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collective presencing series – part one

Collective Presencing: A New Human Capacity

Ria Baeck and Helen Titchen Beeth

This is the first in a series of articles introducing the phenomenon and practice of Collective Presencing, a new capacity evolving in humanity at this time. Great thinkers have foreseen its coming—we recognise it in Aurobindo's descent of the supramental and Teilhard de Chardin's noosphere. But what exactly do those terms mean? Where these gifted individuals intuited and envisioned the birth of this new collective capacity at the dawn of the last century, we are now starting to be able to describe it from experience. While many might recognise the phenomenon from transpersonal group work and other such practices, so far as we are aware, this is the first attempt to articulate it as a path and a set of capacities that can be intentionally developed.

We live in complexity all the time these days. There are no simple solutions—not even complicated ones. As our life conditions have complexified, so has our capacity to deal with complexity. And yet the globalisation of our species has itself provoked a constellation of systemic threats of such nightmarish proportions that no one seriously imagines that any one mind can navigate a rational path to salvation on behalf of the whole. And yet that is what we keep trying to do, as we wait in vain for the inspirational leader who can extricate us from the mess we're in, throwing up our hands in disgust at the antics of our politicians, our governments, our industrialists, our economists, our environmentalists, our scientists... all those 'theys' who should do something about the state of the world.

Deep down, though, we know that when we look to our leaders for solutions, we are looking in the wrong place, in the wrong way. Understanding how the universe evolves can provide some clues—the process of complexification that has been underway since the dawn of cosmogenesis has been accompanied at every step by an interiorisation, which allows the mind of the living universe—and certainly that most complex of beings, man—to interpenetrate ever more deeply with the subtle workings of the Kosmos.

There is overwhelming evidence that human consciousness is evolving, moving from **collective tribal living**, where the individual was totally embedded in the life patterns of the collective; through a gradual, often painful, process of **individuation**, with the emphasis on the will and sovereignty of the individual; to what is emerging in our time: a **conscious return to collectivism** where individuated, or self-actualised, individuals voluntarily—sometimes temporarily—pool their consciousness in a search for the elusive collective intelligence that can help us to overcome the stupendous challenges now facing us as a species as a consequence of how our developmental trajectory has manifested on the physical plane thus far.

So human evolution has something to do with human consciousness awakening first to itself, then to its own evolution and then to a recognition of and, finally, an embodied experience of the

ways in which we are organically part of a larger whole, as we have always been but have forgotten. As we enter this new stage of individual/collective awakening, men and women are being increasingly called to practice the new life-form composed of groups of individuated individuals merging their collective intelligence as the 'Circle Being.'

These collective entities are not made up of a specific, finite group of individuals who stay together continuously. Their DNA lies in the **theme of the inquiry**; their metabolism is the **individual and collective practices** that enable men and women to join the collective inquiry. To join the circle is to offer ourselves up to a larger purpose for the duration of our participation and to allow ourselves to be used by the Mystery—our bodies and minds as sensing organs of the whole, and our lineages, biographies and knowledge as resources, filters and facets of diversity through which the future bubbling up in the middle, called forth by the shared focus and consciously-held intent, can find unique expression.

What if creating these collective beings is simply the next step of human evolution, an expression of our next level of complexity as a species, and the next step towards the ever-deeper integration of complex consciousness into the fabric of the Kosmos?

One such collective inquiry, unfolding over the past 5 years, has been held by a core group and a loose network of women, mostly based in Western Europe and the US, engaged in a practice we call '**Women Moving the Edge**.' From the outset, the focus of inquiry has been on moving the edge of collective intelligence, which has become an embodied exploration of the feminine principle as it is manifesting in the Kosmos at this time. Through periodic gatherings of between 5 and 18 women and regular conference calls with a small core group, we have danced, sung, sat, spoken, painted, wept, laughed, eaten, contemplated and constellated ourselves into an ever deeper experience of individual and collective connection to Source.

The findings of this ongoing collective inquiry are now coalescing into an articulation of this new human capacity, which we are calling Collective Presencing. Not only are we now able to recognise some of the components of this capacity and identify practices that can help us to develop it, one of its essential aspects is that these practices can connect us not only with the natural realm of our living planetary home, but also with the field of unmanifest potential that lies waiting in the subtle dimensions.

The purpose of this article, and others to follow, is to begin to unpack some of these practices and to share our intuitions about what they make possible.

Foundational Practice: The Circle

The circle is the mother of all organisational forms, and the foundation of the earliest human cultures—those with the deepest



connection to the living world in which they were embedded. Simply using the Circle Practice,¹ with the intention of focusing together on whatever question is in the middle, can shift a group from opinionated discussion to reflective shared inquiry.

As the circle continues to sit, over time, with an intention of developing its capacity for collective discernment and wisdom, seemingly extraordinary things become possible. We see two distinct phases in the development from a circle of individuals gathering around a theme of inquiry into a genuinely collective presence able to engage in generative collective action in service of life and evolution not in the Kosmos but as the Kosmos.

