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 Earth Prayer mutual support network is a small, loosely-knit, community of spiritually motivated ecology, social justice and climate crisis activists linked by the Internet and small, local, pairs and groups. We are exploring Teams-of-Two as a mutual-support-for-emotional-resilience strategy in the face of a wide range of deeply disturbing and discouraging issues.

It is not clear to me how anyone will survive in the face of nuclear weapons, global warming, and the crushing social inequalities in force in the world today. 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 once said, “My religion is kindness.” And as Jesus of Nazareth speaks to all people across the centuries, “Love one another as I have loved you.” The way forward is unknown, but faith in life calls us to take up the cause of kindness and social transformation, nonetheless.

THE TEAMS-OF-TWO IDEA BELONGS TO EVERYONE.

Now that we are impacting the entire Earth in such drastic ways, thoughtful people across the globe (including spiritual leaders such as Pope Francis and the Dalai Lama) have become convinced that we need to expand our vision of kindness to include kindness toward the whole planet. How will we do that?

Teams of Two is an ancient idea in human cultures, and an even more ancient survival pattern in the biology of many species. So the goal of the Earth Prayer community in relation to this ancient idea is to practice it, share it, learn more about it, and apply it to meet today’s needs (rather than to try to patent, copyright or otherwise control it). Whatever in the text of this document you find useful in your work to mend the world, you are welcome to use and adapt under a Creative Commons license. (The illustrations in this document, while used with permission, are not owned by us, so we cannot pass on such an open ended invitation to re-use them. However, you are welcome to reproduce this entire document, as is, for nonprofit educational purposes.)

EXPLORING DECENTRALIZED RESILIENCE

Catastrophic climate change is already here. The European heat wave of 2003 killed approximately 70,000 people, many elderly, poor, and isolated. Such events confront us with the knowledge that we need a deeply new civilization, one that is much more web-of-life-friendly and person-to-person friendly. May people everywhere take up the cause of inventing one.

One of the ways we seek to contribute to this process is through imagining, exploring and building resilient, decentralized Webs Of Overlapping Friendships (WOOF! for short) both as individual instances of mutual support and also as an adaptable pattern of mutual support that other groups might make use of.

This sort of decentralized group structure means that you are invited to be always both at the center and at the growing edge of the innovation / exploration process. (This is also a deep and ancient vision of empowerment: “Wherever two or more are gathered in my name, there will I be.”)

Working from three of our evolving principles of decentralized organizing:

Inspire rather than require.
Inform, engage and support rather than direct.
Take up the cause that stirs in you the deepest love.

we support our far-flung participants with organizing suggestions and several large online libraries of inspirational and educational materials, including,

EarthPrayer.net EarthCitizens.net
BreakthroughCommunities.info WorldWheel.org
EarthhouseCenter.org RandomKindness.net
NewConversations.net SpiralJourney.org
How journey partners can help us think much-needed new thoughts and acknowledge disturbing feelings.

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.

In order to think new thoughts, and also to perhaps express doubts about the current way of doing things, 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. The same holds true for what feelings are allowable to be expressed.

In our time, continuous war and profit-driven, out-of-control industrialization are pushing the web of life to the breaking point. Our desperate circumstances are challenging us to both grieve for what we have already lost and 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 will be the great cooperative challenge of our lifetimes, even if it is a challenge we did not seek.

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

**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.

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.

*If you want to travel fast, travel alone.
If you want to travel far, travel together.*
*Ngambai African Proverb*

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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 Book of Faith & 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 OUR CIRCLES 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.

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 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 EarthCitizens.net page on Mahatma Gandhi Study Resources)

From the Rev. Dr. 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 EarthCitizens.net 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 Earth Citizens page on Joanna Macy Study Resources)

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 most famous 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’ inspiring 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 psycho-therapists 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 commu-
communication skills and conflict management now in use around the world.)

**Lawrence Brammer** is an emeritus professor at the University of Washington, Seattle, and author of *The Helping Relationship: Processes 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 mostly 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* 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.)*

**Three-Part Learning Companions – A 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 many 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, and will always be, 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 will be some areas and topics in life where I know more than you do, or have had more experience than you. In relation to those areas, I am convinced that life calls me offer myself as your servant-mentor. My task is to support, accompany and encourage you in your exploration and learning.

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 what I could learn from you, and 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 Interfaith Companions in Blessing 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.

(2022 note: There is no doubt that we are neurologically predisposed to imitate one another. There are ongoing debates about which particular neurons in the human brain are responsible for this tendency.)

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.

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 can increase that transferability a bit, but not nearly as much as one would hope, in my experience.) 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 can you run 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.
TWELVE SUGGESTIONS
FOR ECO-SPIRITUAL TEAMS-OF-TWO
Steps for creating a Team-of-Two partnership to deepen your practice of creative resilience and compassionate resistance
By Dennis Rivers, MA, and friends
July 2022 edition

Context: The current global epidemics of greed and violence (and their combination 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 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.

