

# SELF- REVELATION AND SELF-DISCOVERY EXERCISES

## By Writing About Oneself

- Exercise 1. Epitaphs over your Tomb  
 Exercise 2. Who are you...?  
 Exercise 3. My Memoirs  
 Exercise 4. Letter Writing  
 Exercise 5. Essay Writing

### NOTES ON HOW TO CONDUCT THESE EXERCISES

1. *These exercises are not to be used at random for fun, or just as time-fillers. They are tools and instruments towards "self-revelation" and "self-discovery".*
2. *When an exercise is attempted, make sure that there is ample time for processing its results.*
3. *Be judicious in the use of confrontation. It is dangerous.*
4. *No direct questions or discussions should be had on any personal material shared.*
5. *Only clarifications may be asked from the one making the sharing.*
6. *No one should be given feedback unless explicitly, he asks for it.*
7. *Participants should feel absolutely free to share only what they feel confident to share.*
8. *In case someone in the group is revealing or disclosing personal and confidential material, the moderator- if he thinks it proper- may stop him from doing so.*
9. *Deep and confidential sharing can be done only when the group is mature, receptive, empathetic and discreet enough to keep confidentiality.*
10. *If the moderator has a "hunch" that someone has some serious personal problem, he should not tackle the problem in public. If he feels qualified to handle it, he may call the person concerned for a one-to-one sharing and counseling session. If he does not feel competent, he may refer that person to a professional.*

### USES OF THESE EXERCISES:

- ✓ *For awareness sessions.*
- ✓ *For self-discovery.*
- ✓ *For group building.*
- ✓ *To improve one's self-image.*
- ✓ *For communication workshops.*
- ✓ *As a means of "self-expression".*

- ✓ *To help participants verbalize ideas, feelings and experiences which they have not yet been unable to express conceptually.*
- ✓ *For growth sessions.*
- ✓ *For one to one counseling situations.*
- ✓ *To uncover latent fears, apprehensions, negative feelings, biases.*

## Exercise 1

### EPITAPHS OVER YOUR TOMB

#### Note for the Moderator:

- ✓ This exercise is very simple and suits all audiences.
- ✓ It may help the participants to explicate their self-image both in their positive and negative aspects.
- ✓ It has potential both for "self-revelation" and "self-discovery". The self-disclosure part will chiefly take place through proper interaction with the group members and the moderator.
- ✓ This method helps participants to "verbalize" what they feel about themselves, what they like and what they dislike of themselves.

#### Group Size:

Not to exceed 12 or 14 people. If the number of participants is large, divide them into smaller groups. Moderators for the small groups are necessary.

#### Requirements:

Full scalp sheets of writing or drawing paper.

Thick color felt pens

### 1. Hints for the Participants:

- ✓ You will be asked to write some epitaphs that could be engraved on your tomb. (*An epitaph is a short, concise sentence to be engraved on a person's tomb, which summarizes a salient trait of that person's life and character, for instance – "Here lies man who loved other more than self"*)
- ✓ Use the big sheets of paper and the felt pens given to you to do the job.
- ✓ Write several epitaphs in big, bold, clear, capital letters. One epitaph on one sheet only

### 2. Writing the Epitaphs

#### a) Write three different epitaphs of "positive" content:

- Namely, of things you have accomplished in life, of things you are proud of, of things that brought you joy and satisfaction, etc. or instance, "He shone like a bright star in the world of sports." "Here lies to rest one who never rested doing good to others".
- On the back of each sheet write down the reasons why you have given yourself such epitaph.
- Give examples and instances of your life to prove your point.

#### b) Write three epitaphs of "negative" content:

- Namely .short sentences they summarize your failures in life; they will refer to things you do not like in you or in your life, or to things you feel ashamed of, or to things you would like to forget, etc. You may be a bit sarcastic and witty; for instance, "He showed the way to others, but he never walked on it"; "He closed his eyes to the good in others; neither he could not see good inhimself".
- And on the back of each sheet write the reasons why you have given yourself such epitaph.
- Give examples and instances of your life to prove your point.

