

## *Circling*

### *A Guidebook for a Group Experience in Consciousness*

This book is a map for an expedition into consciousness. It is structured into ten sessions, with imaginative exercises to open the heart and expand the mind. It is designed for people who are ready for the next step in awareness and conscious creativity, and who understand that circling together with others is the most fun and efficient way to get there.

The exercises, in order to keep the creative energies flowing, use music, poetry, mystical writings, images, and story-telling. The approach is full-bodied and multi-sensory, since the wisdom we're after is in our cells and every atom of our being. Our time for research is over. The Information Age is giving way to the Age of Transformation, and we are the ones who are ushering it in. There are 50-55 million cultural creatives who are hospicing out the old era and midwifing in the new—an age of compassion, creativity, and communion consciousness.

We are the lights of the world, shapers of a culture that feeds the soul and builds on the knowing that all is one. It is time for us to throw the bucket down into our wells of wisdom, to mine our experiences and see what jewels are there for the sharing. When the Persian poet Rumi said *“Stop learning, start knowing,”* what he meant is that we already have within us the very thing we seek. There is no need to look outside, above, beyond. We *are* the help and it all becomes clear when we look within.

*“Your own self-realization is the greatest service you can render the world,”* wrote Ramana Maharshi. This book is a guide for that inner journey. The steps take you into yourself and outward to others, from self-love to service. It offers questions that will draw out your wisdom, challenges that will engage your imagination, suggestions that will take you beyond the limits you feel today. The world is ours. Heaven is here. This moment is the moment we've been waiting for.

The great joy of this work is doing it with others, finding ourselves in the mirrors of others' stories, struggles, and insights. If you follow this map, honor your commitments, and release your fears about sharing, I promise you, whole new worlds will open up. You will find inside yourself everything you've been longing for.



*Don't worry about what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive and do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.* Robert Thurman

## *The Artist's Creed*

I believe I am worth the time it takes to create  
whatever I feel called to create.

I believe my work is worthy of its own space  
which is worthy of the name sacred.

I believe that when I enter this space, I have the right  
to work in silence, uninterrupted, for as long as I choose.

I believe that the moment I open myself to the gifts of the Muse,  
I open myself to the Source of All Creation, and become  
one with the Mother of Life Itself.

I believe that my work is joyful, useful, and constantly changing,  
flowing through me like a river with no beginning and no end.

I believe that what it is I am called to do  
will make itself known when I have made myself ready.

I believe that the time I spend creating my art  
is as precious as the time I spend giving to others.

I believe that what truly matters in the making of art is not what the  
final piece looks like or sounds like, not what it is worth or not worth,  
but what newness gets added to the universe in the process  
of the piece itself becoming.

I believe that I am not alone in my attempts to create,  
and that once I begin the work, settle into the strangeness,  
the words will take shape, the form find life, and the spirit take flight.

I believe that as the Muse gives to me, so does she deserve  
from me: faith, mindfulness, and enduring commitment.

## **Ground Rules for the Group**

(read this out loud at the first session)

### **• Confidentiality**

Everything that is shared is confidential. Under no circumstances may anyone share personal information about anyone in the group with someone who is not in the group.

### **• Showing Up**

Everyone's attendance is crucial to the working of the group. We are not just here for ourselves. We are here to hear each other into being. There will be times when you may not feel like attending, but this is not about you. It is about the whole, not the part. Each member needs to make a commitment to the entire process and honor that commitment, except in the case of extenuating circumstances

### **• Dealing with emotions**

This is not a therapy session. It is an experiment in creating a community. There will be tears, as there always are in the presence of truth. And this is good. Let people cry freely. Have tissues out, and do not try and solve each other's problems. The best gift we can offer is the gift of our listening, our heartfelt attention. This is what we long for—to be heard, received, loved. Do this and only this. When one is done talking, allow a few moments of silence before another begins. Speak from your own center, using the word "I" and not "you." Your wisdom is inside you and it only surfaces when you speak from the soul.

