

**Comments on Alliances ... from an hour conversation for a book, being written by Jodie Evans and others, on community practices for activists  
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True alliances are about partnerships, local and global community, amongst those with shared vision, values, and work. They thrive with simple clear agreements and exist beyond boundaries. They are sourced in relations with our common ground, earth, and best characterized by truth and love ....They are part of a paradigm shift, moving away from a kind of “help ethic” and philanthropic mindset to a heart-mind connection, recognizing our interdependence ... supporting each other with the gifts we each have.

If we are going to speak about alliances and working together, it's beneficial to mention some of the shadow side, or negative side, because in building alliances and in movements, there is of course that, too. Maybe we start there, and then move to why I feel alliances are essential for a more beautiful, just, healthy world.

One wound or bump arises when people try to take over. We were told some white people, for example who came to Standing Rock, started trying to organize rather than respect what was fully underway – often a subtle or less subtle way to be in control. Or there have been a number of marches and situations where people with power positions have come in late in the game and claimed it to be their movement – a complaint I have listened to more than once within the women's and racial justice movements.

**Of course, any good vision is had in more places than one – hopefully!**

And still, acknowledgment of source and “whose idea was it anyway?” can get lost once things get rolling. To lose source memory is not only salt on a wound but can cut the energy of lineage. I know because I have been on both sides of this one– both forgetting and being forgotten. To respect sources is not about building egos – it's about accessing the depth of a bigger story we are part of. Watching, naming, healing power dynamics is key, otherwise those less visible, audible, or more marginalized populations can end up getting co-opted, used, or forgotten rather than being the leaders they are. Having been in the most privileged as well as least privileged seat numerous times, I know this pattern intimately. Too often leaders or visionaries claim being the first consciously or unconsciously – rarely doing the home - work to discover the many who have come before or are even doing the work now.

Another place of wounding arises with tokenization. As a woman, I have had my own experience of that, being the only woman in my graduate school; being the first woman after Title IX hired on an international relations project; working for years to get money out of the USAID program to women in then-called “third world countries,” because no monies were ever given to women at that time. There was a long historical time of being the first or the only one and that

continues for many women, and was and is far worse today particularly for black, indigenous and people of color as well as LGBTQ. I am close with some indigenous peoples who have felt tokenized – that they were being brought in to “open an event” or a gathering but are rarely if ever, invited to stay. They’re constantly asked for history and/or prayer, and too often not compensated or gifted for their time. When, where, and how to bridge these worlds, enter the world of other, willingness to simply listen, center those least heard, as well as include, respect, and cross-pollinate is a continued learning and not a formula.

**Being willing to follow is always a good gateway to any alliance.**

Self-examination is crucial, the checking and sharing of intentions. Being aware of the motivation for collaborating is important. Is one doing such because the effort, the mission, will be better for it? Or is it more arising from a personal need, for identity, power, connection or community. Of course, our human needs are part of everything and still, for an alliance to be effective and last, it’s essential to establish trust and transparency around such things. One plus one needs to make three and then four and five. Pretty soon there is a circle where all gifts are welcomed, respected, and in service to the vision.

If we’re going to speak of alliances and “how do we all work together,” I think the first thing is we have to think, feel, and live like a circle. It is the oldest way of living on this planet. Given the genocide of so many Indigenous peoples and attempts to eradicate ceremonies and circle ways amongst First Nations, as well as in many lineages, it’s a blessing that the circle consciousness has still survived.

Community or circle ways do not mean that we’re all going to hold hands together 24/7. It doesn’t mean that we’re all going to think alike. For example, I’m currently speaking to an activist who doesn’t agree with a lot of CODEPINK behavior, and yet I don’t get in an argument with such a person. I don’t take sides knowing that both people are doing their best with similar values, with similar care for their people, and for the planet. So, I acknowledge the difference and focus on any shared or common vision. I “think like a circle” who care about a crisis even if some of those who care have different ways to respond.

**Where and how do we take a stand and stay with it since there is injustice everywhere?**

People in the middle of a war do not necessarily have choices to be involved or not, and yet many do. I personally am blessed, privileged I think, in terms of being able to ask, “where am I to be, and what is mine to do?” Those are my two leading, living questions. Those are what I work with myself and with others I meet. I work with those questions with my partners as well, searching for the places we overlap in that truth because there is teaching, there is healing, there is learning, there is loving, there is peace work needed everywhere. I work to use

that freedom wisely. If we can deepen our ability to know where to be and what is ours to do, then the alliance, the connection with whomever we're to be with, arises out of that. Ultimately, there is a "no choice," what I call "a knowing." It can take seconds or sometimes much longer and is worth waiting for.