Phase One: The Circle of Presence

The first phase is a process of deepening and widening alignment that brings the individual members of the circle into an **embodiment of their own authentic selves** (deepening), on the one hand, and into a **growing awareness of complexity and interrelatedness** (widening), on the other. Both dimensions of the process take place simultaneously, but here we unpack the two separately to show what is going on. Although the learning during this first phase unfolds in the individuals around the rim of the circle, the collective context is crucial as the circle reflects back and affirms the individual as she learns to trust her inner and subtle sensing and to feed it back into the centre whenever appropriate.

Each step of the way, the practice involves a paradoxical movement and attention. On the one hand, the feminine **opening up** to experience, on the other hand, the masculine **focusing** on a specific aspect of experience.

The **deepening** movement calls the individual's focus ever inwards, starting by *observing what is*, with a focus on my full experience (physical, emotional and subtle) in the here and now, of whatever is arising. This practice builds the capacity to *open the mind*. As this experience stabilises, the practice shifts to *accepting what is*, and from there, to *honouring what is*. Here the focus is on widening and deepening my experience, trusting the subtle sensations as they arise in me, and moving beyond. These practices build the capacity to *open the heart*. Finally, the practice opens out into *living what is*, with the focus on sharing and expressing my full experience, including the inner and subtle aspects, rewarded by a growing ability to live authentically. This practice builds the capacity to *open the will*.²

The **widening** movement expands the individual's embrace, going through the deepening practices of observing, honouring and living what is, described above, starting with my *relationship to myself*, and panning out to include my relationship with *others*, with the *group*, and with *future potential*. The fruits of walking this path include a fuller experience of one's own inner being, a more expansive sense of self and a connection with one's inner gifts. I gain the capacity to connect in a truly authentic way that allows me to witness the authentic self of another, to heartfully experience our common humanity and to appreciate and invite diversity in any relationship. A corollary of this is the ability to recognise and integrate my own shadow and stop projecting it out on others. I learn how to hold a collective field, enabling me to participate more fully, become aware of shared assumptions and have a deeper appreciation of others' full potential. Lastly, I learn how to *surrender to the future potential*, and this enables me to start to

perceive the phenomena present in the subtle future field, to source and share from that field, to see new patterns and meaning and act on them.

When enough members of the circle are able to be present on all these levels, they are able to reach **authentic collective wisdom**. But more is possible and the circle can move into a next phase.

Phase Two: The Circle of Creation

The capacity to be present on all these levels is now woven together in a shared field of attention where *the collective can become an entity* in itself. All participants in the group now speak and act in coherence with that entity, still related with the inquiry in the centre. The deepening and transformation of the individuals around the rim continues apace, but the essence of this practice remains collective, and the Circle Practice deepens in certain aspects. It brings us to a place where we can weave human consciousness and intention into the generative processes of life itself. It is a movement towards ever-widening harmony and coherence that echoes through ever subtler realms of existence and can have—we believe—a most astounding impact on the manifest dimension in which we all play out our lives.

This second phase continues the process of deepening and widening alignment, taking it to a place that most of us are unfamiliar with: an experience of the subtle dimensions that our physical senses cannot apprehend, for which we must use subtle senses that we have un-learned to trust. Attempts to speak and articulate in and from these experiences become much more challenging. Our Western language has a build-in fragmentation, which clearly demarcates object and subject as separate entities. How, then, to speak from experiences of wholeness, of interweaving and interpenetration?

In essence, here, we are moving from a basis of acquired authenticity towards what is possible when we live from an authentic and generative space: the *true creation* that we were born into the Kosmos to manifest.

As in the first phase, the **deepening** movement continues to focus on the practices that open the mind, the heart and, especially, the will. The **widening** movement gradually interweaves the individual soul into the many dimensions of existence—space, time and future potential—through an ever richer relationship with the immanent soul in all of creation. What this might mean for the lived experience of daily life is something we are slowly but surely mapping out as our own personal and collective journeys unfold.

From the perspective of the individual, at the outset of this phase I start to focus on my soul's calling, and to interweave the different levels and dimensions of my self. This process is not straightforward and has its own hurdles: Who am I to have a Soul's Calling? Shouldn't I just roll over and go back to sleep? And yet, this stirring calls me to participate, moment by moment, more deeply in life itself. The fact that I am anchored in a collective practice with others in the same inquiry supports me to take one courageous step after another, aligned with life itself. Our personal stories become raw materials into the collective process; we see common themes recurring and archetypes start to emerge. Together, we begin to acknowledge ourselves as subtle, collective and cosmic beings. As

time passes, I find myself expressing more of my Soul's Calling through interweaving my life, my work and my passion; I start to enjoy an Emergent, Authentic Life. This is not something I have sat down and designed. It is something that seems to happen of its own accord when we are open to ever subtler layers in ourselves and in the environment.