### **• Rotating Leadership**

It is a good idea to share the leadership, so everyone gets a chance to realize her or his potential for leading. Ultimately the group gets to decide this. It's your call if you want to rotate leadership or have one person take responsibility for it. It works either way.

### **• Time-keeping**

For some people, this will be their first experience of deep listening, the first time they see people actively attuning to their speaking. This is sometimes so overwhelming that we lose our sense of time and order, meander away from our point, and forget what we are trying to say. That is why we establish time limits. Whoever is facilitating must take responsibility for watching the time. If the exercise calls for each person to speak for 4-5 minutes on a subject, the facilitator should give two and one minute warnings to help the speaker stay on track. (when there are two minutes left, simply say "Two minutes.")

### **• Hugs at the End**

People are being brave, loving, attentive and compassionate in this group. Everyone is doing his/her best to be authentic and forthright. This is scary for some of us. Nearly impossible for others. We're toddlers on the loose, practicing our steps. Remember this throughout and at the end of every session. Be sure to end with hugs all around.



*“No matter how brilliant our attempts to inform, it is our ability to inspire that will turn the tides.” From *Marry Your Muse**

### **At the beginning of every session...**

- Make sure the room is clean and that there's a chair for everyone.
- Have name tags for the first couple sessions.
- Some people are allergic to perfumes and incense. Ask the question in case there's someone who'd like to request a scent-free space.
- Have a candle burning during the session. It is a symbol of the Great Flame we are all a part of and sets a tone of reverence for the sacred work we are embarking upon.
- Sessions usually run about 2 1/2-3 hours. Establish a beginning and ending time so everyone knows the parameters. Start on time from the very beginning. Give people directions to the bathroom and have water available for participants.
- Have a CD player available and select some CDs of instrumental music. There is a list of wonderful CDs in my book, *Marry Your Muse*. You may have your own favorites, and some of mine include anything by Secret Garden, 2002, *A Sacred Place* by Rufino Zaragoza, *Celestial Mozart*, Robert Gass' *Alleluia/Kyrie*, Freedom to Love, Ray Lynch, *The Poet* by Hoppe and Tillman.
- When the group has gathered, put on a piece of music that runs 4-5 minutes and invite everyone to settle down, put their feet on the floor, breathe deeply from their belly, and bring themselves home to the present moment. I usually turn off all the lights for this and have just the candle(s) burning. When the music stops, turn on the lights and begin the session.



*It is only by risking our persons from one hour to another that we live at all. And often enough our faith beforehand in an uncertified result is the only thing that makes the result come true.* William James, *The Will to Believe*

*The artists are now about to take on themselves the burdens that have fallen from the shoulders of priests... filling our minds not with things, but with the essence of things.* W. B. Yeats

## Session One

### Balance

*There are a lot of things we don't have in life, but time is not one of them. Time is all we have—one lifetime under this name to produce a body of work that says, "This is how I saw the world."* Jan Phillips, *Marry Your Muse*

#### **Opening Prayer or Poem**

After the music meditation, read a poem or prayer that centers you together as a group. You might choose *The Artists' Creed*, or a poem by one of your favorite poets. Or this beautiful Rumi poem from Coleman Barks' *The Essential Rumi*. (In the back of this book is a list of recommended poetry books.)

#### The Far Mosque

The place that Solomon made to worship in, called the Far Mosque, is not built of earth and water and stone, but of intention and wisdom and mystical conversation and compassionate action.

Every part of it is intelligence and responsive to every other. The carpet bows to the broom. The door knocker and the door swing together like musicians. This heart sanctuary *does* exist, but it can't be described. Why try!

Solomon goes there every morning and gives guidance with words, with musical harmonies, and in actions, which are the deepest teaching. A prince is just a conceit until he *does* something with generosity.

