



The Circle Exercise: A Practice in Radical Beingness

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This exercise is adapted from a traditional shamanic initiation (see below *). I have adapted it to our modern world and needs because I have found it very efficient for people.

You can do it for 15 minutes, 30 minutes, an hour or more.

You choose a place in nature (or in the middle of the city!) where you can sit still without interruption (you will quickly realize that it does not matter if there are people around or sounds). And you define a small circle around you. You look in front of you with a gentle gaze and you start paying attention to everything you can see and feel around you, without moving, not even your head. You may find your attention moving from little

details to the whole and back. There is no right or wrong way to do this. You simply want to fully experience, with all your senses, and progressively fall into a fullness of being with all that is around you, allow it all to sink into the bottom of your body and bones, and maybe even merge at a very deep level.



After a while, a few things may start happening:

- You might no longer feel that you are around nature or drawing on nature; you will *be* nature with less of a sense of separation
- You will realize the multiplicity of worlds within this world, of the different forms of life and energy that we don't usually notice
- You will "see" and "feel" and "perceive" more



** Here is a description by Martín Prechtel of what the original practice is, in terms very similar to what I experienced myself in the Amazonia during one of my initiations. Although his description refers to what a shaman goes through during her/his apprenticeship, it might help you understand the spirit of the practice and its potential:*

“Out we’d go to the bush, where no human would be likely to poke his or her curious nose. Chive [*his teacher*] would set me up with no water, food, fire, or blanket, and instruct me to stay in one place an hour or so before dawn to wait until the next day’s arrival of our Father the sun. I was to hear, see, tasted on the wind, feel on my skin everything, every sound, every change of heat, humidity, coolness, footsteps, and breezes that went on around me until the next sunrise, without sleeping, drinking, eating, or talking. Learning how to listen like this was call “being in a place well.”

You couldn’t think about your life, or the life of others. There would be plenty of time for that, because to have time and place to just think about this and that is heaven to us. This exercise, however, was to make sure you didn’t think. It was not like some Asian meditation where you empty yourself exactly, but was rather where you filled yourself with all the senses, with every cricket chirp and birdsong, every creak, crack, pop, and twitter. You were not to focus on what happened as an observer, but rather to hear, see, and allow it all to sink into the bottom of your body and bones like silt and seeds dropping into your river of liquid bone from the overhanging trees, while you gazed from the bottom of the water, very still, hardly moving, like an alligator.

If I did the exercise right, my soul would begin to merge with my entire diverse surroundings, and the edges of who I was would get increasingly blurred until my mind would jump and snap me back like a dog on a leash, scared of how far I might wander, and maybe never come back. Then, I’d calm my mind, send it off and slowly begin to listen and see, until I started to merge again with nature and be snapped back again by my mind. Each time, however, I’d get a little farther into nature and a little better at staying there.



A current began to pulse between the mind of self-preservation and the mind of the natural instinct to become part of the life around me. After a year of practice, that pulse became so fast and habitual that it took on the character of a unique "third thing." That third thing that appeared was what I would need to have in order to survive my initiation as a shaman. While immersed in nature, not analyzing, not understanding exactly but becoming nature, one really did begin seeing how vast the human soul can be. It was this middle place, this third thing, Chiv and I were after, the place of shamans in the middle of the world."

From Martín Prechtel. *Secrets of the Talking Jaguar*. Thorsons, 2002: 158-159.