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Community Ritual and Transformative Change

A Primer for Activists

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Sabrina Scott

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About

Sabrina Scott is an illustrator, designer, activist, artist, and nerd. At the time of this writing (December 2012) they are working towards their Masters of Environmental Studies at York University. Their research focuses on relationships between pagan magical praxis and activistic codices, with a focus on cultural production, witchcraft, and environmental justice. In their visual work they explore religion, magic, folklore, ethnobotany, fauna, and everything in between. They make drawings, paintings, woodcuts, books, prints, and goodies for the naturalist in all of us.

Oh yeah - they're also a witch.

At the time of this printing (June 2016), Sabrina Scott is doing their PhD in Science and Technology Studies, also at York. Their research still concerns magic, books, and activism, but has shifted to interrogate the relationship between magic and science. Sabrina is a lifelong witch and Spiritualist, and works as an illustrator, designer, and tarot reader.

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Theory

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"Magick is the Science of understanding oneself and one's conditions. It is the Art of applying that understanding in action." – Aleister Crowley

Magic is "the art of changing consciousness at will."
– Dion Fortune

The purpose of this guide is to provide an introduction to the fusion of popular education philosophies and magical ritual space. Ritual magic and anti-oppressive pedagogies have the potential to be assets that complement each other when working towards personal and collective transformation. These frameworks are worthwhile additions to the arsenal of any advocate of social change.

In writing this document I aim to provide and describe a set of tools that may be used for the purpose of activist magic, regardless of one's cosmology. Not all witches

are Pagan, and not all Neopagans work within the God/Goddess binary of Reclaiming (an explicitly activist Neopagan witchcraft tradition); many may not acknowledge deity at all. I would like to provide a framework that magical practitioners may use to create activist community rituals, independent of theology. Though I constantly speak of spirits in this zine, (and so my writing may be most useful to those who share this basic tenet of my ontology) the techniques I present can also be effective for participants who perceive it as a psychological and metaphorical activity. I would also like to introduce the technique of community ritual and magic to activists and popular educators. I base these techniques on ritual energetics and transformative energy work from a Western esoteric point of view. They are informed by my nearly lifelong involvement in Spiritualism and witchcraft.

In the context of ritual magic, effective energy work can be described as having *duende*. Frederico Garcia Lorca describes *duende* as “a power, not a work. It is a struggle, not a thought” (Lorca, 49). *Duende* is a “mysterious power which everyone senses and no philosopher explains’... in sum, the spirit of the earth” (ibid). Magic and ritual – if successfully executed – live and breathe *duende*. It takes practice to effectively work magic, to harness and release powerful, big, scary energies that may be overwhelming and uncomfortable. Indeed, it may take many years to successfully notice, feel, and work with energy. That energy, when we’re aware of it, is a brush we can use to create action, revolution, and healing. Magic is an art form, and “all arts are capable of *duende*” (Lorca, 54).

It is necessary here to include words of caution. The *Nuu-chah-nulth* (Indigenous peoples from the Pacific Northwest Coast of Canada) word for “a supernatural

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experience between a human and the spirit world” translates roughly into English as “fearful” (Atleo, 72). This is common in many cultures’ understandings of spirit contact. It is certainly not something to be taken lightly – any undertaking in which spirit contact occurs must be treated with the utmost respect. That doesn’t mean that there’s no room for mirth and revelry – it just means that what we do as practitioners of magic is very real and it’s important to proceed with an awareness of the tangible effects of energy work and magic. As with all things, there are risks to be aware of and mitigate. Certain types of paint may be poisonous if ingested, but painting is generally not considered a dangerous activity by any stretch of the imagination. Magic can be thought of in a similar way – but for a lot of folks the magical equivalent of eating paint may not be incredibly obvious without years of practice.

The very tangible risk inherent within magical practice may be linked to reaching towards freedom, for “it is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained... the individual who has not staked his or her life may, no doubt, be recognized as a Person; but he or she has not attained the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness” (Hegel, 233). With risk can come great freedom, great revelation and revolution.

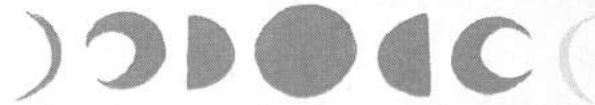
The riskiness of magic, like much activist practice (be it direct action or otherwise), reminds me of the scene depicted in card sixteen of the Rider-Waite-Smith tarot deck. “The universe,” Rachel Pollack writes, “and the human mind will not allow us to stay forever imprisoned in our towers of illusion and repression. If we cannot free ourselves peacefully then the forces of life will arrange an explosion” (Pollack, 118). The card depicts a single stark grey tower, caught aflame and struck

by lightning, with two figures falling down from the tower, suspended in air. The Tower

“[releases] locked up energy as a flood. Why take such a dangerous course? The answer is that no other way exists to finally go beyond the barrier of consciousness, or to break free from that which separates life into opposites and which cuts us off from the pure energy contained within ourselves. The truth comes all at once or it does not come at all” (Pollack, 119).

However, this card, which usually signifies violent upheaval, often leads to freedom and new beginnings.

The struggle depicted in The Tower reminds me of activist struggles across the globe, and in the city where I live. To me the G20 protests in Toronto were The Tower writ large – flaming cop cars five minutes from my house, tear gas, shattered windows, kettled crowds, endless screaming, constant fear. This “struggle to become free Subjects and to participate in the transformation of ... society” (Richard Shaull, *Foreward in Freire*, 29) is a common one, as oppression and hegemony run rampant around the globe in different ways. As violence is inflicted on the oppressed, so the oppressed resist, rise up – a risk worth taking for freedom. The Tower has duende, for “the duende’s arrival always means a radical change in forms” (Lorca, 53) – the same can be said for the appearance of The Tower. As activists, as educators, as practitioners of magic, we must run toward duende, not from it. It is on the wave of duende and The Tower that true transformation travels.



To do so is to live suspended in a land of fantasy, too far removed from reality on the ground to effect change or to intelligently work ritual magic for the purpose of social and environmental justice. Activism and ritual, to fully express the ideology of praxis, must be constantly shifting, responsive to criticism and shifting circumstances, must be constantly aware of power dynamics, politics, and the need for continuous re-evaluation. Too often have I been to group rituals which, holiday after holiday, remain tepid, devoid of duende, suffocated by a vertical hierarchy which stifles many participants to the extent that all they can really do is follow the motions.