You might want to start a practice of reading each poem twice. The poetry we're using for this work is rich with meaning. Reading it a second time gives everyone a chance to absorb it more fully. Let people know you'll be reading it twice, and when you finish, leave a little silent time for it to sink in.

#### **Introductions**

Since this is your first session, give everyone a chance to introduce themselves and say why they're there. If there are ten people in the group and each took 5 minutes, it would take

nearly an hour for the intros. The facilitator should do the math: 6 people at 5 minutes = 30 minutes. This is manageable.

It helps to give people a specific question to address when they introduce themselves. Suggestions: Tell us about a major turning point in your life, or what exists in the world today that wouldn't if you hadn't created it? (think of your own answers and offer a few examples, like a poem or photo exhibition or great recipe or a fabulous work team or a garden, etc.) *Facilitators should always be prepared to give examples and tell stories from their own lives.*

**Exercise:** Have the group fill out the Balance Sheet on the next page. If they don't have their own Circling book, you can copy it or have them draw a circle in their journals and fill it in.

The point is for us to get a sense of how we're using our time. Balance is the foundation for everything. We are artists at life and each of us wakes up to an empty canvas of 24 hours each day. What we do with our time is the creative expression of ourselves. Every moment is a brush stroke. The more mindful we are, the more of a masterpiece we create.

In filling out the chart, you can see the overlap of many activities. If you do yoga, it would go in the physical section, and perhaps in the spiritual section. If you do it with a friend and make an event out of it, you might also put it in the emotional section. I put my non-fiction reading time in mental, but my poetry reading in emotional or spiritual.

For many of us, what's missing is the physical piece. If this is true, think of something fun and physical that you can start doing. *Never assign yourself a task that is not fun.*

Give people about 5-7 minutes to complete it, play music as they're doing it, and when they're done, have them share what they discovered about themselves. (If the group is larger than six people, have people share with a partner, then open the discussion up for final insights.)



*To create is to make something whole from the pieces of our lives and, in the process, to become more whole ourselves. It is a healing act, a leave-taking from the chaos as we move from the choppy surface toward the stillness of the center.*

Marry Your Muse

After people have shared their observations about the balance in their lives, have them come up with some activities that are fun and energizing for the parts of their circle that fall short. Also, have them come up with a NOT TO DO list so they stop doing what fails to support them in living a balanced life.

Put on a piece of music to play as they do this and give them about 10 minutes. (use only soothing, instrumental music for all of these exercises. A list of suggested CDs is in the back of the book.)

- **Other suggestions for group conversations on balance:**

Most of us have learned it is better to take care of everyone's needs before we take care of our own. We often feel selfish about taking time for ourselves, and yet if we fail to do this, we don't have the vitality, the vision and groundedness to be of much use. The heart pumps to itself first. We need to go to the well first, refresh and refuel ourselves before we reach out to others.

Tony Demello, a great teacher, Jesuit and psychologist taught this: ***"Do what you want. That's not selfish. What's selfish is expecting other people to do what you want."***

Have people share their feelings about this.



Carl Jung wrote: ***"Nothing affects the environment of a child so much as the un-lived life of a parent."*** Discussion: How are you role-modeling to your children about the use of time? What did you learn from your parents about time?



**Optional:** If you have a VCR, you could play the video, *You Are Worth the Time*, available from [www.janphillips.com](http://www.janphillips.com) (all Jan Phillips resources are available there).

- Play The *Conversation* from my CD, *All the Way to Heaven*. Have people talk about a line that moved them. Using music and imagery is a good way to keep people in their hearts and out of their heads. What we're trying to do is embody our wisdom, feel it in our beings, so we can live from our knowing, from our faith in what is right and good.

**HOMEWORK:** Notice what you're giving your time to. Does it energize you? Fulfill you? Do you want to change anything? Figure out how to give yourself 30 minutes of uninterrupted time a day. Talk about what you did with this time this next week.

