***The Journey from Grievance to Gratitude:***

***A Path to Awakening***

         This class uses "relationship" as the tool for awakening.  If you are not in a relationship - interject a person in your life that you have the most challenging relationship with. Alter the homework and exercises so that it fits your particular situation.  At times, you might find that you have to use your imagination to do this, but if you do the work and commit these next seven weeks to this work - You WILL have a transformation on the inner levels of your life. When the inner begins to transform, so does the outer!

 Life provides many opportunities to grow up, to discover what you are made of and learn to become kinder, more compassionate and more loving.  It doesn’t matter if it is an illness, a personal loss, a tragedy or a conflict.  Inherent in the challenges and obstacles that you encounter throughout your life is a seed that can bloom into healing and transformation. This seed is a spark, a fragment of your soul, that when discovered leads you to the wisdom that is waiting within you.

         Relationship is one of the most extraordinary experiences available to us as human beings. It is a place where we can meet our demons, heal our wounds and experience the merit and blessing of loving another. When we mindfully or consciously participate in our marriages, partnerships or intimate relationships, we have the opportunity to catalyze our own personal growth and transformation while discovering the deepest meaning to being alive, of being human.

         This possibility of relationship is not something that is advocated when we are born or as we grow up.  Often, we are given idealistic fairy tale dreams about what a marriage, partnership or relationship is and can be. We often dream that our partnership or marriage will come from euphoric love, and include wild sex, financial freedom, possibly sweet and adorable children, and a “best friend” in our lover/partner/spouse. All of this is possible for each and every one of us, but it is not likely and certainly not guaranteed.  Most of us will struggle in our relationships, partnerships and marriages.  Most of us will adore our children if we have them, but they will not always be sweet, easy or adorable.  Often, our partner, spouse or lover will not be our best friend and they will often disappoint us. Because our own “ego desires” and attachments to our own wants, needs and personal agendas will lead us to continually find fault with our partners, spouses, friends, family members or lovers. Most of us will find that our most intimate relationships are fraught with struggle, disappointment and frustration. So the question is: Why have them? If they are going to be so difficult and challenging, why have them?

         At various times throughout your life you have probably asked yourself these very questions.  You must remember, however, that there is another side to relationship. There is the love, the joy, the fun, the discovery, the companionship and the potential to fulfill the dreams that draw you to another person and inspires the intimacy that you engage with.  But you forget and often never consider that once the “honeymoon” period is over, the real work begins!

         What you don’t always realize is that the challenges as well as the fulfillment you experience in your relationships are aspects and reflections of your self. You are not designed to see or discover these parts of your self by your self, which is why you are attracted to certain people and certain circumstances throughout your lifetime. You require the reflections that come with intimate relationships, to show you aspects of yourself that you have either disowned and disconnect from or admire and aspire towards. Your relationships are mirrors of yourself. These mirrors reflect your darkness and your light and that reflection, if looked at, can be deeply illuminating and transforming.

         This course is designed to assist you in the discovery of your deepest self.  Using your most significant, intimate and possibly most difficult relationship you will have the opportunity to explore aspects of yourself that you did not know were engaged, reactive and responsive to words, actions and inactions in your spouse, partner, friends or lover.  The glorious aspect of a loving relationship is that within the interchange between you and your partner, spouse, friend or lover lives the jewel of your Divine nature and the Divine nature of your spouse, partner, friend or lover.  It does not matter if the relationship is strong and you are committed to it, or it is falling apart and you want out of it.  With insight and willingness you will discover the grand gift, the precious jewel that lives inside the relationships that you have.

         It has taken me over 15 years to discover this for myself so that I can share it here with you.

         I began this work because I was literally “called” to it.  “Called” is an indigenous term. It suggests that the Universe (God, Grace, the Tao, Spirit – something deeply connected to the deepest part of our-self), coalesces and brings together both the idea and the people that catalyze one’s life work so that we are able to fulfill our life purpose.

         This work found me! I was asked to assist people with their healing so they could move on from their failed marriage, partnership or relationship. I was asked to mid-wife their healing from the loss of their dreams because of illness, death, loss of work, home, or love. I was also asked to assist couples who were in constant struggle with each other and felt love was draining out of their relationship. They asked me to guide them back to the garden they had initially planted with each other.

         Of course, I have prepared for this work all my life.  I did not know it but as I look back it seems so obvious. Why couldn’t I have seen more clearly why things were happening in my life?  If only I could have trusted back then that all was in Divine Order, I could have spared myself, and my family, so much suffering! But as you will discover from doing this work, there was and is a greater design or plan that is at work in your life. You cannot see this plan when you are in the midst of living it, but if you are willing to trust – it will all unfold in the most astonishingly profound ways. It is in the not trusting back then, that I can guide you and encourage you to trust now.

