

The Presence of the Circle Being

Conversation with the Circle of Seven, Ashland, Or; September 15-16, 2003

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CIRCLE of SEVEN: Anne Doshier, Barbara Coffman-Cecil, Serena Newby, Leslie Lanes, Beth Jandernoa, and Glennifer Gillespie. Circle of Seven voices indicated by "Co7".

I. Introduction

In the summer of 1995, six women gathered in a circle in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Their ostensible task was the development of a program for women who were going through changes in their lives. Following their first meeting, they gave up their images of noble purpose for the sake of others. No matter how hard they tried to create an event for women in transition, they kept being directed into their own life stories to find out what it would be like to unfold the next phase of their lives from deep within themselves and the field of their circle. Though they were dedicated to service, their own healing needs at that time overshadowed what they sought to do for others. This circle, now known as the Circle of Seven, has been meeting for four days three times a year for the past eight years. The seventh place represents the presence of the Great Spirit and provides an occasional space for an invited guest.

Four years after the circle's inception, the original intent resurfaced. The inward- looking cycle turned outward, and the women were ready to share the gold of their experience. This coincided with a maturing of their professional lives. Satisfaction for them had ceased to lie in the heroics of changing organizations; more fulfilling was passing on the sensitivities and orientation toward leadership they had learned to the next generation of women who carry a dream for a healthy and integrated world.

They believe that the premises and approaches they used are foundations for creating a world aligned with life's creative impulse, generosity, and deep design. Their experience confirms that integrated people, both men and women, are the inspiration for an integrated society, and that the field evoked by their presence and the work they did together in the circle has the capacity to hold and transform their lives, and the lives of those to whom they are connected.

The women who created this circle are: Barbara Coffman- Cecil, Anne Doshier, Glennifer Gillespie, Beth Jandernoa, Leslie Lanes, and Serena Newby. This interview is with the first five of these, as Serena was ill.

This conversation is part of a series of interviews that Otto Scharmer conducted with leaders who are learning to navigate into the future, deliberately aligned with life's deeper patterns. In his study he found collective intelligence integral to wise leadership, thus chose to interview a group experimenting in this area.

II. Circle Work: A 21st Century Movement in the Making

Otto: I am interested in seven topics: your story, your experience, the conditions that allow the circle experience to be present, the source from which this presence unfolds, how you consciously build the container that allows this to happen, how you cultivate the capacity for sustaining it, and the practical results that have emerged for you in your professional and personal lives.

III. Charging the Container

Otto: When you begin the circle work, what do you do first?

Co7: One of my beliefs is that we always rediscover how to begin. It's not as though we do exactly the same thing every time.

Having said that, our first concern is to create a charged container in which we can work.

We have to get enough "charge" so that our experience becomes visible and tangible.

That is the first thing.

Co7: I think about it slightly differently. **It takes moving or dropping through different levels of experience and being to charge the container**, for example, what we did at the beginning of this interview. We lit the candle. We ritualized the space by ringing the Tibetan bowl. And we went into silence together. The silence is deference to a larger pattern of life unfolding.

Then we have an experience together. We open the space through one person working something in themselves, or two of us doing something challenging or deepening together, or all of us participating in a meaningful or ground-breaking conversation.

The space gets charged sufficiently so that we can experience what Otto is describing at the bottom of the U model, which he is calling the Nameless. But what we experience at the beginning of our time together evolves. It's not necessarily the content which is the key to a deepening space, rather our positioning. It's about noticing our initial experiences that let us drop into a deeper place.

Otto: Like the seed quality of the whole at the beginning. That's what you did very consciously upfront. Right at the very beginning, you have the nutshell version of the whole. There is something done upfront that is a microcosm of the whole, which intentionally creates a small version of the whole at the beginning.

Co7: Yes, and it starts before that. It even starts before and before (circular gesturing), and it requires attention to notice the nutshell what is wanting to emerge.

Co7: It never stops.

Co7: Exactly. It just intensifies, and then fades and intensifies. I don't know if we should start talking about it now, but it seems to me that a lot of what we do and how we are together is embedded in a much larger context than when we actually sit together in circle together.

When we do sit together in circle, it's a concentration of what we're doing all the time with one another anyway. The circle gathering will just intensify our broader experience together. **When we meet in circle, we concentrate, or condense and then we concentrate more. Then we find ourselves dropping into a deeper space.**

It seems to me, though, that one of the questions, Otto, that you were asking was about how we sustain this. For me, we sustain it because we are always in each other's lives. We're connected in a deliberate way.

When we gather, it simply intensifies that relationship and, therefore, the experience. So in a way, the nutshell that you're describing isn't only present when we meet. It's just present differently. Does that make sense?

Otto: It does. I thought it might be useful to begin the conversation with describing the "what": how the phenomenon you talk about shows up in our everyday life.

IV. Collective Presence

Co7: I'm remembering how this circle emerged. There was something about a co-creative entry into life that it provided for me. That's not a belief; it's a knowing. I remember how the circle helped me, during [my husband] Guy's illness and death. At the time Guy was dying, Serena called, the two of you [other circle members] called, and while you didn't consciously know Guy was dying, at some level you did know. That wasn't planned; it wasn't rational. **It was an example of energetic knowingness that happens when we're all connected in the field.**

Co7: What I heard you just describing was evidence of the collective field that we share, where people were moved to call when they picked up that something special was happening, like when Guy was on his way out.

So the "what" to me is the collective presence. You ask, How do you create those conditions? Well, that's what our circle's been experimenting with for the past eight years.

How does this show up in our everyday lives? Well, Anne gave a good example.

I have to go back before there was ever any collective presence. We each came into the circle with an individual level of discipline, awareness, or understanding of our own connection to whatever that "what" is that you're referring to. I think you have to have that before you can have a collective presence, because they go hand in hand. You learn about that as you sit in circle. But there's something about having an individual, inner discipline that is part of the "how" of allowing a collective presence to form.

Otto: Maybe you could each share a story that exemplifies the "what."

V. Stories

Co7: I could start with something very recent that might be an example. This circle has grown other enterprises, inspired other . . .

Co7: . . . circles?

Co7: Yes, other circles, practices, or projects that we've taken on. One of those is called "Coming into Your Own," which is a program for women in transition.

Four of us were going to run that program, and we invited Anne to be our Elder, because Serena, who usually plays that role, couldn't come to that particular program. Only later did we begin to realize the significance of how life or the field seems to conspire in some way to make something happen for reasons we are not yet aware of.

At first, Anne said she couldn't come. But then the event she was booked to attend was cancelled, and it seemed as though the whole field had colluded in some way to create Anne being with us at that particular event, which included a large group of other women. As it turned out, we later realized

that the 10th anniversary of her initiation as an Elder in women's circles occurred during that program, as did her 80th birthday. This is such a good example of how the field works in ways that we can't plan, but in ways that later enter our awareness.

It seems to me that we respond to an impulse, and the impulse is part of something far larger, which later on makes sense. This, for me, is an example of what we're describing, how the field operates.

Co7: I'm thinking of an example that's a little different and more personal. In one of our sessions a while ago, we decided to have a conversation about menopause. We decided to explore more deeply how it had affected and was affecting our lives.

One of our circle practices consists of inventing processes on the spot that seem to address whatever an individual might be wrestling with, or sheds light on how this fits with what is going on in the larger world.

A particular process we invented for me was having people play different parts of me so that I could keep stepping back to discover a part of myself I was not familiar with. During that session, I discovered what I would call my inner wisdom figure.

It felt so present, so real, as though it were in a cave inside me, as if there were a special place inside me from which insight and understanding came. It was opened in the circle gathering, and I stood in that place and expressed myself from that internal place.

I had never seen or discovered that place before, but it seemed that my experience of it was something that had always been there, but wasn't meant to be accessed or opened until this time in my life.

Because of the group's capacity to respond, create, and generate a process together for me, I was able to discover a place in myself that, ever since, is the place I go to when I'm looking for wisdom. That came out of our deep inquiry. It wasn't just a heady inquiry; it was an inquiry into our bodies and a willingness to create new processes, practices, or activities.

So one circle phenomenon is our willingness to experiment and create new processes.

Since this process, I find that I make wiser choices. I have a larger perspective. For me, that's a story of a powerful thing that's come out of our work and continued in my life and lives with me all the time.

Otto: I noticed that when you were talking about that place, that your hands moved to this place (indicates chest area), around the heart region. And when you then said, "Me," you also pointed to there (same place). Can you describe some elements of that experience? How do you know whether you're operating from a normal identity or from this deeper authentic place? How does it feel different?

Co7: Well, I slow down a lot when I'm in the place of deeper knowing. I try to be aware of my bodily sensations. My breathing is slower; the world seems to slow down and so do I. The sensation is in my heart region. It feels like a deep, open, dark, yet illuminated place. It also feels strong, yet fluid, and different from the normal place from which I operate. When I say "normal," I'm referring to my mind and my thinking, deciding, trying to construct and make things happen, rather than listening to what's wanting to happen.

So when I go here, I have an experience of listening to feelings that are inside me that have valences to them. **A valence means that my experience, instead of feeling thin, feels full. It's more a feeling that my mind and my heart live in a kind of physical centeredness. I feel as though I've filled my whole body, rather than just my head. There's a sense that I'm more present in my whole body.**

I also have a sense of something feeling more ancient, a bit like a place that is older than me. It feels like something larger than me that I'm calling on.

Otto: When you talked about the mind a few minutes ago, you were pointing to your head, and then you were pointing to your heart region. Then in the last moment, when you spoke about "something else," you were pointing behind your head.

Co7: Because it feels as though it comes through me. Maybe that's why I'm pointing behind me. I'm larger than my body, and I feel that larger space. I feel as though I fill out a whole space that is larger than my body, and I'm accessing all the wisdom that's available to me, both in my particular personality or spirit. I'm accessing something that comes through me.

Otto: So when would this experience occur?

