. We already know the kinds of social arrangements that have brought us to our current impasse. Inventing something new and actually better (*evolution!*) will be the great cooperative challenge of our lifetimes.

As one possible way of beginning to meet that challenge, I am proposing in this article that each of us begin by cooperating with at least one other person, each partner giving the other permission to "think outside the box," and also to care about life in widening circles, outside the box of the individual selfishness that is, unfortunately, the glowing ideal of capitalism everywhere. When you start thinking new thoughts about the society in which you live, or start to care with a wider caring that your society allows, you risk evoking intense hostility from people around you who may have given up all hope of a better world. Having a small circle of supportive friends, or even one, can make all the difference. You could think of that new conversation partner as a swim-buddy for the ocean of life, or perhaps a Mother Earth accountability partner.



RESILIENT TEAMS OF TWO

The circle of colleagues exploring the *Teams-of-Two* organizing paradigm are searching for ways to nurture in one another the creative resilience and transformational kindness we need to face of the multiple breakdowns of our era. By weaving friendship into social action, we hope to provide people with the resources and encouragement needed to stay involved with difficult issues for long periods of time. We live in a time in which many churches, government agencies, non-profits and businesses have betrayed the trust that people placed in them, perhaps contributing to a widespread distrust in all organizations, large and small. But in spite of all the many organizational betrayals we may have suffered, the Web of Life still needs our love and care. I am convinced that *Teams-of-Two* can be a way of starting over.

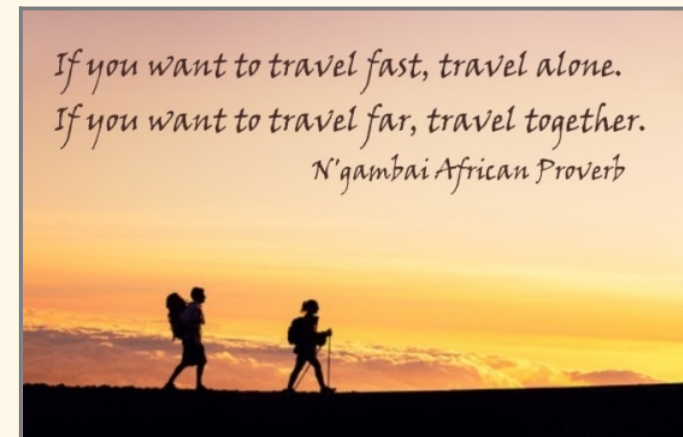


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Used with permission. Text: Traditional

The *Teams-of-Two* approach is also one possible vision of how we might work on issues of ecological sustainability in ways that are themselves emotionally sustainable (for the participants). *Teams-of-Two* is an effort to carry forward and develop the practices that have appeared in recent decades under the headings of "affinity groups," "accountability partnerships," and "peer coaching." And, the *Teams-of-Two* idea is also ancient, with a long history in Buddhism (kalyana mitra), Judaism (havruta), Christianity and Celtic spirituality, and, of course, in

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marriage and in the parenting processes of many living species. Among its many facets, the Teams-of-Two approach is an example of biomimicry: following the patterns (in this case, the two-birds-protecting-their-young pattern) that nature uses to succeed in nurturing life.

In his recent book, **Powers of Two**, Joshua Wolf Shenk explores the highly productive dynamics of creative partnerships and alliances, such as that between rock ‘n rollers Paul McCartney and John Lennon, scientists Marie and Pierre Curie, and the leading French Impressionist painters Claude Monet and Auguste Renoir. The power of these partnership is often invisible to us, Shenk argues, because of the way our culture idealizes the heroic struggles of the lone genius. Inspired by all the examples noted above, we hope to renew, promote and extend this way of organizing co-operative effort in the context of serving the Web of Life in Her hour of great need.

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT IN “ENDURING EMERGENCIES”

One of the fundamental principles at work in this approach is the idea that *the greater the task we ask a person to embrace, the deeper the support we need to offer them*. Many of the topics encountered in today’s eco-activism and social change advocacy are profoundly disturbing of a person’s sense of physical and mental well-being. So we are committed to weaving emotional support practices, information and reflection into all our presentations of those difficult topics. For example, if I am going to appeal to you to make strong efforts over many years to keep the world from being poisoned by leaking nuclear power plants, then it seems quite compelling to me that I should also provide some opportunity for you to express the kinds of distresses you might feel as you master and live with the unhappy facts about radioactive contamination.

Many anti-nuclear and climate change groups have not yet begun to operate at this level, but it is greatly to be hoped that this level of support will emerge as ecological advocacy groups evolve and mature. (All our documents on this and related topics are in the Creative Commons, and you can find them as free PDFs online.) Eco-philosopher and anti-nuclear activist Joanna Macy is an inspiring pioneer in this

area, and her work has deeply inspired and influenced our thinking, and contributed to our online resources.

A good deal of ecological activism follows what I think of as the “house on fire” model. Which is to say, “drop whatever you’re doing right now and attend to *this*, over here” because *this* is the most important emergency. In the case of fighting a fire, you don’t give any thought while fighting the fire to the kind of person you hope to become in the course of your lifetime, nor the kinds of strengths that might have made you a better firefighter.

