



Palliative Institute

Deepening Connections: How Our Presence and “Holy Curiosity” Might Deepen Spiritual Care Conversations

November 13, 2025

Presented by: Christine Enfield CSCP (CASC), RCT (ACTA)
Certified Spiritual Care Practitioner, Covenant Health

Facilitator: Sheila Killoran, Education Lead, Covenant Health Palliative Institute



Reminders

- This session is being recorded.
- Please do not disclose any personal health information during the session.
- Your microphones are muted. When we invite participation, please unmute yourself if you'd like to speak at that time.
- If you experience technical difficulties, please let us know in the chat.

Deepening Connections:

How Our Presence and “Holy Curiosity” Might Deepen Spiritual Care Conversations

Christine Enfield, M.Div, CSCP (CASC), RCT (ACTA)
Certified Spiritual Care Practitioner, Covenant Health

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Land Acknowledgement



Learning Goals

- Consider one's own strategies or rituals for grounding oneself and being present in patient/client interactions
- Learn about “Open Honest Questions”, a concept from author and educator Parker Palmer's work
- Consider how our listening and responding may either keep conversations on the surface or invite deeper sharing

We are the medicine



We are the medicine

- The phrase “we are the medicine” has been used by palliative care physician Dr. Michael Kearney to emphasize that the caregivers themselves, through their empathy and presence, are a vital part of the healing process and can be a source of medicine for their patients.



Question for Reflection

What is the quality of my life?

Quality of life determines quality of presence and
quality of relationship.



...I am speaking about your personhood, the need for each of you to see yourself, as well as every one of your patients, as a whole person. Even as it is only to the degree that you acknowledge and validate the personhood of your patient, rather than his disease, that you will succeed in touching his real needs and easing his suffering, even so **it is only to the degree that you nurture all aspects of your own personhood** that your long-range effectiveness, both professional and personal, will be assured.

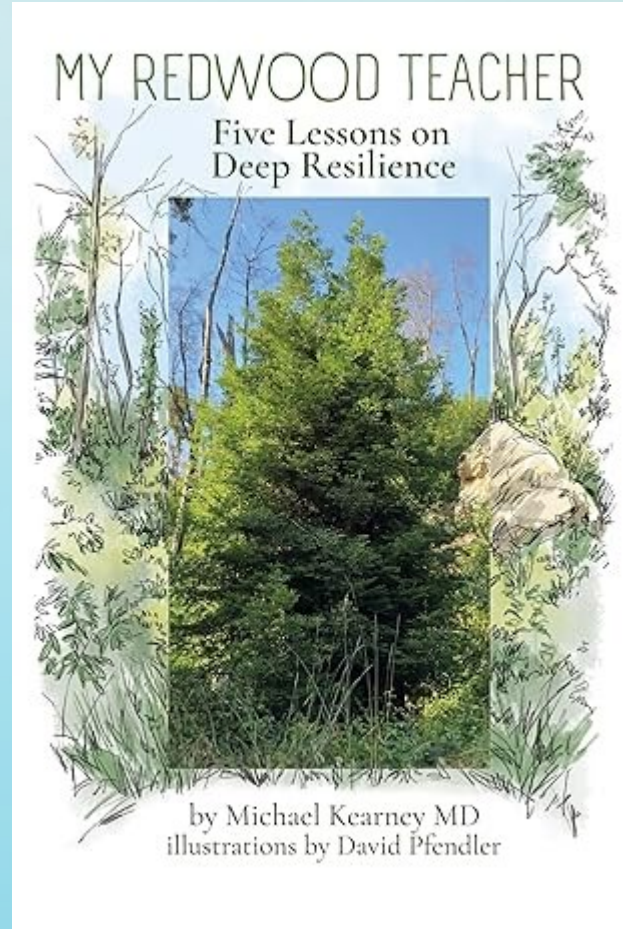
Balfour Mount

Convocation Address,

Dalhousie Medical School, 1986

Two Invitations to Consider

- How do I nurture my own personhood?
- How do I find ways to “ground myself” or connect to my self before patient/client interactions?



“Deep Resilience”

(Michael Kearney)

More than self care as
we’ve known it...

