



## Grounding

### Building a Personal Foundation for Countering Racism

Grounding or centering refers to a person's foundation in the world. It provides the underlying support necessary to be OK in the world, to be whole in a sustained way. Our grounding provides the continuity on which we rely when dealing with the challenges of life. It provides the sense of safety that allows us to risk bringing ourselves fully to the challenges we face. It is essential to be being fully present, bringing our best, and persevering.

Those life challenges – including countering racism - will require us to leave our comfort zones, but a strong sense of grounding can provide enough sense of safety that we say “Yes” to the challenge, leave our comfort zones, and are at least OK - and potentially thrive. Grounding not only supports us in saying “yes”, it also provides a basis for persevering and becoming increasingly resilient.

Our grounding develops over time, often on an unconscious level. Acting with conscious intent, however, can dramatically deepen and accelerate that grounding. We can accelerate our grounding.

The importance of the sources of our grounding will change, sometimes as new sources develop or sometimes as events challenge us in new ways. The importance of one source may also increase as other sources decrease in power or opportunity.

For instance, if we are deeply grounded in our ability to contribute in a meaningful way and opportunities or the ability to contribute decrease, sources of grounding such as belonging, being loved and cared for, or our self-esteem that have developed over time may become critical.

**Both depth of grounding and breadth of grounding are important.** Not being grounded deeply enough or being grounded in too few places can leave us very vulnerable to change and can certainly undermine our ability to lead change. Lack of depth means that it is very easy to feel uprooted and swept away. Being too narrowly grounded means that a threat to those few sources of grounding can be overwhelming.

*“Each person has inside a basic goodness. If ‘he’ listens to it and acts on it, ‘he’ is giving a great deal of what it is the world needs. It is not complicated, but it takes courage...to listen to ‘his’ own goodness.”*

*Pablo Casals*

## **Grounding and Countering Racism**

Countering racism is a daunting challenge, and it will naturally take us, as White people, out of our comfort zones. If we are not adequately grounded we will be too vulnerable to doubts, fears, uncertainties, anxiety, loss of confidence, etc. Without being adequately grounded, we are very likely to either refuse to leave our comfort zones and go forth – or we will quickly retreat back into our comfort zones. Even if we stay in the game we will be vulnerable to the inevitable setbacks and disappointments that happen as we take on racism and we can easily get worn down or lose heart.

**In countering racism there are always two journeys – an inner and an outer journey.** Being grounded is essential for both. Being grounded helps us achieve the desired outcomes in the outer journey of countering racism because it helps us stay out of our comfort zones and bringing our best to bear – consistently.

Being grounded also supports us in our inner journey as we are tested and grow in the process of countering racism. We grow when we are tested, and countering racism comes with many tests. If we are grounded those tests usually result in healthy growth – we discover new bests, become more whole and more capable.

*“Do you want to know who you are? Don’t ask, act. Action will delineate and define you.”*

Thomas Jefferson

**Sources and Settings.** There are both sources of grounding and settings in which we are grounded. Both are important.

## Sources Of Grounding

Fortunately, there are a lot of potential sources of grounding. Some will develop unconsciously, but the depth and breadth of our grounding can be rapidly accelerated by being conscious about it. As life is more about questions than answers, the following questions can rapidly lead to a more conscious sense of grounding.

Many of these factors will already be at play, but raising them to a conscious level increases their impact and provides an opportunity to strengthen them. Some questions will provide the opportunity to add new sources of grounding.