The ecological crises of our time, however, and the chronic wars and global economic inequalities that kill millions of people every decade, may well last longer than our entire lives. They are what you might call *enduring emergencies*. Prof. Rob Nixon has coined the expression, *slow violence*, to describe our predicaments. Global warming and Chernobyl and Fukushima include processes of injury that will unfold over hundreds or even thousands of years.

In relation to such life-long challenges, *I don’t think we can or ought to give up on our quest to become more fully realized persons..* These crises are, for better or for worse, the contexts in which we will become persons. Responding to emergencies usually does not include learning new skills or cultivating new strengths. But from where I stand now, it seems self-defeating for us to assume that we already have today all the personal strengths, all the personal skills, and all the personal webs of mutual support we will need to contribute effectively to the mending of the world over the rest of our lifetimes.

By way of personal example, most of my life has been over-shadowed by issues involving nuclear weapons and nuclear waste. I grew up practicing weekly atom-bomb shelter drills and later lived downwind from a nuclear power plant build on an earthquake fault. Since this is the only planet I’ve got, I am searching for ways to become a kinder and wiser person in the middle of my activities against nukes and on behalf of the web of life. In the course of my struggles, I have found many interesting and inspiring examples of how this might be done: Gandhi’s Karma Yoga, the engaged Buddhism of Thich Nhat Hanh and Sulak Sivaraksa, the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, the Quaker

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Book of Faith and Practice, and the life of **Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador**. When I look at my life from the perspective of decades, the pattern of in-breath and out-breath suggests itself as a model. For every great challenge I face outside of myself, there appears to be a set of corresponding deep strengths that I am being challenged to develop in myself and encourage in my circle of co-workers. In a similar way, I have now become convinced that the deeper the ugliness we intend to confront and mend in the world, the deeper the beauty we need to let into our lives and carry with us. (This conclusion reminds me of the Dine/Navajo blessing prayer: “Walk in Beauty.”)

EXPANDING THE CIRCLE OF EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

One challenge that we face in organizing a peer support network is that in Western societies the psychotherapy profession has come to dominate the process of emotional support-giving. In recent decades psychologists in the United States even moved to classify all processes of emotional support and discussions of personal development as the unique province of licensed professionals (themselves). (This effort failed because of freedom of speech and religious freedom issues.) For the most part, however, the gradual monopolization of emotional support conversations by psychotherapists has not been the result of a conscious plan on their part. It is much more an unfortunate byproduct of the process of professionalization itself. Whenever one group in society starts specializing in a particular activity (brain surgery, house wiring, shoe making, etc.), they generally do it better than everyone else, and most other people stop doing it, leaving it to the experts.

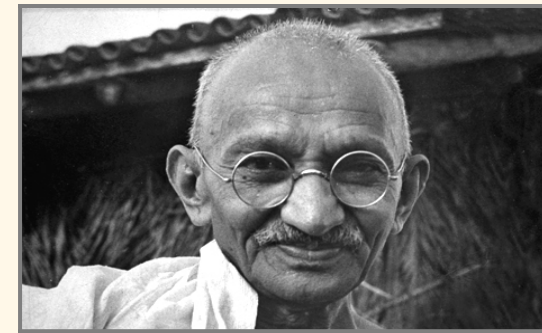
This professionalization brings good results in many areas of life but, I would suggest, terrible results in other areas. Many of the challenges facing us today, such as chronic war, climate change, nuclear waste, and global disease and early death related to tobacco use, can't be solved by experts alone. They involve society-wide consensus-shifting and the participation of as many people as possible. So we need to learn from examples of wide participation, such as 12-Step groups and the Civil Rights movement. We might also learn from other examples, such as how specific card games are played around the world with relatively little supervision, how popular songs spread across the world, and the

structure of amateur sports, to understand more about how such movements and activities reach out to involve and empower new participants.

In contrast to the division-of-labor model, in which a few highly-trained individuals provide emotional care for many people who are feeling overwhelmed, the *Team-of-Two* paradigm envisions and encourages every human rights and ecology activist to be an ongoing giver and receiver of emotional support. This emphasis on everybody taking care of everybody expresses contemporary psychology's growing interest in what is now identified as “emotional literacy.”

THREE EMPOWERING IDEAS

We are searching for resources that could empower people newly concerned about the fate of the Earth. How could we live more courageously, compassionately and supportively? We begin with three ideas from three inspiring “spiritual permission granters:” Mahatma Gandhi, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the eco-philosopher Joanna Macy.



Mahatma Gandhi

From Mahatma Gandhi we receive the idea that we have the power to be the change we want to see. I am convinced that this idea is partly rooted in Gandhi's Hinduism. Hinduism is based on the overarching idea that your individual soul (Atman) is a wave in the ocean of God's Being (Brahman). Therefore, you have infinite resources of love, awareness and understanding within you, although you may not have

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learned yet how to mobilize these resources for the good of everyone. *But having such resources means that we can stop waiting for someone else to do something wonderful! We can find a way to start doing that something wonderful in our own lives, in our own towns, in our own countries.*

It is possible to express this vision of empowerment as based in nature, as well, for those of us who are not members of a specific religious community. (This brings to mind the nature mysticism of John Muir and Hildegard of Bingen.) Starting in nature, one could say that every cell in your body contains the five hundred million year history of life, therefore you have within you a well of living intelligence to draw on in overcoming whatever obstacles your society faces.

