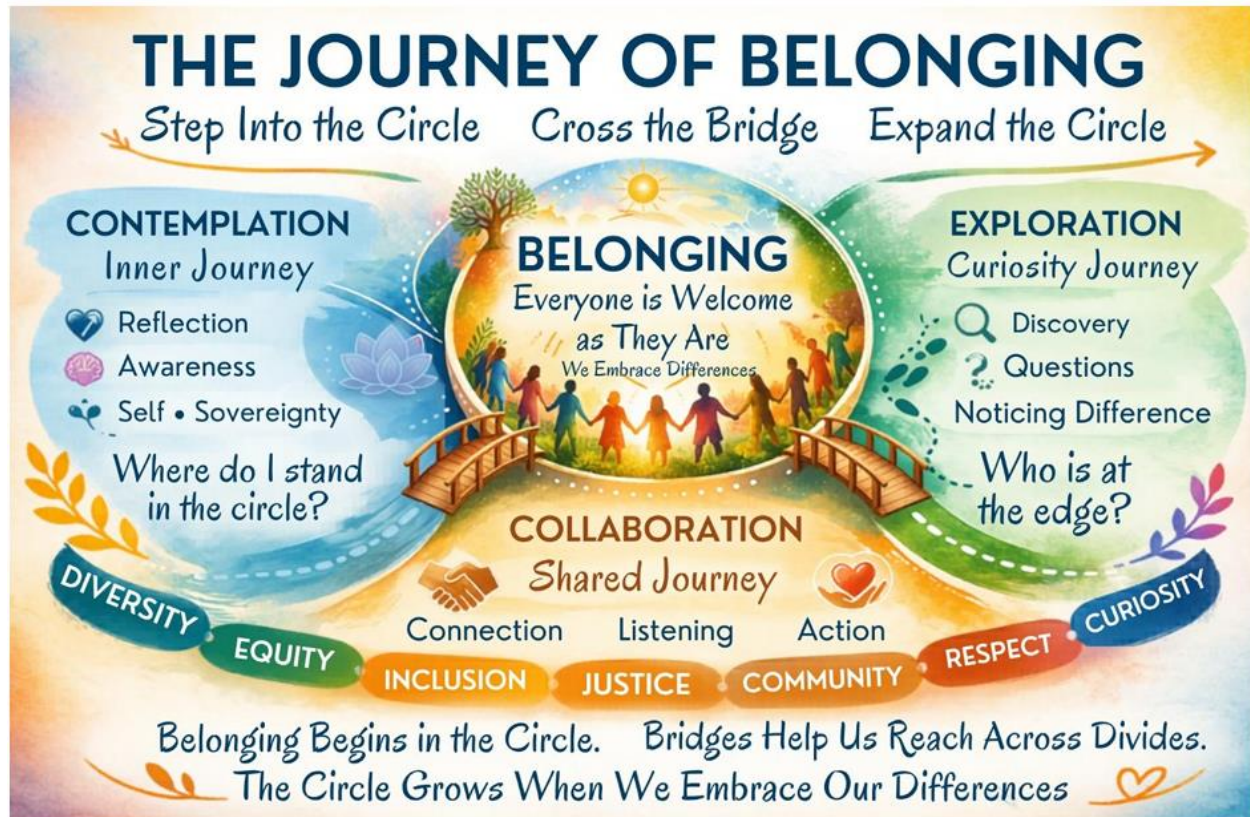




Week Five Handout

The Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Committee of the Centers for Spiritual Living invites you to continue on this Journey of Belonging.

This Journey is not linear. Awareness changes how we see. What we see changes how we engage. How we engage reveals more about ourselves and one another. This week the Collaboration Path invites us to:

Meet. Listen. Share. Create. Act together.

Belonging becomes more than something we experience; it becomes something we create together.

We encourage you to continue to interact with friends you haven't met yet. We invite you to expand your circle and become an ambassador of Belonging.

Shared Agreements

Be as present as you can.

Extend and receive welcome- keep your heart soft to support learning.

Participation is always an invitation- it's never an imposition- you are in charge.

Use "I" statements when sharing- speak your truth in ways that respect other people's truth.

Honor confidentiality here and beyond- what's shared here stays here; what's learned here may be freely shared.

Accept non-closure- trust the process and accept that we don't control what others receive.

No fixing, saving, advising, or correcting others.

When feelings of discomfort grow – turn to wonder and compassionate inquiry or curiosity.

Set aside judgement to listen to others -and to yourself- more deeply.

THE PATHWAYS AS A CONTINUING JOURNEY

The three pathways should not become rigid categories. They are ways for us to recognize different movements within the experience of belonging.

Something encountered through Exploration may awaken an internal response and return us to Contemplation.

Something discovered through Contemplation may change how we enter relationship through Collaboration.

