

 CHAPTER 12

Marking Territory: The Boundaries of Rage and Forgiveness

The Crescent Moon Bear

Under the tutelage of Wild Woman we reclaim the ancient, the intuitive, and the passionate. When our lives reflect hers, we act cohesively. We carry through, or learn to if we don't already know how. We take the steps to make our ideas manifest in the world. We regain focus when we lose it, attend to personal rhythms, draw closer to friends and mates who are in accord with wildish and integral rhythms. We choose relationships that nurture our creative and instinctive lives. We reach out to nurture others. And we are willing to teach receptive mates about wildish rhythms if need be.

But there is another aspect to mastery, and that is dealing with what can only be called women's rage. The release of that rage is required. Once women remember the origins of their rage, they feel they may never stop grinding their teeth. Ironically, we also feel very anxious to disperse our rage, for it feels distressing and noxious. We wish to hurry up and do away with it.

But repressing it will not work. It is like trying to put fire into a burlap bag. Neither is it good to scald ourselves or someone else with

it. So there we are holding a powerful emotion that we feel came upon us, unbidden. It is a little like toxic waste; there it is, no one wants it, but there are few disposal areas for it. One has to travel far in order to find a burial ground. Here is a literary version of a brief Japanese tale that I've detailed over the years. I call it "*Tsukina Waguma*, The Crescent Moon Bear." I believe it can help us see our way through this matter. The core of the story was given to me as "The Bear," by Sgt. I. Sagara, WWII veteran and patient at Hines Veteran's Assistance Hospital in Illinois many years ago.

THERE ONCE WAS a young woman who lived in a fragrant pine forest. Her husband was away fighting a war for many years. When finally he was released from duty, he trudged home in a most foul mood. He refused to enter the house, for he had become used to sleeping on stones. He kept to himself and stayed in the forest day and night.

His young wife was so excited when she learned her husband was coming home at last. She cooked and shopped and shopped and cooked and made dishes and dishes and bowls and bowls of tasty white soybean curd and three kinds of fish, and three kinds of seaweed, and rice sprinkled with red pepper, and nice cold prawns, big and orange.

Smiling shyly, she carried the food to the woods and knelt beside her war-weary husband and offered to him the beautiful food she had prepared. But he sprang to his feet and kicked the trays over so that the bean curd spilled, the fish jumped into the air, the seaweed and rice spilled into the dirt, and the big orange prawns went rolling down the path.

"Leave me alone!" he roared, and turned his back on her. He became so enraged she was frightened of him. Time after time this occurred until finally, in desperation, the young wife found her way to the cave of the healer who lived outside the village.

"My husband has been badly injured in the war," the wife said. "He rages continuously and eats nothing. He wishes to stay outside and will not live with me as before. Can you give me a potion that will make him loving and gentle once again?"

The healer assured her, "This I can do for you, but I need a special ingredient. Unfortunately, I am all out of hair from the crescent moon bear. So, you must climb the mountain, find the black bear, and bring me back a single hair from the crescent moon at its throat. Then I can give you what you need, and life will be good again."

Some women would have felt daunted by this task. Some women would have thought the entire effort impossible. But not she, for she was a woman who loved. "Oh! I am so grateful," she said. "It is so good to know that something can be done."

So she readied for her journey, and the next morning she went out to the mountain. And she sang out "*Arigato zaishö*," which is a way of greeting the mountain and saying, "Thank you for letting me climb upon your body."

She climbed into the foothills where there were boulders like big loaves of bread. She ascended up to a plateau covered with forest. The trees had long draping boughs and leaves that looked like stars.

"*Arigato zaishö*," she sang out. This was a way of thanking the trees for lifting their hair so she could pass underneath. And so she found her way through the forest and began to climb again.

It was harder now. The mountain had thorny flowers that seized the hem of her kimono, and rocks that scraped her tiny hands. Strange dark birds flew out at her in the dusk and frightened her. She knew they were *muen-botoke*, spirits of the dead who had no relatives, and she sang out prayers for them: "I will be your relative. I will lay you to rest."

Still she climbed, for she was a woman who loved. She climbed till she saw snow on the mountain peak. Soon her feet were wet and cold, and still she climbed higher, for she was a woman who loved. A storm began, and the snow blew straight into her eyes and deep into her ears. Blinded, still she climbed higher. And when the snow stopped, the woman sang out "*Arigato zaishö*," to thank the winds for ceasing to blind her.

She took shelter in a shallow cave and could barely pull all of herself into it. Though she had a full pack of food, she did not eat, but covered herself in leaves and slept. In the morning, the air was calm and little green plants even showed through the snow here and there. "Ah," she thought, "now, for the crescent moon bear."

She searched all day and near twilight found thick cords of scat and needed look no farther, for a gigantic black bear lumbered across the snowfall, leaving behind deep pad and claw marks. The crescent moon bear roared fiercely and entered its den. She reached into her

bundle and placed the food she had brought in a bowl. She set the bowl outside the den and ran back to her shelter to hide. The bear smelled the food and came lurching from its den, roaring so loudly it shook loose little stones. The bear circled around the food from a distance, sampled the wind many times, then ate the food up in one gulp. The great bear reared up, snuffled the air again, and then disappeared into its den.

The next evening the woman did the same, setting out the food, but this time instead of returning to her shelter she retreated only halfway. The bear smelled the food, heaved itself out of its den, roared to shake the stars from the skies, circled, tested the air very cautiously, but finally gobbled up the food and crawled back into its den. This continued for many nights until one dark blue night the woman felt brave enough to wait even closer to the bear's den.

She put the food in the bowl outside the den and stood right by the opening. When the bear smelled the food and lumbered out, it saw not only the usual food but also a pair of small human feet as well. The bear turned its head sideways and roared so loudly it made the bones in the woman's body hum.

The woman trembled, but stood her ground. The bear hauled itself onto its back legs, smacked its jaws, and roared so that the woman could see right up into the red-and-brown roof of its mouth. But she did not run away. The bear roared even more and put out its arms as though to seize her, its ten claws hanging like ten long knives over her scalp. The woman shook like a leaf in high wind, but stayed right where she was.