You have the power, in both of these visions, the spiritual and the spirit-in-nature, to begin the change you want to see. And you have the power to stand against the entire world in those times when the world sinks into the confusion of greed and violence. In terms of a mutual support network, Gandhi's vision allows us to see one another as partners in the mobilization of that profound compassionate intelligence, hidden, but yearning to be born, in every human being. (Please see the Deep Green Awakening page on [Mahatma Gandhi Study Resources](#))



Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

From the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., we receive the idea of the “Beloved Community,” a vision of inclusiveness that grows out of the belief in one supremely loving Creator, who has created us all as

brothers and sisters. Because of that, our vision of the transformation of society must necessarily include all those people with whom we now disagree, all those people we see as creating society's problems. In Dr. King's vision, the power of love reaches out to include everyone, to transform unjust social arrangements, and to lift us up to be the generous and noble human beings we were intended to be by our Creator. In terms of a mutual support network, Dr. King's vision allows us to see one another as partners in the mobilization of that deep love, hidden, but yearning to be born, in every human heart. (Please see the Deep Green Awakening page on [Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Study Resources](#))

From the eco-philosopher Joanna Macy, we receive a profound idea that changes our relationship to the crises of our time. Our pain for the world, she insists, is not a problem that we should try to be getting rid of. Our society, obsessed with success, views every discomfort is a sign of failure, which must be medicated or therapized out of existence.



To the contrary, Joanna Macy declares, with the deep strength of a grandmother determined to protect her family and the Family of Life as well, our pain for the world bears witness to our love for the world. Our pain for the world is not a failure, it is the best part of us yearning to be expressed. Even more, our pain for the Web of Life and the obliteration of countless species, *is the Web of Life itself speaking through us*, moving through us, and calling us to a life of heroic service.

The way forward, in Joanna Macy's vision, is not to avoid our pain but to enter into it fully and consciously, and to find the love that is hidden within it. Empowered by that love we can go forth and participate in the healing of the world. In terms of a mutual support network, Joanna Macy's vision allows us to see one another as partners and companions in the radical transformation of personal pain into courageous love. (Please see the Deep Green Awakening page on [Joanna Macy Study Resources](#))

My notes

THREE VISIONARIES OF PEER SUPPORT

Another strong source of inspiration for the Teams-of-Two vision is the work of Carl Rogers (1902-1987), a 20th-century psychologist, university professor and scholar of human development. In the course of analyzing hundreds of psychotherapy transcripts, Rogers discovered that there were three underlying attitudes on the part of the therapist that seem to help the client take the next step in their developmental journey. These three attitudes were *caring, sincerity, and an actively voiced empathy*, a nonjudgmental effort to see the world through the eyes of the client, and reflect that world back to the client.

Rogers built on his experience to propose that *these three attitudes are the universal ingredients of developmental encouragement*, whether between therapist and client, teacher and student, parent and child, minister and parishioner, spouse and spouse, or friend and friend. Rogers' discovery, explored in his book, *On Becoming a Person*, offered the possibility that we might grow toward becoming a more empathic civilization, because these attitudes could be adopted (with some conscious effort, of course) by everyone.

The need for developmental encouragement is more than merely the need of individuals. The developmental problems of individuals become the developmental problems of entire societies, and vice versa. A society permanently at war, such as the one I live in, becomes a society in which the cruelty and deceptions of war become the norms of everyday life. (Citizens of the United States are at war in three ways: at war with other countries, at war with the Earth through savage resource extraction, and at war with each other through in a society organized around relentless competition.) As we work to steer our lives toward kindness and truthfulness, following the path opened up by Carl Rogers' research, we work not only to improve our own lives, but also to steer our culture out of the self-perpetuating labyrinth of war.

Unfortunately, Rogers' discoveries about caring, sincerity and empathy collided with the needs of the emerging psychotherapy profession, which needed, in order to justify its professional existence, to have access to specific tools and techniques that were by definition beyond the reach of "unlicensed" laypeople. Although Carl Rogers did not

succeed in his efforts to universalize the three attitudes he had documented, it is not too late to develop the life-enhancing implications of his work. A small but steady stream of psychologists and psychotherapists have been doing so over the past forty years.

Such is the case with the following two writers, whose work has encouraged me with materials that could be used to deepen peer-to-peer mutual support communication and communities.

Gerald Goodman, now emeritus Professor of Psychology at UCLA, did research in the 1960s that led to his 1972 book, *Companionship Therapy*, which focused on the beneficial effects on troubled ten- and eleven-year-old boys of being in the regular presence of a "supportive other," in this case university students selected for their interpersonal skills. Goodman went on to write *The Talk Book*, a popular communication skills self-help book intended to empower us all to become "supportive others" in one another's lives. (Rogers and Goodman were major inspirations for the creation of the *Seven Challenges Workbook*, a 100-page, free, PDF introduction to cooperative communication skills and conflict management now in use around the world.)

Lawrence Brammer is an emeritus professor at the University of Washington, and author of *The Helping Relationship: Process and Skills*. Brammer points out that most people who are experiencing distress in life are not mentally ill. They simply need the presence of a supportive other in order to help them mobilize their coping resources. We could all learn specific skills and attitudes that would allow us to be more supportive of one another in times of acute distress and disorientation. Brammer documents these skills in great detail. (What I would add to Brammer's analysis is that widespread knowledge of how to be a supportive presence does not fit well into the dominant script of professional success in our society, which requires that one master a rare specialty, and focus on people with spectacular distresses.)

