

## Session 11: Training in Wisdom #4 — Serenity and Insight

"Impermanent are all compounded things."  
When one perceives this with true insight,  
then one becomes detached from suffering;  
this is the path of purification.  
(*Dhammapada 277*)

**Therapeutic Goals of Session 11:** The therapeutic goal of this session is bring together the three trainings in mastery of the mind, morality, and wisdom, to address the fear of death and dying that may be experienced by clients living with HIV/AIDS. Clients learn that grief over loss of health could potentially activate the addict self, and lead to further suffering. They learn to activate the spiritual self and to understand what is and is not under their control. They practice using inner-serenity to develop insight into the impermanent nature of all phenomena.

**Instruction to Therapist:** The format of each session is essentially the same. Each session begins with a renewal of clients' commitment to their Spiritual Path, and 5 minutes of meditation. For this you will need a timer. The meditation period at the beginning of each session will provide you with an opportunity to repeat the instructions for *anapanasati* meditation taught in Session 2; it will also provide clients with the opportunity for additional practice and to clarify any misunderstandings they may have about the technique which they are expected to practice daily at home.

### ***Welcome, Commitment, and Meditation***

- Renewing commitment to spiritual path
- In-session practice of meditation on the in and out breath (5 mins)

**Example of therapist script:** Hello, 'name'. Welcome to the eleventh session of spirituality therapy. That you made the effort to be here tells me that you are committed to your spiritual path, is that correct? [Therapist asks for client's continued commitment to the therapy.] Before we do our review of last week's session, let's begin by practicing our meditation on the in and out breath. As you know, your mind has a spiritual center where you can go to experience your true spiritual nature [or, depending on client's beliefs, to be with God or a Higher Power]. We don't usually experience this in our daily lives because the mind has a tendency to wander here and there; it is never still enough to experience its center. This is the monkey mind that we have talked about in our sessions, and it is this monkey mind that can get us into a lot of trouble. An untrained mind that is allowed to wander freely can get caught up in whatever thought or mood touches it. This means that it can readily get swept away by the addict self. That's where meditation comes in – it helps us concentrate – to focus all our attention on this still, silent place that is within each of us where we can experience our true spiritual nature. In the meditation technique we do here, you are learning to focus single-mindedly on the sensations around the nostrils caused by the in- and out-breath. This area around the nostrils and above the upper lip where you first feel the touch of the breath as it enters and leaves the body is your anchor. It is called an anchor because it

helps you to remain centered during emotional storms, and it prevents you from getting swept away by strong currents of craving and aversion. The technique is very simple, but it does take a great deal of effort and practice to train the monkey mind to stay focused on one thing. Are you ready to work hard?

[Therapist's provides detailed instructions to client]:

- . Sit with back straight, feet flat against the floor, hands on your lap
- . Close your eyes (therapist checks that client is comfortable doing this)
- . Just breathe normally through your nose
- . Focus your attention on the area around your nostrils and above your upper lip and concentrate on the changing sensations in this area caused by the breath as it passes in and out of your nose. Do nothing else, just keep your concentration fixed there in this small area where you first feel the touch of the breath as it goes in and as it goes out – this is your anchor.
- . If your mind wanders away, just note 'mind wandered away,' and then firmly bring your attention back to your anchor. See if you can experience the gentle touch of the breath around the nostrils and upper lip as it enters and leaves the body. Keep your attention fixed here.
- . If you have difficulty concentrating, try the technique I showed you that we called "Just one breath at a time". At the beginning of each breath, commit yourself to carefully observing the changing sensations caused by just that one breath alone. Then fix your attention firmly on your anchor for just for that one breath, then the next, and the next. Continue doing this, taming the monkey mind, one breath at a time.

**We'll do this together for 5 minutes.** I'll let you know when the time is up.

Therapist sets a timer and meditates with the client for 5 minutes. When 5 minutes have elapsed, therapist asks client for feedback in order to ensure that client was able to experience the sensations around the nostrils and that s/he was successfully able to return the attention to the anchor each time the mind wandered away. This is the therapist's opportunity to correct any misunderstandings about the practice and to provide additional tools to clients who are having difficulty maintaining their concentration on the breath.

For example,

a) if client has difficulty experiencing any sensations, expand the focus of attention to include the inside of the nostrils and top of nose. If client experiences sensations, but loses them during meditation, instruct client to take one or two short, sharp breaths, so that sensations can be clearly felt. Then instruct client to return to normal breathing.

b) if client experiences sensations, but has difficulty with mind wandering, therapist provides additional concentration techniques, as follows:

'It sounds like you're doing well detecting sensations caused by the in and out breath; it's your monkey mind that's giving you the trouble, is that right? Don't be discouraged.

Everyone has difficulty at first. You are only just beginning to become aware of your wandering monkey mind – this is an important step – it is the beginning of insight. With awareness of the monkey mind, comes the motivation to work hard to train it. You probably never realized before how difficult it is to train your mind. Remember that it is the monkey mind that will get you in trouble, so just keep working hard to train it. Be persistent. Each time the mind wanders away from the anchor, bring it back gently but firmly. Just as when you are teaching a child to stay away from what can cause it harm, train your mind gently but firmly to stay away from thoughts and feelings that can activate the addict self. Keep bringing the mind back to the anchor over and over again.

If you find that you continue to get lost in your thoughts, you may count your breaths at the end of the out breath. Breathe normally, and count each breath after you have experienced the sensations caused by that in and out breath. Say the number silently to yourself just before the breath turns to come back in, like this:

Breathe in, Breathe Out, Count 'One'.

Breathe in, Breathe Out, Count 'two'.

Breathe In, Breathe Out, Count 'three', and so forth up to 10.

