This is the “how-to” companion guide to Leap! What Will We Do with the Rest of our Lives? You may wish to wait until you’ve read the book before beginning the Workbook. Or you may wish to get started now.
1. **THE LONG AND WINDING ROAD**

*What it comes down to is: what do you really want to do? What will make you feel most alive? That you’ve used your time well? That your being here has mattered?*

*From Chapter 1 of LEAP!*

If you’re reading this, you’ve probably been asking some of those questions, and maybe you don’t have a clue how to answer them. If you do have answers, maybe you’re wondering if they’re true. That’s what I was grappling with in my fifties when I found myself in a dark wood, and set out to look for breadcrumbs, signs, messages, anything that would help me find my way out of the damned forest.

This workbook, a companion to the book, *LEAP!*, is intended to spare you some of the bad attitudes I hung onto. I hope it will loosen things up, cancel what you’ve heard and thought before and clear the screen so that your authentic knowings and longings can light the way. So relax, take a breath, and let go of any expectations. “Workbook” is a misnomer for what’s ahead, because I’d like this to be a playful, surprising and light-hearted inquiry into how to do the next years well.

I’ve divided this “un-workbook” into sections that correspond to the chapters in *Leap!* There are questions and exercises. Write your answers in a notebook, and I’d like you to **write automatically**: don’t think or plan, just
write whatever comes and let it flow, even if it’s: “I don’t know. This is a waste of time, it’s a stupid question...” Set a timer for three minutes and write until the beep sounds, or longer if you wish. Don’t edit, censor or rewrite. When you’re finished, read what you’ve written and see what pops out.

It’s also fun and helpful to do this with a partner. Both of you will write for three minutes, then A will read and B will listen—without interrupting or judging. Listen for what sounds real, raw or wise. Listen for where the gold is—the inner voice coming through. When A finishes reading, B can comment on what he or she found striking. Then reverse positions: B will read and A will listen.

Please proceed at your own pace; you may want to take one section at a time, schedule regular sessions or simply wing it.

Ready?

In chapter 2, we’re going to start by delving into places that may be dark, that may make you feel sad, broken or confused. This is the territory I call “the narrows”—the transition to the next part of life. So before we enter that narrow passage, let’s take time to evaluate your strengths, see what makes you unique, and cultivate some gratitude, darlin’.
1. How has your life been blessed? What have been the major gifts, luck, karma? What can you feel grateful for?

2. What do you have to offer as a friend, partner, or member of a group? What do you bring that’s valuable? What makes you stand out?

3. COMPLETE THE SENTENCE: “I’m a person who feels most alive when...”
2. THE NARROWS

Carly Simon, in her fifties, was diagnosed with breast cancer at the same time she and her husband were drifting apart, her kids were going off on their own, and her record company was abandoning her. Living by herself, she set up a recording studio in her daughter’s old bedroom and would spend all night doing what she’d done at 19—“just making sounds I liked. I had to try to keep pleasing myself – that was the only star I could follow.”

From Chapter 2, 19th Nervous Breakdown

1. Have you had a time when you felt your identity was being ripped away? When everything in your life seemed to collapse or fall apart? When was that time? What happened? (If you haven’t had such a breakdown, write a scenario where everything you know and believe about yourself is stripped from you.)

2. If you’re in the narrows now, when did this transition begin? What happened?

Answer the following questions in the present tense if you’re in the narrows now, or past tense if you’ve come through to a different place.

3. How did you react (are you reacting) emotionally? Were you frightened, panicked, or in grief? Did you have a sense of possibilities, of new beginnings?

4. Did you try to power your way out—take a new job, start a new relationship quickly? Or were you clawing, trying to get back what you’d lost?

5. Who did you blame, at the beginning?

6. Who do you blame now?

7. Were there friends or mentors who’ve helped you? What resources have you found in yourself?
8. These times of breakdown -- when we feel we’ve been brought to our knees -- are also the times that transform us, when we’re open to taking leaps. In retrospect, can you see how you came through the transition stronger? Write down how you learned or changed in ways that might not have happened if you’d enjoyed clear sailing. (If you’re in transition now, visualize how you’ll come through the narrows stronger. Be specific about what life will be like on the other side.)

9. Were you able to (can you) accept: I’m in a transition and don’t know how it will work out?

10. What brought (will bring) you out of the narrows and back to sunlight?

11. If a similar transition occurs again, how would you handle it? What would you do differently? What have you learned that you could apply? Write automatically for three minutes, then read it back to yourself. If there seems to be wisdom here, put it in a safe place (and hope you’ll remember where you put it!) so you can refer to it in the future.
3. SWEET SURRENDER?

