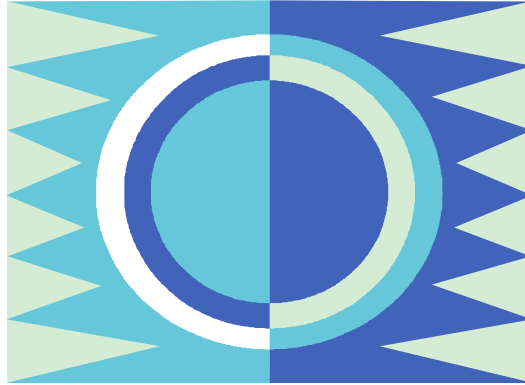


Healing Circles: A Manual for Integrating Spirituality into the Workplace



“There is Nothing so Wise as a Circle”

Rainer Maria Rilke

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AN AGENCY OF



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CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Historical Background	2
The Circle as an Archetypal Form	4
Spirituality in the Workplace	5
Nuts and Bolts for Creating Healing Circles	7
Appendix A: Some Suggestions for Adapting and Modifying the Healing Circle for Other Venues	10
Appendix B: Staff Healing Circle Memo	15
Appendix C: Religious Healing in Boston – First Findings	16
Appendix D: Inspirational Readings for Healing Circles	17
References	20
Endnotes	21

Healing Circles

Letting Go
Anonymous

To Let Go is not to stop caring,
It's recognizing I can't do it for someone else.
To Let Go is not to cut myself off,
It's realizing I can't control another.

To Let Go is not to enable,
But to allow learning from natural consequences.
To Let Go is not to fight powerlessness,
But to accept that the outcome is not always in my hands.

To Let Go is not to try to change or blame others,
It's to make the most of myself.
To Let Go is not to care for, it's to care about.
To Let Go is not to fix, it's to be supportive.

To Let Go is not to judge,
It's to allow another to be a human being.
To Let Go is not to try to arrange outcomes,
But to allow others to affect their own destinies.

To Let Go is not to be protective,
It's to permit another to face their own reality.
To Let Go is not to regulate anyone,
But to strive to become what I dream I can be.

To Let Go is not to fear less, it's to love more.

Introduction

This beautiful poem was given to me by one of my colleagues who has been a regular participant in our Healing Circles. For more than six years, I have had the privilege of facilitating a monthly Healing Circle for the staff of Jewish Family & Children's Service of Greater Boston. There were no roadmaps for the creation of these Healing Circles - just a firm belief that if I was able to "let go" and trust in the process, if there was an interest and desire among my colleagues, then the Healing Circles would happen. Now, after more than 70 Healing Circles have taken place, it is with deep gratitude and awe that I take a moment to reflect on the process. This manual is my attempt to describe what transpired, and to profoundly thank my colleagues who have participated in the Healing Circle for opening their hearts and minds to the process of "letting go."

As a result of the original idea to create a Healing Circle, many circles of caring have formed at Jewish Family & Children's Service. I have been the recipient of many such poems, readings and teachings, over the years, as have so many of my colleagues. It has become commonplace to share inspirational written words with one another, as well as spoken words of support and encouragement. Just as a pebble is thrown into a body of water and creates ripples farther than the eye can see, so, too, the Healing Circle branched off in small ways within the agency, within the community, and beyond. (See Appendix A).

It was in my role as the director of the newly established Jewish Healing Center that I was encouraged to create the Healing Circle. I received support from the senior management who viewed the Healing Circle as a positive force, and positive model, for bringing spirituality into the workplace. Management support is crucial for success. It is my belief that anyone can start a Healing Circle. It only takes a desire to create an environment built on caring, a commitment to do so, and management support. My fervent hope and wish is that you will find inspiration from this "how-to" manual to bring some meaningful aspect of the Healing Circle experience into your heart, your life, and most importantly to those with whom you come in contact each and everyday.

Historical Background

More than seven years ago, a focus group comprised of eight staff members from across the agency, gathered together to imagine the creation of a Jewish Healing Center at Jewish Family & Children's Service.¹ That focus group provided immeasurable support to me during the founding of *Jewish Healing Connections*. The mission of *Jewish Healing Connections*, now in its seventh year, is to help ensure that people in the Jewish community feel connected when facing isolation, illness, or loss. "*It is not good for people to be alone.*" (Genesis 2:18).

As members of the focus group imagined how to provide spiritual support to people in need in the community, what became apparent was that as professional caregivers, we, too, needed support. This realization occurred during one focus group session when a member shared her sadness and grief at the loss of one of her beloved clients. We spontaneously gave her space, support, and time to share her feelings. She described the woman's life, and her own deep sense of personal loss. It was during her sharing that we became profoundly aware that as professional caregivers we needed to make sure to care for ourselves, in both our personal and professional lives. It was in that moment that the first Healing Circle was spontaneously created.