While breathing in and out normally, keep your focus on the sensations caused by the touch of the breath, don't focus on the numbers you are counting. If your mind wanders away before you reach the number 10, begin again at number 1. Once you have reached 10, stop counting, and focus on the sensations caused by the touch of the in and out breath without counting. Then, if the mind wanders away again, you can begin counting up to 10 again. Let's try that now just to make sure you get the hang of it.

We'll just do it for 10 breaths. I'll talk you through it. Sit up straight and close your eyes. Breathe normally through your nose and bring your attention to your anchor – the area around your nostrils above your upper lip where you can feel the touch of the breath as it goes in and out. Now silently, with me, begin counting the breaths at the end of the out breath. As before, you are going to continue focusing on the sensations as you breathe in and out, the only difference is that at the very end of the out breath, just before it turns to come back in, count silently. Let's begin:

Breathe in, Breathe Out, Count 'One'.

Breathe in, Breathe Out, Count 'two'.

Breathe In, Breathe Out, Count 'three',

Breathe In, Breathe Out, Count 'four',

Breathe In, Breathe Out, Count 'five',

Breathe In, Breathe Out, Count 'six',

Breathe In, Breathe Out, Count 'seven',

Breathe In, Breathe Out, Count 'eight',

Breathe In, Breathe Out, Count 'nine',

Breathe In, Breathe Out, Count 'ten',

When you are ready, open your eyes. Do you think you can do this at home if you have difficulty concentrating?

Remember, counting is just a tool to help you get your concentration back. Don't get caught up in the counting. It's your anchor, not the numbers, that you are training your mind to focus on during your meditation practice.

## Review of previous session

Brief review of concepts covered in previous session:

Wisdom includes:

- **renunciation** -- giving up what is harmful -- the addict self and the 5 enemies of craving, aversion, laziness, agitation, and doubt
- **generosity** -- giving to yourself and others what is beneficial – the spiritual self and the 5 friends of faith, energy, awareness, concentration, and wisdom
- renouncing the addict self identity, taking on instead a spiritual self identity

**Example of therapist script:** Let's begin with a quick review of where we left off last week. In our first session together we talked about the need to replace the addict self with the spiritual self and that we were going to help you do this with three kinds of training – training in mastery of the mind, morality, and wisdom, as well as with daily practice of 14 spiritual qualities. We then worked on the training in mastery of the mind, with its three components – effort, mindfulness, and concentration. Then we did the training in morality which we defined as 'doing no harm to yourself and others' in speech action and livelihood. We agreed that this is the foundation of your spiritual path. Then we began the training in wisdom. To have wisdom is to understand that the addict self causes suffering and to realize that it is not your true nature. It is a habit pattern of the mind – a habitual way of thinking that causes harm to you and others. Last week we continued the training in Wisdom. Specifically we talked about renunciation and generosity -- giving up the addict self identity and accepting a spiritual self identity instead. We talked about the five enemies that are characteristic of the addict self, that separate you from your true nature. We also talked about the 5 friends that are characteristics of your spiritual self, that allow you to experience and express your true nature in daily life. You practiced a visualization technique in which you learned to replace the addict self with the spiritual self, by taking on the role of your spiritual self in all your daily activities.

### **Completion of at-home assignments:**

- Coach" role
- Discuss experience with at-home assignments:
  - Did client practice giving up the addict self identity [e.g., abstain from drugs]?
  - Did client assume a spiritual self identity in daily life [e.g., act 'as if']?
  - Did client use the Daily Plan for filling the mind with the spiritual self?
  - Did client do the Spiritual Stretch daily?
  - Did client practice mindfulness (stop 3 times daily to be mindful of addict self-schema activation)?
  - Did client practice daily meditation on the in and out breath, and end with the recitation of *metta* statements?
  - Did client recite the self-affirmation/prayer at every opportunity?
  - Did client transcend craving using the 'observe and name' technique?
  - Did client use *metta* statements in daily life to defuse negative emotion?
  - Did client use a medication mindfulness ritual?
  - Did client talk to at least one person about HIV testing or about HIV? prevention/harm reduction strategies?
  - Did client practice forgiveness?
- Identify specific examples of how the spiritual qualities assigned last session (renunciation and generosity) were experienced and expressed by client during the week.

**Example of therapist script:** Let's go over your assignments for last week. During the week, you were going to practice giving-up your addict self identity and taking on instead the identity of your spiritual self. You were going to do this by pretending you were an actor taking on a role and acting 'as if' you were your spiritual self. How did that go? Did

your 5 friends help you during the week? Did any of your 5 enemies try to stop you? Which ones? Were you able to remain abstinent all week?  
[If addict self behaviors other than drug use were targeted for renunciation during the week, discuss them here.]

How about your other training exercises?

Did use your Daily Plan for filling your mind with your spiritual self?

Did you continue doing your daily spiritual stretch?

[Note: If client has not done stretch daily, review technique and suggest involving a family member].

Have you been remembering to do your three times daily check-ins to see if your addict self is active? What was your cue? How is that working for you?

[Note: If client did not do check-ins three times every day, discuss appropriateness of the cue being used. Emphasize the importance of frequent self check-ins to increase awareness of the addict self; no awareness, no progress.]

Have you been practicing your meditation on the in and out breath -- your assignment was to practice for 50 minutes every day, were you able to do this?

[Note: if client reports having difficulty, review technique, location, and posture, emphasizing the importance of diligent practice for training the monkey mind.]

Did you end your daily meditation with your *metta* statement 'may all beings be happy and free from suffering'?

Have you been reciting your prayer/affirmation at every opportunity during the day, synchronizing it with your breathing or walking?

[Therapist recites the prayer/affirmation to ensure that client remembers it.]

Have you been able to 'stare down' the craving monster – make it lose its power by observing it as if it were under a microscope, and seeing that it is actually made up of fleeting sensations that are insubstantial and impermanent?