"Oh, please, dear bear," she pleaded, "please, dear bear, I've come all this way because I need a cure for my husband." The bear brought its front paws to earth in a spray of snow and peered into the woman's frightened face. For a moment, the woman felt she could see entire mountain ranges, valleys, rivers, and villages reflected in the bear's old, old eyes. A deep peace settled over her, and her trembling ceased.

"Please, dear bear, I've been feeding you all these past nights. Could I please have one of the hairs from the crescent moon on your throat?" The bear paused. This little woman would be easy food. Yet suddenly he was filled with pity for her. "It is true," said the crescent moon bear, "you've been good to me. You may have one of my hairs. But take it quickly, then leave here and go back to your own."

The bear raised its great snout so that the white crescent on its throat showed, and the woman could see the strong pulse of the

bear's heart there. The woman put one hand on the bear's neck, and with her other took hold of a single glossy white hair. Quickly, she pulled it. The bear reared back and cried out as though wounded. And this pain then settled into annoyed huffs.

"Oh, thank you, crescent moon bear, thank you so much." The woman bowed and bowed. But the bear growled and lumbered forward a step. It roared at the woman in words she could not understand and yet words she had somehow known all her life. She turned and fled down the mountain as fast as she could. She ran under the trees with leaves shaped like stars. And all the way through she cried "*Arigato zaishö*," to thank the trees for lifting their boughs so she could pass. She stumbled over the boulders that looked like big loaves of bread, crying "*Arigato zaishö*," to thank the mountain for letting her climb upon its body.

Though her clothes were ragged, her hair askew, her face soiled, she ran down the stone stairs that led to the village, down the dirt road and right through the town to its other side, and into the hovel where the old healer sat tending the fire.

"Look, look! I have it, I found it, I claimed it, a hair of the crescent moon bear!" cried the young woman.

"Ah good," said the healer with a smile. She peered closely at the woman and took the pure white hair and held it out toward the light. She weighed the long hair in one old hand, measured it with one finger, and exclaimed, "Ah. Yes! This is an authentic hair from the crescent moon bear." Then suddenly she turned and threw the hair deep into the fire, where it popped and crackled and was consumed in a bright orange flame.

"No!" cried the young wife. "What have you done!?"

"Be calm. It is good. All is well," said the healer. "Remember each step you took to climb the mountain? Remember each step you took to capture the trust of the crescent moon bear? Remember what you saw, what you heard, and what you felt?"

"Yes," said the woman, "I remember very well."

The old healer smiled at her gently and said, "Please now, my daughter, go home with your new understandings and proceed in the same ways with your husband."

Rest optional Rage as Teacher

The central motif of this story, the quest for a magical item, is found throughout the world. In some cases it is a woman who makes the journey, in others a man. The magical thing being sought is an eyelash, a nose hair, a tooth, a ring, a feather, or some other physical element. Variations on the motif of an animal part or pelt as treasure are found in Korea, Germany, and the Urals. In China, the donor is often a tiger. In Japan, the animal in the story is sometimes a bear, sometimes a fox. In Russia, the object sought is the beard of a bear. In one tale from my family, the hair sought is a whisker from the chin of the Baba Yaga herself.

"The Crescent Moon Bear" story belongs to a category of tales I call aperture stories. Aperture stories allow us to glimpse their hidden healing structures and deeper meanings, rather than just their overt contents. The content of this story shows us that patience will help anger, but the larger transmission is about what a woman must do in order to restore order in the psyche, thereby healing the angry self.

In aperture stories, things are implied rather than stated. In this tale, the understructure reveals an entire model for dealing with, and healing from rage: by seeking a wise and calm healing force (going to the healer), accepting the challenge of going into psychic territory one has never approached before (climbing the mountain), recognizing the illusions (dealing with climbing the boulders, running under the trees), putting one's old and obsessive thoughts and feelings to rest (meeting the *muen-botoke*, restless spirits without relatives to bury them), soliciting the great compassionate Self (patiently feeding the bear and the bear returning her kindness), understanding the roaring side of the compassionate psyche (recognizing that the bear, the compassionate Self, is not tame).

The story demonstrates the importance of bringing this psychological knowledge down to earth in our real lives (coming down off the mountain and back into the village), learning that healing is in the process of questing and practice, not in a single idea (destruction of the hair). The heart of the story is, "Apply all these things to one's rage, and all will be well" (advice from the healer to go home and apply these principles).

This story is one of a group of stories that begin with the protagonist appealing to or soliciting an injured, lonely creature of one sort or another. If we look at the story as if all components were part of

a single woman's psyche, we can see that the psyche has a very angry and tortured sector as represented by the image of the husband home from the war. The loving spirit of the psyche, the wife, takes it upon herself to find a cure for this anger and rage so she and her love can live in peace and with love once again. This is a worthy endeavor for all women, for it treats rage and often allows us to find our way to forgiveness.

The tale shows us that patience is a good thing to apply to fresh or old rage, as is embarking on a quest for its healing. Though each person's healing and insight will be different, the story proposes some interesting ideas about how to go about the process.

A great philosopher-prince named Shotoku Taishi lived in Japan at the turn of the sixth century. He taught, among other things, that one must do psychic work in both the inner and outer worlds. But even more so, he taught tolerance for every human, every creature, *and every emotion*. The balanced valuing of emotion is certainly an act of self-respect.

Even raw and messy emotions can be understood as a form of light, crackling and bursting with energy. We can use the light of rage in a positive way, in order to see into places we cannot usually see. A negative use of rage concentrates destructively in one tiny spot until, like acid creating an ulcer, it burns a black hole right through all the delicate layers of the psyche.

But there is another way. All emotion, even rage, carries knowledge, insight, what some call enlightenment. Our rage can, for a time, become teacher . . . a thing not to be rid of so fast, but rather something to climb the mountain for, something to personify via various images in order to learn from, deal with internally, then shape into something useful in the world as a result, or else let it go back down to dust. In a cohesive life, rage is not a stand-alone item. It is a substance waiting for our transformative efforts. The cycle of rage is like any other cycle; it rises, falls, dies, and is released as new energy. Attention to the matter of rage begins the process of transformation.

Allowing oneself to be taught by one's rage, thereby transforming it, disperses it. One's energy returns to use in other areas, especially the area of creativity. Although some people claim they can create out of their chronic rage, the problem is that rage confines access to the collective unconscious—that infinite reservoir of imaginal images and thoughts—so that a person creating out of rage tends to create the same thing over and over again, with nothing new coming through.

