

A Year of Waking Up!

**Stories, reflections, exercises and
questions to help you ...
Stimulate new ideas,
Broaden your horizons,
Recognize your gifts and talents,
Solve problems,
Identify opportunities,
Follow your own path,
and
Have more fun!**

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Big Couch ... Little Door

*“The aim of life is to live,
and to live means to be aware
joyously, drunkenly, serenely, divinely aware.”
-- Henry Miller*

You know the feeling ... you're faced with a desperate situation; one that cries out for a creative solution. Maybe you have to squeeze a six-foot sofa through a three-foot doorway ... Or your significant other suddenly develops a violent allergy to your beloved Chihuahua ... Or your biggest client delivers an ultimatum: “Come up with a concept that will make the competition's blood run cold ... or else!”

You sit and think and scratch your head. You ponder the problem and you scratch some more. Maybe lightning strikes and a great idea magically presents itself. Most likely, it doesn't.

“Stop scratching! What you need is a brain wake-up. If your mind feels as if it's covered with sludge, here's something to get your synapses firing ... a daily brain booster to stimulate those billions of gray-matter cells. In each of the daily readings to follow, you will find stories, reflections, exercises and the most powerful brain booster of them all: questions.

Questions wake us up. They open our eyes and our ears, our minds and our hearts. They plow the fertile fields of our thinking, preparing the soil for the idea seeds that will be dropped from a chance encounter, a passing bird or a gentle breeze. Without the openings created by questions, answers and ideas too often fall on hard-baked, hostile ground where they wither and die. Author Sam Keen states: “Nothing shapes our lives so much as the questions we ask.”

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Some of the questions in these readings will call to you more than others. Pay special attention to them. They are like the edge pieces in the jigsaw puzzle that is you. They give shape to your life. Unlike a pre-cut puzzle, however, you can continuously reshape your life by adding new questions. Seek out great questions and keep the ones that sparkle for you.

In this book of daily readings, you are invited to live with a new question every month ... not for the purpose of finding an answer but simply to let it create an opening within yourself. There's also a question every day to carry with you as you go through your normal routines. Sometimes a question may not call to you on the day you read it but may come back days, or months, later. When a question comes back to you, honor it. Go back and reread the message for that day, journal about it, talk to other people, know that there is a message in the question.

This book of reading comes to you from thousands of people in dozens of countries, directly and indirectly. It represents the wisdom of the ages passed through the prism of the present. In early 1995, I began a weekly email column called "Good Morning Thinkers!" with the opening line of "Wake-up, Brain ... it's Monday again!" This was one of the first electronic columns in an exploding world of internet communications. It passed around the world at lightning speed until there were thousands of subscribers from countries large and small. We soon realized that Monday in one part of the world could be Tuesday or Sunday in other parts so the opening line changed to "Wake-up, Brain ... it's morning again!"

One week I couldn't think of anything to write but had a question I was pondering and decided to share it with readers. Responses poured in. They were then cut and pasted into the next week's message. This "ask and response" format has been used extensively over the past several years, resulting in a treasure trove of different perspectives and ideas. These have been woven into the daily readings in this volume so that you might touch base, even for a moment, with some of the wonderful

people in our world. The free, weekly electronic column continues and we invite you to join this worldwide gathering and add your voice to the growing wisdom base. You can join this international group by sending a message to wake-up@thinksmart.com.

How to Use This Book

This is NOT a start-on-page-1-and-read-straight-through-to-page-375 type of book. It's far more of a start-where-you-are-and-explore-from-there collection of readings, thought stimulators and intention and reflection guides. The purpose of these readings is nothing less than transforming your life, waking you up to the life force running through you and around you.

Official Permission Slip

This is your *Official Permission Slip* to read this book anyway you want. Start at the end or in the middle. Read it one week but not the next. Nibble on one day at a time or feast on a whole week at once. Do it YOUR way!

Rhythmic Pattern of the Readings

Now that you know you can read this book anyway you want, we'd like to offer three simple suggestions which you have permission to ignore or adopt. First, it might help if you understand the rhythmic pattern of the book, what might be called the organizing structure.

Major Questions – there are twelve major questions that break the book into chapters, or you might think of them as “months” since each chapter consists of thirty readings. Here are the twelve major questions (plus a wrap-up question):

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1. What is the core of you?
2. What sparks your curiosity?
3. What do you see?
4. What makes you laugh?
5. What tugs at your heartstrings?
6. What is your shadow?
7. What is the world your heart longs for?
8. What do you want to let go of?
9. What feeds your soul?
10. What will you do with your “one wild and precious” life?
11. Why is there air?
12. What will your world do next?
13. What’s unfinished for you?

Recommendation #1 – Start where you are!

Pick the Major Question that most interests you and start there! If nothing jumps out at you, start with **Question #1 – What is the core of you?**

Day 1: Setting Intentions – the first reading of every chapter or month is about setting intentions. Deepak Chopra states in the *Way of the Warrior*, “The field of awareness organizes itself around our intentions. Knowledge and intention are forces. What you intend changes the field in your favor. Intentions compressed into words enfold magical powers.”

In effect each new month, each new set of readings, is a new beginning and a chance to think about your intentions and what you want to create in your life. This book leads you into twelve new beginnings.

7-Day Weekly Pattern – After Day 1, readings are organized into four seven-day “weeks” with the following structure:

5 days of readings to stimulate your thinking
1 day to lead you into a simple but powerful deep exploration exercise
1 day of reflection to help you capture your insights for the week

Each daily reading ends with a question to help you integrate the reading into your own life situation. Again, remember, you have permission to read this book *your* way, so if you want to read a whole week at once, do it.

