

Hollow Bones Truth & Reconciliation Ritual

Protocol (with Rationales)

Ground Rules

Invitation: Invite all who want to be there; this communicates a willingness for this process to be open and transparent.

Form 2 circles: An inner circle made up of ordained priests and those who have taken Jukai along with an outer circle for those that are either new to Hollow Bones or who do not participate on a regular basis. Members of the outer circle act as witnesses, holding the container in silence. If they feel compelled to speak, they must tap on the shoulder of someone in the inner circle and speak through that person. This ensures that the container is held tightly and that there are no leaks coming from the outer edge of the container. The structure of this container may be adjusted (specifically the composition of the inner and outer circles and the method for the outer circle to speak) based on the characteristics of the group participating in the ritual and what will be most efficacious based on the group and the circumstances which are the subject of the ritual. From years of experience, it's actually the container that allows for sacred space to be built and sustained. It's vital that the outer circle hold this space in a good way.

In the Center: Create a ritual space for all those that have been directly involved by the concern requiring a truth and reconciliation process. This can usually be achieved by have chairs or cushions placed in the middle, one for each party involved in the concern. It's important to have a place represented for those that are directly involved but may not be able to be in attendance. This helps to ensure that they are not forgotten in the process. Often it's vital that the facilitator check with those unable to attend to see what messages, if any, they want spoken into the container. This step often helps provide more context and leads to a deeper understanding of the issues.

Pledge of Confidentiality: In order to create emotional safety and to enhance the sacredness of the container, have each person in both circles make a pledge of confidentiality to whatever degree is warranted. It can range from "Whatever happens here, stays here. Period." to "I agree to speak only of my own personal experience, and I commit to not sharing who said what to whom without first getting their permission to do so...In other words, refrain from gossiping." to "I want the freedom to discuss any of the details of this meeting with whomever I deem necessary." In general, the second, middle-of-the road, version tends to work best in Truth & Reconciliation Processes because people in attendance often feel the need to process what they have experienced and witnessed afterwards without participants feeling like their comments will be taken out of context or gossiped about.

Preview: Manage expectations upfront by setting parameters in terms of process and timing: who will get to speak, in what order, and for how long. Make sure a timekeeper is designated and have them provide a signal toward the end of the allotted timeframes so that the speaker knows to wrap up their comments. It's important to allow for some cushion in the schedule so that the facilitator can do a process check at the end and have more time allotted if needed. (It's almost always needed, and appreciated!)

No Cross Talk: When people are given the floor to speak their truth, do not allow others to interrupt, offer rebuttals, ask questions or make comments. It's the job of everyone in The container to simply listen from the heart; only the timekeeper or the facilitators are allowed to intervene.

Protocol from the two Hollow Bones Truth & Reconciliation Rituals which have occurred

The Setting: Two priests acted as facilitators (One process occurred at the end of a Sesshin, where two of the individuals directly involved in the matter at hand were charged with inviting newcomers from the Sesshin to witness this process). The space was set ahead of time with 4 cushions placed in the middle for those directly involved with this particular Truth and Reconciliation Ritual. In one of the processes, a candle was already lit in the exact Center, representing the Axis Mundi (the divine energy of wisdom, compassion, and skillful means), in the other, the candle was on the altar, and an empty cushion was placed in the exact center. The empty cushion is the seat for each person who chooses to speak – they move to this seat before speaking (other than those directly involved who already have seats at the focus of the ritual). A staff was also placed next to the door so that it could be used to seal and unseal the container at the appropriate times.

Walking Meditation with Spiral In (5-minutes): In the process which occurred at the end of a sesshin, the process started following a break, with participants lining up outside the meditation hall in a single file line. One priest led the group in; the priest serving as primary facilitator was at the end of the line. A walking meditation ensued as a way to allow people to ground their energy and to prepare for the process. Toward the end of the walk, the leading priest spiraled toward the center and asked everyone to stand shoulder to shoulder as one circle.

The second time the truth and reconciliation process was used, it was set up as an independent event. This began with a 30 minute sitting period (essential, if the process is not part of a sesshin). Walking meditation was conducted outside the zendo, and during the walking meditation period the zendo was rearranged with the center area and two concentric circles as described above. Walking

meditation was led by the priest who also served as timekeeper. The priest facilitating the process, with assistance, handled the set up in the zendo. When the priest signaled that the zendo setup was complete, the walking meditation line returned to the zendo and spiraled in as described above.

Sealing the Container (1 minute): A third priest was asked beforehand to move toward the door when the spiral began and to pick up the staff. When all participants were shoulder-to-shoulder and quiet, the priest stated in a ritual voice:

“This Truth & Reconciliation Ritual of the Hollow Bones Order will now commence,” tapping the staff on the floor **3 times** for emphasis.

This procedure sets the tone for the meeting and encourages people to speak their Truth succinctly.