Co7: When I stop to ask myself what is really wanting to happen here, I'm listening to the wisest part of myself. That's what comes from me. I feel larger; I feel something coming through me.

But it also feels like something in me. It's matching up with something. I also feel it coming down, as though it comes here (points behind head), through the back of me, and then matches up with my whole center. All the chakras, if I can use that language, start feeling open or connected.

Otto: And you would have that experience as part of the circle also?

Co7: I remember the first time when I found that place as I was standing in the circle, and I can access it again. Immediately, I can call up that experience. All of a sudden my body fills out, and I feel connected. Then I start seeing things I don't normally see. Or I feel my capacities to be calmer, more present. I know things that I don't normally know.

Otto: What would be an example of knowing things that you normally don't know?

Co7: I may have a question about what to do in a process that I might be working through in the circle. I may think, !Whoa. I have no clue what to do here. That's when I will step back into that knowing place I mentioned. I will ask that place for help. After that, a new and different awareness seems to show up.

But it doesn't necessarily show up in me. It may show up out there. All of a sudden, someone will speak and suggest something obvious that we need to do. I know then to trust what is happening and to go with it.

Otto: You said you have learned to access that place in yourself anytime. So do you do what you just described? Do you picture the circle situation or bring it into presence through your memory?

Co7: All I have to do is have that image, and then I can go there.

Otto: So the circle is actually, so to speak, a channeling system. It allows you to connect with that source.

Co7: Yes, I would say that. And not just in this experience, but in many experiences. A lot of what we do is to create a ritual space, and after a while, suddenly something deeper starts to come through.

Co7: As you were speaking, I realized that my experience is very different from your's? How you describe your work in the circle and what you access because of it.

I know that for me, it's always a struggle to let go of my individual container and to release myself into the whole container. In a similar way, it's a struggle, or it always takes effort and discipline to release myself into, for example, an intimate encounter, a sexual encounter, or close encounter. This may not be true for others, but for me it's so hard to release my personal boundary and relax into the circle.

It takes a huge amount of inner work and letting go for me to do that. If it weren't for the charged space that we create together, I don't know that I would be able to do that. Even to do the kind of work that we've been describing: the one-on-one work or opening myself in the circle: is really hard for me.

So I draw on the memory living in my own body about how I opened the last time. Some of that's from the circle, and some from other experiences. But there's something about the struggle to open that is mine to bring into the circle, which I think helps create the circle field.

I feel as though, when I release, there's more present. But I probably hold out more than others. We've never really talked about this, but it feels accurate. Each of us works differently with how we let go into the collective. Each time, it requires crossing a threshold. For me, it does, every single time. It even begins with resistance to meeting that I have to navigate in myself every time. It's a different resistance each time. After we had been meeting for a longer period, it got easier. But I still had to navigate it every time at that threshold.

Otto: What were the other elements of this threshold or thresholds? Because you have been down that road often, maybe you have made some observations about the nature of the challenges that you face.

Co7: I feel as though I'm going to die if I let go into the circle. So I have to notice and be okay with the feeling. Now I'm quicker at noticing the feeling, instead of just resisting.

So I notice it, and then I do things to help myself open. For instance, if the circle is in our home, preparing the space helps me let go into it. If it's at someone else's home and I have to cross the threshold and enter, it's much harder for me, because I haven't been part of the preparation cycle.

If I've been home and opened from being in a home space, it's not as difficult. If I have traveled immediately beforehand, or working hard, I've kept myself in a close and protected container; it's more difficult for me to open up.

Even talking about it now is hard for me. Navigating the territory of having been out in the world, managing everything coming at me when I'm working, and then to come into the circle, which I have to do quite often, is very hard for me. And I have to really pay attention and spend time alone beforehand to be able to let go.

Then there's more letting go that's needed when I have to receive feedback from people. **I remember a little while ago we were meeting at Serena's, we all gave each other feedback. Leslie gave me four pieces of feedback in a row. There was so much coming at me that I wasn't prepared for and wasn't open enough. I just said, "Stop! That's enough! I don't want any more feedback!"**

I had to do that to protect myself, because I wasn't in an open enough space and hadn't been in the circle long enough to be able to receive that. So I know from having experienced it often that I hold my heart quite closely. Opening takes me more time than someone like Beth, who lives in that space much more readily.

So releasing into the whole is not self-evident for me, even though I've practiced it many times. I always need to experiment with more ways to open. If I'm not vigilant, I stay defensive for quite a long

time. Then my contribution to the collective suffers. Our field doesn't generate as quickly, partly because of me.

Co7: I want to appreciate what you just shared. I love how you articulated that. You really opened into this circle with Otto here.

Otto: I'm struck by the words, "I feel as though I'm going to die." I do know that experience exactly. How would you describe that? How does the story continue?

Co7: The story goes like this: there's fear, because there's a boundary that has to be stepped over. Traversing that boundary is what I imagine it must feel like to die. I won't be who I am now when I cross the boundary.

So if I'm not who I am now, what will I be when I cross the boundary? Who will I be? Because I don't know who I'll be, it's very frightening, because I can't protect myself. I become vulnerable. I'm frightened, because I have to step over something that has kept me safe in a way that's familiar.

Otto: So what happens next?

Co7: Then I usually step over the boundary, although sometimes I step only a little way. If I step all the way, it's such a relief to have taken the step. I feel freer. Somehow I didn't know beforehand that I would feel freer, even though I've done it before.

It takes a lot to do that. Just as in a sexual encounter when the boundary blurs between two people, you think you're going to lose yourself. You think you're going to lose yourself in the other person, and initially it may be very nice. But after a time, once the two of you start differentiating again and individuating, you've still got to navigate that boundary again in a different way. When everyone's done that, we have this collective presence in a different way. We have a new being. We have the presence of the Circle Being. My experience is that, until I've done that, I don't experience the Circle Being. After that, it's beyond me as an individual. I don't matter so much as an individual anymore. Yet I'm more of an individual at the same time.

VI. Building the Container

Co7: **To me, what just happened was you going over the boundary here.** If I were to describe this energetically, as you started to speak, your voice was higher. You were speaking quickly and breathily. As you pushed into what's on the inside or what's on the other side of that threshold, your rhythm and the pacing changed. **Your voice tone dropped. And the energy moved from here (pointing at head) to here (indicating chest and gut).**

Co7: Now I bet Otto feels as if he belongs. I feel that he belongs.

Otto: Oh, you feel like I belong?

Co7: Yes.

Co7: There's something about the quality of authenticity and genuineness that creates an opening and therefore allows the quality of the collective presence to shift.

VII. Taking Risks

What I saw happening was a risk taken. The story I told is about a risk. **There often has to be a risk in order for the collective to show up. The risk can be one person's, two people's, or all of ours, but there has to be some kind of risk or vulnerability for crossing the threshold that you're talking about.** I felt the whole space shift. Because you took a risk, it shifted the space for all of us. Maybe there are a lot of different thresholds. So, Barbara, was my attribution that you found it easier to cross that kind of boundary accurate?

VIII. Feeling the Essential Connection

Co7: It's different for me every time. You described a more steady resistance, leaving what I call the personality level to drop into something that's deeper and less personal. Sometimes I have a big block like that.

One block for me is if I have a heartache about someone in the room or something in the relationship field is unclear. I don't believe that our group is primarily about personal healing or relationship healing, but if the field is not clear because of personal things, that registers very deeply for me. I have to push through that to open the doorway in myself. For example, there were unclaritys for me last time when all of you were in South Africa. I was hurt by our communication. I felt as though I made a lot of overtures, and nothing came back. I was working hard on joint projects that I didn't feel were understood or supported. So until I could voice that and reconnect at a more essential level, it was hard for me to let go into the circle.

It's as though we have relational issues that need to clarify and shift into something more fundamental. **I think it's true of all relationships, that there is a personality dance that happens, for better or worse. Yet there's a more fundamental note that is the being-to-being connection.**

I just couldn't find the fundamental note. To me, the main reason for working that personality level is so we reconnect at that essential level.

IX. Keeping the Field Clear

One commitment we've had is to keep the field clear in all our one-on-one relationships, even when we're not together. We work at it. I assume it's like being in a marriage. If you're really doing the relationship well, you work at it. Very few collectives commit to that.

It's not that we're so interested in the personality level in the end. My perception is that working the personality level is a prerequisite. There's always a threshold to cross when we've misunderstood and misjudged one another. We could tell a lot of stories about things we've been through to return to true relationship. There's commitment at an essential level that's a big enabler for the collective field.

Co7: I think one reason that I have craved this kind of space is because of an internal sense about how life unfolds. I believe that there is a design, that things are being orchestrated all the time by the larger field.

If nobody gets in the way with their own agendas or our personality scenarios, then a possibility can fulfill itself. **Once we get over the threshold, there's a certain richness, a collective listening capacity that is humbling.** It's unimposing and therefore the kind of experience that you were talking about, Beth, becomes possible.

When the richness is present we can bring different situations to life in it. The reason we activate a representation of the issue at hand, as opposed to just talking about it, is that doing it brings the energy of the situation into the room, as opposed to having an intellectual conversation about it. Enactment of some kind brings real-time energy into the room.

X. The Power of Collective Listening

There is the example of Liz, a woman whose life was fractured, with family in one place, her spiritual life in another, and friends scattered all over. She's a very passionate and complex person. She had an impulse to integrate her life, to experience wholeness of being. So in the circle, I didn't want her to talk just about that. I wanted her to pick up objects in the room and place them in relationship to one another to represent her life and to indicate the different energy streams that were shaping the different parts of her life.

So we cleared a space on the floor. She used some rocks and other objects that were in the room as symbols of her life.

Co7: Raisins.

Co7: That's right, raisins.

Co7: We had granola mix with raisins for snacking!

Co7: Right. So it became real, as opposed to just a description. It was symbolic. The energy comes into the room very directly when you're working with symbol. And ritual intensifies the field. So that's one way of getting out of your head. Once Liz got her life spread out on the floor, we all just held the process she was working with as it developed. We weren't trying to change her or do anything. I just asked her, "How would you like your life to become more connected?"