Untransformed rage can become a constant mantra about how oppressed, hurt, and tortured we were.

One of my friends and fellow performance artists, who claims to have been enraged forever, refuses all help in dealing with it. When she writes scripts about war, she writes about how bad people are; when she writes scripts about the culture, similar bad characters arise. When she writes scripts about love, the same bad people with the identical bad intentions show up. Rage corrodes our trust that anything good can occur. Something has happened to hope. And behind the loss of hope is usually anger; behind anger, pain; behind pain, usually torture of one sort or another, sometimes recent, but more often from long ago.

In physical post-trauma work, we know that the sooner injury is dealt with, the less its effects spread or worsen. Also the more quickly a trauma is contained and dealt with, the faster the recovery time. This is true for psychological trauma as well. What condition would we be in if we'd broken a leg as a child, and thirty years later it still had not been properly set?

The original trauma would cause tremendous disruption of other systems and rhythms in the body, such as the immune and skeletal systems, locomotion patterns, and so on. That is precisely the situation with old psychological trauma. For many it was not attended to at the time, whether out of ignorance or neglect. Now, one is home from the war, so to speak, but it feels as though one is still at war in the mind and body. Yet by harboring rage—that is, the fallout of trauma—instead of questing for solutions to it, what caused it, what we can do with it, we seal ourselves into a room full of it for the rest of our lives. That is no way to live, intermittently or otherwise. There is a life beyond thoughtless rage. As we see in the tale, it takes a conscious practice to contain and heal such. But we can do it. It truly takes only climbing through one step at a time.

Bringing in the Healer: Climbing the Mountain

So rather than trying to “behave” and not feel our rage or rather than using it to burn down every living thing in a hundred-mile radius, it is better to first ask rage to take a seat with us, have some tea, talk a while so we can find out what summoned this visitor. At first rage acts like the angry husband in the story. It doesn't want to talk, it

doesn't want to eat, just wants to sit there and stare, or rail, or be left alone. It is at this critical point that we call the healer, our wisest self, our best resources for seeing beyond ego irritation and aggravation. The healer is always the "far-seer." She is the one who can tell us what good can come from exploring this emotive surge.

Healers in fairy tales generally represent a calm and unperturbed aspect of the psyche. Even though the world may be falling to pieces outwardly, the inner healer is unswayed by it all and maintains the calm to figure out the best way to proceed. Every woman's psyche contains this "fixer." It is part of the wild and natural psyche and we are born with it. If we have lost track of its whereabouts, we can call it again by looking calmly at the situation causing us rage, projecting ourselves into the future, and from that vantage point deciding what would make us feel proud of our past behavior, and then acting that way.

The outrage or irritation we naturally feel about various aspects of life and culture is exacerbated when there were repeated incidents of disrespect, harrowing, neglect, or high ambiguity¹ in childhood. A person thusly injured is sensitized to further injury and utilizes all defenses to avoid them.² Gross losses of power, meaning loss of certainty that we are worthy of care, respect, and concern, cause extreme sorrow and angry childhood vows to, once grown, never allow oneself to be harmed like that ever again.

Additionally, if a woman was raised to have fewer positive expectations than others in the family, with harsh restraints on her freedoms, deportment, language, and so forth, her normal anger is likely to escalate over issues, tones of voice, gestures, words, and other sensory triggers that remind her of the original events.³ Sometimes educated guesses can be made about the wounds of childhood by closely inspecting what matters adults irrationally lose their tempers over.⁴

We want to use anger as a creative force. We want to use it to change, develop, and protect. So, whether a woman is dealing with the aggravation of the moment with an offspring, or some sort of a searing lengthy burn, the perspective of the healer is the same: When there is calm, there can be learning, there can be creative solutions, but where there is firestorm, inside or out, it burns hot and leaves nothing but ash. We want to be able to look back on our actions with honor. We want something useful to show for feeling angry.

While it is true that we sometimes need to vent our rage before we can progress to a learning calm, this needs be done in containment of

some sort. Otherwise it is like throwing a lighted match onto gasoline. The healer says yes, this rage can be changed, but I need something from another world, something from the instinctual world, the world where animals still talk and the spirits live—something from the human imagination.

In Buddhism there is a questing action called *nyübu*, which means to go into the mountains in order to understand oneself and to re-make one's connections to the Great. It is a very old ritual related to the cycles of preparing the earth, sowing, and harvesting. While it might be good to go into the real mountains if possible, there are also mountains in the underworld, in one's own unconscious, and luckily, we all carry the entrance to the underworld right in our own psyches, so we can go into the mountains for renewal with dispatch.

In mythos, a mountain is sometimes understood as a symbol describing the levels of mastery one must attain before one can ascend to the next level. The lowest part of the mountain, the foothills, often represents the urge toward consciousness. All that occurs in the foothills is thought of in terms of maturing consciousness. The middle part of the mountain is often thought of as the steeping part of the process, the part that tests the knowledge learned at lower levels. The higher mountain represents intensified learning; the air is thin there, it takes endurance and determination to stay at the tasks. The peak of the mountain represents confrontation with the ultimate wisdom, such as that in mythos wherein the old woman lives atop the mountain, or as in this story, the wise old bruin.

So, it is good to take to the mountain when we don't know what else to do. When we are drawn to quests we know little about, this makes life and develops soul. In climbing the unknown mountain we gain true knowledge of the instinctive psyche and the creative acts of which it is capable—that is our goal. Learning occurs differently for each person. But the instinctual viewpoint that emanates from the wild unconscious, and that is cyclical, begins to be the only one that makes sense of and gives meaning to life, our lives. It unerringly informs us about what to do next. Where can we find this process that will free us? On the mountain.

On the mountain we find additional clues about how to transform the hurt, negativism, and grudge-holding aspects of rage, all usually felt and often warranted initially. One is the phrase "*Arigato zaishö*," which the woman sings to thank the trees and the mountains for allowing her to pass. Figuratively translated, the phrase means "Thank

you, Illusion." In Japanese, *zaishō* means a clear way of looking at matters that interfere with deeper understandings of ourselves and the world.

