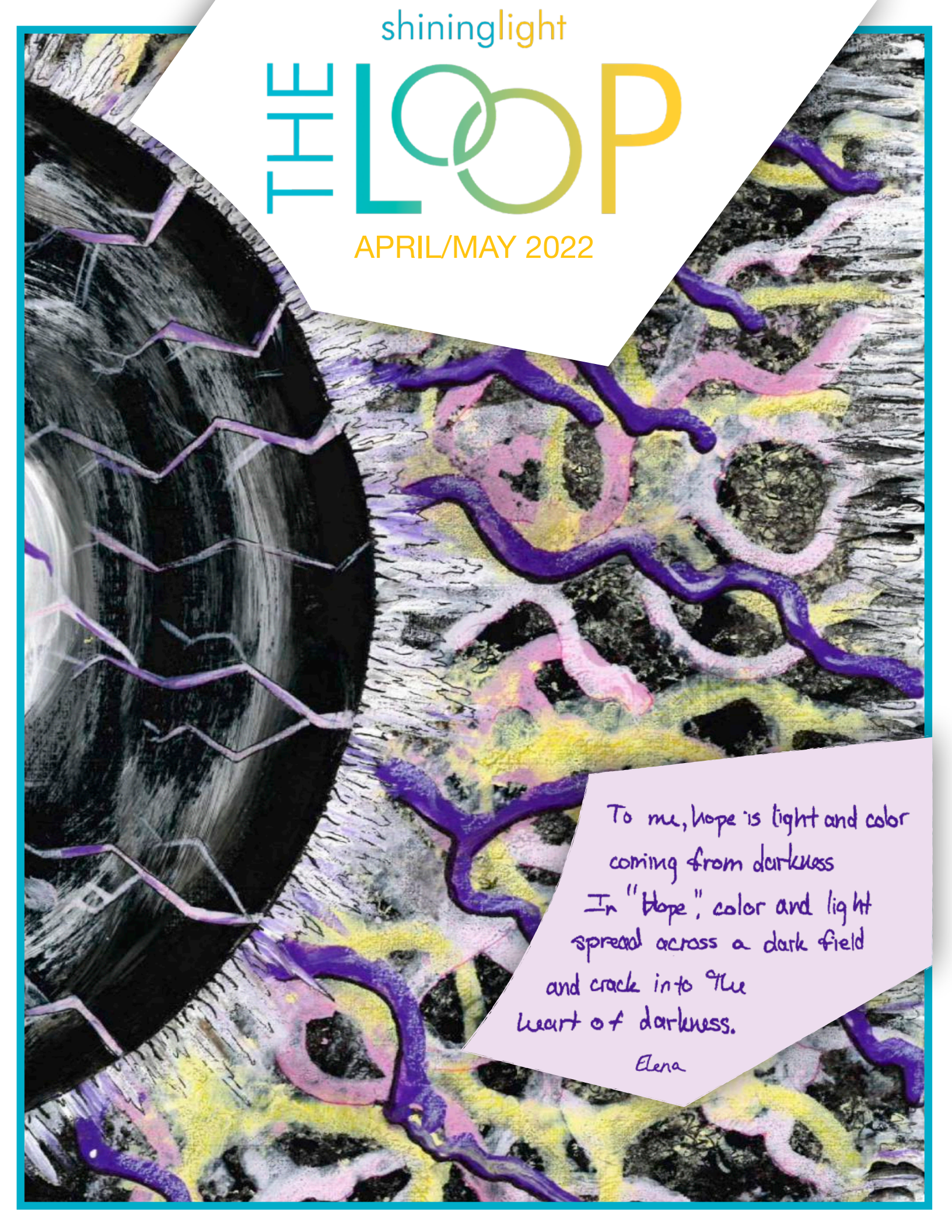


shininglight

THE LOOP

APRIL/MAY 2022



To me, hope is light and color
coming from darkness
In "Hope", color and light
spread across a dark field
and crack into the
heart of darkness.

Elena



At Shining Light, we believe we each have the potential to shine light wherever we are. Through connecting with each other, being creative, and learning together, we can maintain or even brighten that light in ourselves and in our community, despite circumstances that threaten to dim it. The more lights we have, the brighter our collective light can shine, until the whole environment of prison is changed.

More than a single program, Shining Light is a community focused on the potential for personal growth in prisons and jails across America. We define this community as: an open circle of individuals (*all are welcome*) with shared values (*creative thinking, humility, working together, giving your best*) who engage (*actively participate*) in constructive information, activities and relationships that contribute to individual and community improvement (*for your own benefit, and those around you*).

In all of our programs and resources, like The Loop, we strive to be as supportive and relevant as we can while also meeting the expectations of our various partnering facilities and state departments. We welcome feedback from participants and administrative staff to help us improve our ability to affect change and unlock human potential.

The Loop is not just a magazine. It's a sense of belonging to something positive, a reminder that we're not alone, a push to keep going, and a compass to guide the way. It's how we communicate with one another, be it through shared creativity, thoughtful questions and activities, or updates and words of encouragement. It can even be a touchpoint for meaningful connection with loved ones who read it online! (*Every issue is posted at shining-light.com/theloop*)

It is you - the readers and contributors - who make The Loop so special. Your stories of engagement with exercises and the impact it is having, your creativity and insight, and your willingness to invite your peers to subscribe is what keeps momentum going. If you are new to The Loop, we consider you part of the Shining Light community. So when you're ready to join in our ongoing conversation, know that we're always glad to hear from you! We are selective in what we publish, however, so please check out the guidelines below so you know what we're looking for.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

- We will credit contributions with first name, last initial, and state, unless you clearly indicate otherwise.
- If you write anything in a letter that you do NOT want to be shared in The Loop or other Shining Light communications, please note that clearly.
- We reserve the right to edit your contribution as needed to fit space and/or theme.

CONTENT

- Submissions should have a positive intention, which may include creative expression, encouraging words, or a constructive release of negative emotion.
- Remember to be inclusive of people of all faiths and backgrounds.
- Avoid details of your case or extensive criticism of the institution/DOC.

FORMATTING

- Write as legibly as possible (or type) so we can all read what you wrote!
- If possible, submit artwork and writings on blank paper.
- Be concise. Featured writings must fit legibly on 1 page. Responses to activities, questions, prompts, etc should be limited to a short paragraph or two so we can include more people!

We believe it is important to clearly define who we are and what we do to avoid getting pulled in too many directions and spread too thin. Please understand that Shining Light does not provide legal or reentry services, penpal relationships, mentoring, or assistance with publishing creative work, though we will direct you to other organizations that do.

WELCOME, READERS!

