

Monk in the World Leader's Guide

Dear Dancing Monks,

Welcome to the Monk in the World program for reflection and growth. I am thrilled to offer this free resource to support your efforts leading a group of fellow monks in the world through these materials. This guide is based on the Monk in the World Self-Study Retreat which was inspired by the eight principles of the [Abbey of the Arts Monk Manifesto](#).

Each section of this guide explores one of the principles by offering an introduction to the theme, exercises for prayer and reflection, discussion questions, suggestions for incorporating the principles into daily life, and a closing blessing. If you and your group members subscribe to our [email newsletter](#) you have access to the online Monk in the World program which includes some of the materials here but also an illustration for each principle and beautiful videos for the closing blessings.

I suggest moving through each principle per session, whether once a week, every other week, or once a month depending on how frequently your group meets. This guide is intended for use with small groups of 5-8 participants to allow ample time for reflection, sharing, and connection.

It is recommended that participants bring a journal to each session to free write about their experience with the prayer and meditation prior to group sharing. In addition, principles seven and eight have suggestions for additional supplies.

Many thanks to our Abbey Assistant Melinda Thomas for compiling this leader's guide. My heart is full of gratitude for all the ways she supports this community to thrive.

I pray that this resource will inspire you and kindle a heart of beloved community with those you gather.

With great and growing love,

Christine

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Abbess for Abbey of the Arts

Monk in the World Leader's Guide

Silence and Solitude

*Suggested time allotment for sharing is based on a gathering for 5-8 people. Adjust as needed for the size of your group.

Greeting & Welcome (10 -15 minutes)

Honor the presence of everyone gathered. Invite a brief check-in from everyone in the group.

Lighting a Candle & Opening Prayer

As you light a candle for the group if meeting in person or invite each participant to light a candle if you are meeting online, use this text as a suggested opening prayer.

“When your tongue is silent, you can rest in the silence of the forest. When your imagination is silent, the forest speaks to you, tells you of its unreality and of the Reality of God. But when your mind is silent, then the forest becomes magnificently real and blazes transparently with the Reality of God.”

~ Thomas Merton (from *A Year with Merton*)

Introduction to the Theme

The first principle of the Monk Manifesto is: “I commit to finding moments each day for **silence and solitude**, to make space for another voice to be heard, and to resist a culture of noise and constant stimulation.”

Silence requires practice because in the course of our everyday lives noise is the norm rather than silence. Sometimes when we sit down to a time of silence we can be overwhelmed by the chatter of our minds.

Through practice we can become fully present to this inner chatter, being compassionate with ourselves. We resist the silence often because we are afraid of what will be revealed and yet the only way is to awaken fully to ourselves.

We practice silence not just for its own sake, . . . we cultivate silence so that we might hear another voice deeper than our own. We cultivate the conditions to encounter the presence of God.

Suggested Question for Shared Reflection (10-15 minutes depending on the size of your group)

In what ways do you experience silence as a presence and fullness in your life rather than the absence of noise?

Lectio Divina: Sacred Reading (10-15 minutes)

Invite participants to pray the four movements of *lectio divina* using the text and suggested guidelines below.

We will be praying with this text:

Be still and know that I am God – Psalm 46:10

First Movement - *Lectio*: Settling & Shimmering

Find a comfortable position where you can remain alert and yet also relax your body. Bring your attention to your breath and allow a few moments to become centered. If you find yourself distracted at any time, gently return to the rhythm of your breath as an anchor for your awareness. Allow yourself to settle into this moment and become fully present.

I will read the line from the Psalms once or twice through slowly. Listen for a word that feels significant right now, is capturing your attention even if you don't know why. Gently repeat this word to yourself in the silence.

Second Movement - *Meditatio*: Savoring & Stirring

Read the text again. Allow the word or phrase which caught your attention in the first movement to spark your imagination. Savor the word or phrase with all of your senses, notice what smells, sounds, tastes, sights, and feelings are evoked. Then listen for what images, feelings, and memories are stirring, welcoming them in, and then savoring and resting into this experience.

Third Movement - *Oratio*: Summoning & Serving

Read the text a third time. Listen for an invitation rising up from your experience of prayer so far. Considering the word or phrase and what it has evoked for you in memory, image, or feeling, what is the invitation? This invitation may be a summons toward a new awareness or action.

Fourth Movement - *Contemplatio*: Slowing & Stilling

Move into a time for simply resting in God and allowing your heart to fill with gratitude for God's presence in this time of prayer. Slow your thoughts and reflections even further and sink into the experience of stillness. Rest in the presence of God and allow yourself to simply be. Rest here for several minutes. Return to your breath if you find yourself distracted.

Rest into Silence – 5 minutes

Closing

Gently connect with your breath again and slowly bring your awareness back to the room, moving from inner experience to outer experience. Give yourself some time of transition between these moments of contemplative depth and your everyday life. Take a few minutes to journal about what you experienced in your prayer.

Suggested Questions for Shared Reflection (15-20 minutes)

What shimmered for you during your time of silence while praying *lectio*?

What is one thing in your life you could let go of for the next few days to make space for the grace of silence?

Suggestions for Practice

Between now and your next gathering, invite participants to claim a small window of time – even ten minutes is enough to begin – and rest into an experience of stillness. Connecting with the breath – breathe in life-sustaining breath of the spirit, breathing out and releasing whatever distracts you from this moment. As thoughts arise, gently release them and return to this moment. The invitation is toward both outer and inner silence. Notice the way silence nourishes you and consider ways to give yourself this gift each day.