An illusion occurs when something creates an image that is not real, such as heat waves on a road that make the road seem wavy. That there are heat waves is accurate, but the road is not really wavy. That is the illusion. The first piece of information is accurate, but the second piece, the conclusion, is not.

In the story the mountain allows the woman passage and the trees lift their limbs to let her pass. This symbolizes a lifting of illusions that allows the woman to proceed on her quest. In Buddhism there are said to be seven veils of illusion. As each is discarded a person is said to understand another aspect of the true nature of life and the self. To lift the veils makes one strong enough to tolerate what life is about; and to see into the patterns of events, people, and things; and eventually to learn not to take the first impression so deadly seriously, but to look behind and beyond.

In Buddhism, the lifting of the veils is necessary for enlightenment. The woman in this tale is on a journey to bring light into the darkness of rage. To do this she must understand the many layers of reality there on the mountain. We have so many illusions about life. "She is beautiful, therefore she is desirable" can be an illusion. "I am good, therefore I will be accepted" may also be an illusion. When we look for our truth, we are also looking to dispel our illusions. When we are able to see through these illusions, which in Buddhism would be called "barriers to enlightenment," we are able to discover the hidden side of rage.

These are some common illusions about rage. "If I lose my rage, I will be changed; I will become weaker." (The first premise is correct, but the conclusion is inaccurate.) "I learned my rage from my father [mother, grandmother, etc.] and I am doomed to feel this way all my life." (First statement, accurate; conclusion, inaccurate.) These illusions are challenged by questing, by asking, studying, peering under the trees, and by climbing the body of the mountain. We lose our illusions when we take the risk to meet the aspect of our nature that is truly wild; a mentor of life, rage, patience, suspicion, wariness, secretiveness, remoteness, and resourcefulness . . . the crescent moon bear.

While the woman is on the mountain, birds fly out at her. They are *muen-botoke*, spirits of dead people who have no family to feed

them, comfort them, lay them to rest. When she prays for them, she becomes their family, she cares for them and comforts them. This is a useful way to understand the orphaned dead of the psyche. These are the creative thoughts and words and ideas in a woman's life that have suffered premature death, and that deeply contribute to her rage. In a way, one could say rage is the result of ghosts not laid properly to rest. There are suggestions for how to deal with the *muen-botoke* of a woman's psyche at the end of this chapter under *Descansos*.

As in the story, it is a worthy task to propitiate the wise bear, the instinctive psyche, and to keep offering it spiritual food, whether that be church, prayer, archetypal psychology, dreamlife, art, rock climbing, canoeing, travel, or whatever else. To come close to the mystery of the bear, one gives it food. It is quite a journey, this fixing of rage stripping down illusions, taking rage as teacher, asking the help of the instinctual psyche, laying the dead past to rest.

The Spirit Bear

What does the symbol of bear, as opposed to fox, or badger, or quetzal, teach us about dealing with the angry self? To the ancients, bear symbolized resurrection. The creature goes to sleep for a long time its heartbeat decreases to almost nothing. The male often impregnates the female right before hibernation, but miraculously, the egg and sperm do not unite right away. They float separately in her uterine broth until much later. Near the end of hibernation, the egg and sperm unite and cell division begins, so that the cubs will be born in the spring when the mother is awakening, just in time to care for and teach her new offspring. Not only by reason of awakening from hibernation as though from death, but much more so because the she bear awakens with new young, this creature is a profound metaphor for our lives, for return and increase coming from something that seemed deadened.

The bear is associated with many huntress Goddesses: Artemis and Diana in Greece and Rome, and *Muerte* and *Hecoteptl*, mud woman deities handed down through the Latina cultures. These Goddesses bestowed upon women the power of tracking, knowing, "digging out" the psychic aspects of all things. To the Japanese the bear is symbol of loyalty, wisdom, and strength. In northern Japan where the

Ainu tribe lives, the bear is one who can talk to God directly and bring messages back for humans. The crescent moon bear is considered a sacred being, one who was given the white mark on his throat by the Buddhist Goddess Kwan-Yin, whose emblem is a crescent moon. Kwan-Yin is the Goddess of Deep Compassion and the bear is her emissary.⁵

In the psyche, the bear can be understood as the ability to regulate one's life, especially one's feeling life. Bearish power is the ability to move in cycles, be fully alert, or quiet down into a hibernative sleep that renews one's energy for the next cycle. The bear image teaches that it is possible to maintain a kind of pressure gauge for one's emotional life, and most especially that one can be fierce and generous at the same time. One can be reticent and valuable. One can protect one's territory, make one's boundaries clear, shake the sky if need be, yet be available, accessible, engendering all at the same time.

The hair from the throat of the bear is a talisman, a way to remember what one has learned. As we see, it is invaluable.

The Transformative Fire and Right Action

The bear shows great compassion toward the woman, allowing her to pluck one of his hairs. She hurries back down the mountain, practicing all the gestures, songs, and praises that spontaneously rose out of her as she climbed the mountain. She comes running to the healer, so anxious. She might have said, "Look, I did it, I did what you told me. I endured. I triumphed." The old healer, who is also kind, takes a moment, lets the woman savor her accomplishment, and then throws the hard-won hair into the fire.

The woman is stunned. What has this crazy healer done? "Go home," says the healer. "Practice what you have learned." In Zen, the moment the hair is thrown into the fire and the healer speaks her simple words, *that* is the moment of true enlightenment. Notice that enlightenment does not occur on the mountain. It occurs when, by burning the hair of the crescent moon bear, the projection of magical cure is dissolved. We all face this issue, for we all hope that if we work hard and have a high holy quest, we will come up with a something, a substance, a material something or other that will—flash!—make everything orderly forever.

But that is not the way it works. It works exactly the way it is

rendered in the story. We can have all the knowledge in the universe, and it comes down to one thing: practice. It comes down to going home and step-by-step implementing what we know. As often as necessary, and for as long as possible, or forever, whichever comes first. It is very reassuring to know that when one is in a burgeoning rage one knows precisely and with the skill of a craftswoman what to do about it: wait it out, release illusions, take it for a climb on the mountain, speak with it, respect it as a teacher.

We are given many markers in this story, many ideas about coming to balance: making patience, giving the enraged one kindness and time to get over his rage through introspection and questing. There is an old saying:

Before Zen, mountains were mountains and trees were trees.
During Zen, mountains were thrones of the spirits
and trees were the voices of wisdom.
After Zen, mountains were mountains and trees were trees.

