

Spirit Rock



Strength with Heart

A Nine-Month Program for Men

Main Teachers

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Guest Teachers: TBA

Course Overview

Many men today are navigating a bind. The inherited map of masculinity—the one that prized stoicism, self-reliance, and emotional detachment above all else—has lost its authority for a lot of men, and rightly so. But what comes next is still being worked out, in real time, across therapy rooms, men’s groups, meditation halls, marriages, and kitchen tables.

Strength with Heart is a nine-month program for men who want to do this work more effectively. It is not a weekend intensive, a lecture series, or a peer support group dressed up as a curriculum. It is a structured nine-month container that combines contemplative practice, depth psychology, somatic work, and small-group connections and accountability—taught by three senior teachers who have spent decades in this material.

This program is for the man who knows he has more capacity for both tenderness and backbone than he is currently experiencing and expressing—and who wants tools, community, and time to develop both. It is not built around the idea that toughness and sensitivity are opposites to be reconciled. Most men carry both already, in different domains, in different contexts, with different people. The question is range: can you read what a moment actually requires and respond from the part of you that fits? Being

psychologically flexible allows you to meet different moments with strength, wisdom, and skill.

The teaching draws primarily from three streams. Rinzai Zen and Insight Meditation anchor the contemplative practice, bringing complementary Buddhist traditions of disciplined attention and heart cultivation—daily sitting, breath, lovingkindness, and the trained attention that lets a man notice his patterns instead of being run by them. Depth psychology—including parts work and attachment theory supported by four decades of clinical group facilitation with men—provides the maps for understanding how those patterns formed and how they shift. Somatic and martial arts practice grounds the work in the body, where lasting change actually lives.

We call the integration Strength with Heart: men who can do well in the world and also be good for it. This is a sustained path of practice. The work draws from Rinzai Zen, Insight Meditation, depth psychology, men's group facilitation, leadership expertise, somatic practice, and martial arts. These streams are woven into one path: learning to see clearly, feel honestly, act skillfully, and live with both power and care.

What You're Actually Stepping Into

Here is what you can expect.

WHAT THIS IS

- **A nine-month structured program** with daily, weekly, and monthly commitments
- **Designed to get real results** in the lives of the men who participate
- **A sustained practice path** to become steadier, more honest, more embodied, and more relationally skillful over time
- **A combination** of contemplative practice rooted in Rinzai Zen and Insight Meditation, depth psychology, and somatic work
- **A small, accountable community** working with the same material at the same time
- **Taught by three senior teachers** with deep credentials in their respective traditions

WHAT THIS ISN'T

- **A replacement for therapy.** If you are working with serious trauma, active addiction, or acute mental health concerns, this program complements that work but does not substitute for it.
- **A weekend initiation** or a one-time breakthrough event. The work here is incremental and cumulative.
- **A claim to have invented men's work.** This field has been evolving for forty years, and we draw gratefully on the lineages that came before—including the ManKind Project, Michael Meade's and Robert Bly's mythopoetic work, Richard Rohr's initiation teachings, the Internal Family Systems community, leadership development, and the broader contemplative and relational traditions. What's distinctive here is the integration, the practice structure, and the teachers offering it. (add cross disciplinary lens)

Program Intentions

Over nine months, participants will practice:

- Building a positive, accountable community of men who challenge and support one another
- Recognizing inherited conditioning —family, culture, trauma, success scripts, masculine training—and meeting it with greater awareness and choice
- Cultivating emotional range, resilience, and contemplative depth
- Finding courage in its daily forms: willingness to introspect to develop self-knowledge, telling your personal truths to others, asking for help, repairing harm, taking responsibility, and staying present when old habits want to take over
- Developing a “mentor mindset” for the younger men in their lives: sons, students, clients, employees, nephews, and younger men in their communities
- Holding strong boundaries without closing your heart, and staying open without losing your ground

How the Course Works

The course is designed as a steady rhythm of teaching, practice, reflection, and accountability. Each month focuses on one of the Nine Guideposts (below), giving men

enough time to learn the material, practice it in daily life, and bring their real experience back into the group.

