

USG SGM – Attention – November 2019

drawn from Soul Matters materials, see the full packet for more of all of these elements

Intro

Alice Walker famously wrote, “I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it.”

Walker's words are a great reminder that attention and gratitude go hand in hand. Indeed they are a perfect embodiment of the dominant message about attention: that it's here to wake us up to life's many gifts.

But it's also important to remember that attention has a few ulterior motives up its sleeve. So some fair warning is required this month. Because attention won't just make you grateful, it will make you fall in love. And it won't just allow you to notice life's gifts, it also makes it impossible to ignore life's pain.

Spiritual Exercise: Notice With Mary Oliver

In her poem *Gratitude*, Mary Oliver asks herself and then answers eight questions of attention:

What did you notice?

What did you hear?

When did you admire?

What astonished you?

What would you like to see again?

What was most tender?

What was most wonderful?

What did you think was happening?

It's a poem that treats the details of our days as a blessing and calls us to do the same. So for this month's exercise, let's accept her invitation:

First, take a few days and just spend some time with the poem.

Here it is for you to read: <https://thevalueofsparrows.com/2013/11/27/poetry-gratitude-by-mary-oliver/>

Here's an arresting video of it being read aloud:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=65&v=1XKg514_K3s

The point is to let Oliver's eight questions help you remember that our attention is a way, maybe the best way, we say thanks for these precious days we've been given.

Chalice Lighting

Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.

James Baldwin

Check-in *Share briefly what's been on your mind lately or your highs and lows since we last met. We give each other the gift of listening without asking questions or offering advice to allow people the safety to share what's in their hearts.*

Quotes for Inspiration/Readings Quotes for Inspiration/Readings:

If we want to support each other's inner lives, we must remember a simple truth: the human soul does not want to be fixed, it wants simply to be seen and heard. *Parker J. Palmer*

Whenever you find tears in your eyes, especially unexpected tears, it is well to pay the closest attention. They are not only telling you something about the secret of who you are, but more often than not, God is speaking to you through them of the mystery of where you have come from and is summoning you to where, if your soul is to be saved, you should go next.

Frederick Buechner

I've always thought that you don't love a country by turning a blind eye to its crimes and to a problem. The way that you love a country is by seeing everything that it's done wrong, all of its mistakes, and still thinking that it's beautiful and that it's worthy. *Junot Diaz*

Three things cannot be long hidden: the sun, the moon, and the truth. *attributed to the Buddha*

To surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything is to succumb to violence. *Thomas Merton*

Once there was a man who filmed his vacation... With a flick of a switch, there it would be. But he would not be in it. He would never be in it. *Wendell Berry*

Questions *Pick the one question that speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The goal is to figure out what being a part of a people of vision means for you and your daily living.*

1. Who in your life needs you to offer them the gift of attention without advice?
2. Is it time to look upon yourself with a bit more tenderness?
3. Gurus and psychologists alike tell us that we become what we give our attention to. What has more of your attention - and more of yourself - than you want?
4. When was the last time you let your attention linger on beauty? Did you keep your gaze there long enough to feel changed? Or to hear it speak to you?
5. Is it time to pay a bit less attention to what you hope your life *will* be?

Sitting in Silence *Take a few moments to sit quietly and reflect upon your thoughts*

Sharing/Deep Listening *Respond with your thoughts and experiences with the topic. We create a safe space by listening deeply and not responding. When sharing, connect with what is true for you. When listening, give the speaker your full attention rather than thinking about what you will share.*

Reflection *This is a time to respond briefly to something another person said or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared.*

Singing Wake me Up, Aloe Blacc https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M_o6axAseak

Extinguishing the Chalice What is this life if, full of care. We have no time to stand and stare. *William Henry Davies*

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