We drafted a vision statement for the creation of a Healing Circle. On February 12, 1999, a memo was sent to all staff that described the process. The following are excerpts:

The focus group concluded that a monthly Healing Circle for all staff would provide much needed spiritual support. A Healing Circle is a gathering for shared support and self-renewal. We are all asked to provide support, nurturing and care for clients and other individuals and too often we forget to replenish ourselves. We also face particularly difficult times when individuals we work with are suffering or when the health of our clients deteriorates, or they die. Even without these traumatic events the ongoing nature of our work can be stressful. These stressful times affect all of us within the agency, and the Healing Circle is meant to be an inclusive experience no matter which department you work in. Even if you are not facing a stressful time we welcome your participation to provide a nurturing presence for us. (See Appendix B for the most recent memo).

Two noted authors and pioneers in the field of death and dying have written passionately on this emerging issue. For human service professionals working with life and death issues with their clients, these findings are important. J. William Worden underscores the need to provide support for professional caregivers. "There is much current interest in the problem of burnout and stress management among health care providers...Mary Vachon has compared staff stress among those working in a hospice setting and those working with the seriously ill in a general hospital. She finds stress in both settings and concludes that the best care can be given if caregivers are cognizant that they too have needs."² And Rachel Naomi Remen notes, "The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet. This sort of denial is no small matter. The way we deal with loss shapes our capacity to be present to life more than anything else. The way we protect ourselves from loss may be the way in which we distance ourselves from life. Protecting ourselves from loss rather than grieving and healing our losses is one of the major causes of burnout."³

The many losses that human beings experience is something we have in common with our clients. Being human we are mortal and vulnerable and we need to take the time to grieve the losses that we experience in our personal and professional lives. As professionals, we must care for ourselves, and our colleagues, in order to effectively care for our clients.

The Circle as an Archetypal Form

Dr. Jean Shinoda Bolen, a psychiatrist, Jungian analyst and author, devoted an entire book to Circles. Although she focuses on the psyches of women and Circles, this concept can also be applied to men.

My focus is on the meaning of women's circles and their formation and maintenance because women as a gender have a natural talent for them. The circle is an archetypal form that feels familiar to the psyches of most women. It's personal and egalitarian. When the circle is taken into the workplace or community by women – often modified to be acceptable and unthreatening to men, who usually don't find this a natural form for them – it enhances collaborative undertakings and brings people who work together emotionally closer and in a less hierarchical relationship to one another.⁴

Bolen continues,

Marshall McLuhan's famous expression, 'The medium is the message,' greatly applies to women's circles: a circle is nonhierarchical – this is what equality is like. This is how a culture behaves when it listens and learns from everyone in it.

In more ways than one, women talk in circles: conversation takes a spiral shape in its subjective exploration of every subject. Listening, witnessing, role modeling, reacting, deepening, mirroring, laughing, crying, grieving, drawing upon experience, and sharing the wisdom of experience, women in circles support each other and discover themselves, through talk. Circles of women supporting each other, healing circles, wisdom circles...

See one, do one, teach one. When I was in medical school, this was the medical student mantra. This is how doctors learned procedures, an apprenticeship model of hands-on experience. Circle experiences are much the same...the circle experience can have a radically positive effect on relationships outside the circle, because it can provide a model – a place to practice honest and caring communication, until this is what you do and expect from others in your life.⁵

Dr. Susan Sered, an anthropologist, working at the *Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard University Divinity School*, attended one of our Healing Circles. She was interested in observing the Healing Circle as part of her academic research on the contemporary American Jewish healing movement. Her observations were presented in a booklet entitled, *Religious Healing in Boston: First Findings*, and excerpts can be found in Appendix C. Like Dr. Bolen, her observations highlight the nonhierarchical and non-authoritarian nature of the Healing Circle. For in reality, the majority of people who attend are women. And since the majority of human service professionals are women, Healing Circles are a natural fit for a human service setting.