She took the dish of raisins and intuitively started making connecting lines between different pieces of her life. **It came from her heart, a desire. Again, we didn't analyze it to make any big deal about it, but it was just held with sanctity and blessing. Later on, within two months, she broke out of a very stuck place and took a trip.**

Co7: She drove across the country.

Co7: And without even knowing that this happened, she exactly followed the lines that she had drawn.

Otto: Really?

Co7: Between the rocks with the raisins.

Co7: From California to New York.

Co7: And when she got to New York, her parents had organized a family intervention to reconnect with her, which was a surprise. It involved all her siblings, her parents, and two therapists. They had convened because they wanted to connect with Liz again.

What we realized was that she had set the whole pattern symbolically in the circle, as though there was something already present that wanted to come through. It needed expression, and then it could manifest, which it did, exactly.

What I call "unfoldment" is trusting a sense of what to do. You can set a predetermined pattern at some level. It's life's urge for movement. Is this making any sense?

Co7: Let me connect it, Barbara, because that was the birth of the symbols process that you have been through, and the one I use. That was discovery.

Co7: I have an example, too, a very quick, personal one. I've always struggled with my father about money and power. He has always used money for all sorts of reasons to control people and situations. I felt stuck in my use of money and in my relationship with my father, because very often he had made promises to me that he hadn't kept with respect to money, starting when I was very young.

I asked the group whether I could invent a process whereby I would work this territory with my father. So I set up a photograph of him, a big pile of money, and various other symbols representing all the factors in the picture. Then I spoke to him very directly as if he were in the room. It was a very difficult process for me, because I had so much feeling coming up in me. I loved him, and I felt as though I were betraying him.

But with the support of the circle, I was able to say things to him in that process and move money around in particular ways, which changed everything for me. When I went back home, my father gave me a huge, for him, sum of money, freely.

Co7: For the first time in your life.

Co7: Yes. It shifted everything for me. The block that I had with him lifted as a result of bringing what had been inside me, outside me in symbol form.

How the field held me as I worked was very important. It seemed to rearrange everything inside me. My attribution is: In the process, I worked with what was inside me in the arena of the circle, and it changed my experience "out there". But I couldn't change the pattern until I'd represented it here, in mini symbol form.

XI. Unconditional Witnessing

Co7: If I had done that process alone or with a single coach, I don't think it would have carried what it did. But the group knew how to witness, to hold, and to do it on behalf of the larger field.

Co7: It's not that we were trying to get her father to give her money. **It was us loving her, loving her father, and her painting a picture of exactly what was so. And then letting go.** It's a blessing. Then life will use that, if it's a pure offering, to move through into a more whole place.

One hallmark of this circle is the ability to offer things to life for the greater good. The field, in a way, becomes a symbol of a greater knowing.

XII. Being a Portal to Universal Patterns

Co7: I think the reason this is touching to me is because we carry an awareness that the details of our lives are portals to bigger patterns.

Co7: We are very careful not to manipulate though.

Co7: Manipulate, get more money, get better relationships, fix your own life. That does not wash in this circle!

Co7: Is this helpful, Otto?

Otto: Absolutely. I heard you describing three different conditions. There is a field. The field is already there. That's an assumption, right? Or the collective presence is already there. Now, the question is, how to activate that? What you both described is three different conditions or perspectives. During the past few days, when I was at the Dalai Lama conference, people talked about first person and third person.

Third person is observation from outside. First person is introspection, looking into my own experience. Now, what you describe is third person, first person, and second person. So first person is the person who does the symbols process. Third person is actually the representation of that situation in some constellations of symbols that allows us to look at that from a different stance.

Then the last perspective is the second-person knowledge, that is, the unconditional witnessing by the surrounding community. With regard to that, how did you describe the quality of intention on behalf of life?

Co7: The quality of witnessing or holding that we're talking about here is personal identification with source in the circle. Something like: the eyes through which you see, the heart through which you feel, the ears with which you listen are not personal.

What I'm picturing right now is that, when something starts to happen, when something is coming to focus in the room, then I feel that the circle knows how to back into the power of the field.

So there is very little projection onto the situation. There is little intent other than opening to what life wants to have happen right then. There's sensitivity without manipulation. A spirit of blessing. And a deep trust in the quality of that presence.

XIII. Unconditional Love

Co7: Another way to describe that quality is unconditional love -- non-judgment. My interpretation of the conditions that allow a shift to take place is that you take something that's in you, and you put it out there.

It could be some kind of block in you, some kind of energy. You have lots of stuff around it: judgments, spins. You don't like it. **But when it comes into the circle field, we witness it lovingly just as it is.** The power of witnessing unconditionally does something. Suddenly, the situation is looked at and blessed, and maybe it's not as bad as you thought!

Co7: It's transformed.

Co7: ... allowed to shift into something else.

XIV. Three conditions of collective listening and holding

Otto: So there is layering in what you describe, right? The **first condition is a suspension of the projection of the judgments.** You described that as part of your threshold experience. In your story, it was the same thing. So suspension of judgment and unconditional witnessing are one condition.

The **second condition is clearing the horizontal space** by unconditional love. When I interviewed Peter Senge a couple of years ago, he talked about love in terms of “showing up and being present.” That was his definition of love. Showing up and being present. Fully present with.

And the **third condition maybe has to do with having the trust that the presence, or whatever you name it, is going to show up and do the work.**

Co7: Yes. The focus of energy drops out of the head and into the heart in the room, because the opening usually happens when somebody's heart really opens.

Otto: Just a footnote to that. When we talked on the way home about our experience with the Dalai Lama, Katrin [my wife] described a similar experience. She said, "I feel that he loves everybody in the room. He would love me."

Several Voices: Yes, yes.

Otto: That was her primary experience of that impersonal love.

Co7: The language I use -- and people tell me it's accurate -- is that there is a blessing that comes with impersonal love. **It's the impersonality of the love. Your personality doesn't overlay the situation.** And I do think we as a collective somehow manage to simply hold that impersonal level. We have no attachment, no requirement, no judgment.

Otto: The third condition has to do with a certain direction of intension. What is that exactly?

Co7: Some of it, I think, is what you pay attention to. I'll use "B" as an example, on a personal level and on a family level. B has struggled a lot with lack of confidence in different ways. Even in the middle of B's work on lack of confidence, it is not what I see in her. I see through that wound to the truth of her. So it's where I place my awareness; the placement does the work.

For me, her father would be one of the most challenging people in the world if I weren't operating with this kind of awareness. He's ultra-conservative. **But I have made a commitment to seeing her father as a very heartfelt man. I will not back off that. So I have to make corrections in myself.** It's a discipline of attention that has to do with how I see the people who are described by others in the circle.

Co7: I appreciate what you're saying, Barbara. We have an agreement to see the essential self that we call the no-mess-up clause. No matter what one of us does, she can't mess up as far as the others are concerned. We include our families and our friends in this, too.

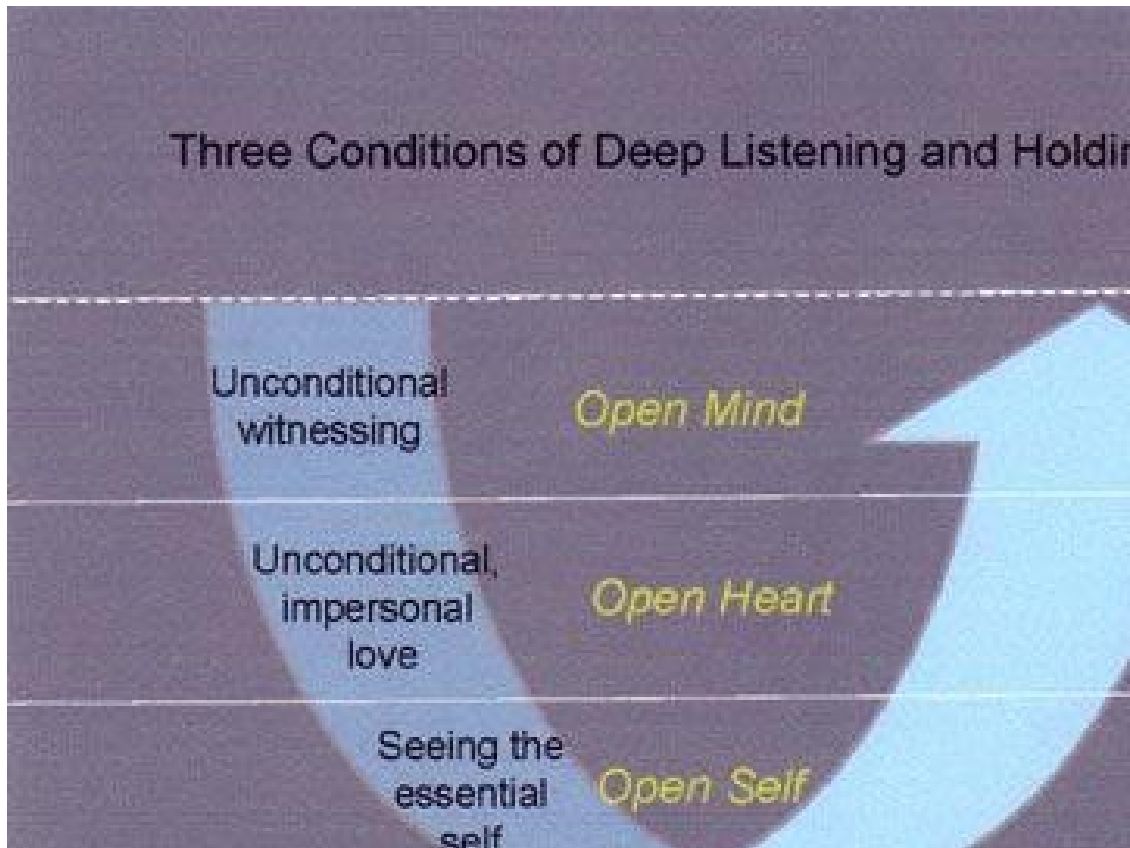
Co7: We include our close relationships, political figures, and others we want to support. But we're very aware that the quality of attention and the way we hold things have creative power.

