



ROOTS and VISIONS on the Eve of the Millennium

This autumn sees us sliding like a fallen skier downhill toward the Millennium, whether we want to go there or not. We can protest the terminology and the numerology; we can proclaim that counting from the birth of Jesus is not our mythology, but we are embedded in a larger culture that has made this date a mythic threshold. The timing coincides with an important milestone for our own community: This Samhain marks the twentieth anniversary of the Spiral Dance ritual, the first large scale public ritual created by what was to become Reclaiming. For me personally, it's also the twentieth anniversary of the publication of my first book, "The Spiral Dance."

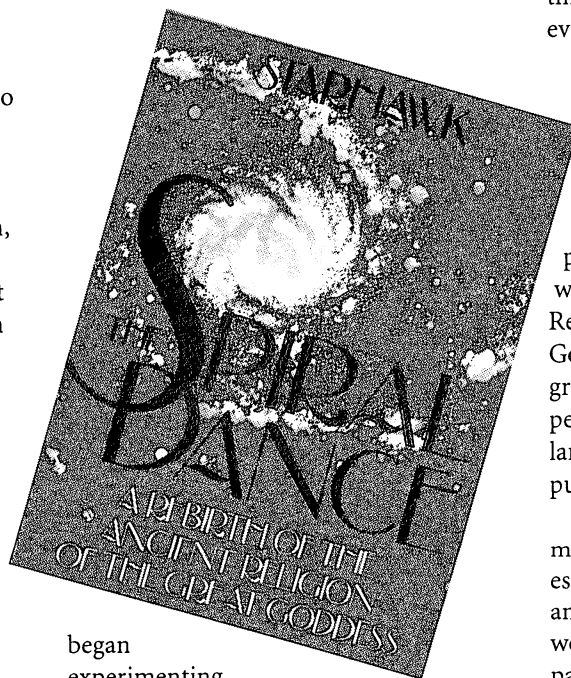
Thresholds are often a good place to pause and look both backward and forward. What path have we been on, and where are we going? Or, if we use the metaphor of Reclaiming as a garden, what beds are feeding us? How did the garden get designed this way? And what do we want to plant to carry us through the coming years?

My own actual garden took shape around the existing fruit trees planted years before we bought the land. I laid out the beds to follow the contours of the land it's planted on. In the same way, there were strong, pre-existing movements and ideas that influenced the way the Reclaiming garden took shape.

Of the "trees" which formed Reclaiming's identity, perhaps the most central was a constellation of ideas that arose within the feminist movement of the seventies, and which might be expressed as follows: "The world, as it is, is unjust, and the changes that need to be made are deep. We can't just replace

those who currently hold power, we must reconceive and restructure power itself. To make such deep changes requires a change in consciousness, and nothing forms our consciousness more strongly than our religious imagery. We need new images of the sacred, new rituals, myths and stories. We need to see the divine in female as well as male form, and to celebrate what is truly dear to us. If those ceremonies don't yet exist, we can create them. And to do so is a political act."

Out of that understanding, those of us who were around in those early days



began experimenting, creating our own rituals, searching for teachers, models, and symbols of power. We held a vision of a spirituality that saw itself as actively political and that fostered political activism. And we held a vision of a political activism fed by our personal

and collective healing, rooted in the deep insights of the spirit, and drawing on the mythic powers of symbol, story and magic.

"In *The Spiral Dance*," I attempted to synthesize that vision. At the time it was published, I was twenty-eight years old. I had been practicing the Craft sporadically for about ten years and in a consistent and dedicated fashion for three or four years. I had also been writing seriously for seven years with no success at getting anything published. So when Harper & Row accepted "*The Spiral Dance*," I was thrilled. I wanted to throw the biggest, most fabulous ritual ever created — and they were willing to rent the hall.

At that time I was working in two covens, a mixed coven called Compost and a Women's Coven called Raving. We had celebrated public rituals of up to thirty or forty people — and we had attended wonderful rituals put on by the New Reformed Orthodox Order of the Golden Dawn and other Bay Area Pagan groups of up to two or three hundred people. But we had never attempted a large-scale ritual aimed at the general public.

