

# ***Spiritual Housecleaning Manual: A Six-Week, Step-by-Step Guide To 'Redding' up your Heart and Soul***

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## **Introduction**

I grew up in central PA. Around here, when you've got a messy house you red it up. The word, as so many of the area inhabitants are, is of German descent. It means to straighten up. It also means to make ready. What better activities to engage in than setting your heart to rights, cleaning up your conscience, and getting your Soul road-ready?

It's time to throw open the blinds and do some spiritual housecleaning. Many of us are homesteading on the outskirts of traditional religious communities and, at one and the same time, finding meaning in the practices and beliefs of many of our neighbors as well as freedom from traditional dictates. We may need a way to look at where we are, and how the way we're living suits our soul's needs. Is there work to be done to create the spiritual home that's just right for our lives?

It's one thing to celebrate the special, once-in-a-lifetime events. It's good to have spiritual practices to keep us centered. But we might also benefit new traditions to support the cycles of life which are the context in which we all live. Most religious traditions offer a way to review how well our lives reflect our beliefs. We need this. It's important to take stock of not only our goals and aspirations but also of where we are now and what might stop us from living the way we'd like to live. I wanted to create a process that everyone could use, whatever their religious beliefs, that would help people feel so comfortably at home in themselves that they could begin to make their dreams come true.

And isn't that what life is really about? Dreaming dreams and making them come true? Bringing dreams into reality doesn't just happen. It's hard work that comes from your heart as well as your head. We have to be at home in ourselves to do that work. Our souls, our psyches require the same things of a home



that our bodies do. It must be safe; it must be clean; it must be comfortable.

It is unfashionable in much of the world to undertake the reflection needed to clean our spiritual houses. Today's world would have us focus constantly on the positive. And that can be helpful. But sometimes we have to clean out our closets of the stuff that no longer fits and the stuff that was a huge mistake. Our fallibility is a human trait that needs to be respected and to the extent we can, shored up. In this process, we have the opportunity to take a good hard look at who we are, what we believe and how well (and sometimes how badly) we live up to those beliefs.

Acknowledging our short-comings and our wrong-doings will help us move on: it's good to have a season in our life where we are aware of our woundedness and try to heal it. It's helpful to have a time when we confront our wrong-doing and mark-missing and to say, sincerely, "I'm sorry, Please forgive me," whether to God, humanity or even, simply, ourselves? I believe these exercises are healthy for us as individuals, as family members and as community members. (and probably rippling on out into the world.) I think the whole world might benefit from our setting aside time to look at these questions. This could result perhaps not only in a replenishment of our souls but also a recognition of where a hurting world could use our support, caring and healing. If we're refreshed and organized, we can perhaps set out to find some allies and make some gentle changes in our lives and in the world.

Lent was what stirred me to write this, but you don't have to do this during Lent. Find any six-week period and enjoy the discomfort! Or stretch it out over a year and do the same! Enjoyment is key because it will allow you to dig deeper and think more clearly.

Take the opportunity to sort through your spiritual debris. What is it that you carry around that no longer serves you, that may, in fact, impede your progress? On what belief are you still



acting, long after you have evolved on a topic? What have you done wrong for which you've never really said either "I'm sorry," or "I regret this in my life?" Why not give yourself the opportunity to clean house — you might even want to indulge in an annual opportunity, that would allow you to come back to your life, centered and ready to engage in the life you create for yourself, according to your dreams? A little bit of respite, a little weeding out, a little bit of buffing and polishing and there you are open to a world of possibilities.

Choose an issue or a topic and dwell on it, in it, with it for a while. You might educate yourself about it. You might simply seek to understand it. Eventually you might want to work to change it. It's important to remember, part of this process should be about lightening your emotional load and letting go of rather than taking on more responsibilities. In ancient times the time between Candlemas (Feb 1) and Spring Equinox was not only a time of blessing the light, it was also a time of taking religious vows and moving up in your training. So there is good precedent for taking time for reflection during this time period which overlaps with Lent.

There is something to be said for an engaged life's being a happy life. But in lives with real deadlines, more engagement is not necessarily what's needed. Sometimes you're better off reasoning your way toward clarity, with both your heart and our mind, rather than adding more responsibilities. This process, then, is not about starting a to-do list. It's about becoming better in touch with yourself and perhaps, better acquainted with your conscience and then, if you want, claiming more of something that fascinates you.