Closing Blessing

Holy Source of Silence,
beneath the clatter and din of the everyday
you offer your mysteries to our hearts.
You call us to pause,
to slow down and listen to the true longing
planted in each of us by you, a seed of holy desire.
Support us in letting go of the inner and outer noise.
Open wide in us a sacred cave for stillness
where we can attune to your presence.
Enliven us with the gift of your sweet music
and allow us to encounter your holy presence

flaming in each of our hearts.
Help us to catch a note of your song
in the wind or in the voice of another,
in times of sadness, and in the rush of our lives.
In a world so filled with distraction,
we listen for your whispers
which call us to another way of being.
and ask for the courage to respond to all
we discover in this tabernacle of silence.

Monk in the World Leader's Guide

Hospitality

*Suggested time allotment for sharing is based on a gathering for 5-8 people. Adjust as needed for the size of your group.

Greeting & Welcome (10 -15 minutes)

Honor the presence of everyone gathered. Invite a brief check-in from everyone in the group.

Lighting a Candle & Opening Prayer

As you light a candle for the group if meeting in person or invite each participant to light a candle if you are meeting online, use this text as a suggested opening prayer.

“All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say: I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” ~ Rule of St. Benedict 53:1

Introduction to the Theme

The second principle of the Monk Manifesto is: “I commit to radical acts of **hospitality** by welcoming the stranger both without and within and realize that when I make space inside my heart for the unclaimed parts of myself, I activate compassion and the ability to accept those places in others.”

St. Benedict invites us to welcome in each stranger we encounter as the face of Christ in our lives. Those people who make us uncomfortable or we dislike are especially included.

There is another dimension to this practice that we sometimes might be tempted to forget, which is inner hospitality. Within each of us we have a multitude of feelings, experiences, inner selves, that we would prefer to close the door on. We have many inner strangers knocking at the door of our hearts.

Becoming a monk in the world means cultivating the ability to welcome in the whole spectrum of our inner experience and develop compassion for all the parts of ourselves. When we are able to embrace all of who we are, we are far more likely to be able to welcome in what is strange or uncomfortable in others.

Hospitality is a lifetime journey, we don't one day figure it out and no longer have to struggle with our impulses and desires. But we can learn not to resist them and find ways to enter into dialogue with them so we deepen and grow into spiritual maturity.

Suggested Questions for Shared Reflection (10-15 minutes depending on the size of your group)

What would it mean for you to welcome in neglected parts of yourself?

When you consider hospitality, is there someone who comes to mind with whom you could practice?

Welcoming Prayer: A Meditation (10-15 minutes)

This practice of Welcoming Prayer was originally developed by Contemplative Outreach's late master teacher Mary Mrozowski, it is based largely on the teaching and wisdom of Fr. Thomas Keating and an eighteenth century work titled *Abandonment to Divine Providence* by Jean Pierre de Caussade.

There are three main movements to the process of Welcoming Prayer:

1. Focus and sink in
2. Welcome
3. Let go

We begin the practice by allowing some time to move your focus and attention to your body. Allow some time to breathe and connect with what you are experiencing. Notice both physical pain as well as emotions. Bring your full awareness to whatever your experience is, without trying to change it. Notice how you experience this in your body. If you feel sad or joyful, how is that manifested in your body?

Don't try to change anything. Just stay present. This is not about trying to discover why you feel the way you do, or justifying your feelings. Simply stay present and alert to the manifestation of feelings in your body. When we bring ourselves fully present to our experience, a remarkable thing happens. We find the courage and strength to stay with the moment.

In this practice we stay present, welcoming it, but don't identify with it. We come to recognize that this experience doesn't define the whole of who we are. We are not made up entirely of our grief just as we are not fully defined by joy.

The second step of welcoming isn't about condoning the situation that caused the physical or emotional pain. You are welcoming in the feelings the experience triggers for you and letting them have some space within.

Allow participants a few moments to settle here. Perhaps name the feeling – I welcome grief. I welcome anger, I welcome joy etc. Whatever you are feeling, welcome it.

The third step is letting go, but the temptation might be to move here too quickly. The real work of Welcoming Prayer is in those first two steps, staying with the experience and welcoming it in until the wall of resistance begins to come down on its own. If you feel resistance to the letting go, don't pretend, simply accept where you are right now and bring some compassion to yourself.

To let go you might say something simple like *I let go of my anger and give it over to God.*

The creator of Welcoming Prayer used this prayer:

- I let go my desire for security and survival.
- I let go my desire for affection and esteem.
- I let go my desire for control and power.
- I let go my desire to change the situation.

When your inner experienced is welcomed in, God can transform it for your own deepening.

Suggested Questions for Shared Reflection (15-20 minutes)

What shimmered for you during your time welcoming prayer?

What is your experience of feeling emotions manifesting in your body, creating space for them, and letting them go?

Suggestions for Practice

Between now and your next gathering, invite participants to practice a session of welcoming prayer, especially in moments of feeling tender or hurt. Allow some inner space to fill with compassion, then extend that compassion to someone else you love. Then see if you can imagine this sacred compassion filling someone you find difficult.

Closing Blessing

Holy Presence of God,
you shimmer in every stranger I encounter
whether in the world or in my heart.
When you came in human form
you sat at table with all those who walked the edges
of life and knew their presence as sacred.
Create in me a space to welcome in

all that is hard and disorienting,
those moments when I feel lost, angry,
heartbroken, overwhelmed, ashamed,
joyful, grieving, or in love with life.
Help me to honor the guests who arrive at the door,
to usher in the grace that newness offers
and find Christ's compassionate presence there.
May your infinite compassion grow in me
the way sunlight spills across a field,
and include everyone in that loving embrace.

Monk in the World Leader's Guide

Community

*Suggested time allotment for sharing is based on a gathering for 5-8 people. Adjust as needed for the size of your group.

Greeting & Welcome (10 -15 minutes)

Honor the presence of everyone gathered. Invite a brief check-in from everyone in the group.

