

Something about Why I The Practice of Council
"Some of us" turned to calling, working in, sitting In, living in
circle
as a practice and a lifeway in 1981 at the Ojai Foundation
excerpts from an interview - Aegina, Greece 2023 – Gigi Coyle

The "Council "(there are many ways this word is used, known, sourced
and carried.)

See waysofcouncil.net. and [https://en.wikipedia.org > wiki > Phil Lane Jr.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phil_Lane_Jr)

Dedication:

I want to speak to council – as I learned that word and use it along with circle with as much care and respect as possible within our wounded world. I speak it in honor of the gifts received not only sitting in circles on the lands of my German/ Irish ancestors, but as well, growing up with the use of word throughout the English language. And, then later in my life, it was a word and way shared with many of us at the Ojai Foundation. It became what we named as essential practice to learn to listen .

I like to acknowledge how such was offered and sadly not taken up very well by our "founding fathers "– or so some say. It is never too late. I am especially grateful for many early council/ceremonial ways with Indigenous and Metis peoples, as well as what Phil Lane jr. shares today thru the Four Worlds Institute.

John Perkins speaks to how I felt way back then and how I feel still.
"On this Native American Heritage Day - we celebrate the amazing ways Native Americans have taught us to come together and take actions to make the world a better place. From the southern tip of South America to the northern tip of North America they have started and joined movements to end environmental destruction and demand social justice. They offer inspiration, motivation, and powerful examples to the entire world. Today we celebrate their incredible wisdom, courage, perseverance, and ability to unite once-antagonistic groups to

promote common causes. Every day we honor their example and commit to learning from it."

May we each be accountable for the words and ways that we offer, use, speak and share ...may we listen for what is authentic, true and serves the intention of healing, learning and love. May we awaken to what has been taken, invented, translated, stolen, monetized or gifted – and pay attention for what doth and who doth it serve: May we give back, stand with and find the common ground of respect for all voices and gifts....for the life and well - being of all beings.

Perspective:

Circle or council, I most often speak it, refers to a practice, a view, a perspective of life.... This way is what inspired me to stay at the Ojai Foundation over many months and then, to come and go over many years.(1980 on. We wanted more than an intentional community, a program center; we wanted to learn, heal, have a sense of true belonging and guidance from Gaia, Mother Earth. This council way gave us the space and potential to be mindful, with care, for all beings... less hateful, violent, causing harm.... more aware, listening to the earth, ourselves, each other, whoever and whatever we meet. It is what gave me courage, to keep showing up.

We failed in some ways, numerous times and still today - to listen well, to inspire others, to fully take it up, to stay in the circle, with the intention and attention; we failed to do so ourselves - many times at best, we simply fell short. We had no titles, no robes, no monasteries; we had our grief, our despair, our concern for humanity, for the world, the wars, the injustice, the suffering. We had our love for the beauty, for the nature, for the moment, to guide us, teach us, carry us and possibly heal us.

We did not sit to share our feelings only or build a team or even a community. I sat to survive; to be able to stay here, to learn to be with

both the grief and the joy. We sat in council, we sat alone and together, with all of life.....

Why?

Of course, there as many reasons as there are people. And, I say we here because there grew to be a "we" amongst those of us who became carriers and core trainers. For me, to sit in council is a prayer and an action; it is a kind of activism, a pathway to a possible future world more safe, more healthy , more whole, more connected and loving for more beings.

Why? A practice ?

Because we had seen how listening deeply to another feels; we had seen when screaming or yelling out of passion and care, frustration, and anger -- the people rarely heard us, the people too often, just fought back.

We had come to know, remember in our bones, that every voice matters, that collective wisdom arrives, that we all want to be seen and heard.... that once that happens, something else can come, can emerge, can arise... truth, heart, connection, compassion, understanding, forgiveness...

Maybe earth's voice, the water's message, grace, God, the divine, great mystery--?

We had seen, witnessed, that if I or we, were the only ones to speak -- if we, whoever, whether master, priest or even an Indigenous one -- went on and on and on... many began to fall away, to lose attention, to miss our part, our responsibility, our need to show up, to be someone, to be ourselves, to become who we were here, who we are here, to be. We need the whole community to be engaged It was in part my response to injustice, to patriarchy, to the wars, the isms - colonialism, racism, the sexism - the polarities, us /them, right/ wrong righteous views ... It was not an answer but one of the essential responses to a prayer, to somehow be part of the healing..

