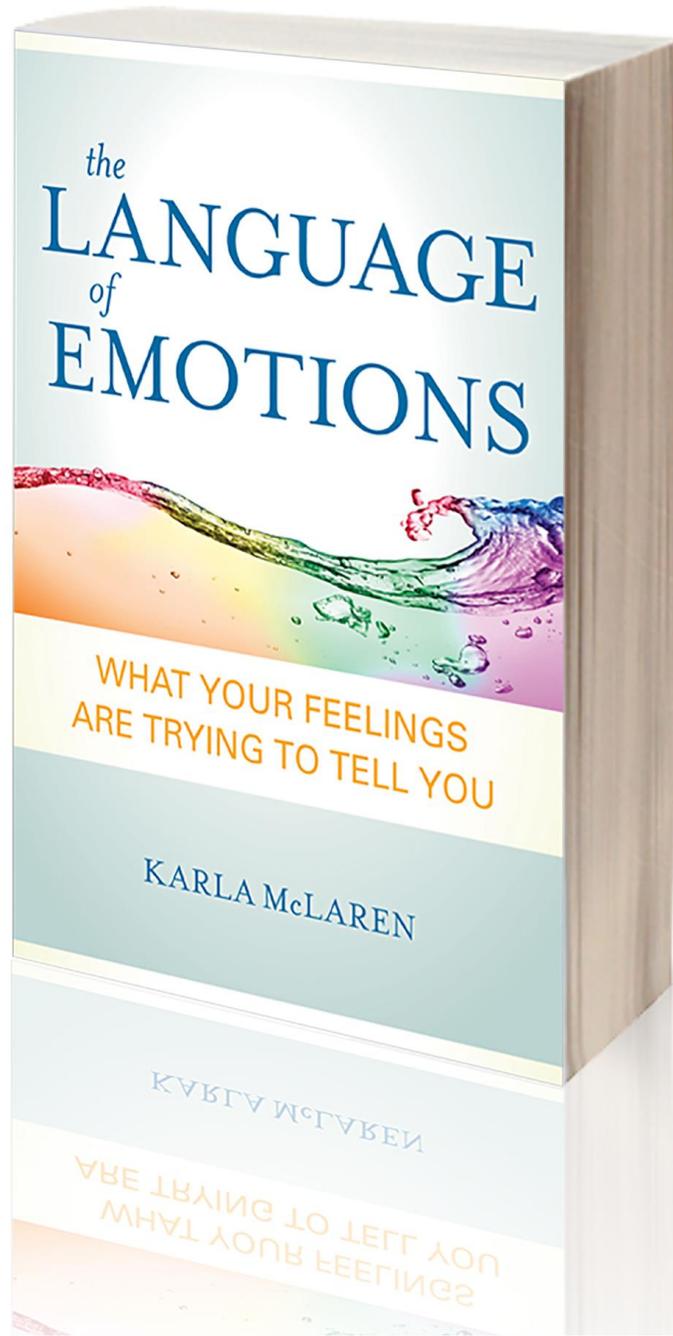


## A Reading Guide for

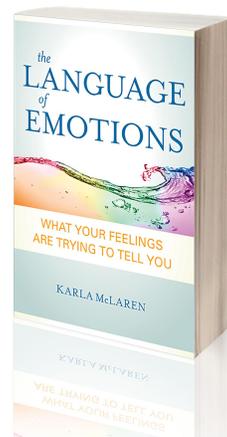
### The Language of Emotions

*What Your Feelings Are Trying to Tell You*



# A Reading Guide for The Language of Emotions

## *What Your Feelings Are Trying to Tell You*



## Welcome!

This guide will support your reading of *The Language of Emotions* by Karla McLaren, and it will help you deepen your understanding of emotions, empathy, and yourself. You can use this reading guide on your own, or you can use it to start a reading group.

## How to Start a Reading Group for *The Language of Emotions*

- Ask friends and family members if they'd like to learn more about emotions and empathy with you.
- Reach out to people from work, your gym, or your church (etc.) and consider posting flyers at these places with information about how to join your group.
- Reach out on social media sites such as Facebook, Meetup, or Twitter by sharing the book and letting people know you'll be starting a reading group.
- Ask at your local bookstore or library. Some bookstores and libraries offer free meeting rooms for reading groups, and some keep lists of people who want to join new groups.
- Keep the group to 12 members or fewer; if you have more than this, there may not be enough time for everyone to talk and share their impressions

## Organizing Your Reading Group

You can organize your reading schedule ahead of time, or you can wait until all of your group members are present to choose your schedule and design your reading/discussion processes together.

- Find a location that's convenient for everyone, or consider hosting the meeting at a different member's home each session.
- Meetings should be scheduled every 3 to 4 weeks to give people time to read. You can assign single chapters or whole sections, depending on your members' wishes and time constraints.
- Schedule your meetings for between 1 and 3 hours, depending on the size of the group and the amount of discussion you'd like to have.
- Decide whether food and/or drinks will be available at the meetings, and if so, how they will be provided and by whom.
- Discuss the best ways to communicate with your group between meetings. The leader(s) should remind members of each meeting, and perhaps share resources with the group based on the topics to be discussed in each subsequent meeting.

## Leading Your Reading Group

You can build healthy group dynamics by maintaining clear expectations, staying on topic, keeping to a schedule, and keeping your group members focused on their reading. You'll want to be fluid and responsive to the needs of individuals, yet also maintain a cohesive vision for the group as a whole.