And all of that just said, is different than sitting on a computer and researching, "Okay, who are all the peace workers focused on Syria right now? And let's write letters to them and let's get them on board. And let's form a big umbrella organization so we can be one big activist, powerful family." I'm not saying that that's not a good thing to do. It may well be but only as part of the work. I think that when we have a true vision, it's essential we research who else is up to what - and it's important when we have an idea, to actually take the time to live into it, feel it and see it. When Kate Bunney had such around a water pilgrimage, I said, "Go learn about the water in this valley. Go learn about the people in this valley. Go learn who else is 'walking around and with water' and calling for the sacred relationship to water. And if you still feel that we have something to do here, come back." And she came back in a year having done (and is continuing to do) that research. Immediately, she's thinking like a circle. She is in respect of those who went before and she is learning we're not "the first," and the spirit of alliance is awakened.

**When people say, "We're the first!" they miss that consciousness.**

I would say they miss an alliance with others that often already exists on other levels. Many communities, actions, movements, I feel, are doing parts of a whole work needing to be done. The alliance, on maybe another unknown level, already exists. We just have to see each other and be seen and the impact will expand. If we help each other remember, if we invite each other to research, to see, to find out, to offer feedback and critique, then we are supporting each other and can activate what is truly needed and wanting to happen.

We started Walking Water, as an example, a couple of years before Standing Rock or the Defend the Sacred Alliance. We soon learned we far from the first ones to walk for and with the water. And when Standing Rock came around, we felt such gratitude that we were in some ways prepared to be supportive in whatever ways we could. And it was clear that some of the younger people that we were connected to would go. It was also clear, when I asked deeply what I was responsible for, that I was not to go. The youngers went, while I found my way to be supportive, to offer supplies and finances to the local Paiute Shoshone, the Numu, as some of them call themselves in the old way. Maybe that role was not as exciting, visible, risky, or the adventure Extinction Rebellion offers, yet someone also needs to hold base camps. It is sustainable commitment, steady ongoing willingness to do whatever that I feel our movements need.... the willingness to go or stay or keep listening for what truly serves, for what is wanted and what each has capacity for.

**I value an alliance that comes from deeply listening, from where to be and what is ours to do, and from vision that brings us together.**

And it doesn't have to be that we're physically together. I have devoted the last many years of my life to certain networks and alliances because I feel the saying is true, when you hold several sticks together in your hand, they're stronger than just one. And I think we need that strength right now more than ever. We need to know and learn how to work together and respect each other's differences, to be aware of each other's wounds, and still have motivation, inspiration, and a commitment that carries us beyond the points of separation.

In council, we say, "When we speak, we know we're speaking because it serves me to say this." And we ask quietly inside, "does it serve the community to hear?" We carry that question, that intention in our hearts. And then we ask, "Does it serve the divine? Does it serve spirit? Does it serve the greatest good for all of life?" To me a moment of grace is discovering perhaps afterwards that, there is one action emerging in response, which actually was an answer to all of these questions. There's nothing more "heartening" than when we know, when we speak from the heart, it actually serves others to hear it as well. And when it's not from the heart, I lose touch pretty quickly no matter how brilliant the plan.

Often, I hear the questions, "Oh, do I have to heal myself before I can heal others?" "Do I have to take care and get totally enlightened on every level before I can make a difference with others in the world?" I ask, is it really us who heal or are powerful or is it something we are part of, something that comes through us? I check on "either-or" mind. That's not thinking like a circle. I don't have a formula that says, "stay home and sit on your pillow until you get this." I suggest we replace "but" with "yes, and" and see if "it depends" is a more reliable, truer answer to most any question. For some perhaps, yes, it might be that we need to be on the soup or picket line 24/7. And for some that want to get touched and awakened by dolphins, they may actually need to spend time with sharks. Every journey is different. What is magic and normal, is, if we sincerely keep asking where am I to be and what am I to do, in service to life, in service to the greatest good for all beings, in my experience, the answers will come.

I support what Joanna Macy and others name "holding actions:" We must stop! Demand the stopping of certain things. I am grateful for those doing this every day. And, "we" also must imagine and water healthy seeds, healing biotopes, eco-villages, sanctuaries, refugia, communities in cities and in our world that are acupuncture points, healthy cells in an ailing body. "We," or some of us I could say, also must watch getting caught in a kind of ego game, a self-righteous, holier than thou persona that was at the foundation of the kind of wars we want to end, i.e., "I'm really powerful because I'm flying to crisis areas standing up saying no to war. I'm out there on the frontlines defending peace – where are you?"

**A lot of activism is motivated by ego and sometimes our backyards are sorely neglected.**

The single heroic myths reign in new clothing within some activist organizations and the people that have been living a more beautiful world amongst some of the harshest conditions, every day, can be overlooked.

