



# Connect: To Your Changemaking Identity and Those You Protect

Note: [Click here to submit your work anonymously](#) for your mentors to read. This will help us improve our program for future students and track your volunteer hours, which will be added to your certificate at the end of the program.

## Purpose:

*Through observation and reflection, increase your sense of connection to people and the natural world. Embody your identity as a compassionate changemaker, in other words, as someone who is using their energy to protect people and the natural world.*

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# 1. Introduction

What is identity? Put simply, identity is how we view ourselves, and the things about ourselves we think make us who we are. Identity, though, isn't stagnant or fixed -- it can change, and we have more control over it than we may think.

Identifying as a changemaker means viewing yourself as a person using your life energy to protect others and the natural world. Creating and owning this identity can be transformative for many people and can lead to a greater sense of empowerment. More than how we view ourselves, our identity also includes how we feel about ourselves and the world beyond us. The more we embrace an identity that feels in alignment with our values and desired role in the world, the better we feel in our everyday lives.

How does one begin to build and embody an identity for themselves as a changemaker? Identifying as a changemaker invites us to view ourselves differently, from a place of compassionate inner power. Rather than viewing ourselves as a single individual, we must extend our sense of self to include all human and non-human beings, and seek to provide compassion and be in service of the greater good. When we really believe ourselves to be in service of all things, we can find more energy and motivation in our lives to continue that work, while building resilience to personal challenges and adversity. When we face a challenge, we can find the courage to overcome it knowing we are working toward something greater than our own experience.

When our identity extends beyond ourselves, we become more willing to make personal sacrifices to prioritize opportunities and efforts to protect and serve the highest good of all things. We also practice identifying with the world in a way that emphasizes that we are interconnected to all other things and can act to benefit the interconnected web of life. If, on the contrary, we continue to view ourselves only as individuals, separate from others, we may harder encounter challenges or resistance when trying to work selflessly in the service of others and the broader web of life.

This activity is about taking the time to consciously root our compassion-driven work in the world in how we personally identify and feel as a person. You will do this by recognizing your intentions for the betterment of others, acknowledging your work's alignment with the betterment of others and sitting presently with the people and natural world you seek to help, while cultivating those connections and emotions. Your goal is to generate positive emotions like gratitude, pride and joy while you sit with people and nature, by allowing yourself to see yourself as active protectors and healers.

As we practice identifying as a true changemaker, it becomes easier to feel and act with compassion for people and the planet. It becomes positively ingrained in who we know ourselves to be -our compassionate identity becomes subconscious and we no longer need to try, because we have *become* a new version of ourselves. The more powerful the positive emotion you can let yourself feel and generate, the stronger this identity will become and you will begin to see positive impacts in your life. So let yourself feel freely and dig deep! Any experience you have while doing this exercise is OK, and practicing it over time will bring new feelings you may not have accessed in your first go.

## 2. Instructions

### 2.1 Activity 1: Sit with the Natural World

Find a place where you can sit in or in view of a living part of nature. You might choose to go to a place with a beautiful view of nature, a park, your favourite tree or any plant you can find in your home, garden or otherwise. You can choose to sit with a single or many plants, animals, insects, fish or any other living organism. It's important you can sit with a being or many beings of the living natural world peacefully, undistracted for a period of time. Once you have chosen a place, go there and sit with the living beings you are visiting. Take the reflection questions below with you, to read and ponder as you observe the natural world. Before you begin, allow yourself a few minutes to become quiet, relaxed and to breathe deeply. This will help calm your body and mind, so you can get the most out of the activity.

Now that you are sitting or standing with the beings you've chosen to observe, follow the questions and prompts below. Give yourself 15-30 minutes to reflect in this part. While you are encouraged to spend the most time in the space of thought, reflection and gratitude you might also choose to write reflections in your journal to return to later.

1. **What do you appreciate about the natural space or beings you are observing?** As you appreciate what is before you, offer gratitude for everything that space or being is, as it is, without judgement. Consider: their appearance and visible beauty, how they sound, how they act, how they came to be in the form they are now (ie. a tree grew from a seed, a bird was given life through an egg and the natural forces that brought its parent birds together to create it), marvel at its colours, wonder how many other beings like it might exist in the world. Let your thoughts and appreciation flow freely.
2. **Imagine how long the natural life before you has existed and evolved on Earth to be here today with you.** Consider that the earliest recorded life on Earth appeared at least [3.5 billion years ago](#) (Pappas, 2017), about [10.3 billion years after](#) (Choi, 2017) the beginning of the expansion and evolution of the universe itself. Over billions of years, this first life on Earth evolved and complexified to become not only the natural life you are seeing, but it also became you. You share an evolutionary story with the natural life before you, here now, at the same moment in Earth's history as living beings who

emerged from the earliest forms of life. Imagine all the series of events, moments, changes, challenges and innovations you and the natural world went through to be in the form you exist in here and now. This unique, irreplicable story includes all of human history and beyond. It is invaluable, beautiful and virtuous by the fact it happened at all. You are not separate from the natural world, you are it.