*In my own descent through the narrows, when I couldn’t find work, couldn’t convince my partner to come back, and every door that I knocked on was slammed in my face, wise people told me I needed to surrender.*

1. What does the word “surrender” mean to you? What feelings does it stir?

2. If you’re asked to surrender at this point in life—to ride the horse in the direction it’s going instead of trying to force it to go where you want—what’s your response?

3. How do you feel about giving up control?

4. Do you believe we can control the most important things in life? Explain why you do or don’t.

5. Jot down three major events in your life so far. Did you engineer them or did they come out of left field? How much control did you have?

6. Have you had an experience of letting go, giving up the reins? What was the result?

7. Can you imagine how letting go might be a positive experience? Describe a specific scenario.

8. What would you like to let go of?

9. Let’s say, even if we don’t believe this, that we don’t have control over the most important matters in life – when and how we find a partner, what fate our children have, when we’ll die. How can you move forward knowing that at the deepest level, you don’t have control? What will enable you to live with gusto?
10. Janet Quinn, a professor of nursing in Colorado, says in *Leap!* that surrender is different from capitulation or giving up. “Giving up makes you small. It’s defeat, being a victim, while surrender is an expansive state, something active and pulsing.” She opens her arms as if to welcome a child or a lover. “You open yourself to what’s unknown.”

Do you agree? Can you recall a time when you engaged in this kind of surrender? What were the results?
4. **THE BODY ELECTRIC**

At a panel in New York on “The Good Body,” Eve Ensler, who created “The Vagina Monologues,” asked Jane Fonda, Marion Woodman and other women, “Is there a part of your body you don’t like?” Almost all the women said “thighs” or “legs.” Then she asked, “Is there a part of your body you like?” The women said things like eyes, lips, or hair—all of them above the neck.

I did an informal survey afterward and asked men: Is there a part of your body you don’t like? Almost all the men said “gut,” and what they did like was their legs. I guess that’s why they keep wearing shorts long after women give them up.

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1. Is there a part of your body you don’t like? Write down why you hate it. Trash the damned part, don’t hold back.

2. NOW, can you be grateful for how this body part has served you? What would your life be like if this part were amputated? The French poet, Charles Peguy, wrote that “All life comes from tenderness.” Write with tenderness and gratitude—a love letter to this body part.

3. How much time a day do you spend on maintenance and grooming—hair, face, nails, teeth, caring for the whole enchilada?

4. Do you ever “let yourself go?” (For me it’s staying in my nightgown all day, not washing my hair or shaving my legs) Imagine letting your maintenance slide. How does that feel?

5. What changes are you noticing in your body that require you to change your lifestyle?

6. Can you accept those changes, or are you denying or raging against them?
7. What about your memory? Describe how it feels when you can’t remember a word, or the name of someone you know, or why you walked into a certain room.

8. Can you roll with forgetfulness? I had a relative, “Uncle Art,” a once dashing and glamorous figure who, in his eighties, wrote his address and phone number on the back of his hand, like crib notes for a test. If he was out and needed to get home, he’d read his hand.

   What strategies can you adopt to help with forgetfulness? What will help you laugh about it instead of becoming frustrated?

9. Do you believe that trying to stay strong and attractive is a vain, superficial pursuit, or one of self respect?

10. What are you doing to sustain the strength and beauty of your body? What could you be doing?

11. What can you laugh at about your body growing older? What seems absurd?

12. Name three advantages in what’s happening to your body? (Don’t leave this blank! There’ll be a reward)

13. Are there people in your age group whose looks you admire? Who?

14. Are there people you know who seem to be trying too hard to look young? How do you feel when you notice that?

15. Are there people you know who are aging with grace? Who? What makes that so?
5. CHANGE IS GONNA COME

Ram Dass, the beloved spiritual teacher and author of “Be Here Now,” says the best way to prepare for growing older is to practice change—being content with change. “I’ve been changed by a stroke,” he says, tapping the arms of his wheelchair, “and I’m content.” How we deal with change is the determining factor in whether we suffer or have joy in the years ahead.

1. Draw a time line—a horizontal line across the page. Tell the story of your last ten years through the major changes that occurred. Mark the changes on the time line. Then write, below, whether you saw them at the time as desirable or undesirable. Below that, from the vantage point of today, how do you view them?

2. Let’s look at one change that you viewed as undesirable. Did you roll with it or resist it? Did you finally manage to accept it? Mark the point of acceptance on the timeline.

3. Write down three benefits that arose from that change. (If you’re sure there were no benefits, make them up.)

4. Several strategies for handling change are presented in Leap!:
A. Learn something new, so you initiate the change.
B. The judo approach-- grab it and turn it to your advantage.
C. Surrender—accept and learn to be content with it.

Write down one example of a strategy you’ve used to handle change.

5. A key strategy that’s important to develop is listening to (and trusting) your intuition. Write down a time when you had an inner “knowing.” Did you act on it, and if so, what were the results?

