

KATE DOES...

Circlewise at The Glade

YOUR wellbeing editor Kate tries out a treatment or event or activity each issue this time it is attending a Circlewise circle.



It was a dark December night. Although it was only 6.30pm, the sky was Obsidian black with no moonlight penetrating the thick cloud cover. A steady drizzle was falling.

I walked the short distance through the woods at Dartington towards The Glade, listening to the patter of the rain on the leaves and my own breathing. A glimmer of yellow light through the trees told me I'd come to the right place.

I was here for one of the regular Circlewise circles, held in this awesome woodland setting near Totnes. This one was called Giving Our Gifts.

As I stepped off the path into the clearing, the warmth of the greeting from facilitator, Heidi Rose matched that of the fire burning at the centre of a ring of upturned logs and wooden benches. I was invited to help myself to herbal tea and sat down beside the fire to watch people arrive – maybe 17 or 18 in total – ready to share stories and reflections. A canopy protected us from the rain.

Although I'm a relative novice when it comes to circle practice, I never fail to be awed by the power of sitting in circle around a fire. And to do this in a woodland setting, with the sounds and scents of nature around us, is profoundly moving. You can almost sense the ancestors standing at our backs, outside the circle of firelight. No phones. No Facebook. Nothing but the fire and the darkness and a group of people sharing from the heart.

We began with a series of simple games to help us introduce ourselves and why we were there. Then we took our seats around the fire again and opened the circle. We were given a gentle prompt and invited to share stories and reflections on the theme of "Giving our Gifts". In truth, I don't remember what I shared but that doesn't matter. I heard what I needed to hear which was that giving our gifts isn't so much about the doing but the being. As I heard that, I felt the weight of responsibility lift a little from my shoulders.

It is hard to put into words the experience of sitting in circle in this way. It's visceral. Although I don't recall the details of what was shared, I can close my eyes and conjure the feelings in a moment, smelling the woodsmoke,



listening to the rain, sensing the warmth of the fire and the deep listening of my fellow participants.

Heidi Rose, who founded Circlewise, has spent a quarter of a century working with circle practices in a range of settings, including schools both here in Devon and in some of the most deprived parts of Los Angeles. She was introduced to this work at the Ojai Foundation in California and has seen again and again the extraordinary transformative power of sitting in circle. She founded Circlewise in May 2020 alongside Chukumeka Maxwell of Action to Prevent Suicide. In the first year of Covid, they held more than 80 outdoor circles in collaboration with The Glade. Their work with schools has resulted in lasting behaviour change among young people, many of whom opted to continue sitting in circle even once the programme ended.



Heidi describes sitting in circle as "a listening practice where we share our experience with an intention". Participants speak from the heart. Only the person who is holding the 'talking piece' (a designated object – in our case, a chunky wooden heart) can speak and everyone else listens, with their full attention. Heidi walks her talk. She has used circle practice throughout her marriage and family life – even during her marriage ceremony.

I have to say that I'm hooked by circle practice. Since participating in Giving Our Gifts I have joined two further circles and also completed Circlewise's facilitator training (which I'll be writing about in future issues). Even if you don't have a woodland setting, even if you can't huddle around a fire in the dark, sitting in circle is something our ancestors did. It's in our very DNA. It's powerful.

● If you want to try it, Circlewise offer circles throughout the year.

See www.circlewise.co and <https://thewoodland.co/the-glade>.



Do you feel isolated and alone?

LIKE so many of us, Simon Blackler was not in the best place over Christmas.

He'd participated in two spiritual events around the Winter Solstice and expected to be flying high. He certainly didn't wish to be feeling depressed, sad and alone.

Simon explained: "I'd had a great personal development journey in 2023 and was looking forward to participating in a plant spirit medicine weekend and a Fast Track Technique experience with a facilitator from Thailand. Both were designed to bypass the ego and connect with the soul. I was hoping to get great feedback after the work I'd been doing, but I was in for a surprise. In these practitioners' opinions, I was still not truly connecting to my heart or my purpose. This came as a devastating blow."

Simon had been on a 20-year personal development journey, so this unforeseen feedback had a big impact on him: "I was suddenly thrown into a 'funk', a real slow period when depression reigned again. This mood proved difficult to shift throughout the Yuletide period."

This was particularly noticeable for Simon because the support systems he normally relies on were closed for the holidays.

"Like a great many people, I felt isolated and alone. I was unable to attend Andy's Man Club (a weekly support group for men, with meetings all over the UK), my Seetec Work & Health team was closed and I don't have family or friends that I can confide in."

Although this time was personally challenging, it led to a realisation for Simon: "If my new circles of 'New Gentle Men' and 'New Gentle Women' had been fully up and running, it would really have helped at this time. This was the gentle reminder I needed to push on with things."

He explained that these innovative men's and women's circles are for people who see themselves as custodians of the planet, earth stewards, soul brothers and sisters wishing to support and assist each other in raising their vibe to fly ever higher in life.

● They occur every other Wednesday and Thursday evenings on alternate weeks for the men (Wednesday) and women (Thursday) online with subscriptions that start from £66 a month. For information about participating call 07929 312675. Email simon@alliesofnature.co.uk or please visit www.alliesofnature.co.uk/new-gentle-men-and-women.html



HEALTH SOURCE TOTNES

You are warmly invited to view our new facilities at the spacious Community Holistic Health Centre on the Totnes Industrial Estate.

THERAPIES

CLASSES

WORKSHOPS/TALKS

IR Sauna / Orynoco Healing Pods / Bemer / Massage

Somatic Experiencing / Physio / Yoga / Pilates

Counselling / Homeopathy / Energywork / Readings and more...

HealthSourceTotnes.uk

Private parking available, good access
HealthSourceTotnes@protonmail.com