

## *Four*

# Stories of Sorrow: Rituals of Renewal

The heart that breaks open can  
contain the whole universe.

—JOANNA MACY

In the desert of the Kalahari, the people known as the !Kung regularly gather to tend their community by holding an all-night healing ritual. Sometimes the ritual is called because someone is ill or has suffered a loss. At other times, it is part of the ongoing maintenance of the people. At least four times a month, they gather to care for the needs of the people.

The ritual begins at dusk, when women gather around the fire and begin singing and rhythmically clapping. This signals to the men and other women that it is time to dance. Slowly, over the course of the night, the energy builds until one or more of the dancers are filled with the power of *Num*—the healing energy of the cosmos. Contact with the *Num* is intense, bordering on painful, and at times it is overwhelming. It is like kissing lightning. When the *Num* arrives, the dancer shakes, often falling to the ground in a state of intense excitement. Once contacted, the *Num* is transferred into those who

are ill or grieving, and healing takes place. Those who risk contacting the *Num* don't do so on their own behalf, but for the sake of the community as a whole. Everyone is touched and soothed, held and comforted. It is an intimate and soulful time. In the morning, after the ritual is complete, everyone feels happy, and the village is renewed. Their regular visit to the healing ground keeps them healthy in body, soul, and community.

The Navajo have a similar process. To the Navajo, healing is seen in the context of their particular vision of the world and cosmos; it is a ritual of restoring balance, a return to beauty, or *hozho*. Beauty is the central organizing principle in their culture—not economics, technology, or politics. It is through beauty that all relations are maintained, and it is when beauty is lost or forgotten that someone gets ill.

Healing is experienced within a defined set of rituals that includes extensive community participation and elaborate sand paintings depicting gods, places, and events specifically centered on the illness being treated. Chants tell the story of the paintings. Healing occurs as a result of the direct interaction of the gods in the images with the individual and the witnessing community.

Thus healing is a restorative process invoking beauty through ritual. The powerful presence of the family and community of the individual who is ill broadens the context of illness to include the entire village. This recognizes that everyone is impacted by the illness. This is powerful medicine, as it frees the individual from having to carry the weight of the illness alone, which, as we have seen, is a major preoccupation of the Western mind.

Imagine the feeling of relief that would flood our whole being if we knew that when we were in the grip of sorrow or illness, our village would respond to our need. This would not be out of pity, but out of a realization that every one of us will take our turn at being ill, and we will need one another. The indigenous thought is when

one of us is ill, all of us are ill. Taking this thought a little further, we see that healing is a matter, in great part, of having our connections to the community and the cosmos restored. This truth has been acknowledged in many studies. Our immune response is strengthened when we feel our connection with community. By regularly renewing the bonds of belonging, we support our ability to remain healthy and whole.

Nearly every indigenous culture has utilized ritual as a means of maintaining the health of the community, which has helped them endure for thousands of years. Ritual is a means of attuning ourselves with one another, to the land, and to the invisible worlds of spirit. Recovering this fundamental skill would help us better tend the needs of our soul and culture. For us to enter the healing ground, we need to become educated in the ways of ritual. It is a language that we have forgotten, but one that we are designed to understand and speak. We need to recover our ritual literacy.

Ritual offers us the two things required to fully let go of the grief we carry: *containment* and *release*. Containment offers the holding space for the ones in grief. It provides the *safe place to fall*, to descend into the depths of both the known and unknown layers of sorrow. I witnessed this beautifully during funeral rituals in Africa. For three days the community holds the bereaved within an elegant choreography of wailers, dancers, drummers, singers, witnesses, all focused on tending to their needs. This holding allows those deep in the throes of anguish to surrender completely to the requirements of grief. Nothing is held back; everything is thrown into the other world for the sake of the one who died. This is especially important, as it is their belief that the deceased cannot get to the land of the ancestors without a *river of tears*.

In the absence of this depth of community, the safe container is difficult to find. By default, we become the container ourselves, and when this happens, we cannot drop into the well of grief in which



we can fully let go of the sorrows we carry. We recycle our grief, moving into it and then pulling it back into our bodies unreleased. Frequently in my practice patients tell me that they often cry in private. I ask them whether, at some point in this process, they ever allow their grief to be witnessed and shared with others. There is usually a quick retort of “No, I couldn’t do that. I don’t want to be a burden to anyone else.” When I push it a little further and ask them how it would feel if a friend came to them with his or her sorrows and pain, they respond that they would feel honored to sit with their friend and offer support. This disconnection between what we would offer others and what we feel we can ask for is extreme. We need to recover our right to ask for help in grief, otherwise it will continue to recycle perpetually. Grief has *never* been private; it has always been communal. Subconsciously, we are awaiting the presence of others, before we can feel safe enough to drop to our knees on the holy ground of sorrow.

