

Groundwork

Groundwork sets the conditions for doing inner work. It is the preparation you need to do to get the most out of using inner work tools. Think of it as laying a foundation. Without a strong foundation, what we build can be off-kilter or even misguided. With a strong foundation, what you build is more likely to ring true and be aligned with life.

Before using any inner work tools take a few moments to prepare yourself in the following ways:

Groundwork

1. Center through self awareness

If awareness is like a lamp, we tend to spend most of our time illuminating things, people, and ideas around us, and very little time shining light on ourselves.

Bringing awareness to your breath, your shoulders, or your core (the solar plexus), can help you come back “home”. Other ways to become centered are to meditate, do yoga, chant, sing, go for a walk, or spend time with a tree. Pausing for a moment and simply intending to be centered works too.

Being self aware is synonymous with being centered, even if you are emotionally agitated. Being centered is a key part of the foundation for effective inner work.

2. Set intention

Once you are centered, the next step is to set an overarching intention. Here is the intention I usually set:

“May everything that comes through me serve the highest.”

You might say serve God or Gaia, or Truth or Love – whatever words work for you. Sometimes I say, *“May I be in service of what wants to come through.”*

Saying or thinking either phrase immediately shifts my center of gravity away from ego-driven, small “s” self to big “S” Self, a point of awareness that is interconnected with all that is. It is like flipping a railway switch to take small “s” self off-line and activate big “S” Soul. I know I have flipped that switch when I feel aligned – as if I have just had a great session at the chiropractor’s.

As I see it, being aligned and serving the highest are two sides of the same coin, and they both require me to be true to my authentic self. Alignment means that I am living my purpose, and that my actions, words, thoughts, and energy fulfill my part in the whole.

At the same time, I am mindful that I cannot know what it is that serves the highest. I must approach each situation with humility because my perspective is inevitably limited. Setting intention is a way of asking that I be guided by life and by inner work to what is truly of service.

3. Open

After setting intention, the next step is to become open or receptive.

Moment by moment, like clams in a tide pool, we open and close our “shells” – sometimes open, for example, to learning from what a friend has to say, and other times not.

Inner work involves opening to our inner wisdom and truth, to another perspective.

We only benefit from inner work tools if we are open to the gifts they bring us. Put another way, I do not engage in inner work unless I am committed to acting on what I get.

So this step involves a moment in which I check in to make sure I am open to insights, and that I trust enough to commit to act on what I get. I have found it helpful to tap into my faith and trust that this is a safe and wonderful thing to do.

Here I often think of a question posed years ago by my brother, Stephen Sutherland: “Is the universe your lover or your betrayer?” I think most of us have a foot in each camp. Before using inner work tools, my practice is to “center” myself in the camp where I see the universe as my lover.

In summary

In doing this groundwork, it is as though you are adjusting three inner dials: First to centered awareness, second to serving the highest, and third to trusting a loving universe. This ground then creates a spaciousness in which you will be far more able to do great work, in the inner and on the outer.



Figure of Eight Breathing

If you want to center deeply and quickly, try this exercise.

- a. Optional: Take off eyeglasses, any heavy jewellery, and footwear made of rubber or plastic.
- b. Stand with your feet shoulder width apart, eyes closed, and your attention on your breath. Sitting or lying down works too, but standing is the easiest way to start.
- c. Inhale slowly and bring your awareness to your heart.
- d. Exhale slowly and imagine your breath is traveling down the front of your body and penetrating to the center of the Earth.
- e. Inhale slowly and imagine you are drawing energy up from the center of the Earth, up the back of your body, and into your heart.
- f. Exhale slowly and imagine that your breath is going from your heart up the front of your body as high as it can go — to the sky, the stars, heaven — whatever works for you.
- g. Inhale slowly and imagine you are drawing energy down from above, down the back of your body and into your heart.
- h. Repeat this “figure of eight” as long as feels right — perhaps 5-20 cycles at the beginning. When you are familiar with this practice, four or five cycles is enough to feel quite grounded.

To start, I suggest tracing the figure of eight shape with one hand, as a way to help your awareness move.