Otto: So the intention is placed on...

Co7: ...the essential self. Maybe it's a little bit like knowing that people are not their personalities. Knowing that we have wounds, shadows, and struggles. It's not that we don't have to deal with them or confront them, but we pay attention to them in context.

Co7: Our fundamental connections aren't about wounds and shadows. But we do deal with these darker elements if they come up. **We don't back off shadows or conflicts if they appear.**

Co7: Right. But I think we have a shared belief that one of the greatest forms of service to people is to see their essential selves -- that somehow through my seeing that, they experience more of themselves.



XV. The holding practice

Co7: If we have a dominant circle practice, it has to do with holding. We frequently talk about holding, and I think we all know what we mean by it. My experience is that usually I go into an altered space when my work is in focus in the circle, and being witnessed.

I'm doing things with the symbols, and I'm saying things that I would never normally think of saying. I'm in a very different state and very different space than I would be, as you said, if I were expressing myself without being witnessed.

I'm held by the group deliberately, which has to do with witnessing, loving, and being fully present, which is not trivial.

Co7: I agree with that.

Co7: That has to do with holding and really paying attention to what's going on in the middle of the circle. For example, when we first arrive for our circle meeting, we might put pictures of our families on the table, pictures of people who we know are struggling, or perhaps a symbol of the Middle East. Whatever it is that we want to have held by the group and blessed during the process, we'll describe and put on the table at the beginning.

As important matters come up, we might add them in symbol form to the collection on the table. At the end, we might each say, **"I have something that I'd like held" or, "I'd like this intention held," when we check out before closing the circle. It could be a simple thing like, "I'd like to write a letter to my brother to really connect with him deeply, and I'd like you to hold me as I do that, until the next circle." Or, "My parents are ill." Or we may really want to hold a particular politician or event that we think is valuable.**

One of your questions was about sustaining. We sustain the intention and the energy of that person's intention by the practice of holding during the time that we're apart, after the circle breaks up. This is a practice of continuing to hold the field that I think we're not fully aware of. It's been developing since we began the circle.

Otto: Before we dive further into that, it seems to me that what you're describing as "holding" is something different from empathic listening, right? With empathic listening, I get lost in the other person. I move into all the sentiments and all the trouble. But you have a rather different gesture, which is that you are partly inside the other. You are present with the other, not just an observer, but at the same time, you are also consciously witnessing.

Co7: Yes.

XVI. Collective Second Person

Otto: Ken Wilber makes the distinction between I, we, and it. It strikes me that what you describe is yet another perspective: the second person plural, that is, unconditional witnessing by a collective.

What I heard you describe is how unconditional witnessing by a collective works in terms of a nonjudgmental stance and in terms of the open heart. That places the attention toward what's becoming - what's coming into being. It's the evolving self, not what's already there.

Co7: Right.

Otto: It would be fascinating to inquire further into the idea that this is not just an individual practice. I know it is an individual practice from interviewing others, but it's also a collective practice. It is the foundation of circle practice. It also strikes me that this is something that you could activate even if you're no longer in the same space and time.

Co7: Yes.

Co7: There's one more piece that has to do with our framing of how you recreate the world. The world is recreated through this practice. Change happens through this practice, but it's change that isn't manipulated. It is change that is evoked from the inside out.

XVII. Transformation through holding (listening)

Co7: If you have a dedicated field like this that's sustained over time, then you can experience the effect of sustained collective attention on things. Trust comes because there's trustworthy action that you keep experiencing over and over. I think it's a developed trust that comes from an experience of how life, or the field, works on things that have been held in that way. We can tell you many different stories about how this has worked. Now we laugh about it. We're not so tempted to manipulate. We're not trying to fix things.

We don't have great ideas for other people. We 've developed a program of mentorship for young women leaders that's built around these practices. We know that a collective way of seeing and affirming each young woman is going to allow her to shift into a deeper level of who she is and how she shows up in the world.

Otto: We just talked about you developing a collective capability here. Could you say whether or not you operate in this collective field or in your individual capacity? How would you know? How can we get our arms around this collective second-person capability? One way to approach that question may simply be to share one or two more stories about that. I, for example, could share one.

Co7: Okay, go ahead.

Otto: At one point, my wife and I ran into some serious issues in terms of not operating from that deeper place. Things gradually became worse, and then there was a turning point. But we didn't even notice that it had happened.

So our best man and best woman [from our wedding] sat together with us, and we described the situation. They listened to us with an open mind, an open heart, and an intention to help. It's not that we hadn't talked about it before, but now it was attended by this quality of listening.

Co7: By them.

Otto: Yes, but they were not just any observers. They asked because they cared. They probed, and some different aspects came out as we talked, not exactly the same aspects as before, but similar.

After the meeting, you could have said, "So what?" But afterward, maybe six or eight months later, we noticed that things had changed. We were actually beyond the turnaround. We were way beyond, but we did not notice for quite a while.

That moment when our best man and best woman sat with us was definitely when things began to shift on a very subtle level. They dedicated their listening to what the reality was and to the future, to the deeper aspects of our unfolding lives. They did not let go of that or give up.

So that's a very vivid example of what you spoke about.

Co7: Your example's a very good one. My view is that people can do this on purpose. If they practice doing it and get good at it as a group, if they can sustain it for long enough to see results, they can influence the outer world.

Now it's embodied for you, and you know that happened. This is what we have been experimenting with for the past eight years.

Otto: My example was relationship, right? So this does not apply just to individuals but also to social entities, collectives, and relationships.

Co7: You might say that their standing up for you at your wedding in the first place is the beginning of holding a container for you and your wife. You spoke your vows and your intentions in a field attended by friends and family. To varying degrees, both the officiates of services like weddings and the people who stand up for and witness their friends have some conscious awareness of what they're doing.

Co7: So relationships are more likely to flourish and to unfold if they are held in a larger field, particularly if they're held consciously in a larger field and cared for or blessed consistently over time.

XVIII. Naming the World

Co7: In listening to your story, the interesting question for me is, how might people be helped to recognize what is happening in their lives and relationships more quickly? What I heard was that you took a long time to recognize what was going on, Otto.

Co7: But in the circle, because we're attending, we can recognize what's happening sooner and begin the conscious work with it.

Co7: Conscious recognition.

Co7: When something is actually embodied, it's easier to see and talk about. You can see how the patterns work. It's very important to be able to describe how a particular pattern works and to find words for it, which I think is part of the reason we're called to do this work. We're doing it purposely on behalf of many people, with increasing discipline, awareness, and skill.

Co7: It reminds me of Paolo Freire, the great community organizer, and his Conscientus Assesione process, in which he taught people to name their world. **Once they could name their world, they could take the next step, which is core to what we do.**

Co7: What does it mean to name your world?

Co7: He worked with people who did not have a language by which they could name and, therefore, see the world they lived in, so they could never change it. He was a great critical pedagogue and educator in Brazil, who worked with the poor. Often the poor had no way to name the causes of their poverty, and the result was what Freire called "internalized oppression."

Co7: I think that that applies here. What you're trying to do, Otto, is help us name the circle world we can no longer see clearly, because we are in it. I'm not sure you can teach this, but we can learn it if we're put into a learning situation in which you're helped to experience it, recognize it, and name it. Then it's learned because it's seen.

Otto: I would say that both the symbols process and your true stories are naming processes.

Co7: A lot of what we do is to name.

Co7: Yes. Most of the things we do are naming.

Co7: It's taking what's inside collectively and bringing it to the outside.

Co7: In your relationship with your wife, the awareness and naming came as you were witnessed. I also think in a lot of the work that we do, whether it's meditation, dialogue work, engaging in an organization, or doing work in the community, we're doing the same kind of thing: witnessing, seeing, naming, learning, and then changing.

I haven't been aware of it in quite this way before. Now I feel as though my work is much more grounded and more powerful. I can access the circle work and bring it more into the world.

Co7: In your own work, you can have people step into different energies and consciously name what they see from different energetic or archetypal perspectives.

I think that really teaches people to hold the situation and to hold each other. There's something transformational in that process. I find when I bring this approach into teams, organizations, or courses that I do, things shift much more quickly than usual.

I think the difference is that, when I hear colleagues talk about this in other settings, there isn't necessarily the dimension or intention of serving life. It's more about serving the team, serving the organization, or serving whatever goals or outcomes are important. So for me, this other dimension makes the circle work differently.

Otto: The quality of intention is different, but then so is the openness of the heart, right? That's very difficult to accomplish. And the same applies to being nonjudgmental. Just saying nothing doesn't mean you're not judgmental.

XIX. Your Essential Self is Present With You

Co7: I have a belief that works for me. My belief is that your essential self is there, present with you. If you talk to me, and I start being judgmental of you, I can still engage with that essential part of you. That takes me out of my judgment of your personality. It works!

Co7: But I thought you liked my personality!

Co7: For me, the point is that we are creative beings; therefore we can evoke or create, or both. In a way, I create Beth. We co-create each other, because of how we see each other. So in the circle, we co-create the circle together because of how we see each other and what we are seeking to do.

Co7: This comes back to what I said at the beginning, **that there's something individual that happens for each of us, and then there's a shared creation that also happens.** It's all going on inside me, but there's also something we do that we agree on that makes it a collective.

XX. Evoking the Presence of the Circle Being

Otto: I am still not quite clear on the exact difference between individual second-person and collective second-person.

Here are two examples. When you told your story, somebody said, "Well, it would not have been the same if just one other person had been attending to it. It was the collective group attention that created the difference." Now, is that always the case? Are you saying it takes more than one person? If there had been only one other, would that have been enough? That's the first question -- where does the collective begin and end? Is it one additional person, or is it two or more?