While the woman was on the mountain, learning, everything was magic. Now that she is off the mountain, the so-called magical hair has been burned in the fire that destroys illusion, and now it is time for "after Zen." Life is supposed to become mundane again. Yet she has the bounty of her experience on the mountain. She has knowing. The energy that was bound up in rage can be used for other things.

Now a woman who has come to terms with rage returns to mundane life with new knowing, a new sense that she can more artfully live her life. Yet one day in the future, a something—a look, a word, a tone of voice, a feeling of being patronized, unappreciated, or manipulated against one's will, one of these—will crop up again. Then her residue of pain will catch fire.⁶

Rage left over from old injuries can be compared to the trauma of a shrapnel wound. One can pick out almost all the pieces of shattered metal from the missile, but the tiniest shards remain. One would think that if most are out, that would be that. Not so. On some occasions, those tiniest shards twist and turn within and cause an ache that feels like the original wounding (rage rising up) all over again.

But it is not the original and vast rage that causes this welling up, it is the very small particles of it, the irritants still left in the psyche that can never be fully excised. These cause a pain that is almost as intense as that of the original injury. Then a person tightens up, fear-

ing the full blow of the pain, in effect causing more pain. They are involved in drastic maneuvers on three fronts: one in trying to contain the outside event, one in attempting to contain the pain broadcasting from the old injury inside, and one trying to secure safety of position by running, head down in a psychological crouch.

It is too much to ask a single individual to take on the equivalent of a gang of three and try to KO all of them at one time. That is why it is imperative to stop in the midst of it all, withdraw, and take solitude. It is too much to try to fight and handle feeling gut-shot at the same time. A woman who has climbed the mountain withdraws, deals with the older event first, then the more recent event, decides her position, shakes out her ruff, puts up her ears, and goes back out to act with dignity.

None of us can entirely escape our history. We can certainly put it in the background, but it is there nevertheless. However, if you will do these things for yourself, you will bridge the rage and eventually everything will calm down and be fine. Not perfect, but fine. You'll be able to move ahead. The time of the shrapnel rage will be over. You'll handle it better and better each time because you'll know when it is time to call in the healer again, to climb the mountain, release yourself from the illusions that the present is an exact and calculated replay of the past. A woman remembers that she can be both fierce and generous at the same time. Rage is not like a kidney stone—if you wait long enough, it will pass. No, no. You must take right action. Then it will pass, and more creation will come to your life.

Righteous Rage

To turn the other cheek, that is, to remain silent in the face of injustice or mistreatment, has to be weighed very carefully. It is one thing to use passive resistance as a political tool as Gandhi taught masses of people to do, but it is quite another matter when women are encouraged or forced to be silent in order to survive an impossible situation of corrupt or unjust power in the family, community, or world. Then women are amputated from the wild nature and their silence is not serenity but an enormous defense against being harmed. It is a mistake for others to think that just because a woman is silent, it always means she approves of life as is.

There are times when it becomes imperative to release a rage that

shakes the skies. There is a time—even though these times are very rare, there is definitely a time—to let loose all the firepower one has. It has to be in response to a serious offense; the offense has to be big and against the soul or spirit. All other reasonable avenues for change have to be attempted first. If these fail, then we have to choose the right time. There is definitely a right time for full-bore rage. When women pay attention to the instinctual self, like the man in the following tale, they know when it is time. Intuitively, they know and they act. And it is right. Right as rain.

This story is from the Mideast. In Asia, versions of it are told by Sufis, Buddhists, and Hindus.⁷ It belongs to the category of story that treats of performing the forbidden or unsanctioned act in order to redeem life.

The Withered Trees

THERE WAS A SOUL whose very bad temper had cost him more wasted time and loss of good friends than any other element in his life. He approached an old wise man in rags and asked, "How can I ever bring this demon of rage under control?" The old man instructed the younger man to post himself at a parched oasis far off in the desert and to sit there among all the withered trees and to draw up the brackish water for any traveler who might venture there.

And the man, trying to overcome his rage, rode out to the desert to the place of the withered trees. For months, garbed in robes and bur-noose against the flying sand, he drew the sour water and gave it to all who approached. Years passed and he suffered no more fits of temper.

One day a dark rider came to the dead oasis, and gave a haughty glance down at the man who offered him water from a bowl. The rider scoffed at the clouded water, refused it, and began to ride on.

The man offering water was immediately enraged, so much so he was blinded by it, and seizing the rider down from his camel, killed him on the spot. Oh la! He was immediately aggrieved that he had been consumed by such rage. And look what it had come to.

Suddenly, up rode another rider at great speed. The rider looked

down upon the visage of the dead man and exclaimed, "Thank Allah, you have killed the man who was on his way to murder the king!" And at that moment, the cloudy water of the oasis turned clear and sweet and the withered trees of the oasis blushed green and burst into joyous bloom.

We understand this tale symbolically. It is not a tale about killing people. It is a teaching about not unleashing anger indiscriminately, but at the right time. The tale begins when the man learns to give out water, life, even under drought conditions. To give out life is an innate impulse in most women. They are very good at it most of the time. However, there is also a time for the gust from the gut, a time for righteous anger, rightful rage.⁸

Many women are sensitive the way sand is sensitive to the wave, the way trees are sensitive to the quality of the air, the way a wolf can hear another creature step into her territory from over a mile away. The splendid gift of women so attuned is to see, hear, sense, receive, and transmit images and ideas and feelings with lightning speed. Most women can feel the slightest change in someone else's temperament, can read faces and bodies—this being called intuition—and often from a plethora of tiny clues that coalesce to give her information, she knows what is on their minds. In order to use these wild gifts, women remain open to all things. But it is this very openness that leaves their boundaries vulnerable, thereby exposing them to injuries of spirit.

Like the man in the "Withered Trees" story, a woman may face the same issue to greater or lesser degrees. She may carry a form of scattershot rage that compels her to pick, pick, pick, or use coldness like an anesthesia, or give out sweet words while meaning to punish or demean. She may force her own will on those who are dependent on her or she may threaten them with severance of relationship or affection. She may withhold praise, or even the giving of credit where credit is due, and in general act quite instinct-injured. It is a given that a person who treats others in this manner is under intensive attack in her own psyche by a demon who does exactly the same to her.