Spirituality in the Workplace

Much of life is spent at work. One of the many spiritual teachings in Judaism, particularly relevant to a discussion on spirituality in the workplace, is the word for work in the Hebrew language, *avodah*. *Avodah* is also the word used for prayer and service. "The greatest window into the rabbinic way of understanding work is through the rabbis' vocabulary. One word, *avodah*, came to mean not only 'work,' but also prayer, Torah study, and sacrifices in the ancient Temple in Jerusalem. What all these meanings had in common was their potential ability to lift each of us out of ourselves and to let us touch something deeper and higher in the world."⁶

This beautiful sentiment regarding the potential transcendent nature of work, is not always easy to actualize. The truth is that the pressures and stresses of 21st century living are many. Whether it is parenting a young child, parenting a sick child, being a single parent, or being a caregiver for a sick partner or parent, we bring our whole selves and these very real anxieties to work. When working in a human service setting the workday is spent giving to others. Thus, it is commonplace for human service professionals to deal not only with the spiritual pain of their clients, but their own, as well. Human service professionals are as much in need of ways in which to reduce stress as those they serve.

The use of Healing Circles at Jewish Family & Children's Service has helped to foster an atmosphere of spirituality and support within the workplace. It has provided an opportunity for people to come together within a spiritual context and cope with work/home life struggles. "Spurred by years of downsizing, rightsizing, and job insecurity, U.S. employees are at the forefront of a grass-roots movement that is quietly creating a spiritual revival in the workplace."⁷ One model for spiritual revival and renewal in the workplace is the use of Healing Circles, offering a place to reduce the stresses and anxieties of daily living.

Tracey Lipsig, director of the Jewish Healing Network, a program of the Jewish Family & Community Services of Chicago, began using Healing Circles with some modifications, based on our experience in Boston. As a result, in June 2004, Tracey and I were invited to present at the *Third Annual Canadian Conference on Spirituality and Social Work in Winnipeg, Manitoba*. Our workshop was entitled, "*Integrating Spirituality into Jewish Family Service Agencies Through the Use of Healing Circles*." At the conference we attended a workshop given by Rick Csiernik and David Adams entitled, "*Seeking the Lost Spirit: Understanding Spirituality and Restoring it to the Workplace*." Csiernik and Adams write, "spirituality contributed to wellness and assisted in counteracting workplace stress."⁸

Agencies that are open to this model or other models for bringing spirituality into the workplace may see improvement in job performance, productivity, and satisfaction. Ian Mitroff and Elizabeth Denton conducted the first-ever survey of

spiritual beliefs and practices among executives and managers. They did a “spiritual audit” of Corporate America that underscored the importance of a sense of interconnectedness in the workplace. The audit concluded, “overall company performance is actually higher in companies where company values and spiritual values coalesce.”⁹

Mitroff and Denton also note other important and significant findings regarding spirituality in the workplace.

First, contrary to conventional wisdom, the respondents in our study did not have widely varying definitions of spirituality. Spirituality is not as variable a phenomenon as is commonly thought. Most of the people we interviewed had a rather definite notion of what it is and what it is not. There was nearly unanimous agreement on the definition of spirituality and on the importance it plays in people’s lives. In brief, according to our respondents, spirituality is the basic desire to find ultimate meaning and purpose in one’s life and to live an integrated life.

*Second, people do not want to compartmentalize or fragment their lives. The search for meaning, purpose, wholeness, and integration is a constant, never-ending task. It is also a constant, never-ending struggle. To confine this search to one day a week or after hours violates people’s basic sense of integrity, of being whole persons. In short, the soul is not something one leaves at home. People want to have their souls acknowledged wherever they go, precisely because their souls accompany them everywhere. They especially want to be acknowledged as whole persons in the workplace, where they spend the majority of their waking time.*¹⁰

Their findings attest to the basic human need to actualize one’s sense of self and to bring one’s whole self to the workplace. Based on their findings, spirituality, Healing Circles, and other models for creating a sense of interconnectedness, are not only relevant for human service agencies!

As directors of Jewish Healing Centers both Lipsig and I are in unique positions to bring the concept of healing and spirituality into the workplace. However, in addition to housing Jewish Healing Centers, what many Jewish Family Service agencies and human service agencies have in common is that the majority of the staff are social workers. This may lend itself to making participation in the Healing Circle more readily acceptable.

As Edward Canda and Leola Dyrud Furman note,

Spirituality is the heart of helping. It is the heart of empathy and care, the pulse of compassion, the vital flow of practice wisdom, and the driving force of action for service. Social workers know that our professional roles, theories, and skills become rote, empty, tiresome, and finally lifeless without this heart, by whatever names we call it. We also know that the people we

serve seek spirituality, by whatever names they call it, to help them thrive, to succeed at challenges, and to infuse whatever materials and relationships we assist them with to have meaning beyond mere survival value.¹¹

In our experience with Healing Circles, we have found that spirituality, faith and prayer can be used quite effectively with some modifications in the workplace to promote a caring workplace environment and hopefully prevent burnout. Over the years we have faced times of transition, change and loss at Jewish Family & Children's Service. These have included the death of a valued employee, layoffs in the course of one difficult time period, and the collective national devastation of September 11.