Lighting a Candle & Opening Prayer

As you light a candle for the group if meeting in person or invite each participant to light a candle if you are meeting online, use this text as a suggested opening prayer.

“To be a monk today or someone seeking to incorporate monastic values into his or her own life presumes being a part of a community of friends, people with whom a person can share the counsels of the heart and speak a language of the heart to one another.”
~ Edward Sellner, *Finding the Monk Within: Great Monastic Values for Today*

Introduction to the Theme

The third principle of the Monk Manifesto is: “I commit to cultivating **community** by finding kindred spirits along the path, soul friends with whom I can share my deepest longings, and mentors who can offer guidance and wisdom for the journey.”

Many of us have multiple communities – a marriage or life partner, close friends, spiritual communities, ancestors, and those we are connected to because of something shared such as a neighborhood or town. . .The contemplative path reveals to us that we are all profoundly connected, rather than disparate people. When people ask me how they know they are having a genuine encounter with God, I ask them if their heart is expanding with compassion, so that they see more and more people with eyes of love.

Love demands upon us like making our relationships a priority and being of service even when we don't feel like it. Love demands that we allow the people in our lives to be themselves without wishing they were different. In our challenges with others we are invited to welcome in the places of dissonance and notice what is being stirred in our own hearts.

In the desert, Celtic, and Benedictine traditions, it was also considered essential to have some kind of soul-level relationship with another person who was further along the path in conscious awareness and spiritual practice. In Gaelic this person is referred to as *anam cara* which means soul friend.

Consider if there is someone in your life who lives with creative vitality and contemplative presence. Invite them into conversation about the ways in which they sustain themselves and nurture their way of being in the world.

Suggested Questions for Shared Reflection (10-15 minutes depending on the size of your group)

Where in your life do you experience a genuine sense of community or soul friendship?

When you slow down and listen to your longings for spiritual companionship, what are some of the qualities which rise up as essential?

Guided Meditation: The Examen Prayer (10-15 minutes)

This is a guided meditation experience and adaptation of the Examen prayer, developed by St. Ignatius of Loyola. He recommended it as a way to pray at the end of each day, reflecting on what has been most life-giving and life-draining. This prayer has been adapted as a reflection on the experiences each day of community and disconnection.

Begin by finding a comfortable position and moving your attention inward. Draw your attention into your body with your breath. Deepen your breathing and with each inhale imagine you are welcoming in the life-breath of God who sustains you moment by moment. With each exhale imagine you are releasing whatever is keeping you from being fully present. Take a few breaths paying attention to this rhythm of breathing in the life force, breathing out what is distracting.

Become aware of the gift of this moment right now, the gift of being alive, of making space and time for prayer.

Begin to move through this past day in your imagination. As you look back over these last 24 hours, reflect on those times when you felt the most connected, whether to yourself, to another person, to God, or perhaps all three. What moments were the most life-giving experiences for you? When did you experience the joy of feeling a sense of loving another and being loved? When did you feel the goodness of being connected to another person, sharing a moment of grace, laughter, maybe sorrow? Notice if one moment in particular rises to the forefront of your awareness. Savor this experience fully. Enter into it again with your imagination, noticing how it feels in your body to be in this moment again. Take a few moments to be with this.

Is there anyone you want to thank for this memory? Spend a few moments dwelling in gratitude.

Take a deep breath and exhale.

Again, reflecting on this past day ask yourself what were the times you felt most disconnected? What moments were the most life-draining experiences for you? When did you feel a sense of loneliness? Or resentment? Or anger? Or envy? Notice if one particular moment wants some more attention and let it become your focus in prayer. Enter into this experience fully and notice how it feels in your body, notice what you are experiencing right now in response without trying to change anything. Take a few moments to be with this.

Is there anyone you want to offer forgiveness for this experience? Spend a few moments seeing if you are moved to extend forgiveness.

Take another deep breath and exhale.

Gently bring your awareness back to the room and spend some time in reflection writing about your experience and noticing the inner movements that happened.

Suggested Questions for Shared Reflection (15-20 minutes)

What do you notice about these experiences? Did anything surprise you or touch you in a particular way?

How might God be inviting you deeper into an experience of community through this time of prayer?

Suggestions for Practice

Consider finding one or two others in your life who might support you on your journey to be a monk in the world. This might be a spiritual director, a small faith group, or a friend with whom you can explore conversations of the heart, allowing each to be with your own experiences of wrestling without trying to fix it or move the other on.

Closing Blessing

God of friendship
I come to know your love and care
through the embodied presence of others.
Weave me together with kindred spirits,
knit me more closely with friends of the soul,

cultivate in me a kinship with humanity
so that I recognize my struggles and joys in others.
In my loneliness reveal to me this communion
and may I be a solace to others who ache for connection.
Transform me through conversation and loving presence.
Help me to see how I am part of a great circle
of pilgrims, witnesses, ancestors, and mystics
who guide me to true connection with You.
Gather me into your great wide heart,
so I might discover I am never separate
but always held in love.

Monk in the World Leader's Guide

Kinship with Creation

*Suggested time allotment for sharing is based on a gathering for 5-8 people. Adjust as needed for the size of your group.

Greeting & Welcome (10 – 15 minutes)

Honor the presence of everyone gathered. Invite a brief check-in from everyone in the group.

Lighting a Candle & Opening Prayer

As you light a candle for the group if meeting in person or invite each participant to light a candle if you are meeting online, use this text as a suggested opening prayer.

“Love all God’s creation, the whole and every grain of sand in it. Love every leaf, every ray of God’s light. Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things . . . When you are left alone, pray. Love to throw yourself on the earth and kiss it. Kiss the earth and love it with an unceasing, consuming love.”