- The first meeting should be a relaxed gathering for members to meet and discuss their goals for the group. Consider leading a guided activity, or asking 3 to 4 questions about emotions, such as:
  1. Were you allowed to express all of your emotions as a child? If not, which ones were you allowed to express openly? Which ones were forbidden?
  2. If you hear someone called *emotional*, what do you think of?
  3. Have you ever seen emotional expression modeled in a way you admired? Who are your emotional mentors?
  4. How comfortable are you with your emotions today?
- The leader(s) should also provide an overview of *The Language of Emotions* and talk about why you wanted to start the reading group.
- Ground rules should be set and the leader(s) should make it clear to members that meetings are not group therapy sessions and do not replace individual counseling or therapy.
- Leader(s) can ask questions throughout the discussion and offer support as needed or if the group gets stuck.
- Be careful that the conversation doesn't digress or focus too much on one person's story or one topic. Group leader(s) should work to keep the discussion flowing and ensure that everyone has a chance to talk and share if they want to.
- You can start each meeting by going around the group and having each person check in about their current situation or their impressions of that session's reading (if they want to – it's perfectly fine for people to pass).
- If you need more information about working with a reading group, the [Kansas City Public Library](#) has a very helpful set of guidelines.

## Concluding your Reading Group

When your group is through reading *The Language of Emotions*, you may want to continue meeting casually as friends, or you may want to start over with a new book that interests you.

If you'd like to read Karla McLaren's next book, *The Art of Empathy: A Complete Guide to Life's Most Essential Skill* (Sounds True, 2013), the free reading guide for that book is available at [Karla McLaren's website](#).

*Thank you for bringing more emotional awareness and more empathy to our waiting world!*

# The Language of Emotions Reading Guide

These are suggestions for deepening your reading of *The Language of Emotions*; however, your group may want to focus on different topics in each chapter. Feel free to shift your focus to meet the needs and interests of your group members.

## Part I: Restoring Your Native Language

### 1. PREFACE and INTRODUCTION

#### *Creating a Conscious Life*

Take this time as a group to talk about your overall impressions of *The Language of Emotions* and what each of you would like to gain from meeting and discussing the book. Each of you can also talk about your willingness to share (or not share) your experiences, thoughts, ideas, and emotions in the group. Make room for different people's varying comfort levels with personal disclosure.

### 2. MY EMPATHIC JOURNEY

#### *The Difficult Beginnings of Empathy*

In this chapter, Karla describes her early life as a hyper-empathic child, her metaphysical career, and her return to college to study the social sciences once she realized that empathy was not a metaphysical skill. She also introduces the idea of trauma as a type of initiation (which will be explored further in Chapters 7 and 8), and the ways in which dissociation helped her survive her own childhood trauma.

**Discussion 1:** Were you hyper-empathic as a child? Did you find animal friends or any other support for your sensitivity and empathic awareness?

**Discussion 2:** Dissociation (the sense that you are separate from your body or the current situation) is an ability we all have. For instance, you dissociate naturally when you daydream. Have you experienced situations in which dissociation was helpful to you?

**Discussion 3:** Have you experienced a sea change in your life, where you realized that you had been mistaken, or that you had been involved in something that no longer felt right? How did you become aware of your need to change?

### 3. TROUBLED WATERS

#### *You're So Emotional!*

This chapter introduces a new way of understanding and interacting with emotions. Most of us were taught that people who are too "emotional" are unstable, irrational, or problematic, as if emotions themselves are bad or wrong:

"Emotions are necessary – even when they're uncomfortable or socially inappropriate – because they are part of your psyche, a part of your neural network, a part of your socialization, and a part of your humanity" (pg. 28).

**Discussion:** Think of times when you've been told that you were *too emotional*, or when you felt uncomfortable feeling or expressing emotions in the presence of others. Feel free to share these experiences and talk about how you handled these situations.

### ***Expression, Repression, and the Middle Ground***

Many of us have been taught to express or repress our emotions; and we weren't taught about any other options. Although expression and repression can be helpful at times, "neither approach works because neither one accepts emotions as important messengers that help us learn and evolve" (pg. 33).

If you can learn to work *with* your emotions and discover the messages they contain, you can access the skills and abilities inside each of them – and develop a more wholesome and conscious understanding of yourself and others. This process of listening to your emotions, supporting them, and identifying their purpose is called *channeling*:

"...which is to direct or convey something along a chosen pathway in a conscientious manner. If we can learn to properly channel our emotions, we can begin to work with them in vibrant and ingenious ways. We can interpret the messages our emotions carry and make use of the instincts our emotions contain" (pg. 33).

**Discussion:** Think about how you work with your emotions now. Do you express them openly with other people or through activities, or do you repress most of them and keep them inside?

### ***Three Empathic Exercises***

**Exercise:** Invite your group to try the emotional channeling exercises on pages 33-36. Each of these exercises intentionally engages with an emotion in its most subtle form. These exercises can help you learn to feel, identify, and befriend your emotions as key aspects of your intelligence, awareness, and social skills – rather than treat them as unwanted things that "happen" to you.

### ***Understanding the Different Levels of Emotional Intensity***

**Discussion:** Karla describes emotions in the different intensity levels of "...their flowing states, their mood-states, and ... their "raging rapids" states" (pg. 37). In the exercises above, you experienced the soft and flowing states of sadness, happiness, and fear. Had you ever connected these states to the subtle levels of emotions they contain?

