

## Pre & Post Session Self-Care

### Pre Session Anxiety - It Is Natural

Often as we prepare to dive into our psyches, we experience to varying degrees of pre-session jitters, or the "heebie-jeebies". The jitters are characterized by physical sensations like flutters in the belly, headaches, hunger, intestinal upsets and colds as well as anxiety, loosing things, running late for appointments, loss of sleep, getting lost and cravings for addictive substances. If you experience any of these symptoms before your first session, take a deep breath and relax. It is normal! These jitters become much less pronounced with more experience.

Many people feel much calmer when they have made the commitment to a session and no disturbing feelings arise. There is a sense of relief that follows when we know we can explore the deepest parts of oneself in a safe environment. Sometimes there is even a seductive feeling of self sabotage "Perhaps I do not need to do the session now" because I am feeling OK.

For others, the approaching a session stirs their stuff and patterns get acted out: couples will fight as they make their way to the session or one partner will suddenly decide not to come; people may feel too poor or they suddenly have something much more important to do. Some people are so overwhelmed with timidity that they feel they cannot come, while others will get ill or have accidents to avoid opening to themselves.

There is nothing wrong in all these behaviors. They are some of the myriad of ways we resist becoming more authentic. Our feelings display how we handle the 'threat' of the unknown. When we continue to show up for our Self and bring these resistances into sessions, we discover resistance becomes our teacher, exposing our hidden motives, old identities and unconscious places of pain and fear, where we do not want to let go.

As we open into ourselves, the inner journey becomes an adventure rather than a struggle.

### Preparing the Body

Notice how you take care of your body in preparation for a session. Your body is after all your home. In our more distressed states of being, we often reflect our feelings through the way we treat our body.

Bathing is not just about getting ready to be with others, it can be used as a symbolic act of purifying the mind and heart, washing away our fears. It is a time to calm down and focus on your inner process and intentions.

During this intense process, the room maybe closed down to create a feeling of safety and inward focus. As a consideration for others in the room, please refrain from eating odoriferous herbs and seasonings, especially garlic, and the use of perfumes. If you have a tendency to need a deodorant, then use a natural, non-scented one. It is also preferable not to wear makeup, especially around the eyes.

During a big release, there may be tears and physical movements and it is suggested you take out your contact lenses, so bring your lens container with you or wear glasses. Also for the duration

of the session, take off any jewelry, metal belts and watches that may get lost, tangled in clothing or your hair or could possibly scratch or puncture your skin.

Wear soft, loose fitting clothing so that you can breathe and move around. Natural fibers are recommended.

### Eating Before a Session

Many people prefer to eat lightly or fast prior to a session as this is easier on the stomach if you become very physical or emotionally expressive. It is preferable to avoid fatty foods, dairy products, fermented foods and sugars in particular. Small servings of fresh protein are recommended for anyone who has blood sugar fluctuations.

### Medications

Please let your guide know in advance of any medications or other substances you are currently taking and of any allergies or dietary restrictions you have. Bring your meds and allergy treatments with you and especially an inhaler if you are asthmatic.

Please ensure cell phones are switched off before each session.

### Setting Intentions

The process of setting an intention provides a way for you to witness how you create your session experience. The issues of your life may be your starting point, giving you a sense of what you don't want. Maybe you feel resistance to becoming clear or perhaps you may have no idea what you want. Maybe you keep changing your intention as you come closer to the session time, allowing the issues to distill into a deeper desire.

There is no requirement for an intention for a session. Indeed there are times when it is profound to simply be open to whatever comes. By creating a deeper focus, however, you may discover that intentions are a powerful force in your inner work, creating pathways for life to support your growing awareness.

### Materials to Bring With You

Many people like to journal, taking notes before or immediately after a session and during the integration. Bring a non-breakable water container that will not spill and warm socks and a sweater if needed. If you are coming to a group session, you may want your favorite pillow and a blanket.

The work often opens up people's creative potential, so another way of integrating is to draw mandalas or write poetry, giving fuller expression to the new energies emerging during and after the session. So if you wish, bring your art papers, felt pens, pastels, crayons or colored pencils.