         I speak a great deal about mindfulness. It is at the heart of this work. When I talk about mindfulness I am speaking of a kind of paradox – Mindfulness is both the use of the mind and not thinking. They happen simultaneously.  Through the process of meditation you are able to engage the mind to be “aware” and also listen to the silence between your rapidly changing thoughts. The challenge is in not paying attention to what is being thought. It is in that “space,” in the silences and stillness that consciousness and awareness live.  You may have heard of the idea of being a “witness.”  Tapping into the Presence that you are.  You ask yourself, “Who is looking through my eyes?” “Who is asking these questions?”  “Who is listening for the answers? Who hears that bird or those words? That “who” has no opinions, no likes, no dislikes.  It is just a Presence. When you can engage that part of your being ness, you are in a state of mindfulness. Meditation gives you the opportunity to practice this state so that you come to know it and then when you “need” it you can call upon it.  The ability to call upon this state of being and apply it when you are struggling in your relationship catalyzes healing.

         You may ask, “How then does mindfulness heal?” When I talk about “healing” I am talking about coming into alignment with harmony, joy, abundance, kindness, gratitude, personal empowerment, humility, forgiveness and love.  I am talking about dipping into the experience, even for a moment, of these states of being.  When you decide to heal your life, you are in fact also healing the generations from your past, your present and into your future.

Mindfulness

* Uses your present circumstances & experiences to improve your life
* Empowers you to experience these times as one of growth rather than loss
* Engages with the present moment rather than with the past
* Embraces your higher self and mends the split between your ego and your soul
* Keeps you from being stuck in your personal wounds and opens up a path to healing them
* Inspires you to be a loving conscious being and to discover real freedom
* Helps you find the highest expression of your being
* Empowers you to reclaim your power, live from your joy and experience the inspiration to create the life of your dreams.
* Teaches you to choose the direction of your life.
* Empowers you to heal your life through your current circumstances
* Supports you to face the adversity in your life so you can heal at the deepest level of your being!
* Helps you remember that you are always at choice to heal
* Empowers you to stop being a victim of life and other people’s agendas –
* Supports you in putting down your problems so you don’t have to carry them around as open wounds everywhere you go.

         In order to receive the most from this course, I invite you to purchase a recorder for the guided meditations that I offer in some of the lecture material.  To do this, read the meditations out loud into the recorder and play them back to yourself when you do the meditations. I also invite you to purchase a journal that you dedicate to this work. Each weeks work suggests additional instructions, rituals, ceremonies and exercises that you are invited to do. By fully engaging in the work and the opportunities in the assignments you will find that your life and your relationship will grow, transform and heal.  Each lesson provided in this course is a teaching with both meditations and exercises.  Taking the time to do the exercises will make a huge difference in how effective this work will be in your life. If you wish to communicate with me while you do this process email me at: illanaberger@gmail.com .

I will answer simple questions, however, if you need more support my fee is $35/15 minutes or $150/hr. This will allow you to work directly with me through your weekly process. We can work via video conferencing if you are not in the Bay Area or Central Coast of California.

***About Meditation***

                  Finding and discovering space and silence within your mind allows the truth of who you are to emerge.  Meditation provides an opportunity to enter into a deep relationship with your own Divine nature and find the peace that exists in-between your being and your doing.When confronted with challenges and challenging people, meditation allows you to come to your center where there are no judgments, no resentments, no likes or dislikes – just “being.” It is here that we can meet our current situation and see it for what it is – an opportunity – an opening – a doorway to our conscious awakening and goodness.

“*Through meditation . . .*

*You can set the stage*

*for important*

*mind-altering*

*and habit-altering*

*brain change”*

*Herbert Benson MD*

*Professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School*

         Often people establish personal practices and bring spiritual teachings into their lives in order to find or rediscover the happiness they are longing for.  Meditation does not really have a goal other than just sitting. The moment you introduce a goal to meditation, it is really no longer meditation. Happiness in life comes not by manipulating what you want to achieve but by paying attention to something seemingly totally unconnected with it. In order to make your mouth smile for example, you might tickle the armpit. This is fundamentally important. Concentration of the mind is not achieved by concentrating the mind, but by doing something completely different. This is what the great masters of yoga were suggesting when they instructed their students to sit down and meditate. In a sense it is a process of distracting the mind so that the mind can rest.

         Your mind is often in an incredible state of disorder. Your attention is not at all steady. Physically, you are often tense. Mentally, you are often distracted. A teacher or friend or spiritual counselor might have suggested to you —"Sit down and meditate."  You may have tried meditation once or twice in the past.  It may or may not have been “successful.”  I often hear, “I tried meditation but I can’t really do it.  I can’t just sit there.  Yes, this too is meditation. Sometimes you will feel as though you “just can’t sit there.”  Do not be discouraged.  Persevering through those moments has rewards beyond compare.  Once you sit down to meditation you might begin to notice that while you are paying attention to your breath, which is totally unrelated and unconnected with the problem you are trying to solve, the problem just dissolves in that moment. You might then discover that you don’t have to solve your problems at all, the problems can just be dissolved in the simple process of meditation, of sitting still and being present with NOW.