~ Fyodor Dostoevsky

Introduction to the Theme

The fourth principle of the Monk Manifesto is: “I commit to cultivating awareness of my **kinship with creation** and a healthy asceticism, discerning my use of energy and things, letting go of what does not help nature flourish.”

We have separated ourselves from creation by claiming consciousness only for ourselves. Creation is the first scripture and offers wisdom to us with each turn. Claiming our inner monk means remembering that we are the children of the earth, and the earth is in our bodies.

Consider the following (adapted from [Earth, Our Original Monastery](#) by Christine Valters Paintner)

Creation is the original icon revealing the face of the Holy

- Just as we spend time gazing upon an icon or our beloved, we can also allow our gaze to be drawn to nature, this most holy and splendid of sights. Gazing is an act of loving reverence, a perspective that opens us up to transformation.

The creatures and trees are spiritual teachers

- In ancient tradition, there were often holy men and women who were described as having a special relationship to animals. St. Benedict, for example, befriended a crow who was later said to have saved his life. It was said of St. Kevin that an otter would sometimes bring him salmon from the lake so he could eat. These special connections and relationships with animals were once a sign of holiness.

The elements are spiritual directors

- Contemplate for a moment the gifts of the four elements. Air is the gift of breath we receive in each moment, the rhythm of life sustaining us. Fire is the gift of life force and energy . . . the living flame of love which burns in each of our hearts. Water is the gift of renewal and replenishment and we might call to mind the ritual of baptism as a call to claim our full gifts. Earth is the gift of groundedness and nourishment.

The mountains and flowers are the Saints

- The animals and the elements live their fullness without holding back and in them we can discover what it truly means to become a saint.

The seasons are our scripture text

- In monastic tradition, even the day has its season with the movement from dawn to day to dusk to dark. Spring invites us to blossom forth, summer calls us to our own ripening, autumn demands that we release and let go, and winter quietly whispers to us to rest.

Forests are the original cathedrals and mosques

- Next time you are in the forest, imagine this space as one of the original churches or sanctuaries, what has helped inspire the creation of thousands of spaces of sanctuary.

Our liturgy arises from the original hymn of creation

- Earth and her creatures teach us how to pray, how to worship and praise. . . Remember that nature is the primary expression of divine artistry.

Develop the stance of contemplative, ascetic, and prophetic

- Contemplative presence – spaciousness, relationship
- Reclaiming a healthy asceticism – conversion, changing individual action.
- Cultivating a prophetic vision – examining our collective impact

Suggested Questions for Shared Reflection (10-15 minutes depending on the size of your group)

What do you see when you turn your gaze to Creation as the first scripture and wise guide?

How can you practice contemplative presence, healthy asceticism, and a prophetic vision in kinship with Creation.

Lectio Divina: Sacred Reading (10-15 minutes)

Invite participants to pray the four movements of *lectio divina* using the text and suggested guidelines below.

We will be praying with this text:

"How necessary it is for monks to work in the fields, in the rain, in the sun, in the mud, in the clay, in the wind: these are our spiritual directors and our novice-masters. They form our contemplation. They instill us with virtue. They make us as stable as the land we live in."

---Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas*

First Movement - *Lectio*: Settling & Shimmering

Find a comfortable position where you can remain alert and yet also relax your body. Bring your attention to your breath and allow a few moments to become centered. If you find yourself distracted at any time, gently return to the rhythm of your breath as an anchor for your awareness. Allow yourself to settle into this moment and become fully present.

I will read the passage from the Merton once or twice through slowly. Listen for a word that feels significant right now, is capturing your attention even if you don't know why. Gently repeat this word to yourself in the silence.

Second Movement - *Meditatio*: Savoring & Stirring

Read the text again. Allow the word or phrase which caught your attention in the first movement to spark your imagination. Savor the word or phrase with all of your senses, notice what smells, sounds, tastes, sights, and feelings are evoked. Then listen for what images, feelings, and memories are stirring, welcoming them in, and then savoring and resting into this experience.

Third Movement - *Oratio*: Summoning & Serving

Read the text a third time. Listen for an invitation rising up from your experience of prayer so far. Considering the word or phrase and what it has evoked for you in memory, image, or feeling, what is the invitation? This invitation may be a summons toward a new awareness or action.

Fourth Movement - *Contemplatio*: Slowing & Stilling

Move into a time for simply resting in God and allowing your heart to fill with gratitude for God's presence in this time of prayer. Slow your thoughts and reflections even further and sink into the experience of stillness. Rest in the presence of God and allow yourself to simply be. Rest here for several minutes. Return to your breath if you find yourself distracted.

Rest into Silence – 5 minutes

Closing

Gently connect with your breath again and slowly bring your awareness back to the room, moving from inner experience to outer experience. Give yourself some time of transition between these moments of contemplative depth and your everyday life. Take a few minutes to journal about what you experienced in your prayer.

Suggested Questions for Shared Reflection (15-20 minutes)

What shimmered for you during this practice of *lectio*?

How are you called to practice kinship with creation?

Suggestions for Practice

Encourage participants to go for a contemplative walk between now and your next gathering. A contemplative walk is one without a destination in mind and staying attentive to the rhythms of the breath, and the natural world around you. Each time you go for a walk, see if you can begin with a sense that you are stepping into a landscape that is animate and alive.

Closing Blessing

God of lavish fecundity,
you overflow into nature in every moment
offering your gifts of beauty and nourishment.
Nurture me with sacred rhythms of light and dark,
rise and fall, fullness and emptiness,
as the pulse which animates every living thing.
Help me to remember my own wildness
so that I come to know every bird, fish, insect, and animal as kin
and to live in ways that renew and sustain Earth and all her systems.
Renew my vision so that I see beyond the barriers I have constructed.
Kindle my longing to join the great song of the sea,
the tress, the mountains, and flowers are already singing,
and to live as a member of the great community of Creation.