Resistance, struggle, solidarity, support, community, agency. These things matter in ritual space, because “spirituality and ritual are not something removed from the world, but are deeply embedded in it” (Starhawk). Activism and ritual magic should not reify hegemonic structures of power – yet they do, and often. This lazy comfortable uncritical magic and activism needs to stop. The last thing activists and magical practitioners should be doing is following the motions – to remain relevant, we must change, react, adapt, think, act, and reflect. It won’t always be comfortable – and it shouldn’t be. Starhawk writes, “conflict is a deeply spiritual place. It’s the high-energy place where power meets power, where change and transformation can occur.” By infusing ritual magic with the ethics of human rights, anti-oppressive pedagogy and community building, it is possible to navigate the stormy seas of transformative justice and emerge – changing, changed, victorious.

Reflection

the world's oceans, or how many Canadians are living without potable water. Practice as force of habit becomes disconnected from achieving any real transformation in participants or their surroundings, and so becomes innocuous, a form of ritual psychodrama, theatre without substance. Alan Moore writes of the disconnect between theory and practice as it manifests in occultism as "leftover hoodwinks, too-tight ceremonial sashes that constrain all growth, restrict all thought, limit the ways in which we conceive of or can conceive of magic."

When ritual magic becomes estranged from its roots – creating change – what we're left with is a room full of people who don't know why they're there, or why they're doing what they're doing, repeating memorized motions and wearing specific clothing and using specific herbs without any introspection concerning the why of their actions. This is something that I've experienced on many an occasion, and it always leaves me disappointed, as a witch and an activist. What's the point of expending energy, making an effort and directing it towards a cause, if there is no more than five or ten minutes of thought that goes into it? Why bother to show up to a protest to scream at cops and wave signs (blaring slogans without context) if you're just there to 'be fashionable' and keep up with the specific humanitarian cause in style this season?

I have never once attended a ritual (in Western ritual or folk magic frameworks) that acknowledged Native sovereignty of the land upon which we do our workings in Canada, a settler society. Only once have I attended a ritual that acknowledged the precarity of the earth, in stark contrast to the more popular view, which seems to ignore the constancy with which our planet is under siege. We can't afford to invoke 'water' without acknowledging pollution of streams and rivers.



Action: Opening

When we intentionally create space, we create the groundwork for action. It's important to shape the space you will be conducting your ritual so that it acts as an incubator, a workspace, a studio, a place of growth where boundaries can be pushed. Community ritual space should inspire participants to work on themselves and the world around them.

The places we inhabit are permeated by energy. Doing activist work for social change and personal transformation – of both our communities and ourselves – is always something which expends a lot of energy, and which sends a lot of energy out into the world. When we engage with energy without intent or awareness, we have the potential to create spaces which are triggering, unsafe, and hostile – spaces where it may be difficult or impossible to engage in the work we wish to do as activists and advocates for each other, and for social justice causes we care about.

Action: Opening

This works on both a literal level and an energetic level. Is the room you are using big enough to comfortably accommodate all of your participants? Is it sufficiently warm or cool? Is there adequate airflow? Sometimes, rooms just have bad vibes. I know that some classrooms, homes, and cafes I've been in make me feel nauseous and uneasy every time I'm there, if I'm not careful to protect myself. Whether or not that's the case with the space you may be using, it's important to know how to work with and clear spaces with negative energy signatures, so that we're able to work with those spaces. Sometimes we may not have another option.

So you've chosen your working space. What now? Sit in the room by yourself, silently, with the lights off. Close your eyes and feel where you are. Let the room reveal itself to you. If you have difficulty focusing during silent meditation, try playing a guided meditation tape or repetitive rhythm, like that of a drum. Sound, especially repetitive sound, is a useful technique to enter an altered state of consciousness. Try to connect with any spirits present in the room, and with the room's energy, the energy signature left by days, months, years of (potentially thoughtless) use. Listen to what these energies reveal to you. If your mind wanders and you find yourself thinking about dinner, let it pass, and peacefully return to your original line of thought – the room. (Though in my descriptions I refer to indoor space, these exercises can easily be adapted for outdoor use. When working outdoors, however, we need to be especially mindful of the creatures and spirits who inhabit that environment.)

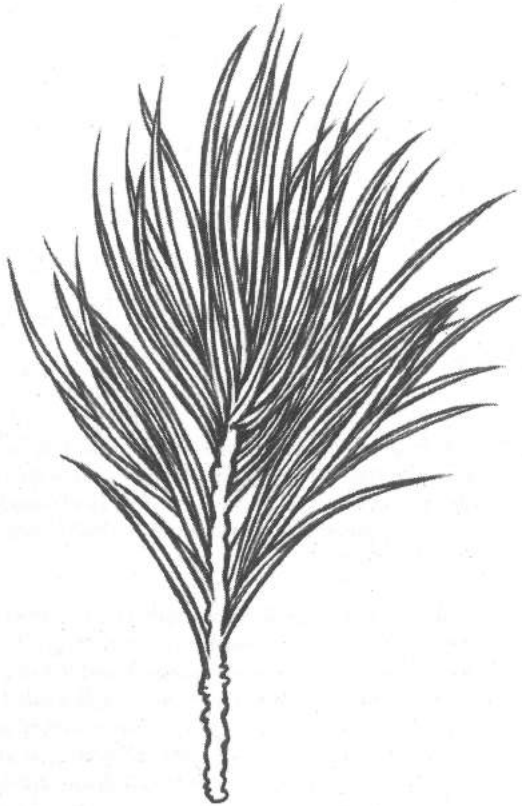
After you've felt out the room, it's important to consider how you might cleanse and prepare the space for the work you will be doing. Maybe you're only using the room once, maybe you'll be meeting every week, maybe every day.



Some scholars have interpreted magic as being a strategy to resolve social tensions, which can provide socially vulnerable or powerless people a means of achieving an informal justice, and achieving existential comfort and control over one's environment (Hayes). Though this analysis may be reductively instrumentalist in the eyes of many magical practitioners (since it is important to acknowledge the ontological reality and mechanics of ritual technology to those who live it), it does provide an adequate framework for understanding the relevance of magic to social struggle, retribution, and rebellion, regardless of how one feels about inferred cosmological truths or untruths. Engaging with magic is very much about achieving results, but it also fundamentally concerns building relationships and connecting with one's world, society, and environment. Repeatedly taking the time and space to focus on forming bonds with the place we live in and the people we're surrounded by is a valuable act that helps us tease out meaning and band together to reclaim agency in times of vulnerability and celebration alike.

Conscious ritual magic allows for constant negotiation and re-negotiation of the liminal space between theory and practice. Magic and activist efforts without forethought fall flat and become ineffective, incapable of successfully transforming communities, individuals or environments. Community ritual can provide space for a fusion of theory and practice, a fertile ground from which praxis can grow.