Psychotherapist Miriam Greenspan uses the term *intervulnerability* to describe the need for this mutually held space. When asked about this idea in an interview, she replied,

When I say we are “intervulnerable,” I mean we suffer together, whether consciously or unconsciously. Albert Einstein called the idea of a separate self an “optical delusion of consciousness.” Martin Luther King Jr. said that we are all connected in an “inescapable web of mutuality.” There’s no way out, though we try to escape by armoring ourselves against pain and in the process diminishing our lives and our consciousness. But in our *intervulnerability* is our salvation, because awareness of the mutuality of suffering impels us to search for ways to heal the whole, rather than encase ourselves in a bubble of denial and impossible individualism. At this point in history, it seems that we will either destroy ourselves or find a way to build a sustainable life together.<sup>52</sup>

Welcoming our sorrow eases the hardened places within us, allowing them to open and freeing us to once more feel our kinship with the living presence around us. This is deep activism, soul activism that actually encourages us to connect with the tears of the world. Grief keeps the heart flexible, fluid, and open to others. As such, it becomes a potent support for any other form of activism we may intend to take. I have worked with many people involved in social justice, ecological protection, and other forms of activism. I remember one man in his sixties who shared that he waked at five every morning with overwhelming feelings of dread for the world. His accumulated grief had become oppressive, weighing him down and strangling his ability to effectively address the issues with which he was concerned. After he attended a grief ritual that I offered in his hometown, he felt the weight lift from his heart. Our activism is directly connected to our heart's ability to respond to the world. A congested heart, one burdened with unexpressed sorrow, cannot stay open to the world and, consequently, cannot be fully available for the healing work so needed at this time.

## The Sacred Space of Ritual

It is in the sacred space of ritual that we are most able to acknowledge the weight of the grief we carry. We have, in modern culture, little understanding of the ways ritual works or how it can move us into a space capable of fully releasing our long-held sorrows.

We are creatures of ritual. We have been using rituals for tens of thousands of years. Ancient burial sites include careful placement of artifacts with the dead, such as bones carved and covered with ochre, pieces of flint for the hunt in the next world, food, and ornamented beads. In fact, grief over the loss of a loved one may have elicited our first ritual actions. There is something about ritual that resonates deep in the bone. It is a "language older than words," relying not



so much on speech as on gestures, rhythms, movements, and emotion. In this sense, ritual addresses something far more primal than language.

The urge to create rituals to help us hold the intensity of day-to-day living exists deep within our psychic structure. For most of our history, rituals provided the means by which the community could address the need for healing and renew the people's relationship with the place where they lived. Over generations, a call-and-response between the individual, the community, and the land evolved that centered on ritual as the primary technology for maintenance of the living world. Today, in the absence of communal rituals that hold and sustain our psychic lives, we often unconsciously fall into ritualized behaviors. These patterns, however, do not carry what is required to make them soul-nourishing practices. In the end we will either participate in ritual deliberately, which binds us to soul, community, nature, and the sacred, or we will be reduced to repetitive patterns of addiction, compulsion, or routines lacking the artistry and renewal of genuine ritual.

### What Is Ritual?

Simply said, ritual is any gesture done with emotion and intention by an individual or a group that attempts to connect the individual or the community with transpersonal energies for the purposes of healing and transformation. Ritual is the pitch through which the personal and collective voices of our longing and creativity are extended to the unseen dimensions of life, beyond our conscious minds and into the realms of nature and spirit.

Ritual is a form of direct knowing, something indigenous to the psyche. It has evolved with us, taking knowing into the bone, into our very marrow. I call ritual an *embodied process*. Author and ritual facilitator Z. Budapest says, "The purpose of ritual is to wake up the



old mind in us, to put it to work. The old ones inside us, the collective unconscious, the many lives, the different eternal parts, the senses and parts of the brain that have been ignored. Those parts do not speak English. They do not care about television. But they do understand candlelight and colors. They do understand nature.”<sup>53</sup> Ritual is the original art form, weaving the personal and the communal in ways that help us relate directly with the larger, unseen world.