Something experienced through Collaboration may reveal a pattern, assumption, or perspective that invites further Exploration. The movement continues:

INWARD → OUTWARD → TOGETHER → INWARD → OUTWARD → TOGETHER

THE COLLABORATION PATH

The Collaboration Path invites participants into relationship. Contemplation helps us become aware of ourselves. Exploration helps us notice and learn beyond ourselves.

Collaboration asks what becomes possible when we **engage with one another**.

Collaboration is not simply doing something for someone else. It is an invitation to move toward **shared participation, mutuality, relationship, and co-creation**. Collaboration creates space to experience:

- Listening and responding to one another
- Sharing stories and perspectives
- Discovering common ground without erasing differences
- Creating with rather than simply doing for
- Sharing voice, power, and participation
- Practicing allyship and accompaniment
- Recognizing one another's gifts
- Working together toward greater belonging
- Translating awareness into relationships and meaningful action

How am I engaging with others, and what are we creating together?

What becomes possible when we meet one another as partners in creating belonging?

Collaboration is not only about what we accomplish. Notice how we are with one another while we are accomplishing it. Belonging is created not only by the outcome, but by how we listen, share voice, make room, and participate together.

*These pages are reprinted from CSL's "**Embodying Our Global Vision Student Guide**" pages 45- 48*

Exploring Unearned Advantage and Disadvantage

Each day we have the opportunity to become more aware of and awaken to things about ourselves and life and see something from a different perspective. Sometimes these awarenesses give us data to make a small course correction, other times it may be more significant. It may even be so grand that we call it a paradigm shift. In DEIJB work, on the individual and community level, these awakenings are also taking place.

Awareness is the first step toward transformation. Justice work often reveals uncomfortable truths about the world, biases we didn't realize we held, privileges we didn't know we benefited from, or harm we didn't see occurring. These revelations can be painful, but they may also be profoundly liberating. They disrupt the status quo, awaken us to deeper truths, and challenge us to live more consciously.

Awakening occurs when we begin to understand things don't have to remain as they are. We see that inequities are not inevitable; they are the result of human choices and systems, and we have the power to choose differently. The past is not a precedent for the future. As we awaken to imbalance, we can consciously engage the creative process and create something new! This realization is empowering, offering us the chance to align our actions with our values and envision new possibilities for ourselves and our communities.

An **unearned advantage** is just that, something we benefit from without any additional effort on our part, often due to social systems, circumstances of our birth, or inherited status. Some unearned advantages in the majority of our world today include: being tall, having lighter skin color, being born into a family with generational wealth, having features considered attractive in our society, being thin, following the major religion of our area, having good hearing, having good eyesight, having full use of our body, being born male.

An **unearned disadvantage** is the hardship we face that is not our fault and comes from systemic inequality, bias, or circumstance. Some examples in the majority of the world today include: being short, having darker skin color, experiencing poverty, having features considered unattractive, having excess weight, being born into a family whose religion is denigrated, being deaf or hard of hearing, being blind or having vision issues, not having full use of your body, being born female, being transgender, having mental health challenges, living in a single parent home.

You didn't earn any of these advantages or disadvantages. Whether something is considered an advantage or a disadvantage is based on the stated and unstated beliefs of the culture in which you were raised.

Today, unearned advantages, also known as privilege, often carry a negative connotation. Saying that someone has privilege or an unearned advantage can sometimes be delivered in a tone that implies the person is racist, misogynistic, transphobic, ableist, or worse. But this couldn't be further from the truth. In the context of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Justice, and Belonging (DEIJB), highlighting unearned advantages can help illuminate the cultural beliefs that underpin social, legal, religious, and community systems and structures.

Despite good intentions, the outreach program might fall short of its goals, or worse, perpetuate a dynamic where the spiritual community is seen as a benefactor "helping" others, rather than collaborating in partnership with the community.

By becoming more aware of unearned advantage, the group could take steps to listen, engage, and share decision-making power, ensuring their efforts are equitable and truly beneficial. When we bring to light unearned advantages and disadvantages with love instead of condemnation, the opportunities for healing and growth are deepened.

The key awareness about unearned advantages and disadvantages is the understanding that they are connected to who we are as we come into the world. Those factors about us we cannot change, our family of origin, where we were born, when we were born, the tone of our skin, our height, our genetic makeup, these are all unearned aspects of who we are. Recognizing that we each come into the world with inherent advantages and disadvantages is a powerful realization. Equally powerful is acknowledging and honoring that everyone carries their own mix of these unearned circumstances. This is where **compassion, kindness, and a genuine willingness to understand both our own and others lived experiences become essential to advancing greater equity and justice for all.**

Allyship is the conscious choice to challenge the societal imbalances that grant unearned advantages. Acting as an ally means standing for the emancipation of those who face systemic disadvantages. No one is at fault for being born into privilege, and having unearned advantages does not negate personal hardships. However, recognizing that we all impact the world, both positively and negatively, is essential for lasting justice. Advocacy within our communities helps sustain justice and foster greater equity.