Day 30: Reflection -- At the end of each chapter or “month,” you are invited to reflect on the readings and the intentions you set as well as your thoughts about the Major Question and the daily questions. This reflection period helps you clarify your thoughts and the lessons that have come to you during this period.

Recommendation #2 – Journal!

Buy yourself a journal ... with or without lines, plain cover or ornate, big or small. Write down thoughts, questions, reflections, insights, gripes and gratitudes as you go through the year.

Having Fun with Your Journal

This book is about waking up to your own life, your own gifts, talents, visions and longings. As you read and think about the readings and the questions, capture your insights and feelings in a journal. But, also let yourself have fun ... use colored pens, doodle, paste in words or

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pictures from magazines, snapshots from family gatherings, cards that touch your heart ... even if you send them to yourself. If you find a story or quote that inspires you, cut it out and add it to your journal. Whatever calls to you or captures your imagination, find a way to put it in your journal.

During the next year, you will learn many things about yourself, some big, some small. Some of the things you learn may change your life. Therefore, I would like to encourage you to keep a journal during this coming year. Use it to explore your questions, capture passing thoughts and ideas and document a year of your life, which just might turn out to be a year of transformation.

Recommendation #3 – Form a Wake-up Group!

Find some compatible friends – at least one other but not more than seven total – and get together once a week, every other week, or once a month to talk about your reading and thinking.

Wake-up Groups

Wake-up groups can help deepen your insights and learnings. Small groups can be powerful mirrors and motivators. They provide a witness to your transformation process and can remind you of where you've been and the progress you've made. Find a group of three to six friends, at home, at work or even on the internet and agree to gather once a week to discuss the readings. At your first meeting, discuss any ground rules that might be important to you, such as confidentiality, punctuality, avoiding judgments, active listening without giving advice and so on.

During your meetings, talk about how the readings and the questions relate to your lives. Pick the question for the week that had the most

“juice” and give each person time to share thoughts and feelings around it. Tell your stories and read excerpts from your journals. To help you and your Wake-up Group, each month will end with a Reflections page which will give you ideas for discussion and journaling.

For best results, your group will need to agree on which chapters you will do next and how “fast” you will cover the chapters. Having companions on your journey will deepen your insights and help you see things in completely new ways.

The Journey of Transformation

Transformation is an amazing journey. Mine began in earnest several years ago as I realized that part of my teaching was that everyone is creative yet my inner voice told me, loud and obnoxiously, that I was the lone exception to this rule. I began to think about my own creativity and to look for signs that I too had this remarkable gift. This process took, and continues to take me to many lessons and teachers. One of the most transformative was the Painting Experience taught by Stewart Cubley and Sonora Beam. They teach a form of intuitive painting which is about inner expression rather than creating a piece of art

For a week we painted without expressing judgment about the quality of what we painted. One painting after another; grappling again and again with the inner critic. And, while, I haven't won the war against this life-sucking opponent, I now seem to win more battles. No longer does this voice of judgment stop my progress. The poem that follows summarizes that week of the painting experience.

Begin Again

I stand at an expanse of white paper.
Fears rise like a rush of ravens cawing
My inadequacies to an indifferent world.
“Begin.” I cry above their screechings.

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I throw paint – fuchsia, chartreuse, deep purple.
Hope for a miracle slowly sinks into gloom
As the Muse rejects my careless offering.
“Begin again!” she commands.

I plan a lofty scene filled with symbol and sign.
Color and context weave an eye-pleasing cry
For approval and recognition that does not come.
“Begin again,” the Muse repeats.

I wildly cover the space with scribble and daub.
Then, lost on the page, I stand frozen in fear,
A hollow husk with no place to hide.
“Begin again,” she whispers.

I stand – waiting, listening deeply.
A feeling guides me to a land timeless and unplanned.
Brush, color and hand create in an unjudged harmony.
I am awake, alive, vibrating with vision.

Softly the Muse just repeats, “Begin again.”

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And, that is the message I'd like for you to hold onto throughout this journey of waking up. If you miss reading for a few days (or weeks), begin again. If you have a break through and your celebrations distract you from your journey, begin again. If you feel that nothing is happening and it's not worth the effort, begin again. Wherever you are, whatever has happened, you can always, "Begin again."

Enjoy the journey!



The Cycle of Creativity

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Question 1: What is the core of you?

1 - Setting Your Intentions

*If you're able to be yourself,
then you have no competition.
All you have to do is get closer
and closer to that essence.*

-- Barbara Cook

The beginning of any new endeavor is a great time for introspection, a time to think about intentions and possibilities. As you look back across your life and forward across a new step, look for clues about your essence, those unique qualities, talents and preferences that make you who you are.

What is the core of you? The question for this month invites you to look at your true nature, discovering the seeds of your future which lie hidden, waiting to be planted and nurtured. Think about those seeds in the inner deep of yourself ... those passions that get you out of bed in the morning ... those gifts and talents that you, and only you, bring to the world.

What are your intentions for this month? Rather than load your self down with new resolutions that are too soon abandoned, try to simply clarify a few intentions. Intentions are gentle, loving reminders about the life that you want to live. Whereas a resolution might be to lose 20 pounds, an intention would be to live in a way that promotes health and well-being. The resolution has an outside reference point. Intentions have more of an internal focus. You feel it when you are living your intentions.

Whatever your intentions for this month, it's good to remember that life is a dance of beginnings and endings. The beginning of a new year follows the ending of the old. The end of an old venture, whether it's a job, a business, a place of residence, a relationship, or a game, leaves us receptive for the beginning of something new. Too often we focus our new year thoughts only on new beginnings but it is important to recognize that something has to end before something new can begin. Even starting a new exercise routine requires letting go of the old ways of using that time.

Q How could you learn more about the core of your self?

