

What the Circles Made Possible

Responding to the Matriarch's Call — Essay Four

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At last, entering the first circle together

By the time I arrived at Heartwood Farm, I had lived with the possibility of these Gatherings for months. I had written about the Matriarch's Call, followed the invitations that arose, and spent many hours in conversation with the women who would co-host with me. We had asked questions, imagined circles, and shaped our intentions into something we could offer.

Now I was meeting Michelle and Val in person for the first time. Around us was Val's home—the beautiful place we had been speaking about: the farm, the land she tended, the community within which this first Gathering would happen.

I had longed for this dimension of being together. After so much connection through screens, we could hug each other in welcome, hear one another in the same place, and begin living what we had been preparing.

> Then the women arrived.

They came through Val's invitation and their trusting relationship with her, bringing a shared curiosity about the Matriarch. Each brought a life I knew little about. They were giving a day of that life to an inquiry I had felt called to initiate, and which was now becoming ours to enter

together.

The first Gathering of the first *Journey of Inquiry* within *Matriarch on Tour* was beginning.

And almost immediately, I made a mistake.

Heartwood — A beginning I had not imagined

After we gathered in the circle, I had started recording so that I could later return to my own introduction of the Matriarch archetype and the inquiry we were entering together. At the end of that introduction, I asked about recording our collective sessions.

Immediately, the energy in the room shifted. Women spoke about privacy, technology, surveillance, and what it would mean for their words to leave this circle. I had not recorded any of the participants' voices up to that point, but the fact that recording had already begun made the absence of prior consent and its impact painfully clear.

> Oh my God. What just happened?

This was the first Gathering. After all the preparation, all the anticipation of finally being here, my own action had unsettled our beginning. My wish to share our collective inquiry with the world had affected the trust of the women sitting with us.

I felt sad.

Writing was part of the intention with which I had begun the Journey. I hoped that what we discovered together might reach women far from these circles, and perhaps encourage other Gatherings, other conversations. A faithful record mattered to me. Letting go of it touched that hope, and I wanted to be honest about my sadness while listening to what the women were telling me.

There was much to hear. Consent, the intimacy of a circle, the reach of digital technologies, the difference between sharing an insight and allowing a personal story to travel: these questions had entered our relationships, where they asked for deep care from all of us.

Michelle offered to take notes. We stayed with the conversation. Women spoke frankly, and we gave time to concerns that had changed what it felt like to be there. I was moved by the openness, patience, and discernment with which the circle met what was happening. I

appreciated the depth of that encounter while at the same time experiencing what to me felt like loss. Both feelings were present in me.

We gave the conversation the time it needed. Then a woman suggested we stop recording for now and revisit consent as we got to know one another. Everyone agreed. With gratitude for this suggestion, I turned the recording off. The energy in the circle now felt calm, and we were ready to turn towards the inquiry that had brought us together.

Our guiding question for the day was:

> What is She awakening in us to embody in these times?

We had prepared to approach it through our relationship with the Sacred Web of Life—through the land, the Matriarch's qualities, and the ways we tend our communities and ourselves. Already, our beginning had called on our capacity to listen, speak honestly, and care for the relational field in which we were gathering.

As the day continued, Val took us out onto the land. She spoke about the farm's life: how water moved across it, how the soil had been formerly depleted, how grazing and rest participated in its regeneration. Listening to her, I could feel the years of attention in what she shared: learning what this place needed, responding, and watching what happened as the land recovered.

We went out on our own with a question: what did we hear the Matriarch awakening in us through the land? Then we met in pairs to share what had come. The inquiry was taking us into the presence of and connection with other living beings, asking us to listen through our bodies and to notice what drew our attention.

Around the abundant potluck table, and later back in the circle, those encounters continued to open questions. What did tending ask of us? How did we recognize what was ours to do? Where did we need rest, or help, or time to receive?

Michelle's offering on living systems brought the relationships among parts and whole into view. We could turn toward our own lives with that understanding, sensing where something needed tending. The question became personal: how was each of us already embodying the Matriarch, and what might support Her fuller expression through us?

I felt the beauty of our co-hosting in these movements. Val's relationship with the land, Michelle's understanding of living systems, and the Matriarch inquiry I brought were meeting in the women's own reflections.

