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Tending the Soul

With

Healing Ritual

Gay Wolff, Ph.D.

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Part 1

The Healing Power of Ritual

A ritual is the enactment of a myth. By participating in the ritual, you are participating in the myth. And since myth is a projection of the depth wisdom of the psyche, by participating in a ritual, ... you are being, as it were, put in accord with that wisdom, which is the wisdom that is inherent within you anyhow. Your consciousness is being reminded of the wisdom of your own life.

~ Joseph Campbell ("The Wisdom of J.C." Interviews)

People need Rituals. In today's modern Western culture of progress and perpetual striving, the reflective qualities of religion, meditation, and ritual reside in the margins of our daily living. Yet many Western psyches yearn for a deeper experience with life and its mysteries. Despite the dominance of a material and scientific world-view, on a personal level, people still crave something more beautiful and meaningful than what materiality and the analytics of logic can offer.

All of us yearn for meaning in life. We want to be moved, to feel loved, valued, and connected. Everywhere we turn, we feel the pressures of the material and rational world-views. Many of us are drawn into the belief that having more of something—knowledge, stuff, time, position—will improve the character of our existence, or make us happy.

Even as we rush to meet deadlines and objectives, we yearn for fulfillment—for something more than what the common life offers. We know material things won't sustain or nourish us. But, what will? To find the something more that nourishes our souls, we must go deeper than the common realms of mainstream reality.

Mainstream existence is defined by the workings of the conscious mind. Yet, our conscious minds reflect only a fraction of who we are, how we really think, and how we relate to the universe. And this is where the importance of Ritual is demonstrated. Rituals offer ways to go beyond the restrictions of the conscious mind so as to nourish and balance the whole human—our body, our psyche, our soul and our relationships. Incorporating Ritual in our lifestyles provides a metaphysical foundation by which we can sustain and nourish ourselves and our loved ones.

In Part One of this book, I explain why people still need Rituals today and how enacting Ritual can help us to awaken and heal our deepest Self.

Part Two provides a menu and guide for personal Rituals designed to stimulate healing and transformational shifts. Most of these Rites are drawn from my accumulated work or re-inventions of mythic concepts. However, some of these are my adaptations of core processes I learned from others whom I wish to acknowledge. The Sandpainting and Fire Ceremony Rites are adaptations from Alberto Villoldo's teachings, the unwinding

chakras portion of the Rainbow Shower I first learned from Deepak Chopra, and the Sun and Moon salutations are adaptations of yoga. It is my hope that as you journey through these pages, you will find yourself walking a path of self-discovery and inner beauty.

1: Understanding Ritual

I believe that if your culture or tradition doesn't have the specific ritual you are craving, then you are absolutely permitted to make up a ceremony of your own devising, fixing your own broken-down emotional systems with all the do-it-yourself resourcefulness of a generous plumber/poet.

~ Elizabeth Gilbert (Eat, Pray, Love)

Beyond the occasional cultural ceremonies we think of as Rituals, such as weddings or graduations, we need embodied Ritual moments that allow us to open the windows of our inner being to let our soul expand, ventilate, and be refreshed. These moments connect us to the world beyond us and reinforce our place within it.

The kind of spiritual or mythic Ritual I am describing here is distinguished with a capital R. Through such a mythic Ritual process, the body, mind, and heart can be brought into alignment, which allows us to achieve harmony with the living and divine world. Through Ritual we can bypass the conscious, rational mind and utilize our intuitive sensibilities to access our heart's wisdom. From this state of reverence and receptivity, we can reclaim a personal and direct relationship with the power of creation, and join many others in becoming co-creators of reality.

Throughout this text, I use the terms "the Sacred" and "the Divine" interchangeably to refer to the various transpersonal forces that exist naturally in the multi-dimensional universe. These include spirit guides, aspects of nature, and psychological forces that are part of the mythic cosmos. To be more specific, beyond the Creator or Great Spirit, the Sacred includes manifestations of divinity that infuse creation with that mysterious essence that intuitive people often sense below and above everyday existence. In religious terms, the Sacred begins with the Creator and includes, other gods, angels, guides, power places and entities, and living energies such as the Holy Spirit and *qi*. Psychologically, the Sacred includes the full range of archetypal forces, our unconscious or higher Self, and the collective or transpersonal unconscious.

For millennia, Rituals have served seekers, sages, mystics, and shamans in cultivating a relationship with these divine forces. Through the intuitive capacities of Ritual, these sages have engaged both internal and transpersonal subtle realities. The techniques of Ritual create access and opportunities for wisdom and healing, but whether we can learn from Ritual depends upon our ability to open and to trust. Sacred Rituals function independently of, but in harmony with, cultural and religious beliefs and can be adapted to virtually anyone's religious, spiritual, or psychological disposition.