The second question is, Can you tell the difference experientially? When you listen to me, can you tell, "Well, now I am listening to him one on one, and now I'm listening to him from our group vehicle of attention?"

Co7: Yes, both questions are good. I hadn't thought about it that way.

Co7: I notice that I hear you differently from how I usually hear you, as we sit here in this circle. I hear what you're saying in the context of how we relate here, rather than in the context of us being in Boston

with other colleagues, with the Global Institute folks, or even just you and I. There's a different quality. I'm hearing what you're saying in new ways. And I'm seeing you differently; you're showing up differently, although you're still Otto, and you still do some of the same things and make the same gestures. But what's being evoked in you is different from what I see being evoked in other settings.

Co7: This may be my own attribution, but here's how I experience work in the circle, if I'm the one who's doing the work, being witnessed, or assisted by another person. My experience is that there's a thickness in the atmosphere of this circle "an enabling presence" that allows me to go deeper than if, say, Beth and I were working only with one another.

I see more. I see more of myself. I see more of what I'm working with. I don't know whether that's because of the skill levels in the group, or whether it's because of the quality of attention, or a combination of both. But my experience is that I see more; I experience more of myself.

We do sometimes work one on one together. But at those times, for me, very little shifts. When we work in the circle, though, more shifts for me. I would attribute that to the quality of the atmosphere or the quality of the container.

I feel like a bigger person. I feel fuller in my own being. And I feel empowered or enabled in a particular way. I feel seen. I feel the focus of attention is refined; that it's nonjudgmental, and loving. And I feel the presence of the Circle Being, which is different from the sum of the individuals.

So I can't really describe it any differently than that. When it's not there, I know it. It takes a little time for the Circle Being to be invoked. When it is present, there 's a different quality to my experience. I feel, through the agreement we have together, I have permission to be my fullest self. I can be wise

Otto: As the witness or as the one bringing content for examination?

Co7: Both.

Co7: Do others have that experience too?

Co7: I'd like to answer your question, Does it have to be one or two or three other people? I would say that I have the experience of being the one held by one person and also that of holding only one person.

Some major change, shift, or transformation can happen by the power of witnessing or holding. But I think it depends on the quality of that holding, the quality of the atmosphere. Certainly, if it's a bigger circle, there may be more power, but not necessarily. I do think it can be done with one person, and that the most important factor is the quality of presence.

Co7: I think it's like that quote from the Bible, "If there are two or more gathered together in one place, with one accord in one place . . ."

Otto: In my name.

Co7: There am I in the midst of them. And I don't mean that in a Christian sense. I mean if two or more are gathered in the name of love, then another presence is evoked and there is intensification.

Co7: When I open, I know that there's a larger pattern, and that there is a world beyond form. There is something that informs the form world. I have great deference and reverence for that.

You used the word "channeling" earlier, Otto. I think it's a very appropriate word if it can be framed in a way that isn't sensational. That can occur when there is an awareness of the greater will of life, which is beautiful, coherent, and ever present. When that can come through, it has a big effect on things.

I have two ways of contacting that "greater will." I used to lean on one of them. I was part of an intentional community, which is why I think I became addicted to the collective. It helped me open to the greater field and the greater pattern. When I opened, that became my reason for living, because I had a direct experience of the greater pattern and the greater world, and the textures and feelings of that.

But now I've been able to develop the personal discipline to actually open into an absolute myself through meditation. I've come to see that there is a different quality of opening, depending on whether it's individual or collective. It works in a different way, but both are openings.

XXI. Calling the Circle

Co7: When we call the circle, I know that we are held in and part of what I call the Great Field. **In calling a circle, we are co-responsible for that which has been called from the Great Field. Yet to me, the partner in the Great Field can always be called upon. The moment that I participate in calling the circle, I'm lighting the sacred fire and entering the stillness.** I have a prayer that I will be co-responsible for that small part of the Great Field of all that is, and that, as humans, we are offering to be co-responsible for.

My experience -- and this could come from a different culture, upbringings, and experiences -- is that the individual moves into the background. That of which I am now a part -- the collective pattern -- moves into the foreground. I can sense it immediately and see it in energetic terms. That great presence, which is the field of all life moving, is available to us. I think we call on that in this circle.

XXII. The Small Group is the Unit of the Future

Research has shown that seven is the perfect number for a small group. I have a totally different experience when I'm sitting in solitude, in groups of 12, or randomly sized groups. I sit in many circles and I'm really quite convinced that the small group is the unit of the future. In the small group, individuals move into the background and the collective being comes into the foreground. We are learning to hold the small field of the circle as a place in which we intensely live our lives and learn things.

Otto: Can you say a little more about what you mean when you say, "We create a place and then I am co-responsible."

Co7: Would you agree that there is a great field that moves throughout creation?

Otto: Yes.

Co7: And that **In calling a circle, we are co-responsible for that which has been called from the Great Field. Yet to me, the partner in the Great Field can always be called upon. The moment that I participate in calling the circle, I'm lighting the sacred fire and entering the stillness.**

Otto: Which you all share?

Several voices: Yes.

Co7: That act of co-responsible calling doesn't set tight boundaries. It says that this field, which is delicate, energetic, and collective, is not just the sum of six or seven people. **It immediately becomes something larger when the collective is called. It's as though the song of the collective appears.**

Do you remember, Barbara, that I was asked to sit as an Elder in that difficult group? The group got quite stuck, even though we had wonderful practitioners there, and the team came and asked me what to do. I said, "What you can do is send a voice to the partner in the Great Field, and ask for words and insights that will move this group." So they did that, and an amazing operational field evolved.

[We broke for the evening, reconvening in the morning with an untranscribed conversation about "how we were doing" from Otto's vantage point. Otto confirmed we were on track and should trust our own instincts as to what was trying to happen step-by-step. A suggestion came to start the day with an experience of yielding to the surrounding field, resting in it as a point of origin for the day's conversation.]

XXIII. Locating Your Collective Identity in the Great Field

Otto: What is the distinction you mentioned between the first, second, third fields?

Co7: I'll describe the fields briefly. Rub your hands together a little bit. Put your hand and arm out as far as you can, palm facing toward your chest. We're feeling for different qualities of atmosphere, like a graduation of thickness or shifting sensation in your hand. Move your hand slowly toward your body and notice if you feel any edges or different energetic rings as you come in.

I'm going to describe my experience. **There's one ring that sits out about as far as I can reach. And then there's a middle range between 10 and 18 inches from my chest, and then I hit something that feels of denser, inside that ring. I feel three rings. Does anybody feel anything different as you try this?**

Co7: Yeah. My experience is such a gradual shift that I don't feel an edge.

Co7: Do you feel a change as you come in through?

Co7: Yes, but not an edge.

Co7: What I've come to know is that, during my meditation, I actually project my locus of identity into the third field, which is what I am referring to as the outer sphere around us -where life's rhythms, and innate design are intact. The inner rings are characterized more by our personality and ancestral stories.

Otto: The outer one?

Co7: Yes. It's why, when people sit in certain meditation postures, their hands often rest on their knees in contact with the third field.

I just relax my being, my body, into the clear third field. The third field holds the universal pulsation and pattern of life, or Great Field. So meditation can locate us more in the Great Field. I'm interested in intending together to locate our individual and, thus, our collective identity in the Great Field.

Co7: I like that. That's a great experiment; let's go for it.

[bell]

[10 minutes of silence followed, then each spoke of his or her experience. The atmosphere in the room softened and slowed down.]

Co7: I had an experience of being like a satellite dish. Then I realized that my attention, in a way, is always like a satellite dish. What am I turning my attention toward? What am I opening up to? When my awareness is raised, I can open up to other frequencies or possibilities, information, and understanding that I have not known were accessible.

I felt like I could have gone on for much longer this morning; we could have had 40 minutes of silence.

Co7: What I noticed was a gentle pulsation. The field had quality to it. I felt myself relaxing my own heart rhythm and breath. These functions were relaxing into that larger field, letting a slower wave inform my presence. **I was feeling the field holding me - breathing me, actually. And interestingly enough, one thing that came to my mind was "What's going on at the WTO?"**

Co7: In Cancun.

Co7: Yes. The alliance between the poor nations and the swell of protest that's been happening there. It wasn't that I was trying to think about it, more like I was feeling the larger current moving through everything. Aware of some pervasive undercurrent, I felt connected to the bigger story.

As that situation in Mexico came to mind, it felt significant to me, from a place of witnessing, not judging or rooting for the underdogs. I noticed that there's a lot going on right now that seems affected by a deeper force pushing through. Events feel shaken up.

In a way, I was resting in a deeper trust that life was having its way with the whole world. That's what I feel like this morning. I also feel, in a more immediate sense, the rightness of our being together in a more aware and open way. This particular combination of people just sitting here feels really precious.

Co7: That's interesting. **I felt urged to call Serena and bless her into the field [she was absent due to illness].** And then Zimbabwe came into my awareness. I was supposed to go there this fall to support some bold people in life-affirming communities. But Harare was too dangerous to visit. So I had to bless these courageous people. The State Department had said, "Do you want to put your whole board at risk by being there this time?" So now I blessed them all again.

XXIV. Serving the clearing

Otto: It strikes me that the quality of the collective field here can be described as a clearing in the woods. It has a vertical dimension and an openness. And it is held by a surrounding outer or horizontal boundary. It's a holding space for the emergence of a new impulse.

Co7: When you talk about following an impulse, it feels related to what you said about an incubator, a place where there's an intention to develop capacities to pay attention to life's intent. Being true to that intent within the boundary of this dedicated time together defines what the Circle of 7 does. We use our own storylines, situations, and connections in service to that emergence. We're not here for ourselves. **I trust that what comes in the flow as "my" challenge or seemingly personal situation has meaning beyond me. Though it is personal, it is respectfully placed in the clearing because we trust it also relates in some way to broader factors that need clarification or realignment.**

Co7: Maybe this has something to do with finding the stillness in a wider sphere that's a little outside of personal stillness. There is a personal stillness: I can get still and my world will be still. But maybe there's a stillness that is the bigger field stillness. That is a silent revolution, carrying a spiraling pulsation- order to chaos, chaos to order- that feeds the whole system. Life is about order and chaos. **Nature shows us that. I am actually starting to see this spiral going. It's coming to me now.**

XXV. Painting pictures of circle presence

Otto: I'd like to invite each of you to draw two pictures showing how you experience your relationship to: (a) a normal group that you might experience in a meeting at work or in your community, and (b) a developed group such as the Circle of Seven.