Deep Resilience – When
Self Care is Not Enough
with Michael Kearney

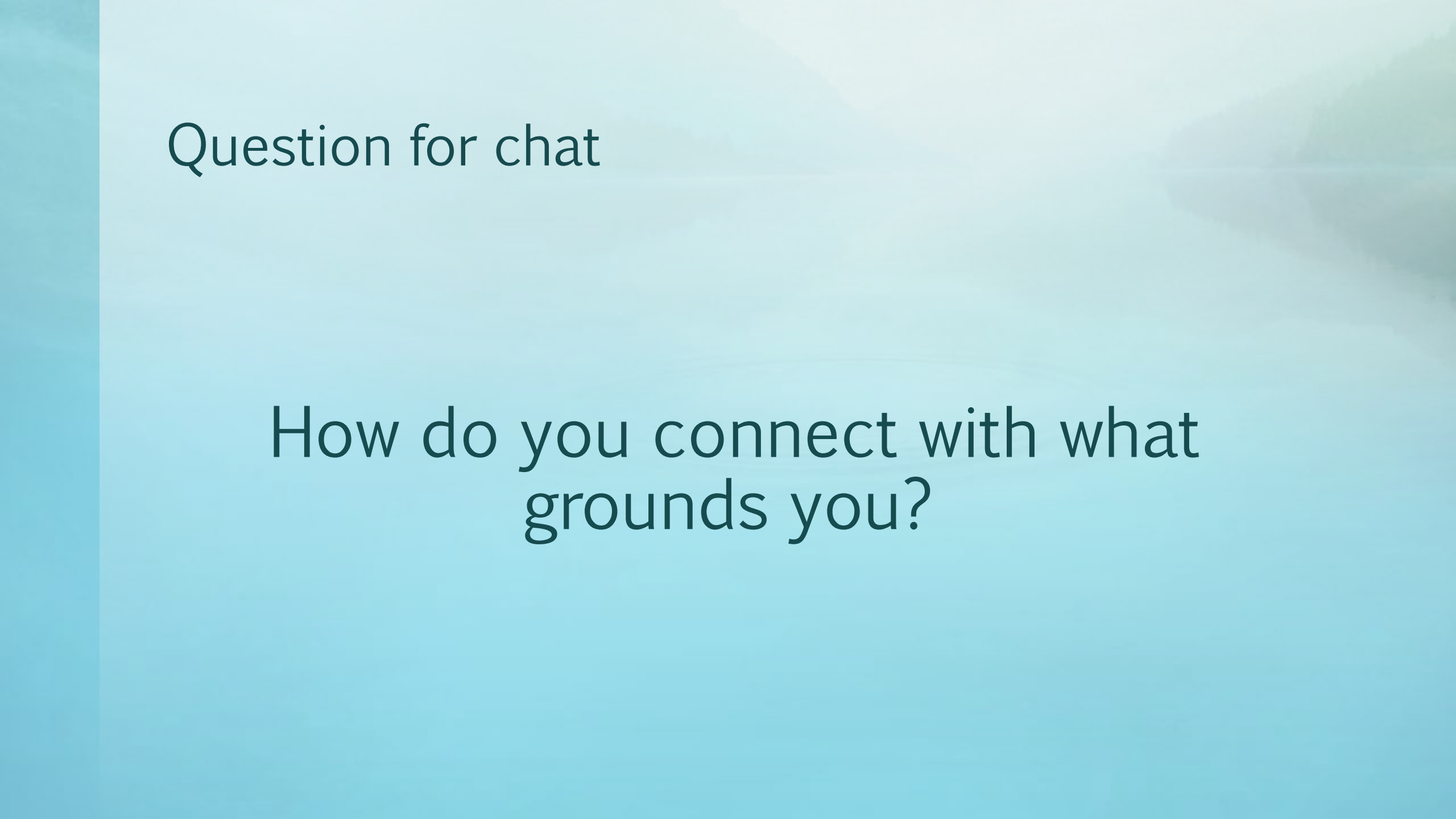
- Take care, know what feeds you and restores you
- Healing Connections
- You are not who you think you are
- All you have to do is rest
- We thrive because of each other

[Deep Resilience with Michael Kearney - Dr. Diana Hill](#)



Five Redwood Teachings

Check out Dr. Kearney's conversation with psychologist Dr. Diana Hill

The background of the slide features a soft-focus photograph of a calm body of water, likely a lake, with misty mountains in the distance. The colors are muted and pastel-like, with shades of light blue, teal, and pale green. A solid teal vertical bar runs along the left edge of the slide.

Question for chat

How do you connect with what
grounds you?

For me...

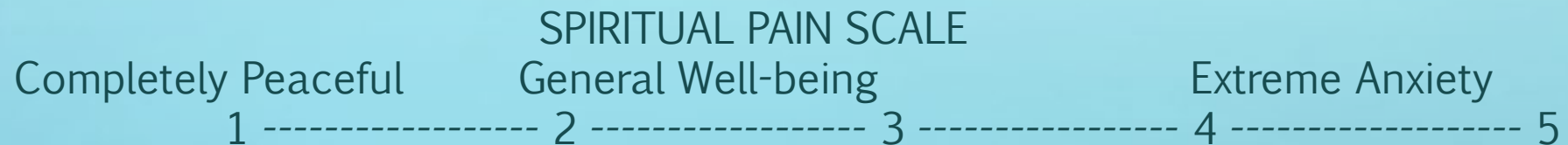
- Movement meditation
- Blessing of my senses and body
- Offering/blessing my whole self
- Silence/Centering Prayer/mantra



Taking a “spiritual pulse”

How are you
within?

