



Spiritual Connection in Daily Life

Questions with spaces for you to write and Bibliography

Lynn G. Underwood

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The audiobook asks you questions to help you reflect on your life. This workbook/journal gives all the prompts for those. You may have just reflected on these in your mind while listening to the audio, but here are the questions written out and spaces for you to write your answers. You may wish to write in your journal, or on your computer since you may need more space, and you can copy the questions into other places such as these. (At the end of this pdf is the Bibliography, so that if you print out these questions, you may wish to just print the pages with the questions, pages 1-18, rather than the entire PDF). **Your** experiences are at the center of the book and here is a chance for you to write out those answers. Here is a summary of the rationale for actually writing down your answers rather than just thinking about them (research support for this can be found in the Bibliography):

- Writing about your experiences can help you become more aware of them.
- Describing your experiences can help you fix them in your memory. It can allow your mind to grasp them and allow you to mull them over in a different kind of way.
- Writing about emotional things in life, both positive and negative is good for you—physically and mentally.
- Your notes can also help you communicate with others, providing specific details for talking with others about things that are important to you in a way they can understand, using the framework of these questions.
- Your writings about these experiences can also help you to revisit them. Most of them are uplifting experiences, and by having some kind of written reference, you can return to these in your mind to recall them and even maybe relive them.

Here are the questions and prompts from the various chapters in the book:

Part Two: The 16 Daily Spiritual Experience Questions



1. Have you been spiritually touched by the beauty of creation?

What are a few experiences that capture this for you? Give yourself a moment to reflect on, and write about, some “awesome” times, times when you may have felt spiritually touched by the beauty of creation. Pick one that was vivid, and spend some time describing the experience and your feeling about it. Jot down notes of that or other times—notes that remind you of images. Expand as much as you feel like. You might feel like you could write a whole book! Or you may feel dry. We are individuals. The combination of our life experiences is ours alone, and how each of us experiences this is unique.

2. Have you felt God’s presence, or the presence of the divine or holy as expressed in other words.

Reflect on the descriptions of experiences of divine presence that I gathered through interviews. Have you ever had similar experiences to any of these? Do they remind you of places or times when you have experienced the presence of God, the holy, the “more than” in your days? If you have ever had these experiences, spend some time describing what they are like. Remember that, for you, sense or experience might be better words than feel.

3. Have you experienced a connection to all of life?

Have you ever sensed a connection that felt spiritual? The natural world, people of many kinds, life or people from the past? When and where did you feel it? Write some specifics about your experiences. If you find yourself answering “Never” for this question, just pass happily on to the next.

4. How close do you feel to God or a divine source?

Do you ever feel so close to a profound source of life that you experience no sense of separation, or a more personal closeness where you remain somewhat distinct? What does this closeness feel like to you?

5. Have you desired to be closer to God or in union with a divine ground of being.

Do you desire to be closer to a “fountain of all holiness” or a transcendent being? Do you feel alienated, or desire to distance yourself from God or do you feel a longing to be closer to God? Describe these feelings.

6. Do you feel compassionate love or God's love for you through other people?

Have you found divine, compassionate love in your relationships with other people? Describe where and when you have felt this kind of love.

7. Have you felt God's love, or love from a transcendent source, for you directly?

If you have experienced this, write down what it has felt like for you. Think about the circumstances in detail and write about them. These notes can be a storehouse for you to draw on in the future and to share with others.

8. Have you had a feeling of selflessly caring for others?

Jot down a specific time you have felt other-centered love. Do you have this feeling toward strangers? Do you have it toward those you are close to? Also describe how it feels to you. Does it bring you pleasure? Does it weigh you down? Or both?

9. Do you accept others even when they do things you think are wrong?

Have there been times you have accepted others even when they have done things you think are wrong? Jot down one or two specific instances and note what it felt like. This could be with strangers or with people you are close to. Did it affect your relationship with the person? And what about accepting yourself? Do you treat yourself with mercy? Do you value yourself while also accurately seeing areas where you fall short, or when doing things you would rather not have done? Describe these experiences.

10. Do you find strength in your religion or spirituality?

Reflect on some of your sources of strength. Are there times when you have found this kind of strength from your spirituality or religiousness, and if so, how did it work for you? Be specific about your feelings. Did it affect your life or that of others? If so, how?

11. Do you find comfort in your religion or spirituality?

Do you ever find a spiritual source of comfort in your daily life? Where and when? What did it feel like? Jot down some specifics from your life. If you have never experienced this, take time to just write about some tough times and how you felt.

12. Do you feel guided by God, or sense divine guidance, in the midst of daily activities?

What helps you make decisions? How are you reassured that your decision is right? Describe any times when you tap into a greater wisdom as you make decisions in your life. In the midst of daily life, do you find yourself engaging with divine guidance? How does this feel? Does it help?

13. Do you ask for God's help, or help from a higher power, in the midst of daily activities?

In the midst of the chaotic environment that is life, do you find spaces, see space, for divine action? Do you ask for help from an eternal source? In what circumstances? Has support ever been provided in ways you can identify? What kind of response do you expect? Would action that you never see, or action that happens in a way that's different from what you expected, count as a reply?

