

## **Ritual Circles: Archetypes for Healing and Reincorporation Following Tsunami**

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**Abstract: This workshop will illustrate through video, didactic, and experiential presentation, a therapeutic community intervention incorporating the “Archetypal Ritual Circle”; The intervention, designed to create safety and stability following exposure to natural disasters, will focus, specifically, upon the response to the Tsunami disaster of 2004. Through the integrated use of voice, repetition, and gesture, the presenter will expose participants to the power of circle work and to the archetypal patterns which emerge over time. The experience will also encourage an understanding of the self as it is transformed through this work from “isolated” to “incorporated”.**

**Trauma, experienced or imagined, has the potential to disconnect its victims from the energetic vortex of life’s continuum, leaving isolated beings in its wake. The dynamic model of the universe understands life’s continuum to be a dialogue between opposing forces, evolving and dissolving, seeking balance and fulfillment.**

**Acute trauma, like a perceptual knife, severs our psychic life line to the world and to the assumptions which we held as basic: 1) I am worthy, 2) The world is dependable and will keep me safe, and 3) I am not alone. Experiencing safety/stability is the necessary first step toward rebuilding these shattered assumptions, providing a foundation for psychological healing and reincorporation. (Macy, 2003)**

**The presenter is a Movement therapist and lineage holder in the Art/ technique of Isadora Duncan. Her work explores the contemporary and cross cultural translations of the “Archetypal Ritual Circle”, basic to the Duncan methodology, to create “Safe place” for community healing following acute traumatic disasters (such as :earthquake, war, terrorist attacks, and tsunami). The Duncan prophesy celebrates: 1) the indomitable human spirit, 2) nature’s unity through rhythm, and 3) the dynamic relationship between “ belief” (based upon experience of mastery in the past) and “hope” (projecting mastery into the future) as it applies to individual and collective resilience.**

**In Indonesia, the presenter interpreted indigenous dance and gestural symbology (hope, community, safety) to create healing “ Ritual circles”; Practicing these circle dances empowered survivors of the December 2004 tsunami to reclaim hope and joy. The ritual circles are being adapted by these survivors as a foundation for their community healing response.**

**We live in a troubled time; we have forgotten that life is not sustained in isolation; we have forgotten that without relationship, we die. Our perception of success comes from the installed cultural mantra: “I win if you lose”; So what happens when we all lose, as in the case of natural disaster, community terrorism, or war? Where do recall safety, empowerment, connection? Our Western (civilized) culture does not have a collective healing tradition. Rather it encourages aloneness: “Establishing connections with others is not merely a matter of participating in a particular pattern of personality. It is a matter of realizing our basic nature. If we adopt a style of aloneness in our relations with others, we contradict a fundamental**

**life process: we defy the biodance, the ebbing and flowing pattern that connects, without which life would cease.” (Dossey, 1982).**

**In the physical circle everyone is equal and included; moving in a circular pattern is grounding and calming; experiencing the continuum of life, the movement of breath in and out of the body, the cycles of the moon and the tides, of birth and death and spiritual return, is the metaphysical, symbolic circle. The circle is symbolic of integration; integration of emotion, spirit, cognition, and the physical is what we seek in the healing process. A group standing or sitting in a circle encloses stillness; focus upon that stillness is calming to the group and to the individual; As an individual participates in “the circle”, his experience of self is transformed from “alone” to “component”. The simple experience of moving or containing stillness, harmoniously, translates to a collective experience of “greater reality” (that which is bigger than me), for participants. All life forms circle and spiral to a rhythm; Participating in ritual circles, by dancing singing, commemorating, encourages relationship to the continuum of time, and to the universe, both of which are dynamic, responsive, evolving ; The experience of relationship, to the physical and social environments can be transformational : the “isolated” sense of self becoming an “integrated” or “affiliated” one. The visual and auditory mirroring of repetitive gestures and songs by peers (that is part of circle ritual) may have tremendous positive impact upon individuals whose early attachment has been disrupted; therefore, circle rituals may impact necessary relationship building as it applies to acute trauma as well as underlying symptoms of childhood trauma which may surface .**

**In circle, one looks across and sees another; through a linear lens, one sees the other as “oppositional”; As the experience of self in circle is transformed, the other, like the self becomes “component”; as both move, unified, they are part of an organism, rather than oppositional; this experience has tremendous implication, especially for children, in their experience or recall of the peer world.**