The strength of these books is that they unfold the process of being a supportive companion in great detail. The limitation of these three books is that they most often conceive of the helping relationship as being primarily between skilled helper and a less-skilled person in need. Our challenge is to translate these ideas into a vocabulary of mutual

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support rather than one-way helping in a fee-for-service context. (In terms of eco-organizing and social change, I view the fee-for-service model as inherently fragile, because whenever the money runs out, the conversations have to stop. So I am searching for alternatives.)

THE THREE-PART LEARNING COMPANIONS VISION OF ALL HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

One important aspect of the universal Teams-of-Two theme is an emerging, *three-part vision* of what it means to be on an equal footing with another person, given that no two people ever have exactly the same experiences, temperaments or skill sets.

In my experience, with *every* person I meet, I have (and am invited by life to deepen) at least three parallel, different and complementary relationships, like a chord of three notes played on the piano.

- There are some areas and topics in life where you know more than I know and you have lived more than I have lived. In relation to those areas I am your student and apprentice.
- There are some areas and topics in life where we know roughly the same amount and/or we've had roughly the same amount of experience. In relation to those areas, I am your companion and co-explorer.
- And there might be some areas and topics in life where I know more than you do, or have had more experience than you have had. In relation to those areas, life calls me to be your servant-mentor. My task is to support you and encourage you in your learning and exploration.

In a society based on competition and merit examinations, there is a powerful focus on knowing more than other people, and on having specialized knowledge that other people do not possess. To the degree that I succumb to that influence, I would tend to focus almost entirely on the areas where I know more than you. But if I were to do that, not only will I become an unpleasant person to be around, I will also be seriously out of touch with you, missing most of the creative possibilities in our conversations. In relation to the complex journey of becoming a person, you already have much to share, much to teach me. You have had many

life experiences that I have not had, and you may have struggled through many difficult situations that I have not yet encountered. Awakening to this, I strive to look at each person I meet and know through this new three-dimensional lens. I invite you to do the same, so that new creative partnerships might unfold in your life and in our world.

CO-MENTORING: A DIFFERENT WAY OF TEACHING

Within the www.DeepGreenAwakening.org extended peer support network, *we are all teachers-by-example*. (We are convinced that this is also true for every person on Planet Earth.) In our view, we may as well accept the responsibility of being teachers, because we are all already teaching-by-example all the time. I may not be teaching algebra all the time, but every waking moment that I am in the presence of other people I am teaching by example how to be a person, how to love, how to live, how to tell the truth, how to express reverence for life, how to forgive, etc. So in relation to these basic qualities of being a person, the division of any human group into teachers and learners covers up something really important. We may not be teaching particularly inspiring lessons, but *we are all teaching each other and all learning from each other all the time!* I conclude from this that since we are already fully on the stage of the world, we may as well learn to sing better. This for me is one of the most important messages implicit in the discovery of the “mirror neurons” in the brain that predispose us to imitate one another whether we want to or not. (I invite you to read up on mirror neurons: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mirror_neuron.)

Of course, in relation to the really important human strengths, I can only show others as much as I have really learned and lived. And the further you go along the path of human unfolding, the more you realize that at any given moment a challenge could come along that would be so large that it would cause you to fail. So at a deeper level, all the beginners and all the experts in this world are really in the same human boat. We are all perpetual beginners, each of us facing our own multiple horizons of the unknown. That is why I enjoy the chambered nautilus as one of my guiding images. We are never finished evolving. All the great human virtues call us toward open horizons.

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All of this has deep implications for teaching resilience in the face of ecological catastrophes. It suggests that however inspired one person's discoveries about resilience might be, there are severe limits as to how much of those discoveries can be transferred with words directly into the minds of others. (Songs and pictures increase that transferability a bit, but not nearly as much as one would hope.) What we can do is walk along beside one another in a journey of exploration and discovery. And that walking-along-beside can be a powerful, life-giving, form of encouragement, even though it tends to unfold in quiet ways, and focuses on living with ongoing questions rather than providing dramatic answers. An analogy from sports would be to say, I can't run for you, no matter how good a runner I am, nor you for me, but running together we can encourage each other to run further than either of us would have run alone. We are co-mentors on the road of life.



My notes



FINDING THE STRENGTH TO FACE THE FIRE

TWELVE SUGGESTIONS for ECO-SPIRITUAL TEAMS-OF-TWO
Steps for creating a Team-of-Two partnership to deepen your practice
of engaged reverence for life/compassionate action
By Dennis Rivers, MA, and friends – 2020 revision

Context: The current global epidemics of greed and violence (and their combinations in chronic wars, climate chaos and ecological devastation) appear to have a powerful, self-perpetuating, momentum about them, like a whirlpool or an avalanche. Therefore, if we are going to live differently and change the societies in which we live, I have become deeply convinced that we will probably need to be a lot more deliberate and systematic about that journey than might have previously been our preference.