> What we had prepared together was becoming a collective inquiry and collective experience, shaped by all of us.

As we shared what this inquiry was awakening, grief about the world entered our conversation alongside a deep belief in what was possible. How could we remain open to both? What did the Matriarch ask of us when we felt despair and still loved life so fiercely? Women spoke about slowing down, softening into relationship, and making room for forms of knowing that came through our bodies and our encounters with the land.

By the closing circle, the question of embodying the Matriarch had become intimate and practical. Women were recognizing that tending life included allowing themselves to receive, to rest, and to discern what was theirs to do. The wish to respond to the world's suffering could feel so immense. As we listened to one another, we were finding a more bearable way to meet it: discerning what was ours to tend in the relationships, communities, and land already part of our lives. I heard relief in recognizing that this care mattered, even while so much appeared to remain beyond what any of us could do.

There was also something tender and courageous in what women were saying about being themselves. Affection for a flower or a tree, the wish to spend quiet time on the land, the joy of meeting other beings with wonder—these had found company here.

One woman spoke of feeling fortified to be herself in places that did not welcome that expression, because she would carry the support of this circle with her. Listening, I felt how closely our question about embodying the Matriarch touched the courage to let more of ourselves be seen.

> The tenderness and ways of knowing we had shared could accompany us into relationships where we might otherwise hold them back.

Women had heard others wrestling with questions they carried too, and spoke of feeling less alone. In their spoken reflections and the cards they left with us, there was gratitude for being nourished, for time to attend to what had been neglected, and for the possibility of receiving enough to give again. I heard a wish to keep getting to know the Matriarch through their own lives.

I listened with deep gratitude. What had initially felt like failing in my role as host and facilitator had also brought an unexpected gift: many women named their appreciation for the honesty and care of our conversation about recording. We had stayed with something difficult together, and that experience mattered to them.

There was still something more I needed to understand. In a later conversation with Michelle and Val, I learned that my assumption about our preparation had been mistaken. I had believed we had discussed bringing the recording question to this circle. We had not. I had confused what we had discussed for Montreal with what we had agreed for Heartwood.

That realization shook me. My assumption had reached into relationships that long preceded my arrival and would continue after I left. I wrote to the participants, clarified that the decision had been mine, and apologized. Once that clarification and apology had been sent, I felt the remaining heaviness lift. I was grateful for what the experience had brought into view, and for the care with which Val and Michelle had navigated it with me.

It reminded me how a strong intention, however sincerely held, can draw attention away from the impact of our actions. Staying present with what matters to me and with what the relational field needs is a practice I value deeply. Here was a humbling reminder of how much attentiveness it asks.

The Gathering at Heartwood Farm, the first Gathering of *Matriarch on Tour — Journeys of Inquiry*, had offered so much more than I could have imagined. I felt affirmed in the path I had begun. This was what I wanted to offer, and to keep living with others.

Montreal — Sharing a home, becoming part of one another's lives

At Michelle's lake house near Montreal, our collective inquiry would have two evenings, the day between them, and a morning for closing. I was looking forward to the intimacy of that shared time: gathering and sleeping in the same place, preparing meals together, and returning to a conversation that had stayed with us overnight.

The question guiding our Gathering was:

> What can the Matriarch's Call awaken in us, as we yearn to participate more consciously in life's creative and healing capacity?

In Michelle's cozy living room, we entered the question through sharing, journaling, meditation, and ritual. We danced, cried, laughed, and sat in silence. We listened for where the Matriarch's Call was touching our lives and what She might be asking us to remember, reclaim, and embody. Our conversations also reached into what it means to have a mature feminine presence to grow toward.

A hike through the surrounding forest took us to waterfalls. We brought our listening into the more-than-human world, sensing how She might speak to us there. Back at the house, we cooked and shared meals, made music, sang, and tended the warming fire. We swam and kayaked, spent time by the lake in conversation and in silence, and returned to the circle with all of this becoming part of how our relational field grew.