6. How can you tell if a “knowing” is a form of guidance or just a random thought?
7. Describe a change that you embraced, dove into and rode to shore.

8. Imagine bringing that spirit to bear on a change you see coming up in the future, a change you may not be happy about. Describe how you can meet this change with curiosity and zest—even if you’re not sure you can. Sometimes you need to “fake it till it’s real.”
6. **SEA OF LOVE**

What happens to our relationships? When the music stops, some of us are seated and coupled and some are walking independently and with every round, things can change. An unexpected meeting, death or divorce and you’re in a state you did not expect to be. Are we hard-wired to keep coupling and re-coupling? Will we expand our capacity and sources for love?

1. Draw a time line from your twenties to the present, and chart the major intimate relationships you’ve had.

2. What’s your pattern of intimacy? Do you stay with one person a long time, stay on your own for the most part, have serial relationships? Describe your pattern so far, and if it’s changed at all.

3. Are you comfortable with your pattern? Does it serve you, or would you like to redesign it?

4. If you knew the next five years would be your last, who would you choose to spend them with?

5. What qualities do you see in people who have long relationships that seem alive and nourishing?

6. What qualities do you see in people who go it on their own?

7. List the people in your life with whom you experience love.

8. *Beverly Kitaen Morse and Jack Rosenberg, psychotherapists who married each other at 59 and 63, say they’ve found that younger people are seeking to be loved, but in later years the focus shifts to wanting love that arises in you: “The way your body feels when you love the ocean, you love a piece of music, you love a lover, you love a child.”*

List the sources and situations that can fill you with feelings of love.
7. THE SECOND SEXUAL REVOLUTION

The boomer generation has had a sexual destiny: we were the advance guard in the first sexual revolution and now there’s a second in attitudes about sex and aging.

1. What do you feel when you think about older people making love?

2. What do you feel when you visualize yourself—naked and going for it—in the years ahead?

3. What have you learned or experienced about sex in the last ten years that you didn’t know before?

4. What are you curious about, what’s still a mystery?

5. What role does sex play in your life at this time?

6. What role would you like sex to play?

7. At this point in your life, are sex and love connected? Do you prefer to have sex with or without emotional connection?

8. If you have a partner, what nourishes your sexual connection? What arouses you, makes you each feel loved?

9. Describe a situation you could create where those elements are present.

10. If you’re single, what can you do to nourish your body, stay juicy, and have warm physical interactions?
11. What pleasures can you cultivate through your senses, such as taking in the intoxicating scent of roses, or tasting warm, fresh-baked bread?

12. What you expect is often what comes to be. What’s your belief: the best sex is in your past; the best is now; or the best is to come?
To work or not to work? Many of us are work junkies and have spent more hours at our jobs than any other activity. We tend to fall into three groups: the first are being squeezed out of jobs; the second are quitting on their own or starting new ventures; and the third are riding square in the saddle and want to keep going.

1. Which group are you in? (Could be none of the above)

2. How long do you think you’d like to work?

3. How do you feel about your current job? If you could start over, would you choose the same field? If not, what would you pursue?

4. If your work is fulfilling, what qualities make it so?

5. If you work is not fulfilling, what aspects make that so?

6. If there’s another kind of work you’d like to do, what steps could you take to enter that field?

7. Do you need to keep earning money? How much?

8. Are you able to shift from working for pay to working for the pleasure and challenge of the enterprise?

9. Tom Hayden says in *Leap!* that at this time of life, we need to “put our career drives down.” How do you feel about that?

10. Can you visualize yourself not working? What emotions come up?
11. THREE BIG QUESTIONS: George Kinder, author of “The Seven Stages of Money Maturity” and co-founder of the Kinder Institute of Life Planning, says he asks himself these questions several times a year as a way of staying focused on his priorities. Spend three minutes writing your answer to each question.

A. If you had large sums of money, what would you do with it? How would you live?

B. If a doctor tells you that your life will be over in five years, but you’ll have good health until then, how will you live? What will you do differently?

C. If a doctor tells you that you have only 24 hours to live, what did you miss? Who did you not get to be? What did you not get to do?

12. Do your answers to the last question change your ideas about the work you’re doing or want to do?
9. SCHOOL’S OUT

I used to view retirement as dropping out of the game and leading a diminished life. I’d lose interest in people who moved to the Sun Belt to play golf and do some volunteering. While conducting research for Leap!, however, I met people who see retirement as “delicious,” or “a grand hall pass.”

1. What’s your picture of retirement? What feelings does it arouse?

2. If you’re able to retire from earning a living, there are at least two approaches. The first is to retire to something, such as hobbies, sports, mentoring young people or building a house. The second is to purposely create some time and space when you’re not committed to doing anything, and see what arises.

Imagine that you’re going to take the first approach. What would you like to retire to? Describe what a day would look like.

