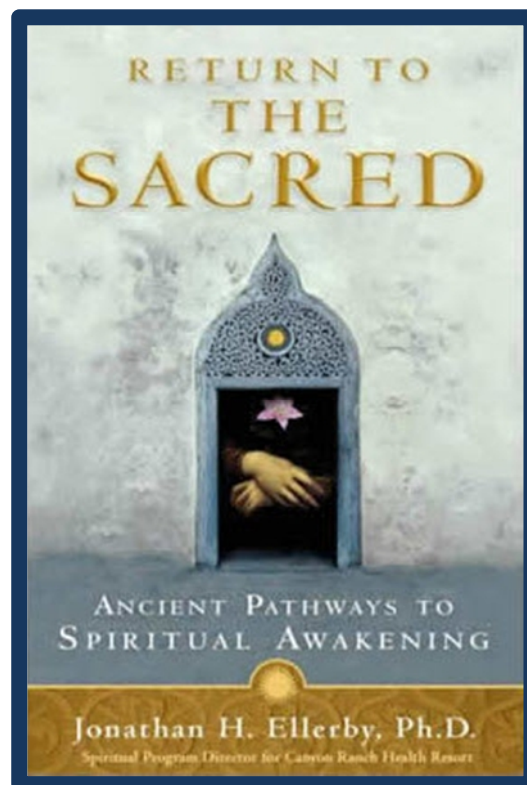




2011 Faith in Action  
Small Group Workbook

# Return to the Sacred

## Ancient Pathways to Spiritual Awakening



### ***Spiritual Life Center***

2201 Park Towne Circle, Sacramento, CA 95825

Phone: 916.448.6508 [www.slcworld.org](http://www.slcworld.org)

Dear friends,

Jonathan Ellerby, the author of our 2011 Faith in Action study book, **Return to the Sacred, Ancient Pathways to Spiritual Awakening**, has dedicated more than 20 years of his life to the personal, professional, and academic exploration of spirituality, healing, and consciousness. He has traveled the world to meet and study with spiritual teachers from more than 40 cultural traditions. Jonathan has a doctoral degree in comparative religion and has worked as a healer, teacher, and consultant for individuals and groups in settings as diverse as hospitals, major corporations, prisons, community groups, conferences, and some of the world's leading holistic-health resorts.

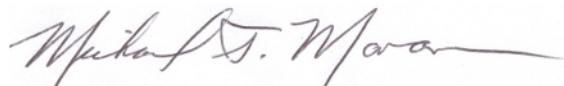
**Return to the Sacred, Ancient Pathways to Spiritual Awakening** is a fascinating guide that will help you understand the importance of spiritual practice and the great diversity of paths that are available. This book does more than provide philosophy and inspiration; it gives you the freedom to find a path that works for you and the knowledge to experience the answers for yourself. You'll learn about the time-tested tools of spiritual growth that will help you discover extraordinary depths of wisdom, power, and peace.

Jonathan Ellerby weaves threads of personal growth and comparative religion into captivating true tales of spiritual adventures with teachers and healers around the world. Through colorful stories and clear reflections, he presents a perspective that reveals the rewards of spiritual practice, and a realistic understanding of the deep commitments and challenging steps along the way. We hope you will find that **Return to The Sacred** is an inspiring journey around the globe and into the furthest reaches of Spirit.

As we travel these seven weeks together studying this year's Faith in Action book, we will explore options to help you discover your spiritual personality and choose the path that will lead you toward the realization of boundless joy and a lifelong journey of meaning.

Let us also remember that we are all fellow travelers—rejoicing in our diversity, respecting our differences, sharing our own individuality, and opening our hearts to each other and to the one God of us all.

Namasté,



Rev. Michael Moran  
Senior Minister of Worship Experience



Rev. Christine Bouten  
Senior Minister of Operations

# Study Group Shared Agreements

**Purpose:** The purpose of shared agreements is to create a safe and healthy environment for the group. It is important that the groups review these guidelines and that there is consensus before beginning any spiritual group.

**Confidentiality:** Everything shared by group members is confidential. What is said here, stays here.

**Compassion:** Group members relate to each other with unconditional compassionate acceptance of each other as human beings. Judgmental comments, and even unspoken thoughts, threaten the group process.