The following suggested action steps and guiding principles are one possible systematic approach, drawn from the author's experience in, and study of, spiritual communities, anti-nuclear and social change movements. The steps and principles presented here implement and carry forward the vision of non-hierarchical "Three-part Learning Companions" vision introduced above in this article (see page 7).

Invitation: We invite you to explore / participate in / adopt / adapt / evolve, open-source approaches toward independent, self-organizing, peer accompaniment and encouragement. We offer the following suggested steps and principles (and the linked support materials) as possible starting places and guidelines. You are also most welcome to use this material as a starting point to develop your own vision of peer accompaniment and team effectiveness.

TWELVE POSSIBLE CREATIVE NEXT STEPS

1. Explore the *Five Wings of the Heart* vision of how we propose to embody the virtues we advocate and live an active reverence for life: more consciously, compassionately, courageously and creatively. We also hope to nurture and encourage the same in all the people around us. Please see the following web and print resources:

[The Five Wings of the Heart Mandala Series](#)

[The Eight Interwoven Strands model of creative resilience and compassionate resistance](#)

[Companions in the Storm, Companions in Blessing \(article\)](#)

[Joanna Macy's Work That Reconnects \(web page\)](#)

2. Follow your calling from the Heart of Life. Pick a specific study topic, create an action project, or select an existing public service organization, which strongly expresses your reverence for life and your evolving compassion for all peoples and all creatures. Here are some suggestions and reflections about picking a topic or project:

- Faced with all the contending appeals for help in the world, we suggest that you commit yourself to the topic/issue that most inspires you to love more deeply and to live more fully. (Inspired by sayings of St. Teresa of Avila and St. Augustine) As Howard Thurman put it, "Don't ask yourself what the world needs; ask yourself what makes you come alive. And then go and do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive." Frederick Buechner expresses this as "Vocation is the place where our deep gladness meets the world's deep need."
- A person who follows their deepest calling with love is much more likely to awaken the love and sense of calling in others, thus increasing the total amount of love energy moving in and through the world.
- Only the causes that move us to love, will move us to master the details and disciplines of our area of concern. Thus, the more we are moved to love, the better advocates we may become.

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- The Shamanism of Lovingkindness: What we care about deeply fills us with its power and cares/acts through us to mend the world. (Thanks to Joanna Macy and John Seed for this deep idea.)

3. Find one or more project partners who share your deep interest, and invite them to become Team-of-Two / Study Group partners with you, dedicated to the above topic or project. Together, dedicate your shared work to the mutual well-bring of all peoples and all creatures. To find possible partners, you can use the Internet to host a local “meet up” focused on your topic. Or you can use your Facebook page, or local network, to announce that you are interested in that topic and would like to find study partners. (For safety reasons, we strongly recommend meeting your study partners online via Skype or Google Hangout, or in public places such as bookstores or cafés.)

4. Explore and agree on project goals. Agree on what you would like to accomplish in a 3 to 6 month period of working together on behalf of the Web of Life as peer volunteers and mutual support partners.

5. Meet on a regular schedule to accomplish your goals, and keep a journal of your progress and challenges. Pass a “talking stick” back and forth to one another or invent other creative rituals to make sure that each person receives a roughly equal amount of listening attention. Make a space for expressing both joys and sorrows. Practice empathic listening. (Please see the [Seven Challenges Workbook](#) for suggestions about how to improve your team communication skills. Please see the [Spiral Journey Mandala](#) for more suggestions about how to work on demanding issues while nurturing the people around you.)

6. Deepen your practice. We invite and encourage people everywhere to explore and develop a Web-of-Life-centered, daily, ongoing, spiritual practice that might include elements of prayer, meditation, blessing, gratitude, invocation, transformation, and opening to immanent and transcendent beauty (in the Navajo and Sufi senses). This could include communion with any and all the great souls who have inspired you on the path of compassion, communion with all your ancestors back to the birth of the Milky Way, and communion with all the future generations of Life on Planet Earth. (We offer the [prayer resources](#) on the Deep Green Awakening web site as one of many possible starting places for this kind of ecological spirituality. You are also invited to visit our

[meditation, prayer and blessing exploration page](#) for a wide variety of examples and suggestions.)

7. Invite others to join with you in your project, if and when that feels appropriate. Encourage new participants to find and team up with new project partners. (Please give new participants a copy of this document.)

8. Create a gift from your work. With your Team of Two (or more) partner(s), create a memo, report, book report, PowerPoint presentation, video, painting, sculpture or music performance MP3 that documents/expresses what you have done and learned.

9. Celebrate and share the results of your project with your circle of friends and extended community, with other communities, and with the whole world through the Internet. Place the results of your project or study in the Creative Commons as royalty-free resources so that others can learn from them and build on them.

10. Evaluate your experience together. Identify areas where you would like to function better and know more, both as advocates for the Web of Life and as Team-of-Two participants. Consider how you would like to deepen your spiritual practice. Record all the above in your personal journal, if you have one. (If you have not kept a personal journal up to now, this could be a good time to begin.)

11. Plan your next step. Renew your participation in a given project for another 3 to 6 months, turn your Team of Two into co-coordinators of a study/action group focused on your theme or project, or conclude your project and make a space for each Team-of-Two partner to bless the other to work on new projects and extend their circle of creative friendships.