Did you also recite your *metta* statement to yourself whenever you had negative interactions with others during the week?

Are you using your mindfulness ritual each time you take your medications? Did you talk to anyone about HIV testing or HIV prevention? Did you continue training your mind in forgiveness?

[Note to therapist: The goal of this discussion is to encourage practice, while helping clients to identify their own spiritual qualities. Therefore, if client has not practiced, therapist asks client to describe a situation during the week and to identify instances of effort, strong determination, equanimity, gratitude, morality, loving kindness, tolerance, courage, wisdom, forgiveness, renunciation, and generosity – the twelve spiritual qualities covered so far in treatment. You can also suggest that they keep their signed Commitment in a conspicuous place and read it frequently.]

You are doing a good job strengthening your spiritual muscles with your daily practice. I really appreciate your being honest about where you're having difficulty. This shows me that you are not allowing the addict self to sabotage your practice. Keep up the good work!

**Instruction to Therapist:** Once you have reviewed the previous session and the at-home assignment for the previous week, you can begin providing the new material. As shown below, introduce the new material to clients in discrete segments to facilitate learning.

Repeat key concepts frequently, and integrate the new material with what you already know about clients' addict and spiritual self schemas, and their spiritual or religious beliefs.

## **New Material: Training in Wisdom #4 – Serenity and Insight**

**Background Information:** This is the final session in the training in Wisdom. Although this session focuses on helping clients gain wisdom by cultivating 'right view' and 'right thinking', it also calls upon previous trainings – the training in mastery of the mind and the training in morality. It does this by describing two different, but connected, aspects of a spiritual path – serenity and insight. Serenity can be attained through the diligent practice of single-pointed meditation that was taught in the training in mastery of the mind. Although serenity is associated with profound states of peace and happiness, it does not necessarily lead to wisdom. Wisdom entails gaining insight into one's true nature. This requires understanding and accepting, with serenity, that all created things (including oneself) are impermanent -- whatever is born, dies; this is the fundamental law of nature that is emphasized in Buddhist teachings. In every moment, all phenomena, including the cells of our bodies, are arising and passing away -- always in flux. Try as we might to hold on to what we love, it will ultimately come to an end. Few of us can accept this, however. Indeed, we go through life acting as if life does not end, and we do not realize that clinging to this illusion of permanence causes us to suffer. The goal of this session is to help clients in two ways. First, to experience their own inner-serenity and use it to gain insight into the impermanent nature of all phenomena, and secondly, to understand that the addict self is a habit pattern of mind that not only prevents them from experiencing the serenity of their true nature, but also perpetuates ignorance of their true nature -- a perception which inevitably leads to suffering. We do this in the context of clients' life circumstance; specifically, living with a life-threatening disease, HIV/AIDS, as a venue for a discussion of fears of death and dying and finding serenity and meaning in one's life and death. A stage model of grief is presented to clients to help them reflect on their own grieving process with regard to loss of health, and potentially life, through AIDS, and to increase their awareness of how the addict self-schema is readily activated when faced with loss. The serenity prayer, which is familiar to most clients in treatment for addiction, is used as a tool to accomplish the session's primary goal of strengthening the spiritual self-schema. The serenity prayer emphasizes the importance of knowing the difference between what one can and cannot control. It is used extensively in this session both as a focus for discussion and as a tool for contemplative meditation in which clients practice reciting the serenity prayer as if for the first time, with their hearts rather than their heads (as in the religious tradition of *lectio divina*), allowing God or their spiritual nature to speak through the words.

### **Segment 1 -- Grief and the Addict Self**

#### **Suffering:**

- death, old age, illness, grief, sorrow, misery, and general unsatisfactoriness or insecurity that come with the realization that nothing in this world is permanent

**Stages of Grief:**

- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance
- Hope

**Grief activates addict self –**

- How did client cope with testing HIV-positive

**Instruction to Therapist:** You will begin this segment of new material by reminding clients that they are continuing their training in wisdom which consists of two components of the Noble Eightfold Path – Right View and Right Thinking. Let them know that in this session they will also be drawing upon their other two trainings -- training in mastery of the mind and training in morality. In fact, one of the goals of this session is to bring the three trainings together. Explain that they will need all three trainings in order to work on today's topic, which is serenity and insight. You can then begin your instruction on suffering and impermanence, explaining that in the Buddhist tradition it is said that we suffer because we cling to people and things as if they were permanent, which they are not. We just cannot seem to accept the fact that all created things must die, and so, when we lose people and things that are precious to us, including our health, we suffer terribly. Explain that although individuals grieve the loss of life and health differently, we all go through certain stages of grief. First, we may **deny** that the loss has happened. For example, someone who learned they had tested positive for HIV, might just try to pretend that nothing has changed. This is the stage where we put our heads in the sand. It is as if impermanence is just too much for us to bear. Then, in the next stage of grief, when it is no longer possible to deny the loss, we become **angry**. Again, as an example, someone who learned they had tested positive for HIV might rage at God, or at nature, or the person who infected them; they might scream to the heavens denouncing any creator that would allow this to occur. When this does not change anything we may move into the next stage of grief and try to **bargain** with God, promising anything in order to reverse what has happened. But then **depression** sets in as we realize that we are completely powerless to change what has happened; this is the stage of grief that many people living with HIV get stuck in. But, with effort, we can begin to **accept** what has happened; we realize that is not something that we have control over; this stage of acceptance allows us to eventually move on to the final stage in the grieving process which is **hope**. In this final stage of hope, we are able to find personal meaning in what has happened, and to figure out what we can do to make sure that our lives or the lives of others are enriched, rather than diminished, by the experience.