Rituals rise from the land, surfacing through the bedrock and the soil, and enter the imagination of the people that live there. In this sense, rituals evolve to reflect the entire context of the people’s lives—the terrain, the animals and plants, the communal wounds, the patterns of weather, the stories and myth, the collective suffering, the beliefs. All these things combine and arise in a dream state requiring expression in ritual form. Rituals also reflect the shared values and mythos of the community. While we have much to learn from indigenous cultures about forms of rituals and how ritual works, we cannot simply adopt their rituals and settle them neatly onto our psyches. It is important that we listen deeply, once again, to the dreaming earth and craft rituals that are indigenous to us, that reflect our unique patterns of wounding and disconnection from the land. These rituals will have the potency to mend what has been torn, heal what has been neglected. This is one way that we may return to the land and offer our deepest amends to those we have harmed.

There are many concerns that are addressed through ritual; these are universal themes: healing, gratitude, initiation, visionary or divinatory processes, grief, maintenance, renewing the earth, reconciliation, and peacemaking. How they are expressed is unique to each culture. For example, while the underlying intent is the same, the healing rituals of the !Kung are vastly different from those of the Navajo. Their styles are a reflection of the land on which they live, the mythology of their culture, and the particular ways they envision healing.

I wrote earlier about the use of ritual in working with grief. Ritual provides the essential elements for this work. Most notably, it offers the necessary structure to hold the wild and eruptive moods of sorrow. It helps us shift the weight of the pain and emotions we are carrying, allowing us to set down portions of the burden. Ritual also evokes a feeling of reverence, a sense of the sacred. Not every loss requires a ritual, though every grief we carry is worthy of the sustained attention that is offered by ritual.

### The Purpose of Ritual

Ritual touches us in many ways. One of its most powerful impacts is that it breaks us open to a vast and more enchanted world. The first function of ritual is to enable us to become *transparent to the transcendent*, to use Joseph Campbell's phrase. It fosters our link to the great mystery. Ritual elicits a certain vibration, a pitch, that enables us to individually or communally connect with the sacred. This pitch activates the psyche. In ritual space, movement, rhythm, expression of emotion, and direction of attention all open gateways to the sacred. At every grief ritual we have held, there has been a palpable sense of the sacred. We call upon this mysterious presence to help us do the work we cannot do alone. The sacred becomes the larger holding space for the community to do the work we have come to do.

Secondly, there is a *reparative function* to ritual. It sutures the tears in the soul that occur in the daily rounds of living. We live in a culture that has forgotten the basic needs of the soul. This is especially important today, as our world is increasingly dominated by the rhythm of the machine. As we succumb to the pressure to adapt to this rapid-fire world, we feel ripped out of our own natural human rhythms. Many of us feel exhausted, flattened by the energy expended to keep up with the pace of culture. These ruptures in our emotional lives are frequent, and yet we lack the basic requirements for restoration



and healing. African healer and elder Malidoma Somé calls ritual the *anti-machine*.<sup>54</sup> Ritual helps us remember and reestablish our inner rhythms and to place them once again in accord with the deeper cadence of our soul. It restores our psychic foundations. By this I mean we are aided in ritual space to remember what we really need to live in community with other humans and the natural world in a meaningful and enlivening manner. Living as we do in the belly of a soul-eating culture, it is imperative that we have measures that can help us come back to soul, especially in times of crisis.

On one occasion our community was faced with a profound trauma. I received a phone call late in the evening from a woman telling me that she and her daughter had been in a terrible accident. It had been raining, and visibility had been very limited. The daughter was driving, and as they headed up a nearby road, a man suddenly stepped out into the road in front of the car; there was no possibility of avoiding him. They bolted out of the car, one running to get help, the other to comfort the man. Unfortunately, by the time help arrived, he had died. It was sudden and tragic.

These women were a part of a ritual village training that I was leading. Fortunately, we were scheduled to meet the next day to hold our second full day of teaching. As I talked with the woman on the phone, I suggested that they both come to the training the next day and that we would do what we could to help them deal with this overwhelming event. She agreed. I then asked that they arrive about an hour later than usual. We would address their trauma as a community.

When I got to the meeting, I informed everyone about what had happened and that we were being called into emergency service. We needed to create a healing ritual for the woman and her daughter to help them restore their emotional equilibrium. When they arrived, the daughter was cold and shaky. She looked ashen and lost. We crafted a beautiful process for them that included comforting touch,



washing of hands and feet, and ample holding. We also utilized some cross-cultural practices such as smudging with sage, brushing them with rosemary branches and anointing them with ash. Sage is used as a way to clear the psychic space, rosemary cleanses the energy field, and ash has been used in many cultures for protection.