Through times of transition, in addition to support provided by the management, we also had a ritual that helped unite some of us through currents of change. "One does not discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore for a very long time," notes, Andre Gide, French critic, essayist, and novelist. Healing Circles can not only be an ongoing model to promote a sense of community and interconnectedness in the workplace, but can be particularly effective during times of transition, change and loss, when one can not see the shore.

On a more positive note we also went through a time of transition with a major move to a new headquarters, in a new city. The move to our new headquarters joined two of our sites into a larger building. As the blueprints were being designed, the management recognized the importance and value of spirituality in the workplace and included a non-denominational chapel in the building plans. We now have a designated sacred space! And shortly before the move, a memo dated January 2005, entitled, *Staff Healing Circles – Looking Back as We Look Forward*, was sent to all staff offering a retrospective on the Healing Circles. In the memo I wrote, "During this time of transition, as we move to our new home in Waltham, it seemed important to offer this retrospective. We look forward to continuing the tradition of the Healing Circles in our new space, and welcoming our colleagues from the Boston office to join us." And they did.

Nuts and Bolts for Creating Healing Circles

Of the more than 70 Healing Circles that have taken place, no two have been alike. Each is a unique experience depending on the participants. We often have between 8-14 participants from across the agency. A schedule is set up four to six months in advance so staff can plan their schedules accordingly, and dates are listed in the monthly management newsletter.

After trial and error a ritual format has developed. However, any new innovations that people may suggest are always welcome and encouraged. The structure is

essentially the same each time. I place a beautiful cloth on the table to transform the conference room. The overhead light is turned off and a dimmer lamp is used and a candle is lit. Native American music is playing while people enter the room. In the center of the table the candle shines brightly and a bowl of water with stones is also a focal point. I like the imagery of stones and water, but many other things could also work as a focal point for concentration. I invite participants to close their eyes, if they feel comfortable, and take a moment to notice their breath. After a few minutes I break the silence with an inspirational reading, or sometimes with a Tibetan bell. I choose the readings thoughtfully, from a variety of eclectic sources, based on my sense of events in the agency, my colleagues' lives, happenings in the outside world. Without fail the readings resonate deeply with some in the group. (See Appendix D). After sharing the reading, I open up the Healing Circle for discussion on whatever topics participants wish to discuss. Sometimes people comment on the reading and how it affected them. Topics vary from month to month, but almost always professional *and* personal issues arise. Some of the topics that have been touched on over the years include: work/life balance, death of a co-worker, September 11, caring for an ill spouse, death of a spouse, divorce, miscarriage, death of a pet, chemotherapy treatments, saying goodbye to a co-worker, self-care techniques, death of a friend, death of a parent, client illness and client death. We also share moments of joy such as significant milestones in our lives and in our clients' lives.

Some months there is more silence than talk. At first I found this very difficult. Over time and with a suggestion from a colleague, I learned to "let go" and invite the silence to be with us in the room. I learned that silence is just another form of feeling a sense of connectedness. I close the Healing Circle by asking participants to offer names of those in need of healing. Sometimes I include a *niggun*/wordless melody, as well, and then we all join in singing Debbie Friedman's version of the *MiSheBerach*, the contemporary Jewish prayer/song for healing. I end by asking people to close their eyes once again and take a few moments to share the silence. I break the silence by sounding a Tibetan bell three times and extinguishing the candle.

Each work environment is unique, and one must take into consideration the specific work setting demands in order to avoid potential difficulties. Our Healing Circles are offered during lunch hour, for one-half hour - the time typically does not conflict with most peoples' schedules. The day rotates so that different staff members, some of whom work part-time, can attend. On the day of the Healing Circle an email reminder is sent. In a human service agency, because of the nature of the work, when participants refer to a client in some fashion, it is crucial that it is only in general terms and that names are never used. Issues of confidentiality are paramount. Since the majority of staff in a human service agency are social workers and human service professionals, it is also important to make a special effort to encourage administrative and fiscal staff to attend. The most personal and effective way to encourage new people is for the

facilitator to speak to people individually. It is important to creating a welcoming feeling and to let new people know that they do not have to speak in the Healing Circle. Over time I have also learned that it is critical to start and end on time. This shows respect for colleagues' precious time. Sometimes, however, depending on the nature of the discussion, participants linger in the conference room and continue to provide support to their co-workers after the closing.