2 -- Life Tinkering

*"Life is creative.
It plays itself into existence,
seeking out new relationships,
new capacities, new traits.*

*Life is an experiment to discover what's possible.
As it tinkers with discovery, it creates more
and more possibilities.*

-- Margaret J. Wheatley and Myron Kellner-Rogers

In the summer of 1999, my friend Dolores Forsythe and I headed off to the green woods of Cortes Island just north of Vancouver to attend a Painting Experience workshop with Stewart Cubley and Sonora Beam. It was a lark, a chance to spend a week with my friend, experience a new place and play with something new. I'm not a painter and had no illusions about becoming one; it was just a chance to tinker. Little did I know it would change my life but, then, that's the part of the joy of tinkering ... you never know what you will discover.

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Tinkering is about playing around and discovering new things. When you tinker with your life, you don't do anything as major as changing jobs or launching a multi-point renovation program, but you might plant a rose bush, watch a sunset all the way to that last faint golden-orange glow, call an old friend you haven't seen for a long time or take an adult ed course just for fun. Tinkering is about making those small changes that are easy and so simple you hardly notice them but suddenly life seems different ... a little richer, a little more loving, a little more fun. Tinkering is something you can try one way and, if it doesn't suit you, you can try another. You can play around with things without risking anything major ... even make a mess in the process!

Buy some watercolors and experiment. Refuse to worry about the final results. It's not about art; it's about tinkering. You can tinker with a recipe and if no one likes it, you can do something different next time. Or, tinker with your wardrobe by adding a new touch of color. Try playing a harmonica ... or an accordion. Try spraying purple dye on your hair (although you might want to use the kind that washes out!) Wear a washable tattoo. Play with your life and see what emerges.

Q How could you tinker with your life today?

3 -- Marathon Monks

*"Only those who will risk going too far
can possibly find out how far one can go."
-- T. S. Eliot*

In Japan, there is an order of Buddhist monks whose spiritual practice includes running. Known as the "marathon monks," they run eighteen

to twenty-five miles daily through the long, cold winter nights, over treacherous mountain slopes. Day after day, regardless of weather, regardless of health, regardless of world conditions, they run to fulfill their commitment of a thousand days of running.

The monks wear white robes rather than the traditional Buddhist black for white is the color of death and there is always the chance of dying on their runs. When they run, they carry with them a sheathed knife and a rope to remind them to take their life by disembowelment or hanging if they fail to complete their route.

The question most of us have is "Why?" Why such grueling, and dangerous, physical feats? For the monks, it's about waking up, becoming enlightened, learning who they are and the true nature of the world. Most of us would never choose to become a marathon monk but we can wake-up to the world around us through any of the many spiritual practices including meditation, prayer, art, journaling, yoga or being in nature. These practices help us quiet our mind and overcome the nagging of our physical self. Only by gaining control of our mind and bodies can we possibly make any kind of commitment, whether it's a series of one thousand long, lonely, painful runs or making a relatively simple change in our lifestyle.

Commitment requires preparation: mental, physical and spiritual. Unlike the marathon monks, we will seldom have to kill ourselves if we do not keep our commitments. However, there is a bit of our spirit that dies every time we do not keep a commitment we have made to ourselves or to others.

Q What commitment would you die for?

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4 – Resolution Folly

*"The changes in our lives must come
from the impossibility to live otherwise
than according to the demands of our conscience...
not from our mental resolution to try
a new form of life."
-- Leo Tolstoy*

Humorist Dan Bennett once said: *Probably nothing in the world arouses more false hopes than the first hours of a diet.* Most adults have experienced the false hopes of a new diet or other resolution that too often drops by the wayside within a few days. Does this mean that we are all just weak-willed weasels?

Not necessarily, perhaps we just do not understand the complexity of commitment and our own nature. This complexity has been played out dramatically in the war on drugs with its catchy but ultimately ineffective slogan, “Just say “No!” It sounded great but, in order to have the passion and energy needed to make significant change, people need something that makes them say “Yes!”

On January 4, 1998, at the beginning of the worst of the El Nino storms of the year, Julia “Butterfly” Hill was perched on a tiny platform high in a giant redwood known as Luna in Northern California. She resolved to maintain her “tree sit” until the safety of this magnificent tree was assured, a commitment that kept her one hundred and eighty feet off the ground for two years. Julia didn’t make this resolution because she “should” or because other people expected her to. She did it because she had fallen in love with this old-growth tree. And, it was only this love that kept her resolve during the following weeks of wind, rain, hail and freezing cold while logging company officials harassed, threatened, cajoled and tried to starve her out of her commitment.

What moves us from “I should ...” to “I will...”? **Love.** Until we love something enough to say “Yes!” and to take whatever comes to us as part of that saying yes, we’re just participating in resolution folly.

Q *What do you love enough to change your life for?*

5 -- Wake-up!

*"Beyond living and dreaming
there is something more important:
Waking up."
-- Antonio Machado*

Beginnings and endings cycle into each other until it is difficult to think about one without thinking about the other. So at any new beginning, it is only natural to think about the endpoints of our lives. What legacy will we leave? Will we have left a footprint on these sands? Most of us would like to leave the world a better place. This yearning to positively impact the world is eloquently expressed by George Bernard Shaw:

I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole
community
and as long as I live, it is my privilege
to do for it whatever I can.
I want to be thoroughly used up when I die,
for the harder I work, the more I live.
I rejoice in life for its own sake.
Life is no brief candle to me.
It is a sort of splendid torch
which I have got hold of for the moment,
and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible
before handing it on to future generations.

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What we hand on to future generations is our legacy. Being conscious about what we leave means waking up. Waking up to our own lives, waking up to lives of our friends, family and neighbors, waking up to the world around us. The Spanish poet Antonio Machado said of Christ: *"All your words were one word: Wake-up."*

Q What legacy do you wish to leave?