- Dame Cicely Saunders



Before entering the room...

- Pause
- Slow breaths
- Entering sacred space
- Opening door as a symbol
 - Connecting with my courage
 - Connecting with my trust
 - Connecting with my holy curiosity



Leaving the room...



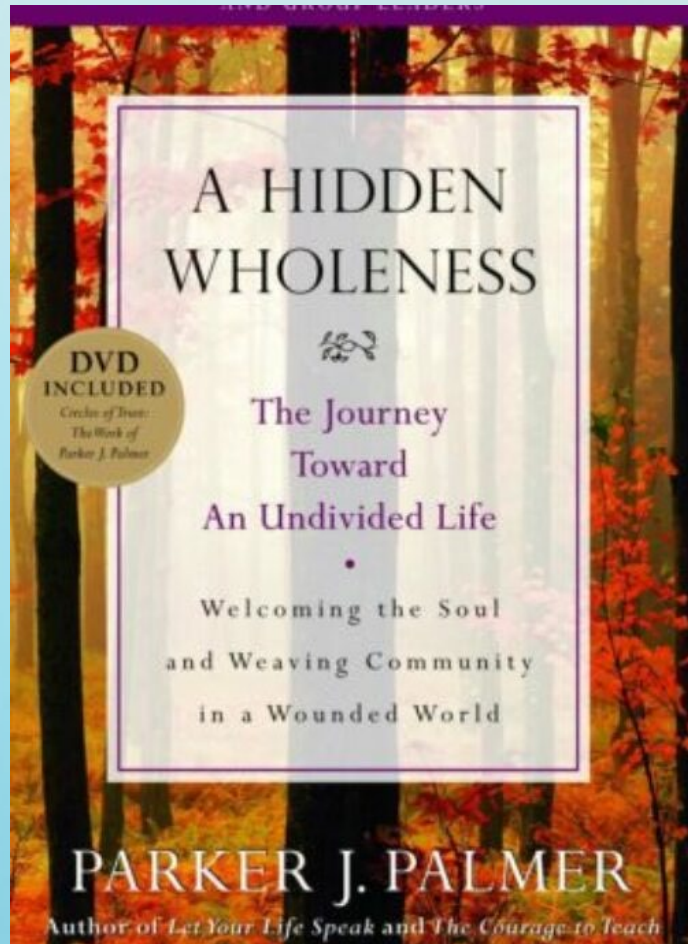
- Sanitizing or washing hands (letting go for now)
- Breath work/short mindful walk
- Gratitude
- Mindful charting

End of shift...

- What was the quality of my presence in interactions today?
- What do I need right now?



Learning from Parker Palmer's work



Countercultural rule of engagement:

No fixing,

no saving,

no advising,

no setting each other
straight



From Center for Courage and Renewal

“Touchstones” [CCR_Touchstones_V5.pdf](#)

www.couragerenewal.org

Asking Open Honest Questions (OHQ'S)

Purpose:

to support another person in listening to their inner teacher, “to hear each other into deeper speech”

The best questions come from deep listening to another. Their feelings, their metaphors, body language.

Guidelines:

- OHQ's are those where you cannot possibly know the answer
- Use the person's own language when possible
- Be brief and too the point
- Focus questions on the person as well as the problem to get to inner realities

e.g. What was that like for you? What did you learn from that?

From a tip sheet developed through content of the Center for Courage and Renewal and Carol Ann Casbon www.couragerenewal.org

Utilized during Anamcara Apprenticeship Training www.Sacredartofliving.org

See **Appendix A** at the end of the slide for a list of open honest questions.

Examples of Open Honest Questions

- How are you within?
- What do you want most deeply in your heart?
- If you could design a self-care kit. What would you put in it?
- What empowers or enlivens you?
- How do you feel about the experience you just described?
- If you were to write a completely open, honest letter to this person, what would it say?
- What keeps you stuck?
- Did you learn anything from that prior experience that seems useful to you now?



A “third thing”

a term used by author and educator Parker Palmer – a way of indirectly approaching soul talk by exploring a topic via a poem, story, piece of music or work of art that embodies it

Telling Our Stories

- One person tells a story of a “good moment/bad moment” in a patient/client listening encounter (You choose one or both as time permits – 5 minutes)
- Good moment: you felt the pt was safe to speak from their centre and gain an insight into their own soul (and it felt good)
- Bad moment: you felt the pt retreat from you and you have a sense that your presence or approach might have caused them to stay on the surface (and it felt bad)
- Other group members practice receptive listening and asking an open honest question as one seems to arise (5 minutes)

Remember:

No fixing, no saving, no advising, no setting each other straight!