Much like contemporary activist efforts, it is common for much public (and private) group magical practice to be devoid of any critical reflection or reflexivity about the subject position of participants in a world of human and non-human actors in the biopolitical sphere. Water may be thoughtlessly invoked during rituals without any awareness of the plight of



Whatever the answer, it is important to engage the space with intention. Thoughtfully cleansing and preparing the space is a big part of that engagement. There is no one specific way to cleanse space. If you have any cultural or spiritual traditions that are meaningful to you, feel free to draw from those traditions when creating intentional space for the purpose of work and ritual.

As a facilitator, you may want to engage in these actions alone, prior to the arrival of your group. Or, depending on the comfort level of the participants, you may want to engage in some of these activities as a group, and reclaim the space together. This can be a great way to build bonds within a group, but also has the potential to alienate participants who are less explicitly spiritual. However, one way to work with that potential area of discomfort is to encourage participants to interpret things in whatever way they like. If they wish to perceive these activities as very literal spiritual cleansings, that's great – but if they prefer to see it as metaphorical (working the way a placebo works), that's fine too. The processes I outline have the potential to be valuable to people with both perspectives. If in doubt, ask – and try to work together as a group to figure out something that is comfortable for everyone.

If you live in a settler country or community (Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand come to mind), I advocate acknowledging whose traditional land you are on before beginning your ritual. For instance, I live in Toronto, and that land belongs to the Mississaugas of New Credit First Nation. Bringing an awareness of the political implications of living in a settler society into a community space working towards transformative change both in one's self and one's environment is incredibly important. If this is

Action: Opening

not something you feel comfortable doing in your space, that's alright – but it may be worth asking yourself why you feel hesitant to do so. Do you feel comfortable acknowledging it some times, but not others? Why? How does acknowledging the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples change the energy in the room?

Something else to consider when planning a communal ritual is the needs of your participants. Does anyone have any (dis)abilities that require attention? Does the venue need to be wheelchair accessible? Are there participants who would prefer to sit on chairs, rather than the floor? Is the ritual going to be open-invite, or closed to a select group of participants? Will the ritual be a space for only women? Only men? Only trans people? Only people of colour? Only survivors of assault? Only residents of a certain community?

We all need our space to heal and work together in a community setting, and thinking about who the space is for might help you and your group set it up in a more intentional way. However, it's important to be aware that exclusive group spaces can be both “nurturing and destructive” (Reagon). But, while it lasts, exclusive group space “should be a nurturing space where you sift out what people are saying about you and decide who you really are” (ibid). Exclusive spaces are “nurturing, but... also [nationalist]. At a certain stage nationalism is crucial to a people if you are going to ever impact as a group in your own interest. Nationalism at another point becomes reactionary because it is totally inadequate for surviving in the world with many peoples” (ibid). It might be a good idea to keep these words in mind as you plan your community rituals. Both open and closed rituals have their advantages and drawbacks, and fulfill different roles in activist work and community building.



Reflection

“We must not negate practice for the sake of theory... to negate theory for the sake of practice, as in the use of dialogue as conversation, is to run the risk of losing oneself in the disconnectedness of practice.” – Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo

“Could not all magical orders, with their doctrines and their dogmas, be interpreted as the unmoving calcified remains of something once intangible and full of grace, alive and mutable? As energies, as inspirations and ideas that danced from mind to mind, evolving as they went until at last the limestone drip of ritual and repetition froze them in their tracks, stopped them forever halfway through some reaching, uncompleted gesture? Trilobite illuminations. Fossil angels.” – Alan Moore

Action: Closing

assuring the success of community. If only one person is helping to clean up, that betrays the feeling that the ritual was created for people, and wasn't a group effort – so try to avoid this, if you can. If it's something you encounter more than once, try things differently next time, and see if you can tweak your style of facilitation to encourage group participation, creativity, and input. You may want to make cleaning up into a game - figure something out that works for your group.

Be sure to touch base with participants and co-facilitators on a regular basis. Does anyone have any constructive criticism or feedback? Someone might have skills to offer, and may wish to help lead a session of their own. This is a never-ending process, so if your first attempts don't go as planned, try to roll with it and learn from it. Don't get too caught up on always being the 'leader.' Meet someone who has never led a ritual before? Awesome! Chat with them and work with them, offer support and resources. Exercise vigilance in regard to group power dynamics. Are men constantly mansplaining things? Do women speak up enough? Are cissexism and heteronormativity rearing their ugly heads? Are there power structures in place that prevent the ritual space from being safe and comfortable for people of colour? These are questions you will need to constantly re-assess and negotiate, especially as people learn together in community space. Some people may call each other out – and that's okay. It's vital not to ignore the elephant in the room, especially in ritual space. (And hey, heated political debate can fuel some pretty intense magic. But that's a topic for another zine!) The best advice I have to give is to be friendly and open to criticism. View it as an opportunity for growth and learning – promptly throw your ego out the window.



Action: Raising

In a ritual setting, the following exercises can be done either solo, or with the entire group present. I would suggest the facilitator or host does a few of these exercises in preparation to host the ritual, and then some can be done with all participants present, so that everyone contributes to owning and transforming the space they inhabit. These techniques are great ways to set the stage for manifesting thoughtful and transformative community space. Feel free to pick and choose from this list, and adapt them as you see fit. Or, find inspiration in this list to come up with some ideas of your own.

These methods can also be used during the raising of energy during the formal ritual itself. However, before that aspect of the ritual can be carried out successfully, the space first needs to be with intention, so that the energy raised is in alignment with that intention and does not become scattered.

Action: Raising

Transforming space by visualizing.

Visualize a big glowing ball of light around the room. What colour is it? What does it look like? Imagine that this is the kind of space you envision it to be, and by envisioning it, it becomes reality. Think of qualities you would like the space to have – would you like everyone in it to feel comfortable? Maybe you want a space that feels especially safe, like a big comfy bed in the wintertime. What other qualities are important to you? I like to transform spaces in which I enact group ritual to be community spaces in which there are equal power dynamics, so that when one person talks too much and others don't feel heard, the group self-directs the energy back on track to be more respectful of each person's contribution and to encourage participation by shyer folks. In this visualization, you can also prepare for any potential unwanted negative energies which may try to shatter the environment you're envisioning. One way to engage with this is to visualize dark tendrils of energy drifting towards your white sphere, and visualizing them bouncing off, and transforming from grey, into white energy.

You can use any colour that has positive associations for you, on a personal or cultural level. Though I do not personally hold white to always symbolize positivity and constructive energy, I am embedded within a Western framework and society that does hold these associations, where 'white' is associated with light and happiness and 'black' is associated with darkness and negativity. So, when teaching others how to visualize energy, I usually keep with the black/white dichotomy of negative/positive, because the cultural associations with these colours can help strengthen the integrity of the visualization for those who are learning. However, you can use any colour that is meaningful to you.