Check-In (10 minutes): Each person was asked to state their given name, their dharma name if they had one, their role for this meeting (participant in the inner circle or witness from the outer circle – in the second time the process was used, this latter role-statement was not relevant, as all participants were Hollow Bones priest, sensei, or senior students and were empowered to speak), and a word or a phrase describing how they’re feeling in the moment. (Check-ins are a great way to get an energetic feel for the container as a whole and a way to invite each person to move into present moment focus.)

Ground Rules (10 minutes): The facilitator highlighted the agenda, clarified confidentiality, got a confidentiality pledge from each person present, defined the terms “Truth,” “Reconciliation,” and “Ritual” for the audience, and briefly provided a context for why the issue at hand has merited a “Truth & Reconciliation Ritual” for the Hollow Bones Order. A note taker was also assigned to capture the essence of people’s comments.

Forming Inner & Outer Circles (2 minutes): The facilitators asked the members of the inner circle to take a step forward, and then had everyone adjust their cushions to round out the 2 distinct circles. Instructions for both circles were reiterated. The individuals involved in the concern which was the subject of the ritual were asked to take their seats in the center.

Opening Comments from those Directly Involved (15 minutes): Those directly involved were each given 3-minutes to “Speak Your Truth” to the Container. The facilitating priest then took up to 3-minutes each to share messages that those who were directly involved, but not in attendance, wanted conveyed to the group in their absence. Some went a bit over the time allotted and some a bit under, but this part of the process took about 15 minutes.

Round 1 from Inner Circle (15-30 minutes): Each member of the inner circle was given up to 3 minutes to “Speak Your Truth...as it relates to how this situation has impacted you personally.” Most chose to speak, a few opted to pass.

In the second instance the outer circle also participated in the first round. Each member of the outer circle was given up to 3 minutes to “Speak Your Truth...as it relates to how this situation has impacted you personally.” Most chose to speak, a few opted to pass (15 - 20 minutes).

Round 2 from Inner Circle (15 - 30 minutes): Each member of the inner circle was given up to 3 minutes to “Speak Your Truth...as it relates to how you perceive this situation impacting the Hollow Bones Order as an organization.” (In the second instance, this was termed “... the Sangha and Hollow Bones Order as an organization.”) Most chose to speak, again others opted to pass.

In the initial instance of the ritual, because there seemed to be some angst from the outer circle related to this round, an opportunity was given to a few members of the outer circle to speak as well. It’s was a judgment call made by the facilitators at the time, with the rationale being that it was important to have this process be as thorough and transparent as possible. In the second instance, the opportunity for the outer circle was part of the structure from the outset, and with round 1 (15 minutes).

Closing Comments from those Directly Involved (15 minutes): In response to comments made in round 1 and round 2, those in the center were given the opportunity to “Speak Your Truth”-- not so much in defense but by way of clarifying, summarizing, and reiterating the primary messages they wanted to convey in this process - especially to acknowledge what they heard by reflecting and summarizing.

Reconciliation Round (10 minutes): All present were asked to stand and to form 2 circles. (In the second instance, there was only one circle.) Those directly involved (those who had been in the center) were asked to independently to come to the center and turn to members of the inner circle. One by one, each of them were asked to look each member in the eye and to listen to each person’s response to the following question posed by the facilitators (as an alternative, this can be repeated by the person in the center, “Are you reconciled with me?”):

“Are you reconciled with this person?”

Members were instructed to simply state yes or no. If the answer was yes, the person in the center was instructed to take that response to heart. If the answer was no, brief explanations were allowed but no processing. The person in the center was instructed to take note and to meet up with the person off line to discern what steps needed to be taken for reconciliation to occur in the future. A

gesture was made by the person in the center to indicate that “the message sent was the message received.” In most cases a quick hug on the yes responses and a bow in gassho for the no replies.

Check Out (10 minutes): All present were asked to form one circle. A brief check out ensued with name, role in the ritual (as before, in the second instance the role was not relevant), and a brief comment related to the experience that they had just had. In some T & R rituals, the facilitators or those directly involved are invited to step into the Circle to receive a blessing as well.

Un-Sealing the Container (1 minute): While all participants remained shoulder-to-shoulder in the circle, the priest who earlier sealed the container went to get the staff from near the door and announced in a ritual voice:

“This Truth & Reconciliation Ritual of the Hollow Bones Order is now complete,” tapping the staff on the floor **3 times** for emphasis.

Spiral Out with Walking Meditation (5-minutes) The priest who led the walking meditation earlier spiraled and led the group in an extended walking meditation before marching out of the meditation hall (or where this is not practical, signaling the conclusion in some other way, as appropriate to the setting). (It’s important “to book-end” these types of rituals by ending them the same way they are started in terms of form and time duration. That way, participants are able to ground their experience before breaking the Silence, and there is a proper sense of closure to the event. Remember, this is “**Soul Work**,” and by its very nature, it tends to need reflection time with definite transitions marking beginnings and endings in order for full transmissions and transformations to occur.)

We recommend allocating at least 2 hours for the ritual and additional time if a sitting period is needed prior.