with your childish demands, and tried to educate you. You would get irritable and sulk, and throw me completely with your unpredictability. Finally I've begun to listen to you. I realize how much there is to learn from you. As you get stronger I can appreciate your wisdom, your imagination and your memories. There is some communication going on at last.'

Since then I've worked as a movement teacher and movement therapist, because I discovered movement could express my being in a way nothing else can, and I love working with this potential in others. Movement is a door through which you can contact your experience. Trying to communicate this in words is hard: the door is only discovered when you move. This involves a surrender, a kind of leap, as you cannot predict with your mind when you really allow the energy in your body to move. But if you express your need and your energy through movement you can heal and transform yourself. You feel pleasure and joy in the relief of moving freely again —just walking, stopping or breathing, allowing the body to move like a child, to take space, to speak with a gesture. This can take you beyond the everyday — or more deeply into the everyday, the present moment — and this is sacred.

Ritual and Transformation

Alex Wildwood

The soul might be cared for better through our developing a deep life of ritual rather than through many years of counselling for personal behaviour and relationships. We might even have a better time of it in such soul matters as love and emotion if we had more ritual in our lives and less psychological adjustment.

Thomas Moore, *Care of the Soul*

Ritual is arguably one of the most distinctive features of human-being, from early human funeral arrangements of bone and pigment to the rituals of present-dayhospital obstetricians. Yet today most of us suffer from ritual boredom, mainly because current religious rituals fail to engage the social, political and ecological reality of our times.

I work with ritual as a means of personal and collective transformation; I've used it as an extension of the Reichian work I do with individual clients. Through body-based therapy and ritual a person works outwards from an embodied sense of themselves to an increasing awareness of their spirituality. Ritual is inherently practical: it is an activity

Alex Wildwood is the founder and coordinator of the Everyman series of events for men and editor of the men's journal Passages. *He lives near Oxford.*

undertaken to effect change in the material world. One of its aims is empowerment — in the Buddhist and feminist sense of discovering our power-with others, both human and non-human. While our minds divide and categorise, ritual works directly through symbols and the senses to give participants an immediate experience of the interdependence of all existence.

In ritual space we enter what Robert Ornstein describes as mystical consciousness, a shift from 'that normal, analytic world containing separate, discrete objects and persons to a second mode, an experience of 'nunityn', a mode of intuition'. But to be effective, ritual must have meaning for the individual, it must speak to their life experience and invite their active participation. Religious ritual has been sanitized; its wild, chthonic aspects have been corrupted by an emphasis on the verbal and rational — reflecting the dominant mode of consciousness in our culture.

Recently, in the emergence of a distinctive women's spirituality, a different kind of ritual practice has been remembered, one which reinstates emotional expression as one of its essential elements. Traditionally ritual was used to address what is hidden from ordinary consciousness and society. Ritual is a form, a traditional technology of the psyche, that allows personal and collective transformation to occur in comparative safety.

Ritual rightly frightens us because it involves what anthropologist Victor Turner termed liminal states, times when the usual definitions and certainties of social life are called in question, when social rules and taboos may be held in abeyance. At these times transformation is most possible, but the person or society will also feel most acutely their fear of the unknown.

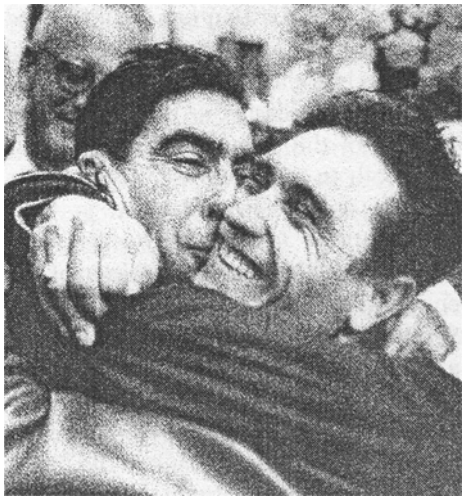
Two ritual forms I have been using over the past eight years illustrate how ritual acts as a means of transformation, as a vehicle for the shift from one consciousness to another.

The Council of All Beings

The Council of All Beings evolved out of the 'despair and empowerment' work of the American Buddhist, Joanna Macy, and the work of Australian eco-activist John Seed (who was influenced by the councils of aboriginal Australians). It was devised to help individuals develop an ecological sense of self.

Participants are directed to go into nature or (if indoors) into a state of meditative reflection and allow themselves to be chosen by an animal, plant or element of nature or the landscape. Stilling the mind and just allowing this identification to happen is a characteristic of ritual, the essence of which is to move beyond personality, to expand identity in a disciplined way.

In silence, participants in the Council make masks or visual representations of their Being. These Beings meet in a circle and share their perception of what humans have done to the planet and the effect human actions are having on them. (A few participants take turns to put down their masks and sit in the middle as a human audience). After all the Beings have spoken there is a further round where they share a gift or insight for humanity in this time. The ritual ends



with participants thanking the Beings and destroying the masks.

I have participated in this ritual several times and am continually surprised by the depths of concern it touches in the participants, the spontaneous poetry and wisdom it evokes. The ritual usually takes place as part of a workshop lasting at least two days, where participants have time to get to know one another and share exercises that encourage them to express their anger, grief, numbness or disbelief about what is happening to our world. The cathartic work is a vital part of the preparation for the ritual (for full details of the preparatory exercises and the form of the ritual itself, see Seed *et al* 1989).