Slowly, over the course of hours, warmth returned to the bodies of the two women, and a sense of presence was restored to their souls. The accident could have triggered a major case of post-traumatic stress disorder, but it was eased and brought into the tolerable realm of grief and sorrow. The two women were hungry by the end of the ritual, a very good sign, and we all shared food and a feeling of having been knit together as a community by this intense experience. The reparative function of ritual was powerfully displayed.

The third function of ritual is that it *invites the denied and forgotten aspects of psyche to show up*, those abandoned parts of who we are. Ritual provides a space potent enough to bring in the undeveloped aspects of our lives in order to help them mature. This is possible because the container, the safe space generated within the ritual field, is capable of holding the intensity of emotions associated with these aspects of soul. This is a pivotal function of ritual. However, inviting in the wounded, neglected, and rejected parts of our psychic life is risky. Without an adequate holding space to contain the emotional release that accompanies the return of these parts, we cannot commit to allowing them to return home. Psychologist Robert Moore writes, "Deep structural change requires a reliable psychosocial framing, the facilitation of a holding environment that can help individuals and groups tolerate the terrors of change, with its attendant painful truths and emotions."<sup>55</sup>

Ritual is a practice that seeks to make the repressed visible. This is, in part, why we fear it. On some instinctual level, we know the power of ritual; we recognize its potential to disrupt our ordered lives. And this is precisely why we need it.



The repressed aspects of our lives carry an intense energy. One man requested a healing ritual to deal with his feelings of hopelessness and depression. He carried a hidden life of alcoholism and was skilled at keeping this part of his life concealed. When the ritual began, however, this buried piece of his soul life rushed to the foreground, demanding to be seen. We asked him to share more about his drinking and how it was siphoning off his life, destroying his work and marriage. He tried to push the group away with a bellowing stance, but we did not yield. In that ritual, something shifted in his heart and the grief of his exile burst out in a great cry.

In ritual space, something inside of us shimmers, quickens, and aligns itself with a larger, more vital element. We are released from the limiting constraints of our collective agreements, such as not showing our emotions in public, not bothering anyone with our troubles, and remaining stoic and self-contained with our pain. This release allows us to enter into a fuller expression of who we are. This is both freeing and frightening. We become vivid in ritual space, exposed and transparent. This is exactly what we need and what we fear.

I was teaching at a university in Oakland, California, several years ago. The class was called *Reclaiming Our Indigenous Soul*. On the first day of class, I started by drumming and inviting the students to get up out of their chairs and dance. They all did so, and after I was done drumming, one of the students, a nun in her mid-seventies, came to me and asked, "Is there any way we could talk privately?" I said, "Sure. I could come down early next week, and we could spend some time together." She paused and then asked, "Is there any way that could happen today?" I said, "Let me make a couple of calls and see." I did, and it worked out that after the class was over, we sat down in a little room and talked about what was happening for her. She said, "When you started drumming, an old memory came to me that I haven't thought of for years. When I was fifteen, I was a novice at

the convent. I had only been there a couple of weeks, when my father died. The Mother Superior called me into her office and told me the news. Then she said to me. 'You may go to the funeral, but if you go, you cannot come back. And if you stay, you cannot cry.' I stayed. I lay in my bed every night shaking, trying to keep the tears inside. And when you started drumming, it all came flooding back in."

My heart was breaking as I listened to her story. I promised her that in two weeks we would hold a grief ritual. I told her it couldn't happen earlier, because we needed to prepare the class for the deep work of grieving together, but in the meantime, I encouraged her to tell her classmates what she had shared with me.

The next week we began the preparations for the ritual. Everyone had stories to share, losses untouched and unattended. The following week we set up a shrine to receive the grief; we said an invocation and entered the intense field of decades-old sorrow. This woman went to the shrine many times, lying on the floor and sobbing her heart out. For the first time in over sixty years, she was able to grieve the death of her father. It was a moment of healing and grace. Everyone was moved by this shared experience. The last time she went to the shrine, she did not cry. She sat there, still, silent like a stone. Afterward everyone shared their experiences, and she said, "The last time I went up to the shrine, I saw a Native American woman holding a child. I was that child. This was the first time I felt like I belonged."