[5-10 minutes of silent, individual artwork]

Should we have a gallery tour? We could each describe our pictures. Who wants to go first?



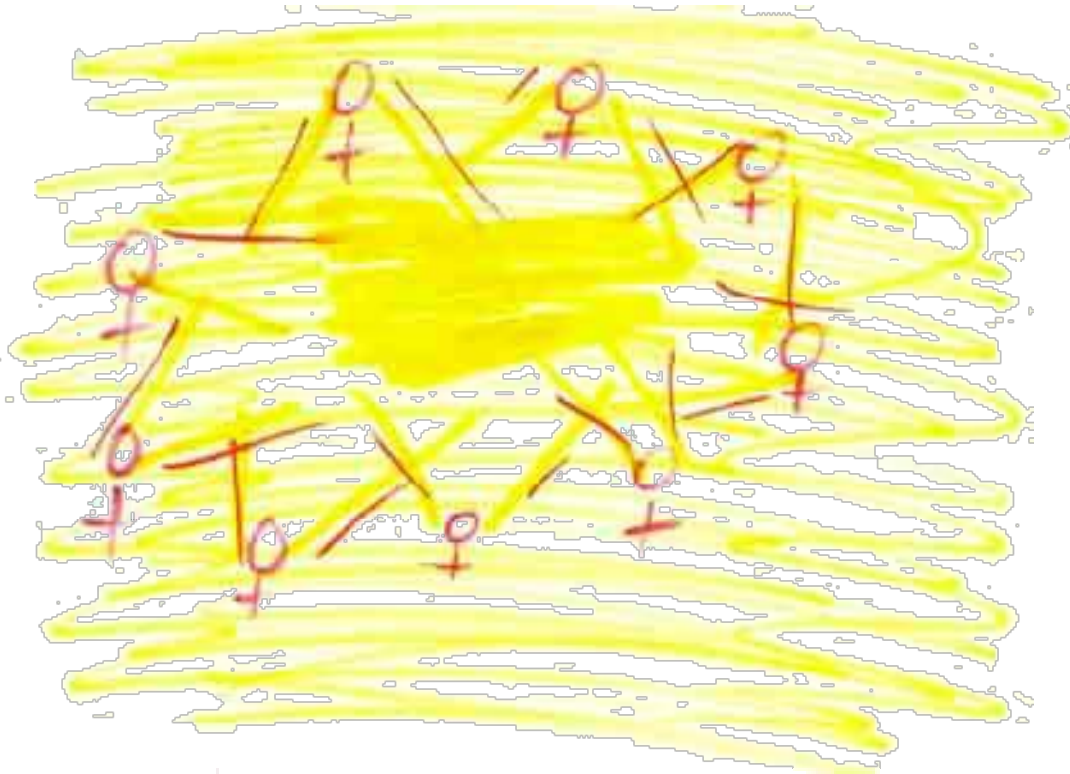
XXVI. A field from which creation stems

Co7: I'll go first.

Picture 1a. Picture of normal group experience in a meeting

The first picture (1a) is like entering into a group that you're with for the first time. What I have drawn here in yellow is the Great Field to which we are connected. Surrounding each person are themes, identifications with emotional patterns, their bodies, and their beliefs. To varying degrees, those things are barriers to their experience of the Great Field and, therefore, barriers to their connection with the person next to them, who is also connected to the Great Field. They both have so many overlying structures that they don't really experience oneness and connectedness. **The connectedness exists, but it's not necessarily experienced and that's why people get into fights, wars, and stuff like that.**

1b. Picture of the Circle of Seven experience



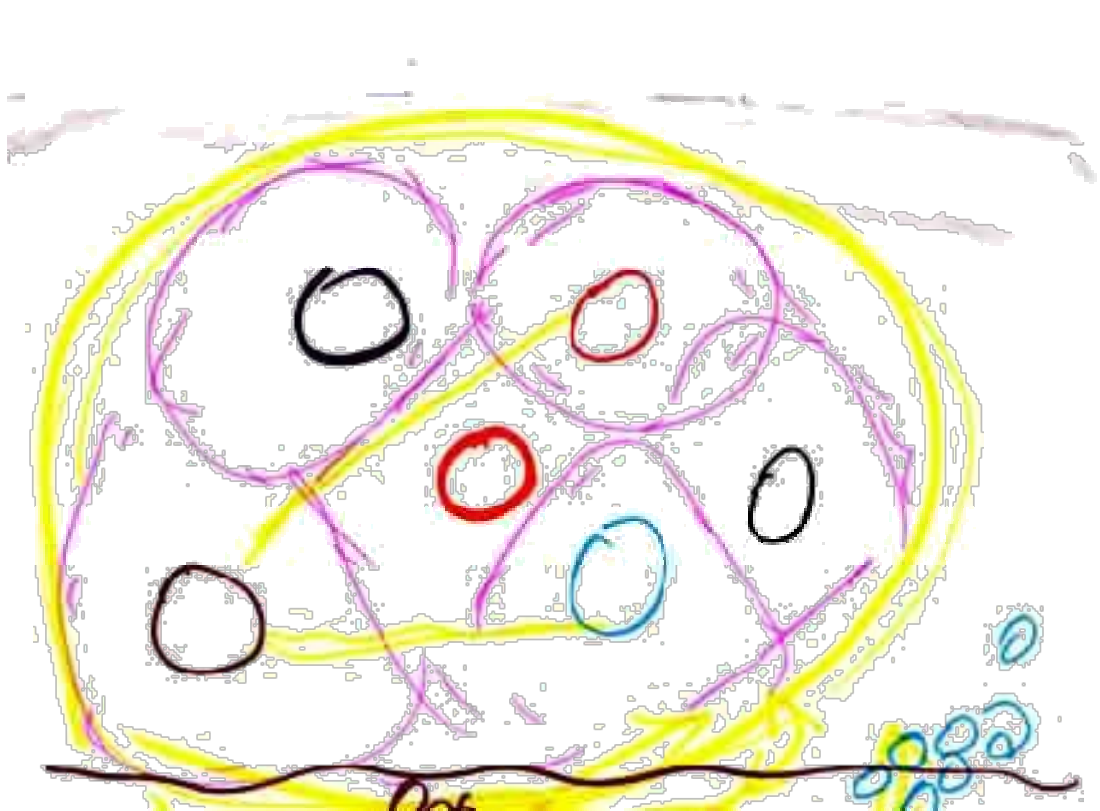
By contrast, I would describe the second picture (1b) to be more the experience of what happens when you're together for a while and you start shedding these separate identities. Maybe you even go into the practice of feeling the field, as we did at the beginning of our session today, where we put our attention on the field, so that it can be magnified in our experience.

So what we're assuming is that this field is all over. We're connected to it. It's within us, around us, and bigger than us. By putting our attention on what may seem very intangible at first, we begin to have our own connection to that field. We soon find that this is the location of kinship with each other and then, beyond that, truly coherent creation.

The clearer the individual connection with the field, the clearer the collective connection and therefore collective creation. That'd be my take.

XXVII. Being seen and witnessed as essential self

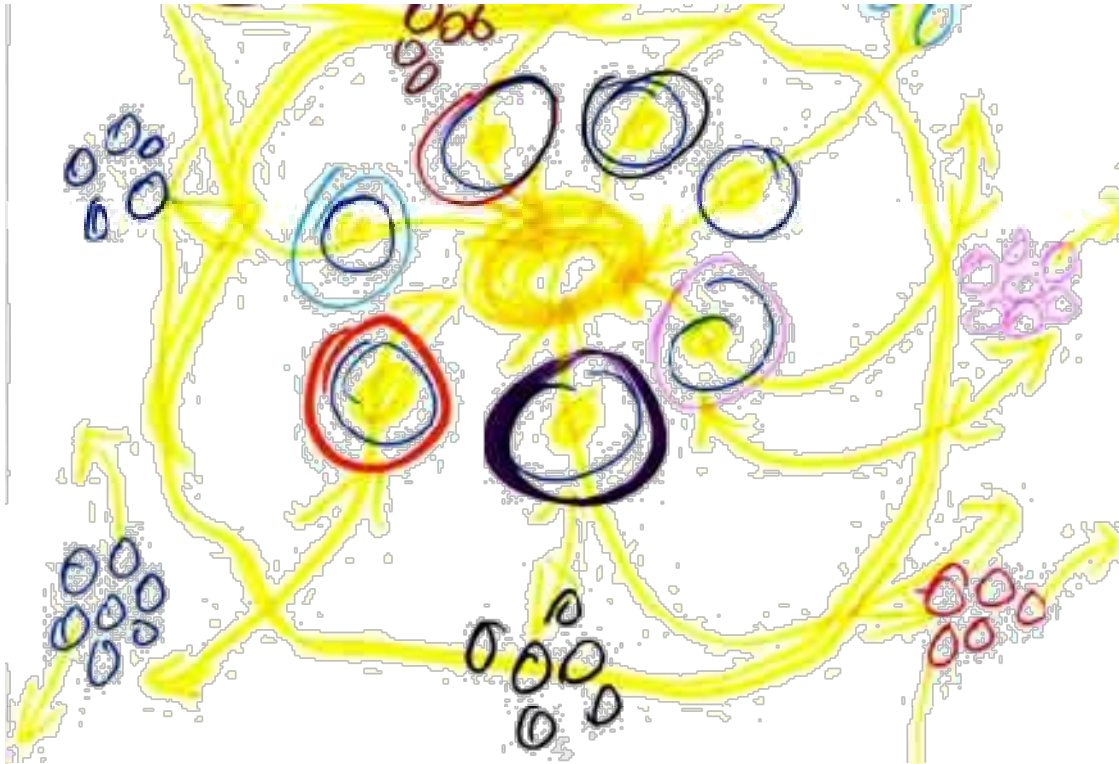
2a. Picture of a normal group experience in a meeting



Co7: In my first picture (2a), I thought about a particular new group working together on health care reform. I remember walking into a meeting. Now, my normal stance coming into a newly gathered group is to hold the disparate members, gathering them into myself and blessing them.