### **3. Sharing - Interaction - Reflection:**

#### **Sharing:**

- The group members will share their epitaphs with the group and explain the reasons why they have chosen them.
- After one member finishes his sharing, all may ask for clarifications. No questioning and discussion will be allowed.

#### **Interaction**

- Encourage interaction. It is through interaction that self-discovery may take place.
- When the sharing and interaction is over, those who wish may ask the group for some feedback. *Note that no one should be given feedback unless he has asked for it*

#### **Reflection**

- The moderator will help the group to reflect on the group processes and on the insights gained.
- He will offer the group his observations.

#### **Personal Prayer and interiorization**

Give the group time for silent personal prayer and examination.

#### **Shared group-prayer**

Close the event with a shared group prayer in which all is enjoined to pray for one another.

## **Exercise 2**

### **"WHO ARE YOU?"**

#### **Dynamics of this Exercise:**

- ✓ The persons taking part in this exercise will be repeatedly bombarded with the question: "**Who are you?**"
- ✓ The exercise will start by posing this question to the group members. "**Who are you?**"
- ✓ Give them about 2 or 3 minutes to write down their replies
- ✓ After that, request the participants to reveal some other aspects of themselves, - some new facets of their personality, something more about their character, yearnings, frustrations, achievements, virtues, vices, dreams, expectations, loves, hates, etc. by asking again the same question: "**Who are you?**"
- ✓ The same question is posed over again for a further 15 to 20 minutes period or more.
- ✓ Experience shows that as time moves on and the process gains momentum, the answers become more and more personal and intimate.

- ✓ At the sharing session, the moderator and the participants have to be careful not to coax others into disclosing more than what they wish to share

### **Requirements:**

Writing materials..

### **Group Size:**

- The group should not exceed 8 or 10 persons. If the number of participants is large, split them into smaller groups of 8 to 10 each.
- The presence of good moderators in the small the groups is a must.

### **PROCEDURE:**

#### **1. Questioning:**

- ✓ The moderator will tell the group that they are to reply in writing to only one single question: "Who are you?"
- ✓ He will alert them to the fact that they are free to reply to the question or not, but that if they reply, their answers should be frank, sincere and true.
- ✓ The question will be asked several times over a period of 15 to 20 minutes.
- ✓ Each time they reply to the question, they will give new facets, new aspects of themselves, their longings, fears, expectations, loves and hates, failures and successes, virtues and vices, etc. as much as they would like to reveal of themselves.
- ✓ The moderator will keep asking the same question during the time agreed upon. They will write their replies seriously and in silence.

#### **2. Group Sharing:**

**Notice: Strict confidentiality should be demanded from all participants on all materials shared.**

- The participants in turns, will share whatever they wish to share of what they have written.
- After each one has shared, clarifications may be asked.
- Questions or discussion on what has been shared will not be allowed.
- The clarifications over, interaction will be encouraged.
- Anyone may ask for feedback from the group. *No one will be given feedback unless asked for*
- The moderator will offer his own observations to the group.
- Time should be allotted for personal reflection and prayer.
- Close the event with a shared group-prayer in which all are enjoined to pray for one another.

### **APPENDIX Variation of the Same Exercise**

**The answers to the question "WHO ARE YOU could be given orally instead of writing:**

- ✓ In that case, the exercise will be conducted strictly in pairs only.
- ✓ One partner will question: "Who are you?" again and again for about 5 minutes, while the other replies.
- ✓ After 5 minutes they exchange roles.
- ✓ When the time for questioning is over, they may exchange impressions, views and feelings about the exercise and each other.
- ✓ They may help each other to understand themselves better and encourage to self acceptance.

- ✓ Finally, all the pairs will meet in the general group and exchange views, experiences and insights. Nothing personal shared in pairs will be mentioned at the general session.

## **Exercise 3**

### **"MY MEMOIRS"**

#### **Note for the Moderator:**

This exercise is simple and meant for all audiences. It is especially useful

- ✓ At the beginning of an event as an "ice-breaking exercise"
- ✓ For community or group building.
- ✓ To initiate a counseling or spiritual direction relationship.
- ✓ To commence a directed retreat.