I loved experiencing the inquiry in this way. We were asking how the Matriarch might become embodied through us, and the ordinary care of living together was an inseparable part of this inquiry. Our being, doing, and becoming were intertwined: the food we prepared, the water we entered, the questions we carried, and the stories and attention we offered one another. All of it together gifted us with a direct experience of our interconnected and interdependent life in this beautiful setting, both vast and intimate.

On the last morning, women spoke about feeling rested and nourished in body, heart, and mind. They thanked Michelle for opening her home so generously and spoke about how at home they had felt. The ease of moving through the house, of finding what they needed, of

sharing its spaces—all of it had enabled the experience and had mattered to their capacity to be fully present and participate.

The peace of being here had allowed them to settle. There had been time for something of each woman to become known, through conversation and silence, through music and play, through all the small encounters of sharing a home.

> Women who had arrived as strangers were speaking with affection about the friends they would be leaving with.

The Matriarch's Call had drawn our attention toward the life within and around us, and we had given ourselves time to follow it. Listening in nature, moving together, allowing joy and tears to have their place: these were ways we were entering the inquiry with our whole beings. By that morning, the wish to go more deeply into the wild, in ourselves and in the living world, had become a thread we could recognize together.

> *Perhaps you know the tenderness of discovering that people who were strangers have begun to matter to you. You have heard them laugh. You have listened to questions they carry. You have shared something of yourself, and now you know they have entered your life and are there to stay.*

Each woman brought something that became part of our life together. An offering of movement could gather us into our bodies; a question could open a conversation; someone's laughter could draw us into play. As in the prior Gathering, the women who had accepted our invitation were giving the Gathering its particular and unique life.

We came to our closing reflections through dancing and play, carrying that aliveness into a final question: What does the Matriarch ask me to remember as I return to my daily life and work?

After a few minutes in silence, we began to share. Women spoke of finding the courage to let their voices be heard, of trusting the presence of the Matriarch within them, and of giving that relationship a place in daily practice. The inquiry had opened a way to listen for how each might serve life: through work aligned with her purpose, through nurturing and protecting what was alive, through staying close to the wildness and playfulness we had experienced together. There was warmth and conviction in the wish to keep gathering, to make time for the friendships and support that had begun here.

The cards the women left with us carried this further. They expressed how deeply the encounter with the Matriarch archetype had touched them. Something long sensed could become clearer, something they could begin to respond to.

> The presence of mature feminine wisdom offered a way to imagine growing into fuller power throughout a woman's life.

Alongside the gratitude came offers to bring their own gifts into what might unfold next.

Hearing the reflections and reading the women's words touched the place from which my own Journey had begun—the search for ways to consciously inhabit elderhood and offer what life had taught me. I had dreamed of relationships forming through this Journey. Here I was, beginning to know and care for these women, receiving their warmth and their encouragement to continue. This emergence of relational ecologies—women coming to know one another, receiving each other's gifts, becoming available to one another—felt to me like the Matriarch unfolding.

Puyallup — Re-membering Her through our own gifts

By the time I arrived at the third Gathering, I had already experienced how entirely distinct each circle could be. That was becoming a great part of the beauty of this Journey. It nourished my curiosity and my love for the unknown. I could prepare with care and still have so much to discover when we came together.

At Chrystal's homestead in Puyallup, three women joined the two of us. I stepped into this smallest circle of the Journey with anticipation, curious about what would emerge among us.

The women had been invited into the Gathering with the guiding question:

> What can open for women, communities, and humanity when the archetypal presence of the Matriarch is re-membered, grounded, and embodied?

Chrystal too had opened her home to us, and the inquiry moved through forms that were becoming familiar: sharing, reflection, silence, movement, laughter, and tears. Yet the conversation was unmistakably our own. As we explored what the Matriarch meant to us, we

encountered questions about trusting our knowing, allowing our gifts to be seen, and having the support to stand in our power.

I felt how much was at stake in these questions. A woman could sense something she wanted to offer and still hesitate to let it become visible. Speaking into the circle gave us a way to meet that hesitation together, to listen for what wanted support and what needed time.

The *Woman in the Middle* practice became a particularly deep part of our experience that day.

Each woman was invited to receive the full attention of the circle for twenty minutes. That time was hers. She could share a story, a question, a pain, laughter or tears. She could remain silent. Nobody else would speak during those twenty minutes; we would stay with her, practice deep listening, and witness.

