



Milling Exercise

The Milling Exercise is active and nonverbal, and provides a change of pace after people have been sitting and talking. Instead of relying on the power of words to manifest into a feeling of connection, the Milling invites images and reflections to shift a person's perspective about each other.

People mill about the room, periodically pausing at an invitation by the facilitator to encounter one other person. The words used by the facilitator are gentle and non-manipulative and can be changed depending on the group or circumstance. The first one-to-one encounter draws attention to the presence of the other. Subsequent encounters deepen the experience of the other by asking participants to imagine the other person's love and connection with life, their pain and crises experienced, their hopes and dreams for the future. The encounters can also cover past, present and future.

Our experience shows that the present realities and connections have much greater impact when we see them reflected in the face of another person. Confronting another's joys and pains often jolts our hearts and minds open more than words can do, and breaks open our capacity to care.

Pretend you're in a crowd of people, at the mall, or in Times Square, rushing to get your errands done. You have important things to do and these people are in the way. Feel in your body the tension of having to make your way among others, like so many obstacles to your own path. Keep moving, no talking. Just circulate, passing each other but not looking at each other, absorbed in your own thoughts.

Now slow your pace and begin to pay attention to one another. Your eyes engage as you pass. You find yourself in front of someone, and stop. Standing before this person, take her or his right hand in yours. Without speaking, let yourself register their presence.

As you look into this person's eyes, let yourself become aware of the powers that are there....Open your awareness to the gifts and strengths and potentialities in this being....Behind those eyes are unmeasured reserves of courage and intelligence...of patience, endurance, wit and wisdom...There are gifts there, of which this person herself is unaware. Consider what these powers could do for the healing of our planet, if they were to be believed and acted on....In this person are gifts for the healing of our world. In him or her are powers that can rebound to the joy of all beings.

As you consider that, let yourself become aware of your desire that this person be free from fear...Experience how much you want this being to be free from greed, released from hatred and from sorrow and from the causes of suffering....Know that what you are now experiencing is the great loving-kindness. Express your gratitude to this person in any way that feels appropriate, and continue milling about the room, looking at each other as you pass.



Now find yourself in front of another person.... join hands and greet this person, without words. As you look into his/her eyes, let yourself become aware of the pain that is there. There are sorrows accumulated in that life, as in all human lives, though you may only guess at them. There are disappointments and failures and losses and loneliness and abuse...there are hurts beyond the telling...Let yourself open to that pain, to hurts that this person may never have told another being....You cannot fix that pain, but you can be with it..... As you let yourself simply be with that suffering, know that what you are experiencing is the great compassion -- it is very good for the healing of our world..... Now express your compassion for this person in any way that feels right, and continue moving about the room.

Now you find yourself in front of yet another person. Take their hands and as you look into their eyes, consider how good it would be to work together...on a joint project, toward a common goal...What it could be like, taking risks together...conspiring together in zest and laughter...celebrating the successes, consoling each other over the setbacks, forgiving each other when you make mistakes...and simply being there for each other....As you open to that possibility, what you open to is the great wealth -- the pleasure in each other's powers, the joy in each other's joy.

Finally, let your awareness drop deep within you, sinking below the level of what words can express, to the deep web of relationship that underlies all experience. It is the web of life in which you have taken being, in which you are supported, and that interweaves us through all space and time...See the being before you as if seeing the face of one who, at another time, another place, was your lover or your enemy, your parent or your child...And now you meet again on this brink of time...And you know your lives are as intricately interwoven as nerve cells in the mind of a great being...Out of that vast net you cannot fall...no stupidity, or failure, or cowardice, can ever sever you from that living web. For that is what you are...Rest in that knowing. Rest in the Great Peace...Out of it we can act, we can venture everything...and let every encounter be a homecoming to our true nature...Indeed it is so...

This exercise was adapted from:

Macy, Joanna and Molly Young Brown. *Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World*. Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers, 1998. Print

Macy, Joanna. *World As Lover, World As Self - Courage for Global Justice and Ecological Renewal*. Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2007. Print.