

Conscious Aging

Transformative Practices

This eBook is an excerpt from *Conscious Aging: A Self Reflection and Conversation Circle Guide*, a workbook available for use in conjunction with delivery of the IONS Conscious Aging Workshop. We hope you will find this eBook beneficial in helping you to enhance perspectives about aging, and continuing to open to the positive experiences of growing older.



IONS

INSTITUTE
OF
NOETIC
SCIENCES

Table of Contents

Inspirational Ideas—Part 1	3
Attune.....	4
Free Write.....	5
Inspirational Ideas—Part 2	6
Free Write.....	9
Reflections on Transformative Experiences – Going Deeper.....	10
Reflection Activity.....	11
Conscious Aging Online Workshop	13

Inspirational Ideas – Part 1

In the last session, we engaged in the process of writing a soul memoir, which allowed us to appreciate the lessons received and wisdom gained from experiences in our lives that had particular importance, significance, meaning, or value for us. We saw how our interpretation and understanding of an event depended on our perception of ourselves and our relationships with others, with life, and beyond. Certain experiences in our lives might have led to significant and lasting shifts in our perspective, sometimes rapidly and dramatically and sometimes more slowly, over time. In this session, we will focus on experiences of deep inner transformation and their initiating circumstances.

In the book, *Living Deeply: The Art and Science of Transformation in Everyday Life*, the authors (Marilyn Mandala Schlitz, PhD, Cassandra Vieten, PhD and Tina Amorok, PsyD) state that “Conscious transformations are profound internal shifts that result in long-lasting changes in the way you experience and relate to yourself, others, and the world.” (p. 14-15) They add that “Your behavior, attitudes, and ways of being in the world are changed in life-affirming and lasting ways only when your consciousness transforms, and you commit to living deeply into that transformation.” (p. 15)

Before exploring consciousness transformation further, it would be helpful to define what we mean by consciousness. According to the authors, consciousness “includes your own internal reality. It includes self-awareness, your relationships to your environment, the people in your life, and your worldview or model of reality. Simply put, your consciousness determines how you experience the world.” (p. 15) We’ve been introduced to this concept previously with the notion of context – frameworks of meaning that lead to perceiving and interpreting the world in particular ways, i.e., through the lens of a particular worldview. The authors explain that a worldview is a *model of reality*.

“We can get pretty attached to what we think is true, important and real – even when presented with evidence to the contrary. To a great extent, our worldview determines what we’re capable of seeing and therefore determines our perception of reality. What your worldview doesn’t expand to contain quite literally escapes our perception. We just don’t see it. This perception of reality colors our reactions and actions, every moment of every day” (p. 18)

Given that we are probably operating with a worldview that is unconscious, how can we become aware and alert to the possibility of transformation? What does consciousness transformation look like, and how can we consciously seek it out? The authors offer a way to focus your inner attention on finding transformations you’ve already experienced in your life that you might not be consciously aware of.

Attune

Take a moment and tune in to your inner guidance. Close your eyes (if you’re comfortable doing so) and take several long, deep, relaxing breaths. Notice any tension in your body, any areas of holding, and then release the tension, allowing yourself to relax into the safety of this moment.

In this state of gentle relaxation and receptivity, the authors of *Living Deeply* invite you to “Stop and reflect for a moment. Looking back over your life, can you find pivotal moments that broadened your perspective? Have there been times in your life that you identify as turning points – moments after which you saw the world in a more open and generous light? Have you ever felt connected to something greater than yourself, and in that connection felt self-centeredness slip away? Or, have you noticed a more gradual process, where over a period of months or years you changed the way you viewed yourself and the world around you?” (p. 15)



Inspirational Ideas – Part 2

The authors pose an important question for consideration, the answers to which we will explore in detail at this point. “How do consciousness transformations – the kind that make a long-term difference in your life – begin?” (p. 33) They note that there are “many doorways to transformative experiences, both painful and awe-filled.” (p. 34). These include the following possibilities:

- 1) **Intense suffering or crises** can lead to transformations of consciousness. “Difficult or painful events often create new levels of openness or vulnerability, thus setting the stage for a shift in worldview. A brush with death, the loss of a loved one, a mental or emotional breakdown, and injury, loss of a job – such painful challenges can shatter defenses that have taken us a lifetime to build.” (p. 34). In such cases, “change is what happens when the pain of remaining the same becomes greater than the pain of changing.” (p. 35)
- 2) **A deep realization that your life has diverged from your values or purpose.** “The further you get from your values or purpose, the more painful life tends to become.” (p. 38) Transformative experiences allow people to “recognize that their beliefs, priorities, and behaviors were inconsistent with who they wanted or believed themselves to be.” (p. 38) This is humorously reflected in the saying, “I want to be the kind of person my dog thinks I am.”
- 3) **Hitting bottom** is another experience that can lead to transformation. “Sometimes in order to reconstruct yourself afresh, the complete destruction of who you have been is required.” (p. 38) In this case, the suffering can be “so great that a person just gives up. While it can feel like defeat – particularly after fighting a long battle against an illness, addiction, or destructive belief pattern – giving up leads to letting go. Paradoxically, this can open the door to an entirely new way of being.” (p. 39)
- 4) **Noetic experiences** also pave the way to consciousness transformation. “Noetic is a Greek word that refers to knowledge that is subjective – the things you know through your own direct experience. us, noetic experiences are those in which there’s a deeply

subjective and internal experience of knowing.” (p. 40) As the authors further clarify, such experiences can be mystical, peak experiences, or transcendent, but they can also simply be a sense of deeper connection to all of life, a profound sense of belonging in the universe, or even an awareness of deep love when gazing into the eyes of another. The authors go on to say that “noetic experiences are often sudden and profound. They include epiphanies, ‘big dreams’ (i.e., those that have a clear significance or emotional impact) and senses of revelation that come in an instant.” (p. 41) “Noetic experiences can take the form of psychic phenomena, including the feeling that you’re being stared at, or the knowledge that the phone will ring just before it does, or near-death experiences, or spontaneous healing, or various other abilities and phenomena that arise in non-ordinary states of consciousness.” (p. 41)

Transcendent experiences may lie “beyond the ordinary realm of perception or beyond the limit of material existence. ese experiences can carry with them an extraordinary quality of numinosity, divinity, or grace, transporting us out of our ordinary worldview.” (p. 43) Noetic experiences are common and occur more frequently when we allow for their possibility. If you don’t believe that something can possibly exist, then it won’t, even if it’s happening all around you. In this light, some important questions to consider are: Is my worldview too small? Does my worldview really reflect my true values? Am I willing to expand it? If not, what is holding me back?

- 5) **Non-ordinary states of consciousness** are also doorways to transformation. These can be “achieved through meditation, shamanic healing arts, trance, past-life regression, hypnosis, art, dance, music, deep play, sex, being in nature, ritual and ceremony, prayer, the sacred use of plants ... as well as many other means. These states can also arise spontaneously...” (p. 48) The authors add that “By entering non-ordinary states of consciousness, we’re able to gain new perspectives on ourselves and our definitions of self – definitions that have been formed by consensual reality...” (p. 48). “...transformative experiences can help us to deeply understand that the self that we perceive in ordinary reality is but a small part of a much larger self.” (p. 48)

- 6) **Meeting a teacher** can be another doorway to transformation. As the authors note, “Finding a teacher with whom you connect deeply is one of the tried and true ways of opening yourself up to deep shifts in perception.” (p. 53) Most religious traditions “include some form of guidance and support from another person who has ‘been there.’” (p. 53)
- 7) **Peak experiences**, which can happen when participating in sports or playing a musical instrument, can also be transformative.
- 8) **Being in nature** is often a source of a shift in consciousness. As the authors relate, “...nature can mirror our inner state to us if we look carefully and quietly.” (p. 57) Traditional American Indian cultures often require a period of solitude in nature,” known as a vision quest. Time in nature allows us to explore our lives and what has meaning, value, and significance for us in a setting that is nurturing, “sacred and mysterious.” (p. 57) “Being a sacred and mysterious force unto itself, nature often reveals new self-knowledge to us, and thus serves as a catalyst for transformation.” (p. 57) The authors conclude that “Nature can provide a quiet, reflective place to listen to your inner voice and your way of being. Looking deeply into simple natural events ... can tell you about your own life journey.” (p. 58)

And so there are many methods and experiences that can be “doorways to transformation” of consciousness. Some of these may have operated in our lives already. Learning about other routes to transformative experiences opens us to new avenues of transformation.