1. Explore the Five Wings of the Heart prayer mandalas. We offer these as one possible example of embracing an active reverence for life: more consciously, compassionately, courageously and creatively. We also hope to nurture and encourage a similar quest in all the people around us, using any and all inspirational materials that they find helpful. As a place to begin, please see the following web and print resources:

The Five Wings of the Heart Mandala Series
The Eight Interwoven Strands
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.
- 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-being 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 Zoom, or in public places such as coffee shops.)

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 Five Wings of the Heart and the prayer resources page on the Earth Prayer Library web site as possible starting places for this kind of ecological spirituality. You are welcome to rewrite these prayers and blessings to meet your needs.)

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.
**Recommended Reading List (in development):**

For PDF of this document with active hyperlinks please visit [https://companions-in-blessing.org/library/cib-teams-of-two.pdf](https://companions-in-blessing.org/library/cib-teams-of-two.pdf)

**Communication skills:**

*The Seven Challenges Workbook: Communication Skills for Success at Home and at Work.*
Dennis Rivers, MA, communication skills trainer and anti-nuclear activist. (See summary on next page.) Available free of charge in PDF format at [www.NewConversations.net](http://www.NewConversations.net)

*The Talk Book.* Gerald Goodman

**Supportive relationships:**

*The Helping Relationship: Processes and Skills.*
Lawrence M. Brammer and Ginger MacDonald.

*Powers of Two: Finding the Essence of Innovation in Creative Pairs*
Joshua Wolf Shenk.

*Power of 2: How to Make the Most of Your Partnerships at Work and in Life.*
Rodd Wagner and Gale Muller

* Becoming Naturally Therapeutic: A Return To The True Essence Of Helping.*
Jacqueline Small.
A universal guide to being a helpful companion on the road of life.

**Co-mentoring:**

*A Philosophy of Havruta*


**Collaborative egalitarianism:**

*Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* Paulo Freire

*Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* Paulo Freire

**Human development:**

*Developing Through Relationships: Origins of Communication, Self, and Culture*
Alan Fogel

*The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development*  Robert Kegan

**Suggestions welcome!**

More information about co-mentoring and accountability partnering to be added to later editions of this document. Please send suggestions of informative/inspiring books and articles to dennis.rivers@gmail.com.
**Communication Skills for Mutual Support**

A one-page summary of The Seven Challenges Workbook

Seven creative steps in the process of communicating more cooperatively and successfully, as explored in The SEVEN CHALLENGES Workbook and Reader, by Dennis Rivers, MA. Free PDF available at NewConversations.net

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**challenge one**

**Start by listening more carefully and more responsively** - acknowledging the feelings and wants that people express in word and mood. Actively acknowledging another person’s experience does not have to mean that you agree or approve. Compassionately allow people to feel whatever they feel. People are much more likely to listen if they have been listened to with actively expressed acknowledgments.

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**challenge two**

**Explain your conversational intent and invite consent.** Use one of 30 basic conversational invitations such as, “Right now I would like to take a few minutes and ask you about... [subject].” The more involvement a conversation is going to require, the more you will benefit by sharing your conversational goal and inviting the conscious cooperation of your conversation partner.

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**challenge three**

**Express yourself more clearly and completely** - giving your listeners the information they need to understand (mentally reconstruct) your experiences more fully. One good way is to use “the five I-messages”: What/how I (1) observe, (2) am feeling, (3) because I interpret/evaluate/need, and now I (4) want to request, and (5) envision/hope for from request. Good for self-understanding, too.

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**challenge four**

**Translate criticisms and complaints into requests** and explain the positive results of having your request granted. Do this for both your own complaints and the complaints that others bring to you. Focusing on the positive outcome shows respect to the recipient of a request as having a positive contribution to make, and shifts focus from past mistakes to present and future successes.

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**challenge five**

**Ask questions more “open-endedly” and more creatively.** "How did you like that movie?" is an open-ended question that invites a wide range of answers. “Did you like it?” suggests only “yes” or “no” as answers and does not encourage discussion. Sincerely asked open-ended questions can open up our conversation partners. (How comfortable are you with this suggestion?)

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**challenge six**

**Thanking... Explore and express more appreciation, gratitude, encouragement and delight.** In a world full of problems and criticisms, make a special effort to look for opportunities to express satisfaction. Whether partnering, parenting or working, it is the memory of many appreciations that makes a relationship strong enough to allow for the stresses of problem-solving & differing needs.

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**challenge seven**

**Adopt the continuous learning perspective...** Make the practices described in challenges 1 through 6 important parts of your everyday living. Pay attention to each conversation as an opportunity to grow in skill, awareness and compassion. Work to redefine each of your “opponents” in life as a learning and problem-solving partner. Jump-start the process of change in your life by personally embodying the changes, virtues and styles of behavior you want to see in others.