Why Ritual?

The purpose of healing Ritual is to bring us closer to the source of our being, where we can clear patterns and shift things more easily in order to understand and change the material reality. Imagine standing by a river where suddenly all your personal possessions are washing down its swift current. Like most of us, you might try to rescue your possessions one soggy piece at a time. Yet, I suspect that many of us would also eventually venture upstream to discover who is throwing our things into the water.

Similarly, we can opt to merely treat symptoms on the surface level and accept the temporary relief of surface remedies. However, to actually heal our physical and psychological ailments, we must seek out their sources. For, when we access our being at the subtle energy level, when we identify the root causes of our afflictions, we can make “upstream” changes to improve our lives on multiple planes, including the emotional and physical.

Ritual is not about having power *over* the Sacred. Rather, it is about being empowered *through* or *with* the Sacred, and activating our own divine nature. With an attitude of reciprocity and balance (what Peruvian shamans call *ayni*), we can access our spiritual power, and the divine forces that inform, enrich, and heal our lives.

Performing Ritual involves our participation in several aspects. At the most physical level, the body is engaged in a ceremonial act. The heart-wisdom is accessed to determine your intent. The imagination (intuition) directs the flow of the Rite, and emotions drive the desire that motivates it. Beyond the body, mind, and emotions of the process, Ritual also works energetically to clear, repair, and make shifts in our *luminous* field. This energy body—also called our subtle, light, or luminous body—is part of the material world, but at a fundamental and subtle level.

The Eastern concepts of an auric field and the *chakras* are widely known today throughout the West, and in the past century, they have become influential. However, many people do not realize that the concept of a light body, including meridians and the centers of light, have also long been recognized throughout shamanic and mystical traditions across the globe.

Perennial mysticism has taught us that Ritual is one of the most direct means of gaining access to the flow of creative energy that is universally understood to be essential to life. We know this living energy by many names: *Qi, Chi, Ki, Tao, Reiki, Prana, Mana*, the *Holy Spirit*, and in Peruvian shamanism, *kawsay*. Soul and spirit are much more subtle than the light body, but by working at the light body level, we are working further upstream—reaching beyond the limits and patterns of our physical body, mind, and energetic resources—toward the levels of Soul and Spirit.

In mysticism, access to both personal and transpersonal mystical domains is understood to happen through a central channel known as the *axis mundi*, the axis of the world. This channel is depicted mythically in a variety of forms, including a sacred tree, a central corridor, a pillar, a ladder, or a hole in the roof. Yet, it is always understood to exist within ourselves, and thus the way to access this path is through the deep interiors of the psyche, which we engage with our intuitive and imaginal faculties. The imagination, therefore, is a gateway into the subtle domains—those transpersonal realms of the living

cosmos and those areas within ourselves that are imbued with the Soul that is uniquely ours. Ritual offers many mystical opportunities, but for our purposes here, we will focus on the personal potentials of Ritual, in particular, the psychological and energetic healing benefits.

The Rituals in this book will guide your soul work to help you engage at an energetic level, where you can access the power to change and heal. Personal Rites can help you to clarify uncertainties and to shift imprints or patterns that are restricting or distorting aspects of your life. This will enable you to reclaim your personal and direct relationship with the divine powers of creation so that you can awaken your innate ability to be a co-creator of your own life and our shared world.

In our modern culture of busy-ness in work and play, many of us have lost touch with how to spiritually engage and recharge ourselves. Since you are reading this book, it is likely that you, like me, have felt something missing from the life you are living—you may feel emptiness where there should be substance. Even if you seem to have a good life, you may feel that your existence, in part or whole, is lacking in meaning or soulful depths.

Psychologically, you may feel at the mercy of the plots and characters that make up the drama of your life. Even if you have a religious or meditative practice that provides some means for managing these influences, you may find that you still desire a better understanding, greater influence, or a deeper experience with that *something more* that is resonating in your heart.

Ritual offers a means to open a dialogue and to regain a personal relationship with both the interior and transpersonal Sacred. It provides a way to harmonize your body, mind, and soul (as well as your relationships with others) for a feeling of congruence, meaningfulness, and ultimately, a deeper joy in living.

You can bring Ritual into your individual and family customs without changing the dynamic of the life you enjoy with family and friends. By this, I mean that Ritual is a personal act that can be adapted and tailored to your family's personality and setting, as long as the basic elements of Ritual are in place.

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