### Significance

1. Making a **contribution** - What difference do I make - might I make? In what domains (areas) of my life do I make contributions? What are those contributions? Do I overlook or undervalue some of my contributions? Where am I not making contributions that I might focus efforts to make a difference that I would value?
2. Sense of **purpose and meaning** - What is my life about - does it have any meaning? What is my purpose? What's worth effort, worth sacrificing for? What is really significant to me? What is of central importance to me? Why am I here?
3. Sense of **identity** (many possible facets) - Who am I - what are my defining characteristics and attributes? How am I distinct, unique, singular? How am I similar, a part of, defined by the context in which I live? How do I think of myself, define or characterize myself? How might others describe me?
4. Sense of **worth/esteem** - "Of what value am I and to whom?" This can be both internally determined and externally influenced. What is it that I do or create or how I live and relate to others that gives me a sense of being worthy, of being of value, of being of quality? What do I admire or hold in esteem about myself? In what spheres of my life is my sense of worth or esteem strongest? Weakest?

*"The two most important days in your life are the day that you were born and the day you find out why."*

Mark Twain

## Relationship

5. **Affiliation/connection** with others - With whom and with what am I connected? For instance, individuals in different areas of life (home, work, community), groups, organizations, communities (from local to international), communities of faith, etc.

To what am I connected? For instance, being connected to places or settings or environments, to work processes, to technologies, to equipment, to missions or objectives.

6. Sense of having a **place and belonging** - Where am I accepted, where am I a member? Where is my place(s)? Where do I belong, feel like I belong? Where am I accepted? Where is my niche? Where do I fit? Where do I feel “right”? Where is my “home place” from which I can orient myself? Where is my base?

7. Sense of **order**, of orientation - How do I make sense of my world so I can make my way? In which parts of my life is there form and order? In which disorder or chaos? Where can I make sense of things and where can I not? How do I make sense of my life?

## Growth

8. **Discovery and mastery** - How am I becoming wiser, more complete, and capable? Where am I able to grow and develop? As a human being? As a family member in various roles? As a student? As a friend? As a worker? As a citizen? Where am I able to master new things, from skills to ways of being or leading? How am I discovering and mastering physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual challenges? Where is it most important for me to grow and develop?

9. **Creativity** - How am I expressing myself, originating or developing things (on my own or with others)? In what ways or areas am I creative, do I bring new things to life? How do I enhance life and for whom? What exists because of me?

10. **Authorship** - personal power and responsibility. How am I taking responsibility for being the author of my life and finding the power and influence to do so? In which spheres of my life do I exercise my capabilities, capacities, potentialities, faculties? Where do I have the most and least influence and impact, where am I most compelling and potent? Where am I most vital and vigorous? How am I finding my gifts and bringing them to the world?

*“Do not ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive, because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”*

Howard Thurman

## **Grounding Settings: Spheres of Life**

The basic question here is, “In which parts or spheres of my life am I grounded?” There are many possible areas of life where the different sources of grounding may grow. In fact, becoming conscious of all the small areas where we are grounded can be quite a surprise. The basic spheres include:

### **Family** – grounded as a:

- Spouse
- Mother or father
- Brother or sister
- Daughter or son
- Extended family member

### **Social Network** – grounded in connection with:

- Friends and acquaintances
- Colleagues or organization members

### **Work** – grounded in a:

- Job or project
- Role
- Profession
- Team or group
- Unit, department, division
- Company or organization

**Organizations** – grounded in my involvement in:

- Social Justice
- The arts
- Sports
- My kids' school
- Community health
- Etc.

**Community** – grounded in my:

- Neighborhood
- Local community
- Regional or state community
- National community
- International or global community

**Spiritual Realms** – grounded in my:

- Self in relationship to God (however defined – from deity to basic ground of human existence)
- Faith, religion, or set of beliefs
- Spiritual or religious groups, organizations, or communities

## **The Key Question**

**“Where and how deeply am I grounded in the different spheres of my life?”**

This question can be answered by looking at (a) specific sources of grounding and (b) in seeing in which domains those sources can be found. For example, looking at a sense of contribution as a source of grounding, the question would be, “Is my sense of contribution based on my job, my role in my family, my work in the community, my spiritual life, etc.?”

The question can also be asked in the opposite direction. For example, “What sources of grounding do I find in my work, my family, my community, etc.?”

