

Brief Encounter with the Taos Institute

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Circles of Joy: Micro Appreciations for Challenging Times



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*Thriving Women, Thriving World:
An Invitation to Dialogue, Healing and Inspired Actions*

Several weeks ago, I got a phone call from seven year old Ellee who exclaimed, “Aunt Di, thank you so much, it is the first real letter I ever got in the mail. I really like it.” I was as delighted to receive Ellee’s phone call as she was to receive a letter from me. Together we co-created a circle of joy, a small relational practice that gave us both a reason to smile, even at a time when our smiles are covered by masks.

Something similar happened a few days later when I was on a zoom meeting with a group of colleagues. You know the routine, everyone briefly checks in: where are you, how are you, who are you with? One colleague shared that she had been home for a month - alone. As she spoke it was apparent – even via zoom – that she was feeling a bit down and might enjoy some long-distance appreciation. I suggested we give her an “appreciative shower,” that we immerse her in words of appreciation. We agreed that within the next 24 hours we would each send her an email of appreciation, telling her what we admire and respect about her, what we value about her contributions to our shared work, and what we imagine for her future. As I wrote, recalling our many light-hearted and productive exchanges, my heart filled with joy. It was as good for me to conjure my gratitude for her as it was for her to get it. The next day we received an email from her telling us how significant it was “to be seen and positively acknowledged, especially when sheltering at home alone.” Circles of joy, small gestures of appreciation that shine the light on another can illuminate the darkness of being alone.

Especially now, it can be challenging to know what words and practices will resonate, opening hearts and minds to learning, love and joy; and what words and practices might unintentionally offend, tearing the relational fabrics of our lives. Recently, as I read a friend’s Facebook post, I wondered, how might I compassionately express respect and care for her? As a black woman, sharing her thoughts and feelings about Black Lives Matter and racial justice, she was clear, she would unfriend anyone making racially divisive comments. I took a chance and responded, “I will take a knee with you until our knees are old and weary.” Her response to me was an immediate, “thank you, yes we are all in this together.” Another small circle of joy, not because I told her my thoughts and opinions, but because I was able to be with her. Circles of joy grow from what is called the “platinum rule – do unto others as they would have you do unto them.”

Listening with others creates a circle of joy that enables shared learning and reveals words and practices that nurture our souls together.

In this time of dramatic endings and delicate new beginnings, when you wonder, what can I do to create positive change, hold your values close and act small. Micro appreciations such as circles of joy, can change the relational context of our lives. Today, consider:

1. To whom might you send a “real letter”? Is there someone for whom it might be a first? Or someone for whom it can be an important reminder that they are seen even if alone?
2. Who do you know who might be in need of an appreciative shower? With whom might you organize an outpouring of appreciation?
3. Do you need an appreciative shower? Who might you ask to organize it for you?
4. What of your relationships might benefit from more listening and less telling, by practicing the platinum rule?

Wishing our Taos community around the globe good health and healing. We are all in this together. Whatever you do, do it to create equality, justice and well-being for all. Wear a mask. Wash your hands. Listen and talk 6 feet apart. Black Lives Matter. Vote.