14. Do you feel joy that lifts you out of your daily concerns during worship or at other times when connecting with God or the "more than."

When do you feel profound joy? Note some times when you might have had transcendent experiences that lift you out of preoccupation with your troubles. Situations and circumstances and exposure to music may open the door for you to experience of the divine while you're together with other people. If so, what are they?

15. Do you feel thankful for your blessings?

Write about what you thought of when you answered this question. What kind of things do you find yourself becoming thankful for on a daily basis? And are there some things in your past that you thought were awful, that have somehow led to good things? If so, describe them.

16. Do you ever experience deep inner peace or harmony?

When do you have a sense of deep inner peace, if at all? How often does this happen for you? Do the arts do this for you? If so, what kinds? Are there things you do or places you go that help you feel deep inner peace or harmony? Do these feelings signal anything to you? Describe these feelings.

Part Three: Themes



Theme: The Flow of Love

1. Recalling Love exercise

Write about the experiences you revisited in your imagination/memory during this exercise:

*Reflect on an ordinary moment in the past when you gave of yourself to another at a cost.

*Remember a time in the past when you personally felt truly loved—loved for who you truly are, beyond the momentary circumstances, beyond the superficial.

2. Burnout

I described the “Kevin and the Blackbird” poem by Seamus Heaney (<https://poetryarchive.org/poem/st-kevin-and-blackbird/>)

Are you holding any birds that have begun to nest? Do you ever find yourself stuck in the midst of commitment and care, in distress yet still desiring to love? Do you find yourself overextended in some way or another? And then what do you do? How do you sustain this love and care? How does that feel?

Bring to mind some specific times you gave of yourself for the good of another person, at a cost. Did this love feel full of affection or passion? Did it take the form of practical kindness? Do you more often have a sense of willing the good of another, a conscious weighing and active decision making? When you love, do you worry? Does it drain you? Do you ever feel resentful? Does it energize you?

3. Receiving love and mercy

Reflect on the quality of “love flowing in” in your life. Are there times when love might be there for you but you do not let love in or erect obstacles? Think back to a particular time and re-inhabit it. If you do not let love in, can you identify any reasons why you might do this? Then remember a time when you let love in, even a little bit. Are there ways you can see right now to cultivate awareness of divine love in your life, directly or through other people? Are there holy valentines coming under your door in small or larger ways in your life?

4. Self-Compassion and Self-Acceptance

Do you value yourself? How do you express that? Is it ever a tough love? And can you accept yourself even when you do things you think are wrong? Not necessarily letting yourself off the hook too easily, but being merciful to yourself, and understanding of your limits. Do you ever express this – If so, how? Do you think you are too easy on yourself, or not easy enough? Is this a part of love flowing in your life? Write some about this.

5. Balance

Reflect on the balance in your own life. Do you have a good balance in your life between love flowing in, and love flowing out? If not, which seems to be needing to be encouraged for you in your days?



Theme: Connection vs Alienation.

1. Connection with the natural world

Do you ever feel connection in the context of the natural world? If so, what is it like for you? When is it most palpable and nourishing for you?

2. Connection with people who are different from you

Do you feel connected with people who are different from you? When does this happen most? How does this feel?

3. Billy Collins' poem about Shoveling Snow with the Buddha

After hearing this description, how did you react? Could you imagine shoveling snow with God or Jesus or another divine being, like an angel? If so, what do you think that would be like? If you can't imagine doing that, why not?

4. Longing, Desire, and Alienation

Write about any feelings of alienation you might have. Also describe your desires, your deep longings. How do you go about satisfying your need for connection and addressing any pains of alienation? Do you sometimes feel lonely and/or feel like you do not belong? What do you do at these times? Do you ever feel a longing for greater connection with God or the transcendent "more than"? How does this relate to these other feelings?



Theme: Yes!

1. We cannot see the future

Take some time here to write about your life circumstances. Is there some circumstance you would love to eliminate from your life that might just have a flip side? Reflect on some undesirable things that might happen if you were to change some of the aspects of who you are or the way your life is now.

If you find that difficult to imagine, reflect on the story of the Chinese farmer with his reply of “Good luck? Bad luck? Who knows?”, and write about how you respond to it.

2. Yes to the past

Take a moment to reflect on an event in your past that seemed bad at the time. Have any good things happened because of it, or that would not have happened if it had not occurred?

3. Rewinding the day exercise

Did you discover any blessings that you missed at the time? Were there things you appreciated more when you did this? Write down some of this experience. What was it like?

4. Happiness

What is happiness for you? Does everything have to be going smoothly at a superficial level for you to be happy? Have you ever been happy in the midst of times that might be described from the outside as being full of problems or that seemed less than ideal in many ways? Write about how happiness may have been there for you in these situations.

5. You are who you are

List some of the good things about the kind of person you are.



Theme: Translating God.

1. Divine language

What thoughts have occurred to you regarding the nature of God, the divine, the holy, as you have encountered divine language in the questions and as you have been reading the text so far? What have been some of your reactions? Have you had a favorite word or image that you substituted for the word God in the DSES questions?