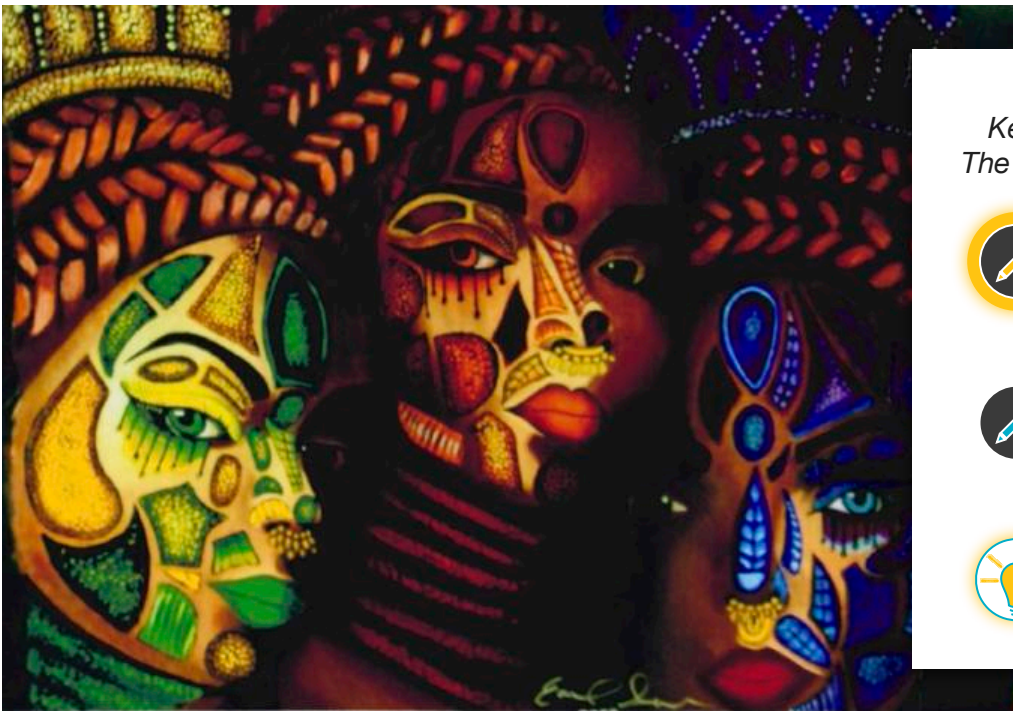


Kelly
PROGRAM DIRECTOR

To our new readers & subscribers, welcome to The Loop! Our community continues to grow deeper and wider all the time, with new folks contributing content from PA to Ohio and Illinois, all the way to Montana, North Dakota, and California!

IN THIS ISSUE: We'll be unpacking Spirituality as one of the 24 character strengths every human being is considered to have. If you're like me, this may raise immediate questions like, "Does that mean someone can have Spirituality even if they don't practice a religion? Is Spirituality the same as faith?" What I'm discovering, and hope to explore through this issue, is a broader understanding of Spirituality that encourages me to grow in my own faith experience while also embracing others with different belief systems. With this broader definition, we'll look at how Spirituality can be developed and used in healthy ways to benefit one's own wellbeing and relationships, beyond specific religious expressions. We know this can be a complex topic, with a wide range of thoughts and emotions tied to it. We'll try to cover as much ground as we can, but our resources are limited! If you have lingering questions or need help to process anything this issue brings up, we encourage you to reach out to a friend, chaplain or someone who can support you on your journey.

Thank you to **Elena H.** in Pennsylvania for the painting and perspective (cover) to get us thinking, to **Earl G.** in Pennsylvania for the painting below, and for others who are submitting incredible art for future issues. (Keep it coming!) As I mentioned before, we have been adjusting our production schedule for The Loop and appreciate your patience with the timing. Our next edition will be a June/July/Aug summer edition. After that, we should be back to every other month 😊



SYMBOL LEGEND

Keep your eye out for these throughout The Loop. Each indicates a different action:



WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Please send a response to keep the conversation going.



RESPONSE IS ALWAYS WELCOME

If you have a response, we'd love to hear it!



SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

We hope these activities give you some food for thought.

FOR THE NEXT ISSUE: We will take a look at the character strengths of *Curiosity* and *Love of Learning*. According to the VIA Institute, curious people "...are interested in exploring new ideas, activities and experiences, and they also have a strong desire to increase their own personal knowledge." For some of us, these strengths do not come naturally - especially not in environments that promote conformity and rigid structure. But for those who are strong in these areas, please tell us:

**HOW DO YOU DEVELOP CURIOSITY OR LOVE OF LEARNING
IN YOUR CURRENT SITUATION?**



TO: YOU
FROM: JEFF

Greetings to all our readers! It is exciting to be writing to so many of you! The Loop began as an effort to stay in touch with our 280 in-person program participants when the pandemic locked us out. Today, thousands of men and women are connected to the SL community through The Loop, with dozens of new subscriptions coming in each week. We are working hard to keep up and thank you for your patience and persistence as this community expands far beyond our expectations!

When Shining Light first started in 1996, spirituality was a central part of my motivation, though it has taken a lot of unexpected twists and turns since then. Sometimes the journey only becomes clearer when you look back and see where you have been. This happened to me a few years ago when I was asked by a chaplain, walking through a gloomy PA prison, "Why do you do this?" He wasn't satisfied with my quick answer, so I had to spend some time digging to really understand some of my motivations...

I was raised in a supportive family but found myself not fitting the mold in my community. I had a lot of health problems and didn't have the same interests as my peers. Our family was "different" because I had a sister with severe mental disabilities. My father died unexpectedly when I was 11, and my sister was placed in a care facility 2 days later. We were supposed to go on as if nothing had happened, but inwardly, I developed severe depression and anger. This came out as an obsession to work, first as a musician and then in business. Spirituality, self-care, and most relationships were pushed aside and ignored. I didn't see how any of that was important.

My workaholicism led to outward success initially, but in my early 30's everything started to crash around me. Potential bankruptcy and frayed family relationships brought me to a point where I could not function. That crisis led to counseling and medication, which eventually brought a spiritual awakening, and my journey took quite a turn toward where I am today.

I was soon applying my energies to music in the church, wanting to share the internal freedom I now had with others. As I mentioned in the last edition, this led to the opportunity to work with young people. My motivation was to help them see God and the world in a new way, which led to us going into prisons and eventually working very closely with people inside - people I never would have thought I would work alongside. I learned to respect people who didn't look like me, or who had different backgrounds, lifestyles, and beliefs. I discovered that as human beings, with all our outward diversity, we are more alike than I ever thought. I did a lot of wrestling with beliefs and deep-seated stereotypes that I didn't even know I had. (This is still a work in progress!)

Today in Shining Light, we focus on encouraging people on their journeys in general - to help individuals in prison discover their value and potential as human beings, which is at the root of spirituality regardless of any particular religion or faith. With that perspective, along with some tools to help impact daily choices, interactions, or overall life direction, we cheer you on in your own journey, including the spiritual elements. Put the rest of this magazine to use in your life and you might be surprised where it leads!

-Jeff



Jeff

**FOUNDER &
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

PROGRAM UPDATES



SL ACADEMY

The SL Academies at SCI Chester (PA) and Belmont CI (Ohio) finally wrapped up in February, after Covid-19 caused weeks of disruptions and delays. Congratulations to our 12 new Academy graduates for persevering and finishing strong!!!

"This group helped me to see myself in a positive light."

- Joven D (Pennsylvania)

"I didn't really know what was going on at first but I kept coming back, out of curiosity, and stubbornness. Now I am applying some of the things I learned every day. I don't feel like I am done... I want to do more."

- Frankie D (Ohio)



Collaborations are well underway for 16 participants and mentors, with most writers already on their 2nd drafts! Here's a sample of one exchange between Harry and his mentor, Nina:

NINA

"I must say what a delight it is to read your poetry! What are you most interested in working on for this piece? What do you want to communicate to your readers?"

HARRY

"I was so nervous that my submission/#1 draft would not be so well received. I am filled with anticipation as I go forward on this journey with someone who can help improve my writing skills. You asked, "What are you most interested in working on for this piece?" After having written this "Untitled" poem, I would recite it to others. Some liked it and expressed their thoughts. Others, although they seemed to be moved by it, exclaimed that it was dark and very discouraging. They felt that it lacked the concept of "HOPE". I was looking for "hope'."



WINTER ARTS COLAB

Real Talk



Naomi

PROGRAM CONSULTANT
COMMUTED LIFER
COMMUTATION SPECIALIST

REFLECTING ON SPIRITUALITY...

I'm a very spiritual person. I love the Lord with everything that is within me. I know that had it not been for God that I would not be where I am today. After looking back over my life, with the alcohol and the drugs, the fast lifestyle. I'm telling you that nobody but God saved me. I know that nobody but God *could* have saved me. And that's what makes me so grateful today. And why every day has meaning. Life is so short. We're not going to be here forever. I always say that I am a pilgrim - I'm just passing through. I don't know when my time is up and so every day needs to count. I want to have a good day every day. Even if it's not such a good day, it is still a good day because I don't know when these days will be over. I get meaning out of everyday just being amongst the living and being alive.

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

"What was your very first day like upon leaving the prison fence?"

