



mystic SOUL PROJECT

Community Groups Starter Kit

INTRODUCTION:

Welcome to this Starter Kit for Community Groups. This is by no means a comprehensive list of everything Mystic Soul Project and it is not made to create a strict formula for creating Mystic Soul Community Groups. This is just meant as a frame of reference for communities looking to start up groups based on the foundational principles and ethos of The Mystic Soul Project. As we will list later in the document there are some basics that we ask groups to agree to, foundations that are non-negotiable around equity and centering the margins which would be a necessary agreement to be listed on our website as a community group. Beyond that, each group will find their own way, shape organically around their own community needs, and grow into their own contemplative/mystical, activism and healing oriented space. We are here to support you as you journey — and this kit is just a starter guide to that support and a breakdown of the basics that guide The Mystic Soul Project as an organization and a global community space. We hope it serves you as you journey towards shaping your own POC-centered communities at the intersection of mysticism, activism and healing.

We send our love and hopefulness, from our community into your own communities and contexts!

Sincerely,
The Mystic Soul Co-Founders & Leadership

Frameworks

OUR VISION[ing]:

The Mystic Soul Project's vision is one that is embodied through our beliefs and values, and acted out in our practices. We offer up a way of being that is possible, accessible, inclusive and aspirational - for us as much as anyone else. One of our practices is the "the practice of imperfection," which simply means that everything we do will be imperfect. To accept that basic truth is a liberation in itself. This is how we engage with our vision for the beautiful world we aspire to create, together, in community, with you. This requires aspirations, spiritual practices and principles - where we can aspire towards our best, along with you.

RULE OF LIFE:

The RULE OF LIFE philosophy originates in Egypt in the third century AD and the first of its kind was crafted by the Desert Mystics (as a reminder: this means the original rule of life was created by POC, by Africans - the original Christian mystics). It was intended to be a series of guideposts to keep those living a contemplative life guided towards God/the Divine by not just static beliefs but living and breathing principles which would keep them on a spiritual path to deepest parts of themselves, where their heart and spirit could meet the One within them. It is a guide to our spiritual becoming -- individually and in community.

We are a community building a being-ness which is centered in the contemplative way of life, and grounded in action and healing. We are also, intentionally, centering that which is often unseen, ignored or invisibilized in contemporary contemplative frameworks for "being-ness" as POC. Often, the guidebook for wholeness, in contemplative space, is assumed as universal, when we hold a unique fingerprint of pain, suffering and barriers, not experienced by those functioning in dominant frameworks of whiteness and the associated privilege. We believe voicing and addressing these factors is CRITICAL to a wholistic vision of the POC spiritual path and contemplative journey.

As such, you can see our RULE OF LIFE is intentionally centering on our POC-being-ness, not as the sole nature of our being, but as integral to how we experience the world, how the world experiences us. It is centered on the things WE need to SEE, to BE, to move through our lived experience, and to fully ground into our being-ness. In essence, it allows us the space to nurture what is not often not nurtured (or even acknowledged) in a dominant framework contemplative path about our historical pasts, our living present, and our aspirational future. It allows us to engage, authentically, with the embodiment of our WHOLE SELVES which, at their core, is the WHOLENESS of the Creator, as well.

Welcome to our RULE OF LIFE. We invite you engage with this principles alongside us!

WE VALUE...