## Why Not Take Six Weeks to Houseclean Your Soul?

Undertake this process because you're ready to have the life you want, the life you create, the life you deserve. This is slow and painstaking work, not work to be rushed through. You need to get used to the process and make it work for you. If you were cleaning your house, you might take an annual opportunity to go room-by-room, or process-by-process (clear clutter now, dust later!) to allow yourself the time to appreciate what you have and displaying them to their best. Six weeks is a lovely long period of time, so give yourself even a few minutes a day to settle into the habit of reflection and meditation. This will offer time to explore, time to mess it up, time to try again and time to succeed. Here are the processes I thought it would be good to work on during these days of quiet cleaning:

- **Clearing the Clutter — Release**
- **Taking Inventory — Examination**
- **Honoring your Heirlooms — Awareness**
- **Polishing the Silver — Repentance & Restitution**
- **Rearranging the Furniture — Forgiveness and Recommitment**
- **Creating a Home You Want to Live in A New Way — Moving Forward**

Farther on, I will speak more specifically about each of these aspects, but I wanted you to see what they were, so that you could then consider how you might work with them. Here are some options I saw off the top of my head.

1. **Six weeks, six processes:** This is an opportunity to chose one topic that is dear to your heart, and then to spend a week delving into each one of the processes, in order, using the chosen topic as a lens!
2. **Six days** (plus a Sabbath, where we're supposed to rest!), **six processes, six topics:** Chose one topic for each of the 6 weeks.



Then over the course of each week, focus your energy on the topic by systematically going through the processes, one after the other. Finish one topic, rest, start again.

3. **Six days** (still resting on the Sabbath), **six processes**: Some people prefer a spiral effect to lingering on a process for a week, but they want to work on one topic and keep deepening their relationship with it. To work effectively this way, you would choose a topic and then week by week, go through the process: Monday — Release, Tuesday — Awareness, etc.
4. You may want to **find your own process** to work on an issue. I would encourage you to touch on each of these objects as you go through this time period.

Whatever you do, you also may want to consider augmenting your reflections by simplifying your life as much as you can. Simple meals, fewer obligations, more sweet time at home and in nature.

Each choice has its own virtues. Each, it's own challenges. You may want to work on your own and share it with your family or friends. You may simply wish to reflect in a journal. But through it all, let us remember to breathe and to be kind to ourselves as we clean up our emotional/spiritual houses. And if you were only to spend the six weeks breathing, that alone might do you a world of good.



## ***Choosing the Right Topic***

**Find something that engages you.** When I'm spending a long time meditating on an issue it helps to be intimately engaged. It may be an issue that catches at my heart but in which I have not yet invested a lot, or perhaps enough, energy. It may be a trait in myself that is less than lovely that I'd like to diminish if not rid myself of. It may be a practice I'd like to grow into.

**Find something you might be able to affect.** To be really effective, especially if this is your first time trying this, find an issue you might be able to impact. For instance, while I can't do anything on world Peace, I can consider ways to support local peacemaking efforts. I won't stop rape, but I support the local rape-crisis clinic. Or, I might choose to work on an issue in my own life. Someone recently told me that he was making a greater effort to be kind. He's a very pragmatic person, always able to see both sides of issues, and thus fairly dispassionate about things. And while he appreciates that about himself, he's not always thinking about what the other person might hear. This would be a perfect topic to take six weeks and work on.

**Change a habit.** They say it takes three weeks to make or break a habit. Six weeks gives you time to break an old habit and start a new one! You just might want to consider why you're not good at giving yourself time to reflect.

**Decide if you're going to choose one or multiple issues.** If I'm working on something fairly well entrenched in myself, I'll need to focus on one issue rather than many. But if what I'm wishing to do is to incorporate this process in me, It's not a bad idea to take six different topics and work the practice.





## Exploring the Process

While this is a meta-process with an overall journey through this time period, each one of these six are individual practices and require careful attention. If your goal is both to clean your spiritual house and to begin to make a difference on a topic that matters to you, you've got to do the work.

**Practice, practice, practice.** Understanding these as practices says exactly what's needed in working through them. We're not born being good at them. There's not much we're born being good at other than involuntary bodily functions and even they get confused from time to time. We need to try them on, try them out and get better at them. It's not easy to make decisions to let go of things or to examine things you might have done better in your life. Even reminding yourself you're looking at missteps because you want to avoid those pitfalls again doesn't make the process pleasant. But ignoring them only make it more likely that we'll repeat them.

Some of these practices you might be better at intrinsically than others. Some things are well-suited to extraverts; others to introverts. Some are better for folk who are more thoughtful and others will suit those whose outlook is more action-oriented. But sooner or later all of us are going to encounter each and every one of these, so no harm in practicing!

**Breathe in, Breathe out.** A big part of meditation processes is remembering to breathe. Even better if we can be deliberate about it. Lenore has been teaching breathing for a long time, so I have attached her summation of some ancient breathing techniques at the end of this. Try them all. Try them all with each practice. Find which ones serve you best for which activities. But mostly? Breathe.



