

sacred
HOYOOP

SHAMANISM AND ANCIENT WISDOM FOR TODAY'S WORLD

SPIRIT HELP

WITH FOOT & MOUTH

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of the VIRUS

Shamanic
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for Healing

EARTH PEOPLE

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Mother Earth

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SILENT SPACES

The Land Art of Chris Drury



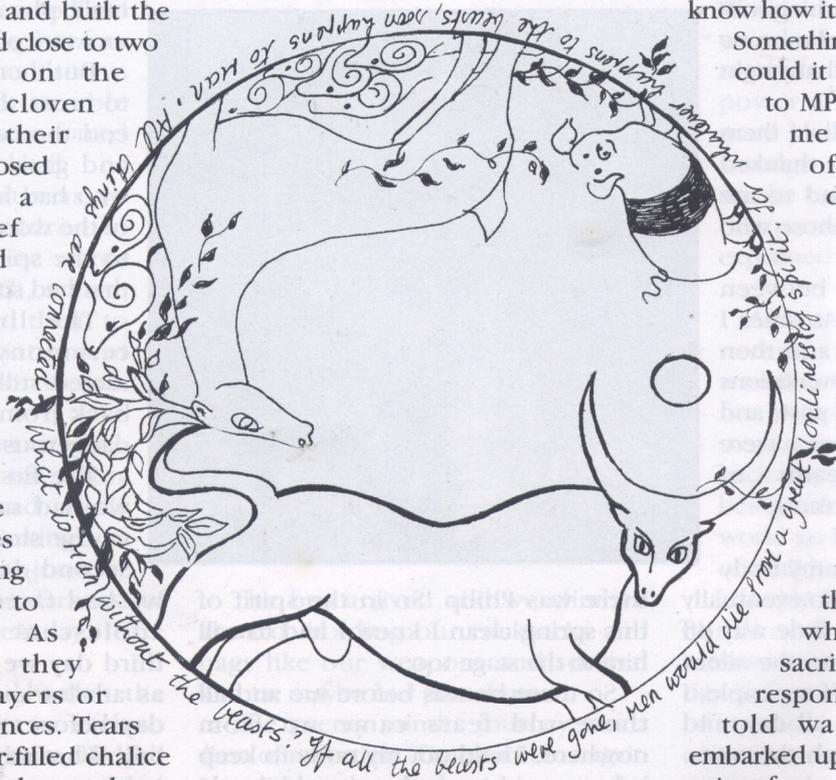
Ritual Politics

Ceremony in the Community by Annie Spencer

Four drummers gently drummed the heartbeat and so held and built the space. At first they stood close to two women who knelt on the pavement, drawing cloven hoofed animals with their chinks while a third enclosed the drawings with a quotation from Chief Seathl. As people started to gather, the drummers moved out, enlarging the sacred space. As the sun set we started.

We told of the plight of the animals and of the importance of grief. Grief is like the salt of life - it gives it vibrancy and meaning and by contrast serves to heighten our joy. As people lit candles, they spoke their own prayers or told their own experiences. Tears were added to a flower-filled chalice of spring water, which was later emptied into the river so that the river could take our tears to the sea and the sea could carry them around the globe and all the earth should know of our grief. We read an amended extract from one of Lorca's poems.

We sang Geronimo's chant, a lament, and then we prayed for inspiration. As the prayer finished, the great West doors of Bath Abbey opened and light flooded out onto our group. A crowd of people poured out and swelled our ranks. For a short while, Christians and their traditional enemies - the earth spirituality peoples - joined together. So the ceremony closed and as we left, we looked back at a simple circle of candles illuminating the drawing and the words: our testament to our relations that we remembered them and we mourned their passing.



Do we use ceremony enough in times of social and political difficulty? When we see the government implementing a policy that we strongly disagree with, most people resort to some form of political action. If we are not used to operating in that arena we often feel clumsy and ignorant and ill equipped. So for many of us the thought never gets translated into action. If it does it may feel unsatisfying and lame.

So it was with Foot and Mouth I instinctively felt that it was wrong for the government to be slaughtering millions of healthy animals especially as the disease is rarely fatal for animals and doesn't hurt humans. This crisis threw into relief the way that we fail to honour the animals we raise; we fail to express gratitude for

the sacrifice of their lives - well, we all know how it goes.

Something had to be done. What could it be? I wrote a few letters to MPs, but the tension inside me continued to grow. As often happens, Spirit dropped a small seed into my head. It was up to me whether I nurtured that seed or let it float by like thistle-down.

The idea was simple. Good Friday is the day when our established Church celebrates and honours Christ's sacrifice. Well, let us take this day to honour these millions of animals whose lives are being sacrificed to our greed. The response of the first people I told was so positive that I embarked upon the venture almost in spite of myself.

