

The 10 Foundation Stones: Protocols for Connection & Empowerment

The *10 Foundation Stones* are a framework for reclaiming connection on many levels and therefore our very humanity. At first, the 10 Stones help us connect with each other, but as you experience them you'll find that they help you connect with all of nature and empower many aspects of your life.

#1. Welcoming (into the “Container” of Conversation)

What if we entered into conversations with awareness and the intention for connection? How would we begin?

Before an intentionally connective conversation begins, we set our intentions from our sense of inner peace. We also set our intentions from our own commitment to support connection for ourselves, one another and with the natural world. It is always good to feel our connection with ourselves, with other people and the natural world before turning to invite others to join. When we invite someone into a conversation that is held in this way, we are initiating a connective conversation.

We want to have full awareness of this intentional container as we move into Welcoming others. This is a container that exists until we close our conversation. When we invite others into a conversation, it is good to Welcome them by being fully present and aware. As the organizers of a conversation we hold a common intention. We are coming from our hearts. We are intentionally holding feelings of gratitude and appreciation for all the gifts brought to the conversation by the participants. We hold a state of peace within ourselves and offer this to others. Coming from this empowered place, we then truly see and feel those entering with us into the container, and then we offer our heartfelt Welcome.

Be sensitive to the needs of those you are welcoming: adjust your style accordingly. Those entering can feel this and they immediately feel seen and valued. This is an important first step in establishing a truly connective and powerful experience.

#2. Wiping off Road Dust

Letting go of stress and distraction that we are holding onto in that moment, becoming present and tuning into our needs and the needs of others to support connection...

When we arrive at an in-person gathering, or on a Zoom call with members of the community; or, when we enter a conversation with another member or members, we may be carrying stresses from our day with us. In other words, we are carrying “baggage” that would be best left outside the door before entering the gathering, meeting or other conversation. Another way to look at this moment—anything that keeps us from being fully present to the spirit of the gathering, meeting or conversation is a distraction generated from our own “holding on to the stresses of the day, week, life, etc.”.

It’s good to slow down to the rhythm of the Earth, check in with each other, share the stories of the day or travels, and get reacquainted. This is often done in small breakouts or can be done in the larger circle. Understanding that some people tend to be “talkers” and others may be reluctant to speak at all, it can be very helpful to go around and call on each person to share their road dust. Encouraging everyone to participate greatly enhances the overall experience as each person is seen and heard. Setting the intention and focusing attention on “what’s keeping me from being fully present?” followed by a small group conversation where we can express things we are carrying to let go of these distractions. The purpose is to release the distractions so you can focus on everyone in the meeting. This step enables us to fully connect with ourselves, with the natural world and one another. From this experience, we will feel heard and understood. All that follows will move more powerfully and will be more connective.

Many people aren’t used to truly being listened to, and at first this “shaking off the road dust” can lead to people talking about all their experiences since their last conversation. It’s best to keep this focused on just what is keeping one from being fully present. The rest of the conversation will give people more of an opportunity to be heard.

#3. Gratitude

To bring our minds together, let's think of something we are grateful for and share this with one another...

After greeting and welcoming one another, and wiping off road dust by letting go of our stresses and distractions, it's time to simply take turns and share in a round—each offering something we are grateful for, saying our names and where we live. It's a good practice to share a round of simple heartfelt gratitude with one another as a way to get deeper into the spirit of connection. This will help us with our sense of belonging and connection to one another, bringing our minds and hearts into resonance and supporting a good conversation.

Gratitude is one of the most effective means for bringing our hearts and minds together, helping us to find resonance with each other and Nature.

#4. Unconditional Listening

Tune into the present moment when in conversation by engaging all your senses as you would if you were in nature...

When we share a story that has meaning to us, especially a story of an experience in nature, or about deep insights, the quality of reception by the listener will determine how deep we can go in reliving our story. The deeper the listening, the more empowered and alive the storytelling becomes. All who are in a state of inner quiet while listening and tuning in with all senses will be transported into the story experience. We, as listeners, will help build this powerful container by entering into and remaining in this state of a quiet mind. When we speak from the quiet mind, our deeper wisdom emerges.

In a listening container like this, creativity may bring new insights to both the storyteller and those who are truly listening from their quiet place. When we reach a place of resonant sharing and hold a compassionate presence, the storytelling goes to a deeper level; transporting us to that time and place, as if reliving the event. This is often experienced as meaningful for those involved.

Reflections offered to the storyteller are most supportive when coming from the deeper wisdom of the quiet mind. The storyteller then feels heard, understood, and valued. They know they are contributing and will experience a deeper sense of belonging.

#5. Culture of Allowance

This is a state of acceptance and openness to the choices and perspectives of others...

Interacting with others can bring up our judgments and expectations. Others can feel this and lose a “sense of permission” to be themselves. The judgments and projections of others may leave people feeling unsafe and disconnected. It’s important in a connective container of listening that we release our attachments, judgments, projections and expectations of one another. Unconditional Listening (Stone 4) is the beginning of this.

With the Culture of Allowance, we choose to be unattached to outcomes, to be present, and to come from a quiet mind. We listen deeply and compassionately. We are neutral and respectful of different perspectives. We honor individual choice. When we bring this intention to a circle or a conversation, then the conversation, insights and stories become even more empowered.