Monk in the World Leader's Guide

Work

*Suggested time allotment for sharing is based on a gathering for 5-8 people. Adjust as needed for the size of your group.

Greeting & Welcome (10 – 15 minutes)

Honor the presence of everyone gathered. Invite a brief check-in from everyone in the group.

Lighting a Candle & Opening Prayer

As you light a candle for the group if meeting in person or invite each participant to light a candle if you are meeting online, use this text as a suggested opening prayer.

"In Benedictine spirituality, work is what we do to continue what God wanted done. Work is co-creative. Keeping a home that is beautiful and ordered and nourishing and artistic is co-creative. Working in a machine shop that makes gears for tractors is co-creative. Working in an office that processes loan applications for people who are trying to make life more humane is co-creative. . .

*We work because the world is unfinished and it is ours to develop. We work with a vision in mind. . . Work is a commitment to God's service."
-Joan Chittister, *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily**

Introduction to the Theme

The fifth principle of the Monk Manifesto is: "I commit to bringing myself fully present to the **work** I do, whether paid or unpaid, holding a heart of gratitude for the ability to express my gifts in the world in meaningful ways."

Work is an important element of monastic life. Benedict called for his monks to live by the work of their own hands. Monastic spirituality calls us to be present to the gifts of meaningful work, work which gives us shelter and food, work which allows us to be a part of something larger than ourselves, work which gives us space for creative expression.

Work isn't always what we are paid to do. Meaningful work is rooted in our sense of vocation - what we have been called by God to offer in service through our unique gifts. Work, as Joan Chittister writes above, is co-creative. It contributes to the flourishing of heaven on earth.

As monks in the world, work life is perhaps the hallmark of our relationship to our communities. It is often the place where we make our offering. Even if our work feels tedious, we are called as monks to be present to each moment and enter into it with love.

Not all work feels meaningful, some of it may feel more like drudgery. And not everything that is considered work is paid labor. Even if we have a job we love, we still need to do the dishes and laundry and clean the bathrooms. Sometimes we have work we dread and still have to come home to the tasks of daily living. Some of us take care of children or aging parents as full-time work or in addition to our day jobs.

Just in the way the desert mothers and fathers remind us that our cells can teach us everything, so can the work we return to day after day be a place of inner transformation. The call of the monk is to bring absolute attention to the work at hand. When we lose this attention, we also lose our freedom.

Suggested Questions for Shared Reflection (10-15 minutes depending on the size of your group)

What would it mean for you to bring yourself fully present to each moment of the work you do, aware of the sacredness of it, conscious of the miracles happening all around you?

Does your work support your ability to also create and rest and dream?

Guided Meditation (10 – 15 minutes)

Find a comfortable seated position in a place where you won't be disturbed. Begin by allowing a few minutes to center yourself and enter into contemplative space. Let yourself slowly move into silence, release whatever is pulling at your attention, with each inhale imagine you are welcoming in the gift of breath, with each exhale, surrender more deeply into this moment, letting go of what is not needed right now.

We are going to experiment for a few moments with the energetic quality of our bodies. First, pretend that you feel exhausted and overworked, slump into your chair, feel your whole body wanting to collapse in on itself, imagine you are looking at the clock, counting the minutes until you are free again. Draw in your most difficult moments at work and see if you can bring them present in your body, really experiencing what that is like and noticing where you feel this, being present to what is happening within you.

Then take a deep breath and shake that out.

Next, pretend that you feel vital and alive, waking up refreshed and renewed from a good night's sleep, you are strong and energized for the day ahead. Breathe this experience into your body, imagine it filling you from your toes all the way through your skull, picture a golden

energy swirling through your body and a feeling of aliveness and being connected and in love with the world.

Notice how this feels in your body and just take a moment to be present to your experience.

Then take a deep breath and release that experience.

Finally, see if you can find a place somewhere between these two extremes, a level of energy that might be sustainable for you over several hours. Bring yourself fully aware to what is happening in your body. Let your body embrace a place of alertness and energy and presence.

Now imagine yourself at work, perhaps at your day job, or doing dishes, laundry, or caring for a loved one. Imagine that the thought has just crossed your mind that you wish this experience were over, that you want it to be later in the day when you are back home or done with this, or on vacation, whatever the story is you tell yourself when you don't want to be doing what you are doing. Then just notice what is happening in your body. Become present to your level of energy, see where you feel this in your body or where the energy seems to be blocked.

Then again, shake this out and take another deep breath.

Again, imagine yourself at work or doing chores and imagine that you are bringing yourself fully present to whatever task this is. There is nothing in the world as important as this moment, as this dish, or writing the next word in this report. Let your breath be sustained and slow. See what happens when you bring curiosity and wonder to exactly what you are doing right now. Bring an attitude of contentment to this moment, as if nothing else were needed for you to feel satisfied. If distractions arise or your mind wants to fast forward in the day, gently bring it back to this moment.

What if you were not in a hurry to finish your task, but simply allowed yourself to savor the experience as one of the gifts of being human and alive? What if you believed that this moment held the key to your inner transformation? What if you lived in a way that each moment was a practice of attention and honoring of the sacred at work right here right now?

Now notice your body and its energy. Pay attention to what you are feeling and where. Be with whatever your experience is right now.

Make a silent vow to yourself to practice this in your everyday life whenever you can, knowing that there will be many moments when you fall back into old patterns. Each time this happens, simply begin again, as St. Benedict advises in his Rule. Begin again by remembering that this moment is holy, this moment is all that is needed for an encounter with the divine.