## **4. IT TAKES A VILLAGE**

### ***Introducing the Four Elements***

This chapter introduces the four-element or *quaternity* model (pg. 42). In this model, your **earth element** symbolizes your physical and bodily experiences; your **air element** characterizes your intellect and your cognitive abilities; your **water element** embodies the flow and depth of your emotions; and your **fire element** represents your spiritual, visionary, and contemplative realms.

**Discussion:** Share your ideas about how the *quaternity* model relates to you. What elements are strongest for you right now – and what elements could you integrate into your life more fully?

### ***In Defense of Judgment***

Judgment is a natural and necessary part of intelligence that helps you understand and categorize your world. However, most of us have been taught that judgment is bad, overly critical, or undesirable. Karla takes a different approach:

“Healthy judgment is a combination of your airy intellect and your watery emotions coming together to form a considered opinion.... It’s an internal decision-making process about what a thing is and whether it suits you or not.... Thoughts and emotions are *partners*. They’re not enemies” (pg. 49).

**Discussion:** What are your judgments about healthy judgment? Share instances where healthy judgments can and should be made. How can healthy judgment support your emotional awareness?

### ***Restoring Your Intellectual Realm***

Many of us have been taught to squash our emotions with our intellect and to treat emotions as irrational or unrealistic. However, the emotions and the intellect can work beautifully together if we allow them to:

“We don’t seem to know how to feel deeply and think brilliantly at the same time, and we’re nearly incapable of connecting our emotional flow to our intellectual processes” (pg. 53).

**Discussion:** Think about ways that your intellect has overtaken or bullied your emotions into submission. What are ways that you can help your intellect and emotions work together as a team?

## **5. REVIVING YOUR ESSENTIAL NATURE**

### ***Balancing Your Five Elements***

Referring back to the *quaternity* model introduced in chapter 4, this chapter provides a deeper explanation of the four elements – Earth, Air, Water, and Fire – and focuses on ways to help you balance each of your elements into a cohesive whole:

“Understanding the function of each of your elements helps you self-diagnose your personal imbalances.... Balancing your village of elements and intelligences is a lifelong practice, but it’s fairly simple once you realize you *have* a village inside you.... Conscious practices in the realm of each element bring that element back into balance in your whole self...” (pgs. 57-58).

**Discussion:** Do you find that you already gravitate to practices that support just one or two of your elements? Share ways that you can make room in your daily life for your neglected elements (if any).

## *A New Vision of Self*

When all of your elements are flowing and balanced, you develop a meta-intelligent, fifth-element personality and a fuller experience of what it is to be a whole and integrated person. A wonderful aspect of balancing your elements is that it is a fairly simple task once you realize that balance is a possibility. However, it can be challenging at first to reach this level of wholeness and integration:

“You just include your physical life, your emotions, your intellectual processes, and your spiritual knowledge in your everyday life [see the balancing practices on pgs. 58-60].... Moving into the full village of your psyche is an exciting and heady experience, but there is discomfort involved.... You’ll gain immeasurable freedom when you break away from the systems and mindset that keep you blindfolded and hobbled. Full-on intelligence and five-element people are unusual, and there’s not a lot of support for wholeness in our culture” (pgs. 64-65).

**Discussion:** What would it feel like to begin balancing your elements? Are there relationships that would have to change as you grow and develop into a fifth-element personality?

## 6. AVOIDANCE, ADDICTION, AND AWAKENING

### *Understanding the Need for Distractions*

Many of us use addictions and distractions to get through our days and deal with the challenging aspects of our lives. Although these practices can help us take our minds off of things, they are not generally forthright ways to deal with troubling situations. As you gently observe your own addictive and avoidant tendencies, it can help to understand *why* you’re distracting yourself and *what* you’re avoiding:

“What happens right before we grind the coffee or plunk down in front of the tube or reach for the chocolate, cigarettes, or the alcohol? What occurs in the moments before we start exercising, shopping, chanting, or painting obsessively? What triggers our movement toward distractions and avoidance behaviors?” (pg. 78)

**Discussion:** If you’re comfortable, share some of the ways you use addictions and distractions currently. What do these practices bring to your life? How do they support you? How do they hinder you?

### *When Suffering Ceases to be Suffering*

The philosopher Baruch Spinoza wrote that “Suffering ceases to be suffering as soon as we form a clear and precise picture of it” (pg. 83). One key to ending suffering is to fully understand the causes and dimensions of our suffering. When we regularly rely on addictions and distractions to deal with pain and suffering, we are actually stopping ourselves from forming a clear and precise picture of what our suffering is about. When we can instead *feel* our emotions and *balance* our internal elements, our suffering will take on new meaning:

“...when we can stand upright at the very center of the village inside us, we will no longer be endangered by the very things that give us life—by movement, by change, by confusion

and pain, by emotions, and by flow. When we're at home at the center of our souls, we'll be able to form clear and precise pictures of the situations that trouble us" (pg. 84).

**Discussion:** If you're comfortable, share some of the roots of your addictive or distracting behaviors. What are some of the ways you can shift these behaviors and start feeling the emotions hiding behind them?

