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## **Circle Tale, October 2007**

### **A PeerSpirit Story**

Here is a story of one of the ways I have incorporated the PeerSpirit concepts into a group that already existed.

About a year ago, a group of women, who had taken just about every course and workshop available at my centre, decided they wanted to continue working together at my place. The decision was made collectively that we would begin a discussion group around a spiritual book of interest. Right at the beginning I said that I would not be running this group, nor would it be a course they had to pay for. So we started out on a relatively equal basis.

I say relatively, because at first the group were not sure how to go about structuring a discussion group, so I offered to model a method for a couple of sessions. After that we took turns being the host of sessions and posing chapter questions.

We carried on very nicely for about 6 months before a summer break. At the last gathering, we talked about a mutual desire to "deepen" our discussions. There was little said about how that might look and happen.

Before our first session in the Fall I felt we would benefit from a discussion around how we were going to 'deepen' this process. I e-mailed everyone and asked if they would agree to allow me to host a PeerSpirit circle using some of the techniques I had learned this summer. They all readily agreed.

Up until this gathering we had been meeting in my living room, sitting on comfortable chairs and couches, but not in a circle. That night I invited them downstairs to my teaching space and into a circle. I had prepared the circle ahead of time with a centre, a talking piece, my bells and a candle. Most of the women were familiar with the concept of the talking piece and being the host.

I briefly introduced the concept of a guardian of the circle and how the bells might be used. I agreed to model both the host and the guardian on that first night. I mentioned the concept of creating agreements, but their first response to that was that we did not need agreements since we all knew each other so well. I let it go at that point.

The first question I posed was, "what does deepening our discussion mean to you?" Everyone began to realize that, although they thought they knew what it meant, they were having some difficulty articulating it. We used a clockwise talking piece format, and then worked popcorn style for further comments. I interjected another question, "what types of things might we be talking about?"

To continue taking the discussion to an even deeper and more personal level, I then asked, "how are you feeling about what we have been discussing?"

After a few responses of "good", "okay", "excited", some said they were feeling rather scared. That allowed a few others to voice the fact that, although they were eager to try this and excited by the possibilities, they felt a little nervous as well.



My next question was, "how can we as a circle help you to feel safe in these discussions?" Lots of ideas came forth. When everyone had a chance to respond, I suggested that this was why we needed agreements in place. We then moved into a discussion and two pages later I had a list of our agreements! One interesting concept arose when one woman said she needed to know that there would be no judgments about what she was saying. At that point everyone was nodding assent. I pointed out that even a positive nod of the head was a judgment. That led naturally to a discussion around how to listen. We also talked about the concept of not 'fixing' someone who we thought might be in need of an energy boost, but to send that energy to the centre where anyone can draw on it. This was an important distinction because many of these women are trained in some form of a healing modality.

We also agreed to change our discussion format to a story one based on personal responses to the readings. Now no one is in charge of chapter questions, a process we realized served us well for a while, but was also keeping our discussion on a more academic level.

We have had our first book session. Again I hosted and modeled the role of the guardian. The stories and personal experiences that were shared were amazing. Next time two other people will be host and guardian. We have all agreed to learn as we go.

My PeerSpirit experience has afforded us all the opportunity to continually deepen our experiences. Thanks Ann and Christina and all my circle practicum friends who definitely have my back.

*If you have a tale to tell, contact the PeerSpirit office and we'll help you share it.*

*For more information on many applications of circle, visit our web site at [www.peerspirit.com](http://www.peerspirit.com) and subscribe to our monthly Circle Tale newsletter using the subscription mechanism at the top right of the page. Your e-mail address will **not** be shared or used by anyone other than PeerSpirit, and you can unsubscribe yourself at any time.*