My first day was so exciting, and bitter sweet, because I had been there for so long and those people were my family. I was leaving people that I loved, literally. But I was getting out, finally, and it felt really good. I was with my son and he asked what I wanted - I wanted KFC and he said, "Mom, people eat Popeye's now," so that's where we went, hahaha. To this day, I still pick up Popeye's now and then!

"A big box of my property turned up missing during my transfer to a new facility and I don't know what to do. Because I was in the RHU when the officers completed the inventory, I was unable to confirm that their list was correct. Everything I own was in that box, including my tablet, legal work, and personal pictures with sentimental value. Any advice you can give me would be greatly appreciated."

Every place is different, but I would write a request slip and ask again if they can check on your property and valuable possessions that are in the box. You have to approach the matter with respect. You can't catch kindness with negativity. Don't approach it aggressively, but go with a little bit of humility because you're wanting them to do something for you. I'm sure that Property has the box. They may have just put it somewhere and don't know who put it where. Be cool, keep your head on straight, and remember it's about how you approach it.

"When meeting new individuals in jails such as inmates, should I inform them of my sexuality upon the new relationship while it is fresh, or wait a bit and inform them with time? Recently I've been informing my cellmates because respectfully I would like to give them the chance to ultimately decide if they'd like to continue as my cellmate. But should I do that with new people I meet or keep it to myself?"

In my opinion, your personal business is really nobody's business unless you are on an intimate level. If someone is liking you and you're liking them and they don't know, then that is the time that you tell somebody about yourself and then let them make that decision if they still like you in that way. Everybody has a right to know if you're personal with them, but going around just saying who you are to everyone, that's nobody's business.

 **ASK ANYTHING** *And if I can't offer any advice, I'll ask someone who can!*

**Please note that while we will maintain a professional level of confidentiality, we are legally required to report any information that involves a serious threat or existence of harm to yourself or others.*



Lee



Freedom

PROGRAM FACILITATORS / COMMUTED LIFERS & ACTIVISTS

What is spirituality? Is it faith, love, or hope? Is it believing in something bigger than ourselves? Is it people working together to create a better tomorrow? Many of us believe spirituality means religion or the belief in a higher power. For us, it was all of the above. But it was also the urge to be concerned with the human spirit. Spirituality is the very thing that helped us to get through 28 years in prison. Although we were down, our spirituality told us we were not out, and that there was a purpose in our incarceration. It set us on the journey of true life.

When we entered prison in 1993 with LWOP (Life Without Parole) sentences for a crime we did not commit, we were traumatized, depressed, and feeling hopeless and helpless. We did not know where our journey would lead, but we eventually turned to our faith and let go. At first it felt awkward, and sometimes foolish. But after a while, we began to develop a sense of purpose in helping others. If we were going to die in prison then we wanted to make a difference there. Like a rose, destiny collided with fate and love blossomed. Old wounds healed, hopelessness was replaced by hope, helplessness by personal responsibility, and depression passed away into the ether.

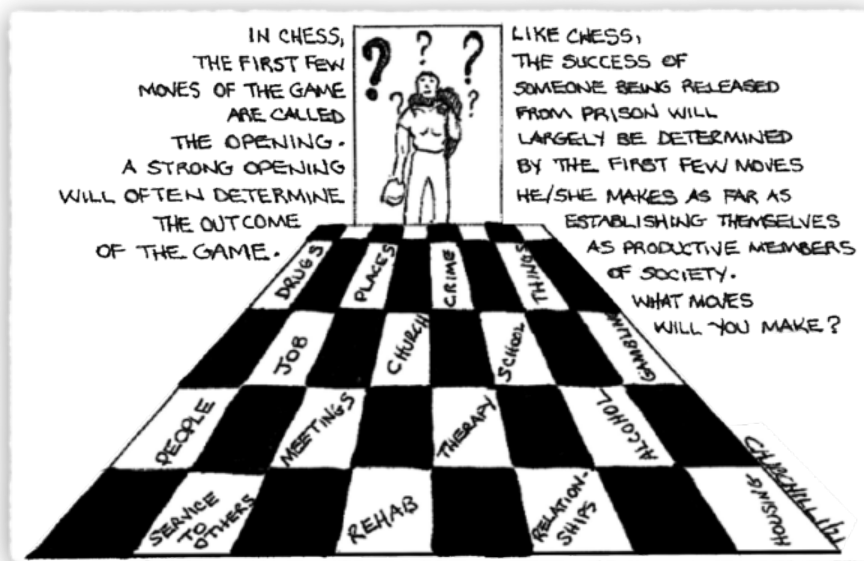
Something greater than ourselves was in control. We followed where it led us and accepted whoever it introduced into our lives. We opened up our hearts and saw the greatness in people even when they couldn't see it in themselves. We were able to see clearly what our grandmother said to us one day on a visit, after we spent the whole time complaining about how cold and dark the prison was: "If it's cold, heat it up with love and if it's dark, light it up with hope." Although at the time we thought she had lost her mind, she was really telling us to draw back on that spiritual essence we were raised with. Growing up we saw our family connecting with others in the community and appreciating people for who they were. Helping people through difficulty with dignity. Nobody asked them to do it - it was a feeling inside that nudged them forward. It was a deep sense of spirituality.

So, our spiritual journey began. Our challenge every day was to see the beauty in others and display beauty and excellence in ourselves. One thing about prison - no one person is an island. You survive through the relationships you build along the way. We are so grateful for the many relationships we built over those 28 years that will stay with us for the rest of our lives, where we connected through the shared pain of struggle and the belief that one day we would be free. The words of our grandmother and the support from our fellow prisoners is what drove us to create and be a part of all the unbelievable programs on the inside. We made it through because spirituality led the way. *Artwork below: "Church" (PA)*



How does spirituality lead the way for you on your life journey?

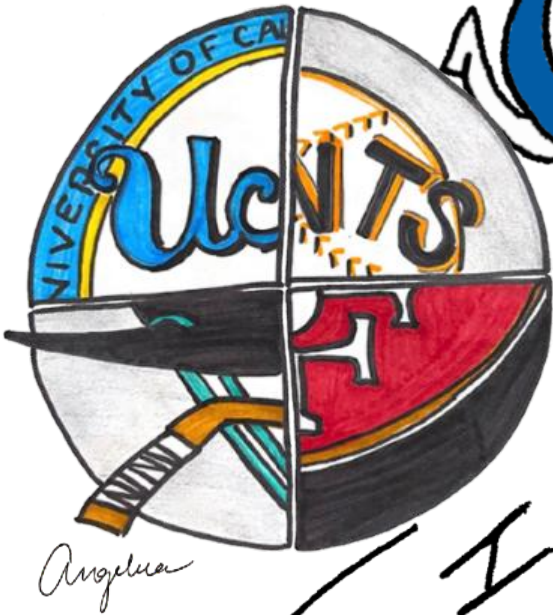
If you're feeling lost, how could spirituality - in any of the various ways Dennis & Lee define it - help guide your path?



CREATIVE CONNECTION

SPORTS MURAL

Last edition's prompt was, "Draw an ode to your favorite team, athlete and/or sport."



I wanna fly like a Eagle!

Go Eagles!!!

Tricia

Larry

Rachel



one hundred and eighty !!!

Kelly



TB
 #12
 THE G.O.A.T.
 Tom Brady
 #1 All Time 10 Super Bowl Appearances
 #1 All Time 7x Super Bowl Champion
 #1 All Time 5x Super Bowl MVP
 #1 All Time 21 Super Bowl Touch Downs
 #1 All Time 3,039 yards in the Super Bowl
 - Night

NEW **CURIOUS TO KNOW?**

People are incredibly complex, and the older you get, the more layers there are. So it's hard to fully know anyone, but by staying curious and asking questions, you can find out some of the most surprising things about the people around you. They play an instrument. They're a good cook. They like to paint.

In an effort to showcase some interesting things about our SL community, **draw a picture of a talent or fact about yourself that you think people would be curious to know.** I'll start us off with something most people don't assume about me:



JENNY
 CREATIVE SERVICES



And since we've got a lot of new people joining The Loop every week, I just want to share why this section matters.

