

# THE GIFTS OF CIRCLEWORK

By Jalaja Bonheim, Ph.D.

In our times, we have an urgent need to create spiritual community. Without spiritual community, we have no chance of transforming our world the way we must, let alone doing so in a spirit of grace and joy.

Traditionally, people looked to religion to satisfy this need. Today, however, many religious organizations have become too rigid to serve the needs of the living soul. This situation presents us with an opportunity to birth something new, and to explore fresh, supple forms of spiritual practice. What do we need at this time? What would best serve our souls, our communities, and our planet?

Circlework reflects my personal answer to that question. I go to my circles as a Christian goes to church, a Jew to temple, or a Muslim to the mosque. When we harness our energies in the circle, we have access to an immense power that can launch us to the stars.

What I call *Circlework* does not simply mean sitting in a circle. Rather, it implies that we consciously relate to the circle as a source of spiritual awakening. C.G. Jung called the circle an archetype of wholeness, and commonly used mandala painting to help his clients protect the integrity of their psyche. Circlework, on the other hand, is a form of relationship practice in which our bodies form the sacred mandala.

Participants often comment that coming to the circle feels like coming home. This is hardly surprising, given that human beings have gathered in circles for tens, if not hundreds of thousands of years. At all times, in all cultures, people have gathered in circles for healing, worship and celebration. However, Circlework does not attempt to recreate the tribal circles of former times. Rather, we are consciously evolving a new, planetary spirituality that supports and honors the great web of life in all its diversity.

I have been practicing and teaching the art of Circlework for close to twenty years. The circle is home to me, and has given me countless gifts. The following are the seven main benefits of Circlework:

1. The circle nourishes the soul, and satisfies our deep longing for intimacy with spirit. Circlework is, to no small degree, an ongoing meditation on the Center—the literal center of our circle, the secret center of each individual's being, and the cosmic center we call God, or by any other name. Circlework teaches us how to joyfully live our lives out of that place of infinite wisdom, love, and power.
2. Circlework gives us knowledge of the sacred feminine and masculine. Each gender has a vibrational quality which must be experienced. Men and women who gather regularly in same-sex circles know their own sexual nature in a deep, instinctual way.

3. Circlework fosters true self-love. Many people in our culture struggle with feelings of insufficiency and shame. Deep down, we fear we are unworthy and "not good enough." In the circle we experience our intrinsic value and unique beauty.
4. In order to fully accept ourselves, we all need to be seen, heard, and witnessed in love. Circlework supports each person in authentically expressing their deepest truth, be it through song, praise, prayer, tears, even rage. In doing so, we discover our true power.
5. Circlework gives us insight into how our personal journey reflects the collective journey. It cuts through shame and isolation and allows us to relate to our personal challenges with great compassion.
6. Everyone has gifts that want to be given to the world. One of the functions of the circle is to insist that we share our light. The circle helps us realize the unique contribution we have come to this world to make. Moreover, it gives us the courage to take the practical steps to achieve our goals and fulfill our dreams.
7. The circle supports us in our personal growth process, and in moving through challenging circumstances such as divorce, loss of job, illness, etc. It's a place where we reconnect with our own inner resources of courage, strength, and wisdom, and where we are comforted, held, and nurtured by others.

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