You may wish to bring any personal or sacred objects like photographs, images, crystals, prayer articles or flowers to use during your process, as a focus for your intention or simply to invite beauty and the sacred into your field.

## Post Session Care

### Integration

After your session or the next day, spend some time integrating your experience, continuing to explore any unfinished feelings or questions, ground what you have learned and vision how to apply your new awareness to your everyday life and relationships. Keeping a journal engages the left brain to integrate the feelings and images your right brain activated during your session. By keeping a record of your insights and your experiences, you can map your progress as you grow.

The deeper the session, the greater the need to allow time to integrate. The psyche will expand to fill the amount of available time for the work, so if you do need to travel or rush off to work, you may not have the quite same depth of integration as when you rest. You will be able to function, albeit on a different level to your norm. It is well worth taking the time to plan for quiet time after deep inner work.

### Maintaining the Container

It is so easy within the open hearted field of a group session to talk and share intimately, and it is often tempting to comment on other's processes. In order to maintain a safe container for this deep work, it is important to keep the focus on one's self, both during and after the integration, by just talking about your own experience, resisting the temptation to judge or give others advice.

It is not always apparent from outward appearances, whether someone is in a young or tender state or what their issues may entail. So we neither share without permission any contact information nor discuss who was present or what happened with anyone else outside any of the groups that occur. If we happen to meet another group member in a public place, we try to remember to ask permission before launching into intimate discussion of anything related to the group.

There is an interesting maturation that occurs as we learn to hold clear boundaries within ourselves and with others. It allows our own process to deepen as we build the inner container and in giving respect to others and their processes, we become gentle with our own vulnerabilities.

### Physical Care

Old patterns hold much tension and subliminal stress in the body, so as this is released through strong expression and movement (either outer or inner), a little fatigue and soreness can sometimes be felt afterwards. At times like this, massage, soaking in a bath with essential oils and Epsom salts or having a hot tub is wonderful. If your body aches, try liquid calcium with boron. Alternatively, you may feel totally liberated and have lots of new energy available, so dance, play, enjoy!

Deep opening and releasing can leave the body feeling tender and open, somewhat vulnerable, there is an important need to rest and restore afterwards. Walks in nature, working in the garden, lying on the beach, yoga, making love or watching beautiful, funny or inspiring movies, reading, painting and playing are great ways to feed your soul. The gentleness you allow yourself at these

times lovingly honors the depth of your work, allowing it to settle within you and balance our sometimes hectic orientation towards life.

It is important to follow up on any medical conditions you become aware of during or after sessions. If grounding becomes an issue, contact your guide for more detailed suggestions.

## Dreams and Images

Frequently, dreams and meditations intensify, contributing to a much richer inner life. Your dreaming body sends messages from your unconscious through symbols and feelings to support your evolution. The most effective way to record dreams is to use a voice activated recorder or an iPod, minimizing movement as you wake up. As soon as you move, the conscious mind is activated and begins to change the interpretation of the dream. Let the dream play forward in the morning as you wake, allowing the images to unfold in the stillness.

## Sleep

Sleep patterns are also often affected by the work, creating new doorways for your conscious awareness to expand. There are times when it is preferable to use this awake time, using the quiet night hours to meditate, read and journal. But when you'd rather sleep, it is recommended to darken the room and wear ear plugs to reduce the sensory inputs and avoid food or drink stimulants that may keep you awake. Also, herbal remedies or supplements available from health food stores or Chinese medical practitioners can be helpful.

Melatonin is the hormone and powerful antioxidant that is produced at night to send us to sleep. It is very dose specific, so start low and work up if you need to. If you find melatonin supplements leave you feeling drowsy the next day, reduce the dosage and if you have any tendency to get depressed, use it with caution.

A major compound which influences production of melatonin is serotonin, which is found in the gut, regulating intestinal movement. It is also an important neurotransmitter (a chemical communication link between brain cells). Serotonin has a significant effect on moods, anxiety, aggression and depression, pain perception, appetite, memory and learning, the production of niacin, as well as the quality of sleep and dreams. To regulate serotonin, take the essential amino acid precursor, tryptophan or 5-HTP (5-hydroxytryptamine) an hour before going to sleep. This is particularly important for use after deeper sessions.