As mentioned before we have Christian and Jewish staff attending the Healing Circle. The *MiSheBerach* is typically the only overtly Jewish ritual. To create an inclusive feeling, I mention that we invoke our common ancestors in the prayer/song, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca, etc., the ancestors of all of us who are connected to the Source of All. Having participants from all departments within the agency helps foster a sense of connection, inclusiveness and relatedness across departments and disciplines. Participants come from different faith traditions, as well as no faith tradition. Inspirational readings offered at the beginning of each Healing Circle are eclectic in nature. The key spiritual ingredient that Mitroff and Denton found essential is the sense of interconnectedness that transcends those things that might divide us.

James Griffith and Melissa Elliott Griffith caution against the potential dangers of the ways in which religion and spirituality can be destructive in clinical practice which also applies to religion and spirituality in the workplace. "A simple maxim guides our clinical work: Expressions of religious or spiritual experience are harmful when they violate the relatedness on which spirituality is based. Spirituality comes into being as one's commitment to relatedness – to other people, the environment, one's God or the numinous, one's heritage, one's body – becomes the paramount concern that organizes understanding and action."¹²

Jewish Family & Children's Service is part of a network of Jewish agencies in the Boston area and is also a non-profit, non-sectarian, human service agency. Our mission statement speaks to our underlying core values and our desire to create a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere. The mission statement of Jewish Family & Children's Service is to help individuals and families of all ages through human service and health care programs that reflect Jewish values of social responsibility and concern for all members of the community. The Healing Circle has been an innovative tool in helping the staff who choose to participate take better care of themselves and each other. In so doing, they more effectively translate the mission into the lives of the people we are privileged to serve.

Appendix A

Some Suggestions for Adapting and Modifying the Healing Circle for Other Venues

Example I:

Rabbi Karen Landy, the Rabbi of Jewish Healing Connections, a guest presenter, and I, have been invited for the past two years to facilitate a Healing Circle/Workshop for professionals who work regularly with volunteers.

**Jewish Community Volunteer Program (JCVP)
Invites you to our 2nd annual workshop**

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF AS YOU TAKE CARE OF OTHERS

The workshop will be facilitated by:

Rabbi Karen Landy, Spiritual Consultant to JF&CS
Jewish Healing Connections

Marjie Sokoll, Director, JF&CS Jewish Healing Connections

Jessica Schwartz, a guest lecturer on Spiritual Healing

Thursday, February 3, 2005

9-11 AM

Leventhal-Sidman Jewish Community Center

Room 205

333 Nahanton Street, Newton MA 02459

RSVP: Yvonne Sacks

(617) 558-6585

Yvonne@cjp.org

A program offered by Combined Jewish Philanthropies

Example II:

In March 2004, a staff training was offered at Jewish Family & Children's Service on "*Assessing and Responding to Suicidal Content for Social Workers in Non-Mental Health Programs.*" Healing Circles have become such an integral part of the fabric of the agency's culture that the presenters invited me to begin and close the workshop in the context of a Healing Circle. This was due to the difficulties surrounding the topic of suicide. In addition, the acceptance of the Healing Circle in the workplace has in some small way contributed to some of the discussions on spirituality and prayer that we have had in our interdisciplinary Geriatric Team Meetings.

Example III:

In September 2003, I co-facilitated a Healing Circle/Healing Service with a minister from the Trinity Church in Boston. She was in charge of the newly established Trinity Church Pastoral Counseling Center. We modified the Healing Circle and a Jewish Healing Service to be sensitive to the therapists who came from different backgrounds, and were part of a new initiative to offer faith-based counseling. We called the gathering *Sacred Circles*.

Example IV:

In March 2002, *The Newton Area Human Service Providers Network* sponsored a conference entitled, *Caring for the Caregiver: Strategies for Reducing Stress*. I was invited to present a workshop on Healing Circles. The workshop description said, "*Participate in a Healing Circle to share experiences, give and receive support, and find self-renewal. In addition to the actual ritual, learn ways and receive resources to create this experience in your own workplace.*"

I felt very strongly that I wanted to share feedback from my colleagues with the workshop participants, as we had taken this collective Healing Circle journey together. Below is my letter and their responses.

Example IV Continued:

**Healing Circle Staff Feedback
Received Via Email
February 2002**

Hi Everybody,

I am writing to make a request. I will be presenting a workshop in March at a conference sponsored by the Newton Area Human Service Providers Network on the creation of our monthly staff Healing Circle. As some of you know our monthly Healing Circle was initially conceived in a Jewish healing focus group with representatives from across Jewish Family & Children's Service. We are now in our fourth year and I would love to hear from those of you who have participated in the Healing Circles over the past few years.