6 -- The Great Underachiever

*"The faculty of imagination is both
the rudder and the bridle of the senses."
-- Leonardo Da Vinci*

Leonardo da Vinci is one of our most beloved artists-inventors, yet surprisingly, he is omitted from Michael Hart's book *The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History*. Here is Hart's reasoning:

"His [da Vinci's] talent and reputation seem greatly in excess of his actual influence on history. Leonardo had a regrettable habit of starting ambitious projects and never completing them. By frequently shifting to a new project before completing an old one, Leonardo succeeded in frittering away a considerable portion of his extraordinary talents. Although it may seem odd to refer to the man who painted the Mona Lisa as an underachiever, that seems to be the conclusion of most persons who have carefully studied his career.

"It is possible that da Vinci was the most talented person who ever lived, but his enduring accomplishments were comparatively few. Although a renowned architect, he does not seem to have ever designed a building that was actually constructed. Nor does a single sculpture made by him survive to#. All that remains of his prodigious talents are a considerable

number of drawings, a few magnificent paintings (fewer than twenty survive), and a set of notebooks which make twentieth-century readers marvel at his genius, but which had little if any influence upon science or invention."

Was da Vinci just a highly talented underachiever? Should we measure a person's legacy only on their tangible accomplishments? Today, think about the play of talent and accomplishment in your life.

Q What is your greatest talent? How has it shown up in your life?

7 - Explore: Follow Your Nose

*Smells:
Babies, wet dogs and cinnamon.
Rain, rosemary and gasoline
Popcorn, lavender and pine.*

Go on a one day "scent exploration." Notice all the smells around you ... good and bad. When you find a smell, don't just sniff it, explore it, drink it in and truly get to know it. Here are some ways to explore more smells:

- Buy one or several essential oils, which can be found in most health food stores and many drug stores.
- Go to a rose garden and compare the scent of the different varieties.
- Saute onions or garlic and revel in the aroma that fills the house.
- Buy several types of fresh herbs ... especially fresh basil, thyme, rosemary or cilantro ... and crush them between your fingers as you inhale.
- Open spice jars one at a time and note each fragrance.

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Inhale deeply throughout the day and see what smells come to you. Notice any memories or emotions that are triggered by the various smells.

Q What did you learn about smells and yourself?

8 – Reflect: Who Are You?

*“If you cannot find it in yourself,
where will you go for it?”
-- Confucius*

Underneath your physical appearance, deep below your intelligence and sense of humor, way beyond your material possessions and roles as spouse, parent, friend, worker or expert at whatever, *who are you?*

Find some time today to reflect on this question. You might want to write about it in your journal, make a collage about it or have a conversation about it with someone close to you.

9 -- Clarity Map

*“Where shall we begin? ... There is no beginning.
Start where you arrive. Stop before what entices you.
And work!”
-- Auguste Rodin*

Decisions! Decisions! Decisions!

Should we take this job or that? Work on Project A or Project B? Study ancient Greek or French? Move to that cute little place in the mountains or teach in an inner city school or maybe join the Peace Corps and go to Africa? We can weigh the pros and cons of any option but in the heat of the moment, we are too often maddened by conflicting benefits. In today's world where all things are seemingly possible, the difficulty of making a decision is magnified by the range of possibilities. Knowing ourselves becomes ever more important because, in spite of all of our technological progress, there are still only so many days in our lives.

One thing that can help is creating a Clarity Map to give us the insight needed to make good choices. This map should be done, as much as possible, long before a critical decision presents itself to you. Then, when you are faced with a choice or a new option, your map can help you make a decision.

The Clarity Map can be an invaluable tool in making decisions so we will spend several days developing it. The process involves looking at three primary questions which link together to form the map. Before we begin to create your Clarity Map, however, think about the last two or three projects or activities you chose to embark upon. Then, think about this question:

Q If you had the opportunity to start all over, would you still do this project? Why or why not?

10 – Clarity Map #2

*“When one loves, nothing is too much trouble,
and there is always time.”
-- Abdu'l-Baha*

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To begin to develop your Clarity Map, it's important to know what you like to do. What is so much fun that you would want to do it even if you never got paid, even if no one ever said "good job," even if no one ever knew you did it?

First Clarity Map question: What excites your interest and passion?

Make a list of everything that excites and energizes you. Put down everything: hanging out with friends, playing golf, having fun, shopping, meeting interesting people, writing, hearing and telling stories, reading, and so on. Since work is a big part of our lives, be sure to think about the type of work you like to do: writing proposals, closing deals, thinking up new ideas, creating systems to make work more effective, leading teams, making presentations, and so on.

Think about what you love. Again, put down everything: chess, nature, beauty, color, solitude, mystery, travel, family, dogs, frogs, clothes, babies, trees, cars, and so on.

Start your "excitement" list immediately and add to it throughout the day. Put down anything and everything that comes to mind. Think about the best times in your life. What was going on? Think about the most exciting projects you've ever worked on. Why were they exciting?

Q What gets you out of bed in the morning?

11 – Clarity Map #3

*"The highest reward for a person's toil
is not what they get for it
but what they become by it."
-- John Ruskin*

Second Clarity Map question: What intrigues or excites you about a new project and makes you want to say "yes" to it?

To continue with the creation of your Clarity Map, think back through your life and identify two or three times when you felt the most pride in your personal achievement, the most engaged with whatever was going on, the most alive. This could be a work project but it could also be coaching soccer, singing in a church choir, working with a group of volunteers to paint a house for a senior citizen, making a Halloween costume for your child, writing a poem, or planting a garden. Choose a project where you can still feel the joy, pride and excitement of being part of that activity.