**Truth and Integrity:** Group members are encouraged and supported by the group to honestly and authentically be who they are. Speaking the truth involves risk and can only occur safely in a compassionate environment.

**Respect:** We practice sacred listening and refrain from giving advice or trying to fix or solve others' problems.

"Listen to others with inward stillness,  
without opinion, assent or dissent, without criticism;  
hearing through the words into the soul of the other."  
Rudolph Steiner

Group members show respect for each other and the group by avoiding interrupting others, arriving on time, and allowing everyone time to share their thoughts and ideas with the group.

**Conflict:** Whenever people come together and speak truthfully the potential for hurt feelings, misunderstanding and conflict exists. If such a situation arises, group members agree to address it within the group process or one-on-one with the facilitator. Unresolved conflict is toxic to the whole group and not just to the parties involved.

**Participation:** Group members agree to participate in discussion and group activities; however, each person has the right to ask to sit out or to modify his or her participation.

*"Unconditional Love is the True nature of who we are."*

Institute for Professional Empowerment Coaching

I accept these shared agreements as the foundation for a successful study group.

Sign: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# STUDY GROUP PRAYER

## **The Co-Creator's Prayer**

Loving Presence, with grateful hearts we join together as co-creators and friends. We come together to support each other as we learn, share, and explore how to live life more intentionally. We open our minds to receive your wisdom. We open our hearts to express your love. We open our souls to radiate your light.

May each of us hear what we are meant to hear and speak as you direct us. Now may each of us speak your intention or prayer for this gathering.

### **(Intention or prayer from everyone who wishes to speak them)**

We now enter into sacred agreement with each other to honor our intentions as we support each other in our spiritual growth. We listen to others with inward stillness, without opinion, assent or dissent, without criticism; hearing through the words into the soul of the other.

Thank you, God, for your loving presence with us and within us; may all we say and do be in harmony with you. Thank you, God!

## **Closing Prayer**

Thank you, God, for your loving presence that has guided and directed us tonight. We honor each person in this group and trust in the process of each other's unique spiritual journey. We hold in sacred trust the personal matters we have shared in this gathering. We go forward in positive expectancy of ever-increasing good as we remain ever mindful of Your presence, power and love within us. We thank You, God. Amen.

# Return to the Sacred

## Ancient Pathways to Spiritual Awakening

By Jonathan Ellerby

Join us for an inspirational Faith in Action program. If you want to fully understand spirituality, you must develop a spiritual practice. We can debate and discuss faith and religion, but underneath it all is one irrefutable truth: spirituality is an experience. It is an experience that only you can have for yourself. That experience comes from practice – from choosing a method that suits you individually and intentionally engaging in that practice on a regular basis.

Together, we will be challenged to explore the four basic types of spiritual practice: body, mind, heart and soul. These practices can bring us to an awareness of God, oneness with God, and awaken our consciousness of the oneness of all things. A meaningful spiritual practice feeds not just your soul but feeds the world as well. Come with us as we awaken to our deepest sense of the Sacred.

WEEK	THEME	COLOR*	AFFIRMATION
Week 1	The Power of Spirituality	Red	Through spiritual practice, I discover a deeper dimension of myself and world. As I experience the unity of all life, the healing power of the Sacred is activated.
Week 2	Awakening the Spirit	Orange	I am learning to love what is and finding the clarity and power to make intentional choices. With commitment and compassion, I seek the daily balance between being a master of change and a master of acceptance.
Week 3	Nurturing the Body	Yellow	My body is a beautiful gift through which I move, breathe, and express Divinity in this world. Tuning into my body's rhythms and potential, I make peace with my body.
Week 4	Expanding the Mind	Green	In the stillness, I behold the vastness of the Divine Intelligence that permeates all life. My mind is a beacon, attracting and radiating God's Love and Light.
Week 5	Opening the Heart	Blue	God, the One Presence and Divine Mystery, is also my friend and Beloved. In loving service, I merge with my Beloved and my life becomes the great offering.
Week 6	Touching the Soul	Indigo	I am spirit moving toward Spirit. There is nothing I need to do to be sacred or important. The spiritual paths I choose help me discover and experience my sacred essence.
Week 7	Sacred Path to Peace	Violet	I face each choice with harmony and integrity, a living expression of my beautiful soul and the One Universal Presence. As I shine, everything shines!