Action: Closing

Techniques and methods for closing a community ritual space vary widely – so you may want to consult with your fellow participants beforehand and see what everyone is comfortable with. If deities, spirits, or ancestors were asked to be present during the opening of the ritual, at the closing of the rite is always a good time to offer gratitude and thanks for their presence. If you are part of a tradition that casts a circle around the space, the conclusion of the ritual activity marks a good time to uncast the circle.

Try to facilitate a group awareness of the need to help tidy up and clean after the working is complete. If you were able to foster a sense of community before and during the ritual, this should be a natural extension of the communal environment that has already been created. There should be a feeling that each participant in the room has something to offer, and that each person plays a fundamental role in

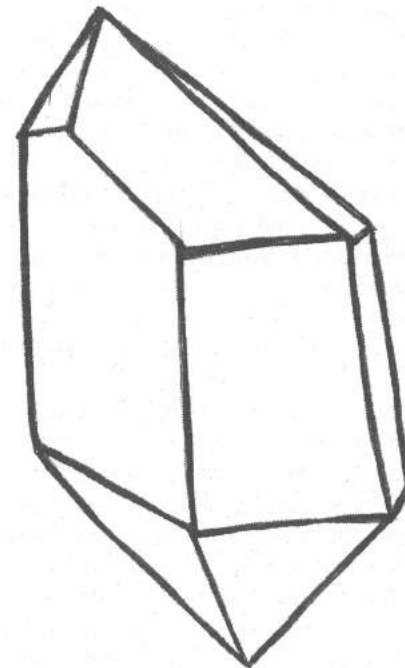
Action: Grounding

Grounding energy with spirit

You can lead yourself through a visualization to ground excess energy. Whichever techniques you feel drawn to, you will have to contend with visualization along the way at some point; in this work, it is unavoidable. It's also a more difficult way of engaging with energy – a lot of practitioners, particularly newer practitioners, like the visual aids, the ritual theatre of constantly working with objects. Since it is likely that you will not always have helpful visual or physical grounding aids on hand, it is always important to know how to ground without them, so you don't become too reliant on external objects as crutches for your energy work. If you're feeling sick from energy overload and you can only ground yourself effectively with your lucky amethyst, your health may be compromised, and you may feel discomfort and pain longer than you would if you had honed your visualization skills to ground yourself. One way of accomplishing this is to imagine roots extending down from beneath your feet, down into the earth beneath you. Imagine all excess energy (be it manifested in agitation, nervousness, headaches, dizziness – or you could do this work as a precaution) trickling down into the ground, into the earth, into the soil, beneath the concrete or grass where you are. Feel the rootedness of your body – embedded in the ground like a tree, trunk strong and sturdy, roots deep. After a few minutes of this visualization you should feel grounded and refreshed. If you don't resonate with a tree visualization, you can also curl up into a ball and imagine yourself as a stone or a rock. I've seen this work very well with young children whose energy levels are over the top!



Maybe in your visualization, you'll use pink to represent a positive, loving, safe space. Maybe you'll use red to represent dangerous energy. What colours you choose are less important than the meanings you associate with each colour. Visualization is very personal, so don't get caught up on someone else's symbols! Use your own. Personalize the technique so that it has more power and truth for you.



Action: Raising

Transforming space by sweeping

We can cleanse the energies of ourselves and the space we inhabit by sweeping away any harmful vibes that we've picked up throughout the day. Some of us may like to do this with our bodies or hands, and some with tools or objects like brooms. Whichever way you're more comfortable with is fine!

In order to get rid of any harmful energies you've been carrying around, you can cleanse your body by hovering your hands about one to two inches above your body parts, and as you visualize any nasty vibes leaving you, sweeping your hands away from your body, and if necessary, making a flicking motion with your fingers (as though you had water on your hands and want to flick it at somebody). As you visualize these negative energies leaving you, imagine them transforming into something positive. You may want to start with the top of your head, and move down to your face, your chest, each arm, and down the rest of your body. My mother refers to this as taking a dry shower – cleansing your body of any energies which have been causing you grief or dragging you down. If it helps to imagine this process as taking a shower, use the same gestures you would as if you were showering.

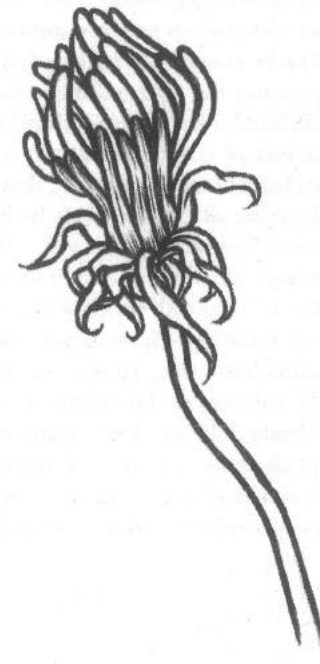
You can use a broom to do this, as well, but in my practice I have found a broom is more useful for sweeping large spaces or rooms, rather than bodies. Use the same visualization process as outlined above – as you sweep, imagine ridding the space of any psychic or energetic 'dirt' – that which does not serve your group or your workings. By all this talk of 'cleansing' and 'dirt,' I don't intend to reify Victorian notions of cleanliness and purity, and the value judgments associated with that period of time which seem



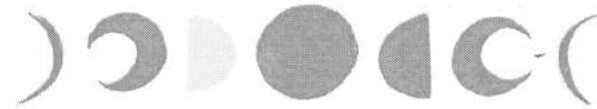
When grounding, you should avoid any objects whose energy signatures cause you to feel agitated or excited.

Grounding energy with air

Light some incense and let the smoke surround you, perfuming your space. Breathe in the scent, and wear it like a shroud that calms and comforts you. If you aren't into smoke for whatever reason, an alternative is to use an oil burner. Be sure to choose a scent that calms you and helps you get rid of any excess energies.



Action: Grounding



Grounding energy with earth

One way to ground yourself after a ritual or energy work is to eat! This is probably my favourite technique. If you eat too much before a ritual, you may notice that your energy is sluggish and that you aren't able to work as effectively as you might otherwise. But that kind of feeling is exactly what you want after an intense ritual, where you don't want the residual energy making you feel scattered and staying with you after you leave the ritual space. For a communal ritual, the most fun way to do this may be to have a potluck! Ask every participant to bring a dish for everyone to enjoy after the ritual. (And I'd suggest making ingredients lists mandatory – those with special diets, allergies, and food sensitivities will thank you.) If your ritual is being hosted at someone's home, and the host is comfortable with a bunch of strangers (or friends) in their space, all the better. If you're doing a public outdoor working, and the weather permits, you can always plan a group picnic after the work is complete. If the ritual was difficult or serious, this is also a great way to regroup and debrief with delicious food and friendly conversation.

