

The Powers of Place

Awareness Questions

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We humans are always embedded in a place of some kind. How often do we actually notice where we are and the characteristics of these places? Most often we're intent on what we are or will be doing there, who else is present, and where we will be going next.

The first step in developing a relationship with place is noticing it. How can we be in partnership with something that is invisible to us? We can *use* place, as we so often do in our daily lives, but we are then robbing ourselves of what place can contribute and setting up the very real potential for its *abuse*. It is what Martin Buber would call an I-It relationship, one that we're very familiar with.

At the Powers of Place Initiative, we want to promote a different kind of relationship between humans and place, an I-Thou relationship. It is more respectful, more reciprocal, and far more powerful.

The questions below are offered to bring conscious awareness about surroundings to those who answer them. They were crafted from the findings in my pilot study, *The Powers of Place: An Inquiry into the Effect of Place, Space, and Environment on Collective Transformation* (2008). They can be used to periodically bring attention to where you are or they can be incorporated into gatherings to encourage collective awareness and invite place in as a contributing force to the outcomes imagined for the group.

If you experiment with using them individually or in groups, I would appreciate knowing what your experience was. Please contact me at renee@powersofplace.com.

Noticing geography and natural environment

1. What is the topography of this place?
2. What are the natural elements (water, rock, fire, etc.)?
3. Do you notice any smells? Colors? Textures? Sounds?
4. Is there animal life?
5. What is the vegetation like?
6. Why rhythm or pace do you experience in this place?
7. What is the weather?

Noticing design, configuration and contents

1. Is the room comfortable for the size of the group?

2. What is the room or building's shape?
3. How is the furniture arranged?

Noticing aesthetics and beauty

1. Do you consider the place beautiful? How so?
2. Do you think others consider the place beautiful? How do you know?
3. How does the place's beauty (or lack thereof) make you feel?

Noticing history, meaning, and intent

1. What is the history of this place? What happened here?
2. Does this history hold any special meaning for you or for the group?
3. Do you know what the founders or builders wanted to achieve for this place?

Noticing physical energy

1. Did you feel (in your body) anything that seems to be coming from the place or surroundings you are in? How would you describe it?
2. What meaning do you ascribe to this physical feeling?
3. Do you think others feel something too?

Noticing wholeness

1. Does this place feel separate and apart from other places or aspects of your life or does it feel a part of something larger?

Noticing relationship

1. Are there any special feelings you have for this place, either positive or negative? Why?
2. What do you think this particular place's role will or has been for your gathering?