1. ...Rhythm Over Time: This means we seek to prioritize relationship, community, story, pain and healing over the construct of time. This means we work to deconstruct a western and colonized model of time, and use of time, that we are so used to, to make space for something that transcends the construct of time -- and allows for a remembrance of community that is ancient, tribal and integrated.
2. ...Centering the Margins: We believe that the least heard voices need to be centered and prioritized. We believe under-represented peoples should be offered space to represent themselves, and not just a seat at someone else's table. We prioritize listening to the intuitive knowledge and wisdom from inside our own selves (as POC and QTPOC) and from our own marginalized histories.
3. ...Co-Learning & Co-Teaching: We believe in the wisdom inside us all, and work to move away from a hierarchy built on privileging the knowledge of a select few over the individual and collective wisdom in a community of people. We value eldership and unique gifts that each person holds, but we vision a world in which certain gifts and voices are not given priority as more valuable than the rest. We look to center the wisdom in all of us and learn in, with and through community-building and greater visioning with each other.
4. ...Whole-Self Contemplation: We believe that we are holistic beings - made up of all our parts - our physical form, our mental selves and our spiritual selves. We believe in grounding in the contemplative histories, practices and memory of our peoples, to hold the spiritual value and fullness of our whole selves - mind, body and spirit.
5. ...Community-Centered Practices: We were not made to exist only in isolation - and we look to abdicate a western model of individualism in favor of a community-centered approach to living, learning and growing. We cannot heal alone, or care for our spirit only in isolation, or seek justice for our communities, individually. We work towards centering our communal relationships in all these areas and move away from a western-centric model that idolizes the individual and individualization over all else.
6. ...Subversion not Reaction: We believe that we can create a subversive and liberative way of being in ourselves and communities without it being tied to a reaction of the wider world's representation or repression of us. We believe in a subversive way forward that doesn't have to always be connected to reacting to how others see or treat us.

WE BELIEVE...

7. ...Self-Care is Liberation: Liberation can feel like a long road. It makes us weary but we don't want to stop. Our lives and the lives of those we love are always on the line. But, we have to pause, and breathe and care for ourselves because 1) we can't make the long journey of collective liberation without our breath, our bodies, our healing 2) and self-care & healing is the liberation we can manifest today - for and in ourselves, and for and in our communities. We cannot forget to breathe - we cannot forget care and love for ourselves, otherwise we will forget, at a core level, what the struggle is for, and the value of our own selves on this journey.

8. ...The Monastery is the World: Inspired by the words and teachings from a foremother of this work, Dr. Barbara Holmes, this is a reminder that the world is our sacred space, our cloister, our monastery, our spiritual journey - and while we move with the Creator inside ourselves, we also move in and with the world. Our communities around us are part of our deep spiritual work and our mystical path. The point of the contemplative path is the return - into and engaged with the world, its suffering, and its joy.

"The world is the cloister of the contemplative. Always the quest for justice draws one deeply into the heart of God. In this sacred interiority contemplation becomes the language of prayer and the impetus for prophetic action." - Dr Barbara Holmes, Joy, Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church

9. ...in A Triad Of Connection: Contemplation, Action & Healing are necessarily interconnected. Each part of this triad is essential - neither one functions fully and completely alone, and each is more balanced by each other part of the triad. We need to be grounded at our spiritual center, working towards healing our pain, and activated to serve in the world - individually and communally.

10. ...Our Stories Matter: As POC & QTPOC our stories, our people's stories, our ancestors and the true formation of history in relation to our experience, pain and intergenerational trauma, has been obscured. Our stories matter. They need to be heard. We must have space to tell them to each other, to archive them for memory, and be heard, in our truth, in the wider world.

11. ...in Invitation Not Appropriation: There is a difference between being invited into someone's culture, history and lived experience rather than taking those histories or cultures or experiences as if they are for the taking, or for other people's consumption. We believe in inviting and being invited into the space of each other's peoples. And we believe that if/when we are not invited in, it is not for us to have, consume or take.

12. ...in Unapologetic Living: As POC & QTPOC our lives have inherent value, goodness, and meaning. We don't need to apologize for who we are or the space we take up in the world. Our voices Matter. They need to be heard. Our bodies are beautiful, in every shape and size. We are whole and complete exactly as we are.

THE PRACTICES:

- The practice of DIMMING DOWN is one that orients around the rule of life on RHYTHM OVER TIME. Consider the ways in which we are both overly connected and disconnected at the same time when our technological focus becomes greater than our focus in the present moment and in the experience we are in - of community, relationship, pain and joy. DIMMING DOWN is an intentional way of deciding to "dim" your technological presence to different levels to be able to be more present where you are. Especially at gatherings we are often programmed to live tweet, livestream, and hold our phone or ipad or laptop between ourselves and our experience. We invite you to find ways and spaces in your own RHYTHM OF LIFE where you can, intentionally, dim down your technology to turn the volume up on the experience right in front of you.