The choice of place was easy. The Abbey courtyard is in the centre of Bath and is a beautiful open space which many people use and is free of traffic. More important, it is flanked on one side by the Abbey and on the other by the building that houses the Hot Springs, a powerful gateway to the otherworld.

I was taken aback by people's reactions - the papershop man, the garageman, everybody in my part of town - by the overwhelming gratitude. Thank you - that needed to be done. Thank you - we are feeling overwhelmed. Thank you - what is going on is so bad and we're glad that someone has stood up and said so. The farmers who came had a space to weep and for their tears to be witnessed and honoured.

So how did the ceremony unfold? At first there was an idea, then there

were the practicalities of getting people together. As this happened, so the form of the ceremony started to emerge. Looking back on it, I guess these are the suggestions I would make to others.

You probably won't have a clear idea of the form at the beginning. That will emerge as you begin to talk about it and will continue during the preparations. The day after I announced my intention to two friends, I journeyed with the drum and received a teaching that translated into a development of the form. As I described the forthcoming ceremony to people, I found the form developing of its own accord and input arriving from all over the place.

The Lorca poem was offered to us on Good Friday by someone who was not planning to come. More details were decided as a few of us, including the drummers, went through a smudge ceremony minutes before making our way down to the Abbey courtyard. So the intent must be clear, the form should be held gently and then it will begin to grow, with input from many directions.

You need to be vigilant and remember your intent throughout the preparation period. For example, what was the right energy to nurture this project? I was asked whether I was advertising this with posters, on the Web, on local radio? I realised none of those ways would be in keeping with the energy of ceremony. I wanted an invitation to be passed around quietly by word of mouth. Who would come would come. We weren't going to be standing on the street handing out leaflets to passers-by. In fact the passers-by didn't matter. What mattered was that we would be able to create the space, hold the energy, and send out our prayers and trust that that was enough. Our airwaves were not radio and television but something subtler - perhaps the pigeons and starlings that cluster around the Abbey courtyard would hear us. The odd mouse or rat. Maybe a fox would venture that far into the city and see our drawing and pause by the light of our candles.

When setting up a public ceremony you need a group of experienced friends to hold the space. You will be too busy yourself running around attending to details and orchestrating

*Beneath all the statistics
Beneath all the columns
There is a drop of blood.
Beneath all the totals,
a river of warm blood.
A river that goes singing
past the bedrooms of the suburbs,
and the river is silver, cement, or wind
in the lying daybreak of the city.*

*I have not come to see the sky.
I have come to see the stormy blood,
the blood that sweeps the machines
on to the waterfalls
Every day they kill in the city,
pigs, five million
cows, one million,
lambs, one million*

*The cows and the sheep
The hogs and the lambs
lay their drops of blood down
underneath all the statistics;
and the terrible bawling
of the packed-in cattle
fills the valley with suffering.*

*This is not hell, it is a street
This is not death, it is a fruit stand.
There is a whole world of crushed rivers.
What shall I do to set my landscapes in order?*

From 'New York' by Federico Garcia Lorca, paraphrased for the vigil on Good Friday

the affair. And the skills that your friends bring will help mould the final form of the ceremony. Everybody has a different gift in the same way that we all have a particular starting point on the Medicine Wheel. Some clearly start in the West, others feel more at home in the South and so on. When considering ceremony, what skills do you bring? Are you a maker with an aptitude for beading, sewing, weaving branches, making wreaths? Are you a collector, the one who knows where to find different stones, rare mineral pieces, the one who can persuade a shopkeeper to loan out a precious glass chalice for the evening? Is music your love? Can you hold and build energy with a drum? Do you sing and do chants come to you? Are you a dancer? Do you like working with people, combining their skills? Encouraging those who feel unsure of themselves? Are you the one to choreograph their energies?

Always remember that the preparation time always takes far longer than the

Ceremony itself. By the time that you start on the form itself, much of the work has been done. You have been calling to Spirit and in fact Spirit has been responding during the preparation stage. Those who prepare for a Sundance generally take a minimum of a year to prepare for a four day ceremony. Then it is a powerful thing. Then we can trust that there is enough force behind our ritual actions - enough power, enough love, enough beauty - that even a small ceremony will send out its energy far and wide. That the fox and the birds, the elements and even the humans will feel it and will respond.

Annie Spencer has worked for many years with Native teachers, and integrates the Medicine teachings she has learnt from them with her skills of humanistic psychology. She facilitates groups both here and abroad. She is co-founder of Shamanka, a Women's shamanic training organisation (see their advert on page 43 of this Issue). She can be contacted on : (01225) 312728.

DRAWING:
A small scale version of the larger chalk drawing by Rose Flint put onto the pavement during the ceremony.