Once you have described the stages of grief briefly to your clients, point out that the earlier stages of grief (especially denial, anger, and depression) are an invitation for the addict self to become activated. The addict self is certainly an expert when it comes to perpetuating denial, as well as at self-medicating anger and depression. People struggling with addiction therefore have to be particularly aware of how they cope with losses of various kinds, or they will fall back on using drugs in order to cope, rather than psychologically evolving in a way that is constructive and adaptive. Ask clients how

they coped with learning they were infected with HIV. Help your clients see that having HIV disease represents a loss on many different levels (you will find some suggested questions to guide the discussion below). The point of the discussion is for you to help clients understand how they may have become stuck in one of the earlier stages of grief after they learned they were infected with HIV, and to help them become aware of when the addict self becomes, or is threatening to become, activated in an attempt to cope with loss.

**Example of therapist script:** Today we are going to continue our training in Wisdom, with its focus on right view and right thinking, but we will also refer back to the other two trainings – mastery of the mind and morality. This session will link together all three trainings on your spiritual path. It will also introduce you to two separate but connecting lanes of the spiritual path – serenity and insight.

We've talked a lot in this program about the suffering caused specifically by HIV/AIDS. But actually life is full of all kinds of suffering, isn't it, not just HIV/AIDS? We are all faced with the pain and anguish of death, old age, illness, grief, sorrow, misery, and a general feeling of insecurity that comes with the reality that absolutely nothing in this world is permanent. Ultimately, we all have to cope with the fact that everything ends; everything that is born, dies. Despite the evidence all around us of this fundamental law of impermanence, we cling to people and things, and our very 'selves', as if they do not end. We don't even realize that we are kidding ourselves. It is said (or: "the Buddha taught") that it is because of our ignorance -- our inability to accept, with serenity, the natural law of impermanence -- that we cling to what is impermanent, and when it comes to an end, as it inevitably will, we suffer tremendously, grieving its loss.

People grieve differently, of course, but in general we go through several stages of grief. At first, we may deny what has happened. This is the stage when we put our heads in the sand, and say, 'this just can't be happening.' Then, once we are forced to take our heads out of the sand and see that it did in fact happen, we get very angry. We may shout and curse at God, at others, or at ourselves. Then, when we realize that our anger isn't reversing our loss, we may try to make a bargain with God, maybe saying something like 'God, I promise to be good if you put things back the way they were.' But no matter how much we pray, no matter how much we wish for things to be different or cling to what we desire; things continue to arise and pass away. And so depression sets in. We feel hopeless and helpless in the face of this impermanence. Eventually we may accept the loss -- how long this takes depends on how attached we were to what was lost. With acceptance, however, comes the stage of hope where we begin to look for personal meaning in the loss. Clearly, losing what we have come to cherish is a very difficult process for all of us, and can include losing objects, losing our health, losing our loved ones, and losing our lives. How we cope with these losses are likely to be influenced by the habit patterns of our mind. **During times of stress, it is the habit pattern of the mind that is strongest and most readily available that is the one that is likely to be activated.**

I'll bet you can see, can't you, how easy it would be for the addict self to get activated as we attempt to cope with the various kinds of loss that come with having HIV or AIDS? Some people, when they first learn they are HIV-positive, use drugs in an attempt to avoid thinking about it. That's the first stage of grief -- denial, right? What about the stages of anger and depression? Have you seen people with HIV trying to self-medicate anger and depression by using drugs? So, you can see how the addict self can easily



get you stuck in one of the earlier stages of grief, and can prevent you from moving forward towards hope.

Did you go through any of the stages of grief that I just described -- denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance, hope -- when you learned you'd been infected with HIV? Did you think of HIV as a loss of your health, your lifestyle, your family, friends? Did you worry that it could mean the loss of your life? Did you use drugs to cope? Did it activate your addict self in other ways -- for example, did it bring on more risk taking -- when it came to protecting yourself against infections, including HIV re-infection, did you say 'what's the point in protecting myself now -- I've already got the virus'?

[Therapist probes client's perception of HIV as life- and/or health threatening, and determines client's coping strategies and risk taking attitudes.]

## Segment 2 -- Serenity, Insight, and the Spiritual Self

- Train the mind to experience the serenity that already resides there, but is obstructed by habit patterns of the mind, such as the addict self.
- Gain insight into one's true nature and the impermanent nature of all phenomena through acceptance, courage, and wisdom.

- **Serenity Prayer**

God, grant me the serenity  
to accept the things I cannot change,  
the courage to change the things I can,  
and the wisdom to know the difference.

**Instruction to Therapist:** The next segment of new material begins by acknowledging clients' suffering and grief over the loss of their health through HIV/AIDS, and by a discussion of the nature of suffering. Explain that a spiritual teacher known as the Buddha ("enlightened one") taught that the reason we suffer so much is because we try desperately to cling to what is in fact impermanent and constantly changing. All created things, including ourselves, arise and pass away; that is their nature; over that we have no control. However, we do have control over our thoughts; indeed, one of the reasons why human life is so very precious is because we do have the capacity to train our minds to follow a spiritual path of serenity and insight. Point out that these Buddhist principles are also illustrated in the *serenity prayer* which is a prayer used by people of all religious and spiritual traditions, often when coping with loss. The serenity prayers reads: 'God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; the courage to change the things I can; and the Wisdom to know the difference'. Most clients in treatment for addiction are familiar with this prayer, as it is central to the philosophy of AA and NA. Let clients know that in this segment of the session, you will be going over each line of the prayer, stopping after each line to discuss its meaning. Be sure to remain sensitive to clients' spiritual/religious beliefs. For example, if clients do not believe in God, change the prayer to an affirmation omitting reference to God in the first line. After reciting the first line, explain that the serenity that is referred to in this line is available to them at any time