Chinese medicine classifies sleep disruption in different ways e.g.: dream disturbed sleep, difficulty falling asleep, waking early, waking at a specific time each night or hard to wake up. Each aspect corresponds to different organ functions, usually the heart, spleen and liver, and the elements which govern them. Treatment is holistic, addressing the emotional, physical, mental and spiritual aspects of the individual's disturbance using ancient Chinese herbal formulas and acupuncture.

Traditional herbs such as valerian, passion flower, chamomile, catnip and hops are available as supplements, tinctures and teas to enhance relaxation and sleep. One favorite is the 'Yogi' brand which has wonderful 'Bedtime' and 'Calming' tea formulas. It is important to research the correct dosage of any supplements as well as the purity of any herbal products.

If you can't sleep, then let yourself be awake, but with awareness on relaxation, soothing body and mind: journal, read poetry, do yoga, meditate, watch a funny movie, take a hot bath or drink some warm milk (the calcium helps relax the muscles). Enjoy the stillness of the night, watch the stars and the moon. Avoid mind stimulating activities like your email and the internet.

## Diet

Following deep sessions, it is so nourishing to sit down to a bowl of grandma's soup. It can also be helpful to have a high protein breakfast followed by low fat, complex carbohydrate snacks throughout the following day, as this combination of foods actually increases serotonin levels. Deep releases and openings are often accompanied with physical detoxification, so drink plenty of water and take antioxidants such as good quality chocolate, vitamins C and E and green tea.

Also, comfort foods are heartily recommended. A little tequila or your other favorite alcohol, in moderation of course, relaxes the whole body. These comfort foods nourish the young places in our awareness and often are just what the body needs after diving into the deepest parts of oneself. Instead of following your usual diet, feel into what your body really wants and needs.

## Emotional and Spiritual Care

As we untangle the patterns that cause pain or do not serve us, it is natural to feel a little vulnerable until you are able to live the new learnings. Relationships shift and change as you break free of patterns and it is an art to develop conscious ways of still being around people who trigger you or as you prepare to leave those who are no longer part of your path. As we relax into our essential self, our experience of change within outer relationships also softens.

Share your experiences with those who do similar work to gain the support you need. When you are ready, take a risk - reach out and give what you want emotionally and discover that service without attachment to outcome is a powerful answer to suffering.

Energy freed up in sessions needs to be redirected to your new intentions and awareness, otherwise you will find yourself slipping back into your old ways and it will seem as if the work does not work or that you have failed in some way. Life often presents a challenge quite soon after a session, which gives you the opportunity to apply what you have discovered. One of the most common is to be loving and gentle with yourself when you do fall back into the old addictive patterns. It takes patience, focus and loving discipline to choose a different response when we are faced with the same old triggers. It is not a pass or fail situation when you repeat your compulsive responses - what matters is how aware and accepting you are of yourself and others as you learn how to love and apply your new emotional and spiritual choices.

Clearing our stuff is part of it, but equally important in this journey is nourishing the seeds of your new growth. Where appropriate, consider practices that build awareness, clarity and compassion.

It helps to find inspiring films, books and activities that feed your spirit and reinforce healthy behaviors.

Pay attention to your intentions and relationships, inner and outer, and form your practice. It may be time to do more yoga, meditation or to be still and more balanced with your inner life. It may be time for you to prepare to change your work and your ways in the world to reflect more clearly your emerging passion and calling. You may find ways to not let other's dramas affect you so much. You might consciously choose to simplify your life or practice holding a different attitude to the way you eat. Caring for your finances, being in Nature more often or taking time to cultivate awareness of beauty are all ways of learning to love yourself and life.

It is important to occasionally check back in with yourself to see how your discipline and practices are working. This can happen in the way of dreams, meditations and images that reflect your progress or noticing you feel different, responding to stressful situations better or maybe you have more energy.

The dedication required to implement the awakening consciousness you experience in sessions becomes devotion as you evolve. Whatever comes out of your sessions, whether it is change or surrender into what is, please be kind to yourself and remember to allow Life to support you in your journey.

Adapted from the article "Taking Care of Yourself Before and After Sessions" by Namae. Namae is a sensitive, powerful healer. I highly recommend her work.