We wrote a script that attempted to make people feel at ease by starting off essentially as a performance, a familiar and comfortable mode. Gradually, we would bring the audience into full participation with the dancing of the spiral. We called on some amazingly talented friends to work with us. Amber Khan and Mara June Quicklightning wrote music, Mara also trained a chorus. Creativity overwhelmed any thought of practicality. Eleanor Myers made fur-lined ceramic headdresses for the the



chorus, and Medea Maquis sculpted full head masks out of porcelain for the Goddesses, along with a triple Goddess tree sculpture for a central focus. Kevyn Lutton macraméd the Goddess vestments and made beaded wire headdresses for the elements dancers. (The masks and headdresses are long sold or broken — but those macramé dresses may yet reappear at this year's ritual!) Sophia Sparks painted silk banners and Selene Kumin created dances. Many other people worked on the ritual and the accompanying art show. We held the event in Fort Mason, in a large interior room since remodeled and demolished, over two nights — the first for video documentation and media, the second 'for real.' On the second night, we were forced to turn fifty or a hundred people away as we just couldn't crowd any more into the room.

The ritual reflected the excitement of that era. Just to use the word "Goddess" was daring and heretical. To call ourselves "Witches" was to take a political stance. That first script included explicitly political litanies: for the species who had become extinct because of human greed, for the victims of violence

and persecution, for our heras and heros, and a litany for our beloved dead.

That last litany fit on two or three pages, and included all the Beloved Dead we could think of in our entire lives. Most of us were still in our twenties, most of our parents and even grandparents were still alive, and AIDS had not yet decimated our community. In later years, as we opened the list to include the Beloved Dead of participants, not just ritual planners, as our community grew and aged and as AIDS became a constant reality, we had



to limit the names to those who had died during that year. This naming became the heart of the ritual.

The other litanies were rewritten many times and took on many different forms. At the tenth anniversary Spiral Dance, Beverly Frederick and Suzanne Sterling choreographed a series of exquisite dances for them. But as the ritual grew longer and longer, and the pain of sitting on cold floors for hours grew excruciating for the participants, we looked for other ways to present the same ideas, often as altars.

Judy Foster built the first elaborate

north altar in 1981, when the ritual moved to the Women's Building. Over the years, the altars have become huge and amazing interactive environmental art pieces. Our altar building tradition grew directly from the influence of the Latino culture around us, where the traditional altares for the dead have inspired a whole genre of art.

Our altars are one example of how we have drawn on the rich cultures that surround us here in the Bay Area. In recent years, I've often heard Reclaiming described as a "European-based" tradition. In the light of our ongoing discussions of diversity, I want to examine that assumption, and the evolution of the Spiral Dance ritual makes a good lens.

Obviously, our ritual calendar, many of our myths, stories, symbols and deities originate in Europe or the Middle East. Yet how we practice is very different even from existing Pagan groups in Europe and the British Isles, let alone from what the ancestors might have done. If we choose to call our roots "European" we may be covering over

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contributions of other cultures, just as when we talk about “Italian” cuisine we often forget that tomatoes and zucchini squash came from this side of the Atlantic.

So the Spiral Dance draws not just on the Latino altar-building tradition, but on the integrated knowledge that death is a part of life that allows us to party with skeletons in the street on El Dia de los Muertos. And our understanding of our relationship to the ancestors as well as some of our deeper magical practices have been strongly shaped by the Yoruba-based traditions around us, in my case especially by my friendship and mutual teaching with Luisah Teish. We were also deeply influenced by Native American teachings about our relationship to the land, to the plants, animals and other creatures who are also our relations. Victor Anderson, who trained me in the Feri tradition, attributed its origins to the little people of Scotland, but what he actually taught me drew on Hawaiian, African, Jewish, Native American and Latino sources as well.

Most of us who worked on the early Spiral Dance script saw ourselves as poets, and we came up in the beat/hippie/avant garde poetry and arts scene of the time. The “Let It Begin Now” litany, for example, was directly inspired by a litany of Diane di Prima’s, “May It Continue.” The many facets of the cultural revolution of the Sixties and Seventies arose from the convergence of Eastern and Western thought, upon a ground of Native American sensibility. Many of us in Reclaiming practice yoga or tantra or Zen meditation. We work with the chakras; we go to acupuncturists and Chinese herbalists. Our understanding of magical energies is informed by those ancient, unbroken traditions, as all of Western occultism

has been strongly influenced by Hindu teachings since the nineteenth century.

Much of our approach to magic, to community building, and to collective organization work comes from the nonviolent direct action movement of

your creative vision.”

One reason we began so strongly proclaiming ourselves a European-based tradition was to forestall charges of cultural appropriation which began to be leveled at many groups some time in the late eighties.

Cultural appropriation as a concept arose from the Native American and First Nations communities, who grew angry at people taking rituals, chants, myths and sacred objects out of their context, diluting their meanings, and sometimes profiting off them or dishonestly claiming authority and expertise they hadn’t earned. To too many European Americans, Native Americans traditions seemed sadly but safely dead, and therefore free for the taking. The cultural appropriation debate was a way the indigenous community could shout loudly, “Hey, We’re Still Here! We’re not dead, we’re alive and still practicing these traditions — and we, not you, will determine how they grow and develop and change. You took our land, you murdered



the eighties, which has also been a strong formative influence on our tradition.