Men's Rites of Passage

A second example of a ritual form designed for modern needs is the Men's Rites of Passage I have developed with two colleagues (Eric Maddern, a musician and storyteller with a background in psychology, and Ron Pyatt, another Reichian therapist) over the past six years.

We begin these events with two days of groupwork sessions to build trust and encourage emotional catharsis through movement, voicework and role play. In an environment of therapeutic attention and intervention, peer support and the wilderness setting of woods and mountains, deeply-repressed feelings can surface. Men get safety from the combination of intensive group work and the ability to go off alone or with a companion into nature.

By the third day each participant has had a chance to work in the group and share his story both as a psychological narrative and then as a mythical tale told in the third person. Refining their stories, each man focuses on a particular transition he wishes to have honoured by this temporary 'tribe' of peers. This may be his birth (or the classic rite of passage from boyhood to manhood) or it may be a current change in work status, a relationship, or an inner change from one state of self-awareness to another.

The emotional work, the environment, the music and singing that spontaneously occur, all help prepare us to enter ritual space together. Each man who is ready for a ritual tells the group what he wants and then leaves, to wait silently on his own. At this point he has to trust the group; he is no longer in conscious control of the process. (He will have a particular 'buddy' who will have heard his story in greatest depth; this man may be his advocate or play a particular role in his ritual).

The next stage, in his absence, is one of creative collaboration. Over three days

he will have revealed himself to each of us in different ways (both in and out of sessions) and we now pool our perceptions and try to get a clear sense of what he actually needs. As we prepare for the ritual, and later, when we create it on the ground, all of us — including the group leaders — are trusting our intuition to guide and inspire us in the moment.

In the preparation of the rituals we have a lot of fun and joking as we exorcise our collective 'shadow': we name any desire we have to be cruel, abusive, or be too provocative. If any individual is aware of antagonism towards the man we deal with that or advise him to play a marginal role in the ritual. From our uncensored sharing, a sense of an appropriate ritual emerges. Almost without fail we devise something which the participant later acknowledges was just what he needed — though not necessarily what he thought he wanted! .

The ritual itself may be a journey, a confrontation with painful emotion, a physical challenge or the creation of a nurturing environment where he receives massage or healing. Each one is different, tailored to the particular story and needs of the individual. Occasionally, our truth is that no clear ritual comes to mind (this is often a sign that the subject has not really shared himself with the group). We tell him this and his response and our reactions then form the ritual. In this kind of ritual especially, the boundary between therapy and ritual is permeable; some men have, in effect, ritualised therapy sessions and almost all the rituals include strong displays of collective emotion.

So how does this differ from group therapy? The question can be answered on many levels. In this work, emotional catharsis is not an end in itself; the intention is to increase the awareness and identity of the individual. Bodywork is used both to open participants up emotionally and to ground them in their physicality — for the body is pre-eminently the vehicle and container of the energies evoked by ritual. What Charlene Spretnak calls the 'ecstatic gift of ritual, a mystery of the erotic', remains afterwards as a body memory.

In ritual space, participants enter an altered state of consciousness; the linear sense of time is lost. Intuition becomes the guiding principle as participants share their truth with authority and emotion. (By authority I mean acting from a sense of our greater identity).

Such rituals move beyond mere insight or understanding to a sensual, experiential enactment of change. In Men's Rites of Passage, such enactment takes place in wilderness, a context that reminds participants that, in Jung's phrase 'the soul is for the most part outside the body'. Here, when men discharge their rage or grief they look up and see mountains; when they want grounding they dance barefoot and when they have cried they wash their faces in a cascading stream. This elemental quality of the work grounds it in bodily sensation and memory and links the therapeutic with the spiritual by opening participants to the experience of belonging to a reality greater than the self and its everyday concerns.

Of course ritual has its own shadow: it can be used to manipulate populations as well as liberate them. Marion Woodman

points to the dangers of working outside the established, if limited, religious forms: 'Without the Church to mark out those strong boundaries between impersonal and personal, sacred and profane, God and Devil, we have to be extremely conscious in order to protect ourselves from the demonic within and without'. And the particular danger of involving the emotional level is, of course, that we are merely activating our complexes and confusing these with divine inspiration.

But the denial of ritual has its own dangers. If the power of ritual to effect change is denied, and religion becomes mere metaphysics, then the understanding of the world becomes the task of pure intellect, and its transformation the work of scientific technology. Ritual restores an accurate sense of mystery to our lives; it reminds us that, even in an electronic age, we cannot live by bread alone.

References

R.E. Davis-Floyd, 'Birth as an American Rite of Passage' in K.L. Michaelson (ed), *Childbirth in American Anthropological Perspectives*, Bergin & Garvey, 1988.

Thomas Moore, *Care of the Soul*, Piatkus, 1992.

J. Seed, J. Macy, P. Fleming, & A. Naess, *Thinking Like a Mountain*, Heretic Books, 1989.

Charlene Spretnak, *States of Grace*, Harper & Row, 1993

Marion Woodman, *Addiction to Perfection*, Inner City Publications, 1983.