You can also spend time outdoors, lying in the grass, or with your back against a big tree. Go outside, take a walk, feel your feet make contact with the earth. Feel that connection and focus on its stability. If going outside and spending time with the local flora isn't an option, you can meditate while holding a stone or plant of your choice. Maybe you have a quartz necklace that always anchors you when you wear it, or a pouch of dried herbs you collected on your last hike. Try sitting with the item and connecting with its energy. Whatever it is you choose to help you ground, be sure it is something that you associate calm, solid, grounding vibes with.

almost inescapable in today's world. No – instead I am referring to that which is harmful and that which is helpful, that which inspires us and gives us strength, and that which weakens us, hurts us, and tempts us to give up. I don't mean to suggest that there is no power in exploring darker shadow sides of life – for there is much healing and wisdom to be found there. One way to think about the dichotomy created by the rhetoric of energetically transforming space is to frame things in terms of that which serves us, and that which does not. Generally speaking, most folks aim to become closer to that which makes us happy, and gives us joy and strength, and to distance ourselves from situations, energies, or choices which may hinder our efforts (towards happiness, healing, causes we believe in, etc).

Transforming space with plants

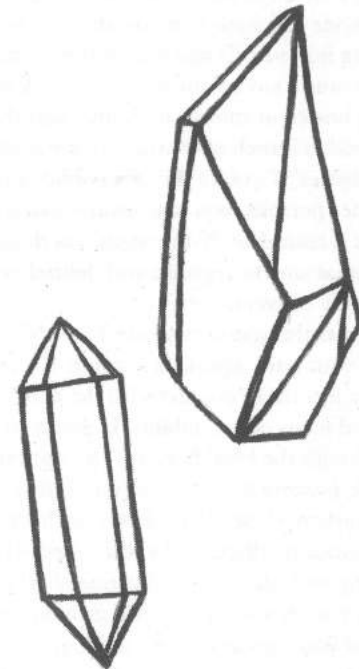
The search for appropriate herbs to use in magic and ritual doesn't need to begin with an encyclopedic book. A herb is not more meaningful, magical, or powerful if you can't pronounce its name or have never heard of it before. One way to approach working with plants is to consider what plants you interact with on a regular basis. What plants do you eat? Which plants nourish you? What do you use in your cooking, or to decorate your home? Which plants are in your garden? Which plants grow outside, in public parks or local forests? The plants that are already interwoven into your life can be powerful allies and powerful healers. These plants already share a connection with you, and so may be good choices.

Maybe you live in Canada, like I do – cedar and pine are everywhere, and have proven to be powerful allies. I've built a strong relationship with the mint plant by ingesting it for medicinal purposes, and I've come to know basil as a

Action: Raising



in a home with a fireplace, you might want to curl up in front of the fire, or if you're like me and live in a small downtown apartment, in front of your space heater. Focusing on the sensations of warmth can be incredibly soothing, and can help dissipate any excess energy that may still be with you after ritual. As you savor the warmth emanating from your choice of heat source, visualize all excess energy leaving your body and flowing down beneath your feet.



Action: Grounding



In Western traditions of magic, often the four Greek elements of earth, air, fire, and water are given as some of the energetic building blocks of magic. So, since that is the place I speak from, the suggestions I offer for grounding will focus on these elements. As with everything written in this zine, feel free to modify and adapt the techniques I outline to your specific personal and cultural frame of reference. If you don't resonate with something, don't do it! There's no point in using something I write down here because it seems unfamiliar or exotic, and so therefore it must have more power – nope, that's not how it works. If an action is meaningful to you, for whatever reason - you will get so much more out of it.

Grounding energy with water

After you get home from doing any kind of energy work, it can be helpful to take a shower. Baths also work very well, but if you're going to go that route, I'd suggest taking a shower afterwards. As you feel drops of water beating against your skin, imagine all excess and built-up energy leaving your body, washed away by fresh clean water (or, if you're taking a bath, imagine it seeping from your pores, into the water, and down the drain). Be sure not to get rid of too much energy, though – you want to feel grounded and strong, not weak with too little energy, and not overwhelmed by too much to the point of migraine. Focus on feeling centred, at peace, stable, comfortable. And/or: tea. 'Nuff said.

Grounding energy with fire

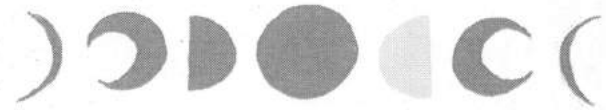
After a ritual, it may be helpful to light some candles. I know if I'm having an intense day and have too much pent-up energy, surrounding myself with lit candles calms me down and keeps me in a peaceful, relaxed frame of mind. If you live

powerful protector by growing it on my windowsill. You can think of plants you grow, use in cooking, or see around the neighbourhood (as long as you can correctly and safely identify it). What plants remind you of your intention for the working space? Are there any plants that put you in mind of strong communities, safety, and nourishment?

Once you have a plant or two in mind, meditate with that plant. Connect with it, see what it tells you. After you do this is the time to look at the herbal correspondence books and see what the plant's medical uses are, and what the plant has historically been used for magically. If you are working in a public space, or somewhere that there are animals or children, I would advise against using any plants which are poisonous. Poisonous plants have their own special and important uses, though I don't feel as though they have their place in basic community practice, where many participants may be very inexperienced. Those noxious herbs are best left to the expertise of the seasoned practitioner. Whatever plants you're working with, be sure to consult medical herbal books if it's something you're unfamiliar with. We know many herbs and plants used in cooking are edible and safe to use, but other more obscure plants may not be. It's always worth double-checking, for the sake of everyone's safety.

One way to work with herbs to intentionally transform space is to sprinkle bits of the herb around the room. If you are picking your own herbs or plants, be sure to harvest them with intention – don't overharvest, thank the plant, and leave an offering (An offering I often leave is rainwater harvested on a full or waxing moon.) Or, you can tie some of the plants together with a string and hang them around the room.

Action: Raising



Transforming space with stones

Much of what is written above can also be applied to selecting stones. You may have a stone that means a lot to you. Maybe it's a quartz necklace, maybe it's a big chunk of amethyst on your dresser. Maybe it's a simple stone you picked up at your local park. Whatever it is, it can work with you to intentionally set up space. Try to use your intuition to select stones that call to you, that you feel may align with the kind of space you intend to create. You can also consult reference books for this (*The Book of Stones* is a handy guidebook). Stones do need to be regularly cleansed, especially before being used to cleanse a space. You can do this by burying it underneath the earth, setting it outside on the night of a full moon, and in some of the ways listed above. Whatever techniques you use to transform the energy of a space can be enacted on stones as well.