### *Hiding behind Mr. Bunny*

Mr. Bunny is not just a child's toy; it's anything we use to distract ourselves from our emotions or our discomfort. We all use different forms of Mr. Bunny to protect ourselves, but because he's a tool of distraction and avoidance, Mr. Bunny doesn't actually bring lasting relief:

"If there's trouble or pain somewhere, we rarely sit with it and honor its truth.... Instead, we bring out some form of Mr. Bunny and terminate our discomfort. But in doing so, we multiply it into suffering that hurls us right out of our psyches.... the troubles get bigger, and the suffering becomes more powerful—and Mr. Bunny becomes the central figure in our culture" (pgs. 86-88).

**Discussion:** Can you track Mr. Bunny through our culture? Are there shared practices, traditions, recreational activities, or accepted behaviors that are actually some form of Mr. Bunny?

## 7. UNINTENTIONAL SHAMANS

### *The Role of Trauma in Soul-Making and Culture-Building*

Most of us have been through or know someone who has been through trauma:

"If you are not a trauma survivor, then one of your parents, siblings, mates, children, teachers, friends, or peers is.... The definition of trauma is individual; you know it when you see it or when you've experienced it. Trauma can occur when you've been assaulted or attacked, but it can also occur during surgery or dental procedures, in response to the death of a loved one, or even from witnessing someone else's trauma. You can also be traumatized emotionally when important people yell at or insult you, or when you're embarrassed in front of others. However, not everyone responds to trauma in the same way you and I might, and some traumas heal on their own" (pg. 91).

**Discussion:** Take care in bringing up past traumas in your group. If people are uncomfortable, let your group members choose topics they'd like to share from this chapter. If there are trauma survivors in the group, please direct them to the Trauma Healing resources on page 400.

### *Following the Tracks of Trauma*

Because we were not taught how to understand and deal with our traumas, many of us seek relief in some sort of dissociative state. These dissociative states can also be felt viscerally by others even though they may be unaware of what they're sensing:

“Empathically speaking, traumatic and dissociative behaviors are almost always contagious. Our disavowed (though never absent) empathic skills always alert us to traumatic behaviors and dissociation in other people.... As a species, we have been socialized to dissociate and distract ourselves from life as a matter of course, and as a result, most of us aren’t fully aware of how or why we dissociate” (pgs. 93-94).

**Discussion:** If you feel comfortable sharing, what are the dissociative practices you might use to deal with trauma? If the group would like to explore this topic more deeply, you can discuss the rest of the chapter and, specifically, the three responses to trauma on pages 95-98, and the three stages of trauma and initiation on pages 100-112.

## 8. THE ROLE OF EMOTIONS IN THE RESOLUTION OF TRAUMA

### *Water Will Carry You Home*

When we can understand and work with our emotions in empathic and respectful ways, they can help us work through pain and trauma. Emotions are messages from deep within ourselves; they tell us what’s going on – and what we need to do – in any situation:

“Emotions alert us to specific trouble, and they do so without any subterfuge. If we’re aware enough to listen to them—if our attention is focused and our minds are centered—our emotions will be able to contribute exactly what we need to move into and then out of any trouble imaginable.... With the support of our fully awakened emotions – those unceasing and abundant energies – we’ll be adequate to any situation, any issue, or any trauma” (pg. 113).

**Discussion:** If your group is comfortable, you can talk about any repetitive emotions that are trying to get your attention. What gifts and awareness are these emotions trying to bring to you?

### *Creating the Ceremonial Space: Anger and Fear Return*

“The first emotions that usually arise when people begin healing from distractions, avoidance behaviors, addictions, or traumatic dissociations are the various mood states of anger and fear.... Anger restores the boundaries we lose during trauma (and after we distract or dissociate), and fear restores the focus and intuition we lose when our instincts are overwhelmed. Together, anger and fear set the container or sacred space from which we can retrieve our honorable, intuitive, resilient core selves” (pg. 115).

**Discussion:** Whether you’ve survived trauma or not, have you experienced the healthy, boundary-restoring aspects of your anger and the intuitive and instinctual aspects of your fear?

### *The Complex Relationship between Anger and Forgiveness*

Many of us have been taught that forgiveness is necessary before we can move on from painful or traumatic situations. We’ve also been taught that anger is toxic. Sadly, these ideas are only partially true, and they can actually slow down our healing. Anger and forgiveness can work beautifully together if we know how to honor them appropriately:

“When you’re integrated and fully resourced, your anger will alert you to boundary violations.... When your psyche is properly protected again, you can then forgive the person or situation that damaged you..

Forgiveness is not an emotion, and it can’t take the place of one. It is a decision made by your whole self after your true emotional work has been done.... Real forgiveness isn’t a polite and teary gesture, made with a bowed head and demurely folded hands.... Real forgiveness is a process that creates true separations from torment and tormentors, and true separations require proper application of boundary-restoring anger, or they won’t mean a thing” (pgs. 118-119).

**Discussion:** What have you been told about forgiveness? Does your current concept of forgiveness include healthy anger, as it should? If not, how can you responsibly channel your anger and work with forgiveness in a healthy and empathic way?

## 9. THE STEADFAST PROMISE

### *Why Love Is Not an Emotion*

Karla sees deep and enduring love as entirely different from emotions, because deep love simply doesn’t behave in the same way emotions do (however, *romantic* love often does):

“When an emotion is healthy, it arises only when it’s needed, it shifts and changes in response to its environment, and it recedes willingly once it has addressed an issue. When love is healthy, it does none of these things. Love does not increase or decrease in response to its environment, and it does not change with changing winds. Love is not an emotion; it doesn’t behave the way emotions do. Real love is in a category of its own” (pg. 123).