I feel as if everybody's got their own little bubble around them their identity. So I've drawn what they're walking in with in different colors. In a way, we already have something larger that we're about, but we don't know each other; we don't know if other people are really about the same thing. So there's distance between everyone.

2b. Picture of the Circle of Seven experience



In the second picture (2b), there's an impression of the unique gift of each one's inner presence or essential self. What I see happening is more of our essential selves coming through, and at the same time, we're becoming more differentiated in our thoughts and contributions. We are experiencing more of our lives more fully as a result of being seen and witnessed both for who we fundamentally are and for our personality structures and points of view.

In my experience of working at our highest, I put the same color as essential self on the individual and the collective levels. This basic presence is an aspect of the Great Field. But, at the same time, we are all different, so I've also used different colors.

In my experience, there's a circle around us, permeating and holding us all. That energy informs us if we are receptive, affecting our understanding, our feelings, and our whole expression. Coming through us individually, in a collective, light is shed on complicated challenges, usually characterized by a basic generosity and a comprehensive view.

When I leave this circle and do my professional work, I bring the continued strength and substance of this space that we've created. I take it everywhere I go. I feel stronger in all those other places. I think people in my work environment feel a sense of their own presence and power as they come into contact with something we've experienced here. They, in turn, go out and take that kind of experience to others.

Otto: There is a high resonance in that picture with experience, don't you think? The essential core connects fluidly to the little microcosms on the periphery. You captured many elements in that picture by linking the outside microcosms "the third space" with the living center of this Circle Being.

XXVIII. We all come into this circle surrendered to the field

Co7: One thing that's common in these drawings so far is that because of our experience in this circle, we enter other circles with a consciousness of holding them with the same attention we have learned here.

Co7: Yes, we do that when we go into other circles, but when we're in this circle, we surrender that kind of holding and let ourselves be held by the field itself.

Co7: We all come into this circle surrendered to the field.

Co7: In other words, we enter less developed circles on behalf of the field.

Co7: I agree. It doesn't have to do with agenda or expectation. It has everything to do with quality of field and quality of presence.

3a. Picture of a normal group experience in a meeting



Co7: First I drew my relationship to a less mature field (3a). The way it came out is that this group (the fragmented or inexperienced group) is the center of clearing, rather than the more conscious collective. The incoherent group of individuals has actually pushed the field back so much that it has separated itself from an integrated life pattern, not unlike a cyst.

I'm describing the clearing as opposite to how we did before. Because of strong personality factors, personal agendas, and egos, the new group has separated itself from the larger pattern of possibility.

Co7: This is fragmentation.

Co7: Yes. So here I am, rather like an alien to this group. I'm out here. I'm doing my darnedest, but in actual fact, I feel like an alien.

Co7: And probably everybody here does.

Co7: Exactly. The more anybody has identified with the field, the more they're going to have a [split] experience in a group that is operating as -every person for themselves,-with no ear to life's input for the sake of the whole. It's a familiar win/lose dynamic.

3b. Picture of the Circle of Seven experience



In the second drawing (3b), there's no clearing because we haven't pushed back the influence of the third field. I've flipped things around. What this represents is the effect of the field happening everywhere. We're not special; the field is creating everywhere that there is openness to it.

It's hard to see, but each person has a spiral going up and a spiral going down representing his or her own opening in consciousness. I think both our own personal practices and deliberate development of certain collective practices keep expanding our vital connection to the Great Field.

Sitting within this larger field is our collective field. There is a unique chemistry to our configuration. We've called that the Circle Being, which has its particular shape, color, and character. It's a little different now with Otto's presence folded in.

Though not very bright in the drawing, this is the new thought and creativity that comes out of the center.

Co7: I'm a little hung up on your reference to being an alien. When I go into situations that are foreign to me, isn't there always the larger field influence somewhere that I can access if I want to, whether a group is in touch with it or not?

Co7: I would agree that's true. You are the connecting point to a deeper flow. But I do note that, in order to honor where those people are, I may express myself in a different way.

Co7: Like going to a costume party or something? Putting on something?

Co7: Not exactly. For me, it's being multi-lingual and respectful. I believe that everybody's connected to the field, but may not be aware of it. I think collectives can sometimes create a bubble that is separate from the field, creating a self-affirming consensus reality and operating very arrogantly and destructively from those assumptions.

XXIX. The Presence of the Circle Being

Otto: So when you say the "Circle Being," is that just a concept with no reality behind it just a label? Or, does it denote a living presence?

Co7: I will give you an example. We have friends who come here to initiate new directions or projects in the circle. I'm thinking of Lexi, for example, who felt drawn to call together a circle of younger women, based on her mentorship work with some of us. She knew that if she sat in our circle, not with us as individuals all gathered together, but in the presence of the Circle Being, that her seed for the young women's circle would grow. So the Circle Being acts on the potentials.

There are many things that people have placed in this circle to be cared for by the action of the field. Sometimes, though, when we sit together, the Circle Being is not present. It is a palpable presence.

Otto: How can you tell?

Co7: **It's a change in atmosphere. My ears ring; things slow down; time changes. A quality of depersonalization sets in, and I am urged not to speak casually. I speak when I'm moved by a larger presence that needs a voice. There is always a bit of a mix, but overall it jump-shifts into another zone. Sometimes we note, "We've dropped into the field."**

Here's a conjecture, something I'm testing now as background causation. I assume part of the reason you came here, Otto, is that you've been moving with the same phenomenon that is moving

us. I feel that there are conversations between higher selves that are happening around the planet. It's as though there's another layer of interaction going on, even with people we have not yet met. This presumes we have descended into this earthly dimension from a realm where we are in full expression, and a design of connection is fulfilling itself.

Co7: We've projected a part of ourselves into this physical world. So, when the conversation "drops," I suspect that a quality of interaction between our higher selves is finding its way into form in this dimension.

Co7: With regard to the Circle Being, for me, there's a difference when we're all present. There's a shift when we are intentionally together as a whole circle. Yesterday all of us were together, except Anne, planning an upcoming program. Then Anne arrived and everything was different. So there's something about us actually coming together as an intact circle. There's a shift in the atmosphere. It feels as though something larger than our normal relationships at work.

When we first met, it felt as if this group had some kind of destiny together, though we were unclear about what it was. I wonder if we made a promise to assemble at a higher level, and here we are eight years into fulfilling that promise.

Co7: It's always interested me that when we made the decision to define ourselves as a dedicated circle of 7 [delineating a limited, constant configuration], many other women wanted to be in the circle. I believe when we came together, we dedicated ourselves to the task of learning what a circle is, over time, and how it is designed to function in its deepest sense. The precision of a committed purpose and defined boundary seems to have ignited a proliferation of other circles.

Co7: I feel that our first meeting as a circle could have been configured differently and still provide what it seems to be providing in the world.

Co7: What if there was a function that needed to be fulfilled at that time, rather than a destiny for certain people to be together? And it landed on us. It could have been other people. As though life were seeking out an open, eager group that could work this one out, probably as part of what is needed now in the evolutionary pattern of the world community.

Co7: That's why many women said to us, "I want to be part of this," or, "I feel I should be part of this." Maybe they could have been. Sensing the same call, these women created their own circles and have in turn spawned others. I note that every variation, like a fractal, has its own signature.

Co7: That's really important, Otto, in terms of your communicating anything about the circle. The fact is that every combination of people will have their own blueprint or possibility. One group can't copy the signature of another group, just as an individual can't become someone else and fulfill who he or she uniquely is.

XXX. Forgoing Images for the Truth of the Moment

Otto: What commitment did you make to keep the field alive and the connection to the Circle Being?

Co7: We started with an image about what we should be. **It was a grand idea; we were going to initiate women everywhere into the fullness of who they are.**

Co7: We were asked to do that by one of the founders of the Mankind Project, an initiation program for men. In the end, we admitted we needed to sort out our own transitions. So we let go into the obvious

next step. Our dedication became fulfillment of the possibility for this group as it showed up in each encounter.

We began listening for what we were actually supposed to do every time we were together. In every moment, the dedication was to sensitivity, perception, accuracy of expression, and actual fulfillment of the never-ending unfolding of next steps. We used whatever came to us - invitations to meet people, hunches about where we needed to meet together on the earth, extemporaneous ceremonies that presented themselves to us, arising crises in our families, books that fell into our laps - as the material we metabolized together. That became the whole point of the exercise.

Co7: It was like paying attention to what the “partner” in the Great Field was inviting us into next. We used the name, the Great Partner. It wasn’t primarily about personal “initiation.” We were being initiated by invitation from the partner, as a collective. I’ll never forget when I first understood that. Paying attention, then, became the discipline - collective attention to not only what we imagined we were about but to what was really being asked of us together.

XXXI. Practices and practical results

Otto: I’d like to follow up on your notion of practices. The presence of the group is not just something that happens when you meet three or four times a year, but it’s something you consciously and intentionally relate to every day. I would like to hear how or if that is the case.

Co7: I personally don’t have a routine of bringing this circle to mind regularly. **But I can attest to the impact of the circle on my everyday life, in terms of the quality of my presence at any moment.** Also, I learn a lot about myself in the circle. Honest feedback and disciplined reflection help. For example, I’m more aware of how my shadows impact in the world.