Because your perspective matters.

This section is not just for the those of you who consider yourselves artists. We all need different avenues to express ourselves, and sometimes, that's done with pictures more than words.

So when you feel like you're out of the loop, the murals we make together should serve as a reminder of this growing community. It brings people hope. It brings people encouragement. And it's nice having something new to look at :)



Last time we looked at the practical goal-setting tip of starting small - the idea that it's best to first learn to drive in a parking lot, and build up to driving on the highway. In addition to this concept being helpful for achieving "New Year's Resolutions" and taking creative risks, we encouraged you to also consider what this concept would look like in terms of relationship building or benefiting your community. We love

hearing stories of "small" steps you're taking in this area! Listening more than talking on phone calls, initiating conversations, pointing out the positive vs the negative....

According to the VIA Institute, "Spirituality is believed to describe both the private, intimate relationship between humans and the divine, and the range of virtues that result from the relationships." (*full definition on page 15*) Perhaps this is the crux of the Community Codes. Because we believe that we are connected to one another, as we are also individually connected to the divine, how we treat ourselves and one another matters! If you look at our full list of Community Codes (from the Welcome Packet) you'll see they're meant to cover both...

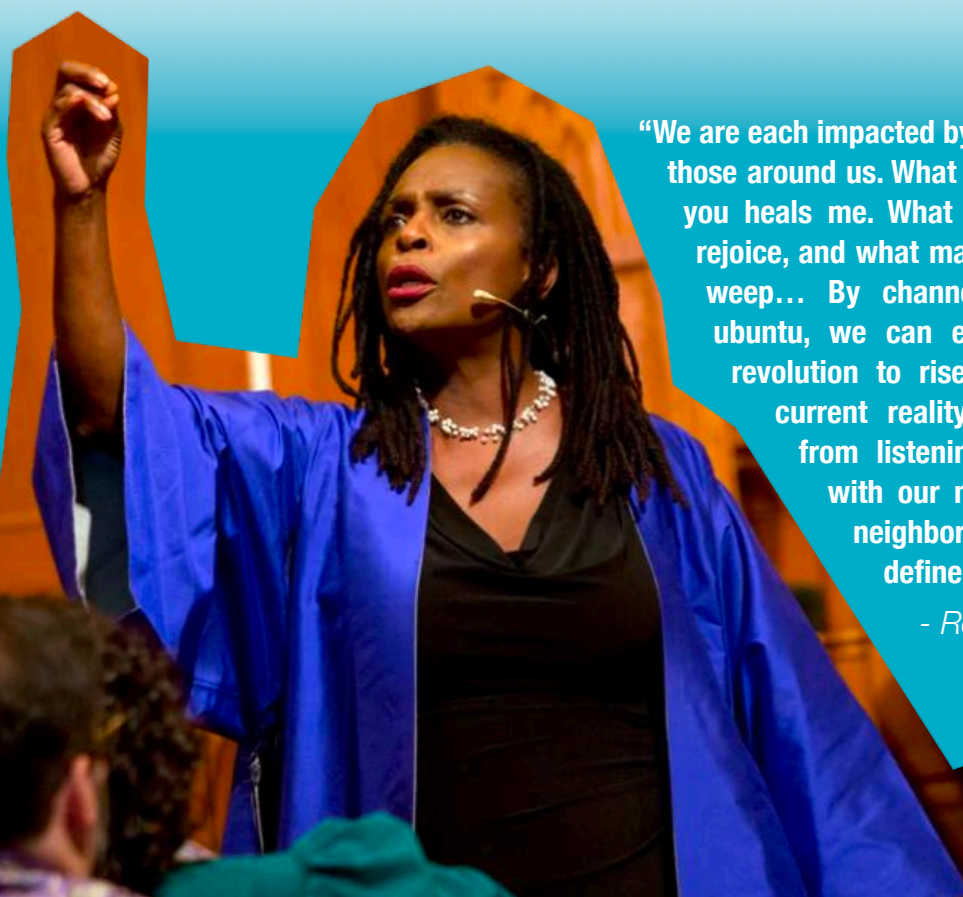


CARE FOR SELF & OTHERS

- **Take responsibility for yourself (physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually) to be ready for whatever the day may bring.**
- **Recognize and value what others may have to contribute; keep an eye out for those who may need support and offer it when you can.**



There is an African philosophy called *ubuntu* which encompasses this idea that we are all connected on a spiritual level. (*See page 19 to learn more.*) As you read the quote below, reflect on how you can be part of a "badly needed love revolution" in the midst of your situation. ***What is one thing you can do in the next week or two to better care for yourself or others?***



"We are each impacted by the circumstances that impact those around us. What hurts you hurts me. What heals you heals me. What causes you joy causes me to rejoice, and what makes you sad also causes me to weep... By channeling the ancient wisdom of ubuntu, we can engineer a badly needed love revolution to rise up out of the ashes of our current reality.... The empathy that grows from listening to others, from connecting with our neighbors, and from loving our neighbors as we love ourselves can define the courses of action we take."

- Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis



Hope

by Gary

SOUTH CAROLINA

Hope is the prisoner who sits in a cell believing that the sun will rise tomorrow and that glint on barbed wire will one day shine on him instead . . .

Hope is looking beyond the immediate the belief in, the knowledge of a future beyond the walls of confinement to a world awaiting their return . . .

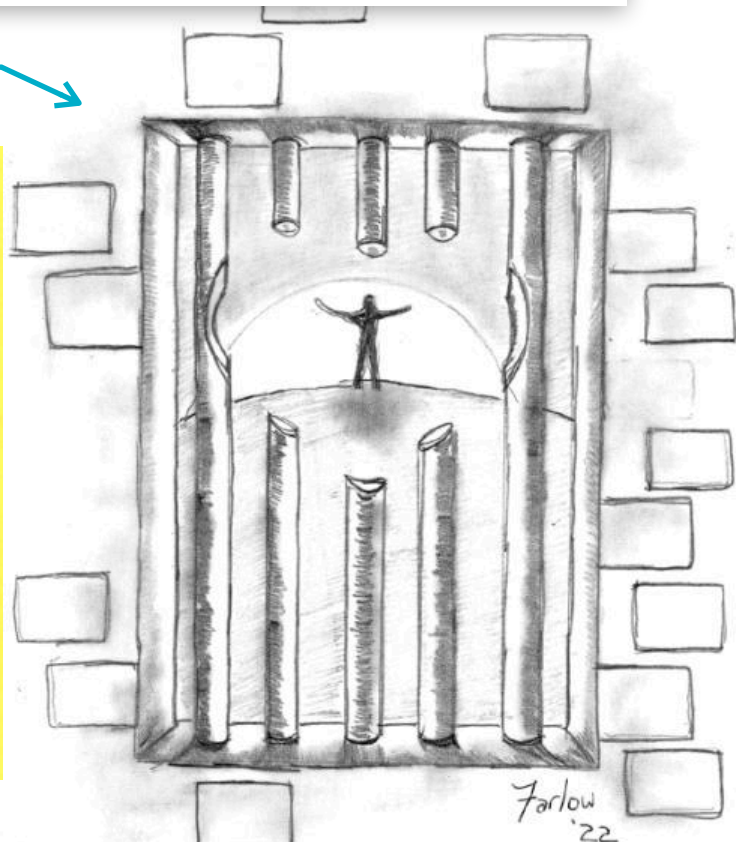
Hope is the assurance that you can pick up the pieces of a broken life find redemption in a new day and live again - not as a number, but as you . . .

Hope is like the air - invisible yet fundamental to human life because without it we are left alone to struggle, gasping, against despair . . .