**Acknowledge your time constraints.** Presumably, you're not going to an ashram to spend the six weeks I'm suggesting you spend on this project. Therefore, your life will be marching along while you're working on this task. If you can give yourself somewhere between a half hour and hour every day for six weeks, I think you'll be surprised at the benefits you'll reap. The time may shorten as you go on, because as you live with the topic, you'll make connections more quickly. It's a nice process.

**Read the entire week's assignment before beginning.** It helps to have the entire context clear. I always flunked that test when you got it in school, and I'm still likely to. But really, check it out. You may find that some pieces aren't things you need to work on... so read first, sit on the cushion later!

**NB. By and large, there are six thoughts to guide your thinking through the week.** You may want to take a day and do each one. You may want to do some of them together. And then take the Sabbath and let it go for a day! Take up the next task on First Day.



## ***Remember the Sabbath***

This is a particularly apt word for working on Sabbath keeping. Remember means, basically, to put back together. For too many of us of us the notion of a Sabbath is not part of our lives.

But it can be life changing. My hope is that if you try it for the six weeks of this exercise you'll be delighted enough that you'll want to keep it up.

Unlike what happened in most families in my town during my growing up years, my mother never cooked a big Sunday meal. We'd have something a little special, but easy — A tomato on the grilled cheese sandwich, a hamburger, maybe soup. We ate in the dining room, but no chicken was roasted or family gathered beyond our own. Too much of that growing up, I think. Sunday supper was always exciting because we got to eat when and where we wanted to. Most of us made a sandwich and went into the den and watched Sunday TV together (remember the days when there was only one TV?). "It's my Sabbath too," mom would say and she'd sit down and read the Philadelphia paper from cover to cover. We'd go for a hike or a swim, read a book in the living room, or watch a game on TV. At some point, we'd get our homework done and our clothes ready for the week ahead.

Now not all of us observe the Sabbath on Sunday, so not every family needs to prepare for school or work, but building leisure into your Sabbath requires some planning. But I suggest, at least for the duration of this experience, that you plan for some lovely relaxed unstructured time to just do something you love to do. Even if you have chores to attend to, don't waste the whole day working.

Keeping the Sabbath holy means acknowledging the beauty of your life and your connections to friends and family and the natural world. Enjoy it. Luxuriate in it. Claim it.



## **Clearing the Clutter — Release**

You walk in your door and there are piles of paper and stuff everywhere. If that sounds at all familiar, I suspect your psyche looks much the same. We stuff all sorts of things in without looking and rarely take the time to sort through the detritus and let go of things. Well, here's your chance. It's no less distracting to live in a house full of things than it is to have a soulful.

Letting go of something that's niggling at us is a great idea in theory. But it's actually something you have to get good at. Most of us have so much going on in our lives that we're not able to just sit and be. It is not a bad thing at all if, whether in this season of contemplation or throughout the entire year, we all took a day a week to let go of responsibilities. So whether or not you choose to do this process one day a week, or to take each of these practices week by week, one after the other, it's not a bad idea to schedule yourself a day of release every week. (Let me say right up front that this particular activity could take almost an hour every day if you could give it to yourself. But you will get 20 minutes of cardio and about the same of meditation, so there are real health benefits to be gained by doing the practice.)

**Why let go?** We let go because holding on to things takes up time and energy.

We don't necessarily consider that release takes as much organization as anything else on this list, but it does. If we're going to let go, we'll feel better about it if it's planned.

What do you have to do to practice **Release**?

**Set a time.** And then commit to it. Each of these practices will need some focused energy, but to have a time of letting go, you actually have to have a time. It probably needs to be



an hour, because there are a variety of things you will want to look at.

**Prepare.** You can't let go of things without making plans for the things you're going to not be doing. Someone has to pick up the kid from daycare. You'll either need to adjust the time of your practice, or arrange for someone else to help you out. Make a list. Check things off. Who knows, if you do this consistently, you may find it works to get you through everything you have to accomplish. If there are people in your house who tend to interrupt you, create a small contract — include consequences. If people interrupt, carry through.

**The Practice itself:** There is really only one job for you to do here. And that is to let go. Those who meditate talk about Monkey Mind; others refer to mental chatter. You can find your own name, but we all have something going on in our heads that interrupts the stillness.

For some people it works to just sit and drop into stillness. Would that I were one of those people! I have a very busy, noisy mind, so I need tools.