#### **Requirements:**

Writing materials..

#### **Group Size:**

For the sharing part of it, groups of not more than 10 persons.

#### **Note for the Moderator**

The memoirs can be written in two ways:

**1<sup>st</sup> Way:** In a historical sequence of events, namely, childhood, adolescence, youth, etc.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Way:** Chapter or area-wise, namely, about social life, work or professional life, home and family life, etc.

The moderator has to clearly tell the participants the theme on which he wants them to write. For instance:

- ✓ Period or periods of life. (*Childhood, boyhood, youth, last ten years, last year, etc.*)
- ✓ Themes or areas to be covered. (*Home, educational, occupations, social life, etc.*)
- ✓ Or a combination of both. (*Home life during adolescence; social life during college days; religious life during the last five years, etc.*)
- ✓ Once the theme on which to write has been announced, the moderator should not give the participants any other hints. They will go about their work as they feel.

### **1. Personal Work. Writing their Memoirs:**

- Give the participants the pertinent instructions and allot them sufficient time to complete the assignment.
- To help you to delineate the extent and content of the memoirs you would like the participants to write about, confer the appendix at the end of this exercise.

## **2. Group Work. Sharing - Interaction - Reflection:**

### **The sharing**

It may be done in different ways. All depends on the aim the moderator has in mind:. For instance

- ✓ It can be done alone with the moderator for counseling, guidance and spiritual direction.
- ✓ It can be done in pairs for the purpose of communication, listening, building relationships, creating a feeling of acceptance.
- ✓ It can be done in small groups of 8 to 10 persons for group dynamics, for self-revelation and self- disclosure, or for group therapy sessions. In that case the presence of a good moderator for each group is a must..

### **Procedure**

If the main purpose of this of the exercise is "self-revelation", follow this procedure

- ✓ One participant at a time will do the sharing of what he has written. He should feel free to share only what he would like to share.
- ✓ When he has finished, the group members may ask for clarifications. Questions and discussion on what has been shared will not be allowed.

**Interaction** After clarifications, interaction will follow. When interaction is over anyone may ask for feedback from the moderator or from the group. *No one will be given feedback unless he asks for it.*

**Moderator's remarks:** At the end the moderator may offer his remarks, comments and observations.

### **Closure:**

Moderator, give the participants some time for silent personal prayer and interiorization. End with a shared group-prayer in which all are enjoined to pray for one another

## **APPENDIX: Some Hints to Help Writing the Memoirs**

### **A) By Historical Sequence of Life**

#### **1. Childhood Memories:** (Up to the age of 9 or 10)

Write sort of autobiographical notes on your childhood days, specially your feelings as a child. Relive them. Stress those events that affected you deeply, however trivial they may look to you now.

- Think of persons: Dad, mum, brothers, sisters, relatives, friends, teachers, neighbors, servants, school mates, etc. that influenced you very much.
- Recall to mind places, houses, schools, churches, playgrounds, parks and gardens, roads where you lived in
- Remember events like picnics, parties, celebrations, deaths, holidays, outings, visits to people and places, etc. that impressed you.
- Think of your body: health, sicknesses, strength or weakness, games, growth, discovery, sex, your senses, etc. that affected your life.
- Visualize your emotional life: feelings, sentiments, joys, sadness, passions, anger, jealousy, etc.
- Occupation: studies, home-work, helping at home, etc.

- Prayer life and God, church, prayers, religious practices, remorse, guilt, sins, your image of God at that time, religious upbringing, moral life, etc... that marked you for life.

**2. Boyhood Memories:** (Up to 13 to 14)

(Same as above)

**3. Adolescence Memories.** (Up to 17 to 18)

(Same as above)

**4: Youth Memories.**(Up to 24 or 25)

(Same as above)

**5. Adult Memories:** (Up today)

(Same as above)

**B) By Chapter or Area-wise:**

**1, Home Life:** Parents... family spirit..., strengths and weaknesses of the family... family principles and values..

**2. Academic Life:** Education... school days... college... reading habits... studies... intellectual pursuits... artistic pursuits... technical skills...