Identify common elements of those activities. Were you:

- working on a team or in solitude, outside or inside?
- learning something new or doing something you knew well?
- collaborating or competing, with children or adults?
- working within a well-established structure or breaking new ground?
- mainly using your hands, your heart, or your mind?
- meeting new people or staying within the comfort of family or close associates?

The common elements of those projects that excited and engaged you are "yes" elements. List as many "yes" elements as possible and add to them throughout the day as you think back to these activities.

Q If you could be exceptionally successful in only one area, what would it be? (money, prestige, fame, love, knowledge, family, self-understanding, contribution to community, or any other success factor of importance to you)

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12 – Clarity Map #4

*"Life begets life. Energy creates energy.
It is only by spending one's life that one becomes rich."
-- Sarah Bernhardt*

Third Clarity Map question: What aspects of previous projects made them less enjoyable, perhaps even less successful and might make you say “no” to a future project?

Continue creating your Clarity Map by thinking about the two or three activities in your life that were most frustrating and least successful, projects that seemed to suck all the life and energy from you and left you with a hollow "why did I ever do that?" feeling.

See if you can identify common elements. Did the project or activity involve:

- lots of details or conceptualizing the big picture?
- high level of risk or safe and routine?
- travel and moving around or staying in one place?
- being in front of people or being behind the scenes?
- regular schedule or sporadic, unpredictable hours?
- taking detailed directions or making your own decisions?
- working with other people or alone?
- variety of tasks or repetitive routines?
- maintaining an existing system or creating a new process?

When the project was over, what was your biggest loss: prestige, money, respect, self-worth, time, love, friendships, or health? What was it that made these activities cost more than they were worth to you? The become your “no” elements. Write down all the elements you can think of that would make you avoid a new project or say no to a decision. Add to this list as you go through the day.

Q *What drains your energy?*

13 – Completing Your Clarity Map

*"A thought, even a possibility,
can shatter and transform us."
-- Friedrich Nietzsche*

You've just been offered a new job on the other side of the country. You'll be leading a "power team" to create and launch a new product. The pay and benefits are terrific; the hours will be long with a great deal of foreign travel; the career visibility incredible. Is this the opportunity of a lifetime or the job from hell? Depends on who you are, where you are in your life and what your Clarity Map looks like. To an upwardly mobile, energetic person who thrives on challenge, loves to travel and explore other cultures, this opportunity could be nirvana. For a person committed to family time and participating in community activities, this could be life destroying.

We're all different and the Clarity Map helps you understand your unique strengths and weaknesses. Now it's now time to put everything you've learned from the past four days into the creation of your own map. Draw a circle in the center of a page and write the word "Clarity." Draw a branch up from the center of the circle and entitle it "Excitement." Write down all the elements that you said excite you on lines off that branch. Obviously some elements are more important than others so highlight or circle the 3-4 items that are most important to you, the things that really energize you.

Next, draw a branch from the center to the right and on it write, "Yes." Write down all the elements that you came up with that would make you say "Yes" to a new project or decision. Highlight the 3-4 most important.

Finally, draw a branch to the left and on it write, "No." Write down all the elements that you came up with that would make you say "No" to a

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Notice what's growing in your backyard. What needs attention and what needs to be moved or removed? If you could change one thing, what would it be? What feels absolutely right?

Q What did you discover about yourself from looking at your backyard?

15 – Reflect: Where Do You Find Joy?

*"The sun does not shine
for a few trees and flowers,
but for the wide world's joy"
-- Henry Ward Beecher*

In the warm softness of a baby's head,
In the blazing stars in a new-moon-black sky,
In the lingering smile on a lover's face,
In the first green announcement of
spring through a mantle of snow,
In the summer ballet of baseball on
an emerald diamond,
In the comforting presence of an
old friend,
Or, in the peaceful satisfaction
of a job well done.

Where do you find your joy?

Find some time today to reflect on this question. You might want to write about it in your journal, make a collage about it or have a conversation about it with someone close to you.

16 – Doing a Pike Check

*"We can easily forgive a child
who is afraid of the dark;
the real tragedy of life is when
adults are afraid of the light."
-- Plato*

The pike is a long, lean, predatory, fish, which eats smaller fish. In an experiment, minnows were placed in a clear bell jar inside an aquarium with a pike. The pike saw the minnows as a snack and lunged at them, banging its head on the glass. Again and again, the pike banged painfully into the glass. Finally it stopped and began to ignore the minnows. The experimenters then removed the bell jar allowing the unprotected minnows to swim freely about the aquarium. The pike continued to ignore the minnows, apparently still associating them with pain and, therefore, missing out on some tasty meals.

We are probably every bit as smart as a pike fish so we also learn when to stop banging our heads against a barrier. The trick is to know when the obstacle we've been banging up against has been removed. Every once in awhile it is wise to do a "pike check" to see if the things we've been avoiding are still valid. Is the reality you see truly real?

What are the lessons you've learned along your life path that might need to be re-examined? Pay special attention to the elements that showed up on your Clarity Map as things to avoid. Does avoiding them still make sense in your life?

Q What was your most painful life lesson? Is it still valid?

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17 – Speaking Our Values

*"Our lives begin to end the day
we become silent about things that matter."
-- Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Paul Ray, author of *The Cultural Creatives*, states that there is a rapidly growing population that shares values around the environment, human rights, simpler lifestyles, bio-diversity, and peace. He believes that this group makes up almost a third of Western countries but has yet to exercise its political power. When I asked Ray why this group has yet to coalesce, he had a simple answer: we don't talk about our values ... especially at work. And, there's a pretty logical reason why we don't. Fifty years ago, there were almost no "cultural creatives." Think back to the 50s and our society's easy acceptance of discrimination of all other forms, pollution in the name of progress, the righteousness of warfare, and tolerance of domestic violence.

