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MEDITATION LIFE COACHING MINDFUL LEADERSHIP

## Mindful of Race

### *Guidelines for Cultural Affinity Groups*

Being Mindful of Race is no small task. The intimacy of a small group makes the emotions we feel more palpable. This added with the shame and embarrassment that leaks out when we discover what we don't know, or we say or do something that exposes our ignorance, aversion, or desire to be something other than we are in the moment, makes this commitment even more challenging and doubtful. However, there is no shift in consciousness around race - no healing or knowing our part - without the grit that only relating makes possible. As is our practice of mindfulness, we return to the breath again and again, in exploring our experiences of race and its impact, we return to our intention to wake up, to live our practice in the world, to not cause harm, and to benefit all beings. Being mindful of race is intensely personal and requires self-disclosure. In this light, the following guidelines may be helpful when forming your Cultural Affinity Group.

- Attend gathering eager to listen, learn, be heard, and ultimately, to respond more wisely to life.
- Commit to the group. Individuals coming and going or distracted with outside interests negatively affect safety and the quality of disclosure.
- Throughout your gathering, maintain a priority of respect for the humanness of each person participating.
- Only the person sharing may speak. There is no "cross-talking."
- The person sharing determines the level of disclosure and vulnerability they will express.
- When speaking, take your time. Speak slowly and experience your words.
- When someone is sharing, others should pay attention to what is being said as well as the courage it takes to say it.
- Relax and release expectations. No opinions, judgments, or dislikes are to be expressed (verbally or nonverbally) toward the person sharing.
- Tune into your own experience - how you are being touched and shaped by the gifts offered. Be curious about your inner experience not just your thoughts.
- No questions should be asked of the person sharing. Listeners should receive what is being said as a gift that is being slowly unwrapped. You can't know what the gift will be until it has opened.
- While gentle clarifying questions can be useful, listeners are not to probe, argue, seek agreement, or invoke forms of retaliation. Nor should listeners speak of their story when someone is sharing.
- Whatever is said in the group **stays** in the group.
- When you feel uneasy, be aware of how you feel while also staying present to what is being shared.
- When you want to talk about something that was said during a discussion once the gathering has ended, ask permission of the person before engaging. When expressing your concern, make deepening the relationship your priority.

**Keep in Mind:** It is common to experience distrust, embarrassment, and fear when sharing personal information. These feelings can trigger the impulse to strike out, shut down, or to remain superficial in your interactions. Know that choosing to remain engaged without judgment or fear of retaliation will often result in a more honest exchange and satisfying connection.

#### **Reflection Questions:**

You may find it helpful to reflect and journal each day on one or more of the following questions:

- How do you feel about what you are discovering about yourself?
- What still frightens you? Saddens you? Shames you? Enrages you? Engages you? Why?
- What can you do to further enhance your ability to be mindful of race?
- What can you celebrate about your life today? About others?

With more self-awareness, you will extend this same kindness and respect to everyone you encounter within and outside of your group.