- **Length:** Nine months, one Guidepost per month, plus opening and closing integration sessions
- **Opening session:** Four hours. Orientation, community formation, and the first deep dive
- **Monthly deep dive:** 3-hour live sessions at the start of each month
- **Home groups** 30–45 minutes, in week 3 of each month with discussion, practice, and Q&A
- **Monthly teacher Q&A**
- **Daily meditation:** Pre-recorded, guided 10–15 minute meditations drawn from the Rinzai Zen and Insight Meditation traditions
- **Embodiment sequences:** Breath, movement, and grounding practices tied to each Guidepost, drawing on various somatic traditions
- **Practice assignments:** Reflection prompts, real-world application, and small group check-ins
- **Closing integration:** Final session brings the nine Guideposts into a living, daily practice

The structure is simple (but not too simple) by design: learn the Guidepost, practice it, bring it into your life, and return with what you discover.

The Nine-Month Arc: The Guideposts

The nine Guideposts form a developmental arc. The work begins with awareness—learning to **notice** what is actually happening in the body, mind, heart, and relationships. From there, it moves outward into connection, courage, intention, centering, care, building, leadership, and enjoyment.

Each month focuses on one Guidepost and follows the same rhythm: a 120-minute deep dive in week one, three weekly practice sessions, daily meditation, embodiment work, and partner accountability throughout.

For each month, you'll learn the material in our main session, then will work with weekly prompts that support you to explore and integrate the Guidepost in your life.

OPENING SESSION

Course overview, community formation, and foundational frames:

- What we mean by “shadow,” and why it matters
- What “doing the work” actually involves—and what it doesn’t
- Radical responsibility versus self-blame and shame
- The power of small steps and the trap of trying to get it right

MONTH 1—NOTICE

Most men are run by parts of themselves they cannot see. This month, we learn to see them.

- **Week 1:** Observe your inner “boardroom”—the parts, patterns, and sub-personalities making decisions for you. (Adapted from Internal Family Systems and parts work.)
- **Week 2:** Identify which board members dominate—the protector, the rebel, the inner critic, the romantic—and learn to pay attention to your impact on others.
- **Week 3:** Strengthen the integrated self that can hold all the parts and lead with wisdom.
- **Week 4:** Partner check-in: where reactive patterns showed up, and where you held your seat.

Month 2—Connect

Connection is not a luxury. It is, biologically and psychologically, a survival need. And, it is a primary source of joy.

- **Week 1:** The biology and psychology of connection. Why isolation literally shortens men’s lives.
- **Week 2:** The cost of disconnection, and the cultural myths that keep men alone (the lone wolf, the self-made man, the strong silent type).
- **Week 3:** Reclaiming brotherhood. Practical skills for authentic, nourishing connection with other men.
- **Week 4:** Partner check-in: connection goals and first steps.

Month 3—Courage

Most courage is not the heroism of saving someone from a burning building. It is the willingness to say the harder, truer thing in a small moment.

- **Week 1:** Redefining courage—from stoic suppression to skillful expression. Finding the full range of bravery, from the obvious to the subtle. This includes the willingness to see different aspects of yourself: beauty, warts, and all.
- **Week 2:** Micro-bravery: small daily acts that exercise the muscle.
- **Week 3:** How courage shifts across life stages and cultural contexts.
- **Week 4:** Partner check-in: where courage showed up, where it didn't, and what's next.

Month 4—Intend

Without intention, men default to whatever's loudest—the inbox, the anxiety, the next obligation.

- **Week 1:** Slowing down enough to define a lived intention for relationships, work, and self.
- **Week 2:** Identifying who and what your purpose serves—yourself, others, or something larger.
- **Week 3:** Daily and weekly intention-setting practices.
- **Week 4:** Partner check-in: progress toward intentional living.

Month 5—Center

Staying centered under stress is the foundation everything else rests on.