**3. Emotional Life:** Feelings.... emotional balance... fears... anxieties... ambitions... interests... obsessions... compulsions... sex... love... privacy.... shame... psychological complexes...

**4. Moral Life:** Virtues... shortcomings... strengths...weaknesses... habits... dispositions...

**5. Spiritual Life:** Faith... religious practices... prayer life,..., beliefs... devotions., relationship with God... ideal of God

**6. Occupational or Professional Life:** Working habits... jobs... occupations., job satisfaction., employer-employee relationship... changing jobs...

**7. Social Life:** Friends... interpersonal relationships... parties... good-poor mixer... social commitment... concern for others... civic responsibilities... political life.

**8. Physical Life:** Health..., sickness... fitness... care of the body... coping with constitutional limitations... vigor...

**9. Recreational Life:** Leisure... games... sports... outings ....., hobbies... love of outdoors... movies... music... theatre ... television... reading...

## Exercise 4

### LETTER -WRITING

**Note for the Moderator:**

- ✓ This method is very simple and suited to all groups.
- ✓ The participants are asked to write a letter to their best friend or confidant to whom they reveal something of themselves.

- ✓ The topic of the letter is left to the choice of the moderator keeping in mind the areas of his participants' life he wants them to share.
- ✓ They can also be given a list of possible topics they can write about and choose the one that appeals them most. (*The choice of topic in itself will tell much about the writer*)
- ✓ The participants should know that their letters will be shared. (*Of course, all will be free to share only what they feel confident to share*)

### **Requirements:**

Writing material.

## **1. Personal Work. Letter-Writing:**

- Ask the participants to write a letter to their best friend on a topic you wish them to share
- Else, give the participants a list of topics and instruct them to write on any of topic in the list they like best, for instance: :
  1. The saddest day of my life; the saddest year of my life.
  2. The happiest day of my life; the happiest year of my life.
  3. The unluckiest day of my life.
  4. Turning points in my life.
  5. Regrets I have about my past and why.
  6. Fears I have of the future and why.
  7. My job/studies/work.
  8. My home problems.
  9. My personal problems.
  10. My religious doubts and fears.
  11. Things I have never told anyone.
  12. Things I would like to know but do not dare ask.
  13. My difficulties in dealing with people.
  14. My failures.
  15. My successes.
  16. My ambitions and secret longings.
  17. I would like to get from others.
  18. My strengths and my weaknesses.

## **2. Group Work. Sharing - Interaction - Reflections - Prayer**

### **The sharing**

- ✓ Will be done in groups not exceeding 8 to 10 persons.
- ✓ The presence of a moderator in each group is required.
- ✓ The participants, by turn will read their letters to the group. (*They will be free to read only that much they feel confident to share*)
- ✓ After a participant has finished reading his letter, all may ask for clarifications.
- ✓ Questions and discussion on what has been shared will not be allowed.

### **Interaction:**

- ✓ After sharing and clarifications, interaction will follow.
- ✓ Encourage interaction as much as possible.

### **Moderator's Remarks:**



- ✓ When sharing and interaction is over, the moderator may give his own observations and comments, if any.
- ✓ Anyone may ask for feedback from the moderator or from the group. *No one will be given feedback unless he asks for it.*

**Closure:**

- ✓ Give the participants some time for silent personal prayer and reflection.
- ✓ Close the session with a shared group-prayer in which all are enjoined to pray for one another.

**VARIATIONS OF THE EXERCISE:**

- ✓ The participants may address their letters to one member of the group.
- ✓ For this purpose they should pair up.
- ✓ With permission of the authors, the moderator may read the letters to the group
- ✓ No sooner a letter is read, all will jot down their "emotional" reactions to the letter.
- ✓ The participants, will be invited to guess who is the author of the letter just read, and explain why or how they made their guess.
- ✓ The author of the letter may disclose his identity to the group.
- ✓ They will share their reactions with the group or with the author at the "interaction" stage.