To sit in council, in a circle or a spiral (as one of the forms we co-created for large groups)- was and is to sit in life differently than how many of us were raised. It took and takes practice to listen with the heart, to speak with the heart, to care, fully; it is not so easy to do in this world. It was, it is, so much more than about sharing our feelings, our truth, even our story. For me, it is about listening to our soul and daring to be with that in company.

All that said, councils can be fun, funny and creative, as well as serious places to work thru conflict, a blessing time, or a time simply to connect in a myriad of ways. We created courses, trainings, networks, went on pilgrimages to lure people in... Knowing it was not for everybody, trusting there would be some - seeing time and time again how it served, not just us, but others and possibly the earth herself.

Council ways have grown in schools, churches, corporations, NGO's. families - relationships and communities of all sorts over the past 40 years as I have known itMany circle ways are now seen to be reviving after years of suppression if not repression thru genocides in the Americas and other cultures as well. Council as a practice is a part of the bigger story of circle ways existing all the way back to the beginning of time.

In the 70's I had sat in a lot of circles with women ...the circle way it seemed was in our bones and in the earth-ways of my Irish ancestors, for sure. We wanted to be safe, to be respected, to be seen as more than an object, to be known, to be loved, to be heard. More came - those who also wanted to be at least somewhat "safe", who wanted to find their voice, who longed for a place where their presence mattered, where they were not silenced, oppressed.

And as white, as American, as woman - I grew, I knew - to listen deeply to where I was, the voice of place as well as who I was with; to honor

the roots in different lands, to connect with my and our ancestors to sit quietly with Indigenous peoples, whose voices perhaps most needed to be heard, who had been raised to listen, to care for all of life in ways, I, and many of us, hadn't. And then, of course, not to forget the children, the import then and now, of beginning with and centering the children.

In going back now to the roots at Ojai, to why, way back then we needed council as a community; I want to say why some of us at Ojai wanted, needed something different than or in addition to the more traditional "talking stick circle" we had been invited into with many Indigenous peoples. Sitting in such cross cultural circles, that were being more widely shared in the 70's, we witnessed a need to focus on listening even more, on finding ways to teach, learn and heal thru the body, the songs, the silence as well as the words. We knew this generation, certainly westerners, settlers, as well as others, actually needed to learn to listen to all of life as valued relations, in ways we may have never done before

That is why many of us practiced, that is why I came to offer and grow council as a practice, and that is why I still do, when and where it is needed, when and where it is wanted, when and where it serves. That is why I, with a few others, created "Ways of Council", waysofcouncil.net, to recognize the many circle ways, as well as "the way" we grew and that grew us; to bear witness to the different intentions and possible uses of councils, the many ways and important power of sharing story – thru words, in art, in movement, in song, in silence. And from there, for those who are called, the opportunity to continue to learn thru many experiences specific to culture, place and the time.

This is why our work continues, to co- create spaces where all voices can be welcomed as a beginning – for meetings, for governance, for

decision making, for learning. Then in my experience, there is room for connection, community, for what some call the third, or perhaps Spirit's voice to arrive in a group more easily, in our world, in this time. This is why I have patience, for most any and all councils, for even a very long story, especially an Indigenous one - any opportunity to hear those who have not been heard for centuries, to go on as long as they need, or actually for as long as "we" need. This is why I cringe when I go on too long, get lost in my personal story, or super cringe if a white man does such. And I practice forgiving myself and them; Forgive, forgive, forgive and commit to learn to practice again for the sake of our children, our earth, our future.

This is why I practice; this is why I have partnered with Jack Zimmerman, Marlow Hotchkiss and many others of different genders and cultures. This is a part of why I'm married to Win. If I could live and work and love this way with white men, on some level, the most challenging for me to be with, the ones with whom my greatest wounds had occurred, the most privileged in certain ways of all species, the oppressor to so many by their lineage, race, status, class, position.... then I had hope that I, we, could do it with anyone, with everyone. They got it, wanted to learn to practice, to live in this way together, not only with me, but with the world. It was our part to play, our part in nature, our part as nature.

If I could heal my own wound of feeling less-than, unseen, unheard, un-respected, unsafe, then perhaps, just maybe, healing was possible with others, with those even those far more radically impacted than I. If I could connect with fellow humans, especially those I feared, judged, othered - with my heart than anything was possible. If children learned to share their stories with heart and truly listen to others - then maybe some of the old stories of judgement, revenge and hatred might not be so easily passed and carried on; maybe a new story of justice, beauty and love could actually grow. May it be so .

