

## Introduction

### *Welcome*

Dear Sisters,

Greetings of Peace and All Good—and welcome. We honor the sacred journey that you are embarking on by entering into this small group process together. We are filled with hope in knowing that you are forming community where you can share stories about the gifts and graces you have experienced, as well as the struggles you have encountered along the way, as women seeking to make peace with yourselves, your families, your communities, and in our society. With the turtle, ancient symbol of feminine wisdom and power as your guide, we are grateful that you are claiming your power and imparting your wisdom, wisdom that our world badly needs to hear.

In her poem, L.R. Berger observes that a storm is up! Violence and injustice swirl around us—but so does the Spirit. She calls to us, “Follow me.” She “stirs what is sleeping to the surface,” those qualities and values that we possess as women that our world so desperately needs to recognize and embrace to be made whole. Jean Shinoda Bolen summarizes this need: “Empowered maternal concern [*in its broadest sense*] is an untapped feminine force that the world needs to balance and transform aggression.”

In the midst of this impending storm, the women go around faithfully “collecting what is necessary, what is beautiful,” what is compassionate and loving. You are gathering in circles as women have done throughout the ages, trying to light the fire—a fire within that ignites a holy love of self, a fire that burns brightly with a passion for peace, beckoning others to come close and warm their hands and hearts. May this manual help kindle the fire that you are lighting as you begin this journey together. As you gather, know that the goals of the *Traveling with the Turtle* process are:

- To explore the values and practices of women’s spirituality
- To see how these values and practices help you heal and make peace with yourself, in your relationships, in your communities, and in society.

Therefore, in this manual, you will consider women’s experiences of violence and conflict and habitual responses to them, and then learn concrete ways of making peace that are practical, creative, inclusive, and nonviolent. You will be one of an increasing number of circles of women that are acting together for peace.

### **The History of Traveling with the Turtle**

*Traveling with the Turtle* draws from the work of *Engage: Exploring Nonviolent Living*, a program of Pace e Bene Nonviolence Service that invites participants to discover the power of

nonviolence for personal and social change. After facilitating *Engage* workshops for several years, we began to hear the need for a similar resource designed specifically for women. At one workshop, several women raised questions and concerns such as: “How do I feel and constructively express my anger?” and “Are you equating staying in an abusive relationship with nonviolence?” No, we are not.

Unexpressed or inappropriately expressed anger. Always trying to smooth things over. These are deeply ingrained responses that women have learned to use in the face of conflict and violence. *Traveling with the Turtle* is a response to these and other questions and concerns that women are raising as part of their peacemaking journeys.

Women are struggling with similar issues globally. Cindy Preston-Pile, one of the authors, participated in *Asking the Right Questions: Nonviolence Training and Gender Consultation*, a conference held in Thailand in 2004. There she met women from Africa, Asia, Eastern and Western Europe, the Americas, and Canada, who were seeking to convey in their nonviolence trainings they offered for women, and many times men, the belief that ending violence and discrimination against women is an integral part of peacemaking. These trainers sought to empower women to break out of roles that were often narrowly defined for them by their societies. Women who participated in such trainings felt more confident, valued, and liberated in their lives as they began to reclaim the power that a violent, male-dominated system had stripped from them. *Traveling with the Turtle* is an attempt to stand in solidarity with women and men, who are working to end violence—both internalized messages of oppression and external forms of violence—against women.

Her life-long endeavors of accompaniment as a professor and a spiritual director led Irene Woodward, the other author, to further discoveries. She met numerous women thirsting for a greater understanding of women’s spirituality, for a validation of their own experience of themselves and of the Divine. She found that as these women probed more deeply the experience of this Spirit, they discovered others from many religious traditions and backgrounds asking the same questions, and found a connectedness, indeed a sisterhood, in this spiritual search. As part of this journey, the women whom Irene met embraced inclusiveness and mutuality as ways of being in the world, as well as the common desire for healing the wounds of our Earth and of other people.

*Traveling with the Turtle* is based on the premise that women’s spirituality is a powerful force for peacemaking. Throughout the thirteen sessions you will reflect on different aspects of this spirituality, and how they heal, support, and empower you on your peacemaking journey.

## **Spirituality**

What is spirituality? This is a rather elusive term. Sometimes it is equated with formal religious worship. Other times it is viewed as an alternative to such a structured practice. In this manual, we believe that spirituality pervades the entirety of our lives. Our life pilgrimage, our

journey toward wholeness, is a spiritual undertaking. We encounter Spirit as we delve deeply into our own lives, into that inviolable part of ourselves sometimes called soul, and discover our own beauty, strength and goodness, our passions, and life's purpose. We encounter Spirit as we form relationships both with those whom we love deeply and with those who are different from us, who perhaps challenge us, as they help us to grow and enable us to glimpse the Divine who resides within us all.

We encounter Spirit in the presence of creation, of Earth and all of her glorious creatures. And, we encounter Spirit as we come together as families, as communities, and in movements for social change to struggle for justice and peace or, as Carter Heyward writes, "to re-create the world." Our lives are holy. We are sacred beings. Spirituality embraces all of this. It is the ground upon which we walk, the deep well from which we draw throughout this process.

### **Important Elements of Women's Spirituality**

Women's spirituality believes that it is important that we, as women, acknowledge that we, too, are created in the image of the Holy One whom, throughout this manual, we sometimes refer to as Her, the Feminine Divine. Many other times we simply say "the Divine" or "the Holy One."

