

## The Value of Ritual By Linda Costello

I recently read a book called “Spiritual Hunger,” by Dr. Allan G. Hunter<sup>i</sup>, in which he talks about how we, as Americans, tend to chase after empty, materialistic dreams to the point that we are disconnected from the Earth Itself.

He discusses the importance of establishing meaningful rituals to reconnect us to the sacredness of life and to each other.

Hunter also discusses the five stages of myth-making, referring to the work, “Mythologies,” by Roland Barthes<sup>ii</sup>, and published in the 1950’s. He explains that the first stage is simply a neutral fact. The second stage is seeing that fact in a local context of meanings. The third stage is what happens when an emotional component is added to that content of meanings. This is when the neutral fact begins to take on the aspect of a ritual. The fourth stage is when the ritual is seen as a part of something larger, and finally, as more stories and beliefs are told around those emotional and historical contexts, a myth is born.

Myths can be beneficial or detrimental. For example, a myth that develops out of targeted propaganda can affect an entire country negatively, such as in the case of Nazi propaganda, where a certain race is depicted as being supreme, and hundreds of thousands of others were killed in the process. In America, the acquisition of material goods for a meaningful life could be just as harmful, as making money becomes more important than relationships.

On the other hand, myths that connect us to something palpable and eternal are quite beneficial.

For those of us on an earth-based spiritual path, as we celebrate the turning of the year in our seasonal ceremonies, we are tapping into these myths, and adding deep meaning and resonance to our lives. In addition to remembering our interconnectedness and the cycles of nature, we are feeding our souls, or inner beings. Life becomes multi-dimensional and worth living.

Let me illustrate how a celebration of one of our high days fits into this model of creating meaningful and beneficial myths for our times.

### Stage 1: Fact

May 1<sup>st</sup> is the date between the Spring Equinox and the Summer Solstice.

### Stage 2: Meaning

In northern hemisphere cultures, this time of year coincides with an acceleration of growth and vegetation, and with increased mating activity, thus establishing an awareness of abundant creative energy surging forth.

### Stage 3: Emotion/Ritual

As we watch buds open into blossoms, and new life emerge, we rejoice at the wonder of such beauty, and the promise of a healthy harvest to come. We are filled with hope. We tap into the creative energy of the season as we open our windows and doors to air out our homes after winter. We celebrate the coming of summer.

#### Stage 4: Stories

While recounting our observations of the world around us, we remember other years when we were struck by the vibrancy of blossom and color, and we talk about times from childhood when we could play outside later as the days grew longer. We may even tell stories from long ago, remembering the ancient myths of deity lovers or the annual maypole celebrations of other cultures.

#### Stage 5: Myths

We have woven our own ritual celebration of this time of year into the tapestry of the annals of time. In the process, we have connected with the earth, the seasons, the energy, with both our personal history and ancient history. We have contributed to the ongoing energy of this time of year, thus tapping into eternity. We truly are in a time without a time, a place without a place.

In her book, "In Search of Woman's Passionate Soul," Caitlin Matthews<sup>iii</sup> says that, although most of us have mystical experiences, we don't have a social framework in which to share them. She encourages people to attend to the imaginal realm for "messages."

Matthews says, "Those subtle messages are most often neglected, or discounted as irrelevant, but are potent signposts of experience nonetheless.... They give us rich resources to sustain, support, and transform us. If we steer without imagination we find our lives petrify, solidify, cease to sparkle; daily life becomes a route march to be endured."<sup>iv</sup>

Living within our rituals and myths, tapping into the depth of meaning, sustains, supports, and transforms us, as well as those whose lives we touch.

As one who follows a druid path, regularly celebrating the changing of the seasons for the past two decades, I am grateful for the meaning I add to my own life and the lives of others. The world needs it!

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<sup>i</sup> Hunter, Allan G., *Spiritual Hunger, Integrating Myth and Ritual into Daily Life*, 2012, Findhorn Press, Scotland

<sup>ii</sup> Barthes, Roland, *Mythologies*, 1957, Les Lettres Nouvelles, France

<sup>iii</sup> Matthews, Caitlin, *In Search of Woman's Passionate Soul*, 1997, Element Books, Great Britain

<sup>iv</sup> Matthews, Caitlin, *In Search of Woman's Passionate Soul*, pp 101-102