2. Creative ways to express the transcendent

Did any of the quotations resonate with you? Which ones and how?

Simone Weil

Thomas Aquinas

Werner Heisenberg

Greek word for person, sounding through

Wendell Berry

Video by Monsters of Folk

Einstein

3. Apophatic theology

Can you to make a list of what "God is not..."? (or your word for the divine is not...)

4. A list of what are some qualities of the divine for you. Do you feel like making a list of "God is...." ? Or qualities of a transcendent entity or being, the divine in your words. If so, do that.

Part Five: Awake and Alive



Are there any of the methods in the Awake and Alive section that seem useful for you in order to increase the frequency of your Daily Spiritual Experiences? If so, what are they? What practices might you wish to use now and in the future to draw your attention to Spiritual Connection in your daily life?



Appendix A - Research Results

Were there any of the studies that seemed relevant to your life? You can skim through the bibliography to remind yourself of the various studies. Did any motivate you to try to increase how frequently you experience connection to the transcendent in your days? Which ones?



Appendix B: Playing with Number Scores.

Using the number scores in your personal life

If you feel like it, go through the DSES as it is used in research, and answer all the questions. But remember the scores are not able to compare you with another person. The groups of people's scores are predictive, but for an individual, there are no "high" or "low" scores. They do not tell you how spiritual you are. The scores can, nevertheless, give you some interesting information about yourself.

Here is the scale with the number scores:

“The list that follows includes items you may or may not experience. Please consider how often you directly have this experience, and try to disregard whether you feel you should or should not have these experiences. A number of items use the word God. If this word is not a comfortable one for you, please substitute another word that calls to mind the divine or holy for you.”

How often do you experience the following?

- Never (1)
- Once in a while (2)
- Some days (3)
- Most days (4)
- Every day (5)
- Many times a day (6)

- 1. I am spiritually touched by the beauty of creation.
- 2. I feel God’s presence, or I sense the presence of the divine or holy.
- 3. I experience a connection to all of life.
- 4. How close do you feel to God or the divine as expressed in other words?
Not close (1), somewhat close (3), very close (5), as close as possible (6)
- 5. I desire to be closer to God or in union with the divine.
- 6. I feel God’s love or compassionate love for me through others.
- 7. I feel God’s love or divine love for me directly.
- 8. I feel a selfless caring for others.
- 9. I accept others even when they do things I think are wrong.
- 10. I find strength in my religion or spirituality.
- 11. I find comfort in my religion or spirituality.
- 12. I feel guided by God or sense divine guidance in the midst of daily activities.
- 13. I ask for God’s help, or help from a higher power, in the midst of daily activities.
- 14. During worship, or at other times when connecting with God or when I feel connection with the “more than,” I feel joy that lifts me out of my daily concerns.
- 15. I feel thankful for my blessings.
- 16. I feel deep inner peace or harmony.

After filling in the form:

- a. Add them up, and divide by 16 – that is your overall score.
- b. Look at the individual items. Which are lower, which are higher?

The lower ones may just not be relevant to you, or they may be ones you could re-read the sections on, and see if there are more in your life than you have thought, or ways you might add these experiences to your life in creative ways.

The higher scored items may identify experiences to draw on for you, possible resources for you to draw on in times of stress.

Checklist version:

Another way of answering the DSES is using a checklist version. You could even have this in your phone. You could answer it once a week, for example, to remind yourself to notice these transcendent experiences, especially given the research results that noticing these can have positive effects in your life. This may be especially useful when you feel low, or are going through tough times. You may find that a subset of the questions is more important for you, or even just one in particular, and you could just use those.

Recently . . .

1. Have you been spiritually touched by the beauty of creation?
2. Have you felt God's presence, or the presence of the divine or holy?
3. Have you experienced a connection to all of life?
4. Have you felt close to God, or to the divine or transcendent as expressed in other words?
5. Have you desired to be closer to God or in union with the divine?
6. Have you felt God's love or compassionate love for you through others?
7. Have you felt God's love or divine love for you directly?
8. Have you felt a selfless caring for others?
9. Have you accepted others even when they have done things you think are wrong?
10. Have you found strength in your religion or spirituality?
11. Have you found comfort in your religion or spirituality?
12. Have you felt guided by God in the midst of daily activities?
Or: Have you felt divine guidance in the midst of daily activities?
13. Have you asked for God's help in the midst of daily activities.
Or: Have you asked for help from a higher power as you go through the day?
14. During worship, or at other times when connecting with God, have you felt joy that lifts you out of your daily concerns?
Or: At times when connecting with the "more than" have you felt joy that lifts you out of your daily concerns?
15. Have you felt thankful for your blessings?
16. Have you felt deep inner peace or harmony?

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Appendices: Research Results and Playing with Numbers

For the references to the DSES studies cited and more, with summaries, see www.dsesclear.org especially: *Using the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale in Research and Practice*, Underwood LG (2020) Applelane Press. This and the Underwood studies cited in Part One and Two give citations for all the materials in the Appendix.