Holding this state of allowance and acceptance requires a high level of self-awareness. It’s even more powerful to find gratitude for the perspectives and uniqueness of each person’s story as we also listen for those feelings and words unspoken. Weaving this intention into a circle deepens understanding and our sense of belonging. When another’s choice does not agree with ours, we can tune into the group resonance for help in gaining greater perspective or finding a way forward in the conversation.

#6. Lifting up the Gifts in Others and Ourselves

Bringing forth the gifts of others and ourselves provides a foundation for building regenerative and connective communities...

A conversation held using the 10 Stones intentionally draws on the wisdom of supporting others. One of the deeper aims of conversations using these helpful protocols is drawing out the gifts, talents, passions and unique perspectives of others. In one of the later Stones we will focus on how intuition can direct conversations, storytelling and how we receive the stories of others in a way that brings out the gifts in others. When using this Stone, we also help people see the gifts and talents in themselves.

Lifting up the Gifts in Others and Ourselves is part intention, part awareness, and part the practice of reflecting and acknowledging people's unique contributions. When we do this together over time, our gifts arise and we connect more fully with the resonance of the group or conversation. People who have become aware of their gifts, and who are comfortable in their gifts, tend to hold a stronger resonance within a group. When we connect in this way it supports the emergence of a more empowered community. Empowered communities provide the foundation for regeneration.

#7. Supporting Peace, Love, Joy & Purpose

“The four things people really work for in life, peace, love, joy, and a purpose beyond self...”

From Tom Brown Jr. quoting Grandfather (2012)

We sometimes call this stone *Peace-tending and Relational Modeling*. When we speak with one another in a connective container, it's always important to come from our own sense of inner peace. When we lose that inner peace, it is good to know how to get back. We may use: activating our senses, such as peripheral vision or listening to the quietest sounds around us; connecting with nature; meditation or mindfulness; gratitude or any other routine that works for us.

Building this place of inner peace over time into a state that we can hold is part of the journey as we deepen with routine practice. Peace becomes a doorway to joy. When we feel joy in ourselves, others will feel this when we share. The group resonance will emanate this sense of peace and joy.

When we know our purpose in service to others and the world around us, our sense of peace and joy grows as we find more meaning in our lives. We settle into ourselves and our personal gifts come forth. Our capacity for offering and receiving love grows with this as well. We support one another with intention, attention and awareness to hold our container for *Supporting Peace, Love, Joy and Purpose*.

When we have this foundation in place, the group is more capable of having the hard conversations, taking action quickly, and being resilient in the face of challenges. When this is done in a conversation or circle over time, we experience a deeper sense of being seen, heard, valued and truly understood. It is then that we know we are contributing and that we belong to this community with intent and purpose.

#8. Facilitation as a Cultural Element

Facilitation is helpful to ensure everyone is seen, heard (and understood), and valued; and that each person is contributing and feeling a sense of belonging.

The modern world does not offer many opportunities to live and conduct ourselves in containers based on these wise, connective protocols. Without lived experience of practicing connective protocols, people may not know how to show up in support of others. For this reason, when people begin to join these conversations they will likely need facilitation in these practices.

With this in mind, facilitating the 10 Stones, even in a light-touch way, will help. The facilitator (and everyone) is in service to, and in connection with, the harmonious resonance of the group. One of the facilitator's roles is to make sure that all voices are included – even the quiet ones – so that their wisdom, vision, gifts and perspectives are brought into relation within the group.

As facilitators, we use our awareness to track the whole group's level of connection and attention. We guide towards deeper connections for everyone within the circle. As people develop the pattern of tapping into the resonance of the group, the facilitation gets easier and less facilitation is needed over time. Facilitation is a way to learn mentoring, and helps to ensure that essential communication skills are regenerated.

#9. Mentoring, Curiosity and Inner Vision

When we are centered in our own sense of inner quiet, we often intuitively sense what is needed in a connective conversation...

Over time, and with the support of the 10 Stones, the harmonious resonance of the group emerges, and becomes strong. This resonance guides the conversation, group or circle in more and more helpful and insightful ways. When we listen to one another from inner peace and with genuine curiosity, we often are blessed with intuition, or what Tom Brown, Jr. calls “Inner Vision.” Insights we receive and listen to from Inner Vision will likely guide all in the conversation. This can result in deep learning and in group coherence growing stronger and more filled with joy and vitality. Inner Vision and Curiosity also support the wellbeing of others—and ourselves—in surprising ways. This is truly a gift to everyone’s journey of connection and moves us into our authentic selves. As this coherent state grows into a steady presence, Mentoring, Curiosity and Inner Vision will allow us to be more perceptive and to feel a greater sense of contribution.

#10. Wrapping the Bundle and Closing

Reviewing the conversation in summary at the end of the meeting, and offering reflections and gratitude helps bring good closure...

Just as the first Stone was the opening of the Sacred container of sharing and connection, this tenth Stone is about remembering to release and close the container with intention. We want to wrap the bundle of the conversation by asking “What were the takeaways from the conversation? Any final reflections? What are you grateful for?” This can be done in a short round where each participant offers their thoughts.

It’s always good to offer gratitude for what has happened in this container of connective conversation. These reflections wrap the bundle by creating a clear sense of accomplishment, connection, and completion.

Experience has shown us that it is important to close the container of a conversation that is held in this way. Intentional closing allows people to cleanly separate their minds, heart and intent from the group mind. This way, when people walk away, they don’t feel that something is unfinished or left behind. Rather, we can move forward with a fresh start and a clear mind into the next steps of our journey while still holding the feeling of belonging on a deeper level.