The widening process now moves beyond the sphere of the individual and into the sphere of the collective. It is important at this point in the story to remember that **the living heart of a collective entity is a field of shared inquiry held in an open container where the potential can manifest**. Every meeting of the circle takes place as a continual dance of alignment of unique individual perspectives into a collective intention that can deepen and broaden the coherence of the field of inquiry, enabling coherent and generative manifestation in the world, for the good of the greater whole.

Moving into the collective sphere, then, our undivided focus is now centred on the collective calling. As we interweave the diversity in the group, we lean in to inquire what it is that the collective soul is calling us to do. We learn to hold the intensity, the disturbance, the not-knowing that are invoked by this seemingly impossible question... and to wait. When clarity arises, it comes not out of the minds around the edge, but out of the centre. This is no longer a circle of human personalities, it is a bubble of cosmic consciousness that has seeped through from the invisible realms into the container we have lovingly formed and held, focused not on each other but, as one, on the mystery in the middle. This is the space of **collective sourcing**. This is what it means to live the authentic collective—the Circle Being.

With the Circle Being now stable, the going becomes almost effortless. Our shared attention is riveted on the field of subtle place and time pulsing just out of range of our habituated physical senses, behind the veil that separates the realm of future potential from the manifest domain. Our subtle senses attuned, questing, to the subtle context of our shared inquiry, we are content to sit, with our physical eyes and ears 'on hold' until revelation dawns from the rich field of the invisible and unmanifest. We observe the synchronicities that speak to us of the interweaving of all life, we begin to dare to drop our agendas for Making Things Happen and lean in to a radical acceptance of cosmic timing and place.

We begin to notice that the information we seek is coming to us from nature, from the arts, from the archetypal and mythological dimensions, and so we open up to the abundant and profligate Mystery. Knowing doesn't come in bits and pieces now, it comes Whole—body, mind, spirit—gross, subtle, causal. Words can portray only the tip of the iceberg. We are invited to colours, lines, textures, shapes, sound and melody, touch, movement, embrace, laughter, tears and an ineffable inner knowing that is hard to express. We release into wonder, surrender into existential trust in the rhythms of nature, the powers of place, and begin to repeat the mantra, smiling: *What if it's easy?* From the embrace of this strong, subtle container, we can begin to give language and form to our subtle knowing about whatever project is at the centre of our inquiry. From this place we can see and birth the next, minimal, elegant step out into the field of action—one at a time—trusting that it will be wise, that it will serve the whole.



Images of Women Moving the Edge

Now at the culmination of the journey—or as far as we have yet been able to perceive—we know we are not alone in the Kosmos. We can focus on playing our full part in the generative processes of life, bringing our collectively aligned intention to play in a full interpenetration with further dimensions of creation, both ‘known’ and unsuspected. We notice the feedback from life itself and respond accordingly, opening our minds, bodies and heart for co-creation with the subtle. We understand that human free will and focused intention are our species’ unique and needed contribution to the Kosmos—a gift from evolution itself, a gift of consciousness to itself. Understanding also that we are not alone in being conscious, we use this gift to invoke the other dimensions into consenting co-creation for the good of the whole. We are in love with the Future, continuously sensing into its unmanifest potential, and we joyfully embark on a continuous collective action research project, funded by the Kosmos.



At the time of writing, we are teetering on the edge of a dawning intuition that the full flowering of this collective human capacity we are seeking to develop is a collective lovemaking with future’s potential: a full-body/mind/spirit, no-holds-barred consummation of evolutionary potential with no ‘little death’ at the moment of orgasm. It’s time to enjoy the Collective, Creative and Generative Life that has always been our birthright.

Conclusion

We cannot emphasise strongly enough the benefits of these practices. The benefit to individuals who participate regularly in one or more such collective inquiries is a quickening and deepening of the maturation process, which culminates in the rich rewards of the Authentic Life. For the collective and the inquiries at hand, the practice brings the benefit of generating wise action on behalf of the whole, as well as a deep, ongoing engagement with the social and natural field—the level from which generative social transformation of the kind we so badly need can spring.

¹ For a more detailed description of what Circle Practice entails, see the following: <http://www.peerspirit.com/gifts/PeerSpirit-Circle-Guidelines> 2010.
² Readers familiar with Otto Scharmer’s Theory U will recognise our use of Scharmer’s terms Open Mind, Open Heart, Open Will. For an explanation of how Collective Presencing builds on Theory U, see: <http://www.presencing.com/projects/collective-presencing>.

Ria Baeck (second from top right) is a transformational change professional. She is a Steward of the Art of Hosting global network and co-initiated the project leading to the book *Collective Presencing: always asking ‘How to unleash the un-manifested potential?’*

Helen Titchen Beeth (right) works in the European Commission in Brussels as a web editor and change consultant. She is a lover of wild nature and mother of twins.