Suggested Questions for Shared Reflection (15-20 minutes)

What shimmered for you during this meditation?

How did your body feel when you practiced staying present to love in each moment?

How might you bring more love and delight to all the tasks you are called to do?

Suggestions for Practice

Listen to the invitation. Arise each morning and take time for gratitude for the chance to do work which supports you. Make time to listen for the sacred whispers of the holy in moments of silence summoning you to offer your gifts. Create spaciousness so that you can hear the invitation being extended to your heart.

Closing Blessing

God who labors within and through us,
help bring our full attention to our work in the world
as we enter into an act of co-creation with you.
Show us how all the ways we work have dignity and purpose
whether paid or unpaid, whether our heart's true calling
or just to be able to support ourselves.
Guide us in challenging systems that exploit and enslave people
through their labor and help us to build communities
where everyone can thrive by the work of their hands.
Support us in the endeavor to do everything with love,
remembering that each small act of compassion
is woven together into a great tapestry of kindness.
Bless our hands as we offer our gifts
in service to your unfolding grace.

Monk in the World Leader's Guide

Sabbath

*Suggested time allotment for sharing is based on a gathering for 5-8 people. Adjust as needed for the size of your group.

Greeting & Welcome (10 – 15 minutes)

Honor the presence of everyone gathered. Invite a brief check-in from everyone in the group.

Lighting a Candle & Opening Prayer

As you light a candle for the group if meeting in person or invite each participant to light a candle if you are meeting online, use this text as a suggested opening prayer.

“The meaning of Sabbath is to celebrate time rather than space. Six days a week we live under the tyranny of things of space; on the Sabbath we try to become attuned to holiness in time. It is a day on which we are called upon to share in what is eternal in time, to turn from the results of creation to the mystery of creation; from the world of creation to the creation of the world.”

~ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath*

Introduction to the Theme

The sixth principle of the Monk Manifesto is: “I commit to rhythms of rest and renewal through the regular practice of **Sabbath** and resist a culture of busyness that measures my worth by what I do.”

The work of the monk is important, but equally important are rhythms of rest and restoration. Benedict’s Rule is exquisitely balanced. In a world which runs nonstop where we are always accessible, we have to make the choice to step out from under its tyranny of demands. Sabbath calls us to restore ourselves and remember that the world will go on without our labors. It is ultimately an act of humility which means to remember our earthiness. Sabbath gives honor to our gifts by also acknowledging our limitations.

Sabbath is an ancient practice, appearing in the first creation story of the Hebrew Scriptures, which climaxes on the seventh day. Having created everything, God rests, and blesses this day, and makes it holy declaring just how very good creation is. Resting, God takes pleasure in what

has been made; God has no regrets, no need to go on to create a still better world. The word Sabbath comes from the Hebrew word Shabbat, which means to cease.

During Sabbath we enter into rest and stillness, releasing our doing, and offer ourselves a time to integrate the blessings and challenges of the week into our psyches.

There are even secular movements these days for what are called technology Sabbaths. We live in such a wired and connected world that it is nearly impossible to truly unplug unless we do so with intention.

When we practice Sabbath, we commit to living in a way that is different from the dominant culture. This is part of what being a monk in the world means – to witness to an alternate way of being, one that is slower, more spacious, more reflective, more generous.

Suggested Questions for Reflection (10-15 minutes depending on the size of your group)

What would it mean for you to cease? To set it all down? To pause for a while and let yourself do something utterly not useful.

Lectio Divina: Sacred Reading (10-15 minutes)

Invite participants to pray the four movements of *lectio divina* using the text and suggested guidelines below.

We will be praying with this text:

For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it. – Exodus 20: 11

First Movement - *Lectio*: Settling & Shimmering

Find a comfortable position where you can remain alert and yet also relax your body. Bring your attention to your breath and allow a few moments to become centered. If you find yourself distracted at any time, gently return to the rhythm of your breath as an anchor for your awareness. Allow yourself to settle into this moment and become fully present.

I will read the passage from the Exodus a few times through slowly. Listen for a word that feels significant right now, is capturing your attention even if you don't know why. Gently repeat this word to yourself in the silence.

Second Movement - *Meditatio*: Savoring & Stirring

Read the text again. Allow the word or phrase which caught your attention in the first movement to spark your imagination. Savor the word or phrase with all of your senses, notice what smells, sounds, tastes, sights, and feelings are evoked. Then listen for what images,

feelings, and memories are stirring, welcoming them in, and then savoring and resting into this experience.

Third Movement - *Oratio*: Summoning & Serving

Read the text a third time. Listen for an invitation rising up from your experience of prayer so far. Considering the word or phrase and what it has evoked for you in memory, image, or feeling, what is the invitation? This invitation may be a summons toward a new awareness or action.

Fourth Movement - *Contemplatio*: Slowing & Stilling

Move into a time for simply resting in God and allowing your heart to fill with gratitude for God's presence in this time of prayer. Slow your thoughts and reflections even further and sink into the experience of stillness. Rest in the presence of God and allow yourself to simply be. Rest here for several minutes. Return to your breath if you find yourself distracted.

Rest into Silence – 5 minutes

Closing

Gently connect with your breath again and slowly bring your awareness back to the room, moving from inner experience to outer experience. Give yourself some time of transition between these moments of contemplative depth and your everyday life. Take a few minutes to journal about what you experienced in your prayer.

Suggested Questions for Reflection (15 – 20)

What shimmered for you during this practice of *lectio*?

What might happen when you allow yourself to receive the full grace of Sabbath rest?

Suggestions for Practice

Invite participants to set aside some time – an hour, a half a day, a full day – to practice sabbath. Create a ritual to signify moving from the realm of doing into the rest of sabbath. Perhaps lighting a candle and offering a prayer of intention or listening to a piece of music.