During the workshop I will invite participants to actually participate in a Healing Circle, I will describe the logistics, and I will also provide them with the inspirational readings we have used. Since I am sure that some folks will be hesitant to begin something like this in their own agencies, I thought it might be helpful to offer them some staff feedback, which might help to overcome some initial anxiety.

If you have any thoughts or feelings you would like to share with me, I will collect them and pass them on anonymously to the workshop participants.

*Thanks so much for your thoughtful comments,
Marjie*

.....

I would like to let you know that the Healing Circle is one of the all agency offerings that I look forward to attending. It has a very special significance to me. I have found it to be a safe place to talk about difficult life and work situations and to feel nurturance and support. I think it has also brought our staff closer together. As the agency has had to face recent layoffs and personnel changes, having this sacred space to share feelings has been wonderful. The other thing I look forward to is the break in my day. For a brief time, only 30 minutes, I know I will be relaxed and focused, leaving all the stresses and pressures of the work outside the room. The low light, the music, and your guidance help us get to another place inside ourselves. I give you credit, for providing the agency with a much needed focus on our own mental and spiritual health as a way to make us better people and probably more productive workers! You set the tone in the room and model the kind of non-judgmental support that makes it work so well. The readings you choose are always appropriate and often memorable. Thank you for giving this to us and for spreading it around!

I am going to jot my thoughts down randomly otherwise I won't get this to you in a timely fashion. When I was going through difficult times with health concerns regarding my son and then my husband, both potentially life-threatening illnesses, the Healing Circle was both a refuge and a means of gathering support from the agency as a whole without having to share all the details with multiple people. The power of communal prayer cannot be overstated! Attending when I am not in "crisis" has allowed me to get to know staff from other programs in a more intimate way than is normally possible. Being able to offer support while reflecting on similarities in my own life experiences has been gratifying. The readings you share are often uplifting and/or thought provoking. My one "complaint" is that I feel often that an hour, rather than a half-hour, is needed. That could be because I am a slow unwinder! However, I am often time pressed and can't always make even a half-hour time sooooo. Thanks.

.....

It seems like a wonderful opportunity to expand the Healing Circle to other agencies. The supportive atmosphere and the permission given to participants to remain silent as well as to speak, played an important role in my feeling comfortable. I appreciate the opportunity to get together with staff to share, reflect and support one another. The Healing Circle provides me with the opportunity to carve out time during a hectic day to focus on myself in a spiritual way. Since we work in an environment in which we are constantly focusing on others who are in need, it is important that we ourselves feel replenished. I think that the leadership role is crucial to the success of the group. I appreciate the readings and the comfort of silence as well as sharing with one another.

.....

For me, the monthly staff Healing Circles feel like an oasis in the midst of our extremely busy workdays, their value confirmed by the consistently high attendance. Each is a half hour of peace and calm, and a space for genuine conversation about the pain we all confront in our professional and personal lives. They are re-energizing. It's hard to believe that we are now in our fourth year. Initially, they felt very new and different. Now, they are very much a part of working at Jewish Family & Children's Service and I, personally, am so happy that you started them. Thank you.

.....

I wish I had a Healing Circle in my previous jobs – I would have felt more connected to my co-workers and the agency. The reasons to start a Healing Circle far outnumber those against it – but the benefits are not measurable. We are all very busy – so I recommend they have the reminder signs and personal recruitment by the leader for the circles on the day of the event. I recommend

the half-hour time frame, reminders to be on time and start on time, and that participants eat lunch before or after the Healing Circle.

The Healing Circle has been a wonderful opportunity to connect to myself and to engage with staff in new ways. It's a little like before one goes into a therapy session, you take stock and sometimes that's as important as the work itself. I think that the validation of silence can't happen enough – even if the entire time is spent in silence. It's such an active silence. I love the readings, but find it a bit disruptive of my flow when I am asked if I have any thoughts, or reactions. I might find it more helpful if the leader began with a reading and then said something like “let's now let our Healing Circle continue or flow or open or something,” again validating silence and using the reading as a trigger but not have the question asked by the leader, “did this resonate with anyone?” I think you have begun a very powerful and exciting movement here Marjie.

Some thoughts/reactions if this will help. The Healing Circle gave all of us a place to deal with the pain of September 11th. Although my own participation has been limited I felt the experience was valuable, welcoming and open to all. From a business perspective, the Healing Circles have not been disruptive to the work environment, in fact people come back to work more centered, less stressed and better able to focus – the Healing Circles have been a great addition to our working environment.