Transforming space with sound

Ring some bells or clap your hands to clear the room of any nasty energies. You can also play music – and this doesn't have to be hippie new-age music, either. It can be contemporary or old school, anything that makes you feel good and want to dance. It can even be something that makes you feel calm and relaxed. Some of my favourite music to play to transform the energies of a space to align with the kind of work I like to do is Nina Simone, 80's new wave, or contemporary house music like Rataat, Deadmau5, or Daft Punk. As long as the music makes you feel good and gives you good energy, play it! What you play is less important than how the music makes you feel. Pick music that inspires the kind of feeling you want to permeate your working space. This may change based on what kind of work you're doing. For instance,

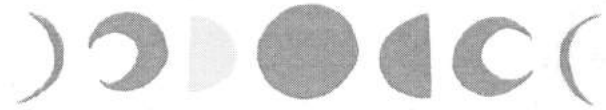
Action: Grounding

Cultivating an awareness of energy is incomplete without adequate knowledge on how to ground excess energies we encounter when performing ritual work. If not well grounded or shielded, new practitioners may feel ill after magical practice. Their body may not know how to deal with excess energy, and so they may get headaches, feel dizzy, sick to their stomachs, or pass out from overexertion. Notice that none of the techniques discussed in the Action: Raising section of this zine involved expending one's personal energy. Instead, the methods I outline involve awareness and manipulation of energies surrounding us at all times – energy from candlelight, herbs, the earth, sunshine, and everything in between. It's important to look after our health as magical practitioners. If you feel exhausted after a magical working, there's a big chance that there's something seriously wrong with your technique.

Action: Directing

grass or cluster of benches, or even playground equipment, and encourage everyone to share a positive, happy story or memory of an experience they had in the park. Funny stories are the best, and can help keep the energy high. If the group is especially large, you may wish to suggest participants break off into small groups, or to pair up with someone they have never met before.

To complete the ritual, ask for parade leaders for one last hurrah around the park's perimeters. You may ask them to lead a chant or to sing a song – anything works! The words of the song matter less than the positive energy participants feel from singing and marching in solidarity with new friends and old friends alike. With the final march around the park, the ritual is complete. You may wish to encourage folks to grab drinks or food with you afterwards – or both!



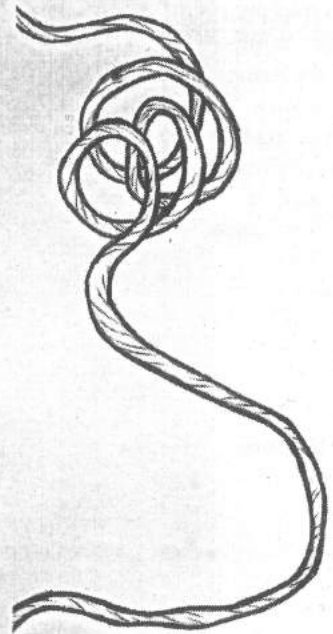
for a community ritual on healing the music you choose may be very different than the music played to set the space for a ritual to banish bad habits. Sometimes that angry, sad music may be exactly what the ritual needs.

Transforming space with movement

Many of us need music to dance – so if you play music, don't be afraid to move around! Even if you're doing this by yourself before your participants show up, play some songs and dance, move, sway, stomp your feet and move your arms. No one's watching, so get that energy out! As long as you dance with intention, all of the energy you expend dancing will go towards making the space a positive place. If you know your participants enough to know that a group dance party would be something they'd be comfortable with, you can even have a dance party to build community and set the intention to have fun and work together. This technique, as with many of the techniques outlined here, can also be used to raise energy in the bulk of the magical act aspect of the ritual. Any of these techniques can constitute the full extent of a magical rite.

Transforming space with smoke

Smoke cleansing is usually done by setting dried herbs or plants on fire. Blow out the flame, or wave the herb around (this can either be a stick of incense, a cone of incense, a bundle of dried herbs, or crushed dried herbs with resin on charcoal, as in a censer), and the herb will usually continue to smoke until much of the plant material has been burned up. You may have to put it out early, by snuffing it out in a mini iron cauldron or similar, or you may have to re-light it. If you're working indoors, try to open as many windows as you can, or temporarily turn off the smoke detector – just



Action: Raising

remember to turn it back on! Move around the space with your burning herbs, and imagine the energies of the herb mixing with your space, transforming it into the kind of space you would like it to be. As you walk around the room, think of the qualities you'd like your space to radiate – maybe community, safety, love. Maybe you're looking for something more challenging, and if that's the case, walk the smoke around the room with the intention that the space become a safe space for airing concerns and thoughts which may be difficult or uncomfortable to work through. Be sure not to force this, but intentionally set the space so that if anyone feels the need to bring up certain subject matter, the space is set out to be an okay place for that to happen.

Transforming space with flame

Fire is something to be careful with. You don't want to burn down your indoor space, and you don't want to risk starting a forest fire or similar if you're working outdoors. If this is something you're worried about, you might want to consider using candles which are encased in glass – seven-day candles can be picked up at many magical supply stores, particularly those with more of an African diasporic bent. Another bonus in using these candles is that the wax is contained within the glass, and you won't have to clean it up off the carpet or iron it out of fabric. You might wish to pick up a blank seven-day candle and draw on the glass with a marker some key words you want to bring into the space. You could also draw pictures or designs that represent those feelings to you.

Light is an interesting symbol to use when transforming space and raising energy, and has many symbolic attributes. It might work well to light a candle in conjunction



ritual for the reclamation of public space. Much of this may not need to be said, given the circumstances and who is present, but it may be pertinent to say a few words of solidarity and encouragement. As many people are not fond of surprises and generally like to know what they're getting themselves into, you may also wish to explain the ritual process.

As a group, circle the perimeter of the park clockwise, wrapping yarn around any poles, streetlights, benches, fences, bike racks, and other non-living structures. Explain the allure of yarn for this project – it's soft, comforting, colourful, friendly, and so is a natural representative of safe space. Yarn bombing the park is a literal and magical act of reclaiming it. After one round has been done, encourage participants to wander into the park and affix yarn to additional non-living structures, as the growth of trees may be negatively impacted by yarn wrapping. Give out some of the mirrors to participants to affix to larger poles on the outskirts of the park, and encourage them to trap the mirrors beneath layers and layers of yarn, so they stay firmly in place. Once a ball of yarn is finished, the end of the string should be tied to yarn already on the structure, so the yarn doesn't unravel. As you pass out the mirrors, be sure to explain their purpose, as well, so participants know why they are doing what they're doing. There's nothing worse than thoughtless actions in community ritual. Make sure that the actions people perform are enriched with meaning – only then can the space truly feel reclaimed. Otherwise, participants aren't participating, just blindly following prescriptive motions. Remember, the ritual isn't just for you, as facilitators – it's for everyone.