### \*What does it mean to have a weekly COLOR during Faith in Action?

Chakra colors are used each week as we journey toward greater awareness and aliveness. Chakras, as an ancient spiritual system, show the path to enlightenment and integration. Many in the SLC community join together and wear the "color of the week" on Sundays to show their commitment to the journey. The weekly bulletins and affirmation cards are printed in Chakra colors as we progress on our journey together toward wholeness and transformation.

# 2011 Faith in Action Schedule

WEEK	DATE	READING ASSIGNMENT
Week 1*	October 2 - 8	Pages 3 - 48
Week 2	October 9 - 15	Pages 49 - 76
Week 3	October 16 - 22	Pages 77 - 104
Week 4	October 23 - 29	Pages 105 - 142
Week 5	October 30 - November 5	Pages 143 - 181
Week 6	November 6 - 12	Pages 185 - 224
Week 7	November 13 - 19	Pages 225 - 247
Gratitude Sunday	November 20	Rev. Mary Morrissey, Guest Speaker

**\*NOTE:** Prior to the first week of in-home study groups, be sure to read pages 3-48 of **Return to the Sacred, Ancient Pathways to Spiritual Awakenings**. Complete the assignment in this workbook before attending your study group for Week 1.

# The Power of Spirituality – Week 1

Spirituality is both the recognition of our true self and the connection with the sacred. When we are on a spiritual path, we find that the journey to know the self and the journey to know God are really the same. Jonathan Ellerby points out that when individuals and communities of people deepen their experience of the spiritual nature of this universe, the world begins to reflect the qualities of those experiences: peace, connection, love, and cooperation. We see that God is not a separate being; it is our own nature. We experience the "oneness" of all things.

1. What is your definition of spirituality? What place does spirituality have in your life?

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2. Ellerby states that willingness, sincerity, and discipline are all essential to the path of awakening. He notes that many of us fail to make our spiritual lives a priority. Describe your willingness to commit to the spiritual path.

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3. When we create harmony between our true self and our daily attitudes and actions, only then is our potential for health and fulfillment fully activated. What is your experience of the link between spirituality and health?

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“Every challenge brings a lesson and a step closer to realizing that there's a force within us that is eternal, indestructible, and beautiful beyond words. After such a realization, we are never the same again. The false self burns away in the light of the innermost spirit, and the soul begins to shine.” (p. 47)

# Awakening the Spirit – Week 2

Jonathan Ellerby tells us that the rewards of a healthy spiritual life are virtually unlimited: freedom, peace, balance, and clarity. He also tells us that the path is long, sometimes uncomfortable, and often filled with unexpected challenges.

1. The purpose of a spiritual practice is transformation. It is not safety or comfort. Ellerby tells us that an attitude of complacency isn't the intention you should bring to spiritual growth or to anything else in life. What feelings does this statement bring up in you? Describe.

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2. What are your barriers to the spiritual path? Why do you think they exist for you?

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3. On page 64, Ellerby describes four types of spiritual practices. Which resonate for you? Why?

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## **The Mystic Mind-Set: Attitudes That Will Help You Transform Your Practice**

Compassion: No Harm.

Optimism: No Fear.

Observation: No Judgment.

Contemplation: No Striving.

Dedication: No Procrastination.

Humor: No Ego.

Surrender: No Attachment.

Intention: No Doubt.

(p. 72-73)

# Nurturing the Body – Week 3

In these chapters, Jonathan Ellerby describes the spiritual practices of the body-- specifically ceremony and ritual, sacred movement, and sacred sound. Each of these practices can help us engage The Sacred, allowing us to participate in the spiritual world through conscious uses of time, space, motivation, action, sound, and symbol.

1. The words ceremony and ritual have lost their importance for many people, yet their power remains available to everyone. With ceremony, we create a bridge to The Sacred, embodying its qualities here on Earth. What ceremonies and rituals have you participated in? Which were the most meaningful and why?