**Discussion:** Have you experienced deep and lasting love – such as the healthy love of a parent and child, or the dedicated and adoring love of a pet? How is that type of love different from the volatility of romantic love and crushes?

## 10. BUILDING YOUR RAFT

### *The Five Empathic Skills*

Karla developed the Five Empathic Skills to help you integrate each of your elements and prepare to welcome all of your emotions into your life in healthy ways. Feel free to try these practices in your reading group, with people in your life, or on your own.

### *Getting Grounded*

Getting grounded is a way to create physical stability, comfort, and a sense of being centered in your body. Grounding relies on the soft and subtle forms of healthy sadness and fear; the *sadness* helps you let go of things you don’t need any more, and the *fear* helps you access your instincts and intuition and focus your attention on the present moment. Grounding is very stabilizing, but it can feel unusual, because it’s basically the opposite of the distraction and avoidance behaviors most of us have been taught:

“Centering our attention in our bodies in the present moment is uncommon in our culture because so many modern people make distinct separations between the physical (or profane) world and the spiritual (or divine) realm... When you have proper grounded focus, you can direct flows in each of your elements, and you can learn to navigate those flows rather than being pushed around. When you can navigate, you won’t need to distract yourself or avoid your emotions, because you’ll be able to focus your attention properly” (pg. 128).

**Exercise and Discussion:** Try out this practice as a group and share what it feels like to ground yourself. Is this grounded state natural for you, or does it feel very unusual?

### *Defining Your Boundaries*

Boundary definition is a job for healthy anger, but since we rarely see healthy anger in action, many of us have no idea how to set and define healthy and effective boundaries for ourselves:

“Our culture supports distraction and dissociation at every possible turn; therefore, remaining centered and integrated can be rather difficult. In order to stay focused and grounded, you’ll need protection and definition; you’ll need a sacred place where you can work without interference, and you’ll need a strong and flexible boundary around yourself” (pg. 134).

**Exercise and Discussion:** Try out this practice as a group. As you define your boundary, see if you can feel a connection between grounding yourself and setting your boundaries. Does boundary setting feel natural to you, or does it feel very strange?

### *Burning Contracts*

Burning Contracts is a wonderful exercise in emotional channeling:

“The skill of burning contracts brings together each of the skills you’ve learned so far and invites all of your elements into an active and focused healing that frees your soul from bondage.... The empathic practice of burning contracts supports your equilibrium by allowing you to separate yourself from behaviors and attitudes that destabilize you” (pgs. 141-142).

**Discussion:** Would you like to burn any of the old contracts you’ve made with yourself or others? Are there old behaviors that feel entrapping, or that you’d like to change? If you’ve already tried this practice on your own, share your experiences with the group.

### *Conscious Complaining*

Bringing consciousness to your complaining is a fun emotional channeling practice. An added bonus is that it’s very easy! Complaining consciously is a healthy way to become aware of, express, and release what’s going on inside of you – in safety and privacy:

“Conscious complaining is especially helpful in a life of striving, good works, and personal growth, where complaining is often considered less than saintly (this is a shame, because all by itself, a lack of permission to complain can cause unresolving repetitive mood states like worry, depression, and apathy).... Conscious complaining gives a voice to your

struggles, and in so doing, it restores your flow, your energy, your sense of humor, and your hope” (pg. 149).

**Exercise and Discussion:** Discuss the difference between Conscious Complaining and positive affirmations (see pages 149-151). If you’ve already tried this practice on your own, share your experiences with the group.

### *Rejuvenating Yourself*

As you work to balance your elements and engage with your emotions empathically, it’s important to have a practice for rejuvenating yourself. This practice helps you soothe yourself, take some quiet time to integrate the changes you’re making, and move forward refreshed:

“...it’s important to rejuvenate yourself so that old behaviors won’t be able to reanimate themselves. When you clear a space in your psyche with contract burning, it’s important to refill yourself consciously. If you don’t consciously refill that empty space, it will be filled unconsciously, and you don’t want that!” (pg. 153)

**Discussion:** What rejuvenates you and brings you a sense of calm and renewal? Do you have any regular rejuvenation practices now?

## Part II: Embracing Your Emotions

### 11. WADING INTO THE WATER

#### *Awakening All of Your Emotions*

In Part II, Karla organizes the emotions into 16 categories and explains the messages and gifts that each emotion brings to you. (In *The Art of Empathy* [Sounds True, 2013] she adds Anxiety for a total of 17 categories). It’s important to understand that these categories are not meant to separate emotions from one another:

“...I’ve separated the emotions into categories in order to simplify your movement into the water, but as your awareness deepens, you’ll find that—just as it was with your elements and intelligences—you can’t truly separate your emotions from one another. Emotions don’t fit into tidy compartments; there’s a tremendous amount of interplay between most emotional states. Emotions move under, over, and through each other in a healthy psyche, and they hide behind or crush each other in an unhealthy one” (pg. 161).

**Discussion:** Before delving into the emotions one by one, are there any emotions that you’d like to understand better or integrate more fully? Also, which emotions do you have a healthy relationship with right now?