Afterward, the surrounding women could mirror back what had touched them, what they admired, what resonated, or what questions had arisen through their listening. The invitation was to offer unconditional support: to let a reflection or an open question grow from what had stirred in us, with the possibility of deepening the experience of the woman in the middle.

Twenty minutes can feel like a great deal of room when everyone's attention turns toward you. There was a pattern we could all observe. At first there was nervousness, a sense of not knowing what to say or why a particular story was coming. As the surrounding women stayed with that moment, holding space with care and compassion, stories began to flow.

> A woman could speak before the meaning of her story was clear, and then begin to connect with her own words in new ways.

We witnessed that unfolding in one another and experienced it when our own turn came.

I was moved by how the practice took its shape among us. We could experience what it means to be given room, to show up as fully as we can in a particular moment, and to be met with compassion and without judgment. I knew the value of this kind of witnessing. Living it with the women who had joined our inquiry was a gift I was receiving anew.

The question of re-membering and embodying the Matriarch was meeting us here, in the recognition of our own gifts and the willingness to let those gifts have a place. Being witnessed had helped women feel the value of their presence. They spoke of returning to daily life with greater courage, with more trust in themselves, and with the support of women who mattered to them.

In our closing circle, we returned to what the day had meant to us and what we would carry into our lives. The women spoke with such fullness about being heard, about the relief they felt in speaking openly, and about the friendships that had formed. Reflecting alone, speaking in pairs, and then receiving the attention of the circle had given them time to recognize and connect things within themselves. They could feel more clearly what they wanted to nurture in their lives, and more confidence in their capacity to do so.

Again I could feel how the inquiry I had imagined was alive, taking form through the women who had joined it. I was experiencing what I had hoped to invite. The encouragement of that reached me deeply: this was a way I could respond to the Matriarch's Call, and I wanted to continue.

Before we parted, we were already considering when we might meet again.

El Salvador — Listening across generations

Then came the final Gathering of this first *Journey of Inquiry*.

At Lisa's home in El Salvador, a beautiful gazebo offered a place for our circle. As the women arrived, I experienced how the group took its unique form: different generations, local and international lives, different professional backgrounds and ways of meeting the world. As always, I was curious about the women joining us, and deeply grateful to be sharing this day with Lisa, whose friendship and invitation had brought me here.

The intergenerational inquiry had been present in our collaboration from the beginning. Now we could bring its guiding question into the circle:

> What becomes possible when women of different generations gather to listen for the wisdom, responsibility, grief, love, power, and life-serving embodiment that wants to move through us now?

We began to hear how the question met each woman. English and Spanish moved through our conversations, with translation offered where it was needed. We took time to listen across the differences in our lives. Older women recognized wisdom in younger women; younger women received the experience of those who had lived through other seasons of life. There was so much to offer among us.

Through the *Woman in the Middle* practice, we began to hear more of the personal experiences each woman brought to our shared inquiry. In the introduction of the practice, Lisa and I invited all of us to slow down, open our hearts, and listen with our whole bodies. We spoke of the vulnerability of entering the center and of the power in asking for what we needed. The conversation about tears came up and became an invitation to let them come, to allow ourselves to be seen as fully as we can in this moment.

In the practice, trust was a recurring topic. As women spoke openly and vulnerably about the difficulty of letting go, of allowing support to reach them, and of showing what they might ordinarily protect, it was beautiful to experience how trust grew among us. A woman's sharing stirred recognition in others. We heard how much strength could go into caring for those we loved, and how difficult it could be to receive care ourselves.

When Lisa asked a woman in the middle what would feel nourishing to receive, I felt the energy of our relational field grow. Her question invited the woman to pause, connect deeper with her own need, and then allow us to hear it. What emerged was a longing for recognition, for someone to see the care she had given and affirm it. Others responded with warmth, recognizing something of their own experience in hers. I was touched by the vulnerability of asking for something so deeply needed, and by the tenderness with which it was received.