XXXII. Commitment to Keeping the Field Clear and Open

Co7: One thing we have mentioned before is keeping a clear and open field with each person. **That’s a rigorous discipline. We pay attention to static and blocks, and clear them as best we can.** That’s a commitment to the circle that works out one to one, in every combination, in gatherings and between. It always feels risky, because these friendships matter so much. But in the end, honesty and courage maintain the essential clarity of the field. We’ve each learned a lot about what it means to take responsibility for our end of whatever disturbance comes up. That personal, inner work is a discipline.

When this circle began, I didn’t have a meditation practice. My primary, palpable experience of opening to another frequency came through the rhythms of the circle and the deep qualities of listening we had learned. I now have other ways to open, primarily through my own forms of meditation. I am learning how these two modes of shifting energy fit together. The interplay between these two disciplines is very interesting.

Otto: What I hear you saying is that, in your own journey, the circle has been your teacher.

Co7: Deep circle work is still a primary baseline of experience of finer dimensions, other frequencies, and a realm or source that is as real to me as this physical world. But it’s not my only teacher. It was a teacher and still is a teacher. I hold it as a primary vehicle for what I came here to do, because I believe that this circle cares for the world in a way that has a critical influence. There’s no proving that one way or another, but I know it’s true. That’s a really, really big thing for me. It’s part of that function that fell on us.

Co7: I just had another thought after what you said. When I am in other circles, I feel as if I represent this Circle of Seven in a certain way. I definitely feel this when I'm doing Millionth Circle activities [the Millionth Circle is a non-profit, which supports the proliferation of life-giving circles around the globe]. When I'm across the world facilitating circles, or when I'm sitting in a circle in this country that was inspired by our own, I am carrying our Circle Being with me. That's when I feel it.

Co7: The circle often comes to me from other people, like from my brother, who we have held in the circle for years. My two brothers, who have very challenging lives, will be the ones who will say, "Thank your circle. This is what's happening. Tell them this is what's happening." Because they've been held through really rough times, even though most of you have never met them. They know they're not judged for what they're going through, that they're loved and held regardless and that they will blossom and grow and make mistakes. They keep saying, "Please tell your circle, this is what 's happening. Thank you, thank you, thank you."

Often I've said to people, "We brought you into our circle because I felt that you could use some blessing and some special attention."

Co7: Children have been central in our circle.

Co7: Yes, our precious children. Also, if there is a piece of professional work that needs something extra, I might say, "I've got a team working with a particularly tough problem. Would you hold this?" Because I know you're with me when I walk in there; I feel held. I feel something is stronger in me; there's something of the Great Spirit working through me. At some level, I think my clients feel it working too.

XXXIII. How Do You Hold the Collective?

Otto: How do you as a circle practice this holding of specific people and other collectives?

Co7: At the beginning of a session, we may describe a situation or put a picture of someone who needs to be remembered in the center. We often close a circle and ask for different intentions or people to be held. **We stay in touch with each other in between about what's going on. Even if, for some reason, we aren't in touch, we each sustain a loving awareness of that which has been put in our care.**

Co7: It's very interesting how other people want to be held by this circle. I'm going to Washington on Thursday to be with the First Nation elders at the Vigil for Peace on the Mall. And behind that is the little group that had the vision. This is the eleventh year of that huge celebration on the mall. I'm very honored to go and be with First Nation elders. Sharon said thankfully, "You'll be coming with the blessing of the Circle of 7."

Then there are the Foxes, a new circle of highly placed Democratic women who have given up on politics as usual. They have determined that their calling now is to put a loving field under the Capitol; they want to learn how to introduce that field. **It's wonderful. I will be going into that circle with the blessing of the Circle of 7. I'm never alone.**

XXXIV. The theory of change: Shifting the fields of attention

Co7: I think our attention is the greatest gift.

Otto: So the underlying change theory is reshaping the world by shifting your attention, by creating loving fields of attention.

Co7: Absolutely.

Otto: I think we're designed to envelop crisis situations in fertile fields, out of which a new reality can emerge.

Co7: My inspiration doesn't come from trying to change the world. It comes from doing what comes out of my own love and my own connection with the Great Field.

[We lingered in a full, quiet space together.]

Would you like your work and your life to be held?

XXXV. In Summary, the Circle in Action

Co7: So, Otto, I have a real-time consideration. I'm wondering if you'd like you and your work to be held by this circle?

Otto: Actually, the question you ask showed up in my mind as well. I always have rational reasons why I do something, and then afterward I find out why I really did it. So this may be part of the real reason for this time together.

[Otto was quiet for a long time.]

The answer is yes.

Co7: Could I ask you a question? Is there some place in your life scenario where our attention might rest? It could be a generalized thing, where we simply think of you, or it could be something more particular, a hope or dream or deeper tension playing out. Could we find the best leverage point of attention to help you fulfill your longing?

Otto: When I think about my work, I realize it's not something that is separate from me. That's the territory where I am already connected to all of you. The real work for me is to make this field of change more accessible to fellow travelers all over. I think of the work as the emergence of a new global movement. It connects the most personal with the most universal or global.

You said you think about it in terms of a function, that there's a function that we play. That's how I feel. You might hold me, through placement of your attention, on truly serving that function we have described in many ways.

The second is not to fail in the face of the challenges. I feel I am going through an eye of the needle in my own life, in the next one or two years. I can feel it. What's beyond, I don't know. It has a tangible part, which is finishing this thesis book. It also has an intangible part. What would help me enormously as I go through this transition period in the next year or two is to have your presence and focus on movement in the right direction and on not getting stuck.

Co7: Otto, you said that your insight from being in the presence of the Dalai Lama this week was that you needed to "refine and focus your life and your work." Those are your words. I wrote that down because I felt that somehow we might offer to hold you in that. It felt like a direct transmission from the Dalai Lama.

Otto: Yes, that speaks right to the essence of what I tried to say. That's maybe the more precise way of saying it now.

Co7: You said this. I don't think there are any coincidences. I think we somehow are in a great, synchronous wave in the field. But, as Glennie said, the field configures and we agree. I don't think it's a coincidence that you're here.

Co7: The experience of what seems like coincidence or synchronicity is just a natural occurrence when one's in tune with the Great Field.

Co7: Absolutely.

Co7: And when it happens only once in a while in people's lives, it's because there are lesser degrees of being in touch with the field. Otherwise, it's just what life is. It all fits together in ways that make sense. Again, it is not predestination, but it just fits.

Co7: I'm holding your deepest intention to face your roadblocks, to deal with the distractions, and to keep bringing yourself back. I heard your deep commitment and your longing to really live that. I want to say yes, to do it very consciously and stay in touch with you.

Otto: Thank you. I know that you know how much that means to me.

Co7: I feel like a guardian of some deeper mission, something that you came here to do. I know only bits and pieces, but somehow it relates to accurately portraying or unveiling something that is pivotal in the world right now.

I see you as having both the brilliance and positioning to inspire a social movement and also the wherewithal of an open heart. This is a very rare combination. I will care for the unfolding of your intimate relationship with the undimensional. It seems you have a certain destiny stream that flows out of that intimacy into the world. I will hold your fulfillment of both those levels as they inform each other.

Co7: You said that what's before you feels like going through the eye of the needle. That image stayed with me. There's a gate in the old city of Jerusalem called the Eye of the Needle, which is very narrow and low. Getting through the gate meant unloading the camels and donkeys, taking off all your packs, and getting on your knees. That's the image that I'm holding of your voyage, your pathway into the center of the city, into the center of yourself.

Otto: Thank you.

Co7: I'm aware of the time. Perhaps the ending time is near.

Co7: I am feeling a larger presence in the room. **I don't know what to call it the Circle Being, the field, the sacred, whatever. I've really loved the rich, deep silence together.** I feel a new level of commitment and responsibility in the world. It feels to me like the opening of doors. I feel empowered, stronger, excited. I feel the power of aligned intention.

Co7: I'm filled with gratitude yet again, another reason why we can trust the way unfolding life orders itself. I feel a great heart present. This group is a wise circle of heart. I too feel the expansion. I feel very respectful of what's been entrusted to all of us.

Co7: Well, I feel the Beauty Way chant in the room.

Co7: Anne, please say the words.

Co7:

In beauty before us may we walk.

In beauty behind us may we walk.

In beauty above us before us may we walk.

In beauty below us may we walk.

And in beauty all around us may we walk.

It just had to be said. Beauty is the harmony way in the Navajo tradition.

Co7: Otto, I want to give you this symbol. It is a poster commemorating November 2nd as a World Day of Circles of Compassion. It comes from the Geneva Women's World Summit Foundation; it's the very thing that you're seeking to magnify, written in four languages-a symbol of what we've been talking about - covering the world.

Otto: Thank you. I am a little overwhelmed. I don't say that lightly, because of all the gifts I have been receiving intellectually, in terms of the interview, which is really important, and even more, what happened in the past hour. That means more to me than words can say, particularly because I know that in my situation, at times I really am alone, and yet the function needs to be played. I couldn't do otherwise.

A third element I'm moved by is arriving squarely in one's purpose. We are here together for the first time, and yet, it feels as if this is exactly how we were meant to converge, something we intended long ago. And now we're doing it.

[Again, quiet descended.]

Co7: Otto, you are one of the "heralds." Have you ever thought of that? The announcer who delivers a message. That just came to me. Maybe you need a shield; maybe this is the shield. [Anne held up the poster of the Circles of Compassion] The heralds always, as you know, had shields. On the inside of the shield, facing the herald, is an en-abyme, a French term for "greatest depth." Do you know about this? I'm the only one who knows anything about heraldry; that shows how antique I am. On the back of the shield, there is a polished, smaller shield that the herald may look into in order to assure himself that he is totally congruent with the message. It's called the en-abyme of the shield of the herald.

I don't know where this is coming from. Obviously, at some time, I studied heraldry. I see you there with this beautiful shield depicting the Circles of Compassion, and you're helping us tell the story; you are heralding that which must come if we are to have a future. Then I thought you needed a shield. So, now you've got one.

If you are interested in programs which are born of this circle, or would like to be in touch with us, our contact information is as follows:

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