1. **Do Not Disturb sign.** This is a good idea, even if you live alone. Go into the room where you will do your meditation and close the door with your DND sign on the outside. Acknowledge to the world and to yourself that the work you're about to do is private. Again, even if you live alone, it's helpful to put times of your meditation on the sign. If you've made contracts, post them. Keep your contract with yourself. Light a candle and begin.
2. **Lists.** Begin with a stack of small slips of blank paper and a pen. For the first 15 minutes of an hour, or until I'm done, I will write down everything that comes into my mind. If I have time. I separate the mess into orderly piles. Money, Job, House, Exercise, Hair, World Hunger, whatever makes sense. If I have to set a timer I do. At the



end of that time, I say those piles, "Thank you, I'll think about you later." And move away from them.

3. **Movement.** I will either go outside and walk, or turn on my music and dance really hard for the next 15 minutes. This is really one of those moments to dance like no one is watching.
4. **Sit or lie.** You must be comfortable. So, comfortable clothes, a blanket, maybe a pillow. And breathe. Think about nothing. When a thought comes, thank it and release it. If it keeps coming back, hold it in your mind breathe in, hold your breath to a count of five and then exhale, deliberately letting it go. Spend between 15-20 minutes.
5. **Clean up.** Review your piles to see if there was anything you needed to put on your to-do list for the next day. Throw the rest out or burn them. Your goal is to shorten the list and the amount of time that you need to write them.
6. **Make a short journal entry about the experience.** What prevented your letting go? What helped? What happened at home or work today to make life different. Is it a crisis or a long-term problem. Don't judge, just record.

**When You're Finished?** Blow out your candle to signify that you've completed the day's work. Put away your blanket. Close your journal. Go back to your life. Thank your family for giving you the time. Thank yourself for taking it.

**Having difficulties?** If it's hard to stay in any of these steps for a long period of time? Break them up, alternate. By the end of the week, you want to be able to sit or lie longer at the end. But continue to dance, it's good to practice ecstasy, even when you're not feeling ecstatic. It'll come. You also want to work toward having fewer and fewer things in your piles by the end of the week. You want to acknowledge that there are things that



distract you. If you can do something about them, then you put them on your list. If you can't, you let them go or write them and burn them.



## **Taking Inventory – Examination of the Topic**

You've chosen a topic. There's a lot of information you want to gather (now that you're all relaxed and clear). The more you gather, the more you can engage. But you probably also have a lot of information. Why not figure out what you know. Any good householder will tell you that it's easier to make decisions about what you're going to do if you understand what your resources are.

The great thing about taking inventory is that you're going to find things that you really want to use and you're going to find things that aren't going to be very helpful and you can recycle them. This is as true with ideas as it is with objects. Clear a table top, and haul things out of the closets of your mind.

You'll want to **reserve a half-hour** for this process and then mull over the information if you have time during the day. As you go through the week, you'll be sorting out what's important to you about both the process and the topic. Here are your tasks to consider in your review. You'll want to be journaling your answers as you go through the process so you have a record.

So, back into your space with your **Do Not Disturb** sign and light your candle. At some point you may want to be able to troll the web and you may want to keep your journal on line. Some people are adamant about beautiful books, at this point I keep much better notes on line. But this is a personal choice.

1. **Define the topic for yourself.** What connects you to the topic? What caught your interest about it?
2. **What do you know about this topic already?** Write those things down. Who introduced you to the topic? Have you spent time researching this topic before either by pursuing it, welcoming articles that come your way, or





simply by having conversations with people who know something about it.

3. **What are the parameters of the topic for you?** Is this a personal issue, a communal or regional interest, or a national issue?
4. **Do some research.** You might need to make a library visit, you might want to work on your computer, or you may need to make a few informational calls to organizations or individuals who know something about this topic.
5. **Who are the experts on this topic?** What do they know that you would like to know?
6. **Categorize the information.** You want to have this information organized so that you can easily refer to it when you need to.

Some of these exercises may overlap. If you finish early in the week, without making any real judgments about whether this is interesting to you or useful, just consider all the information you've gathered.



## ***Honoring Your Heirlooms – Awareness***

Ah, our history. And our families' histories. Heirlooms are wonderful things to have. Even the funny, kitschy, ugly ones are reminders of who we were and where we came from. But heirlooms require special care. There are decisions to be made about whether we mend dents or breaks or leave them there for posterity. Those flaws may add to their value, or they may render them useless to us or to anyone. It may be time to move this heirloom down the family line, or even just retire it altogether.

Translated into soul work, this is the time of facing up to our past. Some of that past is lovely and serviceable. Some of it is dented and some of it is downright unpretty.

Often the reason we choose a topic is because we have a history with it that is conflicted. Not always, certainly we have things that we passionately believe in that we've just never given ourselves the time to explore. In that case, the question to look at here may be why you haven't chosen to dig into your passion.

But, let's assume that most of us will have some tie to the topic we've chosen. Your goal this week is to figure out what those ties are and how and whether they aid or constrict your relationship to the topic. In some cases, they may do both.