- **Week 1:** Recognizing fight, flight, freeze, and appease in real time, drawing on contemporary trauma physiology.
- **Week 2:** Building the capacity to respond rather than react, especially under pressure.
- **Week 3:** Working with shame, fear, and failure without collapsing into them or attacking outward.

- **Week 4:** Partner check-in: moments you held center, moments you lost it, what shifted.

Month 6—Care

Men are often conditioned to express care through doing rather than being—and to hide it altogether when it feels too vulnerable.

- **Week 1:** How men learn to mask care, and what that costs them and the people around them. The primary importance of compassion, towards both oneself and others.
- **Week 2:** The varied expressions of care: protective, stoic, relational, systemic. None are wrong. It's our range and flexibility that matters.
- **Week 3:** Orienting consciously around what you actually care about—and what you don't.
- **Week 4:** Partner check-in: how care is showing up in action, not just thought.

Month 7—Build

What you build in this phase of your life depends on the architecture you're working from.

- **Week 1:** Your inherited blueprint for building—survival, power, tradition, innovation, inclusion. Where it came from, and where or how it serves or limits you now.
- **Week 2:** Choosing what you actually want to build now: self, relationships, legacy.
- **Week 3:** Naming the obstacles—avoidance, burnout, fragmentation, confusion—and beginning to dismantle them.
- **Week 4:** Partner check-in: concrete actions taken and next steps.

MONTH 8—LEAD

Leadership is less about position and more about presence.

- **Week 1:** Leading from the inside out. Integrating purpose, structure, clarity, execution, empathy, and care.

- **Week 2:** Honest examination of how you have led—or failed to—in the past.
- **Week 3:** Resolving leadership paradoxes: structure and flow, vision and feedback, empathy and execution.
- **Week 4:** Partner check-in: real-life leadership challenges and what the “strength with heart” stance asks of you.

MONTH 9—ENJOY

We end with joy because joy is what makes a life not just bearable but delightful—and like every other capacity in this program, it can be trained. This month draws directly on the Insight Meditation tradition's explicit cultivation of joy as a skill to develop on purpose, not a reward for finishing the work.

- **Week 1:** Reclaiming joy as essential, not a reward for finishing the work.
- **Week 2:** Play as presence—sport, adventure, creativity, sensuality.
- **Week 3:** Working with the blocks to pleasure—guilt, overwork, disconnection, the conviction that you haven't earned it.
- **Week 4:** Partner check-in: where aliveness has expanded.

FINAL INTEGRATION

The closing session brings the nine Guideposts together into a single, lived practice. The work becomes less about concepts and more about a way of being—the capacity to read a moment, a relationship, a challenge, and respond with what's actually needed. Sometimes that's strength. Sometimes it's openness. Sometimes it's the wisdom to soften and follow.

Integration is where our personal work becomes a meaningful contribution to the world. As we develop these qualities within ourselves, our practice creates a rippling beneficial effect that counters the “What's in it for me?” default that drives so much toxicity in our culture. Through this path of care and integrated leadership, we learn to become a refuge for others, acting from a spirit of service that transforms not just our own lives, but the communities we inhabit.

Where This Sits in the Landscape

While many valuable programs for men exist, Strength with Heart distinguishes itself through **deep integration over time**.

Many men find that insights gained in isolation—whether through therapy, retreats, or physical training—don't always translate into real-life changes. Lasting transformation requires reaching the whole man: body, mind, heart, and spirit. **Integration is the hardest part, and it is the core of our offering.**

Over nine months, we bring Zen and Insight Meditation, depth psychology, somatic practice, and small-group accountability into one conversation. This sustained path allows new patterns to meet the complexities of real life—parenting, work, and relationships—ensuring that psychological insight and contemplative steadiness reinforce one another until they become a way of being.

This program is neither fast nor easy. It is designed for the man looking to build a foundation that will hold for the next twenty years.

How Integration Delivers Results

THE MECHANISM, IN PLAIN TERMS

Integration works because body, mind, heart, and spirit are interconnected access points to the same nervous system. Isolated changes often hit a ceiling. Working them together allows each modality to unlock the others, creating deeper, more sustainable transformation.

