

Breathe With Me

An Invitation

Dear friends,

As the world becomes faster, louder, more efficient and more knowledgeable, I feel a greater need to safeguard the sacred space within me. This is a space where I am learning to connect with myself, nature and the true essence of all things and beings. This is a space where I am learning to be with silence, a wordless world, where our true nature resides.

I have been learning to hold my own space for the past few years and it is a tremendously difficult task. Mindful Self-Compassion practices, both on my own and in the community have been an indispensable support for me during this trying time. As my journey takes me deeper and deeper into myself and my vulnerability, I feel the need to deepen my silent practices, and thus the need for a community that could support me and my practice in the many days, months and years to come.

Equally importantly, having received a variety of help from many kind souls on my journey, I have come to the understanding that the kind of support that I most need from others is not in helping me with the details of my struggles and the twists and turns of my life, but being witnessed and companioned exactly as I am. Parker Palmer's words resonate with me deeply: **"The human soul doesn't want to be advised or fixed or saved. It simply wants to be witnessed — to be seen, heard and companioned exactly as it is. When we make that kind of deep bow to the soul of a suffering person, our respect reinforces the soul's healing resources, the only resources that can help the sufferer make it through."**

The deep wound that I carry makes me extra sensitive to words when they were spoken with the intention to fix or save and this has caused great pain for me and tremendous difficulty in being with others. And yet I have been blessed enough to be witnessed by a few wise and compassionate teachers and many other brave souls that I have met, and their respect for who I am empowered me to work my way through the intense struggles that I have been in, one breath at a time.

Thus I have been searching and exploring different communities that could meet my needs - practicing silent meditations together and bearing witness for each other. It is in this search, a dream was born. If I could not find one that both resonates and is located at timezones near me, I could start such a community for myself and others who have similar aspirations and needs.

So I dreamed. And as I dreamed, I slowly realized that while it sounds exciting and simple, it might not be easy to make it come true. Each of us has our own busy life. Our priorities might be different, our timing might not match. Each time we meet in the vast space and time we are in, it is a rare chance and therefore a real blessing. Yet, with the help of technology, we are now in an unprecedented era where face to face connections across the globe

become a reality accessible to almost all of us. Meanwhile, I am in the process of creating a website to share my poems. I dream these poems will be my voice to invite more like minded friends from all over the world to join me. And I dream that with the support of this community to be, our personal practices will flourish and we will be able to breathe more air into our daily lives, when we are with the important people in our life, when we are doing the important work for the world and when we are simply living our messy human life.

It has felt extraordinarily vulnerable to be the bearer of this dream, and I have been sitting with this idea and slowly working through my thoughts and feelings in the past few months. Coincidentally, I nearly finished my writing on the day before Vesak Day in Singapore. It is a public holiday here and the devotees commemorate the birth, enlightenment, and passing away of the Buddha. It feels like a great synchronicity to send out my first few invitations of this breathing space on this day. I am not a Buddhist, but I feel compelled to honor the compassion and wisdom inherent in our breath and pay tribute to Buddha in this special way. And I hope Buddha who lived more than 2500 years ago can give me and my dream his blessings, in every breath that I take.

I invite you, my dear friend, to join me in building this community. It might be just a handful of us at the beginning, and it would be wonderful! I would be so grateful to find just one other person to breathe with me!

My dear friend, I am so glad that you have read through this lengthy letter from me. Please take your time to let this invitation settle in your being. And I am asking for your support and encouragement for my dream - a breathing space for vulnerability. Even if you could not join me, I am asking you to be my witnesses - how I dreamed and how I dared. Because every dream matters, including this one.

If this resonates with you, please have a read of the proposed format of our circle and some community values and rules that I have suggested. Please feel free to let me know your thoughts or any suggestions you might have. Please also feel free to forward this invitation to anyone who might resonate with this. My email address is mabelcailei@hotmail.com. I look forward to hearing from you.

With fierce gentleness,

Mabel, Cai Lei
2023.6.2

Proposed Format of the Circle

Proposed day/time:

Monday, Wednesday, Friday
2PM Singapore time.

Duration: 40 minutes

Part 1: 5 - 7 minutes brief check-in to share our location and what is alive now.

Part 2: 23 - 25 minutes of silent meditation, starting with a short reading. My intention is to allow slightly more time for silence than words.

Part 3: 10 minutes of sharing and ending.

Host:

There will not be a host. During check-in and sharing, we could take turns and acknowledge each other in our own ways. We could also feel free to share a short poem or passage that feels called for. If nothing comes forward, we can start with whatever is in the room.

Time keeper:

One option is to do this together. Each of us could have alarms at the following marks:

- 7 min where check in needs to end.
- 30 min where silent meditation needs to end.
- 40 min where the circle ends.

Alternatively, the first person who enters the zoom room could help keep track of time.

Attendance:

Drop in - It is completely optional. While we indicate our preferred day and time, attendance is optional for each circle. It is my wish that each of us are guided by our own commitment to ourselves and nothing else. However, please do let me know if this no longer resonates or the timing does not work for you anymore.