simply by remembering their training in mastery of the mind -- serenity is theirs if they tame the monkey mind and focus single-pointedly on their anchor. Whenever the mind wanders, they can just bring it back to its anchor – its place of peace and serenity. Emphasize the point that serenity is their birthright, that it is always present, but often hidden from awareness by habit patterns of the mind, like the addict self. If appropriate to your clients’ religious beliefs, you could add that this place of inner-serenity is their connection or God or a Higher Power. Then engage clients in a brief discussion about what this line of the prayer means to them personally. Ask clients if they view serenity as a characteristic of their spiritual nature, and if the addict self has ever prevented them from experiencing it. Then go on to the next line of the prayer -- ‘to accept the things I cannot change’. Explain that this line reminds us that we don’t seek serenity for its own sake, but rather to gain insight into impermanence. No one can change the fact that everything that is born must die. No one can change the fact that everything is constantly changing (perhaps in ways that we egocentrically view as not desirable for us). No one can change the fact that we will eventually lose our loved ones. No one can change the fact of being infected with HIV. Acceptance sounds like a passive activity, but it is actually hard work. It takes a great deal of effort to overcome habit patterns of the mind, such as the addict self, with its tendency to put its head in the sand and self-medicate. Help clients articulate what they currently have difficulty accepting about being HIV-positive; help them give voice to any fears they have about death and dying and living with HIV/AIDS; help them understand the ways in which the addict self prevents them from accepting what cannot be changed, and thus causes them to suffer. Then, go on to the next line of the prayer – ‘the courage to change the things I can’. This line reminds us that we are not powerless; there are things over which we do have control. We do have the power to change our thoughts and our actions. We can choose to activate our spiritual self rather than the addict self. This is *our choice*, and this is where the training in morality comes in. When we are on a spiritual path that has a strong moral foundation we make decisions in our daily lives that prevent harm to ourselves and others. For example, clients cannot change the fact that they are infected with HIV, but they can make the decision to act in ways that protect others from infection and themselves from super-infection. In the context of discussing this line of the serenity prayer, help clients identify any ongoing behavior that is under their control that harms others or themselves, and brainstorm specific actions they can take immediately to begin to gain control over this behavior and thus provide them with access to the serenity of their spiritual nature.

The last line of the prayer – ‘and the wisdom to know the difference’ – is crucial. If we don’t recognize the difference between what we can and cannot control, we will most certainly continue to suffer. We will try to cling to what is impermanent, and then suffer greatly when we lose it, and we will neglect doing what is actually in our power to do, which is to train our minds to experience serenity and to have insight into our true, spiritual nature. This is why it is so important to always be mindful, and before simply reacting, to ask ourselves ‘is this really something I have any control over?’ Engage clients in a brief discussion about what this line of the prayer means to them. Then, as a segue to the experiential component of the session, ask clients if they are ready to work hard to attain serenity and insight.

<p><b>Example of therapist script:</b> It’s interesting, isn’t it, that it is actually our need for control, and our unwillingness to accept the impermanent nature of all things, that</p>
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causes us to suffer. If we could serenely accept nature's fundamental law of impermanence, our time on earth would be much more peaceful. There's a prayer (or affirmation) said by people around the world to help them break through the illusion of control and accept with serenity what cannot be changed. You've probably heard it:

[\*Note to therapist: if belief in God is consistent with the client's religious beliefs, the first line of the poem should read 'God, grant me the serenity'; if not, change the line to read 'May I experience the serenity.].

God, grant me the serenity [\*alternately, 'May I experience the serenity']  
to accept the things I cannot change,  
the courage to change the things I can,  
And the wisdom to know the difference.

Let's discuss each line together.

Line 1: God grant me the serenity (or \*May I experience the serenity)

In the first line, we affirm our commitment to training our minds to experience serenity. Remember serenity is not something you acquire, it's there all the time --it's a characteristic of our true spiritual nature. We just have to be able to experience it. Our monkey minds -- our wandering thoughts -- create obstacles that prevent us from experiencing the serenity which is present in each one of us. To experience this serenity we have to continue training our minds, just as we do in our meditation. We begin by forming the intention to experience our serenity; then, whenever our minds wander from this place of serenity, we bring it back; over and over again we bring back our wandering mind; we train our mind to have serenity as its anchor -- serenity as its single-pointed focus. This is an example of 'right thinking' which is a component of your training in wisdom.

Do you experience this serenity in your own life? Do you believe that serenity is a characteristic of your true spiritual nature? Do your habit patterns of mind, like the addict self, prevent you from experiencing it? Tell me more about that.

[Therapist helps client understand that (a) serenity is a birthright, (b) that it is the client's habitual ways of thinking that interfere with him/her experiencing serenity, and (c) that with training and 'right thinking', serenity can be experienced.]

Let's move on to Line 2 -- to accept the things I cannot change.

This line says that you don't just want serenity for its own sake, but rather that you want to use your serenity to gain insight into what is beyond your control. A fundamental law of nature that cannot be changed by you, or anyone, is the law of impermanence -- you cannot change the fundamental law of nature that everything that is born, dies. So, in this line of the prayer we learn that acceptance of this basic condition is essential. Acceptance sounds like a passive word, or a word that means you have given up, but it really isn't. It takes courage and wisdom to accept impermanence, and it takes hard work. It takes work because the non-accepting habit patterns of our mind, like the addict self, are constantly trying to deceive us -- for example, by conning us into believing that we can effectively protect ourselves from suffering by surrounding ourselves with lots of expensive objects. However, when we allow ourselves to be deceived in this way, we forget our true nature, and we wind up fearing, rather than accepting, impermanence.