After the yarn and mirrors are all affixed to structures, gather everyone on the most convenient patch of

Action: Directing

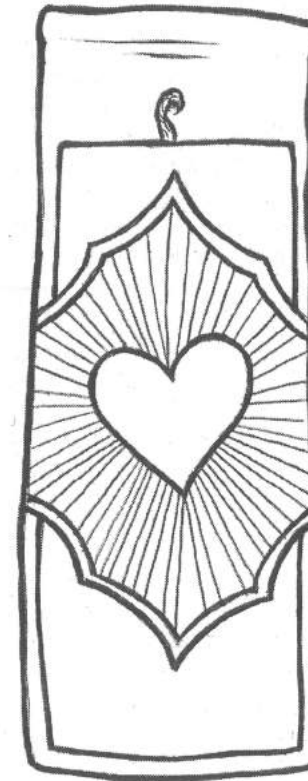
mirrors with reflective energy – one way to visualize this is to use a similar technique to ‘transforming space with visualization’ in the Raising Energy section of this zine. Visualize the little mirrors as a reflective shields that don’t absorb negative energy – instead, they dissipate it.

Leave enough time before the formal ritual to perform one additional task as a small group. Walk around the perimeter of the park, clockwise, while sprinkling the collected water as you go. Be sure to conserve enough to last you the entire journey around the park – this may vary widely based on the size of the location in question. While you do this, imagine the water being soaked into the ground, strengthening the space, revitalizing it, cleansing it of negative, harmful and violent energetic residues, which may have resulted from assaults in or near the space in question. The purpose of doing this before additional participants arrive is to lay a strong energetic foundation for the ritual. Since it is open invite, many folks may show up who are unfamiliar with energy shielding and protecting themselves prior to and while encountering violent energy. These people may begin to feel sick, get headaches, or become dizzy or claustrophobic, and not know why. The action of intentionally sprinkling water around the park’s perimeter will result in the park being a safer space for less experienced folks to do community work. Additionally, laying this foundation in a small group rather than in a large crowd will ensure that participants feel like participants in a ritual, rather than merely bystanders. In your call for participants, feel free to invite people to bring their own balls of yarn, so they can join you in the rest of the process – the rest of the ritual being fully public.

Once all participants have arrived, you may wish to explain why you have chosen to engage the community in a



conjunction with the visualization exercise, as the candle flame would add a physical, tangible component to the visualization of a bubble of light filling up a space with positive, warm, comforting energy.



Action: Raising

Transforming space with food

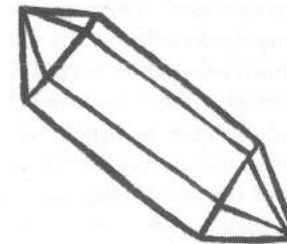
If you like to cook, this is an easy and fun option to warm up a space! While you make food for everyone to enjoy, think about how you'd like your fellow community members to feel in the space you're working towards creating. You don't want to give people indigestion, though - so I'd suggest only working with edibles when you're looking to have a space that is happy, supportive, and full of warm feelings. Sharing intentionally brewed food and drink is an excellent way to strengthen ties with new and old friends, and the inclusion of food in community space always does seem to change the entire vibration of a place - as long as it was cooked with clarity and intention. There's something about potlucks that makes me feel instantly at home and closer to everyone participating. Try to be aware of any allergens or dietary needs - it's always worthwhile to bring ingredients lists, too. This extra attention to detail will make everyone feel warm and fuzzy!



may have wounds that are still very fresh. Respect their healing process, and the form and pace it takes.

The materials you will need for this ritual are bowls, mason jars, mini mirrors, and as many balls of colourful yarn as possible. Depending on the time of year and where you live, the small core group should collect rainwater or snow in preparation for the ritual. Get as much of this as you can! And don't pick it up from the street - leave out cups or bowls to collect it as it falls from the sky. Leaving out one mason jar may seem poetic, but trust me, it won't do the job - leave out as many as you can! I'd recommend bowls with a wide brim so you can increase your collection area and get more snow or rain. If you are collecting snow, let it melt. The more you can collect the better, especially if the space you're looking to reclaim is large. You may need to do multiple collections to get enough to use.

As a small group, you should charge the water and as many colourful balls of yarn as you can reasonably afford for the purpose of re-energizing and reclaiming the park as a safe and nurturing space. Purchase little mirrors and charge them, as well - but with a different purpose. You should infuse the



Action: Directing

For this ritual you should have at the very least a small core group of very experienced energy workers and magical practitioners, to carry out the skeleton of the ritual and to keep group energy focused and on task. As long as you have that small core group, you can open this ritual up to the public as an open-invite event. I would recommend being careful about who you tell and where you advertise, if you do – nothing ruins a ritual more than folks who just want to fuck with what you're doing and make fun of your healing and reclamation process. Otherwise, though, the more the merrier! You may want to reach out to survivors, victims of assaults, friends, family, and people who live in the neighbourhood. Though the bones of this ritual are tied together by a small group of experienced practitioners, the focus should be on fostering community engagement and reclaiming ownership of community space.

Since the work being done in this ritual is difficult work, it may be wise to plan for any potential outbursts of emotion. In addition to keeping the energy on track during the ritual itself, members in the small group should have a step-by-step process planned should any participants be triggered, feel unsafe, or visibly upset during the ritual. How will this situation be mitigated? What resources and actions will you plan to use to assist this person? If no assistance is wanted, they may wish to leave, or simply have some alone time. Defer to what they say will help them feel the most safe, and always be sure to ask if they would like your help, and what their immediate needs are. You may wish to have a space nearby planned to bring individuals to clam down or regroup, if necessary. It's likely that this won't be necessary – but it's always preferable to be prepared, especially when intense energy work of this nature is being done. Some participants



Action: Directing

This section contains examples of full rituals. These rituals may be used as they are presented here, but I would suggest making adaptations – however minor – to perfectly suit the rituals to the needs of you and the group you will be working with. The ritual structure won't break or explode if you change something, so feel free to play, explore, and try new things. If something doesn't work for you or your group, try something different next time.