As few as thirty years ago, we had little sense of our planet as a system and hardly any connection with people in other states, let alone countries. The few people who saw life differently didn't bump into each other frequently and often felt so out of step that they didn't talk about the things close to their souls. Like chameleons, they adapted to their surroundings, keeping their uniqueness hidden away. This hidden life often created an inner sense of isolation and hesitancy to voice deep beliefs.

Life is vastly different today. Through the internet, we can talk as easily to someone at the South Pole as to our neighbor. Through the 24-hour, ubiquitous coverage of every facet of our world, we see up-close and in real time the horrors of injustice, the repercussions of global decisions, the undeniable fact that we are all connected on this small blue marble of a planet.

Those of us who share these values of interconnectedness are now a significant proportion of the population. We could become a powerful force for change. However, this will require two changes: first, that we recognize ourselves and our common values. Second, that we loosen our grip on our individual identities as lone voices in the wilderness. Only by joining our voices together can we create a chorus loud enough and passionate enough to change the world.

Q What would you speak about if you had an hour of prime time available to you?

18 -- Three-Bean Salad

*"All the way to heaven is heaven."
-- Catherine of Siena*

As we look around the world at the seemingly irreconcilable conflicts that pit country against country and religious belief against religious belief, I am reminded of a story my friend Dolores Forsythe tells.

Several years ago she was working in New York on the 57th floor of the headquarters building of a large company. One day she was sitting in a meeting with two senior managers at a long mahogany table and the managers were quarreling bitterly. The confrontation was basically about an idea that one of them had claimed as his own when the other person thought he should get the credit. As she sat listening to them waste time and energy fighting over who should get credit, she thought, "I need to get back to Texas where people are real."

Shortly after that high level conflict, she flew back to Goatneck, Texas, to visit her family. Goatneck is smack dab in the midst of the Bible belt and all of Dolores' family are active church goers. As she sat having

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coffee with her Aunt Gladys, Dolores noticed that her aunt Bernice had not stopped in yet. It was very unusual for Aunt Bernice not to show up when Dolores visited so she asked why.

Aunt Gladys said, "Last Sunday at the church social, Bernice brought a three-bean salad and when someone said how good it was, she said it was her recipe. She knows it was my recipe so now I'm not speaking to her."

Dolores states, "Suddenly I realized that people are the same everywhere, whether they're in a New York City skyscraper or on a Goatneck, Texas, farm. Conflicts and disputes happen. The problem is that my Aunt Bernice died not long after that incident with the three-bean salad without ever talking to my Aunt Gladys again."

A recipe for three-bean salad,
the credit for a great new idea,
or a treasured piece of hallowed ground ...

Are these things really worth fighting for? Worth splitting a family for? Worth killing and going to war for? Will we ever learn that ideas are only worthwhile when they are shared? Will we ever comprehend that we can never own the earth? When will we truly understand that when we go to war, we sacrifice our young, our future, on the altar of ego and ideology?

Q Where do you have an unresolved conflict in your life? Is it worth it?

19 – Mental Flossing

*"Life is short so we must move very slowly."
-- Thai proverb*

"She pushed all my buttons!" Or, "He made me so mad I could have killed him!" How many times have you said (or heard) those words? Generally it means that someone touched a sensitive spot and you reacted automatically, almost without control, with anger, hurt feelings, or often both. This type of reaction is often out of proportion to the words or actions that caused it.

There is a message here: look beyond the cause and explore the reaction. What is it in you that is bruised, blistered or festering that causes those overreactions?

It may not be an elegant metaphor, but these reactions can be compared to flossing your teeth. When your gums are healthy, you can floss vigorously and they will not bleed. But, ignore them for awhile and even gentle flossing will cause bleeding. Just as the bleeding is a signal that we need to pay more attention to our dental hygiene, emotional over-reactions send us clues to look at those soft spots in our lives.

For instance, if there was an important meeting at work and you were not invited, you might react in a variety of ways. If you were secure in your position and feelings of self-worth, you might just find someone who could bring you up to date and make sure your name was on the list for the next meeting. If, however, you are feeling insecure, you might rail at the unfairness of it all and think someone was trying to undermine you.

Q What caused an over-reaction for you recently? What was your underlying soft spot?

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20 – Fractal Life

*"You know you're old
when you've lost all your marvels."
-- Merry Browne*

In many ways I was an early bloomer. I learned to read before starting school and reached my full height by the fifth grade. As an only child, I tended to hang out with adults a lot so I was always “old” for my age. Therefore, by the time I reached my thirties, I thought that I was fully developed. What there was of me was basically all there would ever be of me.

Funny how life plays these games on us because when I turned 50, something happened. Something other than more gray hairs and gravity playing its games on my body. Like a pre-programmed clock, I found myself in a new space, a new phase of life, a new mindset. Something within me wanted to see the light of day, and it was naggingly insistent that I let it out.

Following that persistent nudging, I began a journey of exploration that took me to a place I never expected to see ... my own creativity. Hesitantly at first I began to try out new experiences, then I began to embrace the unfamiliar. Gradually, I began to let go of the notion that I had to be good at any of the new things I tried. I began to write poetry that would never win awards and paint pictures that would never hang in a gallery. But, these things pleased me deeply somewhat like a homely, but much loved child.

This journey has made me wonder anew how much there is to ourselves that remains undiscovered. Are we like a fractal that, as we zoom in, reveals ever more patterns, each wonderful and beautiful?

Q What are you afraid to try because you believe you won't be any good at it?