## **Exercise 5**

### **ESSAY WRITING**

**Note for the Moderator:**

- ✓ This method uses "essay-writing" as a means to self-revelation.
- ✓ Topics that are vague, emotionally charged and ambiguous have great potential for "self-revelation and self-discovery. . Confer the: "List of 40 Titles Suggested for Essay Writing" appended at the end of this exercise.
- ✓ The topic or subject-matter of the essay has to be fixed by the moderator according to the aims he has in mind. For the exercise.
- ✓ Occasionally it may prove very revealing to give the list of suggested topics printed below to the participants and allow them to choose the ten topics that appeals them most.
- ✓ Finally, ask to choose one among the ten as their favorite to write their essay. In the very choice of the topics they will disclose a lot of themselves.
- ✓ This method may take quite a long time to go through.
- ✓ Fix beforehand the time allotted to complete the essays.

**Group Size:**

This method works best in small groups, say of 5 or 6 members. If the number of participants exceeds 8, divide them into smaller groups of 4 to 6. In that case moderators are required for all groups.

**Requirements:** Writing material for all.

## **1. Essay Writing:**

### Instructions to the participants:

1. Write an essay on this topic. "....."  
*or as alternative*, you will be given a list of 40 topics for essay writing. Choose from them the one that appeals you most
2. You have (.....) minutes to complete your essay.
3. Be true to your feelings and experiences.
4. Be original; be yourself, be sincere.
5. Describe your thoughts and feelings as vividly and as realistically as you can.
6. This is not an essay writing competition. No ratings will be given; no comparisons will be made.

## **2. Sharing — Interaction — Reflecting:**

### ➤ **Sharing:**

The group members will share their essays

They may share only what they feel comfortable to share.

After a person has read his/her essay, clarifications may be asked. Questions and discussions will not be allowed.

- **Interaction** will follow. Encourage the group to interact and so foster further self-revelation.
- **Reflection:** The moderator may reflect on the processes of the group and its findings.
- **Feed-back:** After the sharing and the interaction are over, the participants may ask for feedback from the moderator or the group. *No one will be given feedback unless he asks for it.*
- **Personal Prayer and Interiorization:** Give the participants some time for personal reflection and interiorization
- **Group Prayer.** Close the session with a shared group-prayer in which all are enjoined to pray for one another.

## **APPENDIX**

### **A List of Suggested Titles for Essay Writing**

1. My Wildest Dreams.
2. The Worst Hours of My Life.
3. If I Were God and I Could Create Myself Again...
4. If Only I Were Allowed to...
5. What I Would Like Most to Get Rid of...
6. My Greatest Torment...
7. When I Think About It, I Feel Like...
8. I am so Powerless!
9. If Only People Could Understand!
10. If You would Really Know Me, Would you still like Me?
11. Will They Ever Take Me Seriously?
12. The Less Known Side of Me.
13. Yes, I am Afraid, So What?
14. No One Seems to Love Me!
15. Am I like or not, like other People?

16. My Experiences with Friendship.
17. I Need Someone in My Life.
18. If Only I Could Speak!
19. Things I Would Like to Forget.
20. Why I Am Afraid of Life?
21. My Regrets.
22. What's so Wonderful about Life, After All?
23. My Changing Moods.
24. My Love Experiences.
25. My Philosophy of Life.
26. My Secret Thoughts.
27. My Apparent Self.
28. This Is What I Am, Damn It! Take It or Leave It!
29. I have to Lean on Others for Almost Everything!
30. The Bright and Dark Sides of My Life are...
31. I Have to Face It! But How?
32. They Say Life Is Beautiful. Is It So?
33. They Say That All Men Are Searching. What Am I Searching for?
34. My Greatest Joy.
35. I Can Go Alone in Life? I do not Need Others.
36. My God-Experience.
37. Will God ever forgive me?
38. They Say That We Have to Love Others. Why and What For?
39. Will I Ever Cope with My Anxiety?
40. Life Is a Hoax! I Feel Cheated!