

**FEBRUARY MONTHLY THEME:
WIDENING THE CIRCLE**

Circles are often a helpful symbol of feeling included and of being part of a community. And yet, not only does the line of a circle exclude those on the outside, but it also cuts off those on the inside from the insights of those on the outside. This month our theme calls us to explore widening the circle of our concern and to consider the perspective of being on the outside. Is it possible that being on the inside leaves you out of the loop? What if being shut out allows you to understand the insiders better than they understand themselves? While having an inner circle may provide a sense of safety, what do we lose by staying snug within our familiar circles? What new freedoms might we encounter by breaking out of our circles, by breaking down circles and systems of exclusion? How might we actively work to dismantle circles of exclusion, such as racism, even when we benefit from being on the inside?

Which question is calling to you? Where is it leading you?

1. When were you “saved” by someone who widened a circle to let you in?
2. Has an experience of being excluded permanently left a mark on you?
3. Has taking a trip ever widened your circle of concern?
4. How has your definition of racism widened or shifted since you were younger?
5. Is your circle of friends keeping you small?
6. What has life taught you about widening circles to include your “enemies”?

Wise Words:

He drew a circle that shut me out—
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But love and I had the wit to win:
We drew a circle and took him in!

Edwin Markham

It's the community's job to figure out how we can stretch into the so-called margins to broaden our understanding and the ability to be inclusive. Inclusivity is not 'how do we make you a part of what we are?' but 'how do we become more of what you are?'

[*angel Kyodo williams Sensei*](#)

Diversity is being invited to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance.

Vernā Myers

If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.

Lilla Watson

Differences are not intended to separate, to alienate. We are different precisely in order to realize our need of one another.

Desmond Tutu

To be free, you must embrace the breadth of your own existence without apology...But to actually be free, you must know and you must fight for the entire Universes inside of everyone else.

[*Theresa I. Soto*](#)

In a true community we will not choose our companions, for our choices are so often limited by self-serving motives. Instead, our companions will be given to us by grace. Often they will be persons who will upset our settled view of self and world. In fact, we might define true community as the place where the person you least want to live with always lives.

Parker J. Palmer

A classic Zen exercise is the ensō, the circle hand-drawn in a single fluid brushstroke. It is close to perfect, but never there. If perfection is what you want, you can produce it anytime by using a compass or a computer, but the ensō defies such mechanistic precision; indeed it is often incomplete, left slightly open as though in invitation to everything beyond it... A perfect circle is uninteresting, a closed system containing nothing, while an imperfect one vibrates with warmth. It invites us into the moment of its creation...It is open, human, fallible—an expression, that is, of soul.

[*Lesley Hazleton*](#)