Tech Sabbath: Another invitation to is take a tech sabbath away from phones, screens, computers etc. for a designated amount of time. Open to the space and stillness that enters when we unplug from technology and turn to rhythms of rest and renewal.

Closing Blessing

God of holy rest,
on the seventh day you paused,
laying down the work of creation
and entered into sacred stillness.
Let us remember we were freed from slavery
in Egypt and you called us to be people of liberation.
Kindle in us the strength to say no
to a world of perpetual busyness.
Inspire us to set aside all of our plans
and goals to receive the lavish gift
of rest for ourselves.
Let the Sabbath be a time of profound renewal,
of intimate connection with You,
and a rekindling of our holy desires to be of service.
Sustain in us the desire to simply *be*
and not succumb to the demands
of productivity and an endless string of achievements.
Let our lives be a loving witness to a world
of restoration and refreshment,
of the profound goodness of joy and delight,
taking pleasure in the generous gift of pausing.

Monk in the World Leader's Guide

Conversion

*Suggested time allotment for sharing is based on a gathering for 5-8 people. Adjust as needed for the size of your group.

Materials Needed: Index cards and pens or markers

Greeting & Welcome (10 -15 minutes)

Honor the presence of everyone gathered. Invite a brief check-in from everyone in the group.

Lighting a Candle & Opening Prayer

As you light a candle for the group if meeting in person or invite each participant to light a candle if you are meeting online, use this text as a suggested opening prayer.

“If the Angel deigns to come it will be because you have convinced her, not by tears but by your humble resolve to be always beginning; to be a beginner.” ~ Rainer Maria Rilke

Introduction to the Theme

The seventh principle of the Monk Manifesto is: “I commit to a lifetime of ongoing **conversion** and transformation, recognizing that I am always on a journey with both gifts and limitations.”

Conversion in monastic tradition is never a once-and-for-all event. Instead it is always a process of unfolding, ripening, emerging, arising. I like to think about this commitment to conversion as always being surprised by God, always remembering that God’s imagination is far greater than our own. Or in David Whyte’s words, through conversion we commit to opening our eyes again and again, seeing what is deep below the surface of everyday life. We let ourselves be moved by something unexpected, a momentary awareness of beauty or grace.

One of Benedict’s principles in his Rule is that we always begin again and he describes the Rule as for “beginners.” This beginner’s mind and heart is central to conversion. As monks in the world, we are always on the path, always growing, we never fully arrive and so we always have more to learn.

Conversion calls us to a radical kind of humility, where we recognize that we simply do not know, we aren't in control, that at the heart of everything is a great Mystery. Only when we surrender to that kind of radical unknowing can we be transformed. Only when each moment of life breaks us open with wonder and awe are we on the way.

The word humility is derived from *hummus* which means earth. Humility is at heart of being well-grounded and rooted. Humility is also about truth-telling and radical self-honesty. It is about celebrating the gifts we have been uniquely given in service of others, as well as recognizing our limitations and woundedness. . . Humility invites us to embrace the challenges as doorways toward deeper understanding of ourselves and God.

Suggested Questions for Reflection (10-15 minutes depending on the size of your group)

What does it mean for you to commit to always being on the path of growth?

When have you been "surprised by God"?

Lectio Divina: Sacred Reading (10-15 minutes)

I invite you to pray lectio divina with the following scripture passage:

*Do not remember the former things,
or consider the things of old.
I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.*
—Isaiah 43:18-19

First Movement - *Lectio*: Settling & Shimmering

Find a comfortable position where you can remain alert and yet also relax your body. Bring your attention to your breath and allow a few moments to become centered. If you find yourself distracted at any time, gently return to the rhythm of your breath as an anchor for your awareness. Allow yourself to settle into this moment and become fully present.

I will read the passage from Isaiah once or twice through slowly. Listen for a word that feels significant right now, is capturing your attention even if you don't know why. Gently repeat this word to yourself in the silence.

Second Movement - *Meditatio*: Savoring & Stirring

Read the text again. Allow the word or phrase which caught your attention in the first movement to spark your imagination. Savor the word or phrase with all of your senses, notice what smells, sounds, tastes, sights, and feelings are evoked. Then listen for what images,

feelings, and memories are stirring, welcoming them in, and then savoring and resting into this experience.

Third Movement - *Oratio*: Summoning & Serving

Read the text a third time. Listen for an invitation rising up from your experience of prayer so far. Considering the word or phrase and what it has evoked for you in memory, image, or feeling, what is the invitation? This invitation may be a summons toward a new awareness or action.

Fourth Movement - *Contemplatio*: Slowing & Stilling

Move into a time for simply resting in God and allowing your heart to fill with gratitude for God's presence in this time of prayer. Slow your thoughts and reflections even further and sink into the experience of stillness. Rest in the presence of God and allow yourself to simply be. Rest here for several minutes. Return to your breath if you find yourself distracted.

Rest in silence for 5 minutes

Closing

Gently connect with your breath again and slowly bring your awareness back to the room, moving from inner experience to outer experience. Give yourself some time of transition between these moments of contemplative depth and your everyday life. Consider taking a few minutes to journal about what you experienced in your prayer.

Suggested Questions for Reflection (15 – 20 minutes)

What word or phrase shimmered for you during this practice of *lectio*?

What wisdom is being stirred by this opening?

Suggestions for Practice

Invite participants to write the words “always we begin again” on a card and place it where they can see it regularly as a reminder to be gentle on the spiritual path. The invitation to respond to the call of being a monk in the world is not something we simply become and arrive fully. It means daily practice of contemplative ways of being. It means being committed of the process of discovery and transformation for a lifetime.