I've listened to activists say, "Look, I don't care if it's just that you need adventure to get you off your couch and out on the street. Just that you get off your couch and out on the street." So, ok, I hear that. I get that. And if the people are getting off their couches and onto the street, but they've come there just because they're bored, or because they want an adventure, or because they've never been initiated in their lives as adults, and now they get to feel powerful, well, that has it's benefit for sure ...and, in my experience, it's not a revolution that is going to last very long.

**I want to support developing a lasting compassion, a lasting love, a lasting commitment to show up with care for each other and for this earth.**

And that can look like being on the front lines of demonstrations or just be walking out the front door ready to love, to act, to bear witness, to defend the sacred. You, we, can find the way to do that, today. And maybe as I or you or others find the way, we can do it every day in our lives not just on Fridays. Some are the ones that will demonstrate at the White House gates and some will stay home, hopefully all developing that way of living. That is an alliance of different pathways of deep care, maybe not quite as visible but growing I feel nonetheless.

There is and will be conflict along the way, and there are many ways of being with such. As Leonard Cohen sings, it's the cracks in us and in the world that let the light in. I need to remember to keep looking for the light and watering the healthy seeds when conflict inevitably emerges. How do we embrace and move through whatever conflicts continue to arise in ourselves and in our world? Nature teaches, if I am going down a river in a canoe and a wave is coming at me, if I react only in fear and I swerve back away from the wave, I will flip. But if I feel for sure the alarm and then take that one breath in the next second, lean forward with my paddle and just aim right into that turbulent water, I will most often go through it. Bottom line is to be working with people that have agreements to stay with the fire, to check out underlying patterns and cause, to commit to heal, to be ready to change.

**Let's talk about safety, because safety for one person is very different than safety for another.**

I'm the kind that likes everything out in the open because I came from a family where a lot was underneath the table. And other people, everything out in the open all of the time is actually overwhelming and not safe for them. So "brave" space is a word that many are using today that I appreciate. (Brave Space, LLC)

I give attention to creating a space where people know that all commit to staying with it. They, we, also commit to a time that works for all. The practice of nonviolent communication is important. If you can't attend to or respond to a conflict immediately or at the time the other wants, it is important to say when you will. Agree with each other on that as a first step. This is a course in Community Best Practices, 101.

There're so many beautiful ways and important ways to be with conflicts. Exploring the conflict and getting to truth is more important than a sole focus on resolving it. There needs as well to be a commitment to learn skills and contexts for such situations, i.e., social skills, the power of storytelling, theater, song, movement, working within ceremony, within circle. Thankfully, more and more peacemakers are on it today with both old and new practices.

There also needs to be the ecological awareness and understanding of a bigger system and story that we are part of. Often, we do not understand how we are impacting the land and how place is impacting us, the different levels and realities at play are missed if and when we solely a focus on the human dynamics around what is happening. Sometimes, we best get out or over ourselves and discover a larger truth. It's key to listen not only for the 'what' an issue is, but as well for 'where' it is, where we are. Again, I do return to the import of knowing where to be and what is ours to do. Where to stand up, where to dream anew, where to defend, to meet, to move, to stay. Where to commit to be a part of restoring and building relations with places, and not just using or visiting them. A conflict can arise simply because we are in the wrong seat or wrong place—wrong not in terms of politics, wrong in terms of responsibility, destiny. If for example, I recognize that I am a settler, then that affects where and how to show up as an activist. It likely means a lot of healing work and reparations are needed. If from a tribe or community whose existence is part of a place, that is my homeland to protect and the ground and guide of my actions. If I travel elsewhere, any leave-taking may best be supported and protected. If a pilgrim, in the best sense of the word, if a roaming activist, a migratory species or an oceanic being whose home is inside, ever fluid, the relationship to place, sensitivity and attention to my coming and going, had best be named and heightened.

**I'm curious to see what world we will co-create if more and more people move with questions, deep care, and commitment...a deep connection to nature, to place.**

I share these questions and thoughts as I walk with them, grow them within myself and with others. And I'll get to see only as much as I do in my lifetime. Still, a 100 % commitment is needed. The invocation of the circle is an invocation of a consciousness. It's an invocation of the spirit life within all of life. And I don't know if that ever ends. And being, as I have been in ceremonies, it seems like "it" continues and continues beyond - continues and continues - past, present, future, ancestors, and future beings, in a way that I have only an inkling of. And it makes me curious to have an afterlife and know more.

I thank you for your questions, your interest, your work, your commitment and care. I think it's a worthy intent to unwind, unravel, or go in deeper on how to be with conflicts or how to build alliances or how to live in the movements of our times and strengthen relations and restore relations with water, with fire, with air, with all beings. I thank my many teachers including nature and many different spiritual traditions, many indigenous people and many elders who have kept the love alive thru genocide. I hope that the little parts that I've shared inspire the bigger conversations, and even more than conversations, the commitment to care for self, others and this earth, and to go from there.