**Facilitator:** Be mindful of the hour and bring the group to a close at the decided upon time. It'll be tempting to go over, but don't give in. It's important to honor the time commitments of the group.

*True spiritual practice springs from, not toward, enlightenment. Our practice does not lead to unity consciousness—it is unity consciousness. Krishnamurti*

*If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you.*  
Jesus- Gospel of Thomas

NOTES:

Session Two

## Who Am I and What Am I Here For?

Light the candle. Select a piece of music (CD suggestions in back of this book) and play a song for 4-5 minutes as people close their eyes, breathe deeply, and gather themselves together for the circle.

Read an opening poem. This poem *Seekers* is from *Marrow of Flame* by Dorothy Walters.

### **Seekers**

Each of us is searching for  
a wise man or woman  
to lead us,  
to present us  
a scroll heavy with answers.

Some of us have climbed the mountain,  
tracked the glacier's crust,  
lain down in snow for days, years,  
burning away to essence,  
preparing.

Others have clung  
to the underside of overhanging rock  
until their fingers turned  
to stone,  
until they were riveted  
like lead  
to this thin edge of certainty.

And others wander, drifting like mist  
through the valleys.

What is it we are seeking?  
What will we do if we are brushed  
by this lion's mane?



Read the poem twice and leave some breathing time before going on.

**Homework Review:** Before you start on this week's theme, return to the BALANCE question briefly. Give people a chance to say what's happened for them in the matter of TIME. Has anyone made any changes? Have they managed to give themselves 30 minutes of time a day? What's changed in their lives as a result of their actions? Give everyone 4-5 minutes to share. (Give time warnings if it seems warranted). Once everyone has shared, begin the exercise for this week.

**Exercise:** *Who Am I* and *What Am I Here For* are BIG QUESTIONS and many of us need help in discerning the answers. Our training has taught us to ask "What shall I do?" but not "Who am I?" If we know who we are, the doing comes naturally. When we act from our being, our *doing* is authentic, rewarding, meaningful, and passionate. And that's what we're after.

1. Play a piece of music and give people time (8-10 min) to fill out **A Modern Day Myth**. ***\*\*If there are men in the group, remind them that all their lives women have had to work at feeling included, being told that the word "he" meant all of us. I left the pronouns feminine here to give men a chance to experience this.*** Keep your eye on the group and notice when people start finishing. Give a two minute warning when half the group is done, allowing the slower ones to wrap it up. When everyone is done, have people read their story to a partner. If there are only 5-6 people in the group, there may be time to have everyone read. Give whomever wants to share time to read, and remember this exercise does not call for dialogue, just deep listening.

### A Modern Day Myth

Once upon a time, a little girl came to earth in order to \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_.

Her family called her \_\_\_\_\_ but all along she knew her real name was \_\_\_\_\_.

She had a ring with a special symbol on it and that symbol was a \_\_\_\_\_.

As this child grew up and explored the world, she encountered many dangers along the path, but she had a special animal that stayed by her side and protected her. This animal that loved and protected her was a \_\_\_\_\_. One day the animal whispered its name to the child, calling itself \_\_\_\_\_.

The animal gave to the child its special powers of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

On her journey through life, the child had to ward off the demons of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ when they tried to block her way. She battled bravely

using the powers from the animal, and her own inner gifts of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. Sometimes she failed, but most times she succeeded because \_\_\_\_\_.

When it came time for \_\_\_\_\_ to make a contribution to the world, she chose to \_\_\_\_\_ for she loved to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

She found great joy when \_\_\_\_\_ and was discouraged when \_\_\_\_\_. She did her best to bring about \_\_\_\_\_ and felt proud of herself when \_\_\_\_\_.

When the Great Goddess asked \_\_\_\_\_ what more she wanted from the heavens, reminding her that she could have anything she desired, she asked for \_\_\_\_\_ so she could \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_.

She received this in abundance and ever since then the world has been \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_.

THE END

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