Please be assured I will drop anchor for the space and keep breathing, even if no one else is here. This is my commitment to myself.

Prerequisite:

Everyone is welcome! However, some experience of meditation and being comfortable with silence will be helpful because it is not a course to teach meditations. By joining the circle, we also agree with the community values and rules.

Zoom link:

I will be the one to hold the zoom link. I will share the link once participation is confirmed.

When can we start?

We can start anytime! While it may take a while to sort out the details or try out different ways, we can start anytime as long as our timing matches, because we only need to show up as we are. That's all.

The above proposal is just my initial thoughts, alternatives are welcome. Please let me know what works for you and what does not work for you, and what needs to change so that it

might work for you. Any suggestions or advice will also be appreciated and received with gratitude.

Proposed Community Values and Rules

B.R.E.A.T.H.E

B is for **Bearing witness** for both ourselves and each other.

R is for **Respecting** each other for who we are at each moment, no more and no less.

E is for **Equality** and **Ensuring confidentiality**. We each participate in equal capacity to simply hold space for each other. We ensure what is shared in the space stays in the space.

A is for **Allowing** and **Always be in choice**. We allow our experience just as it is and we make choices to help ourselves feel safer, for example not joining the circle, turning off the camera, choosing your postures, leaving earlier, choosing how much to share and choosing not to share at all.

T is for **Trusting** ourselves and our experiences.

H is for **Holding space**. What others shared might be triggering for us. Please hold ourselves with kindness and gentleness, and refrain from giving advice or suggestions.

E is for **Encouragement**. Time and time again, I witnessed how our courage encouraged each other. In this space, we can feel encouraged simply by each other's presence.

Let's Build A Village

Mabel, Cai Lei

Where there is safety,
There is trust.

Where there is trust,
Everything makes sense,
And I am in heaven.

Where there is no safety,
There is no trust.

Where there is no trust,
Nothing makes sense,
And I am in hell.

Oh, the gift of safety,
No one can truly give it to me.
Because it is something that lives within me.
Instead, what I was given,
Was a precious gift -
A promise
That it is possible to feel safe
To be me.
It is possible,
That's all I need to know.
It is possible,
I looked at her face smiling warmly at me
And hope took root.

Holding that hope in my heart,
I ventured out on a journey,
To the deep and dark places within myself.
And I found her,
A little child feeling scared and lonely.
I wanted to run away,
I wanted to push her out of my mind,
But there she lives, unsafe and not able to trust.

Holding that hope in my heart,
I stayed with her in the darkness and coldness.
I built a furnace that warms both of us.
I weaved a soft blanket out of stinging nettles
To cover our shivering bodies.
I held her close to my chest;
I sang and I rocked her.
And when she feels a little better,

We looked up at the winter sky
To count the stars that twinkled at us.

Holding that hope in my heart
And my scared child in my chest,
I walked out of my door.
I walked into the breeze.
I walked among the trees.
I walked along the lake,
And I walked into a village.

It is a village like no other place that I have been to.
It is a village of homes built by other brave human beings.

One home at the beach belongs to
A lighthearted teacher who has
Courageously nurtured herself with compassion
And now she sends out
Ripples of compassion and kindness
That nurture countless others including me.

One home sits by the edge of a mystic river
And belongs to a wise and warm hearted teacher
Who has bravely allowed himself to be witnessed
And in turn becoming a witness for others
Who are still struggling, like myself.

And another home belongs to a friend of mine,
A lovely bamboo hut.
She said she is building a home within.
Each practice is a bamboo stick being added,
Sometimes to strengthen the foundation,
And other times to build the platform from which a new horizon is seen.

Another home belongs to another dear friend of mine.
And she is building a safe home for
Her wounded inner child,
Where she is making space and
Getting to know her more and more.

And one of the homes
Belongs to me.
It still trembles and feels deep loneliness at times,
But it is right here.

And there are many other homes
That offer safety and protection
To their dwellers.

And together they make a village.

It is a village
Where we feel safe to be ourselves,
Where we can fear and dare,
Where we can tear and jeer,
Where we can sit in silence together,
Until a little yellow bird visits us
And breaks the silence with her delightful chirping.

Let's build the village,
Together.

The fears may be strong,
So are our innate wishes
To feel safe,
To be embraced and
To flourish
Just as we are.

And we smile tenderly and warmly
At our wounded selves.

Breathe With Me

Mabel, Cai Lei

Breathe with me,
Deep in the darkness.
Have faith,
The light is here.
It is right here.
I have seen it.
I can feel it.

Breathe with me.
Do not be afraid of the light.
Let it shine upon us
And the naked truth.
We are alive,
And we are dying.

Breathe.
Feel your stomach rising and falling.
Wear a mysterious smile on your face.

Breathe.
Be a child of the earth,
An eternal cycle of things.

Breathe with me.
We need each other,
Like one hand needing the other.