In addressing the Divine as feminine, our intent is not to exclude but rather to include women who perhaps have felt that addressing the Holy One in exclusively masculine language has meant that they cannot relate to this divinity, that they are not made in His image. New language seems to be needed to express the multitude of ways that women experience the Divine, and so we hope that, in the spirit of inclusivity embraced by women's spirituality, we will open ourselves to an array of ways of imaging the Divine.

Another important feature of women's spirituality is the understanding of power that it offers in both intimate relationships and political realities. A question that often arises with respect to power is whether or not power is a bad thing, as when one person exerts control over, another's life. Drawing on Starhawk's and Pamela Cooper-White's schemas, we call such control power-over, domination of another person, an entire people, or of Earth. This is an abuse of power.

At the same time, power can be an extraordinary, wonderful, creative, life-giving energy. The New Oxford American Dictionary offers us the following definitions of power: 1) the ability to do something or act in a particular way; 2) the capacity or ability to direct or influence the behavior of others or the course of events. Women's spirituality seeks the empowerment of women, the ability to make decisions that affect our lives—at home, in the workplace, in matters of religion, and in many other areas. In order to do this, we draw on our power-within, that deep wisdom and intuition that wells up inside of us. In listening to this voice deep within us, as Audre Lorde writes, "we begin to demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves to be capable of."

Power-with or power-sharing “carries the dignity of power-within into relationship.” Peacemaking. Nonviolence. We seek to enable other people to experience this same power, strength, freedom, expression of our truest self, that we have felt. As the circle widens, power-with blossoms into community power and, eventually sisterhood—or people power. These thirteen sessions are structured around these four themes—Power-Within, Power-With, Community Power, and Sisterhood. As you move through this process, we invite you to delve deeply into your own power, to consider how you want to use it—and then act—that together we might transform the domination, the power-over that we have experienced in our lives as women and in the life of our world.

### **The Structure of This Process**

Traveling with the Turtle is a process developed by women for women. It is comprised of 13 two-hour sessions.

Session 1 introduces you to women’s spirituality.

Session 2 explores empowering images of the Divine.

Part I (Sessions 3-5) helps you claim your power-within.

Part II (Sessions 6-8) explores your familiar responses to conflict and violence, as well as creative, nonviolent ways of making peace.

Part III (Sessions 9-10) considers how you can build inclusive communities.

Part IV (Sessions 11-13) honors the many social change movements initiated by women and guides the group through the process of developing and carrying out a nonviolent action. Session 13 concludes with a celebration of your lives that commissions you to go forth and continue to make peace.

Each session uses a variety of learning styles and methods to explore women’s spirituality and peacemaking: ritual, story-telling, role-plays, small and large group discussions, meditation, creative imagination exercises, movement, singing, and action. Throughout the process, you are encouraged to express yourselves in a variety of ways using images, movement, song, as well as written or spoken words.

In between sessions, you are asked to engage in a Life Practice, respond to journal questions, and reflect on several readings.

### **The Elements of Each Session**

**Opening Ritual** You will honor the sacredness of each other and your time together by beginning each session with a ritual that may include meditation, prayers, music, movement or symbolic gestures. We invite you to savor this time of centering and re-collection.

**Sharing, Reflections on Life Practice, Journal Questions, or Readings**

At the beginning of each session there will be time to share with a partner insights, questions and concerns that arose between sessions through engaging in a life practice, journaling, or from the readings for that session.

**One or Several of the Following Activities:**

Creative imagination exercises

Sharing in pairs, small and large groups about exercises or readings

Guided meditations

Role-play

Movement

**Closing**

You will end your time together with a closing ritual or circle activity.

**Life Practice**

Life practices help you embody what you have learned in each session.

**Journal Topics and Questions**

We offer questions and topics to reflect on before the next gathering.

**Readings**

Each session will include several articles that may be read in preparation for the following session.

**Using This Process**

It is our hope that this material will be adapted for an array of groups, so please adapt *Traveling with the Turtle* to meet the needs of your group or community. (Keep in mind, however, that this process is not designed to be used as the main resource for a therapy or support group.)

If you wish to concentrate on certain parts of a session because you feel that those areas are most important for your group or you need to change the agenda as stories are told and important issues and conversations arise, please do so. If you want to bring in new resources, again, do so. You may want to go through all 13 sessions or you may wish to do fewer. (For instance, you could do Parts I and II that address personal and interpersonal power and then close with the Sending Forth ritual in Session 13.) You may also want to gather for a preliminary session, perhaps over a meal, to share personal stories so that group members will get to know each other before beginning the *Traveling with the Turtle* process. Or, you may want to meet an hour before the first session.

Your group can meet every week, every other week, or once a month. We cannot say it often enough—make this process your own to whatever extent you desire. And, if you adapt a session, or sessions in a way that worked well, let us know.

**Blessings**

During the time Cindy was surrounded by the incredible group of women who gathered in Thailand, she dreamt of visiting a zoo filled with vibrantly colored turtles who came in a vast array of shapes and sizes. This dream turned out to be relevant because, as the title of this process explains, the turtle symbolizes women's wisdom and strength. Here again, we stand in the midst of circles of amazing, beautiful, courageous, passionate women— all of you. We pray that this turtle will walk with you as you slowly and faithfully travel this new, yet familiar path. May you be blessed by the wisdom and power of all of the women who have gone before us, all of the women who now walk with us, and all of those yet to be born.

Cindy and Irene



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