#### *Welcoming Emotional Flow*

“The primary rule of emotional flow is this: All emotions are true. All emotions tell the absolute truth, either about the specific situation that brought the emotion into play, or about some area of the psyche.... *All emotions are true*. This doesn’t mean that all emotions

are *right* or that you should take their word for everything!... Some of your emotional reactions can display prejudices you didn't know you had, while others can make you lust after things that would damage you; therefore, you don't just follow your emotions like a fool.... Your task is to welcome that truth and support your emotional flow by bringing a full village of perspectives to each of your emotions" (pg. 162).

**Discussion:** Think about situations in which you may have overreacted, or in which the intensity of the emotion(s) you felt might not have been the best response. Would you approach the situation differently today?

## **The Anger-Based Emotions**

### *Anger, Apathy & Boredom, Guilt & Shame, and Hatred*

#### **12. ANGER**

##### *Protection and Restoration*

Anger brings you the gifts of boundaries, honor, a stable sense of self, and the capacity to restore these things when they've been damaged or impeded:

"Anger sets your boundaries by walking the perimeter of your soul and keeping an eye on you, the people around you, and your environment.... If your boundaries are broken (through the insensitivity of others or in any other way), anger comes forward to restore your sense of strength and separateness" (pgs. 167-168).

**Discussion:** Think about your relationship with your own anger. Is it healthy? Do you regularly express your anger, or do you more often repress it? Have you ever channeled your anger in a way that works for everyone? Reflect on the internal questions below and feel free to share your insights with the group.

***The Internal Questions for Anger:*** What must be protected? What must be restored?

#### **13. APATHY & BOREDOM**

##### *The Mask for Anger*

Apathy and Boredom arise to mask your anger when you can't work with it openly, or when it's not safe to access your anger:

"When you don't have the time, energy, or ability to work with your anger properly—when you don't protect your boundary or the boundaries of others, when you feel unable to speak out against the injustices you see, and when you feel incapable of affecting your surroundings, you'll often fall into the masking state of apathy (also known as boredom)" (pg. 192).

**Discussion:** Do you feel apathetic or bored in any areas of your life? If so, think about how your apathy and boredom might be providing a protective mask for you. Reflect on the internal questions below and feel free to share your insights with the group.

***The Internal Questions for Apathy & Boredom:*** What is being avoided? What must be made conscious?

## 14. GUILT & SHAME

### *Restoring Integrity*

Your healthy guilt and shame are close comrades with your healthy anger; their job is to warn you when you've done something (or are about to do something) to break someone else's boundaries:

“...guilt and shame are the sentries that face inward and protect your internal boundary (and the boundaries of others) from your own incorrect or ill-conceived behaviors.... With their assistance, you'll be able to honorably monitor your behavior, your emotions your thoughts, your physical desires, your spiritual longings, and your ego structure” (pgs. 197-198).

**Discussion:** Are there times when your shame feels repetitive or stuck? Is your shame *authentic* to you, or is it *foreign* shame that comes from authority figures, social training, toxic ideas, or the media? (The skill of Burning Contracts is a specific healing for foreign guilt and shame). Reflect on the internal questions below and feel free to share your insights with the group.

***The Internal Questions for Guilt & Shame:*** Who has been hurt? What must be made right?

## 15. HATRED

### *The Profound Mirror*

Hatred is the expression of our *shadow*, or those unlived and unwanted traits and behaviors that we deny in ourselves and despise in others:

“When we express hatred, we fool ourselves into thinking that we're totally separate from our hate targets—that we're nothing like them, that we're stronger, truer, better, and more righteous. If this were the case, though, we'd have appropriate boundaries and the ability to treat people with respect. Resentment, hatred, and contempt don't arise when we feel strong and whole! ... If we can channel hatred inside our own psyches, we can instantaneously reconstruct our boundaries, focus ourselves intently, and perform amazing feats of shadow-retrieval and evolution” (pg. 219).

**Discussion:** If you feel comfortable, talk about some of your hatreds in the group. What do you think your hate targets say about the unlived and unconscious parts of you? Reflect on the internal questions below and feel free to share your insights with the group.

***The Internal Questions for Hatred:*** What has fallen into my shadow? What must be reintegrated?

## The Fear-Based Emotions

### *Fear, Confusion, Jealousy & Envy, and Panic & Terror*

#### 16. FEAR

##### *Intuition and Action*

Fear is a vital emotion that brings you many gifts, including the ability to react skillfully to stimuli:

“...free-flowing fear brings you focus, instincts, and intuition. Fear hones your senses, alerts your innate survival skills, and increases your ability to respond effectively to novel or changing environments. When your fear flows freely, you’ll feel focused, centered, capable, and agile” (pg. 235).

**Discussion:** What are your reactions to the things we’ve all been taught about fear? Have you ever heard *any* positive messages about fear? Think about times when your fear has worked well for you, and reflect on the internal question below. Feel free to share your insights with the group.

**The Internal Question for Fear:** What action should be taken?

#### 17. CONFUSION

##### *The Mask for Fear*

Confusion arises to mask your fear when there’s too much input, too many decisions to be made, or too much going on. Confusion can give you a much-needed time out:

“Confusion actually tries to protect you by halting your actions, but it can easily spiral into a persistent and unresolving state. It’s fine to be confused, but it’s important to know *why* confusion appears. If you can unmask your confusion, you can revive your instincts and intuition, and discover why you’re being prevented from taking decisive action” (pgs. 257-258).