If this is confusing, let me share some thoughts about my ties to Peace. One of the best things that ever happened to me was that I spent my senior year in high school in Sweden as a Rotary Exchange Student. I fell head over heels in love with my family, a couple friends and the country. At the same time, I got my first dose in culture. I realized how differently their world operated than mine back home in Pennsylvania. At that point, Sweden was almost a perfect mono-culture. It seemed like every family in Sweden made the same three kinds candies and four kinds of cookies for Christmas. The kids were political and anti-



war. I'd never conceived of kids' having a point of view or making a difference. It was startling to me that people had different ways of living and of seeing the world. I came home from that trip interested in being a bridge between cultures, although I might not have said it that easily.

As I became more sophisticated about the way I think, I began to understand how racist, sexist, ageist, you name it, my thinking was and how that impacted the ways in which I thought people could come together. Having always thought of myself as an "open minded and good" person, it was shocking to me and to my system that my worldview often compounded people's ability to achieve justice. And as Monsieur Marley told us, "No Justice, no Peace."

While I've certainly come a long way since those days, I'm sure there are lots of things that stand between me and my open hands and heart. I suspect I'm not alone. However well-intentioned I am, I am often misguided. There are times, even while ostensibly working for Peace, I have been guilty of compounding the problems. This week's work is about discovering both the wonderful impulses that move us to do good in the world around this particular topic and the completely human close-mindedness that prohibits us from doing the work as effectively as we'd like.

You can take these one at a time, or keep deepening your answers over the week. By the end of the week, you want to be able to identify

1. **What draws you to this topic?** Why are you interested in it? What needs will working on this fill in you?
2. **Which of your fundamental beliefs make this topic right for you?** Name those closely held values and identify how they might fuel your work. Because the fact is, when we're working in tandem with our values rather than against them, we have more energy.



3. **Which of your underlying assumptions work against this topic?** Too often we work against the values we say are most important to us. We're busy, and we get sloppy. It happens. This week is an invitation to look at the way things creep into our lives and start functioning as our underlying beliefs. If we identify them here, we can change or adjust our thinking and therefore our actions.
4. **Where have you misstepped concerning this topic?** Have your underlying assumptions, your laziness, or even earlier deeply held beliefs caused you to commit actions about which you are not particularly proud or even deeply ashamed. It is so important to be able to identify these things. You are, you know, merely human. Identifying those areas where you "missed the mark" which is really what the word sin means (when taken from the ancient Hebrew) has grown to be such a fearsome thing. I believe that this is true, in part, because we have no process or ritual of repentance and acceptance.
5. **Where have you shone in relation to this topic?** It is as important to list our successes as well as our failures. Knowing your strengths and your achievements helps you to be able to set your sights on achievable goals. No false modesty, because that doesn't allow you to take a straightforward look at what you accomplished.
6. **Is there someone who wounded you concerning this topic?** Anything that ties us to the past doesn't help us move forward. We should know what our hot buttons are and how to not let them be pushed.

**Review.** Go back over all your notes and see whether you've gotten everything.



## ***Polishing the Silver — Repentance, Forgiveness and Rejoicing***

In actuality, if you were housecleaning, you might not want to polish the silver next. You'd be more likely to move the room around. But in this process, if you've uncovered things that are uncomfortable, you may well want to just get rid of them. In spiritual housekeeping, this may just be the most important part of the cleanse.

You will do the same ritual every day this week. You may have different small actions or activities to review, but each time you will go deeper. If you find you're finished, then you can see whether there are other places in your life you'd like to review in this fashion.

You'll want to be alone for this process because you're going to be talking to yourself. There is real value in saying these things aloud. At some point, you may decide there are people you need to acknowledge as you face your successes and failures.

What sort of things might you look at you ask, in case nothing came up last week? Well, If I look at my life, I have always emphasized the need and always sought to serve as a bridge between different cultural groups, different age groups, etc. I built a successful business creating rituals celebrating life passages for individuals, couples and families who found themselves outside or between traditions. I loved my work.

I'm sure there were plenty of times I didn't notice when I stepped on toes during my work life, but my most pointed memories of having absolutely failed to live up to my deepest beliefs happened at seminary. I have that terrier-like need to be right. When you add that to standing on unfamiliar and shifting ground while exploring your racist, sexist, ageist, heterosexist, you name it-ist assumptions, it can leave one vulnerable. Or more correctly, left me vulnerable.



My blessed mentor Eleanor took my teeth right out of a shibboleth that I was going to gnaw to death, insulting another woman all the way. Looking back at my behavior in that moment in seminary before she threw me a challenging but grace-filled life raft can still invoke that red face of shame. Thirty years later, I can feel the burn — and the grace. That was a pivotal moment for me and I learned a lot, I'm sure not enough to please the woman I was struggling with! But since then there have definitely been times where I have conveniently forgotten this growth experience.