Closing Blessing

God of holy surprises,
infuse us with your wild wonder,

attune our hearts to all the ways
you dance through the world
from the ordinary to the sublime.
Sustain us in the daily practice
of opening our eyes to grace.
Expand our imaginations to see
more deeply and more widely than before.
Align us with all the ways you are at work,
always extending a new vision
when all seems shut down.
Help us to experience the eruption of seeds
in springtime and that abundant growth,
as a sign of your generous love.
Inspire us to begin again and again.

Monk in the World Leader's Guide

Creative Joy

*Suggested time allotment for sharing is based on a gathering for 5-8 people. Adjust as needed for the size of your group.

Materials Needed: Music player, paper or journal, and a pen

Greeting & Welcome (10 -15 minutes)

Honor the presence of everyone gathered. Invite a brief check-in from everyone in the group.

Lighting a Candle & Opening Prayer

As you light a candle for the group if meeting in person or invite each participant to light a candle if you are meeting online, use this text as a suggested opening prayer.

*“For the world and time are the dance of the Lord in emptiness.
The silence of the spheres is the music of a wedding feast . . .
Indeed we are in the midst of it, and it is in the midst of us,
for it beats in our very blood, whether we want it or not.
Yet the fact remains that we are invited to forget ourselves on purpose,
cast our awful solemnity to the winds and join in the general dance.”
~ Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation**

Introduction to the Theme

The eighth principle of the Monk Manifesto is: “I commit to being a dancing monk, cultivating **creative joy**, and letting my body and ‘heart overflow with the inexpressible delights of love.’*”

*quote is from the prologue to The Rule of St. Benedict

Our whole purpose in following a spiritual path and nurturing these practices in our lives is to expand our inner freedom which expands our capacity for loving the world. As we release the hold of expectations and disappointments, as we stop trying to live into the imagined life and live the one we have been given, we discover a profound inner freedom to make choices out of love, rather than obligation or resentment.

Our capacity for joy is in proportion to our capacity for sorrow, so the more we resist our grief, the more we also resist the treasure of joy available to us in abundant measure. Following our principle of inner hospitality, we are called to welcome in these feelings, and in the process, we carve out space for joy and love as well.

In St. Benedict's description of humility, he says the 6th step is contentment. . . a commitment to be with the truth of our experience and find a measure of peace and joy with what you have. Contentment helps us to let go of our expectations for what might be and to rest in the grace of what is.

Finding contentment with this moment is a very monastic practice and opens us to the possibility of joy. One of the definitions I sometimes give for an artist is that the artist creates out of the materials given. When we can live our lives in such a way that we accept the truth of our situation, and then seek to create from it, whether beauty or more peace or a way of honoring the grief, then we become artists of our everyday lives. The artist does not wait for some better materials to come along first. The artist does not say, I will only dance when I am thinner or healthier.

I describe this as creative joy, because we most often tap into it when we are engaged in creative activity like art or dance, or when we are in the midst of nature witnessing the Great Artist at work.

Suggested Questions for Reflection (15 – 20 minutes depending on the size of your group)

Are there creative pursuits which call to your heart, but you resist for fear of wasting time or looking silly or (insert your favorite judgment here)?

What might happen if you embraced this as a gift to yourself in partnership with the Great Artist at work?

Guided Movement Practice (5- 10 minutes)

"Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing." Exodus 15:20

I invite you into a movement practice. Allow yourself **just 5-10 minutes** this day to pause and listen and savor what arises.

- **Begin with a full minute of slow and deep breathing.** Let your breath bring your awareness down into your body. When thoughts come up, just let them go and return to your breath. **Hold this 8th principle gently in your heart and imagination:** I commit to being a dancing monk, cultivating **creative joy** and letting my body and "heart overflow with the inexpressible delights of love," planting a seed as you prepare to step into the dance. You don't need to think this through or figure it out, just notice what arises.

- **Play a piece of music on the website** ([here is a suggested song](#)) and **let your body move in response**, without needing to guide the movements. Listen to how your body wants to move through space in response to your breath. **Remember that this is a prayer**, an act of deep listening. Pause at any time and rest in stillness again. ***Sit with waiting for the impulse to move and see what arises.***
- After the music has finished, **sit for another minute in silence**, connecting again to your breath. Just notice your energy and any images rising up.
- Is there a word, phrase, or image that could express what you encountered in this time?
- If you have time, spend another five minutes journaling in a free-writing form, just to give some space for what you are discovering.
- To **extend this practice**, sit longer in the silence before and after and feel free to play the song through a second time. Often repetition brings a new depth.

Suggested Questions for Reflection (15-20 minutes)

What did you experience during the movement practice?

Suggestions for Practice (5-10 minutes depending on the size of your group)

Gratitude is a profound experience of finding joy in what is, rather than in what we wish to be true. Invite participants to a practice of gratitude. Have them write a list of 20 things for which they feel grateful. This might include the more obvious things like a loved one, the beauty of sunny weather or a sunset, but as they try to come up with 20, they may start thinking of smaller graces like the grocery bagger who smiled with kindness, the taste of morning coffee, the ability to breathe freely, the gift and taste nourishing food.

Invite participants to cultivate a daily practice of gratitude, writing a list of 20 things for which they feel grateful at the end of each day.

Closing Blessing

Blessed Source of Joy
 carve out room in us for the
 inexpressible delights of love.
 Let our hearts become fountains overflowing
 into the world with your love and compassion.
 Help us to pause each day and whisper “thank you”
 for the most ordinary graces and gifts.
 In the way that you looked upon your Creation
 and called everything *so good*, kindle in us

that kind of generous vision.

Lift us beyond our narrow concerns and help us
to see how there is no separation, we are all connected.

Support us in honoring our bodies as sacred temples
and losing ourselves in the great cosmic dance.