Many a woman so afflicted decides to embark on a clean-up campaign, and resolves not to be petty anymore, to be "nicer," to be

more giving. This is worthy, and often a relief to those around her, as long as she does not become over-identified with being a giving person like the man in the story. He is out in the oasis, and by serving others, he begins to feel better and better. He becomes identified with the evenness yet flatness of his life.

So too, a woman who avoids all confrontation begins to feel better. But it is temporary. This is not the learning we are after. The learning we are after is to know when to allow right anger and when not. The tale is not about striving for gentle sainthood. It is about knowing when to act in an integral and wild manner. Most of the time wolves avoid confrontation, but when they must enforce territory, when something or someone constantly hounds them, or corners them, they explode in their own powerful way. This happens rarely, but the ability to express this anger is within their repertoire and it should be within ours too.

There has been much speculation that an angry woman is awesome in her power to cause fear and trembling in those around her. But that is far too much projection of the viewer's personal angst for any woman to justly carry. In her instinctual psyche, a woman has the power, when provoked, to be angry in a mindful way—and that *is* powerful. Anger is one of her innate ways to begin to reach out to create and preserve the balances that she holds dear, all that she truly loves. It is both her right, and at certain times and in certain circumstances, a moral duty.

For women, this means there is a time to reveal your incisors, your powerful ability to defend territory, to say "This far and no farther, the buck stops here, and hold on to your hat, I've got something to say, this is definitely going to change."

Like the man in the beginning of "The Withered Trees," and like the warrior in "The Crescent Moon Bear," many women often have within them a tired-out, battle-fatigued soldier who just doesn't want to hear it anymore, doesn't want to talk about it, doesn't want to deal with it. A parched oasis in the psyche rises up because of this. This is, without or within, always an area of great silence, just waiting for, just begging for a roaring to take place, a breaking, shattering, shaking something that will create life again.

The man in the story is initially taken aback by his deed of killing the rider. Yet, when he understands that, in that instance, "first thought, right thought" applied, he is released from the too-simple rule of "never be angry." As in "The Crescent Moon Bear," enlight-

enment does not occur during the deed itself, it occurs once illusion is destroyed, and one gains insight into the underlying meaning.

Descansos

So, we have seen that we wish to make rage into a fire that cooks things rather than into a fire of conflagration. We have seen that the work on rage cannot be completed without the ritual of forgiveness. We have spoken about women's rage often deriving from the situation in her family of origin, from the surrounding culture, and sometimes from adult trauma. But regardless of the source of the rage, something has to happen to recognize it, bless it, contain it, and release it.

Women who are tortured often develop a dazzling kind of perception that has uncanny depth and breadth. Although I would never wish anyone tortured in order to learn the secret ins and outs of the unconscious, the fact is, having lived through a gross repression causes gifts to arise that compensate and protect.

In that respect a woman who has lived a torturous life and delved deeply into it definitely has inestimable depth. Though she came to it through pain, if she has done the hard work of clinging to consciousness, she will have a deep and thriving soul-life and a fierce belief in herself regardless of occasional ego-waverings.

There is a time in our lives, usually in mid-life, when a woman has to make a decision—possibly the most important psychic decision of her future life—and that is, whether to be bitter or not. Women often come to this in their late thirties or early forties. They are at the point where they are full up to their ears with everything and they've "had it" and "the last straw has broken the camel's back" and they're "pissed off and pooped out." Their dreams of their twenties may be lying in a crumple. There may be broken hearts, broken marriages, broken promises.

A body who has lived a long time accumulates debris. It cannot be avoided. But if a woman will return to the instinctual nature instead of sinking into bitterness, she will be revived, reborn. Wolf pups are born each year. Usually they are these little mewling, sleepy-eyed, dark-furred creatures covered in dirt and straw, but they are immediately awake, playful, and loving, wanting to be close and comforted. They want to play, want to grow. The woman who returns to the in-

stinctual and creative nature will come back to life. She will want to play. She will still want to grow, both wide and deep. But first, there has to be a cleansing.

I would like to introduce you to the concept of *Descansos* as I've developed it in my work. If you ever traveled in Old Mexico, New Mexico, southern Colorado, Arizona, or parts of the South, you've seen little white crosses by the roadway. These are *descansos*, resting places.⁹ You'll also find them on the edges of cliffs along particularly scenic but dangerous roads in Greece, Italy, and other Mediterranean countries. Sometimes crosses are clustered in twos or threes or fives. People's names are inscribed upon them—Jesús Mendéz, Arturo Buenofuentes, Jeannie Abeyta. Sometimes the names are spelled out in nails, sometimes they are painted on the wood or carved into it.

Often they are profusely decorated with artificial or real flowers or they glisten with chopped-up new straw glued to wood slats, making them shine like gold in the sun. Sometimes the *descanso* is just two sticks or two pieces of pipe tied across one another with twine and stuck in the ground. In the rockiest passes, the cross is just painted onto a large rock at the roadside.

Descansos are symbols that mark a death. Right there, right on that spot, someone's journey in life halted unexpectedly. There has been a car accident, or someone was walking along the road and died of heat exhaustion, or a fight took place there. Something happened there that altered that person's life and the lives of other persons forever.

Women have died a thousand deaths before they are twenty years old. They've gone in this direction or that, and have been cut off. They have hopes and dreams that have been cut off also. Anyone who says otherwise is still asleep. All that is grist for the mill of *descansos*.

While all these things deepen individuation, differentiation, growing up and growing out, blossoming, becoming awake and aware and conscious, they are also profound tragedies and have to be grieved as such.

To make *descansos* means taking a look at your life and marking where the small deaths, *las muertes chiquitas*, and the big deaths, *las muertes grandotas*, have taken place. I like to make a time-line of a woman's life on a big long sheet of white butcher paper, and to mark with a cross the places along the graph, starting with her infancy all

the way to the present where parts and pieces of her self and her life have died.

We mark where there were roads not taken, paths that were cut off, ambushes, betrayals and deaths. I put a little cross along the time-line at the places that should have been mourned, or still need to be mourned. And then I write in the background "forgotten" for those things that the woman senses but which have not yet surfaced. I also write "forgiven" over those things the woman has for the most part released.