If we see ourselves as purely “European based”, we are inevitably limiting our diversity. We’re subtly saying “This is a European house, and people of other heritages of course are welcome guests, but don’t try to bring in any of your furniture.” Or “The garden beds are laid out, the design is set — come weed and hoe and even plant but don’t expect to make this garden reflect

millions of us, now keep your hands off our ceremonies! And besides, *you don’t know what you’re doing!* You’re taking the form without the culture, the acclaim without the accountability, the symbols without the knowledge behind them, and you’re screwing them up. Go practice your own traditions — or create them, but hands off ours.”

In Reclaiming, we were both looking for the earth-based roots in our

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Starhawk: Visions

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own varied but mostly European heritages and creating new rituals. We were never claiming to be Indians or to be performing Indian ceremonies. Nevertheless, the Pagan community as a whole was for a time included in these charges. Pagan rituals and Native American ceremonies share enough similarities — the concept of the circle, the four directions, the reverence for the earth — that it could easily look like we were trying to do Indian ceremonies and just not getting them quite right. But of course, we could not practice an earth honoring tradition on Turtle Island without being shaped by and incorporating elements of the indigenous culture.

Because Reclaiming folks tend to be sensitive, politically conscious people, we listened to what indigenous voices were saying. We put away our smudge sticks and purged our chants of anything questionable. We became more acutely aware of how our different cultural interpretations might cause pain or harm to others. As an example, in Reclaiming we have a long standing tradition of writing parodies of our most sacred chants. It's part of what keeps us sane and humble. One time I had taught a group of students a chant I learned from Luisah Teish, and later that day was horrified to hear them singing a not-very-nice parody of it. Had someone from her community heard it, it would not have sounded like loving self-mockery, but like racist trivialization of something sacred. A Hopi clown can ritually mock the ceremony he is part of — but were a stranger to jump in and do the same it would be a hostile and destruc-

tive act. We can make fun of our own sacred symbols, but not of somebody else's — especially when we belong to a group that has historically been the oppressors, and the somebody else has historically been the target of our oppression.

As the cultural appropriation debate spread to include other traditions, we in Reclaiming became more and more careful about what symbols we used and what deities we invoked. In practice, this meant that our rituals became whiter and whiter. The issue of what sacred powers, myths and symbols we have the right to work with became very confusing. Does our entitlement depend on our ancestry? If so, then how do I as a Jew have the right to call on Brigid any more than Spider Woman? Am I limited to Asherah and Shekinah? Do I have the right to play the doumbec because presumably somewhere back in the lost mists of time my ancestors came from the Middle East? Then what about Mary Ellen Donald, my drum teacher, who has not a drop of Middle Eastern blood in her body, to my knowledge, but plays all the instruments better than I ever will. Must she be limited to the kettle drum or bodhran? Can I claim Freya because the Germans killed my people, or the Baba Yaga because presumably, somewhere in their sojourn in the Ukraine, at least one of my ancestors may have been raped by a Cossack?

In practice, we tended to feel entitled to anything European along with whatever we could claim some remote blood connection with. However, we Reclaiming teachers also do work in Europe — where actual Europeans tend to see themselves as German or Irish or Welsh and not something as generic as the new proposed currency. The women in our German Witch camp loved working with the Baba Yaga, but they didn't identify the story as representing their heritage: they're looking for a German story for the next camp, and if they find a story from north Germany, the Swabish and Bavarian women may not identify it as theirs. At our English

camp in Glastonbury last year, we worked with a Welsh story from maybe fifty miles away, and were asked constantly "Why aren't you doing a story from here?"

Questions of entitlement can make us as obsessed with our ancestors as any keeper of the roster of the Daughters of the American Revolution. At a certain point, we have to stop ourselves and say, "Hey, is this the road we want to go on? Weren't we working for a world of freedom, where we could honor the ancestors but not be cut off because of our race or culture from realms of human knowledge or endeavor?"

In the midst of my own personal wrestling with these issues, I ran into an old, wise woman in trance who simply shook her head and said, "Forget about your ancestors, child, it's the children that I care about!"

As I write, three of my Goddess daughters are up in the loft giggling over the Harry Potter books. Their ancestry includes English, Irish, African, Jewish, Native American and probably many others, but two of them look "white" and one looks "black." I know that in spite of all our efforts to eradicate racism, their lives will be shaped differently because of that fact.