I woke up with the sun in my face.
 Today is a good day, man I feel lucky today.
 I may be locked up but I won't let it knock me.
 Nah, won't let it stop me.
 Smile on my face, blessings in this place
 Glory to the lord above, he been good to me
 Only right I tell the world what he has done for me
 No matter where you are, the world
 is such a better place with a smile on your face.
 You don't have to see the stars to shine
 For you are the light of the world, a city on the hill.
 You are the star so shine like you are.
 Yeah today been a good day and tomorrow
 will be too.

-Dominique

ILLINOIS





Marcus & his new wife Leslie



SL COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

MARCUS SUAREZ

We met Marcus at SCI Benner Township (near State College, Pennsylvania) when he was a leader on the drama team in a Shining Light Workshop in 2017. Marcus grew up in the Bronx and was very active in arts, even attending a performing arts high school. But by age 16 he was getting pulled into life on the streets, which eventually led to his time in prison. Marcus just celebrated 2 years out; he was released in February 2020, after 14 years served.

What surprised you the most about returning to society?

It was definitely a culture shock when I came out. For the first two weeks I was overwhelmed. I still had a prison mentality. My kids were grown. Everyone was older. I had to learn to use an iphone. I was in a funk for two weeks and would lock myself in my room. Then my brother challenged me and I decided I had to get on with life. So I went and found a job.

What were keys to your successful re-entry?

Staying grounded in relationship with the Lord. Without Him I wouldn't be able to do it. Keeping working and having family support have really helped. I also left the gang life behind. I was a top person in a gang in one of the prisons where I lived, but a pastor came to me one day and said, "God knows you love him, but you can't serve 2 masters." I left the gang life behind and never turned back.

What was the hardest thing about re-entry for you?

Not working. Shortly after I got out and started working, I had to have surgery and was off for months with no income. It was a real battle with lots of temptations, but I didn't want to go back to the street. Fortunately, my family helped me out until I could get a job as a Fed Ex delivery driver. Then after about a year of that, I got hurt on the job and I have been off for 10 months. But, this time has been easier.

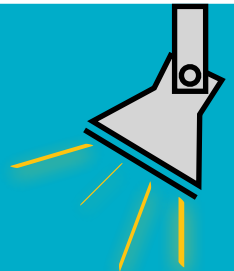
How is life now?

I am blessed. I met a girl I grew up with and we are getting married! (March 3, 2022) I am recovering from my injury and looking forward to getting back to driving truck and hopefully starting my own business. I am part of a church and their men's group, where I serve by helping give food to homeless people.

What would you say to those inside?

To keep up hope. Keep faith in the Lord. Know he will never fail you. Keep your hopes and dreams. It is impossible to do anything without God.

We're hearing about all kinds of great things that people in our community are doing from the inside, and we want to start featuring those people and stories in future issues. So if you have a project or program that you've started in prison that is making a positive impact on others, let us know. We may not be able to give everyone the recognition you deserve, but we'd love to highlight as many as possible!



At Shining Light, we want to be a community that helps each other focus on the positive in the midst of the challenges and painful situations we can't avoid. (We're not ignoring the bad; we're just finding a way to rise above it!) This page is all about celebrating accomplishments and good news, so tell us...

"Even in prison where things are negative doesn't mean we can't look for something better. When you share what went right with other people, even when crazy stuff is going on, they start to notice too."

AMIN
ACADEMY GRADUATE
PENNSYLVANIA

WHAT WENT RIGHT?



- What accomplishments are you proud of?
- What good news are you excited about?
- Are you or someone you know coming up on your release date?
- _____

After a few years of saving money I finally have the money to do a college course, because of being so limited in the prison system. I have chosen to do business management. Always strive to better yourselves for success, but ask God for help Always

Rabbit

PENNSYLVANIA

I have many accomplishments to be proud of. I started with hardly no education to a G.E.D. to 8 credits away from associate degree in Liberal Arts.

Tammy

ILLINOIS

I have a reason to Celebrate. In less then 3 months, I get released after serving 16 years. And I get to meet my son who was born 3 months after I was locked up.

- Raven -
OHIO

I found that if I acted on impulse to a negative situation, then I'd have negative results, (like being denied parole the last 2 times I seen them) But if I learn'd to walk away from negative situations then I could persevere and succeed and have positive results for my actions! Like seeing parole next month with 18 months misconduct free!

That's Perseverance!! - Beau

PENNSYLVANIA

Everytime a play or poem I write gets published. Hopefully, my writings will leave a legacy about me when it's all said and done.

Larry

PENNSYLVANIA

FOLLOW-UP: STRENGTHS SPOTTING

Last issue we asked readers to write in when they used the SEA model to strength-spot Perseverance. “Rabbit” shared a perfect example of this: **S**potting perseverance in a peer, **E**xplaining the situation, and **A**ppreciating how the use of perseverance impacted himself and others...

I was not big on sitting in the day room and doing bible study. I would always sit in my cell doing my own thing. recently I've noticed a brother who sits out here everyday. People walk by and say rude things to him. So I decided to go out of my comfort zone and sit with him a few weeks later. we have 5 people who sit with us. this brother shows true perseverance because he kept going no matter what people said and in the end he brought others together.

Rabbit

PENNSYLVANIA

Thank you to Beau (PA), “Night” (PA) and Tammy (IL) for your examples of perseverance, as well!



Next time you notice someone using the strength of Spirituality, let them know what you appreciate about it!

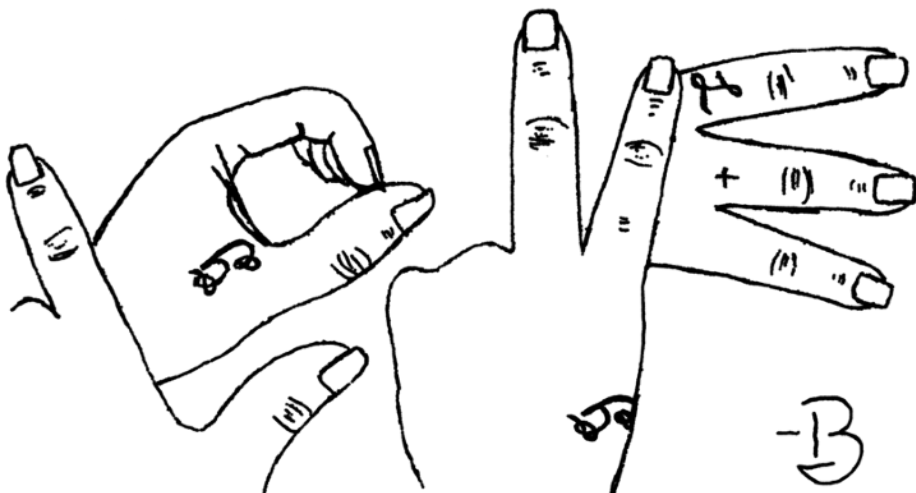


IDENTIFYING SIGNATURE STRENGTHS

Before we dive deeper into Spirituality, we always like to take some time to review the fundamentals of Character Strengths. So whether this is the first time reading The Loop or the tenth time, let's not forget about our Signature Strengths, or the “top five.” A helpful way to discern this is through the **3 E's**:

- Which of the 24 strengths feel the most **ESSENTIAL** to my identity?
- Which are the most **EFFORTLESS** to use?
- Which give me the most **ENERGY** when I use them?

Remember, you possess all 24 character strengths to some degree, but the 3 E's can help to identify those that are most important to you. Strengths that fall outside of your signature strengths are often referred to as middle and lower strengths, and may feel less essential to your identity, take more effort to use, and aren't quite as energizing. (Niemi, 2012)



BIANCA F.
PENNSYLVANIA

Many people check in on this about every 6 months and find it helpful to reflect on if/when there have been any changes. If it has been a while, or if you've not yet reviewed the list and identified your signature strengths, it may be worth doing! (If you're a subscriber, the full list was included in your Welcome Packet. You should also find it on your tablet through Edovo or APDS.)



LET US KNOW WHAT YOU DISCOVER!