I encourage you to make *descansos*, to sit down with a time-line of your life and say "Where are the crosses? Where are the places that must be remembered, must be blessed?" In all are meanings that you've brought forward into your life today. They must be remembered, but they must be forgotten at the same time. It takes time. And patience.

Remember in "The Crescent Moon Bear" the woman said a prayer and laid the wandering orphaned dead to rest. That is what one does in *descansos*. *Descansos* is a conscious practice that takes pity on and gives honor to the orphaned dead of your psyche, laying them to rest at last.

Be gentle with yourself and make the *descansos*, the resting places for the aspects of yourself that were on their way to somewhere, but never arrived. *Descansos* mark the death sites, the dark times, but they are also love notes to your suffering. They are transformative. There is a lot to be said for pinning things to the earth so they don't follow us around. There is a lot to be said for laying them to rest.

Injured Instinct and Rage

Women (and men) tend to try to draw an end to old episodes by saying "I/he/she/they did the best they could." But to say "they did the best they could" is not forgiveness. Even if true, that peremptory statement cuts off the possibility of healing. It is like applying a tourniquet above a deep wound. To leave that tourniquet on after a time causes gangrene for lack of circulation. Denying anger and pain does not work.

If a woman is instinct-injured, she is typically faced with several challenges regarding rage. First, she often has a problem with intrusion recognition; she is slow to notice territory violations and does

not register her own anger until it is upon her. Like the man at the beginning of "The Withered Trees" her temper comes upon her in a kind of ambush.

This lag is the result of instincts injured by exhortations to little girls to not notice dissension, to try to be peacemakers at all costs, to not interfere and to stand the pain until everything calms down or temporarily goes away. Typically such women do not act upon the rage they feel but jump the gun, or having a delayed reaction weeks, months, or even years later, realizing what they should have, could have, would have said or done.

This is usually *not* caused by shyness or introversion but by too much "fifth and sixth guess" thinking, too much trying to be nice to one's own detriment, and not enough acting from soul. The wild soul knows when and how to act if a woman will only listen. Right response carries insight and right amounts of compassion and strength mixed together. Injured instinct must be arighted by practicing and enforcing strong boundaries and by practicing firm and, when possible, generous responses, but solid ones nevertheless.

A woman may have difficulty releasing anger even when it impedes her own life, even when it causes her to obsessively dwell upon events years old as though they happened yesterday. Dwelling on trauma and doing so intensely for a period of time is very important to healing. But eventually all injury has to be given sutures and be allowed to heal over into scar tissue.

Collective Rage

Collective anger or rage is also a natural function. There is such a phenomenon as group hurt, group grief. Women who become socially, politically, or culturally conscious often find that they have to deal with a collective rage that seeps upward through them again and again.

It is psychically sound for women to feel this anger. It is psychically sound for them to use this anger about injustice to invent ways to elicit useful change. It is *not* psychologically sound for them to neutralize their anger so they will not feel, so they will therefore not press for evolution and change. As with personal rage, collective anger is also a teacher. Women can consult with it, question it in solitude and with others, and act upon their conclusions. There is a difference be-

tween carrying around old ingrown rage and stirring it with a new stick to see what constructive uses can come of it.

Collective rage is well utilized as motivation to seek out or offer support, to conceive of ways to impel groups or individuals into dialogue, or to demand accountability, progress, improvements. These are proper processes in the patterns of women coming to consciousness. These are appropriate to their caring about what is essential and important to them. It is part of the healthy instinctual psyche to have deep reactions to disrespect, threat, injury. Devout reaction is a natural and expected part of learning about the collective worlds of soul and psyche.

Stuck in Old Rage

If and when rage again becomes a dam to creative thought and action, then it must be softened or changed. For those who have spent considerable time working through a trauma, whether it was caused by someone's cruelty, neglect, lack of respect, recklessness, arrogance, ignorance, or even fate, there comes a time to forgive in order to release the psyche to return to a normal state of calm and peace.¹⁰

When a woman has trouble letting go of anger or rage, it's often because she's using rage to empower herself. While that may have been wisdom at the beginning, now she must be careful, for ongoing rage is a fire that burns her own primary energy. To be in this state is like speeding through life "pedal to the metal"; trying to live a balanced life with the accelerator pressed all the way to the floor.

Neither is the fieriness of rage to be mistaken as a substitute for a passionate life. It is not life at its best; it is a defense that, once the time of needing it for protection is past, costs plenty to keep. After a time it burns interminably hot, pollutes our ideas with its black smoke, and occludes other ways of seeing and apprehending.

Now I'm not going to tell you a big, fat lie and say you can cleanse all your rage today or next week and it will be gone forever. The angst and torment of times past rise up in the psyche on a cyclical basis. Although a deep purging discharges most of the archaic hurt and rage, the residue can never completely be swept clear. But it should leave a very light ash, not a hungry fire. So the clearing of residual rage must become a periodic hygienic ritual, one that releases us, for

to carry old rage beyond the point of its usefulness is to carry a constant, if unconscious, anxiety.

Sometimes people become confused and think that to be stuck in an outdated rage means to fuss and fume and to act out and toss and throw things. It does not mean that in most cases. It means to be tired all the time, to carry a thick layer of cynicism, to dash the hopeful, the tender, the promising. It means to be afraid you will lose before you open your mouth. It means to reach flashpoint inside whether you show it on the outside or not. It means bilious entrenched silences. It means feeling helpless. But there is a way out, and it is through forgiveness.

"Oh, argh, forgiveness?" you say. Anything but that? But you know in your heart that someday, sometime, it will come to that. It may not come until the deathbed time, but it will come. Consider this: Many people have trouble with forgiveness because they have been taught that it is a singular act to be completed in one sitting. That is not so. Forgiveness has many layers, many seasons. In our culture there is a notion that forgiveness is a 100 percent proposition. All or nothing. It is also taught that forgiveness means to overlook, to act as though a thing has not occurred. This is not true either.

A woman who can work up a good 95 percent forgiveness of someone or something tragic and damaging almost qualifies for beatification, if not sainthood. If she is 75 percent forgiving and 25 percent "I don't know if I ever can forgive fully, and I don't even know if I want to," that is more the norm. But 60 percent forgiveness accompanied by 40 percent "I don't know, and I'm not sure, and I'm still working on it," is definitely fine. A level of 50 percent or less forgiveness qualifies for work-in-progress status. Less than 10 percent? You've either just begun or you're not really trying yet.