The stories themselves belong to the women. What moved me was how we were meeting one another through them. The woman who spoke could begin to hear herself more clearly; those listening could recognize questions in their own lives. There was tenderness in that recognition, and courage in continuing to speak when tears came. The inquiry into the Matriarch was asking something of each of us: to trust our deeper knowing, to make room for vulnerability, and to offer our presence in support of another woman's power.

Witnessing what the women offered, I could feel how the *Woman in the Middle* practice invited each to show herself more fully. Each sharing felt like a gift. A woman's experience was received without someone taking it over or deciding what she should do. We stayed with her.

> To me this felt like the Matriarch rising.

I could feel Her in that connection of care and strength, and in the trust this connection could nourish among us.

For our closing, we asked what might now become possible: what wanted to move through each woman and be embodied by her? We took time in silence before speaking. The inquiry that had brought us together was returning to each woman's daily life, carrying the experience of what we had shared.

Women spoke about the courage to trust their own sensing, to loosen their hold where control had become painful, and to allow themselves to receive. Listening to another woman had sometimes brought an answer to a question within themselves.

> Being listened to had helped them hear what needed their own attention.

Their gratitude reached across the whole day: the time to pause, the music and dance, the food shared, the kindness of small gestures, and the experience of being heard. One woman described leaving with a sense of wholeness. Another spoke of wanting to open herself more, having felt us listen with our hearts. Women were thanking one another for what they had received through witnessing someone else's experience, and offering friendship beyond the day. Again, I was moved by how much had become possible among women who, only that morning, had known so little of one another.

I heard responses to the Matriarch's Call in these intentions: care that included ourselves, power that could welcome vulnerability, trust in the wisdom each woman carried. The circle had given us a place to practise those qualities together. Now women were speaking about how they might continue in their daily lives. We had experienced how, together, we could build trust, truly be there for one another, and offer and receive support. That experience gave substance to the wish to keep these connections alive.

I spoke about how deeply the difficulty of trust had entered and nourished our inquiry. Lisa placed what we had heard within a wider context. The women's sharing had given us glimpses of histories carried in the region and beyond, and of how experiences across generations shape ways of protecting oneself.

It was powerful to feel the resonance as we acknowledged this together. I found myself sensing how we could meet our difficulty with trust more compassionately, with awareness of what had made protecting ourselves necessary. The difficulty and the trust were both

present. I felt such gratitude for the women's willingness to open up, and for the care with which we had met one another. We explored how a connection like this might continue, so that when one of us needed to be heard, there would be women she could turn to.

The women spoke about the significance of having come together as strangers and finding this capacity to listen, trust, and support one another. They encouraged me to keep going. They wanted more women to experience this. Their encouragement reached into the hope with which I had begun the Journey. I had followed Her Call whose expression I could only discover by entering it with others; now these women were telling me what our day together had meant to them, and asking for more.

Even now, reflecting on the experience and writing about it, I feel tears of joy and gratitude well up. This was the inquiry I had hoped to bring into the world, unfolding through their voices and their lives. Through their encouragement, I heard the Matriarch's Call to continue with what I had begun on this Journey.

As the first Journey came to an end

What I had spent so long imagining and preparing was now experience: encounters with women and the way we had entered each other's lives, collaborations we had lived together, questions that had become personal in ways preparation could never fully anticipate.

I felt deeply grateful to my collaboration partners and to every woman who had joined us. Each had helped shape what became possible through her presence, her questions, her willingness to listen, and what she chose to share. Their responses and encouragement strengthened my wish to continue.

And now this first Journey of Inquiry was coming to an end.

The richness of experience and insight felt almost overwhelming. I am giving it as much time and attention as I possibly can—to reflect, to process, to let the learning become part of how I live and how I will approach what comes next.

That integration is still unfolding. Writing these Essays has become an important part of it. Returning to the many encounters, listening again to the recordings and rereading what was shared, trying to find words faithful to what I experienced: all of this gives me the opportunity to deepen my relationship with the journey and to recognize more of what it has offered.

In the next essay, I want to make my best effort to share my personal learnings this first *Journey of Inquiry* has offered. I want to explore the potential I experienced for the Matriarch archetype to become re-membered and embodied through these Gatherings, and how I hear Her ongoing Call from here on forward.

There is much I am still coming to understand, and much I feel called to continue.

With love,

Christiane