3. Imagine you’re going to take the second approach. You’ll need to shift from being active and making things happen to being receptive and seeing what unfolds. How do you feel about not planning and not knowing what you’ll do?

4. It’s important to know your nature and what will best suit your temperament. Which approach did you prefer? Could you relax into unstructured time, or will you be more comfortable scheduling your days?

5. Steve Binder, who’s about to retire from the financial industry, says his colleagues talk about retirement “like thirteen-year-old boys talk about sex.” Pretend you’re having a conversation with a friend about retiring, and write down what you’ll both say.
Wherever I travel, I hear people having “the conversation” — trying to figure out how they can grow old with their friends, rather than be parked in a home with strangers with whom they have little in common. If that’s what we want, people ask, “Why aren’t we doing it now?”

1. Do you have a wish to live in a community with friends? Describe how this community might be set up. What kind of housing units? Where? How much group interaction would there be? Formal or informal?

2. Write down the people you’d like to have living with you or nearby. Begin with those who are most important.

3. How do you feel about moving? Do you like to change locations, or do you find satisfaction remaining in the same place?

4. Would you like to divide your time between several locations? Which ones?

5. Are you interested in living in a foreign country? Which? For how long?

6. What are the qualities and temperament best suited to being an ex-pat?

7. If money were not a concern and logistics not a problem, what would your ideal living situation be for the next ten years?

8. Are you motivated to take steps to make this happen?

9. What steps could you take?
11. & 12. REVOLUTION NO. 9
and
WE ARE THE WORLD

The impulse to give back, to leave the world a little better than you found it, often rises strongly at this time of life. As Bebe Moore Campbell, the acclaimed African-American writer, put it: “We’ve been stars, now it’s our turn to serve.”

1. What does the concept of “giving back” bring up for you?

2. Draw a timeline of your life, and mark the moments when you were involved in activities that, in the Jewish tradition, are called “tikkun olam” – fixing the world.

3. What were the high points in your endeavors to fix the world? The low points? What did you take away from those experiences?

4. Would you like to participate in political work, advocacy or community service? Name a specific type of project you feel motivated to do.

5. What skills, resources, and knowledge could you offer?

6. Describe a situation in which you could do that.

7. If your life were to end now, what would you feel your contribution has been? What’s occurred that wouldn’t have happened if you hadn’t been here?

8. Imagine that you’re reading your obituary. What does it say?

9. What would you like to add to your obituary – something you’ll pursue in the years ahead?
13. **MY SWEET LORD**

In Eastern cultures, the third part of life is traditionally reserved for deep spiritual work. When I traveled in India, I saw renunciates in orange robes who, after raising their families, had given up their possessions and set out to seek truth— in temples, caves or wherever they might find it. But in Western society, wandering the streets with a begging bowl would not be supported.

1. What spiritual activities could you pursue in your community, or in places you’d like to visit?

2. Describe what “religion” and “spiritual” mean to you.

3. Draw a time line of your life, and chart your spiritual autobiography. When were there awakenings, moments of realization or closeness with the Divine? Mark the teachers or groups who influenced you, and what traditions or practices you followed at certain times.

4. Do you have an ethical code? Can you summarize it?

5. What moral qualities would you like to develop or deepen?

6. What religious or spiritual stream do you feel most at home with?

7. What would you still wish to learn or embody in this lifetime?

8. Can you let go of goals and judgments about how evolved you are?

9. What is guidance for you, and where do you find guidance?

10. When and where do you receive your greatest inspiration?
14. WHEN WE’RE 64

Erik Erikson, in “Childhood and Society,” describes the final stage of psychological development as “ego integrity:”

“It is the acceptance of one’s one and only life cycle as something that had to be and that, by necessity, permitted of no substitutions.”

1. In your one and only life cycle, what’s the specific dance you’ve danced, the theme you’ve played as in a symphony—the only theme you could play?

2. Write a note of appreciation for that dance, that theme -- why you’re grateful it was yours.

3. Many find it rewarding to create a ritual for turning 50 or 60. Write down what you’d like to include in a ritual or celebration for the next milestone birthday you’ll have.

4. Facing and preparing for dying comes with the territory ahead. Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi suggests that you conduct a life review, acknowledging what you’ve learned and accomplished and forgiving yourself for what you need to forgive. Try doing this with someone who unquestionably loves you.

5. A life review can be daunting. As a warmup, Reb Zalman suggests a weekly moral review. Think back now over the past week and write down the moments that stand out--what brought you joy, what you had difficulty with, what you learned.
6. Let’s conclude with an exercise that Joan Borysenko sent me just before I turned 60. Complete the following sentences.

A. I realize that life is both precious and short, and that I have lived the majority of my years. When the angel death comes to my door, I will be ready to go because....

B. The thing I will miss the most when life is over is...

C. In the years to come, I will be grateful for...

And now... good night and good luck!