

Thought for the day – Friday 3rd November 2023

By Jill Howard-Gunasekera

Talking Circle

At the moment I'm really enjoying taking part in something called a Talking Circle led by indigenous women elders from all over the world.

At the beginning of each talking circle the guidelines are spoken and I'd like to share them, I hope you find them nourishing. I transcribed them as best as I could from one of the Circles.

One note - in Alaskan indigenous culture, they use the term 'other selves' to mean other people in the circle.

Guidelines.

At the beginning of every Circle, the facilitator will read aloud the guidelines, (like the host sets the table for the meal even if everyone knows where the forks are).

We need to treat it (the Circle) with respect, to yourself, to our 'other selves' and respect time and attention, there are limits.

Listen with innocence – like a child, hearing something for the first time. Think about the first time you heard about pyramids or unicorns or a platypus and you weren't wondering is it true or not, you were just taking in the story.

Or even if it sounds too familiar, or a cliché, try to reach a place, in us where we're not judging, where we have no resistance, let the story be offered, alongside other stories, truth by truth, like dishes in a potluck, so you don't have to push the pasta away to put your salad on the table, and you can just choose what you want to take to your own plate and palate and appreciate that others may have other needs that would nourish them.

Expand and make room for different truths that may be opposite to yours, but just as valid. There maybe a lion and a deer in the same circle, they will each have a different experience of the chase.

Stay clear of agendas, and titles and flags. Try not to plan what to say, be in the moment, not marketing or lecturing or advising or teaching or correcting.

Speaking without talking across each other. Let the circle do the talking.

Even if you do not speak you will be heard.

We only speak of what we know to be true from our own lived experiences not something that we have been taught or borrowed from someone else.

Don't speak on behalf of anyone else but only each person about themselves.

So even if I had a shared experience with a friend and we were both out walking and a car nearly ran over us, maybe I thought it was really funny and I say to someone – it was really funny a car came over near us and splattered us with mud and we got covered in mud; my friend also shares with someone and describes it [the same experience] as a traumatic incident where a car came over near us and it reminded her of when her life was in danger... and you can see how (although different) it doesn't have to conflict - it can be completing rather than conflicting, if we allow it. Even if it is not comfortable, we can expand and allow it to be.

Speak when the words are ripe, maybe we don't need to speak because it has already been expressed in the circle. We don't have to repeat it.