I'm a better person for having made that mistake and understanding why I made the mistake has helped me help others. But that doesn't help the woman who was my "learning opportunity" at a point she was struggling anyway. Although she could see Eleanor working with both of us — and was able to see me understand how I was wronging her and to have me apologize. In the end, she was very gracious with me. But if sin is missing the mark, I was a mile wide of the target. It's not a way I like to learn. If Eleanor had not been so skillful I might have shut down and decided on some other goal than building Peace bridges, simply because I was embarrassed.

Yet, that was a crucial learning experience for me. My goal when I did such a ritual years later was to forgive myself. The woman I'd wronged had accepted my apology. I was so freaked by my insensitivity, however, that I had never forgiven myself. That edge hampered my movement forward. It was hard for me to facilitate group work because I was so fanatical about making sure no one ever encountered unpleasantness. And when you add a "big" personal mistake to a familial horror of missteps, you wind up fairly paralyzed and very stilted.

It took, as Robert Ellers-Isaacs says in his litany of Atonement: being able to "forgive myself and others and begin again in love."

We also need to take care of the second part of Ellers-Isaacs' statement and forgive others. As long as we don't, we are



holding ourselves hostage in the past. There is no making the past different.

I love these words of Faith Baldwin: "I think one should forgive and remember... If you forgive and forget in the usual sense, you're just driving what you remember into the subconscious; it stays there and festers. But to look, even regularly, upon what you remember and know you've forgiven is achievement."

And after we forgive, we must begin again with love.

Try this very simple ritual. Repeat it every day, staying focused on your topic. You may want to choose one thing every day from each list, or you may want to read the entire lists every day. You'll see what works for you.

- Make a list of the things you have done of which you are not proud, of places where you have missed the mark.
- Do the same with things that have been done to or against you.
- And then again a list, but this time of successes you have achieved.

Ready?

1. Say: In my life, as I was working on TOPIC, I failed myself and my deepest values. I disappointed and wounded others. **Read the first list.** I have struggled with both my actions and my inactions. I will carefully consider whether I must apologize or make amends for what I did. I understand that But at last, I am ready. I admit my transgression and I forgive myself for what I did. I am ready to learn my lesson and to move forward in life.
2. Say: In my life, as I was working on TOPIC, there were others who discouraged and disappointed me. **Read the second list.** I now understand that they acted from their fear and limitations. I cannot know their motivation and I cannot change what they did. I may or may not be able to continue building a relationship with them. But I will no longer carry the burden of their hurtful behavior, nor will I be mired in the past. I forgive them for their shortcomings and move forward with my life.



3. Say: In my life as I was working on TOPIC, I have had some amazing successes. **Read the List.** I proudly claim those successes and embrace the evidence of my talents. I will move forward into my passion, knowing that if I continue to develop my skills I will continue to succeed and advance a cause I care very much about.

Do this every day. At the end of the sixth day, you will be done, and your past will be in the past where it belongs. If you feel as if you're done earlier, push yourself to do it one more day. Great work! Congratulations. Now go enjoy the Sabbath.





## **Rearranging the Furniture – Clarification and Recommendation**

Once you've cleaned the skeletons out of the cupboard, it's time to structure your (inner) space. Your house and your soul are where you make your dreams come true. It's where you retreat to think (and rethink!), it's where you stroll up to the mirror and try something out. At this point, you might invite a couple very close friends in to review your progress and add some input.

Be careful who those friends are, however. You want friends who are willing to encourage you. There are some friends who know how to bring up major flaws in your thinking without pointing out how incredibly stupid you were for not thinking of those things. You don't want to be in competition for being right as you reorder your soul!

1. **Are you interested in doing something with this topic now that you've explored it?** Sometimes we need to look at a topic simply to work out our relationship to it. Not everybody wants to jump into "next steps." For some people having come as far as forgiving ourselves and each other, we choose to move on in love with the rest of our lives and finish this portion of our life. Forgiveness is a great deal of work. And in some cases you may have found that doing something with this topic will require far more effort than you have to give. All of this is just fine. (And if you're done, you may want to start another topic, or you may want to just be done with the topic and/or the process for the year. In which case, enjoy!)
2. **How would you like to become involved with this topic?** Now that you've been living with this project for several weeks, what part of it is calling out to you? How can you make a meaningful impact on this project from where you live? List your skills and interests and match them up to the areas of work you're qualified for. Many of us have skills that we're not all that interested in spending



time with. If we have some talent, but not a huge amount, it may cost us emotionally to do those things. If you're talking about a volunteer job, how much draining work would it really serve you to take on as you continue your life?