Doorways to transformative experiences (summary):

- 1) Intense suffering or crises
- 2) Realizing your life has diverged from your values or purpose
- 3) Hitting bottom
- 4) Noetic experiences
- 5) Non-ordinary states of consciousness
- 6) Meeting a teacher
- 7) Peak experiences
- 8) Being in nature

Reflections on Transformative Experiences – Going Deeper

As the Living Deeply authors so eloquently state, “Inquiring deeply into your own transformative experience can allow you not only to honor these experiences, but also to see patterns, retrieve elements that have been lost in translation, and integrate realizations from these experiences more fully. Like dreams, these experiences often have layers that are only revealed when revisited.” (p. 64)

It may be helpful to close your eyes and take a few slow, deep centering and relaxing breaths. Relax any tense muscles and allow yourself to focus on the miracle of breath, breathing deeply in and out for several rounds, noting the sensation of the breath that sustains your life. Now allow your breathing to resume its normal, relaxed pace. From this centered, relaxed place, reflect on experiences in your life that you might now see as having opened your eyes to new ways of seeing the world and your place in it. Maybe these were simply glimpses, or perhaps they were transformative experiences that affected your overall patterns of thinking and behaving. “These ... experiences could be pleasurable or painful. They could be meeting a person, losing a loved one, reading a life-changing book, traveling, having an extraordinary teacher...” (p. 31-32) A transformative experience “may be of the spiritual or religious variety. It may have been a response to something in nature. Or it may have resulted from relationships with other people, art, music, or many other things” (p. 64), such as those mentioned in the discussion above. “The key factor here is your own felt sense that the experience was some sort of turning point or shift in your life.” (p. 32) Whatever experiences come to mind are the right ones for you to explore right now.



For each of the transformative experiences you recalled, “note in the chart below what – if any – transformative practices or activities you engaged in during that time period, including both formal practices like going to church or practicing meditation, and informal practices like being in nature, playing sports or an instrument, reading, writing, or experiencing a new realm of study. Focus on practices you engaged in specifically to learn more about yourself, to experience your consciousness, or to heal. As you review your transformative experiences and practices, also write down any other factors that might have set the stage for your personal transformation, such as the beginning or ending of a relationship, an illness or healing crisis, a birth, a death, a trip or a new-found passion. What helped pave the way for any shifts in your perception of yourself, your relationships, your sense of the broader environmental and transpersonal world? Make notes, pictures, or symbols in the time slot you have created. Spend time quietly reflecting on what you have learned about the seeds of transformation in your own life. Name and describe the insights and themes that have emerged and been woven throughout your life. Can you decipher any patterns and relationships between your transformative practices and experiences? (p. 32)

Turning Point Life Experience	Transformative Practices	Other Factors	What helped shift your perspective?

Feel free to share your discoveries, reflections, and observations with trustworthy people who will listen with compassion and respect. This is an exercise you can return to again and again as you recall more transformative experiences that have occurred throughout your life. You may be surprised that, once the “pump” of memory is primed, memories of such experiences may arise spontaneously for appreciative reflection that will continue to enrich your life.

We hope you have found the materials in this eBook beneficial. The mission of the Institute of Noetic Sciences is to reveal the interconnected nature of reality through scientific exploration and personal discovery. If you would like to continue exploring Conscious Aging, check out our next workshop:

Conscious Aging Online Workshop

A live, online, experiential workshop for older people seeking guidance, meaning, and connection.

noetic.org/conscious-aging

Find more information about IONS programs, including Conscious Aging, at:

noetic.org | experience@noetic.org

101 San Antonio Road | Petaluma, CA 94952

707-775-3500