<https://www.viacharacter.org/topics/articles/what-are-your-signature-strengths>

VIA DEFINITION: SPIRITUALITY

As is true for many of the character strengths in the VIA Classification, the strength of spirituality has many dimensions. Some of these include meaning, purpose, life calling, beliefs about the universe, the expression of virtue/goodness, and practices that connect with the transcendent. Spirituality has been defined consistently by scientists as the search for or connection with “the sacred”. The sacred might be that which is blessed, holy, revered, or particularly special. This can be secular or non-secular: sacredness might be pursued as the search for a purpose in life or as a close relationship with something greater; the sacred might be experienced in the forgiveness offered by a child, a humble moment between a leader and a subordinate, an awe-inspiring sunset, a profound experience during meditation or a religious service, or the self-sacrificing kindness of a stranger. As a character strength, spirituality involves the belief that there is a dimension to life that is beyond human understanding. Some people don’t connect this belief with the concept of a divinity and prefer to think of it in terms of a sense of meaning rather than spirituality, but in the VIA Classification the terms are considered closely related. Spirituality is believed to describe both the private, intimate relationship between humans and the divine, and the range of virtues that result from the relationships. Spirituality is universal. Although the specific content of spiritual beliefs varies, all cultures have a concept of an ultimate, transcendent, sacred force.

VIA Institute On Character. (n.d.). <https://www.viacharacter.org/character-strengths/spirituality>

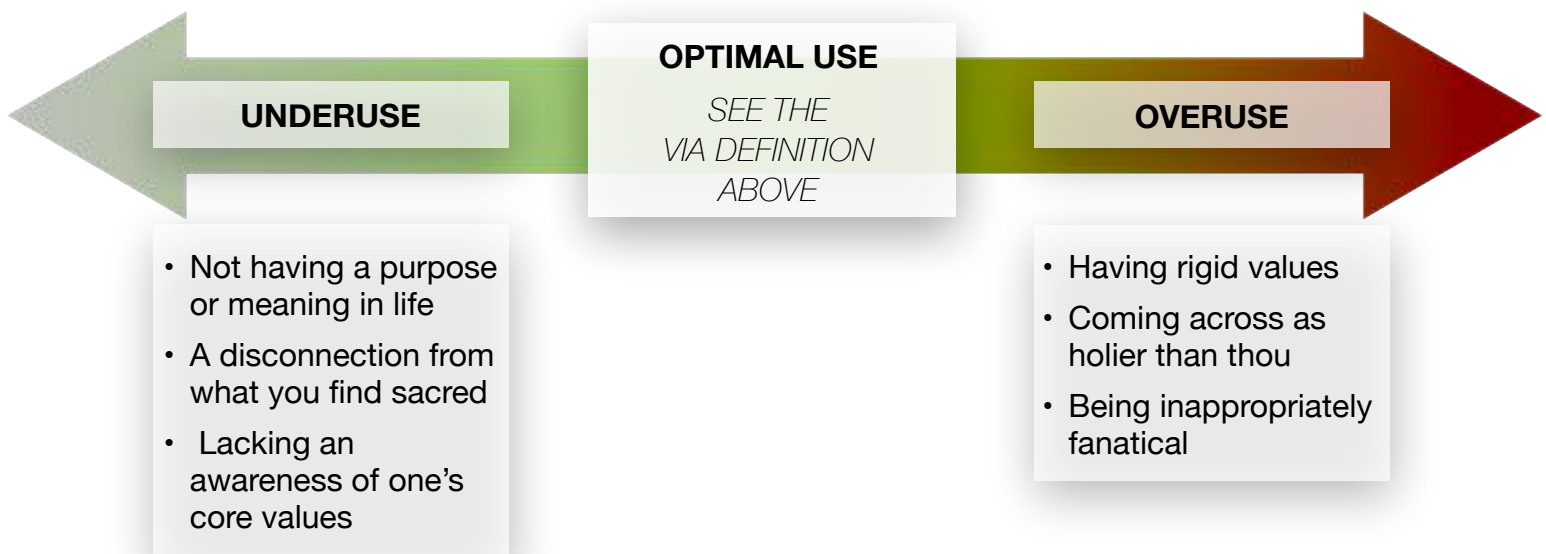
OVER USE & UNDER USE

Like the last issue, let’s consider what under, optimal, and overuse looks like in regard to spirituality. As a reminder, context is key when looking at the spectrum of using a character strength. Consider the difference in expressing spirituality at work, on the block, with family, or in a place of worship. What does it look like to tap into this strength in a way that positively impacts the people around you? (Niemi, 2019)



Travis
PROGRAM DEVELOPER

SPECTRUM OF SPIRITUALITY



Where do you see your use of spirituality on this spectrum? Is there a context where you tend to over- or underuse this strength? How might you work towards an optimal use in a way that brings more fulfillment to you and enriches those around you?



SPIRITUALITY: IN PRACTICE

Below are two different exercises you can use to build your strength of spirituality. Both can be used as a way to reflect on what you find meaningful and to take an intentional step toward living out your strength of spirituality. I encourage you to consider each and pick at least one to try!

PROACTIVELY ENGAGE IN A NEW ACTIVITY YOU WOULD FIND MEANINGFUL

Consider something that you wouldn't normally do, aren't required to do, and something that connects with your values. Maybe it is volunteering somewhere in your facility, rekindling a forgotten hobby, attending a faith community, or even just setting some time aside to reflect on your values. The goal is to take that initial step and to engage in something that builds a sense of purpose within yourself! Let us know how that goes - what did you end up doing and what did it mean to you?

REFLECT ON A SPIRITUAL ROLE MODEL

Maybe you have done this in other areas of life, but consider this in regard to your spirituality. Who is someone you admire, and what spiritual traits and qualities do they exemplify? Where would you like to apply these traits and qualities in your life? Take some time to write about that individual and why you identified them. Then consider how you want to take their example and apply it in one area of your life.

Last issue's community code, Start Simple, can be helpful with this activity. Oftentimes when we identify a role model, we think of individuals who have put in years of effort and work toward becoming the person they are. So start simple as you work towards exemplifying the quality you identified in that role model - one step, or one area of your life at a time.



We'd love to share some examples of how you are taking active steps to develop your strength of spirituality. Whether you choose one of these exercises or something else -

What kind of impact has it made on you and/or others in your life?



IN RESPONSE TO : WHAT SIGNIFICANCE
DOES SPIRITUALITY HAVE IN YOUR LIFE?

IT IS THE
DRIVING AND GUIDING FORCE
ON HOW I'VE CHOSEN
THE PATH I TRY TO WALK.

JAKE
NORTH DAKOTA



In this issue, we are looking at one of the most ancient practices humans have ever had: Breathing!

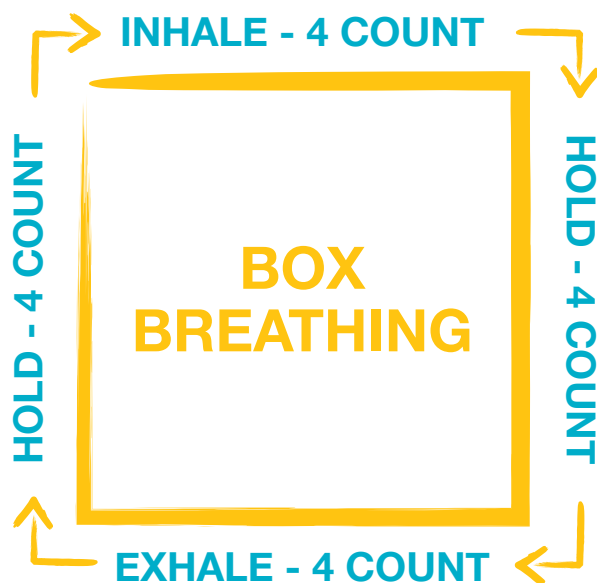
Specifically, a technique called Box Breathing has shown to have a variety of benefits. It is utilized by NAVY seals and is also the yogic practice, sama vritti pranayama, which I (Travis) think shows the diversity of application. But beyond its expansive use, breathing techniques like this one can lower stress by both reducing certain hormones and activating parts of the nervous system responsible for rest and digestion.

