

Garden Of Women

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(Revised: 31 March 1997 by Clinton Callahan)

FORMAT:

Group process standing
Duration: approx. 1 hour

PURPOSE:

To explore the Deep Feminine archetype and provide a powerful, deep bonding experience for everyone in the room. To provide for men a reference of safety and nurturing from the Feminine. To provide women an opportunity to deeply bond with each other and express their Deep Feminine archetype. To provide women with a reference for the possibility of safety in intimate relationships with men.

SETUP:

See instructions.

INTRO / BACKGROUND:

This process can be led into from at least two directions. One is from the Demand being on man who is expressing fear of intimacy with women. Another is with any situation that arises where it becomes apparent that a woman has issues with bonding with other women and/or has experienced trauma (i.e. sexual abuse, especially if they are in denial to the extent that they will not go to the floor and work with the issue directly) such that the Trainer determines that what is needed is deep nurturing and acceptance from other women.

INSTRUCTIONS / PROCEDURE:

1. Trainer asks all the men to stand at one end of the room
2. 2a. Trainer asks all the women to form a circle in the middle of the room (inside the chairs) facing in towards each other and holding hands. This is the beginning formation for The Garden of Women Process.

2b. Trainer asks the Circle of Women to create a garden inside their circle. Ask them to use their intention and their vulnerability to make it the Garden of the Feminine. Allow them 1 to 2 minutes to do this together silently. You can ask them to close their eyes while they do this.
3. When the trainer has the intuitive sense that the space of the Garden of the Feminine is solidly grounded and being held by the women, ask for one specific man to approach the circle and stand just outside it. If this process has

culminated out of a man's Demand, this man is the one to be asked to approach the circle. If not, choose a man who you feel stands to gain a lot from this process (maybe someone who is not in a relationship because of their fear of commitment) and also who the women would feel comfortable with as the first man to enter the garden. It is important that the women feel comfortable and not threatened by the men throughout this process, most especially by the first man to enter the circle.

4. Have this man ask if he can come into the Garden. The question is "Can I please come into the garden?" and is asked to the Circle of Women as a whole. Instruct the women that if it is okay for the man to enter the garden to open a space in the circle for the man to come into the center of the circle, if they don't do this automatically when he asks. The man is to stand inside the circle and not to make himself a part of the outer circle with the women.
5. Allow the man to be in the garden in silence for a minute or two, but not more. Look to see that he is being accepted, that the women are comfortable with him. He may ask the trainer what to do next or begin to make comments or to ask a question of the women. This is okay, but the idea is to have him ask the question "As a man, what is my place in the Garden?" Provide him with this question to ask if necessary. His questions are to be directed to the women, not to the trainer.
6. Allow the women to begin to answer this question with the man taking in what they offer silently and not responding or engaging them in a conversation. Instruct the man to be silent if he begins to speak after asking the question. Women will begin offering answers like " We just want to be with us in the garden, we don't want anything from you." and "You don't have to do anything, there are no expectations here, just enjoy the garden."
7. When the response from the Women seems to be nearing completion, ask if there are any other men who would like to enter the circle. All will be very interested, but probably one or two will not make action on the invitation because they are too afraid and/or shutdown. Gently encourage these men to ask to come in, but if they don't, allow them to stay outside.

Instruct the other men to approach the circle and ask the women to come into the circle. The question used to ask is the same as with the first man "Can I please come into the garden?" It is very important that each man ask for and is given permission by the women before proceeding into the circle. When the men are inside the circle give the instruction for the men not to isolate with one woman or with small groups of women. The exception to this is that committed couples who are in the training can pair up during this process (and can be encouraged to do so). All others should be discouraged from this to prevent the experience from turning into a one-on-one between a man and women who are not in relationship as opposed to an exchange between the masculine and feminine archetypes.

This instruction is very important in order to maintain the gender boundaries appropriate to the context of Athanor and is essential to make the process energetically safe for both men and women. Some men may look out at the women, some may look in, and some may look down at the ground. Many men

will shift around between these different orientations. A man whose wife is also in the training may stand directly in front of her and engage her with his eyes.

8. Have the women continue to speak, saying whatever they would like to the men as a group or anything they would like to share with one another in the presence of the men. Have the men remain silent. Women will continue to speak. Examples of speaking at this point are statements like: "It seems like all have you have reconnected to where you came from as you each came from a woman in the beginning." The women may also invite the remaining men to come into the circle. Women may also speak about their fears around men or their appreciation of the safety of the space, such as: "I'm so glad that the men asked for permission before coming into the Garden" This type of safety is very important and very appreciated by any women who have a history of sexual abuse. The sharing may indeed turn to the domination of women and the disrespect of the Feminine in the world today.
9. When the sharing of the Women to the men and to each other begins to dissipate, have the men all turn in towards the center of the circle, with their backs to the women and facing each other. Ask the men to begin to speak whatever they want to share about their experience of the process so far. Have the women remain silent. An Example of sharing from the men is: "I've never felt so honored and so blessed before in my life." Men may also express their fears of women, or their remorse about what has happened to the planet and to the feminine as a result of the patriarchy.
10. When the sharing from the men is dissipating, invite the women to make any response that they want to the men out of what they shared. After a few minutes of this, allow the men to make any comments and allow for an exchange to occur between the men and the women. This exchange will now actually be a conversation between the Deep Feminine and the Deep Masculine. An example may look like a woman responding to men's remorse about having to be in charge of the planet by saying "I think that it is an illusion that the masculine is in charge of the planet. You can quit trying so hard." A man may respond by saying "I'm really glad to hear that." A man may say, "I'm glad I'm a man so that I can appreciate women and the feminine as something that I don't take for granted" or "I feel silly that this garden is what I was so afraid of."
11. At this point the Garden of Women process is nearing completion, but one of the biggest pieces to land in the room is at this point. Tell the men that it is now time to leave the garden and that they must each individually ask for permission to leave the garden. Also, have them express appreciation for their time in the garden. The statement is something like "Thank you for inviting me into the garden, I appreciate it very much. Can I would like to leave the garden now. I have to go." Women will allow the men to pass from the garden. Instruct the men to quickly and quietly pair up to do holdings with one another. Have a male Assistant Trainer facilitate any pairs that need assistance. Instruct the Assistant Trainer to have the pairs switch roles after six minutes. An alternative is to have the men breakout into a separate men's circle to debrief at the same time the women are also debriefing in their circle. Then put both men and women into holdings.

12. Have the women remain in a circle holding hands. Once the men are settled into their holdings tell the women that this is a time for them to debrief with one another about the process. Have them share anything that they want to say in the presence of one another. An example is "I've never felt so bonded to women before in my life, I'm so glad I was here to experience this and create this together with all of you." Don't underestimate this aspect of the process for the women. For at least some of them, this will be the strongest reference of bonding with women that they have had in their lives. Give them the time to language their experience for themselves.
13. After the men's holdings are complete, have people Circle-Up and do a group share and debrief about everyone's experience of the process. One of the most important aspects to elaborate and make sure that everyone gets, especially the men, is the step of asking to leave the garden anytime a man enters the Garden of a Woman. Allow women to elaborate on the feeling of honor and safety that this provides them in relating to men. Also speak about energetic boundaries and unconscious tendencies for men to want to energetically move into a woman's space without her conscious consent and women's tendency to invite men in without realizing that this is what they are doing. This unconsciousness is what often produces confusion, emotional upset, dysfunctional relationships, etc. You might speak about conscious consideration of relationship vs. flirtation and "ending up" in relationship.
14. Send everyone on a 15 -20 minute break.

DEBRIEF:

Sharing about experience.