Ritual is able to hold the long-discarded shards of our stories and make them whole again. It has the strength and elasticity to contain what we cannot hold on our own, what we cannot face in solitude. As this nun's story beautifully illustrates, it is never too late to grieve these buried pieces of soul.

When we enter the healing ground, we are stepping into an alternate reality. In this space, the rules of consensus reality dim, and those of another possibility emerge. The usual agreements—such



as not weeping together side-by-side or holding one another when in the throes of sorrow—don't hold in ritual space. Ritual signals to the psyche that a different order has been established, one that invites alternate styles of behavior and modes of social engagement. For example, we don't normally all weep together, but somehow, when we step across the threshold into a grief ritual, it feels right. We enter a *borderland state* between our individual lives and the unseen world of spirit. This is the terrain of radical change.

Ritual provides the elements necessary to help transform whatever it is we are carrying in our psyches. It may be fear, grief, rage, or shame. It may be that as a community, we have been shattered by the loss of one or more of our youth through murder, suicide, or war. Whatever it is, it evokes an emotional response that necessitates a holding space in which we can invite everything to be present. In this way, ritual provides sufficient intensity to help access the emotions that are present. We need its heat at times to help us cook these states into something new.

Ritual provides something else that we deeply need: a level of witnessing that truly enables us to be seen. Attention is necessary for embodiment, for fully stepping into the world in an open and vulnerable way. There is something sacred about sustained attention; it deepens the connection between all present. I have repeatedly seen individuals reveal themselves in remarkable ways inside ritual space. There is a fierce grace that comes with this type of transparency, as it removes all strategies of concealment and falseness and exposes the raw and naked pieces of our soul to the community. I remember, in a number of rituals, men who always hung back, but finally they found the courage to approach the grief shrine near the end of the ritual and express their pent-up rage over their pain and suffering. Each of these men pounded the floor, shouted, wept, and shook. They had been waiting for this level of witnessing in order to fully reveal what they were carrying in their souls.

Sometimes, after years of being alone with our pain, the offer of deep attention initiates a radical shift in our worldview. One woman contacted us following a grief ritual to share how this level of being witnessed had changed her life. She said she had arrived at the weekend terrified and not even sure if she could stay.

I never would have thought that raw, searing grief and sorrow could bring out the most tender, generous, compassionate, and loving sides of total strangers. It was exquisite. I will carry this with me for the rest of my life. I saw in the darkest corners of our pain and grief, something very beautiful. Suffering compels us to reach. When you find a channel for your rage and deepest suffering, and there's another hand there reaching back, what lies in the wake of it all, is finally—blessed peace. Calm. Nothing has changed about your loss ... it's still there. But your relationship with it has been greatly altered. You have been heard and held tenderly. You have been drained. And then you can open yourself up again. You can start to rebuild in that annihilated place.<sup>56</sup>

Rituals are intended to take us into those places where we can engage with the difficulties in our lives in ways that are potentially transformative. They help us move from places where we feel stuck into territories of fresh living.

While most of us have a difficult time touching our sorrow, some of us feel that we may have gotten lost in it; we feel that grief has taken up permanent residence in our hearts and souls. We are trapped, unable to break free from the emotions that swirl around our sorrow. Grief becomes an identity, a way of locating ourselves in the world. It can become a place of hiding.

One man with whom I worked had lost his wife to cancer about eight years earlier. It was clear that he still carried a great deal of grief for her death. There was something about the grief, however, that made me wonder whether he was unconsciously using it as a



way to avoid retaking his place in the world. I didn't assume that this was a conscious decision on his part, but one day these words came out of my mouth: "I think you are hiding in your grief. I have no right to say this to you. Your loss is real, and yet I have this feeling that you have found a place to hide." I didn't know what to expect as a response, but something inside of him registered the truth of what I was saying. He began to see how his clinging to the grief excused him from the risk of loving again, of venturing back out into a world that could hurt him once more. As we explored this further, it became clear that we needed to find a way to help him move in the direction of being engaged with the world. We arranged a ritual with his community and made the necessary preparations for the event.

I asked him to gather some objects that represented his marriage, things that he would be willing to burn in the ritual. He found some objects and placed them inside a small coffin made by one of the men in the community. He also wrote out "The Days of Sorrow," a list of the fateful days of his wife's illness: the day the cancer was diagnosed, the day they told the children, the day it was declared terminal, the day she entered the hospital, and the day she died. He also wrote "The Days of Joy": the day they got married, the birthdates of their children, his wife's birthday and his. Finally, he prepared a statement of commitment that he would share that night.