         Have you ever had the question arise when you were unhappy, “what happened to my happy person?” And when you were happy perhaps wondered, “what happened to my unhappy person?” Some part of the Self seems to mind that you are happy sometimes and unhappy at other times. The mind seems to assume many different disguises from moment to moment and day to day. What we know is this, it is not possible for the mind to be in two moods at the same time, and even when you are able to juggle your moods quickly, it only means that your mind is able to change very quickly.

         There is no deeper mystery to meditation than this; by sitting down and focusing on your breathing, you temporarily forget your problems. A problem that is forgotten does not exist. Unhappiness that is forgotten is happiness.  If you have been unhappy for 6 or 7 hours at a stretch, you know that if you sit down and meditate will have at least 20 minutes of happiness available during that time. Unhappiness is just a mental state, nothing more than a mood and through choice it can be changed.

         In life, if external situations are responsible for your unhappiness, that situation is not going to be changed by your being unhappy. Therefore, the teachings say, "free yourself from external obsessions and realize that unhappiness is a mental mood." Sri Swami Venkatesananda from The Divine Life Society teaches that the mind is always there with you. When you feel depressed or sad it is because the mind has temporarily assumed the form of unhappiness, the character of unhappiness. However, even if you are in the worst of all moods now, the sun is not going to darken because of you. The sun will still shine brilliantly. And if you shake off your bad mood and get into the sun, it is to your advantage. You have been unhappy before, you may be unhappy again—‘so what’! All your problems are there waiting outside the meditation room—leave them there! For the next half hour or so, as you sit down and breathe, and you will suddenly find that your unhappiness is not with you. Suddenly you realize that you (or something in you) are totally independent of the happiness or unhappiness that your environment had imposed upon you. It is possible to create a sense of freedom just by sitting down and watching your breath. In the meantime, you also might discover that it is possible for you to be happy within yourself, without changing a thing in your life. This is the heart and healing of mindfulness and it is the simple gift of a meditation practice.

         The most important thing in meditation is not to try to solve your outside problems, but to taste the present mood of peace, joy and happiness that is flowing all the time within you. Then when you complete your meditation you are able to face any problem.

         There are four stages of meditation practice:

*Approach*

*Technique*

*Meditative Awareness*

*Conscious Conclusion*

***APPROACH***: **This refers to how you set up the space (external and internal) for your daily meditation practice.**

* Have a place where you wish to meditate and have it be for that purpose only.
* Don’t put your meditation altar in the TV room for example.  Put it somewhere where its sacredness and your intention can be maintained and respected by your partner, family, friends and/or roommate. Your altar might contain a candle and perhaps a small bowl of water and an icon or something that brings you peace when you look at it.
* Have a clock with an alarm so you know how long you are to sit and perhaps a bell of some sort so that you can ring in a moment of mindfulness before you begin your meditation and at its conclusion.
* Meditate for 10 to 20 minutes to begin – after a couple of months increase this to 30 minutes consistently.

**TECHNIQUE: This refers to “how” you meditate – your posture, your intention and awareness, your cushion or chair, etc.**

* Your posture is very important. You want to be sitting in an alert position. You do not need to sit on a cushion cross-legged but if you choose to sit in a chair, be sure that your spine is erect and you are not slouching.  Do not lie down!
* Begin with a short prayer that you say each time before you begin. It brings the mind into alignment with the body and your environment.
* Close your eyes and focus your inner sight on your third eye, the place between your eyebrows and a little above them.
* Breathe in deeply and exhale at least twice to bring your body to a full awareness of its presence and your soul in communication with your body. The breath helps your whole being become alert.
* Breathe in and out and follow your breath by noticing the in breath and the out breath, you can even say to yourself.  In – while breathing in  . . . Out – while breathing out. You may count your breaths from one to ten and then begin at one again or you can just say, In . . .  Out . . .

**MEDITATIVE AWARENESS: This refers to the actual state of your mind and your attention.**

* When thoughts begin to arise, just notice them, witness them and then bring your attention back to your breath. You may even get seduced by the thoughts, no problem, once you realize you are thinking, just witness it, notice it, and then gently come back to the breath. You can name this “thinking” and then come back to the breath.
* The awareness of the flow of your breath, the flow of your stillness and your resting in that stillness is meditative awareness.
* Rest in that stillness
* When you find that you are completely at peace – be with that.
* After the bell rings that brings your meditation to an end, bring your attention back to your environment by focusing on your awareness of your feet, you’re body and the sounds in your environment.

**CONSCIOUS CONCLUSION: This refers to how to conclude your meditation sessions.**

* Make a closing prayer to extend this feeling of peace you have experienced into the world, to your (ex) spouse/partner, and into your life.
* And then open your eyes.

***Knowing others is wisdom,***

***knowing yourself is***

***Enlightenment.***

***Lao-tzu, Tao te Ching***