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TITLE: Rooting Exercise

SUMMARY: A facilitator leads visualizing exercise that explores the way plants move and communicate underground.

AGES: 10 and up

GROUP SIZE: Flexible.

SITE: Flexible. This version is scripted for an interior space. For an outdoor space see version one. Feel free to adapt for urban or rural settings.

RESOURCE LIST/SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL:

“The Intelligent Plant”, by Michael Pollan, *The New Yorker*, December 2013

Dr. Monica Gagliano & *Mimosa pudica*: Prudence Gibson, “Pavlov’s Plants”, *The Conversation*

“The Wood Wide Web”, Ed Yong, *The Atlantic*, April 2016

LEARNING & EXPERIENTIAL OUTCOMES:

- Consider differences and similarities between the way humans and plants experience and move in the world.
- Attune to the presence of soil, land, and its accumulated histories.
- Calm, center and connect body and brain in relationship to the local environment.
- Build solidarity among participants.

INSTRUCTIONS:

Stand in a loose circle with about a shoulder’s width between participants, facilitator included.

Facilitator: This is a brief exercise in vegetal mobility. We’ll begin by settling into and connecting with our human bodies. Then we’ll take that bodily awareness and attempt to use it to explore how plants sense and move in the world. Let’s begin by breathing together.

3-4 deep breaths with facilitator leading, in through nose, out through mouth, feel your abdomen rise and fall

Facilitator: Now, if you feel comfortable, go ahead and close your eyes. Take a moment to attune to your other senses. Can you feel the atmosphere your skin? Is it dry, cool, warm, in motion? Can you sense where the light is coming from? What sounds are vibrating in the air around you?

5-10 seconds of silence

Facilitator: What about the surface under your feet? Rock up on your toes, back on your heels, and try to settle down into the surface below your feet. Feel how it supports you. How you push down on it, and it pushes back.

5-10 seconds of silence

Facilitator: How far below you is the soil? What separates you from that life-giving substrate? Let's take some time to let those barriers dissolve and melt away. Start with the soles of your shoes, dissolving away so your feet meet the floor. Flex those bare feet, coming into firm contact with the smoothness of floor on your skin, then allow your bare feet to sink down through wood, steel, concrete, layers of the built environment merging into rubble, until, you're met, finally, by cool, dark, moist soil. Feel your heels sinking in, soil welling up between your toes, and pressing into your arches. Let yourself settle.

5-10 seconds of silence

Facilitator: Your feet are coming into closer and closer contact with the soil- up to your ankles now, you're very slowly descending into and merging with the earth. As you feel and sense this merging, take a moment to consider the many forms of life that helped build this soil over the eons. You're up to your shins now in the legacies of microbes, insects, plants and people who grew, harvested, digested, decomposed to build this soil. Who is building soil here, today? Sink into that reality. Wiggle your toes- Feel tiny tendrils begin to reach out, budding from under your toenails, from the hollows of your ankles, from the base of your heels, threading their way between rocks and compressed soil, finding tiny cracks and crevices with pockets of air and water.

5-10 seconds of silence

Facilitator: These tiny tendrils are roots. As they thread their way through the soil, they meet other organisms. How does it feel to intertwine with delicate white wisps of fungus? With the roots of other plants? Beneficial relationships form this way. Try to communicate & learn through the soil. Feel the give and take of water and nutrients.

5-10 seconds of silence

Facilitator: Now that you're beginning to root, let's explore your life above ground. You're firmly anchored at your base, growing and learning below ground. Now try flexing your trunk or stem- lean gently to your right, then to your left. Maybe there's a slight breeze that causes you to undulate north to south, or east to west. A new barrier, like fence, wall, or another plant, pushing on you. Will you lean in or recoil? What can your base support? Can you lean towards the light?

Can you spread your limbs, rolling your shoulders and lifting your arms? Leaf out by spreading your hands, wiggling your fingers. Perhaps the weight of your extremities, drought, or heat, causes you to droop and wilt. Let yourself soften, then right yourself again. Spend a little time learning what your above ground half can do. How might you respond to the inputs around you?

15-20 seconds of silence

Facilitator: Remember as you move that your above ground life is supported by a robust life in the soil. Don't forget your roots. As you bend and sway in the wind, your root network is actively expanding. Have you encountered a rich patch of soil? A large bolder to work around? Leaching toxins or a concentration of nutrients? Try to stretch your root network laterally, out around you, and also push it down

below you. Do you have a strong deep taproot that reaches groundwater? Or a shallow horizontal network that spreads way beyond our circle? Are you intertwining with your neighbors and sharing nutrients and information? Maybe you have rhizomes spreading in the soil, pushing up new clones of yourself in a sunny, open spot nearby. Spend a little while attending to your underground life as you continue to bend and flex your above-ground self.

60 seconds of silence

Facilitator: Now it's time to start to return to the human. We'll leave that robust root network underground to decompose and enrich the soil. Feel your toes, heels, ankles separating from roots. Wiggle and flex them a little. Then when you're ready, start to flex one of your legs. Jiggle a knee, curl a foot. Feel soil dislodging. Then slowly pull a foot up from the earth, and uproot. Take one step forward, and another. Open your eyes.

Discussion questions:

- What did you notice most during this experience? When were you most engaged? When were you bored? Why?
- What else moves in ways that are different than how humans move? What other kinds of visualizing exercises might we do to (attempt) to get outside human notions of time and movement?
- Did you have any realizations about life as a plant during the exercise? Or any realizations about life as a human?
- How would this exercise be different if it was done in a different location? Did anything about the place we did the exercise define the experience?