**Discussion:** Are there situations or relationships in which you regularly feel confused or indecisive? How might your confusion be protecting you in these situations or relationships? Reflect on the internal questions below and feel free to share your insights with the group.

**The Internal Questions for Confusion:** What is my intention? What action should be taken?

#### 18. JEALOUSY & ENVY

##### *Relational Radar*

Jealousy and Envy are similar but separate emotions:

“...jealousy arises in response to unfaithfulness or deceit in an intimate relationship, while envy arises in response to the unfair distribution of resources or recognition.... If you can

honor these two emotions, they'll contribute tremendous stability to your personality and your relationships" (pg. 263-264).

**Discussion:** What do your jealousy and envy tell you about what you may be missing, wanting, or needing in your life? Karla has said that a great question to ask jealousy and envy in order to help them focus on the entire situation and everyone's needs is: "What would be fair?" Reflect on the internal questions below and feel free to share your insights with the group.

***The Internal Questions for Jealousy & Envy:*** What has been betrayed? What must be healed and restored?

## 19. PANIC & TERROR

### *Frozen Fire*

Panic and Terror are closely related to fear, but they're distinct because:

"...these emotions bring us survival skills that help us do three very specific things. We're all aware of our "fight or flight" responses to danger; these two panic- and terror-based responses can protect us from harm, but there is another response that isn't as well known—it's called "freezing" (pgs. 281-282).

It's important to understand that panic and terror can be responses to everyday events:

"...panic-inducing traumas aren't restricted to serious assaults, combat injuries, or criminal acts. Traumas routinely arise from such mundane events as witnessing accidents or violence, from standard medical or dental procedures, or even from being emotionally assaulted by the everyday name-calling, prejudice, overstimulation, or isolation we all endure" (pg. 283).

**Discussion:** Panic and terror arise to literally save your life. Have there been times where you've experienced the lifesaving gifts of panic or terror? If you'd like to share with the group, please be careful to tell your story in a non-dramatic way so that you don't overwhelm your group mates. For instance, don't get into gory details – just note the traumatic incident (i.e., car crash, injury, betrayal), and focus on which of the three responses your panic selected to save your life: fight, flee, or freeze. Reflect on the internal questions below and feel free to share your insights with the group.

***The Internal Questions for Panic & Terror*** (these questions refer to cyclical replays of the panic-inducing event, which are often called PTSD): What has been frozen in time? What healing action must be taken?

## The Sadness-Based Emotions

### *Sadness, Grief, Depression, and Suicidal Urges*

#### 20. SADNESS

##### *Release and Rejuvenation*

Sadness brings you the gifts of grounding and the ability to release things (including ideas, relationships, behaviors, etc.) that aren't working for you any longer. If you can release things that don't work for you, you'll be rejuvenated and refreshed, and you'll be able to welcome things that *do* work:

“Sadness is your psyche’s water-bearer; it restores life-giving fluidity and movement when you’ve become arid and inflexible. Sadness helps you slow down, feel your losses, and release that which needs to be released—to soften into the flow of life instead of holding yourself rigidly and pushing ever onward” (pg. 295).

**Discussion:** Do you welcome your sadness and give it the time it needs to ground you and help you let go of things that no longer serve you? Or do you try to avoid, repress, or rush through sadness – so that it never has the chance to bring relaxation and rejuvenation to you? Reflect on the internal questions below and feel free to share your insights with the group.

**The Internal Questions for Sadness:** What must be released? What must be rejuvenated?

#### 21. GRIEF

##### *The Deep River of the Soul*

Grief is different from sadness. Sadness helps you let go of something that isn't working – you have a choice about letting go – but grief comes forward when something has died or has been lost forever. Grief arises to support you when you don't have a choice:

“Grief is a beautiful, languid, and powerful emotion that arises when death occurs, be it actual death or the death of profound attachments, ideas, or relationships.... Grief transports you to the deepest places when you have no choice but to let go... If you can't move into your grief, you'll only experience destabilization and dissociation in response to the shock of loss, injustice, inequity, and death, instead of being cleansed and renewed in the river of all souls” (pgs. 311-312).

**Discussion:** Grief is not openly supported by most people, except in funeral rituals. However, funerals can be stilted, shallow, or too rushed to allow people to grieve fully. As you think back to a recent death or loss, were you able to grieve fully? Or is your grief still lingering and waiting to support you in utterly letting go? Reflect on the internal questions below and feel free to share your insights with the group.

**The Internal Questions for Grief:** What must be mourned? What must be released completely?

## 22. SITUATIONAL DEPRESSION

### *Ingenious Stagnation*

Karla refers to depression as the “brilliant stop sign of the soul” that contains many emotions:

“Depression is not a single emotion, but a constellation of emotions, postures, decisions, and health issues. Depression is an ingenious (albeit overwhelming) movement in the psyche that takes you out of commission for crucial reasons.... Depression arises in response to exterior and interior conflicts that destabilize your psyche, and while it can be crushingly disruptive, depression has a vital healing purpose” (pgs. 327-328).

**Discussion:** Karla makes a distinction between *situational* depression and the more serious forms of depression (see pages 329-330). If you have worked with your own situational depression (which restricts your energy for important reasons), what did you find to be helpful? What *didn't* work? Reflect on the internal questions below and feel free to share your insights with the group.