3. **Realistically, how much time do you have to dedicate to this project?** There are some projects that I'm totally fascinated by. And I get a lot of requests for help on projects that are worthy. One of the hardest things for me has been realize that my time, energy and focus are limited. If I want to feel good about my contribution and successful in my endeavors, I really need to be realistic about what I have to offer. It may be the best project in the world, or a topic that will change the world if dealt with, but if I can't give it time, it'll be frustrating and not very helpful. A caveat, however, if this something about which you're passionate, it might actually be important that you make some space. Now is a good time to think about this.
4. **Is this an issue you might like to become involved with as work?** As you've explored your topic, are you called to do this as your work? By that I mean as your career, rather than your life's Work. Even if you think it's something you might like to do when you retire, and you're 30 years old now, it's still something you'll want to keep abreast of. How are you going to work your way from where you are now to where you'd like to wind up? Now's the time to plan, to deepen your knowledge base and to acquire the skills you might need.
5. **How would you structure your work on this project?** If you're making a plan for getting involved now, there's lots to consider. Is there a community of people or an organization that is already working on this? Do you want to assume a role they've already created? Do you have new ideas that you'd like to put to work, and if so, do you



want to start something new or make alliances to fill in the pieces you might not be great at?

- 6. What pieces are missing for you to make a meaningful contribution?** If you're starting something new, or even adding something to an existing program, look at what it is you want to offer and see whether or not there aren't holes that need to be filled by someone else. Get very clear what you'd like to do. If you decide to take something on that you're not excited about, be very clear with yourself how long you might be willing to do this. Do you know someone else you'd like to work with on this? Do you have a network who can help you find someone with the right skills.

This is your opportunity to put things in place in your life. Your psyche has every bit as much need for order on the inside as it does in the outside world. What's helpful about this process is that this may be the first time that you're looking at a possible project without lots of baggage. It's not as if we don't always have our own insecurities and hang-ups, but at least, once our judgments about our behavior is gone, it's easier to move on to do what you want.



## **Creating a Home You Want to Live in A New Way – Moving Forward**

If the last section was about getting the furniture in place, this section is about paying attention to the little things. You move the lamps so that you can see well and you set out your precious knick-knacks because they tell the story of your life. There are going to be far fewer of these after this process, because you've been weeding things out. This is the place where you worry not just about usefulness but also hominess. As far as your soul's concerned, this is about establishing good boundaries and deciding exactly who you'd like to have know about both the work that you've done over the last six weeks and the work you want to do in the future.

1. **Take some time to review the work you've done during the preceding weeks.** You've accomplished a lot. My friend Julie-Jess would tell you to eat a piece of chocolate and give yourself three atta-girls or boys. Right some of those accomplishments down so you're not tempted to say, oh, it wasn't really so much... It's always good to keep track of your accomplishments. You may want to spend a little time making some connections and drawing some conclusions.
2. **How will you let what you've learned about yourself and this topic change your life?** Will you define yourself different as a result of this new clean space in your soul? Can you find a way to keep your deepest values on the surface rather than on the sidelines. Part of your work this week is to understand how to live your life inside of rather than alongside of your integrity. If you were decorating your house, you want to design it so it's comfortable to live your life in it, not because a certain style is what's in fashion. Be in fashion in your own life.



3. **Are there other people you want to invite into your life?** As you rearrange your time and sense of self to accommodate what you've learned, do you want to shift or just tweak who you hang out with. Are there people already in your life, with whom you'd like to spend more time? Who inspires and encourages you? It doesn't need to be related to your goal. People who are loving their lives are people who will encourage you.
4. **How can you give yourself more flexibility with your time?** How do you re-organize the absolutely-have-to-get-done things so that they don't own your life? Hint: (and this is so hard for me) structure. Always pay your bills on a Monday. Or, make a list of chores and apportion them out. We all have things in our lives that must be done. If you're ruthless in your organization, and stick to that, you'll spend less time procrastinating and complaining about what you have to do, because you'll have done them. Now, I may be the only person who is always surprised how much less time it takes me to pay my bills than to whine about having to settle down and get this done, but, I doubt it!
5. **Take your first step.** Make an initial contact with an organization that works on the topic that interests you. Sign up for dance lessons, call to volunteer, find out who's offering courses, or begin to plan to start the business you've always wanted. Find a way to get involved in what your interested in. It's fine to do informational interviews. You don't owe anyone anything for inquiring. And even if something isn't right for you, you may know someone who might be interested in working with a particular cause or institution.
6. **Safeguard your soul.** Decide you're going to be kind. That you're going to be upbeat. You want your house to be peaceful. This means you need to build yourself some sacred space. Not everyone gets to come into your inner sanctum. You don't invite everyone over to your house,



and it's good to be judicious about inviting folk into your heart of hearts. You want your soul to be peaceful as well. After what you've been through, you've got to know that what people do is rarely about you and almost always about them. So let it go, concentrate on coming alive and pursuing your passion. You never wanted to hurt anyone with your missteps, you were thinking about yourself. Give others the benefit of the doubt. Bless their craziness and do a bit of Teflon coating on your soul. Life will be a lot more fun when you hang up that no-soliciting sign on your soul and on your door at home! (Except, of course for Girl Scout cookies!) Let's keep our homes for soul and body sacred. Life will be a lot sweeter.