I find the Healing Circle to be one of the highlights of the work month. It is a brief respite in the midst of a workweek when I have a chance to stop, breathe, get centered and to connect to my colleagues on a very caring level without the normal interruptions of a busy workday. I find great personal benefit from the Healing Circle as a “spiritual fix” during my hectic life. It offers me a chance to connect to my spiritual self in ways I rarely get to do. Marjie sets the mood, always provides a meaningful reading and I relish the opportunity to participate in this Circle. It is truly a gift.

Appendix B

TO: All Staff
FROM: Marjorie Sokoll, Director
Jewish Healing Connections
DATE: April 29, 2005
RE: DATES FOR UPCOMING HEALING CIRCLES:
CIRCLES THAT HEAL

"There is Nothing so Wise as a Circle"

Rainer Maria Rilke

Healing Circles/Circles that Heal are a gathering time for shared support and self-renewal. Please join us as we seek to create sacred space to share our experiences of illness or loss, as well as moments of joy, in our work and in our lives. Each month different people gather together and a unique experience is created where we offer support to one another. **If you have not participated in the past, please join us. Hope to see you there!**

All Healing Circles meet in the Second Floor conference room.
Please mark your calendars with these dates.

Wednesday	May 11	12:30 - 1:00
Wednesday	June 8	12:30 - 1:00
Thursday	July 7	12:30 - 1:00
Thursday	August 4	12:30 - 1:00

Appendix C

Religious Healing in Boston First Findings

Susan Sered and Linda L. Barnes, *Editors*

Massachusetts: Publications Center
For The Study of World Religions,
Harvard Divinity School, 2001

From Jewish Healing in Boston

In addition to the organizational work that she does, Sokoll leads a monthly healing circle for the staff of the Boston-area JFCS, a circle that, for Sokoll, is aimed at “healing the healer.” Participants in the healing circle work in direct services to the sick, elderly, and needy. Although both men and women are employed by JFCS, primarily women staff members—not all of whom are Jewish—attend.

At a typical healing circle, held in a JFCS conference room, Sokoll arrives a few minutes early to dim the fluorescent lights and spread on the large conference table a black velvet cloth with pictures of the moon and stars. On the cloth she sets out an aromatherapy candle, a rock, a picture of her dog who recently died, a tape player (with a tape of bird sounds), and a book. The circle begins with one woman striking a beautiful and haunting sound on a Tibetan gong, followed by a few minutes of silent meditation. Sokoll’s ritual leadership is low-key and nonauthoritarian. She reads a Hassidic story teaching the importance of taking the time to look at the sky because life is impermanent. The women sitting around the table are invited to say what the story makes them think of, or anything else they want to say. One woman suggests they take time to remember a staff member who died recently. Memories are shared and then Sokoll reads a traditional Hebrew prayer, *El Male Rahamim*, for the dead. Participants are invited to share feelings, problems, concerns, and issues that have come up recently. Several talk about maintaining relationships after death. Time is given for people to utter the names of sick people they want to have healed, and Sokoll reads the customary Hebrew *MiSheBerach* prayer for the sick; unlike in the traditional Hebrew text, she names the biblical matriarchs before the patriarchs. A bit of time is left for silent prayer with eyes closed. Sokoll then starts to hum a wordless melody (*niggun*), and the Tibetan gong is rung once more to signal the end of the service and the return to the work of caring for, advocating on behalf of, and serving others. (p.45)

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Appendix D

Inspirational Readings

A Hassidic Tale

One day a rabbi looked out upon the marketplace. Everyone was hurrying through the marketplace attending to his or her particular business. Suddenly the rabbi saw a familiar face. “Moshe, come in, I want to speak with you.” “Shalom Rabbi, how are you?” “Thank God, I am fine. Tell me, Moshe, what were you doing in the marketplace?” “Oh, I’m very busy. I have a lot of business to take care of.” “Moshe,” asked the rabbi, “Have you looked up at the sky today?” “At the sky, Rabbi? No, of course not. I’m too busy to look at the sky.” “Moshe, look out the window and tell me what you see.” “I see people and horses and carriages, all rushing around doing business.” “Moshe, in fifty years there will be other people in other carriages, drawn by other horses, and we will no longer be here. And, Moshe, in a hundred years, neither the marketplace nor this town will even exist. Look at the sky, Moshe, look at the sky!”

Emotional Genius

By Karla McLaren, Interview from Sounds True Catalogue, www.soundstrue.com

“Grief is an exquisite emotion that helps us become fully human and fully alive. That seems like a contradiction, but it’s not. Grief asks us to drop down into the river of life and truly mourn the passing of what we love and value. If we don’t make that journey, we can’t move forward whole in our lives. I call grief “the utterly necessary river of the soul,” because it reconnects us to life after we’ve experienced deep and profound loss. When I see people running from grief, I feel such sorrow for them, because I know that they won’t be whole until they grieve. We fear that grief will break us in two, but that’s not what happens. In true grief, our hearts break open, but they don’t break apart. We aren’t emptied by grief—we’re expanded. When we come up and out of the river of grief, we have more capacity to love, and more room to breathe.”