**The Internal Questions for Situational Depression:** Where has my energy gone? Why was it sent away?

## 23. SUICIDAL URGES

### *The Darkness before Dawn*

Karla sees suicidal urges as crucial messages that arise when things have gone seriously wrong in your life. Suicidal urges are related to depression (which arises to restrict your energy when you really *shouldn't* move forward), but when suicidal urges arise, it can mean that something integral to your identity (an idea, a behavior, a relationship, a job, etc.) has become intolerable and needs to end completely – to die. However, *you* don't need to die. We need you here!

“...suicidal urges move forward when the difference between who you are in your deepest self and who you've become in this world of distractions and trauma is so extreme that it can no longer be tolerated. Suicidal urges are an emergency message from lost parts of your psyche—parts that are in real danger of soul death in your current situation.... Suicidal urges come forward with all their intensity and all their ferocity when your situation is so unbearable that you require an intense infusion of energy, *but they do not come to kill you*. Your suicidal urges arise when you need enough energy to wrench yourself bodily, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually out of a situation that is killing you already” (pgs. 347-348).

**Discussion:** If you feel comfortable with the subject, share a situation in which you felt suicidal urges. Since you survived, what helped you? Were you able to identify the intolerable situation that needed to end? Reflect on the internal questions below and feel free to share your insights with the group.

**The Internal Questions for Suicidal Urges:** What idea or behavior must end now? What can no longer be tolerated in my soul?

# The Happiness-Based Emotions

## *Happiness, Contentment, and Joy*

### 24. HAPPINESS

#### *Amusement and Anticipation*

Happiness is a wonderful emotion, and just like all emotions, it needs to arise when it's appropriate and recede when it's no longer needed. Unfortunately, most of us have been taught that happiness is something we need to feel 100 percent of the time:

“We chase after it, sell our souls for it, and try to cement ourselves into its territory, no matter what else is going on in our lives. This exploitation of happiness jeopardizes us, because when we refuse to honor any emotion except happiness, our emotional landscapes become stagnant and unbalanced, which makes us chase even more furiously after happiness” (pgs. 359-360).

**Discussion:** It's difficult to achieve a balanced relationship with happiness in a culture that chases after it as if it's a prize. Do you allow your happiness to flow and recede freely, in its own way and in its own time, or have you been taught to chase after it and never let it go? What is your relationship with your happiness?

**The Internal Statement for Happiness:** Thank you for this lively celebration!

### 25. CONTENTMENT

#### *Appreciation and Recognition*

Contentment arises when you've done something that makes you feel proud of yourself:

“Contentment arises when you're living up to your own expectations and your internal moral code, and when you've accomplished an important goal or done your work well and properly. Contentment comes forward in response to tangible actions and the mastery of clear-cut challenges. Contentment also arises when you've successfully navigated through your difficult emotions—especially your angers, hatreds, and shames” (pg. 365).

**Discussion:** When was the last time you felt content with yourself? Do you allow yourself to feel and enjoy contentment when you've done well or accomplished something? If not, how can you give yourself more credit when it's due?

**The Internal Statement for Contentment:** Thank you for renewing my faith in myself!

### 26. JOY

#### *Affinity and Communion*

Joy is an intense emotional state that arises when you feel blissful unity and communion with something larger than yourself:

“...joy seems to come forth during moments of communion with nature, love, and beauty—when you feel as if you're one with everything.... ...joy is not a goal in and of

itself, [it] arises in a life that's resourced with honest hardships, triumphs, ordeals, loss, hard work, love, laughter, grief, and wholeness" (pg. 369-371).

**Discussion:** Have you ever become too attached to the experience of joy and tried to hold on to it or force it to arise in place of another emotion or experience? If so, how can you develop a more appropriate and empathic relationship with your joy?

**The Internal Statement for Joy:** Thank you for this radiant moment!

## 27. STRESS AND RESISTANCE

*Understanding Emotional Physics*

"Stress" is not an emotion; it's an ambiguous term that stops us from accurately naming and feeling our emotions:

"The word "stress" has become a universal catchall for emotion in a culture that doesn't have a functional emotional vocabulary.... ...if we're sad, furious, frightened, exhilarated, exhausted, despondent, ashamed, mournful, panicky, or even suicidally depressed, we can use the word "stress" to describe our condition. This is not a sign of empathic awareness or emotional fluency" (pg. 378).

**Discussion:** Think about how often you use the word "stress" or "stressed out" to describe any number of emotions – and think about how you can begin to use the actual names of your real emotions.

## 28. EMOTIONS ARE YOUR NATIVE LANGUAGE

*The Fine Art of a Life Well Lived*

Take this time to process what you have experienced together as a group. Think about the different emotions and practices that you've discovered and discussed. Talk about Karla's final thoughts on our emotional vocabulary and the benefits of understanding people who are emotion shrines:

"If you can shift your perspective and honor the strength and courage of people in turmoil, you can shift your behavior and your demeanor so that you don't add insult to injury by fretting over them or treating them as broken and disordered entities" (pg. 390).

**Discussion 1:** Are you now or have you ever been an emotion shrine? Can you share your journey (or your hoped-for journey) out of the underworld?

**Discussion 2:** How extensive is your emotional vocabulary? If you need some support, you can download your **free** [Emotional Vocabulary List](#) at Karla McLaren's website.

*Thank you again for bringing your emotional awareness and empathy to a waiting world!*