How this looks in practice:

Contemplative practice makes psychological work stick. While therapy provides intellectual insight into patterns like an inner critic, meditation builds the real-time capacity to notice these reactions as they arise. This trained attention allows you to meet your patterns with equanimity and compassion rather than being captured by them.

Psychological work makes contemplative practice honest. Meditation alone can become a form of avoidance. Psychological maps like parts work and attachment theory ensure that you aren't just getting calmer, but truly more whole by addressing buried trauma and grief that silence can sometimes bypass.

Somatic work translates change into the body. Lasting change happens in the nervous system, not just the mind. Embodiment practices rewire the physical threat responses that override good intentions, ensuring your capacity for patience and presence survives high-pressure moments.

Relational practice is the proof. The ultimate test of growth is how you show up with others. Small groups and accountability partners provide the "pressure test" needed to move these skills from theory into lived reality during conflict, stress, and disappointment.

The Teachers

The program is guided by three senior teachers who have spent decades helping men grow in the places that matter most: relationships, purpose, emotional honesty, embodiment, leadership, and spiritual practice.

Their backgrounds are different by design. Clinical psychology. Men's group work. Rinzai Zen. Insight Meditation. Martial arts. Leadership development. Together, they offer a rare integration of psychological depth, contemplative discipline, relational skill, and embodied practice.

Daniel Ellenberg, Ph.D.

Psychologist with more than forty years of experience leading men's groups and coaching leaders. Former president of the American Psychological Association's Division 51 (Society for the Psychological Study of Men and Masculinities). Founder of the Men and Boys Compassion Coalition, a principal in the Rewire Leadership Institute, and founder of Strength with Heart men's work. Daniel brings the depth in male psychology and group facilitation that anchors the program.

JAMES BARAZ

Co-founding teacher at Spirit Rock Meditation Center and a senior teacher in the Insight Meditation (vipassana) tradition for over four decades. Creator of Spirit Rock's Community Dharma Leaders training program and author of *Awakening Joy*, the foundational text of his widely taught course of the same name. James brings the contemplative weight of the Insight lineage, the heart practices of lovingkindness and compassion, and the embodied cultivation of joy that the final third of the program rests on.

KEITH MARTIN-SMITH

Ordained Zen priest in the Rinzai tradition, lineage holder in Northern Kung Fu, and leadership consultant for CEOs and executive teams. Keith brings the rigor of contemplative practice, the discipline of martial arts, and the pragmatism of working with leaders in high-stakes environments. He leads the daily meditation curriculum and the embodiment sequences. He is also the award-winning author of 5 books.

Together, the three teachers offer a combination—clinical depth, two complementary Buddhist lineages (Zen and Insight), and embodied leadership practice—that is unusual to find under one roof.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of nine months, participants will be able to:

- **Recognize** and work skillfully with internal patterns and parts
- **Build** and sustain meaningful, nourishing connections with other men
- **Act** with courage in the small, daily contexts where it actually matters
- **Live** with greater clarity, purpose, heart, and intention
- **Stay centered** under pressure and stress
- **Express** care in grounded, embodied ways
- **Build** self, relationships, and legacy with integrity
- **Lead** with both strength and heart
- **Reclaim** joy, play, and vitality as core capacities

The Result

At the end of nine months, participants don't just understand themselves and masculinity differently—they live differently. Quite simply, they become men with more range: able to notice their patterns and redirect them, stay centered under pressure, connect authentically, lead from the inside out, and hold a boundary and stay open in the same breath. They know what they're building and why. They have rediscovered joy as an ordinary, daily presence rather than something rationed out for vacation. Strong without being rigid. Open without being unmoored. Caring without being self-erased.

Men who can do well in the world, and be good for it. That's the work. That's why it lasts.

Class Logistics

9 Saturdays, Oct 3, 2026 - May 1, 2027

8 mid-month Q&A sessions

Home groups

The compass question we leave you with:

Who do I serve, and why?