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2. In sacred movement practice, your body will show you not only where you hold tension, but can sometimes tell you why. In your own body, you can find an imprint of your inner world. What experience with sacred movement have you experienced? How was it meaningful to you?

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3. Sacred sound isn't just the accompaniment to worship, ceremonies and healing practices, it is a practice in itself. Have you experienced the sacred in sound? Describe.

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4. Select one of the “body” practices and commit to practice it each day for the next week. Which have you chosen and why?

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“Once a practice is established, the where and when become less important. When the mind surrenders to the body and relaxes in to the spiritual senses, our practice takes us into a deep awareness of The Sacred.” (p. 92)

# Expanding the Mind – Week 4

Prayer, meditation, and sacred study are the practices of the mind. Some of us need to talk to God, listen to God, and study holy teachings to find our connection to The Sacred. These practices allow us to communicate from a place of deep and sincere thought. As Jonathan Ellerby says “the world is alive and listening to our prayers, actions, and to our energy.”

1. Describe your week of body-centered spiritual practice.

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2. Praying shapes thoughts, clarifies intent, energizes affirmations, and strengthens resolve and optimism. True prayer helps us become what we are praying for. Describe your experience of prayer. How does prayer fit in your life?

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3. According to Ellerby, meditation is about working consciously with your awareness. It's about expanding awareness while moving beyond thought and mental distraction. It's about being totally present. Do you meditate? What have experienced through the practice of meditation?

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4. The mind can lead to the heart and soul. The study of sacred texts and objects can provide people gifts for the spiritual path. How has sacred study informed your spiritual practice and awareness?

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5. Select one of the “mind” practices and commit to practicing it each day for the next week. Which have you chosen and why? Explain.

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“Don’t pray for peace. Pray peace. Feel and be its energy now.” (p. 109)

## Opening the Heart – Week 5

The practices of the heart are devotion, service, and study with a teacher. Devotion is a practice that many may find to be uncomfortable, yet the love of The Sacred is shown most deeply through the practice of gratitude.

1. Describe your week of mind-centered spiritual practice.

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2. On the path of devotion, we ultimately feel as if we have fallen "in love" with God. All actions, thoughts, and feelings circle around a preoccupation with the Divine. Our life becomes an offering; all things remind us of our sacred passion. Is devotion a path that has meaning for you? Explain why or why not.

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3. In service, we come face-to-face with life and know the astounding capacity to triumph, as well as its delicateness in the midst of uncertainty. If we look at what we resist when we serve, in time it will set us free. How has service been a spiritual practice for you?

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4. Describe your experience with a spiritual guru or master teacher.

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5. Select one of the “heart” practices and commit to practice it each day for the next week. Which have you chosen and why?

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“A healing relationship with The Sacred emerges when we remain engaged in creation and are open to growing, learning, and changing.” (p. 150)

## Touching the Soul – Week 6

The soul practices are ones that many of us find difficult to embrace. Ascetic practices like fasting, being alone in the wilderness, and other challenging experiences can help tear away the ego. As Jonathan Ellerby states, “what you hold on to will hold on to you.” Facing death can help us see that we are not our bodies and teach us to honor all life. And finally, how we live our lives becomes our spiritual practice.

1. Describe your week of heart centered spiritual practice.

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2. Ascetic practices are radical in what they ask for as well as in what they give. (p. 192). Describe your experience with ascetic practice.

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3. The path of death, or the "death practice," is about intentionally being with death and dying. In some traditions, the role is highly ritualized. How has death taught you to honor life?

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4. We must live our spirituality in each moment of our lives. That's why we have the expression 'walk in balance.' It means every step. Has your life itself become your spiritual path?

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5. Choose one soul practice and practice it each day. Which did you choose? Why?

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"The fight to be separate from God – that is why we suffer." (p. 174)

## Sacred Path to Peace – Week 7

Jonathan Ellerby challenges us to put the practices we have learned to real use in our lives. He pushes us to ask the hard questions about what we will make of our time on this earth.

**If you take nothing else from these seven weeks of study, deeply ponder questions 2 and 3 below and answer them honestly for yourself.**

1. Describe your week of soul centered spiritual practice.

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