21 – Explore: Seeing Abundance

*poem:
small enough to live in a word
large enough to hold a wounded soul.*

A milkweed pod pops open and a thousand seeds drift gently to new destinations. A sunset thunderstorm kaleidoscopes colors and shapes into a pageant too dazzling to capture or reproduce. A choir of frogs chants a holy serenade in the church of the woods.

Diane Ackerman says "How sense-luscious the world is." Nature is profligate with her gifts, an abundance too seldom perceived and appreciated. Spend the day noticing and reveling in the abundance around you.

Q Where is there abundance in your life?

22 – Reflect: What are your gifts?

*"Use the talents you possess,
for the woods would be a very silent place
if no birds sang except the best."
--Henry Van Dyke*

Every person is born with at least one unique and specific gift. Expressing that gift in the world is part of our life mission.

What are your gifts?

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- Can you comfort a child, plan a complex meeting, bring peace out of conflict?
- Are you great at managing money, trouble shooting a problem or drawing roses?
- Is it easy for you to read and follow maps, lead teams or comprehend physics?
- Do you lose track of time when you're teaching, organizing data or writing?
- Are you energized by brainstorming, speaking in public or baking cookies?
- Is it satisfying to learn something new, dance, or repair a car?

What are your gifts?

Find some time today to reflect on this question. You might want to write about it in your journal, make a collage about it or have a conversation about it with someone close to you.

23 - The Age Barrier

*"As you grow older,
you'll find the only things you regret
are the things you didn't do."
-- Zachary Scott*

- P**. T. Barnum founded the Barnum & Bailey Circus at 71.
- Golda Meir was 71 when she became prime minister of Israel.
 - George Bernard Shaw broke his leg when he fell out of a tree while trimming it ... he was 96.
 - Grandma Moses started painting at 80 and completed over 1,500 after that ... almost 400 of those finished after she was 100.

- Michelangelo was 71 when he painted the Sistine Chapel and the architect of Saint Peter's Basilica from age 72 until his death at 88.
- Albert Schweitzer was still performing operations at 89.
- Galileo published his masterpiece at 74.
- Antonio Stradivari fashioned two of his most famous violins in his early 90s.
- Daniel Defoe wrote *Robinson Crusoe* at 59 and *Moll Flanders* at 62.
- Dr. Seuss wrote *The Cat in the Hat* at 53 and *You're Only Old Once!* at age 82
- Louise Nevelson sculpted into her 80s, after switching to Plexiglas and aluminum in her 60s.
- Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) successfully completed negotiations for India's independence from Britain at age 77.

So, who says there's an age barrier?

Q *Whether you're 15 or 95, what are you not doing because you think you're too old?*

24 - Life Lists

*"Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it.
Boldness has genius, power and magic in it?"
-- Goethe*

John Goddard was a scrawny teenager sitting at his kitchen table doing biology homework when he overheard a conversation that would change his life. A visiting friend was talking with John's parents in the living room and said, "Boy, I wish I were John's age again. I'd really do things differently."

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John heard the wistful sound of unfulfilled dreams and immediately pulled out a clean sheet of paper and at the top wrote: My Life List. Number 1 was explore the Nile; Number 2: explore the Amazon. The list grew through climbing Mount Everest (21); to riding a bucking bronco (77); to milking a poisonous snake (117); and living to see the 21st century (127). As he wrote the list, he visualized himself doing each of the items on the list. At last report he had done 108 of the items listed and was working on the rest.

Goddard says: "If you really know what you want out of life, it's amazing how opportunities will come to enable you to carry them out." For him, his life list turned out to be the map for his entire life. Following his list, he has lived a life beyond the imagination of most of us, studying primitive cultures, exploring the world's great rivers, and climbing the highest peaks. Because of his list, he still has exciting challenges ahead of him.

Q What would you put on your life list?

25 - Palm Trees and Hot Rods

*"The scientific theory I like best
is that the rings of Saturn
are composed entirely of lost airline luggage."
-- Mark Russell*

An important aspect of our ability to generate ideas is fluency – the ability to come up with a lot of ideas in any situation. Some people inherently have this talent but everyone can further develop fluency skills by learning to recognize the connection that exists, or that can be created, between seemingly unrelated items.

For example, what do pigs and baseball have in common? You might draw a blank on this one but the St. Paul Saints, one of the most popular minor league teams around (motto: Where FUN is Good), connected the two and at every game a pig delivers the baseballs.

To develop your own fluency, pick any two items and find a way to relate them. For instance you might ask, "How is a blackberry related to a dragon?" This might make you think: The fiery breath of the dragon could be used to cook blackberry pies. Or the dragon's fiery breath comes from eating too many blackberries. (We're not looking for brilliance or literary output here ... just exercising our minds.)

Another example: palm trees and hot rods. Possible connection: The young mechanic couldn't afford a top for his hot rod so he put a potted palm behind his seat to protect him from sun and rain. Now this may seem nonsensical and unproductive but if you try this occasionally, you will soon begin to see connections you never saw before.

Try one or more of these:

Mouse ... tarot card
Umbrella ... catnip
Mask ... pansy
Pillow ... phone book
Salary ... beer mug

Q What would change if your ideas flowed more easily?

26 - Flap Your Arms!

*"Laughter is the shortest distance between two people."
--Victor Borge*

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Mel Brooks may be one of the funniest people to hit Hollywood – either that or he has a completely warped mind which nevertheless produces one rollicking comedy hit after another: *Blazing Saddles*, *Young Frankenstein*, *Silent Movie*, *The Producers*, and many more. His off-beat, often politically incorrect humor is reflected in some life advice he gives:

" ... you got to flap your arms and legs, you got to jump around a lot, you got to make a lot of noise, because life is the very opposite of death. And, therefore, as I see it, if you're quiet, you're not living. You've got to be noisy, or at least your thoughts should be noisy and colorful and lively."