- The practice of COMING AS YOU ARE means not putting unnecessary expectations on yourself - who you should be, how you should present, what part of yourself you should make visible in any given space. It means coming with your WHOLE SELF, exactly as you are, inside and out. It also means holding who you are as precious -- we know there are times we must necessarily protect the preciousness and vulnerability of ourselves in spaces where our whole selves cannot be fully accepted or seen. This is also why, for POC and QTPOC, Mystic Soul seeks to create and engage in spaces where our WHOLE SELVES can be liberated to just BE. Find those places where you can be, and sink deeply into them -- like a warm blanket or a comfy chair. Find where you can be, and COME exactly as YOU ARE. Come home to your whole self.
- The practice of IMPERFECTION means holding ourselves all accountable - as people, communities, and organizations - to the inherent nature of our imperfection. Practicing and embracing our IMPERFECTION is, in itself, a spiritual practice. It is a practice of acceptance, without judgement or criticism, when we see imperfection in the world around us and in our interior world of SELF. We can never get it "all right" or "perfect" and there are no sets of rules or ideologies that will find some perfect way of being. The spiritual path is IMPERFECTION itself, and when we embrace that our own liberation and the liberation of what we do is limitless. Let go of the ideal and live into what IS. It is beautiful, because of, not despite, its inherent imperfection.
- The practice of LETTING GO is valuable in many spaces. When your life and view and vantage point has come from a place of privilege LETTING GO can mean abdicating the comfort of the privilege to center others, rather than self, and letting go of what that space of privilege has meant, how you have been attached to it and the benefits of that position. It also means LETTING GO of the guilt around that privilege and activate that energy around living into a new way of being. LETTING GO when you come from a place of marginalization means releasing the ideas of you put on you by outside forces and systems which said you were not "good enough." Own your enoughness and LET GO of anything that says that you are other than the fullness of the divine, down to your core. LETTING GO, whatever our social location, means LETTING GO of what was pre-prescribed for us and living into our authentic self - fully whole, divine, no more or no less than anyone else.
- The practice of BEING HERE NOW means that we allow ourselves (as expressed in DIMMING DOWN) to let go of what was before, or what will be (it doesn't mean we forget), to be fully in this moment we are in. It means LETTING GO of the suffering of our past, and not letting it inform our present (it doesn't mean we forget). It means transcending that which has hurt us, including what is useful from our past, and finding a way to release the suffering that we carry around like a heavy backpack, filled with stones. BEING HERE NOW means living into the fullness of THIS moment, and the fullness and wholeness of ourselves in THIS MOMENT - not letting anything limit the potential and the beauty in us, right here, right now.

Grounding Resources

Joy, Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church
<https://www.amazon.com/Joy-Unspeakable-Barbara-Holmes/dp/0800636430/>

Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love and Liberation
<https://www.amazon.com/Radical-Dharma-Talking-Race-Liberation/dp/1623170982/>

Sacred Wounds: A Path to Healing from Spiritual Trauma
<https://www.amazon.com/Sacred-Wounds-Healing-Spiritual-Trauma/dp/0827235372/>

Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around: Stories of Contemplation and Justice
<https://www.amazon.com/Aint-Gonna-Nobody-Turn-Around/dp/0819233633/>

Embodied Spirits: Stories of Spiritual Directors of Color
<https://www.amazon.com/Embodied-Spirits-Stories-Spiritual-Directors/dp/0819228931/>

Booklet of Uncommon Prayer
<http://www.evangelicalsforsocialaction.org/myuncommonprayer/>

Nobody Cries When We Die: God, Community, and Surviving to Adulthood
<https://www.amazon.com/Nobody-Cries-When-Die-Community/dp/0827225318/>

Jesus and the Disinherited
<https://www.amazon.com/Jesus-Disinherited-Howard-Thurman/dp/0807010294/>

Community Group Listing

Groups in formation listed below. Let us know if you want a group and your name to be added! If you have a description of your group specifically you want to add, now or later, we can do that too! Points of Contact are subject to change over time and may have names added. See website for most updated information.