Then, when loss occurs -- such as losing someone we love -- the addict self is likely to tell you to 'get high; put your head in the sand; don't think about it and it will go away". It deceives you by making it seem that this sign of impermanence is abnormal, and that permanence is how things really are, or should be. Yet, we know it's just the opposite; but, this is the addict self's habit pattern – to try to turn reality on its head, and to be angry and disappointed when reality doesn't cooperate.

Does your addict self get in the way of coming to terms with the fact that one day your life and the lives of your loved ones will end? Has HIV changed how you think about life and death? Do your religious or spiritual beliefs help you cope with loss of health, and ultimately loss of life – whether from HIV/AIDS or any other cause? How?  
[Therapist helps client articulate his/her beliefs and fears about loss and the end of life.]

Let's move on to Line 3 -- the courage to change the things I can.

This line reminds us that although we cannot change the fundamental laws of nature, we do have control over our own thoughts and our own actions. However, we need to be willing to make significant changes in our life. This is where our training in morality – our everyday ethics – comes in. We can choose to use our thoughts and actions to experience serenity and gain insight into our true spiritual nature, or we can allow them to be used in the service of habit patterns of the mind, like the addict self, which cause great harm to ourselves and others. The choice is ours. People who have been infected with HIV may feel that they are powerless. It's true that they can't change the fact that they've been infected, but they can make the decision to protect others from infection, and they can make a significant contribution to stopping the suffering caused by HIV/AIDS. They can also make the decision to protect themselves from superinfection (i.e., re-infection with a different strain of HIV) and from other infectious diseases. They can also make the decision to follow medical recommendations. We discuss this in detail in another session, but it is important to remember that taking medications exactly as prescribed is something that is under your control, if you have the courage to stick to what might be a complicated medication schedule and take medications that might have some unpleasant side-effects. All these are things you can change. But along with your intention to change, action must follow. You have to actually begin making positive changes in your life. It is through positive, morally guided, action that your inner serenity can be revealed to you and insight into your true nature can be attained.

What kind of changes can you make in your life to clear away obstacles to experiencing your serenity? Are you still engaging in any behavior that goes against your moral code and so places a big wall between you and your serenity? Is there any action you can take immediately – for example, is there something you can do now to protect your health and the health of others?

[Therapist helps client identify changes that can be made in his/her life that are consistent with the moral teachings of his/her spiritual path that will allow client to experience serenity and insight into his/her true nature.]

Let's move on to Line 4 -- 'and the wisdom to know the difference'.

This line really puts it all together, doesn't it? We have to know the difference between what we can control – that's our own thoughts and actions—and what we cannot change -- the law of impermanence. We can train our minds to experience serenity, and with

serenity and insight, there is no fear of death or dying because we know, and can actually experience, our true spiritual nature.

Do you feel you know the difference between what's under your control and what's not under your control when it comes to HIV? Do you have faith that if you make the effort to stay on your spiritual path, you can develop the serenity and insight needed to cast aside any fear you may have about death or dying?

[Therapist ensures that client understands the difference between the client's thoughts and actions, which can be controlled and directed either towards preventing harm or towards causing harm, and the law of impermanence, which cannot. Therapist also determines whether client has fears of death and dying that can be addressed in the context of the serenity prayer.]

So, that's the serenity prayer. You may have heard it before and even said it to yourself on occasion, but I'll bet you never thought of it as such hard work before, did you? It is hard work, but it's hard work that has an enormous reward for those willing to do it. The reward I speaking of is the peace of mind that we all search for, but usually look for in the wrong place. Are you ready to get to work on experiencing your serenity and developing insight into your true nature? Let's continue working on it in our spiritual work-out.

### **Segment 3 -- Experiential component**

- Gym metaphor: need to exercise your spiritual muscles
- Using serenity to develop insight
- Contemplative Meditation Exercise on the Serenity Prayer

**Instruction to Therapist:** In this segment you will do a spiritual workout with your clients focusing on the spiritual quality of serenity, and helping clients to use this serenity to develop insight. Explain to clients that in this exercise they will continue to work with the serenity prayer. However, unlike the previous segment in which they reflected on what each line of the serenity prayer meant to them intellectually, they will now be doing a contemplative meditation in which they will practice becoming open to what these words mean to them spiritually. Emphasize that this approach is suitable for people of all faiths. If your client has a belief in God, you might want to describe the exercise that you will be doing with them as being similar to a technique used in another religious tradition for reading holy scriptures with the heart, rather than with the head, in order to allow God to speak to them through the scriptures. Whatever your clients beliefs, emphasize that whereas in the previous segment they were encouraged to think about the meaning of the words of the serenity prayer, now in this segment, they are discouraged from thinking about the words, and instead are encouraged to allow the words to speak to them through the serenity of their spiritual nature.

You will begin by asking clients to focus on their anchor and to connect with the serenity of their spiritual nature. Your task is to read aloud the serenity prayer, stopping after each line to provide instruction. Your clients' task is to listen to the words with their heart, rather than with their head, and to listen as they have never heard the words before. They will then silently recite each line of the prayer allowing their spiritual nature to speak to them through the words to provide personal meaning for their lives.

Emphasize that they are not to force anything. If they are not aware of any special spiritual meaning arising, that is alright. Encourage them to simply remain open and receptive to the wisdom of their spiritual nature as they listen to and recite the words of the serenity prayer. At the end of the exercise, they will give thanks for the serenity they experienced and for any insight they gained.

**Example of therapist script:** This is the part of the session when we work together to help you strengthen your spiritual muscles. Today we are going to work on the spiritual quality of serenity and then you will use your inner-serenity to develop spiritual insight. We are going to do a special type of contemplative meditation using the serenity prayer. First you will focus on your anchor so that you can connect with the serenity within you. I will then ask you to listen to the words of the serenity prayer. This time though I want you to listen to the words as if you had never heard them before. Listen to the words with your heart, not your head. After I have said the line out loud, and you have listened with your heart, you will then recite it silently to yourself and allow your spiritual nature to speak to you through these words. Allow yourself to be receptive to whatever spiritual message is in those words just for you. Don't force anything, don't think about the words, just feel the words, and let the spiritual meaning of the words come through.