Anyway

Anonymous

(A favorite prayer of Mother Theresa)

People are often unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered;
Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives;
Be kind anyway.

If you are successful, you will win some false friends and some true enemies;
Succeed anyway.

If you are honest and frank, people may cheat you;
Be honest and frank anyway.

What you spend years building, someone could destroy overnight;
Build anyway.

If you find serenity and happiness, they may be jealous;
Be happy anyway.

The good you do today, people will often forget tomorrow;
Do good anyway.

Give the world the best you have, and it may never be enough;
Give the world the best you've got anyway.

You see, in the final analysis, it is between you and God;
It was never between you and them anyway.

A Native American Tale

An old Cherokee man tells his grandson about a fight that is going on inside himself, inside his head, a fight between two wolves. One wolf is evil and feels anger, envy, greed, arrogance, guilt and resentment. The other wolf is good and feels joy, kindness, compassion, faith, peace, love, and hope. The grandson thought about this for a while and then turned to his grandfather and asked, "Which wolf wins the fight?" The old Cherokee man looked at his grandson and replied, "The one I feed the most."

Listing of Some Inspirational Readings Used in Healing Circles

Bombeck, Erma, "If I had my life to live over."

Elkins, Dov Peretz, "A Lesson from King Hussein," and "Making a Difference – One by One," in *Forty Days of Transformation*, Growth Associates, 1999.

Ellis, Linda, "The Dash."

Jurist-Levy, Ruth, "The Circle."

Kushner, Lawrence, "There must have been a time," in *Honey from the Rock*, Jewish Lights, 1977, p.69.

Mountain Dreamer, Oriah, "The Invitation."

Oliver, Mary, "The Journey."

Piercy, Marge, "To Be of Use", in *The Art of Blessing the Day*, Alfred A. Knopf, 1999.

Remen, Rachel Naomi, "Professionals Don't Cry" and "Just Listen," in *Kitchen Table Wisdom: Stories that Heal*, Berkeley Publishing, 1996.

Rumi, "The Guest House."

Stepanek, Mattie, "For Our World," in *Hope through Heartsongs*, Hyperion, 2002.

Twerski, Abraham, "Change Changes Us," in *Do Unto Others: How Good Deeds Can Change Your Life*, Andrews McMeel, 1997.

Weinberg, Sheila Peltz, "Traveler's Prayer," in *Kol Haneshamah: Daily Prayer Book*, The Reconstructionist Press, 1996, p. 174.

Williamson, Marianne, "Our worst fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure...." in *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of "A Course in Miracles"*, HarperCollins, 1992.

(This passage is commonly misattributed to having been said by Nelson Mandela in his 1994 Inaugural Address.)

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Endnotes

¹ The focus group was comprised of Penina Adelman, Florence Berkowitz, Sandra Black, Jim Elkind, Frances Langfur, Marion Ross, Ira Schor, and me.

² J. William Wordon, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner*, Third Edition (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 2002), p.177.

³ Remen, Rachel Naomi, *Kitchen Table Wisdom: Stories that Heal* (California: Berkeley Publishing, 1996), p.52.

⁴ Bolen, Jean Shinoda, *The Millionth Circle: How to Change Ourselves and The World* (California: Conari Press, 1999), p.6.

⁵ Ibid. pp.14-16.

⁶ Salkin, Jeffrey K., *Being God's Partner: How to Find the Hidden Link Between Spirituality and Your Work* (Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1994), p.43.

⁷ *Boston Globe*, December 16, 2001.

⁸ Csiernik, Rick and Adams, David, "Spirituality, Stress and Work," *Employee Assistance Quarterly*, Volume 18, Issue 2, (New York: Haworth Press, 2002), p.29.

⁹ Mitroff, Ian and Denton, Elizabeth, *A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America: A Hard Look at Spirituality, Religion, and Values in the Workplace* (California: Jossey-Bass Inc. Publishers, 1999), back cover.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.xv-xvi.

¹¹ Canda, Edward R. and Furman, Leola Dyrud, *Spiritual Diversity in Social Work Practice: The Heart of Helping* (New York: The Free Press, 1999), p.xv.

¹² Griffith, James and Griffith, Melissa Elliott, *Encountering the Sacred in Psychotherapy: How To Talk With People About Their Spiritual Lives* (New York: The Guilford Press), pp. 219-220.