

## Community Meetings – Social Presencing Exercises

I created these exercises from listening to what I heard from sangha members and leaning into what I sensed could help, drawing on my experience with dharma art, social presencing and embodied leadership. While they were specific to the gatherings for which they were created, I share them with the hope that they can serve as a model of how to apply our embodied practices to our community life and inspire others to create what is needed for their own sangha. In my view the sangha has become the primary teacher for our time. And it is a good one.

[Liz Korabek-Emerson](#)

Intention: For everyone to be seen and heard, and all topics placed on the table

We began with a series of 4 embodied practices to establish ground and spaciousness

1. A contemplation: bring to mind the current situation as you understand it, whatever that means to you. The invitation is to connect to the felt sense of the whole situation and try to step back from the individual stories. Then going around the room, offer a descriptive word, image or phrase that expresses the felt sense.
2. An object arrangement: Bring a basket of rocks of different sizes and shapes. Give everyone a sheet of paper of at least 11 X 17. Ask people to connect to their current relationship to the larger mandala and the local sangha by placing 3 rocks on a sheet of paper representing, themselves, local sangha and larger mandala. Observe their relationship and others around the room.
3. Pick a 4<sup>th</sup> rock to represent the topic they want to talk about today. Place it on their paper, in relation to the three other rocks.
4. A standing practice. With the charter for the center (or a mission statement) in the center of the room, people are invited to bring their topic rock and stand in relationship (how close or far away do you feel) to the charter in the middle of the room. Invite them to notice where they are and who was near them. Then one by one, ask people to say their topic, place their rock at their feet and returned to the outside circle until everyone was finished. Take a moment to see the distribution of rocks vis a vis the Charter. Topics can then be scribed for further discussion.

We had some immediate decisions to make about our center so we began a focused discussion. In the course of that discussion, many people expressed concerns about all the “unknowns” in our situation. For example, what the larger mandala would decide, how much membership we would lose, etc. We found it helpful to acknowledge this groundlessness by collectively making a list of “unknowns”.

Intention: to help people explore and articulate how they want to be together

1. We began with walking meditation. People were invited to connect with the sense of the whole group, walking together.
2. We then began to take the walking meditation out into the whole room, walking everywhere in no particular pattern, moving as individuals, to feel the singleness.
3. I then directed the group into various social configurations, exploring the social body. For example, facing off in two lines, lumped together, lumped together with one outsider, all facing one person, all facing the same direction (shrine). At each configuration, people were invited to pause and take a moment to feel into the configuration.

Intention: to help people take a stand (on some hot button issues)

1. Walking meditation, feel the group
2. Standing in a circle – look around, notice how it feels to stand together
3. Several hot button topics were written on pieces of paper and placed in the middle of the circle. People were invited to take rocks from a basket of rocks and place one by every piece of paper that they thought should be discussed. (voting rocks)
4. Stand next to the issue you think is most important. You can also stand on the circle if you don't relate. Everyone is here because they care. If your issue is not represented, stand next to the blank paper. You can write down your issue. With new issue, reconfigure. (many people realigned with new issue)
5. Dyads addressing the issues
6. Reminder about the six points of mindful communication
7. Open discussion

Intention: to help people say what they needed to say, get all opinions in the room

1. Invitation for Tonglen

2. Established meeting ground rules, collectively which were then scribed
  
3. Open Share – in a round robin people were invited to share for 2-3 minutes. They could pass. After everyone shared, there was an opportunity for those who passed to offer their contribution.

It is important that these exercises be facilitated by someone who can hold the container with a sense of spaciousness, warmth and genuineness.