Okay, get comfortable in your chair, legs uncrossed, hands resting comfortably in your lap. Close your eyes, and take a few slow, deep, breaths through your nose. As you do this, feel the sensation of the breath in the area just below your nose and above your upper lip. Focus your attention here, on your anchor. Do this for a few moments in silence. [Therapist remains silent for approx. 30 secs.]

Now with a one-pointed mind, continue to penetrate your anchor, and feel yourself being led into a place of deep peace and serenity. Know that this is your birthright. This is the serenity of your spiritual nature. It is always there. You have only to clear away what is blocking you from experiencing it. Take a moment now to experience this peace and serenity [Therapist remains silent for approx. 30 secs.]

Now, as you continue to focus on your anchor and experience the peace and serenity of your spiritual nature, I'd like you to listen as I read the first line of the serenity prayer. Listen with your heart, not your head. Listen to the words as if you have never heard them before.

'God grant me the serenity'

Now recite this line silently to yourself and allow your spiritual nature to speak through the words. Reflect on the personal meaning these words have for you. Don't worry if nothing comes to you immediately; just remain open and receptive to receiving whatever spiritual meaning that these words may have for you in your life [Therapist pauses for 30 seconds.]

And now listen as I recite the next line. Again, listen with your heart, not your head. Listen as if you have never heard the words before:

'to accept the things I cannot change'

Now recite the line silently to yourself and allow your spiritual nature to speak through the words. Reflect on the personal meaning these words have for you. Again, don't worry if nothing comes to you immediately; just remain open and receptive to receiving

whatever spiritual meaning that these words may have for you in your life [Therapist pauses for 30 seconds.]

And now listen as I recite the next line. Listen with your heart, not your head. Listen as if you have never heard the words before:

'the courage to change the things I can

Now recite the line silently to yourself and allow your spiritual nature to speak through the words. Reflect on the personal meaning these words have for you. Again, don't worry if nothing comes to you immediately, just remain open and receptive to receiving whatever spiritual meaning that these words may have for you in your life. [Therapist pauses for 30 seconds.]

And now listen as I recite the next line. Again, listen with your heart, not your head. Listen as if you have never heard the words before:

'and the wisdom to know the difference'

Now recite the line silently to yourself and allow your spiritual nature to speak through the words. Reflect on the personal meaning these words have for you. Again, don't worry if nothing comes to you immediately, just remain open and receptive to receiving whatever spiritual meaning that these words may have for you in your life. The meaning may come now or later; just remain open and receptive. [Therapist pauses for 30 seconds.]

Now I am going to recite the entire prayer and you recite it along with me in silence, allowing the words to speak to you.

[Therapist recites the entire prayer out loud]:

God, grant me the serenity,  
to accept the things I cannot change,  
the courage to change the things I can,  
and the wisdom to know the difference.

Now, return your focus to your anchor once again. As you focus on the sensation caused by the in- and out-breath, feel the peace and serenity of your spiritual nature. Know that it is there, that it is always there; you have only to train your mind to experience it. And then give thanks for the wisdom of your spiritual nature, trusting that with practice, you will be able to experience its insight more and more. [Therapist pauses briefly.]

And now, when you are ready, open your eyes, and return your attention to the room.

Do you think you understand the technique sufficiently to practice it at home? Do you have any questions about it?

#### **Segment 4 -- At-home practice assignments**

- Continue: Use daily plan for filling the mind with the spiritual self
- Continue: Renounce addict self and act 'as if' you are your spiritual self
- Continue: Daily 3-S stretch
- Continue: 3 times daily self-schema check-ins (with cue)

- Continue: Meditation on the in and out breath (55 minutes) ending with metta statements
- Continue: Recite prayer/self-affirmation throughout the day
- Continue: Transcend craving by systematic observation of impermanence
- Continue: Use *metta* meditation statements to defuse negative emotion
- Continue: Use medication mindfulness rituals to help you follow medical recommendations
- Continue: Talk to others about HIV testing and HIV prevention/harm reduction
- Continue: Ask for and offer forgiveness
- New: **Meditate on each line of the serenity prayer daily**
- New: Spiritual quality assigned -- 'serenity'

**Instruction to Therapist:** In this segment of the session, clients are given their at-home assignments. They are reminded that being on a Spiritual path requires all the spiritual muscles they have previously worked on and so they are to continue the at-home exercises previously assigned in addition to the ones you will be assigning today. Be sure to refer clients to the page in the Client Workbook on which the at-home exercises for today are written. Then go over each of them with clients to ensure that they understand what is to be accomplished during the coming week. Clients are to continue using their Daily Plan, renouncing their addict self, and assuming the role of the spiritual self in all their daily activities. Their daily plan should incorporate their Spiritual Stretch, their 3 times daily self check-ins, their medication mindfulness ritual, and their meditation on the in and out breath, which should end with the recitation of *metta* statements – ‘May all beings be happy and free from suffering’. Note that their daily meditation time is increased as appropriate. This will depend upon how clients are progressing. Keep in mind that the goal is to have each client meditating for one hour each day by the end of treatment. They will also continue using their spiritual self-affirmation/prayer at every opportunity, synchronizing it with their breathing and walking. They will transcend craving whenever it arises in their daily lives by carefully examining the rise and fall of the sensations associated with it, knowing ‘this too shall pass’, and whenever they have potentially negative interactions with others, they will recite their *metta* statements. They will also continue using their medication mindfulness ritual when they take their HIV medications; and they will continue speaking to others about HIV testing and HIV prevention and harm reduction, and will continue their training in forgiveness. Once the usual routine is reviewed, the new assignments are added. The new Spiritual quality to assign in this session is 'serenity' and their new assignment is to meditate on the serenity prayer daily in order to contemplate its personal meaning in their lives. The segment ends, as it always does, by asking for clients' commitment to completing their at-home assignments and remaining on their spiritual path.

