

Council of All Beings

Introduction to a Council of All Beings practice



'Council of All Beings ' is a 'Work that Reconnects ' deep ecology practice from Joanna Macy and John Seed. This group process strengthens our direct experience with other beings. It invites us to step back from our human identity and speak on the behalf of another form of life, an animal, plant or a feature of the landscape eg.river. We then represent these beings at a gathering called a Council.

We can view this as a way of building empathy with another aspect of nature or a ritual in which we allow other beings to speak through us.

We take time "to be chosen" by the being we are going to represent, this might be in silent contemplation or through spending a time of silence walking or sitting in nature. We then take time

silently to make masks to wear that represent the chosen being.

At the appointed time we join in a circle of “Council” and listen as each being is invited to speak in turn.

This can be done as a regenerative practice in your local groups or regions/nations or as part of a larger rebellion. Here is a suggested format for holding a Council of all Beings.

Welcoming of group & Agreement

We welcome all parts of all the participants, e.g. certainty, uncertainty, fear, joy. We agree to co-create a safe container of confidentiality, consent and compassion.

Landing/ Trust Building

Brief check in with names then a word of how we are, something you are grateful for in the last 24 hours, or a concern about being alive at this time.

Setting the scene

Outline the practice.

Invite awareness of the seasonal context.

Or tell a local story or myth of the natural world.

Or if familiar one of the practices of the work that reconnects e.g. Beings of three times.

Connecting with a Being

In this process, we imagine that other beings, other life-forms apart from humans, seek to be heard at our Council. The participants take time alone to let themselves be chosen by a life form. Ask people to relax deeply, opening their mind wide like a radar dish.

Encourage people to stay with the first impulse that arises. It is not a question of choosing a species one knows a lot about, but rather allowing oneself to be surprised by the life-form that comes, be it plant, animal, or ecological feature, such as swamp or mountain - basically any nonhuman being. Suggest that they visualize this being fully and from every angle, its size and shape and ways of moving. Then they request this being's permission to enter it, so they can imaginatively sense its body from within. Finally, they ask the being how it wishes to be represented.

Practice moving and speaking as the life-form. If time allows, this practice session helps people identify more fully with their life-form.

The following activity can help ease our self-consciousness.

The guide invites participants to start moving as their life-form.

Breathing easily, begin to let yourself feel how it is to take body in this new life form.

What shape are you?

- How much space do you take up now?
- What is your skin or outer surface like?
- How do you take notice of what is around you?
- How do you move, or are moved?
- Do you make any sounds? Play with those sounds.

Inauguration of Council

The Council is called and participants join in a circle.

These words can be spoken to open the Council: "Welcome all, to this special Council. Gather now in this hour, join with us now in this place. We hope to hear your views, concerns, stories, sorrows and inspirations."

Round 1 - Introductions

The beings move to the Council ground "in character" when summoned by drum beat or animal call. When they are all in the circle, the guide, as her adopted life form, welcomes them to this council on what is befalling their Earth and their lives.

She invites them to identify themselves. Each being introduces themselves as the aspect of Nature they have chosen, e.g. "I am River, I speak for the waterways" or "I am swallow and I speak for the migratory birds".

Round 2 - Voice concerns (humans are invited in to listen)

1. Now, speaking at random, the beings express the particular concerns they bring to the council. For example:
As River: "My waters are polluted, and thrown away plastics float upon my surface..."
The Beings in the Council respond with "We hear you, River."
2. After a while, the guide reflects that all the suffering that the beings describe seem to derive from the activities of one adolescent species. "It would be good for humans to hear what we have to say. Let us summon them to our Council, to listen only. Would five or six of you put down your masks and move to the centre to be humans?" They are addressed

directly: “Hear us, humans. This is our world, too. And we’ve been here a lot longer than you. Yet now our days are numbered because of what you are doing. Be still for once, and listen.”

After a time, when more beings have spoken, the drum beats again and other humans replace the ones in the centre. In this way, everyone takes a turn to listen as a human.

Round 3 - Offering gifts to the humans

When all the beings have had a chance to address the humans and call them to account, the beings then offer resources to the humans.

The guide may say “For all their machines and apparent power, the humans now are frightened. They feel overwhelmed by the momentum of the forces they have unleashed. It does not serve our survival for them to panic or give up, for truly our life is in their hands. If they can awaken to their place in the web of life, they will change their ways. What strengths and gifts can each of us give them to help them now?”

Each being has the chance to offer to the humans, and receive as a human when they come to the centre, the powers that are needed to stop the destruction of the world, the strengths and gifts inherent in each life-form. Sometimes the humans break their silent listening to say simply “Thank you.” “I, Wild Flower, offer my fragrance and sweet face, to call you back to beauty. Take time to notice me, and I’ll let you fall in love again with life. This is my gift.”

Ending

Councils can come to a close in different ways.

Reflectively in silence.

With hugs or sounding together when everyone has joined the humans in the centre to receive the gifts.

With drumming and dancing, with hoots and howls and other wild calls.

In whatever way the Council ends, a formal letting go and thanks should be given to the beings.

People are asked to speak to the life-forms they adopted, thanking them for the privilege of speaking for them, and then letting that identity go.

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