12. Expand the circle. Meet other participants in your region and begin to have monthly or quarterly regional meetings/potlucks, where participants can share their ongoing work and evolve new forms of celebrating the Web of Life and our existence within Her. Deepen your knowledge and practice of the path of service that calls to you (see #2 above), then offer to co-mentor others in that path of service. Encourage your Team of Two partners to develop other Team of Two partnerships.

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RECOMMENDED READING LIST (IN DEVELOPMENT):

For PDF of this document with active hyperlinks please click or visit:
<https://DeepGreenAwakening.net/library/transformational-teams-of-two.pdf>

Communication skills:

The Seven Challenges Workbook:

Communication Skills for Success at Home and at Work

By Dennis Rivers, MA, communication skills trainer and anti-nuclear activist. Available free of charge in PDF format at www.NewConversations.net

The Talk Book:

Six talk tools that strengthen relationships and repair communication breakdowns

By Gerald Goodman, Professor Emeritus of Psychology, UCLA.
BookSurge Publishing, 2009. ISBN: 978-1439246894

Supportive relationships:

The Helping Relationship: Processes and Skills

By Lawrence M. Brammer and Ginger MacDonald.
Pearson, 8th Edition, 2002. ISBN: 978-0205355204

Powers of Two: How Relationships Drive Creativity

By Joshua Wolf Shenk. Mariner Books, 2015. ISBN: 978-0544334465

Power of 2:

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My notes

TWELVE VOWS IN THE ETERNAL NOW

www.DeepGreenAwakening.net/twelve-vows-in-the-eternal-now.pdf



Fractal Cathedral -- Artist unknown

By Dennis Rivers, with suggestions from Maía,
Gene Knudsen Hoffman, and Paloma Pavel, and
with inspirations from Joanna Macy, John Seed, Ramon Panikkar
Duane Elgin, Matthew Fox and Brother David Steindl-Rast

First published in 2003. July 2021 revision

PREFACE

These twelve new openings/vows/intentions/aspirations are born of both joy and sorrow. They express the new love of nature, and concern for the well-being of all creatures, the spirit of Earth Day, that has emerged in the last half century, beginning with writers such as Rachel Carson, Loren Eiseley, and Thomas Berry.

The same time period has also witnessed the continuation of chronic war, the re-emergence of religious and political fanaticism around the world, and, in the sexual abuse of children by clergy, the tragic betrayal of entire religious communities by the very people who had vowed to care for them.

And if these developments were not enough to break your heart, the drastic side-effects of out-of-control industrialization are endangering the Web of Life and propelling Earth into the Sixth Great Extinction, which will probably include us.

Having been spiritually “thrown overboard” by these powerful conflicting currents of ignorance and tragedy, that call into question any possible future, we invite you to explore with us a spirituality of compassion in the eternal present.

In this vision, traditional vows about our conduct in the future have been transformed into openings in the now, openings to live a thoughtful and heroic love that moves outward from the heart into whatever this day may bring.

In this approach we seek to, “open to it today, celebrate it today, practice it today,” rather than “promise it forever”.

One way of exploring these openings, in keeping with the theme of “today,” is to read the Twelve Vows each morning on waking up. This is the one day we have been given by Mother Universe in which to increase the total amount of kindness in the world.

This is a profound invitation, but it is not a requirement. What is really important is that you find the rhythm of affirmation and commitment that expresses your own deepest yearning for communion with the Web of All.

Also, as you explore these openings, please feel free to re-write them in your own vocabulary, as often as the spirit moves you, *or develop a set of life-affirming vows entirely your own! **Life evolves through exploration and variation!***

May these evolving commitments to nurture life become your lifelong friends.

My notes

1. TURNING TOWARD REVERENCE FOR THE WEB OF LIFE AND PEOPLE

This moment and this day,

I open my heart to consider, to delight in,
to nurture and to celebrate
the beauty, integrity and well-being of all life-forms and natural
systems:

people of all ages, kinds and races,
animals and plants, lands and seas, rivers and mountains,
which co-exist with me now
and which will come after me into the far future.

These I take to be my kin,
expressions of the same Heart of Being,
the same Living Universe,
of which my life is an expression.



Painting by Meganne Forbes
(used with permission)
www.meganneforbes.com

2. DEEPENING MY SERVICE FOR, AND CELEBRATION OF, THE HIGHEST GOOD OF ALL

This moment and this day,

understanding and embracing the infinite interwovenness
of my life with the life of all creatures great and small,
I commit myself to serving the living Web-of-Life-and-People,
to hearing the pain of both people
and our sister and brother life forms in distress,
to finding the path of service that is right for me,
and to inviting, joining, encouraging, and accompanying others
to do the same.



Painting by Meganne Forbes
(used with permission)
www.meganneforbes.com

My notes

3. EMBRACING SAINTS, EXEMPLARS, AND FUTURE BEINGS IN DEEP TIME

This moment and this day,

I open my heart to receive the grace
of all those who have walked before me
on the paths of courage, compassion, caring, creativity and truthfulness.
I open my life to receive the empowering gift
of their lives and their love for all.

I open my life to be a window of nurturing mercy
that future generations of people, animals, plants,
oceans, rivers and mountains,
might be born into a green Earth
capable of sustaining life in all its richness,
and not a nightmare world poisoned by industrial and nuclear wastes,
and genetic damage.