Something to think about when drafting a ritual is who will be involved in the drafting. As the facilitator, will you come up with something and hope everyone likes it? Sometimes it isn't possible to get everyone's opinion, as when rituals are open-invite. If you're working with a smaller group with more experienced practitioners and an egalitarian bent, it might be pertinent to check in with everyone participating. You can brainstorm together, and work on creating a ritual

Action: Directing

structure together based on feedback from the group and their preferences. If you have a working group that meets often, try loosening your reins on the operation and allowing less experienced group members to create a ritual outline, and invite them to facilitate. All involved are learners, and all involved are teachers. Having a group facilitator may be important to keep everything running smoothly and assuring that the energy is kept in check, but try to switch up roles frequently and invite everyone to participate. Facilitators are not 'above' the participants – they merely have a different role to perform. If you are facilitating, be sure to remember “facilitation is the art of leading people through processes toward agreed on objectives in a manner that encourages participation, ownership, and productivity from all involved” (Tilley, 7). The energy of a non-hierarchical group can be a beautiful and transformative thing.

Healing

This is a tricky topic. Every participant may have something different to heal from. Depending on the comfort level of participants with one another, some folks may feel comfortable disclosing, while others may not. It is important to ensure the space remains a 'safe' and comfortable one throughout the ritual. The focus should not be a talk-therapy session, but instead working together in a ritual setting to engage with the ritual technology of communal magic to work towards healing and support, for each individual and for the group.

You can do this ritual at any time, but with each moon phase you might want to frame the ritual differently. I decided to list all potential moon phases and different ways of



Once everyone is finished braiding, it is time to do a big raising of energy, to ensure that the healing energy of the braids is as powerful as it can be. Turn on some music that everyone agrees to, dim the lights (if you like), and have a healing dance party! The music you play doesn't specifically have to be about healing, but the focus of this aspect of the ritual should be about feeling happy and comfortable in our own skin – which is something necessary for healing of many types. Be sure that participants hold onto their yarn braids while dancing! When everyone's all danced out, the yarn has been charged with healing vibes. Encourage participants to hang the yarn braid on their wall, somewhere that they can see it every day as a reminder of their commitment to their healing journey. You can suggest that people put it on a bag as a keychain, or to wear it as a bracelet, but whenever I've tried this the braid lasted only a few days, and I quickly forgot about it – but this has its own power, too, it just depends what type of energy work you want to do.) Then, close the circle with any of the techniques listed in the Grounding Energy section of this zine.

Reclaiming space

This ritual was written for the purpose of reclaiming a public park after repeated sexual assaults in or near that space. It is written in such a way that it is suitable to be performed during any moon phase, though I would recommend doing it on a Tuesday, at roughly the time of day when the assaults had taken place. Each day of the week has different energetic associations, and Tuesday has long been thought to be ruled by Mars, and what I'd call 'go-get-em' energies. If you need to do magic which involves fighting back, resisting, or rebelling, Tuesday is your day.

Action: Directing

All participants sit. Facilitator brings out a pink ball of yarn. For this part of the ritual, each participant will say one thing that they feel has been an impediment to their healing. When someone wishes to speak next, the ball of yarn is thrown to them (make sure that they catch it!), and then they throw it to the next speaker. This should look a bit like a web. Once everyone has finished listing perceived impediments to their healing process, the facilitator introduces the next aspect of this exercise. Now, a pair of scissors will be passed around, and participants are invited to cut will cut the yarn between each connection (the thread of yarn between two participants would equal one connection) when they offer ideas or suggestions/etc to facilitate healing for themselves, someone else in the group, or the group as a whole – basically, ways to overcome some of the impediments or challenges people brought up in the first part of the exercise. This section of the exercise is based on practical solutions – ie, remain accountable to another buddy in the ritual, and check in with each other more often to make sure the other is okay, and if so, offer support. Or it could be a suggestion to make time for journaling every Sunday night before bed. Encourage the group to keep making suggestions until all links in the web are broken.

Then, invite participants to evenly divide up the lengths of yarn. Ensure that each participant has three or more lengths, even if it means cutting up some more of the yarn used to make the web. (But do not grab more yarn that was unused.) Turn on some music, and lead the group in braiding the yarn together. Let the conversation wander, but try to ensure it focuses on the topic of healing and how to overcome obstacles to healing, and ideas for strengthening the healing process.



engaging with the purpose of the ritual, because oftentimes folks get too hung-up on ‘having’ to do a ritual at a certain time. You can do a ritual at any time, as long as you’re creative about your reasoning and phrasing. Sometimes, we don’t have the luxury of waiting until the next moon phase to do a ritual – sometimes we need to do magic immediately, especially if it’s for the purpose of healing.

Waxing moon: Magic is usually done to bring things to us or to increase things. If you were to do a ritual for healing during the waxing moon, you could envision the ritual as bringing healing to your group and increasing the healing energies in your life.

Full moon: Be careful - these energies pack a big punch! The full moon adds extra oomph to any magic done at this time. If you decide to do this ritual on a full moon, you can frame it in almost any way you want; with a full moon you can’t go wrong unless you’re not very specific about what you’re trying to achieve.

Waning moon: Time to push things away from us – illness, bad habits, debt, etc. If you were to do a healing ritual at this time you could frame it so that you were banishing any impediments to successful healing, and casting away any blockages to healing.

New moon: This is a time for rest and introspection. Strengthening opportunities and resolve to engage in self-care to facilitate healing would be a good use of the energies associated with this moon phase.

Materials needed: Water, salt, bowl, small bowl, ball of yarn (pink), rose petals, scissors, music, blankets or pillows to sit on (optional).

Action: Directing

This ritual was specifically created for a small group of people who may not know each other, but who may feel they require healing in their lives. This ritual contains some explanations, and is written with the expectation that most participants may be new to magic and ritual. Phrasing and structure used are for the context of a full moon.

Before participants arrive, begin to energetically transform the space by visualizing a healing white ball of energy around the room. Sprinkle salt water around the parameters of the room while saying something like (either aloud or silently), "By water and earth, healing is birthed." Yeah, that sounds pretty corny – but the exact words matter less than your intention. A short semi-rhyming phrase may help you be more engaged, as it will serve as a reminder of what you're doing and why.

Once all participants have arrived, ask everyone to grab a few handfuls of rose petals from a bowl, and stand in a circle. One by one, ask each person to introduce themselves, say why they are present, and what they hope to gain from the ritual. After each participant is finished speaking, they will step a few feet outside the circle, and scatter the rose petals on the perimeter of the circle. Once finished, they should return to their spot, and allow each participant in turn to continue the same process, though it is recommended that each person begins speaking as soon as the previous person has finished. (Otherwise there might be a lot of self-conscious staring at folks sprinkling rose petals, and it's supposed to be a semi-private meditative exercise for individuals when they are doing it.) Facilitator explains that as each of us do this, we are merging our intentions to the space, individually and as a group, so that the conversations we have and magic we do may better serve us and suit our goals and needs.