Integrative medicine specialist Dr. Melissa Young recommends staying within your comfort level to complete the practice, and to not strain your breathing by going too fast or too slow in your counting. She also recommends trying to complete the practice once or twice a day, no matter how you are feeling.

<https://health.clevelandclinic.org/box-breathing-benefits/>

BOX BREATHING STEPS

1. **Breathe out slowly, releasing all the air from your lungs.** *(Staff Tip from Kelly: You may find it helpful to place one hand over your heart and one hand over your stomach to help you consciously notice how the air fills and exits your lungs.)*
2. **Breathe in through your nose as you slowly count to four in your head.**
3. **Hold your breath for a count of four.**
4. **Exhale for another count of four.**
5. **Hold your breath again for a count of four.**
6. **Repeat for three to four rounds.**



In line with our theme of spirituality, feel free to take a moment after you complete the exercise to connect with whatever you find sacred.



As you give this a try, notice how you feel after completing the exercise. Does it have any lingering effects throughout the rest of your day?

What works for you?

**SEND US ANY PRACTICES YOU USE
FOR HEALTH & WELLNESS**



FEATURED WRITING

Last edition, we looked at bell hooks' claim that childhood is the original school of love. Then we asked what you thought of that opinion and what you learned about love during that time. Here is one of the responses we received:

Throughout my childhood I was abused. My stepfather and my grandfather would do things to me that I won't speak about, but even though I felt like I wasn't loved, my sister who is older than me, would come to my room at night and hold me and tell me everything would be okay. I would cry in my sister's arms. You see even when I felt that way, there was someone who loved me and tried to protect me. So even on your worst days when you feel like no one loves you, there is always someone. And don't forget God loves you always. And you can always talk to him and he listens. So I believe that Bell Hooks claims are true.

- Rabbit

PENNSYLVANIA

Our prompt for the Featured Writing in the next Loop comes from Marcus J...

"The importance of having a vision!" 

I'm serving an 18 year to life sentence and early on I had no vision of returning to society, being a better man, or vision of what my future held. The result of this added to my hopelessness mindset and my behaviors, reflected. As I got older, I learned that creating a vision of what kind of man I wanted to be and what type of life I wanted to live in prison and out of prison, helped me to grab on to hope and to start living in a way that is productive. So it would be nice to also hear other people's vision and how their vision helps them in their daily struggles.

- Marcus

OHIO



Rachel

PROGRAM
COORDINATOR

We are highlighting another publisher you may be interested in submitting your writing and/or visual art to - The Incarcerated Writer's Initiative at the Columbia Journal. The very cool thing about this journal is that every single submission will receive detailed feedback from a current Columbia writing student - which, if you are new to submitting work, is so valuable and not something that many publishing houses do.

To submit work, send a digital copy to ColumbiaWI@gmail.com or a physical copy to:

Heather Gluck - Incarcerated Writers Initiative, Columbia Artists/Teachers
415 Dodge Hall
Mail Code 1804
2960 Broadway
New York, NY 10027

More specific info at: columbiajournal.org/iwi/

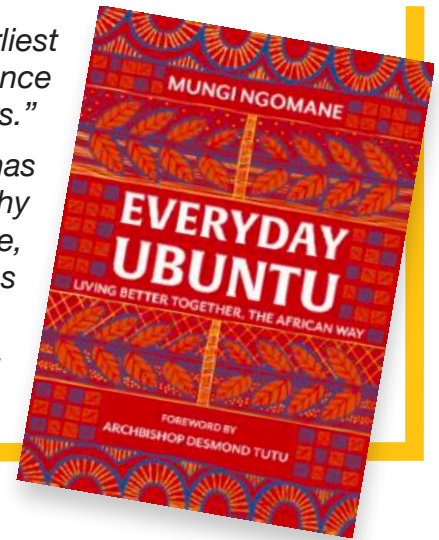
Below is an excerpt from a book by Mungi Ngomane, explaining the African concept of *ubuntu*:

Ubuntu is a way of life from which we can all learn... Originating from a Southern African philosophy, it encompasses all our aspirations about how to live life well, together. We feel it when we connect with other people and share a sense of humanity; when we listen deeply and experience an emotional bond; when we treat ourselves and other people with the dignity they deserve...

I was raised in a community that taught me ubuntu as one of my earliest lessons. My grandfather, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, explained the essence of ubuntu as, "My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours."

In my family, we were brought up to understand that a person who has ubuntu is one whose life is worth emulating. The bedrock of the philosophy is respect, for yourself and for others. So if you're able to see other people, even strangers, as fully human you will never be able to treat them as disposable or without worth...

Mungi Ngomane, *Everyday Ubuntu: Living Better Together, the African Way* (New York: Harper Design, 2020), 13, 14.



What do you think of this concept? How does it relate to your understanding of Spirituality? How can we as a society get to this way of living and seeing one another?

Perhaps it starts with us - one life at a time - connecting with the divine as our source for all of the goodness we hope to add to the world. Consider the well-known Catholic prayer of St. Francis below, often called the Peace Prayer, as a helpful guide...

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
 where there is hatred, let me sow love;
 where there is injury, pardon;
 where there is doubt, faith;
 where there is despair, hope;
 where there is darkness, light;
 where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
 to be consoled as to console,
 to be understood as to understand,
 to be loved as to love.
 For it is in giving that we receive,
 it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
 and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
 Amen.

**DID
YOU
KNOW?**

It has been said that the Peace Prayer first became popular at the height of World War I, was more globally used during World War II, and that Mother Teresa recited it daily.



Angelina

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR

One sign of a healthy community or relationship is the ability to disagree respectfully. We want to provide a chance for you to share your differing ideas in a safe, constructive way and practice critical thinking, hearing different perspectives, and carefully crafting a respectful argument. Life throws us situations where we need these skills all the time, so think of this as your practice ground.

Last edition proposed the statement “Something shared in confidence with someone should never be disclosed.” and asked if you were for or against it. Here’s what you had to say:

 AGREE

 DEPENDS

 DISAGREE

"Agree. It's about trust to hold on to personal understanding of certain things you talk about to someone special."

Jwin, CA

"I agree in part, as I wouldn't want anyone making permanent decisions on temporary problems."

Felix L., WA

"Yes. Some people have been hurt in the past just by sharing something with someone which was meant to be personal."

Jesus H., AZ

"I agree, but there is always a limit with me...I cannot keep a secret if I know someone is possibly in danger of hurting themselves or others."

Daniel M., MI

"No, because I facilitate and certain illegal acts are required by law to be reported, which is understood prior to any sharing in confidence."

Anonymous, CA

“SOMETHING SHARED IN CONFIDENCE WITH SOMEONE SHOULD NEVER BE DISCLOSED.”

"Yes. When someone trusts you with an issue then that trust should be honored."

Jerry C., AR

"...If they tell me, there is trust, which if I repeat, is spent, with a result that they have one less person to turn to, feel more isolated. With trust I would help them to get help..."

Jake, ND

"If you're told something in confidence you keep it that way, especially if you were asked to, however, that may vary like in a situation where two people have ill feelings toward each other and tell me in confidence. I could pull both of them aside and make light of the situation... also 100% agree with Barb."

Amir "Night" W., PA

"I disagree. If someone is going to hurt himself or others something has to be done."

Bradley S., AZ

(please note: some answers have been abridged for space)

FOR OUR NEXT EDITION, WE WANT TO KNOW...
DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THIS STATEMENT AND WHY:

**“NO ONE CAN EVER FULLY UNDERSTAND
WHAT SOMEONE ELSE IS GOING THROUGH.”**

WRITE US A SHORT PARAGRAPH (100 WORDS OR LESS) WITH YOUR THOUGHTS.