I wish for Florence a world in which she will never for a moment see her skin color or the texture of her hair as anything but beautiful, where every opportunity she craves will be open to her, where prejudice, racism and slavery will seem as incomprehensible and archaic as the metallurgy tools of a Bronze Age culture. I want her to know that she is the Goddess, and that the Goddess is black, brown, red, yellow, fat, thin, old and young.

To create that world for her, it's imperative that she see images of the Goddess that resemble her. I don't have the luxury to ask "Do I have the authority to put African Goddess images in my home?" I need to have them, for her sake, and to know something about them if I am to fulfill my responsibilities to her.

But what about Allison and Lyra? I want them, too, to see themselves as the Goddess, as

beautiful, as able to do anything they want. And I want them to know that the Goddess is also black, brown, red, thin, fat, old and young, and that deity comes in all genders and forms. Is it not equally important that they grow up surrounded by a

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multiplicity of figures and images?

And is it not important for the grown-up children we are to also see a multiplicity of images of deity? First, so that we truly know that we are welcome in this community whatever our heritage may be. But also so that we who live in a deeply divided, racist world, remind ourselves, again and again in sacred space, that deity comes in all colors and that all of us are valued.

How do we do this without falling back into superficiality and cultural appropriation? And without losing or diluting traditions and connections that are dear to us?

These are not simple questions and each one deserves a longer discussion than I have room for here. But here are some guidelines we might begin with:

Be Honest: Don't pretend to be what you're not or to speak with an authority you haven't been granted.

Make Room: Conceive of Reclaiming as a garden big enough for many different kinds of beds. Make room for people to express their heritage, to sing in their own language, and to call on the deities and symbols they are deeply connected with.

Define Ourselves Differently: Or maybe refuse to define ourselves. Instead of "European based", to acknowledge that we are more like jazz or rock music, a synthesis of many influences. We call ourselves an earth-based tradition without limiting our roots to one continent or one heritage.

Deepen Our Knowledge: Truly learn and study the traditions that call to us. Take lessons on that drum and learn about the rich musical heritage it comes from. Don't just pick a name out of a book — devote real time and effort to developing in depth knowledge of both a diety and its surrounding culture. Moreover, learn about the history and present day struggles of the people.

Ask Permission: This one isn't always easy, because we don't always know who to ask permission from or who has the authority to

speak for a tradition. But sometimes it's clear — if someone teaches you a song they wrote or a story, ask permission to pass it on and give credit where credit is due.

Interrupt Oppression: Speak out when you hear insensitive, racist, sexist, homophobic remarks. Don't put the burden on the target group to confront attacks. If a culture has fed you, defend it.

Give Back: If we are fed by symbols, stories or deities of a particular people, we have an obligation to give back something to that community and to participate in their real life, present day struggles. This might mean doing political work, or supporting particular events, or teaching what you know in that community, or visiting a friend in the hospital and entertaining him with a tale from his own culture he doesn't know. It might mean giving back money: if you hit platinum with your recording of a Latvian folk song, you tithe back to that community.

In practice, because everything is interconnected, giving back also means working on the global economic, social and environmental issues that affect us all.

Love All the Children: Amory Lovins says his design criteria on a new project is "How do we love all the children?" If we are nurtured and inspired by a tradition, we can worry less about who our ancestors are, and start to think of ourselves as the ancestors of the future, taking on responsibility for the lives and well being of the children of that culture, and for creating the world we want all the children to grow up in.

The path we take into the next millenium will depend upon how we define ourselves. My hope is that we can see our-

selves as a garden broad enough to contain many different beds and vistas, with room for all our ancestors, and nurturing food for all the children to come.

Starhawk is the author of many published books on Goddess religion, from "The Spiral Dance" to "Circle Round, Raising Children in Goddess Tradition." She is a feminist, activist, teacher, Witch, gardener, drummer and one of Reclaiming's founders. For Starhawk's schedule of appearances, see page 46.

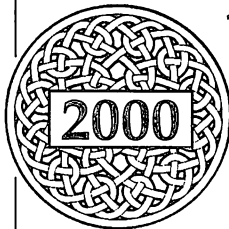
Importance of Iron

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than supplements. Iron in meat is better absorbed than vegetable sources (nonheme iron). Red meat is one of the best sources of heme iron. Black tea, coffee and calcium block absorption, while vitamin C promotes it. Iron supplementation is not recommended without due cause because iron toxicity is possible, especially in men. In fact, accidental iron poisoning is a major cause of death for children under the age of three in the U.S. Ferrous sulfate is the most common form of supplement, but it can be irritating to the digestive tract, possibly causing constipation and diar-

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