But, in any case, once you've reached a bit more than halfway, the rest will come in time, usually in small increments. The important part of forgiveness is to *begin and to continue*. The finishing of it all is a life work. You have the rest of your life to work at the lesser percentage. Truly, if we could understand all, all could be forgiven. But for most people it takes a long time in the alchemical bath to come to this. It is all right. We have the healer, so we have the patience to see it through.

Some people, by innate temperament, are more easily able to forgive than others. For some it is a gift, for most it has to be learned as a skill. Essential vitality and sensitivity seem to affect the ability to

pass things off. High vitality and high sensitivity do not always allow wrongs to be passed off easily. You are not bad if you do not forgive easily. You are not a saint if you do. Each to her own, and all in due time.

To truly heal, however, we must say our truth, and not only our regret and pain but also what harm was caused, what anger, what disgust, and also what desire for self-punishment or vengeance was evoked in us. The old healer of the psyche understands human nature with all its foibles and gives pardon based on the telling of the naked truth. She not only gives second chances, she most often gives many chances.

Let us look at four levels of forgiveness. These stages I've developed and used in my work with traumatized people over the years. Each level has several layers. These can be dealt with in whatever order and for however long one desires, but I've listed them in the order I encourage my own clients to begin working.

Four Stages of Forgiveness

1. to forego—to leave it alone
2. to forebear—to abstain from punishing
3. to forget—to aver from memory, to refuse to dwell
4. to forgive—to abandon the debt

TO FOREGO¹¹

To begin to forgive, it is good to forego for a while. That is, to take a break from thinking about the person or event for a while. It is not leaving something undone, but rather more like taking a vacation from it. This prevents us from being exhausted, allows us to strengthen in other ways, to have other happiness in our lives.

This is good practice for the final letting go that comes with forgiveness later on. Leave the situation, memory, issue as many times as you need to. The idea is not to overlook but to become agile and strong at detaching from the issue. To forego means to take up that weaving, that writing, to go to that ocean, to do some learning and loving that strengthens you, and to allow the issue to drop away for a time. This is right, good, and healing. The issues of past injury will bedevil a woman far less if she assures the wounded psyche that she will give it healing balms now and deal with the entire issue of who caused what injury later.

FOREBEAR¹²

The second phase is to forebear, particularly in the sense of abstaining from punishing; neither thinking about it nor acting on it in small or large ways. It is extremely useful to practice this kind of containment, for it coalesces the issue into one place instead of allowing it to flow everywhere. This builds focus toward the time when one proceeds to the next steps. This does not mean to go blind or dead and lose self-protective vigilance. It means to give a bit of grace to the situation and see how that assists.

To forebear means to have patience, to bear up against, to channel emotion. These are powerful medicines. Do as much as you can. This is a cleansing regime. You need not do all; you can choose one, such as patience, and practice that. You can refrain from punitive uttering, muttering, from acting resentful, hostile. To refrain from unnecessary punishing strengthens integrity of action and soul. To forebear is to practice generosity, thereby allowing the great compassionate nature to participate in matters that have previously caused emotion ranging all the way from minor irritation to rage.

FORGET¹³

To forget means to aver from memory, to refuse to dwell—in other words, to let go, to loosen one's hold, particularly on memory. To forget does not mean to make yourself brain-dead. Conscious forgetting means letting go of the event, not insisting it stay in the foreground, but rather moving it off a stage, allowing it to be relegated to the background.

We practice conscious forgetting by refusing to summon up the fiery material, we refuse to recollect. To forget is an active, not a passive, endeavor. It means to not haul up certain materials, or turn them over and over, to not work oneself up by repetitive thoughts, pictures, or emotions. Conscious forgetting means willfully dropping the practice of obsessing, intentionally outdistancing and losing sight of it, not looking back, thereby living in a new landscape, creating new life and new experiences to think about instead of the old ones. This kind of forgetting does not erase memory, it lays the emotion surrounding the memory to rest.

FORGIVE¹⁴

There are many ways and portions to forgiving a person, a community, a nation for an offense. It is important to remember that a "final" forgiveness is not surrender. It is a conscious decision to cease to harbor resentment, which includes forgiving a debt and giving up one's resolve to retaliate. You are the one who decides when to forgive and what ritual to use to mark the event. You decide what debt you will now say needs not be paid further.

Some choose blanket pardon: releasing a person from any restitution now or ever. Others choose to call a halt to redress in process, abandoning the debt, saying whatever has been done is done, and the payback is now enough. Another kind of pardon is to release a person without his having made any emotional or other sort of restitution.

To some, a finalizing of forgiving means to regard the other indulgently, and this is easiest with regard to relatively benign offenses. One of the most profound forms of forgiveness is to give compassionate aid to the offending person in one form or another.¹⁵ This does not mean you should stick your head in the snake's basket, but instead respond from a stance of mercy, security, and preparedness.¹⁶

Forgiveness is the culmination of all foregoing, forbearing, and forgetting. It does not mean giving up one's protection, but one's coldness. One deep form of forgiveness is to cease excluding the other, which includes ceasing to stiff-arm, ignore, or act coldly toward, insisting on being neither patronizing nor phony. It is better for the soul-psyche to closely limit time and repartee with people who are difficult for you than to act like an unfeeling mannequin.

Forgiveness is an act of creation. You can choose from many time-honored ways to do it. You can forgive for now, forgive till then, forgive till the next time, forgive but give no more chances—it's a whole new game if there's another incident. You can give one more chance, give several more chances, give many chances, give chances only if. You can forgive part, all, or half of an offense. You can devise a blanket forgiveness. You decide.¹⁷

How does one know if she has forgiven? You tend to feel sorrow over the circumstance instead of rage, you tend to feel sorry for the person rather than angry with him. You tend to have nothing left to remember to say about it all. You understand the suffering that drove the offense to begin with. You prefer to remain outside the milieu.

You are not waiting for anything. You are not wanting anything. There is no lariat snare around your ankle stretching from way back there to here. You are free to go. It may not have turned out to be a *happily ever after*, but most certainly there is now a fresh *Once upon a time* waiting for you from this day forward.