*What are the impacts if the above statement is true? If it's false?
How do we behave in light of that?*



Keep our **Community Codes** in mind as you write, especially:

- Speak life
- Share ideas, not ID's
- Speak from the "I"

WE CAN'T WAIT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

PASSOVER: A festival Dedicated to the Remembrance
of the Deliverance from Physical and Spiritual Slavery

The institution of Passover (Hebrew, פסח, Pesach) began in Egypt and can be read in the Bible (Exodus Chapter 12). This festival has deep meaning for every Jew but even a non-Jew can gain a loving connection with it.

On Passover, Jews remember their enslavement and freedom from that bondage suffered in Egypt. Their release allowed them to build a nation dedicated to free worship of God. What a powerful epoch of history told in only two sentences! (Can anyone relate?)

As a result of the Jewish enslavement the Jew is told: "You shall not oppress the stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, for you yourselves were strangers in Egypt." More importantly, the Jew is dedicated to the work of creating a world where oppression is obsolete.

This year, in the month of April, the Jew will observe the days of Passover (15th-23rd). When you see a Jew, dedicate some time with him/her in your understanding of Passover and how you can relate.

Shalom,

Brian

PENNSYLVANIA

HOLIDAYS/SPECIAL EVENTS COMING UP:

 RAMADAN APRIL 2 - MAY 2	 PASSOVER APRIL 15-23	 EASTER APRIL 17	 MOTHER'S DAY MAY 8	 MEMORIAL DAY MAY 30
---	---	--	--	--



We love Brian's suggestion to spend time with someone of a different faith, to learn about their traditions and find common ground. With other spiritually significant events on the calendar this month, let's take him up on this and see what happens!

GAMES & ACTIVITIES

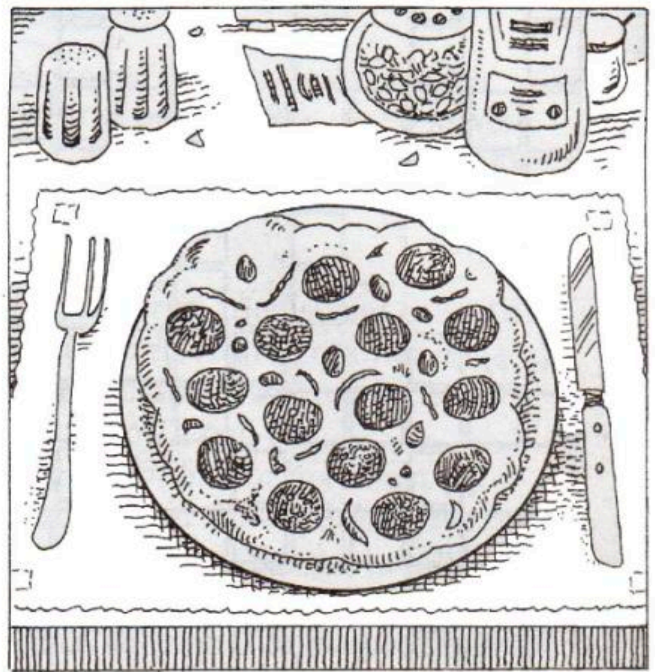
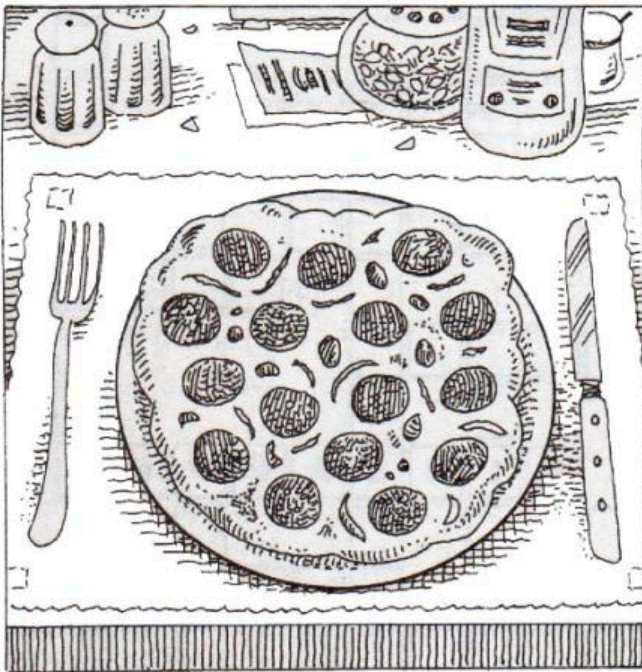
SPRING HAS SPRUNG



THUNDERSTORM
LUCKY CLOVER
BUTTERFLY
SUNSHINE
JOYFUL
BABY ANIMALS
ROBIN
EGGS
BUNNY
ANEW
HATCH
SAPLING
FLOWERS
INVIGORATING
CHIRPING
RAIN
DAFFODIL
HARMONY
BEES
BLOSSOMING
PASTEL
RAINBOW
SPRING CLEANING
CHICS
BLOOM
GRASSY
SWEET SMELLING
BULBS
POLLEN

X	L	L	B	K	D	B	B	Y	L	F	R	E	T	T	U	B	O	N	E	L	L	O	P
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SPOT THE 8 DIFFERENCES





THE FOUR AGREEMENTS
BY: DON MIGUEL RUIZ
ALDO A., CA



Tiny Changes,
Remarkable Results

**Atomic
Habits**

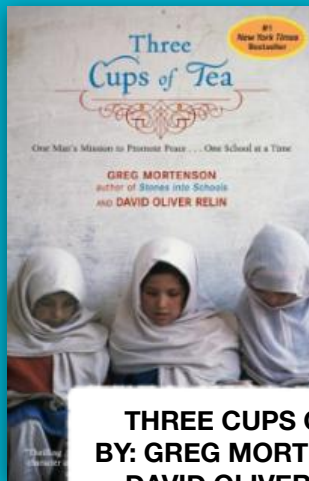
An Easy & Proven Way
to Build Good Habits
& Break Bad Ones

James Clear

ATOMIC HABITS
BY: JAMES CLEAR
ANONYMOUS, CA



SERVICE: A NAVY SEAL AT WAR
BY: MARCUS LUTTRELL
DANIEL M., MI



THREE CUPS OF TEA
BY: GREG MORTENSON &
DAVID OLIVER RELIN
MAP, AZ

**JUST
FOR
FUN**



**KEEP THE
RECIPES COMING!**

Our wheels are turning with what we can do with all these great recipes coming in. So please keep sending them and just know we're hoping to use them soon!



**WORK OUT
MIX TAPE**



We're getting some great recommendations, but we want as much variety as possible to represent our diverse community! So if you haven't submitted your favorite workout jam, please do! Thanks to everyone that has already sent one (or many) in...we're jamming out already!

MS. NAOMI'S CORNY CORNER

WE KNOW YOU CAN'T HELP YOURSELVES

WHAT DO YOU CALL...

A pig that does karate? **Pork chop**

A hungry train? **Chew chew**

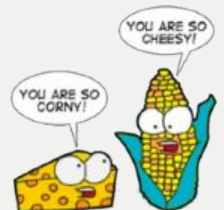
A boy with an encyclopedia in his trousers? **Smarty pants**

A fairy that never wants to take a bath? **Stinkerbell**

A man with cat scratches on his head? **Claude**

How do you know you're a pirate?
You just ARRREE

AMIR "NIGHT" W.
PENNSYLVANIA



FOR THE NEXT ISSUE



HERE'S WHAT WE NEED TO KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING

(Try to submit on blank paper if possible)

- NEXT ISSUE'S THEME - P.3
- POSITIVE NEWS - P.13
- CONSTRUCTIVE DEBATE - P.21
- "CURIOUS TO KNOW?" - P.9
- SIGNATURE STRENGTHS - P.14

SEND IN COVER ART FOR "THE LOOP" FOR A CHANCE TO BE FEATURED!

**NEXT ISSUE'S THEME:
CURIOSITY & LOVE OF LEARNING**

How do you develop curiosity & a love of learning in your current situation?

SUBMISSIONS DUE BY MAY 5

SEND THIS IN TO RECEIVE YOUR OWN COPY OR SHARE WITH A FRIEND


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