Kitchener-Waterloo Area, Ontario, Canada (KW Tri-City Area)
Point of Contact: Matthew Morales

Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Point of Contact: Rose-Ingrid Gracia

Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada
Point of Contact: Celine Chuang

Denver, Colorado
Point of Contact: Beth Leyba

Oakland, California
Point of Contact: Xan West

New York, New York
Point of Contact: Alexis Francisco

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Point of Contact: Lynette Davis & Jenn Hart

Grand Rapids, Michigan
Point of Contact: unknown
currently a non-POC group?

Chicago, Illinois
Point of Contact: Kwame Pitts & Jade Perry

Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina
Point of Contact: Tami Johns & Beverly Wallace

Greensboro, North Carolina
Point of Contact: Reggie Weaver

Albuquerque, New Mexico
Point of Contact: Cliff Berrien

San Diego, California
Point of Contact: Hailey Mitsui-Davis

Virginia Beach-Hampton Roads Area
Point of Contact: Byron McMillan

Boston, Massachusetts
Point of Contact: Cicia Lee & Yani Burgos

Los Angeles, California
Point of Contact:
Patrice M. Ford & Deandrea Breann Lottier Ross

Houston, Texas
Point of Contact: Brandi Holmes

Boston, Massachusetts
Point of Contact: Cicia Lee

Indianapolis, Indiana
Point of Contact: Michelle Anastasia

Community Agreements

While each Community Group is independently and autonomously organized, working organically as your community needs, to be listed on The Mystic Soul Project website we do ask you to commit to the following:

- **The Mystic Soul Project CENTERS THE MARGINS - which means that we urge groups to be LED by POC (people of color) and center the most marginalized in communities.** This means that facilitation, participation, and voice in the space seeks to center and lift up the most often unheard (women of color, queer people of color, trans people of color). This also means that if Non-POC are present in the space their voice may have to take a backseat to center those who are less heard in the dominant culture.
- **The Mystic Soul Project is inclusive and centering of queer, trans, LGBTQIA voices.** This means that for a group to be a Mystic Soul Community Group we ask for your unequivocal agreement to be trans and queer inclusive space. This also means not just including persons who are queer and trans, but centering queer and trans POC in the community space created.
- **The Mystic Soul Project centers a contemplative ethos which means that communities will utilize the guiding principles of the RULE OF LIFE and PRACTICES to help frame out how you build community** and integrate a contemplative way of being with each other, sharing practices with each other, and communicating with each other. How that shape may look slightly different for each community but holding the contemplative grounding is an important essential piece of a Mystic Soul Community Group.
- **The Mystic Soul Project creates space for spiritual diversity and an inclusivity of spiritual expression beyond dominant religious and spiritual frameworks.** This means that although many people who are part of the Mystic Soul Community at large come from Christian historical contexts not everyone does, and not everyone who shares that history still holds that spiritual framework. Mystic Soul Community Group space is one that is willing and able to hold space for the diversity of spiritual expression, indigenous and tribal reclamation, and a diversity of spiritual and religious frameworks of existence.

Prior to formation of your group please contact mysticsoulproject@gmail.com to discuss these principles and the starter kit. The Executive Director, Teresa P Mateus, or another one of the team members will get back with you shortly to go over the process of group formation and review these commitments listed above. As long as you are willing and able to create space that holds these values we are very glad to welcome you and list your group on The Mystic Soul Project website - as well as your local point of contact for your group.

We are glad to offer continuing support as your form and grow your own Community Group in whatever ways we are able — we want you to build what serves your community best, and we also want to be able to support that growth however we can!