

What is Council practice?

With roots in ancient and indigenous cultures, Council practice is an intuitive, relational model of group communication that supports authentic expression, generosity, compassion, equanimity, and courage, reminding us that we are all connected to and touched by each other's experience.

Council practice creates space to ground, presence, and resource ourselves and each other as we hold space for sharing stories, different perspectives, and individual and community distress and grief. It honors the wisdom of the circle, allowing insight and healing to intuitively emerge.

Developed by Roshi Joan Halifax for the Ojai Foundation, the Way of Council draws upon Native American, classical Greek, and Quaker practices of sitting in circle and using a talking piece to listen and speak from the heart. Halifax shared the Way of Council was shared with Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, who wove it into the Sangha practice of the Order of Interbeing. It has been written about by Zimmerman & Coyle ("The Way of Council").

In Council, each sits so that he or she can see the others. A shift is made from busyness to intimacy and truth. Connection is made with the spirit of place and the sacredness of space. We use a talking piece to hold space for whomever is speaking. When we are holding the talking piece we know that we will not be interrupted, that we can be in silence, shed tears, or sing and that this will be listened to and witnessed by others in the circle. There is an agreement of confidentiality within Council space, as we each speak from personal experience and practice the "Four Intentions of Council."

The Four Intentions of Council are to:

- *Listen from the Heart.* We listen with a kind of deep devotion to the speaker, not judging, practicing absolute tolerance and non-prejudice, as though we, ourselves, are listening from within the speaker. The option to interrupt the speaker is removed, so that depth and truth may be spoken more comfortably. Bearing witness by listening from the heart brings presence to the relationship and to the circle as a whole.
- *Share from the Heart.* We speak mindfully, from the heart and not the head. Words, expression, or silence from the heart are supported by simplicity and passion, and creates the context for transformation within the circle for both the speaker and the listener.
- *Be lean of speech.* It takes practice to pause and take a centering breath to locate what your heart wants to say, to share our storytelling in a clear, deep and efficient way. We create a situation of deep consideration and generosity, as it is important for each to have the time and space to speak.
- *Spontaneity.* Trusting the feelings of the body and heart in the present moment is an art. In Council, that intuitive voice may be exactly what needs and wants to be expressed at that moment. Setting an intention to not to rehearse what you want to say allows for more connection in both speaking and listening from your heart.