Give yourself a little time to quietly appreciate all you have accomplished and all you have released. Then, take the trash out! Get a cup of something and sit down and appreciate your hard work.



## **Sweet Satisfaction**

Well, congratulations! Not everyone has the courage to be as ruthlessly honest as you have just been with yourself. I hope you're proud, you should be. Your soul looks great since you've redded up! How's it feel?

You've sorted and pitched and polished. You've also patched yourself up a bit and perhaps forgiven yourself for having been unthinking or unkind. Hopefully, you've extracted whatever bit of lesson there was to learn so you really can pack it away for good and use it only as a reference point, not an anchor.

This process is worth doing once a year. You don't have to choose another topic, you could just go one level deeper into the exercise. The great thing about repeating, is it gives you less to unearth each time. (Don't worry, though, you're unlikely to run out of opportunities to re-pent... turn around. That's the glory of being human.)

It's not a bad exercise to try with a your beloved or your children, you can ask yourself what stands in the way of your doing a better job loving someone for being who they are. That one is such a challenge for me, since I have such a clear idea how the world ought to function and what people *should* do. And here I go: What I think you should do is love yourself fiercely and then go out and change the world with your passion and gentle strength.

And because it was your heart and soul you housecleaned, wherever you are, you will always have a wonderful place to come home to. Welcome to your present. Make a great future.



## ***Breathing Techniques***

All inhalation and exhalation should be done through the nose.  
(body permitting)

### ***Basic 3-Part Breath (also known as Dirgha breathing or the complete breath)***

This breath is done with long, slow, deep breaths while focusing on the three chambers of the lungs. The lungs are much larger than most people think they are.

The first part of the breath is in the abdominal region. When you breathe deeply into the lungs, they push against the diaphragm, which causes the belly to inflate. So, you can tell if you are breathing into this chamber when your belly inflates like a balloon on the inhalation.

The second chamber is the thoracic region of the ribs and middle chest. When you breath into this chamber the rib cage and the intercostal muscles ( the muscles between the ribs) expand and contract like an accordion.

The third chamber is the clavicular region and is located in the area of the upper chest and shoulders. This breath fills the upper region of the lungs. If you were to place your fingers on the soft tissue directly above your collarbones, you would be able to feel the breath pressing into that area.

Breathing into the 3 chambers "belly, chest and throat" allows for the fullest and most complete breathing possible, thereby allowing us the most effective breath.

This breath takes some time to learn, so consider practicing it often. Couple it with a long exhalation, and it is indeed a





calming breath. "A body full of oxygen becomes relaxed, feeling good with a sense of well being."

Meditation variation techniques using this breath can be as follows:

1:2 breath. Count how long it takes you to breathe in and then work to double the exhalation.

4:2:4:2 Breathe into four, hold for two, breathe out to four, hold for two. Repeat

4:4:4:4: Breathe into four, hold for four, breathe out to four, hold for four. Repeat

### ***Ujjayi Breath ( the Ocean sounding breath, or the Darth Vader breath)***

This breath is done with long, slow, and deep breaths while slightly contracting the back of the throat in the area of the glottis. This subtle muscular contraction creates a hissing sound in the back of the throat that sounds like the rising and falling of the ocean tides.

( I suggest thinking that you're drinking in your air through a straw.)

**With practice of these you will reduce stress, energize, cleanse toxins from the system, promote focus.**

### ***Alternate Nostril Breathing (Nadi Shodhana "the sweetest breath of all")***

This basic breathing practice is suitable for everyone. It is considered a balancing breath.

1. Form the fingers of your right hand into the following: Curl your index and middle finger into your palm. Use your thumb to close your right nostril and your ring finger and fifth finger together to close your left nostril.



2. Close the right nostril with your thumb and gently exhale through the left nostril and then inhale through the left nostril.
3. Then close the left nostril: exhale through the right nostril and then inhale through the right nostril.
4. Steps 2 and 3 complete "one round"
5. Repeat, alternating nostrils after each inhalation

**With practice of this breath you create whole brain functioning by balancing the right and left hemispheres, reduce stress, alleviate headaches, migraines and generally frazzled states of being.**