I embrace all saints as my parents.
I embrace all life forms,
as long as the Earth shall endure,
as my children.



Chambered Nautilus Canvas Print
Canvas Art by Ev Cabrera Marinucci

4. QUESTIONING AS A PATH OF TRANSFORMATION

This moment and this day,

mindful of the ways that answers can become meaningless
without the questions that evoked them,
and that even great truths can become lifeless dogmas,
I embrace the practice of creative, open-ended, questioning
of self, of others and of institutions
as a way of deepening my engagement with the ongoing quest
for a wiser and more compassionate world.

Following in the spirit of the teachings of Jesus and Gandhi
“to be the change you want to see,”

I open my heart to translate every “Thou Shalt...” and “You must...”
into “How will I...?” and “How will we, together,...?”

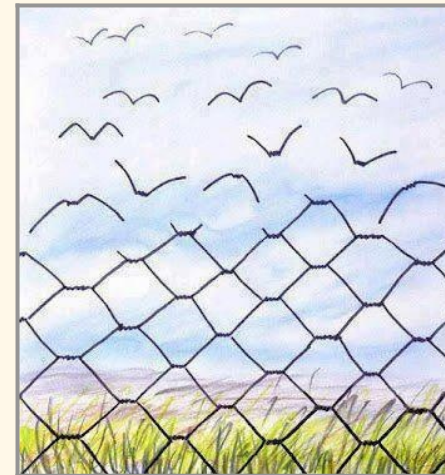


Image from Pinterest – Artist Unknown

Solomon Ibn Gabirol, the Spanish poet and philosopher
wrote: "We are wise only while in search of wisdom;
when we imagine we have attained it, we are fools."
(*Day By Day*, Rabbi Chaim Stern, p.295)

My notes

5. CULTIVATING COMMUNITY AND TEAMS-OF-TWO

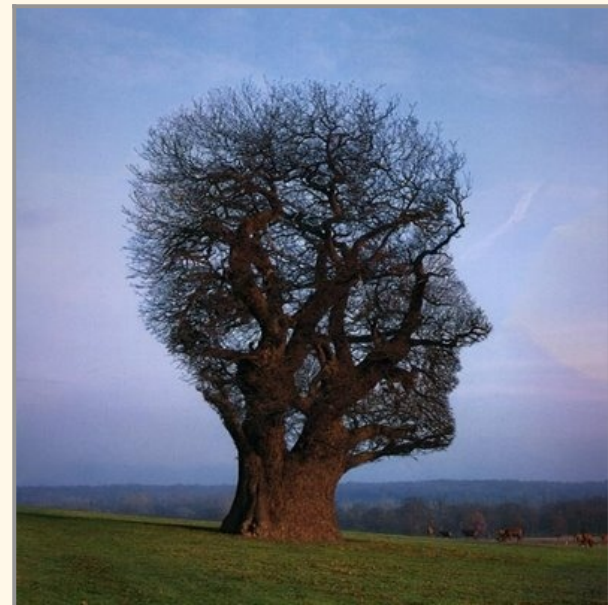
This moment and this day,
I commit myself to befriend others
who love, serve and celebrate the Web-of-Life-and-People,
and to work with others to build
cooperative communities of mutual support,
in widening circles,
that honor and encourage such love, service and celebration.



Image copyright : [Edward Hardam](#) via 123rf.com
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6. DEEPENING GRATEFULNESS AND PRESENCE

Learning of the countless ways
that people, the Earth, and the Universe support my life,
I open my life *this moment and this day*
to expand the circle of my gratefulness
by becoming more fully present
to each moment of the life that is given to me,
and by surrounding with mercy and lovingkindness
all that is wounded and incomplete in myself,
all that is wounded and incomplete in others, and
all that is wounded and incomplete in the world,
that we might journey together
into a deeper completeness.

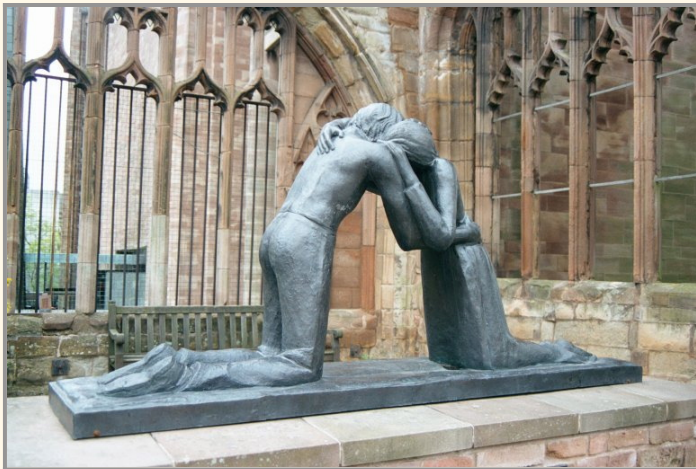


From: <http://favimages.com/image/177841/>
Artist unknown.

My notes

7. DEEPENING FORGIVENESS & OPENNESS

This moment and this day,
learning from the way that nature starts anew each year
I open my heart to the new possibilities hidden in each moment
and I open my heart
to grow in my forgiveness of others,
to make amends for my mistakes,
and to ask others to forgive me when I have injured them.