On the night of a full moon, we met on a hill and started two fires. The first fire was dedicated to receiving the coffin, the Days of Sorrow, and his tears. This was where he needed to set down his grief. He wept and talked to his wife, telling her that he had to get on with his life. It was very tender. After some time, he felt as though he was ready to move on. I had him stand and take in the world around him: the rising moon, the setting sun, the feeling of the fire, everything that surrounded him. I told him, "This is your home. This is where you live. You cannot live in her world. You live

here.” As I said that, he nodded, and we stepped away from the fire. He turned and proceeded to a threshold we had created between the two fires, a symbolic boundary that separated the old world from the one he needed to reenter. He stepped across this line and made his way to the second fire, where he shared the “Days of Joy” and his declaration to be alive. Then he shattered an object that represented the old agreements. He felt free. As Terry Tempest Williams has said, “Grief dares us to love once more.”

Some months after the ritual, I checked in with him. He told me that he was dating again and stepping into his world in new ways. The ritual had offered him a way to return to his life.

One of the central gifts of deep ritual is its ability to help us enter a state of *derangement*. This word is ominous, conjuring images of men and women out of control, wreaking havoc across the countryside with weapons and terror. What I mean by *derangement* is simply a state that is beyond our normal way of perceiving and experiencing ourselves and the world. Ritual invites the full expression of our long-suppressed emotions. Grief, in particular, requires a *letting go* whereby we drop deeply into the well of sorrow that has gathered and is longing for release. We cannot do this without entering into an altered state. Derangement is necessary because our current emotional “arrangement” is not working. We often find ourselves clinging to control, self-conscious, hyper-vigilant, and fearful of showing our emotions to others. This carefully “arranged” relationship with life denies us the freedom to receive the support we require from our community in times of loss. When we cross the threshold and enter into the healing ground of ritual, we are able to pass into a territory that grants us permission to be authentically who we are. This move initiates a rearrangement that brings us closer to the genuine nature of the soul. We don’t want to come out of ritual the same as we entered. We step into ritual ground in the hope of being changed.



In ritual space, the community that has gathered may experience a shared derangement. At the end of a grief ritual, one man observed, "We conjured some weather today. You know, like one of those big midwestern storms with dark clouds and lots of thunder. Then the storm broke, and now the air is clean and fresh." These times of entering into a shared state of attunement offer a unique opportunity to experience what anthropologist Victor Turner called *communitas*.<sup>57</sup> From his time living with various tribes in Africa, he witnessed how the feeling of belonging and social bonding were strengthened in the midst of deep ritual process. We need times of *communitas*, times that reinforce our connection with one another. Ritual can bring us into that state of togetherness, and there we can remember our deeper affinity and communality.

Ritual does not rid us of the wounds we carry or free us forever from the weight of grief. Ritual is a maintenance practice that offers us the means of tending wounds and sorrows, for offering gratitude, and for reconciling conflicts, thereby allowing our psyches regular periods of release and renewal. Being human is hard, especially in a society virtually devoid of rituals that are intended to help us wade through the waters of living intact. When we accumulate too much grief or feel outside the circle of welcome for too long and cannot see any means to resolve the breach, we spin toward depression or wander into the wasteland of toxic bitterness. Ritual offers us a way home.

Learning how to bring ritual into our lives helps us face whatever arrives at our door. Ritual is a covering, a mantle that protects us in times of great need. The stories I have shared reveal the ways that we are held within the sacred space of ritual. Once again, I encourage you to experiment with rituals. Gather a circle of people and allow the imagination to inform the moment. We need to build faith in ourselves as ritually literate people. At times we will be asked to create rituals that can dress the wounds of suffering in our community;

someone has died or is ill, has lost his or her job or is facing a divorce. At other times, we will need to spontaneously create a ritual to help hold space for someone who is in intense pain and grief. It can be very simple. The main thing is that we begin to take risks, that we contribute something to the moment that can potentially offer healing. Once we begin the ritual, it is out of our hands; it now belongs to Spirit. Life is far too complex to rely solely on our intellect. We need the invisible hands of Spirit to shelter us, to support us, and to offer us the nourishing comfort that comes from that Other World. This concert between the human and the sacred is ancient; it is held in the bones. Trust this bond. It is our healing ground.