**Isadora Duncan spoke of the danger inherent to linear thought and movement; She was a student of the Laws of Nature, wherein all is the circular expression of unending, ever-increasing evolution, wherein are no endings:“The movement of waves, of wind, of the earth is ever in the same lasting harmony. We realize that the movement of the free animals and birds remains always in correspondence to their nature, the necessities and the wants of that nature, and its correspondence to the earth nature. It is only when you put free animals under false restrictions that they lose the power of moving in harmony with nature, and adopt a movement expressive of the restrictions place upon them. So it has been with civilized man.” (Duncan, 1928)**

**Larry Dossey, M.D., in his book, *Space, Time and Medicine*, expresses a similar concern. He traces man’s disconnect with cyclic natural processes to the evolution of the linear concept of time: “Linear time is divisible into past, present, and future, and once an event has happened, it will never occur again. Our lives are so chronometrically dominated that not only have we become unconscious of the cycles of nature, we have become inured to the cycles within ourselves. We no longer eat when hungry or sleep when sleepy, but follow the dictates of the clock.” (Dossey, 1982)**

**The perception of time as linear does not include the concept of repetition. In his remarkable book, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, Mircea Eliade states that primitive man believed that an act became real only insofar as it repeated an archetype. Repetition or participation formed the sole basis for reality. Only by ceasing to become himself could he achieve reality. Inherent in the imitation of archetypes and in the repetition of paradigmatic gestures is that *time was abolished*. As we borrow from the past, taking on an archetypal role or participating in a ritual, we honor our place in the ever-spiraling continuum, we are empowered to experience ourselves as component to a greater reality: We are not alone.**

**Isadora Duncan was not seeking to invent or devise anything, but only to discover the roots of that impulse toward movement as a response to every experience, which she felt in herself and which she was convinced was a universal endowment. She was sourcing experiences which were transformational, which give humans a connection to their ancestors, to the natural world, to the archetypes which assured their never ending connection to humanity. Without the benefit of formal psychology, she knew that the spontaneous movement of the body is the first reaction of all men to sensory or emotional stimuli. Though civilization tends to dull and to inhibit this tendency, it is still the fundamental reaction of men to the universe about them. She had, however crudely and in whatever inaccurate and unscientific terminology, discovered the “soul” to be what less imaginative men have called the autonomic system.**

**I have come to understand that any group of people , connected through emotion, will naturally find rituals to encourage sustained affiliation; the**

celebration of that connection , repeated over time, replays old celebrations, ancient rituals: archetypes. These universals connect all men, they are deeper than the cultural differences which bring us to be warriors/dominators rather than partners. We need only to have encouragement to remember our deep affiliation. Carl Jung said, “ An archetype is like an old watercourse along which the water of life has flowed for centuries, digging a deep channel for itself. The longer it has flowed in this channel the more likely it is that sooner or later the water will return to its old bed” (Jung,1970). Many years, and many groups later, having also sought the source of affiliation, I too have tapped into the archetypal. It is this understanding that I bring to my international work. What originated in an institution for mentally retarded children, my “Gesture Dance” (the foundation of my ritual circle) has application to all humanity: “We find the goodness inside our hearts, share it with our friends, feel the earth below us and the sky above, and keep the breath of life circling and connecting it all”. The Turkish called it the “Dervish”; In Nepal it was likened to Yogic principles; In every cultural group, it is familiar.

Certain elements continue to emerge in my circles; The repetition of these elements contribute to their attainment of “ritual” status; The repetition also creates a dependability in the structure and content of the circle experience for participants, encouraging mastery of the elements through the practice that repetition assures. As I explore community healing rituals of ancient cultures, I am pleased to find the existence of many of these elements. (One example can be found in the dance of Kwan Yin, the Japanese Holy Mother of Compassion (Stewart,2000).)

**Elements Component to Archetypal Ritual Circles:**

- 1) **Circular Movement Pattern:** Circumambulate for grounding, meditation
- 2) **Movement/Chant Repetition** in “4’s to a beat of “4’ beat of 4 (“Hail Mary”)
- 3) **Heart as Physical/symbolic orientation:** breath cycle flow :internal to external
- 4) **Alternating focus :** individual (as whole) to group (individual as part of whole)
- 5) **Gathering/watering/planting Movements symbolic of Nourishment :**
- 6) **Soothing Movements symbolic of Nurturance:** (ex: Lullaby)
- 7) **Upward visual focus/ physical aspiration:** Internal / Spiritual processing

With humility and reverence, I acknowledge these archetypal patterns that continue; I have not invented anything, I have submitted to the flow of the ancient water course, and it flows through me.

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