

# BEING IN A SACRED CIRCLE

By Heather Ensworth

Being in a sacred circle is a profound and transformative experience. It gives us the opportunity to “hear each other into speech” (Nelle Morton) and to find and speak our own deepest truths. It is a practice that has existed for thousands of years in every culture. The circle process involves deepening our connections with each other and with the spirit in each of us and with the Spirit of the circle that is beyond the sum of our individual identities. Being in a sacred circle is about tuning in to each others’ words, emotions and energies as well as attuning to the Spirit of the circle that has brought us together and guides us in our process.

Here are a few guidelines that can help us in this process:

**Council format** –One of the main components of the council format is that it gives people an opportunity to share from their hearts. From this openness, comes a weaving together of stories, of experiences, of personalities, which all combine to create a group or circle synergy. The sum of the whole is exponentially greater than its parts.

How it works: We sit in circle, and a talking stick or talking piece is passed, (in our case, an egg made of semi-precious stone, representing the potential and the totality of each individual and of the Circle as a whole.) When an individual has the egg, or talking piece, they have the undivided attention of the Circle. They should not be interrupted, unless the group facilitators feel a need to do so, for instance to call for a break, to resolve an issue or question, etc. An exception would be if you did not hear what a person said, you may ask them to speak up or to repeat what they said. When holding the egg, your task is to speak from the heart, to discern what is important to share with the Circle, and to practice brevity.

As listeners, our task is to open our hearts and to listen as fully as we can without judgment to the individual who is holding the egg or talking object. We listen with our hearts and try to feel what the person is sharing. We try, as a person who is waiting to share, to not rehearse what we will say when it is our turn to hold the egg. Doing so, takes us out of the moment and away from truly being with an open heart with the one who is sharing. We cultivate trust that Spirit will guide us in sharing what is sacred to us, in sharing what needs to be brought to the Circle, and that the rest will stay behind. We learn to search for what it is that the Circle needs from us – what bit of wisdom is

percolating up from our depths that must be shared, what treasure is coming to the surface from the depths of our souls, that will be of benefit to the Circle. It is important to speak from our own hearts, and if we are compelled to respond to what another has shared earlier, to do so from what was touched in us, not as a way of commenting on or evaluating another's sharing.

**Confidentiality** - It is extremely important for the safety and integrity of the Circle, to keep confidential all that is shared within the Circle. Also, it is important not to talk about what has been shared within the circle outside the circle even with others in the circle. With friends and loved ones, it is fine to share your own process but not the experiences or disclosures of others.

**Watching for our own projections** – In a circle, we learn about ourselves as we are mirrored by others, both in how we are seen and affirmed by others and in how we can become aware of split off parts of ourselves as we experience them in others. Watch for ways you may be activated or triggered by others. Learn to work with these experiences as a way to deepen your own self-awareness rather than polarizing or projecting those aspects of yourself on the other and then distancing or reacting to that person.

**Dealing with conflict** – As women, we are often afraid of conflict and anger. Yet, to be whole, we need to honor our full range of emotions. In a circle, when you feel anger or conflict, acknowledge it in yourself. Look to see what issues are getting activated for you and what you can learn from this experience. Then, in dealing with the other person, share your feelings with respect, openness and a willingness to hear the other's feelings and perspectives. Use "I" statements and avoid placing blame or focusing on the other person's behavior. Take responsibility for your own part in the conflict. Also, it is important to realize that we can not control or change others, only ourselves.

**Take responsibility for your own process** – Being in a circle is a shared experience, and yet we each are responsible for our own process, feelings, experiences and actions in this journey together.

**Honoring the shared journey and the growth of the Circle** – Being in a circle means deepening in relationships with others and also honoring the circle as an entity that is more than our collective identities and relationships. When difficulties arise in a circle, it is an opportunity for the circle as a whole to grow and to deepen. Certain circle members may bring forward characteristics or dynamics so that as a circle, we can more fully integrate these aspects. Rather than seeing those individuals or dynamics as a problem, we can use them as challenges for deepening our process as a circle. Growth in a circle

means learning to continually expand our capacity to hold each others' differentness and the range of emotions and experiences in our midst.

**Listening to the silence** - Being in a circle is an opportunity to find our unique voices and also to listen to the depth of wisdom in the silence between the words. It is also important to attune to the rhythms and energy of the circle, to what is unsaid as well as what is spoken. We will also engage in meditation and shamanic practices that assist us in being in an altered state of consciousness and attuning to the voice of Spirit within us and between us.

**Giving and Receiving** – As women, we often find it easier to give to others than care for ourselves or to receive from others. It is important to allow ourselves to be deeply nurtured and to honor the gifts from others and to keep this in balance with our caring for others.

**Developing the witness self** - As we grow in consciousness and self-awareness, we can utilize the witness self to observe our emotions and behaviors rather than being mired in our experiences. We soon learn to let go of our stories and our identification with the details of our lives and honor the soul-self that is beyond time and space and that can guide us in our growth and purpose in this lifetime.

**Having fun** – As we develop our witness self, we realize that many things that often distress us are not that important in the larger scheme of life. The more that we are able to laugh at ourselves and with each other, the more our circle will deepen in closeness and in enjoyment of each other.

**Be in the mystery** – Being in a circle is a mysterious dance of intimacy and distance, times of growth and rest, light and dark, sorrow and joy.... The journey within a Sacred Circle will often surprise us and challenge us, and it will be filled with magic, wonder and mystery if we are open to the moment and how the process unfolds.

The practice of sitting in Sacred Circle is very ancient. It is a gift that many people never experience. From being in a Sacred Circle, we emerge transformed, with a deepened sense of self, of the others in the Circle and of the Spirit which lives within the Circle. The energy of a Sacred Circle, like a stone tossed into a pond, ripples out with love and healing energy affecting all who touch us in our lives outside of the circle.