Reconciliation
St. Michael's Cathedral, Coventry, UK
Designed by Josefin de Vasconcellos

8. EMBRACING UNIQUENESS AND VARIETY

Understanding that nature thrives in variety,
I open my heart *this moment and this day*,
to celebrate and learn from difference,
as well as to delight in agreement,
and I affirm the rightness of each person to find their own path,
their own unique vocabulary, and their own community
with which to express their love for and concerns about
the Web-of-Life-and-People.

I will affirm and bless all those
who leave my familiar circle to follow their own calling.

I open my life to embrace the many moments and blessings
on my journey that I alone may see and understand.

I open my life to honor the unique world of experience
of each person, creature and eco-system I encounter.



Artist unknown

My notes

9. EMBRACING CHANGE

Understanding that nature is a continuous flow of change and renewal,
I open my life *this moment and this day*,
to acknowledge all that is changing in my life and world,
and to the periodic reevaluation of all my commitments:
to organizations in which I may participate,
to points of view that I may hold
to the social roles that I may play,
and positions of influence that I may occupy,
to citizenships and affiliations that may claim my allegiance
to all the forms of work and ownership through which I participate
in the economy of the world.

May all of the dimensions of my life
be continuously transformed
by the ever-new practice of lovingkindness.

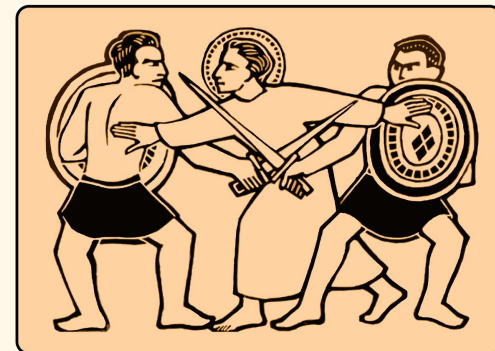


Turbulent Flow – Painting by Amelia Farrugia

10. TRAVELING THE ROAD OF PEACE, NON-VIOLENCE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

This moment and this day,
understanding that human conflicts in a technologized world
have ever more drastic consequences for both people and the Web of
Life, I commit myself to work for the peaceful resolution of conflicts
between persons, between nations, and between humans and
the many other children of the Earth.

Following the saints of all religions,
and my own deepest inner guidance,
I adopt the Golden Rule as the rule of my life,
and I renounce the intention to injure others, in any way.
In support of that process, I commit myself to facing,
acknowledging, forgiving and transforming,
any and all of my own anger, fear, greed, and ignorance,
any and all of my own self-deception, unfulfilled needs, lack of skill,
and lack of creative engagement,
such as they may be, and also the same,
of my culture and my country.
These are the steps I earnestly wish all others would take.
These are the steps that I myself will take.



Saint Telemachus the Peacemaker

who, according to a bishop in the early Church, was killed in
391 AD as he tried to interrupt a gladiatorial contest. His act of
love and courage inspired the Roman Emperor Honorius to
issue a ban on gladiatorial fights, which ended in 404 AD.

My notes

11. EMBRACING THE LIFE OF JOY AND SORROW, PASSION AND COMPASSION

This moment and this day,
learning from the cycle of the seasons
that holds both the harshness of winter and the pleasure of springtime
I open my heart to embrace more fully
all the joys and sorrows
of my life,
of all people,
and of all Life.



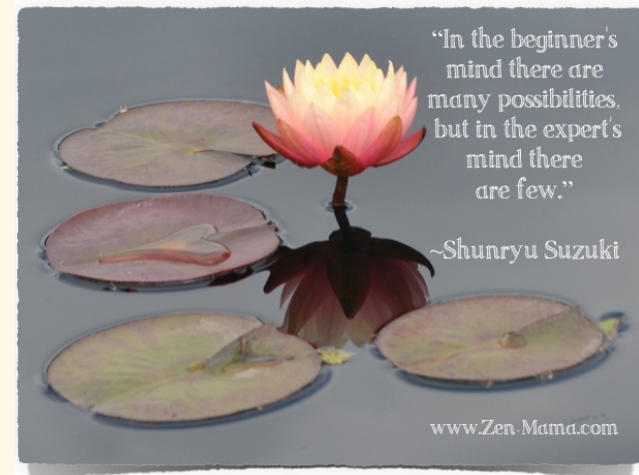
From: <https://positiveprovocations.com/2017/07/25/joy-and-sorrow-are-inseparable/>

12. BEGINNER'S MIND: EXPLORATORY SPIRAL OF ENDLESS BEGINNINGS

This moment and this day,
understanding the limited capacity of words to hold spiritual meanings,
and understanding the temptation to try to complete with words
what can only be completed in living,
I affirm these Green Vows/Openings of the Eternal Present
as a way of mobilizing my inner resources
to continue my path of exploration, action, embodiment, and dialogue,
my path of compassion, reflection, and celebration.

I make and hold these aspirational declarations
as beginnings rather than endings,
as not completing, resolving, or even fully describing
any of the themes they name.

I open my heart and mind
to affirm and learn from all that is reverential toward life
in every tradition and culture,
and to evolve new affirmations and practices
as my reverence for life deepens.



My notes



MAY YOU BE A BLESSING
TO ALL WHO WALK BESIDE YOU

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Namaste_IN_india.jpg
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