What do you do to stimulate “noisy, colorful and lively thinking?” If you can’t think of anything noisy in your life, deliberately do something today that you wouldn’t normally do. Be outrageous ... even if it’s only slightly outrageous, such as:

- hand out little toys to remind people to let their minds play
- sing with great gusto (even if it’s only in the shower)
- have a dinner where everyone has to eat with their fingers
- wear your hair in pointy, purple spikes (even if you don’t get out of the house!)
- speak pig latin to your kids
- call a talk show and disagree with everything the host is saying
- visit a kindergarten and do everything the kids do.

Let yourself play!

Q *What would happen if you flapped your arms and legs and made a lot of noise?... So?*

27 – More Flap Your Arms!

*"When a thing is funny,
search it carefully for a hidden truth."
-- George Bernard Shaw*

Many readers of the *Wake-up, Brain!* internet column had difficulty with Mel Brooks exhortation to "Live Noisy" wishing they had more silence rather than more noise. However, in this case, I think Mel is talking about noise metaphorically ... letting the world know we're here, speaking our piece, raising a ruckus occasionally. In case you're having trouble thinking of ways to add color and “noise” to your life, here are some more ideas:

- Angie Thoburn likes tiny toys and miniature games that fit on key rings.
- Carmel Glover is constantly "on the lookout for the whimsical, the unusual, the unnecessary." People often drop into her office to "read" her walls which are filled with amusing pictures, quotes and so on.
- Thomas Lang throws something away every day as one way of proving that he's alive.
- Pam Mathison took her college-age daughters to Disneyland where they had their pictures taken with every Disney character they ran into. "We all cherish the pictures as a reminder of fun times together," she states.
- Lynda Curtin enjoys surprising people with her green suede shoes.
- Peter Mellalieu while in Hong Kong bought a red silk jacket and bright Chinese collared silk shirts instead of a business suit.
- Tim Richardson looks at the world through the eyes of his three year old.

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Q What would you do if you gave yourself permission to flap your arms and live noisy?

28 – Explore: What Is Age?

*Creosote Wisdom**
If you want to live long,
Stay low, need little,
Bend with the elements, and
No tasty morsel be.

Today talk to a very young person and a very old person. Watch how people of different ages talk, dress and move. How do you feel when you talk to people at different ends of the age spectrum?

Think about these signs of "age:"

- George Burns won his first Oscar at 80.
- I. M. Pei designed the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland at age 78.
- Mary Baker Eddy established The Christian Science Monitor at age 87.
- Sarah Bernhardt, despite losing a leg in her early 70s, continued acting until her death at age 78.
- Frank Lloyd Wright designed the Guggenheim Museum at 91.

Q How do you feel about getting older?

* Recently scientists discovered a desert creosote bush which may be the world's oldest living thing having sprouted some 11,000 years ago.

29 – Reflect: Who Do You Love?

*"We are all born for love.
It is the principle of existence,
and its only end."
--Benjamin Disraeli*

I love you.

What do those words mean?

- When said to your parents or your children,
 - When spoken to your lover or your dearest aunt,
 - When conveyed to your best friend or nearest cousin,
 - When uttered to your faithful dog or ancient cat?
- Who do you love? And how?*

Find some time today to reflect on this question. You might want to write about it in your journal, make a collage about it or have a conversation about it with someone close to you.

30 – Reflections & Letting Go

*"Don't go back to sleep."
-- Rumi*

Stop for a moment and reflect on your readings and your life for this past month. What have you learned about your inner core? Was there anything that surprised you? What stories resonated with you?

Letting Go: What are you ready to let go of? An assumption that no longer serves you, an old conflict, or all those old magazines you'll never read again?

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Wake-up Journal:

Read back through your journal for the month and highlight one or two thoughts that seem especially important. Write about why those are speaking to you right now.

Wake-up Group:

Spend one meeting talking about values. Do a sticky note flash – each person writes down their values on sticky notes – one per note – and then everyone reads their values and puts them on the wall. Look for similarities. Notice when someone reads a value that you realize is important to you but wasn't one you thought of initially. Continue to add values to the wall as you discuss them. Then individually create a list of your ten most important values and rank them.

Resources:

- For more information about the Marathon Monks, go to: <http://millennium-tv.com/monks.html> among others.
- For more information about Julia “Butterfly” Hill and her Luna tree sit, read *The Legacy of Luna*.
- For more information about John Goddard and his life list, go to: <http://www.ushistoryteacher.com/resources/goddard.html>

Q What insights and lessons have you learned this month?

Poetry Moment:

At the Cross Roads Café

Several light-years away from Kansas,
I sit at the Cross Roads Café.
One thousand faces
Reflecting two thousand races

Create an ever-changing
human kaleidoscope passing my table.

In the moist equatorial air, the smell of dim sum
Mingles with the deep fat odors of KFC and
McDonald's, the acrid whiff of a neighboring latté, and
Behind all a thread, the merest buttery-foul hint,
of last night's durian fruit feast.

Business suits, backpacks, saris and sarongs,
Delicate, dark-eyed Asian girls,
Bound by invisible ties to the past,
Lurch toward the future on impossible shoes
While cell phones chiming a hundred English dialects
Chase the wealth of the west.

This shopping-center-hub of the world
Buzzes with giant-screen offerings—
Bulges with salves for unknown desires,
Bargains with temptation and greed,
Luring longings into full-blown lust.

And, yet, on the morning street, an old man
With a wrinkled, nut-brown face
Sweeps leaves with a handmade broom,
A design ancient and true,
And patiently smiles as he
Waits for the click of this stranger's camera.

“Oh, Singapore,” I wonder,
“Who are you?”
And the echo of my question
Bounces off the stone canyons of commerce
Taunting back
“Who are you?”