3. **Imagine what it means to you, to be a protector of the gifts of this evolutionary story, by putting your energy into changemaking.** Consider that as a human being, you are an expression of nature's evolution that has reached a point where you, as nature, are aware of being aware itself. You have the ability to sense, wonder about and protect all the other expressions of you (all other living beings), for the betterment of the whole, not only yourself. You are nature protecting itself and every other version of you expressed in all other living beings. You are the universe aware of and experiencing itself. Through you and other changemakers, the universe is becoming aware both of its own destruction on planet Earth, and the potential to end this destruction. By becoming conscious of the depth of the story of your own evolution, you become able to sense and feel immense gratitude for the virtues of all the life around you, and can recognize and be in awe of their beauty. By protecting the beings of planet Earth with your changemaking energy, you are protecting the gifts of billions of years of evolution.
4. **Close your session by sitting in gratitude for all you've been able to see, understand and feel today.** Feel grateful that you allowed yourself time to connect and feel the fire of compassionate changemaking grow inside of you. Feel free to redo this process in other spaces, with other beings as many times as you would like. The more you step into this practice of thought, embodiment and identity as a protector of our evolutionary virtues, the deeper your appreciation of all things and yourself will become.

### **A Daily Practice:**

As you go about your daily life, remind yourself of your session today whenever you see a plant, an animal or other part of the living world. Show yourself some love for continuing to care and act to protect the natural world. Through this daily practice, your feelings of empowerment and gratitude for your changemaking work and the natural world will become more automatic and a normal part of your life, as you train your body and mind to see and feel the world, and your changemaking, in this way.

## 2.2 Activity 2: Sit With the People You Love

In this activity, you will repeat a similar process to activity one, only this time you will sit with people you love, such as friends, family or a partner. Find a time and place where you can sit quietly in the presence of a person or people you love. Spend 10-20 minutes reflecting on the prompts below. While you are encouraged to spend the most time in the space of thought, reflection and gratitude you might also choose to write reflections in your journal to return to later.

1. **What do you appreciate about the people you are observing?** As you appreciate the people before you, offer gratitude for everything that person is, as they are, without judgement. Consider everything you find beautiful about them, such as their best traits, personality, abilities, skills, talents and so on. Think about all the things they might enjoy, like eating, playing, singing, storytelling, creating art, etc. Can you see their experience in life as unique to them and special simply by the essence of them having this experience at all? Can you see their experience as similar to yours in that like you, they enjoy things that make them happy and that those things are important to them? Do you share an enjoyment of any of those things they enjoy, or like doing it with them? What would it mean to them, and you, to protect and empower their ability to do those things they love?
2. **Imagine all the conditions and events of the past that brought them to the life they have right now.** How many generations of ancestors came before them? How much water and energy from food did it take over their lifetime to grow and heal their body, and how much water and energy did it take from the planet and the sun to grow that food? What about the food of all the people in their ancestry? Consider how they have lived a life of many moments and experiences, with many people and in many places, that have shaped every aspect of their being (just like your experiences have shaped you). They were also shaped by the circumstances that led to their very existence, that brought together their parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, etc., all the way down their ancestral lineage. Beyond that, remember that this ancestry extends beyond their human lineage and includes the lineage of 3.5 billion years of evolution of life on Earth, which created the conditions for their human lineage to begin at all. Can you see the history and depth of how these people came to be loved ones in your life?
3. **What does it mean to you to be a protector of these people you love, and of everything they love?** You are someone who can feel compassion for the

people you love and who will act to protect their opportunities for a happy, healthy and safe life. You are special in that you can truly appreciate that these people are here on Earth with you at this time in the story of our evolution as a planet. You can recognize and value our shared history and seek to protect it for the future. As a changemaker, you can act to protect all the beauty in the lives and experiences of your loved ones. As you sit with your loved ones, can you feel grateful for your opportunity to be a changemaker? Can you feel grateful you have compassionate perspectives? Can you feel proud to be a person acting to heal the world for the future of your loved ones and all others to come?

4. **Close your session by sitting in gratitude for all you've been able to see, understand and feel today.** Feel grateful that you allowed yourself time to connect and feel the fire of compassionate changemaking grow inside of you. Feel free to redo this process with other people as many times as you would like.

#### **A Daily Practice:**

As you go about your daily life, remember your session today whenever you see any of your loved ones. Also try to extend gratitude and compassion for strangers or other people you do not know well -- they too are worthy of your protection and care. Feel strong and proud knowing you are acting for the greater good and contributing to a better world for them and all others to come. Through this daily practice, your feelings of empowerment and gratitude for your changemaking work and compassion with others will become more automatic and a normal part of your life, as you train your body and mind to see and feel the world, and your changemaking, in this way.

### 3. References

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