**Example of therapist script:** The session is almost over. Let's go over your training schedule for the week.

**Continued:** You will continue incorporating all your practice assignments into your Daily Plan [Therapist ensures that client still has a copy of the Plan in the 3-S Journal], and you will continue renouncing the addict self and acting 'as if' you are your spiritual self in



all activities of your daily life, that means remaining drug free [and/or whatever other addict self behaviors are to be renounced]. Do you think you can do that? Keep doing your daily spiritual stretch and your mindfulness practice of checking in with yourself three times a day to see what habit pattern of the mind is currently active. Use your cue (...name cue...) to interrupt yourself three times a day. Also continue your in-and out-breath meditation practice, ending it each day with your *metta* statements – ‘May all beings be happy and free from suffering’. If you can, increase the time you practice each day to 55 minutes.

[Therapist gauges practice time to client’s progress.]

Also keep reciting your prayer/affirmation at every opportunity, synchronizing it with your breathing and walking. If the craving monster shows up, stare it down – say ‘this too shall pass’ and watch as the sensations arise and pass away. Also don’t forget to use your *metta* statements whenever you have negative interactions with others so that the addict self doesn’t get activated. Remember to do your medication mindfulness ritual when you take your HIV medications and try to talk to people about HIV testing and HIV prevention and harm reduction techniques. Also keep working at training your mind in the spiritual quality of forgiveness.

Added: Your new assignment for the week is to meditate everyday on the serenity prayer as we did today in our exercise. Don’t just recite it; begin by experiencing the serenity of your spiritual nature, and allow the meaning of the words to speak to you through this serenity.

The spiritual quality you will be finding in yourself and strengthening this week is ‘serenity’. You have already demonstrated that you have access to this quality during our session. Keep up the good work. You will need it for maintaining your spiritual path.

Commitment: Can you make a commitment to staying on your spiritual path, to doing all your assignments, and to contemplating the personal meaning of the serenity prayer in your daily life?

## Segment 5 -- Summary

- Suffering is caused by craving and clinging to what is impermanent
- Stages of Grief: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, Acceptance, Hope.
- Early stages of grief activate habitual patterns of mind, such as addict self
- Serenity prayer:
  - Train the mind to experience the serenity that already resides there but which is obstructed by habit patterns of the mind, such as the addict self.
  - Gain insight into one’s true nature and the impermanent nature of all phenomena through acceptance, courage, and wisdom.

**Instruction to Therapist:** The next segment of the session is the summary. The purpose of the brief summary is to help clients remember what was covered in the session. The summary for this session should include a brief review of the training in wisdom, with the focus on gaining insight into the impermanent nature of all created phenomena, including themselves. Remind clients that if they are not mindful, the early stages of grief can be an invitation for the addict self to become activated, and if this happens they can lose sight of their spiritual path. Review with them how they can use the serenity prayer to cope with loss and to train their minds to experience the peace and serenity of their spiritual nature.

**Example of therapist script:** Let's review briefly what we covered today. Today, we continued our training in wisdom, but we also integrated the other two trainings in our discussion – mastery of the mind and morality. We talked about the suffering that comes with our not being able to accept that whatever is born dies, that nothing in this world is permanent. We discussed the stages of grief that we all go through when we experience loss, and how the addict self can easily get activated when we are grieving. Specifically, we considered the ways in which the addict self can keep people with HIV stuck in denial, anger, and depression, and how this only adds to the suffering they are experiencing by preventing them from finding personal meaning in their lives. We reflected on the serenity prayer, and found that if we work hard to train our minds, we can experience the serenity that naturally resides there, and we can begin to use this serenity to gain insight into our true nature.

## Segment 6 -- 3-S stretch

- 3-S stretch with new spiritual quality 'serenity' inserted

**Instruction to Therapist:** As you know, each 3-S therapy session ends with the spiritual stretch. You will find a diagram of the stretch in this manual and also in the Client Workbook. The goal of the stretch, which is to be performed daily at home, as well as at the end of each session, is for clients to affirm both physically and verbally their commitment to spiritual practice. At each stage in the stretch, which is performed slowly, therapists and clients affirm, aloud, the commitment to the client's spiritual path and to developing the spiritual quality assigned for the week, in this case serenity. The words spoken during each part of the stretch are to remind clients that being on a spiritual path requires making their thoughts, words, emotions, actions, and perceptions consistent with the highest spiritual ideals. You will do the stretch with your client at the end of each session so that you can correct any mistakes as the stretch is executed, and ensure that clients know how to do the stretch when they get home. Until clients are familiar with the wording, have them repeat each phrase after you. Explain that the stretch is a simple way to begin their day that can remind them to stay on their spiritual path. Remind them that the stretch is one of their at-home practice assignments, and show them once again where they can find it in their workbook. Then do the stretch together and end the session.

**Example of therapist script:** As serenity is the quality you will be working on this week, let's end by focusing on this quality while doing our spiritual stretch together.

[Therapist and client stand and perform the stretch together – see appendix for posture.]

'Today I take my spiritual path. May my thoughts reflect serenity; may my words reflect serenity; may my emotions reflect serenity; may my actions reflect serenity; may my perceptions reflect serenity; may I be open and receptive to serenity. I am my spiritual nature.'

**End**

**Example of therapist script:** Thank you for coming today (client name). I look forward to seeing you at our next session.