Re-group

- What was that experience like for you?
- Did a truth arise for yourself that you would like to share?



Key learnings and encouragement:

The way we listen and respond can invite opening of soul conversation or close it!

Nurturing the art and skill of soul listening is a life-long project!

Keep learning, listening to yourself, and nurturing your personhood to nurture the quality of your presence.



The first duty
of LOVE is to
LISTEN.

~ Paul Tillich

Questions? Comments?



Evaluation



<https://redcap.albertahealthservices.ca/surveys/?s=CAL4AEKJJHF8EKKK>

Upcoming Session

Session #3: Guided Imagery and Music Approaches for Palliative and Grief Care

Date: December 11th, 2025

Presenter: Sheila Killoran MA, MTA, FAMI, Certified Music Therapist,
Education Lead, Palliative Institute, Covenant Health

This session explores techniques for visualization, guided imagery, and music applicable for use by palliative and grief care health care professionals. We will discuss the use of scripts, short interventions, as well as advanced practice considerations. Participants will experience a music imagery intervention. This session includes a member-sharing opportunity, and you are invited to bring any resources on this topic to share, if you wish

Thank You!

Stay Connected

- Visit [Palliative Institute | Covenant Health](https://covenanthealth.ca/palliative-institute) (covenanthealth.ca) to access all our tools and resources.
- Contact us at: Palliative.Institute@covenanthealth.ca



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OPEN & HONEST QUESTIONS (OHQ)

Guidelines

Purpose: To support another person in listening to his/her inner teacher.

(...and in support of the rule from Circles of Trust: ***“no fixing, no saving, so advising, no setting each other straight”***)

- OHQs are those where you cannot possibly know the answer.
- Use the person’s own language where possible.
- Be brief and to the point.
- Focus questions on the person as well as the problem to get to inner realities.
 - What was that like for you? What did you learn from that?
- Consider “off the wall” questions such as...
 - What color might this issue be for you and why?
 - If the problem were an animal, which one might it be and why?
 - What song comes to mind when you think of this and why?
- *The best questions come from deep listening to another, their feelings, metaphors, body language. The spirit of love and care is the ground on which this process grows and flourishes.*

OHQs

- What did you mean when you said?
- How are you within?
- What do you seek/are you looking for?
- What do you want most deeply in your heart?
- Is there a place in you that needs comforting, solace or rest?
- What is most on your heart and mind?
- If you could design a self-care kit, what would you put in it?
- To whom or what do you give away your power?
- What empowers and enlivens you?
- What would your life be like if you lived as if you loved yourself?
- If you could wave a magic wand and change anything in yourself or your life, what would that be and why? What change would you like to see?
- What might your first step be with this change?
- Could you say more about that?
- Has something like this happened before?
- Where in your body do you feel this? What does it feel like?
- With the feeling you just mentioned...
 - Could you say more about that?
 - What does that mean to you?
 - What is it trying to tell you?
 - Who’s voice is it?
 - Where does it come from? (past, present, future?)
- If this time in your life was a book, what would this chapter’s title be?

- If you could write a completely open, honest letter to this person, what would it say?
- Where is the freedom and unfreedom in this?
- What is the fruit of this thought, feeling, action?
 - Does it lead toward or away from love?
 - What is this doing to you, others and/or the world in which we live
 - Does this help nurture and sustain connection and understanding with yourself and others?
- Is there something you're hanging onto?
- What color is this issue for you? Why?
- Where is grace in this for you?
- What are areas of darkness or light in this/in your life?
- In all that you're telling me is there a sense of something calling to you? If so, what might that be?
- What breathes life into you?
- What keeps you stuck?
- Is there something that has been repeatedly showing up in your life—a word, tune, animal, experience?
 - If so, what might be behind that?
 - What does that mean to you?
- What kind of culture (spiritual/familial/economic/ethnic) did you grow up in?
 - How has/hasn't that experience supported you?
 - What did it do to you?
- What is your view of humanity?
- What concepts, images, experiences give you a spiritual sense?
- What can you name as your experience/experiences of God/the Beloved? Where or in what do you feel/sense the Beloved?
 - How do those images/concepts/experiences impact you and your life?
 - Do they encourage your growth or shut you down? If so, how so?
 - Do they lead you to respond with openness, compassion, connection, care or defensiveness, self-protection, disconnection and a desire to detach?
- What prevents or encourages you to explore yourself/life more deeply
- What areas of resistance, defense, challenges or struggles for you?
- What brings moments of joy, comfort, peace, light, ease to your life?
- Where is there balance or imbalance in your life?
- What is something you avoid talking about, even with yourself?
- What do you notice coming up for you around this?

Developed by Susan Hickman through content of the Center for Courage and Renewal and Carol Ann Casbon www.couragerenewal.org and the Anamcara Apprenticeship www.sacredartofliving.org