

Inspiration and invocation: Creating a ritual with Brigid.

There is no *need* to invent a Brigid ritual; many a fine one already exists. But rituals that are created (rather than inherited) offer a personalized embodied experience of the Goddess in a way that following someone else's "ritual-recipe" can't compete with. Since one of the faces Brigid wears is that of the patroness of the arts; surely she would bless the creation of a ritual seeking her council.

From the Latin *rītuālis* – rite or ceremony, rituals have been present since the beginning of time and across all cultures as an integral part of religious, spiritual, political, social and family life. Rituals help us to embody symbolic expressions of our inner life and search for meaning. What need is greater than the need to make meaning of life? This search for meaning has been expressed over and over in the mythologies of humankind. prompting Dr. Radha Parker of Old Dominion University to call myth and ritual "the vehicles through which the value-impregnated beliefs and ideals that we live by, and live for, are preserved and transmitted." Rituals, like homing beacons, help us to find our way home. They provide many psychological benefits as well. A comprehensive review of 50 years of research on the psychological use and importance of ritual by Dr. Barbara Fiese and her colleagues at Syracuse University finds rituals to be "...powerful organizers of family life, supporting its stability, and increasing both personal identity and marital satisfaction." What a noble role ritual can play, protecting and nurturing a group of people, helping each member to self-actualize and to learn to love deeply! Sadly, many powerful rituals have been claimed as the property of various religions, and those that are leftover are often so watered down that their original magical intentions are too weak to be effective. Personalized rites based on the composition and need of the members return them to their more powerful origins.

Rituals follow a very simple recipe. They have an opening, a verb/intention and a closing. The opening generally serves to create sacred or liminal space, and to raise some energy that will be directed toward the verb/intention. The verb/intention is the most important part, as it is the place where the action and magic of the ritual occurs. The closing generally serves as a time for gratitude, disillusion of any energies still present, and a return to regular non-sacred space.

Clarity regarding the intention of the ritual will help with the choice of the ritual verb. Imber-Black and Roberts have studied rituals for much of their career, and suggest five common ritual verbs: relating, changing, healing, believing and celebrating. These broad categories of rituals may include rites of blessing, cursing, worshipping, invoking, banishing, pacifying, energizing, imbuing, consecrating, and transforming to name but a few. Psychodrama teachers such as Adam Blatner caution that a good ritual must combine "hypnosis and drama... effectively evoking images memories and ideas that are most appropriate for the experience". The stimulation of all five senses is encouraged whenever possible, as each of our senses follows it's own path back to the archetypal experiences of our ancestors. This allows for the use of music, incense, food, fabrics and special altar items. Once the

ritual intention is chosen, it must be made manifest within the ritual. For example, the ritual intention of banishing would be made symbolically by letting a helium balloon float away. The ritual intention must have a concrete physical expression in the ritual; it is the climax of the ritual and the focal point of the energies that are raised in the opening portion of the ceremony.

A ritual accessing the goddess Brigid begins like any other ritual - with the choosing of the ritual intention. Her own feast day - Imbolc - (or Candlemas, post Christian conversion) – falling on February 2nd, celebrates the awakening of spring and is a good time to seek blessings for new pursuits, but this is not the only time Brigid can be invoked. As a triple Goddess of healing, smithery and creativity, Brigid has many powers to choose from; they can all be considered transformative energies. She can be called on to help a woman become a mother, calibrate a magical tool or inspire a work of art. Baby showers are a very watered down version of a Brigid blessing ritual, the ritual verb/intention being to bless the new life. New students of the magical arts often take their vows on Brigid's feast day, with the ritual intention of transforming their egoic personalities into soulful tools of healing for the world. This author dedicated a weekend campsite to Brigid while writing this article, creating and hanging an eye of the goddess above the writing table, and writing only while the campfire (of inspiration) was burning.

For purposes of this article, let's work with the first example, a blessing ritual (sometimes called a 'blessingway') for a pregnant first time mother-to-be. The intention, to bless the woman's transformation, must be made tangible. Brigid's symbols can be used throughout the ritual to physically, psychologically and spiritually express this transformational blessing. Symbols are the oldest form of communication known to human kind, and allow something small and simple to represent something quite epic. Symbolism is key to the creation of a good ritual. Perhaps the simplest yet most powerful symbol associated with Brigid is the element of fire. Her name translates as "bright one", and in ancient times she was worshiped as a fire goddess at her sacred shine in Kildare. Brigid blesses the fires of the home hearth, the fires of the forge and the fires of creative inspiration. Water is another of Brigid's symbols, as she has long been associated with sacred wells and the waters of inspiration and healing. The image of an eye, also attributed to Brigid, offers wonderful symbolism related to clear-vision and being watched over or protected. It can be represented by Brigid's iconic straw crosses or by colorful yarn wrapped crosses known as "eyes of the goddess". Each of these symbols lend themselves beautifully to a blessingway ritual.

Ritual symbols are often displayed on an altar of some sort, often in the center of a real or imaginary circle, which will be designated as sacred space during the opening of the ritual. Candles and a lovely chalice full of mountain or mineral water would lend themselves well to an altar for Brigid.

The simplest ritual opening might involve a formal procession into the room followed by a prayer invoking Brigid's presence, or a song with a similar intention.

Other common ritual openings include the verbal invocation of the four directions, four elements, or 4 facets of the Goddess – maiden, mother, queen and crone perhaps – done by an officiating high priestess, or by other ritual participants. Ritual cleansing of the space and or participants may be done with incense or sprinkled water at this time as well.

Once sacred space has been established, Brigid can be invoked and invited in. Poetic invocations are often used because they are easy to remember, and can be recited with increasing speed and volume (usually three times) as a method of raising the energy in the room. They need not rhyme. In *The Goddess Path*, Patricia Monaghan offers the perfect invocation for a Brigid blessingway:

*Brigid, gold-red woman
Brigid, flame and honeycomb,
Brigid, sun of womanhood
Brigid, lead me home*

Another invocation might draw on references to fire and water:

*Brigid, keeper of the flame
transform the dark to light;
Brigid, keeper of the well
Wash our fears away*

or to Brigid's areas of specialty:

Brigid, healer, blacksmith, muse...

The most important ingredient in an invocation is its enthusiasm; it has to feel right.

Once sacred space has been created and Brigid has been invoked, the ritual intention of transforming the mother-to-be can take place. A simple and powerful way to make the mother's transformational intention concrete might involve the use of candles that will remain lit in some format until the after the mother's labor. Guests might be asked to write possible obstacles to a peaceful labor and birth on magician's flash paper, and then offer them for transformation into Brigid's flames. Or each guest might hold the chalice of healing water from the altar, and put wishes and blessings into it. The mother-to-be might drink the water during the ceremony, or save it until she is in labor. The gathering community could make colorful goddess-eyes and Brigid's crosses to hang in the delivery room, so that the goddess can watch over her delivery. Beads that are strung on a necklace could represent blessings. All who attend the rite could be woven together with yarn around their wrists, each vowing to wear the yarn until after labor is complete, and each vowing to lend the mother and child strength, peace and courage during the time of transformation. Climax of the ritual, this is where creativity enters, and as the realm

of creativity also belongs to Brigid there are no shortage of expressions. The only requirement for this part of the ritual is that it make sense to the mother-to-be, and that she has something tangible to take with her from the ritual and into her labor.

The closing of the ritual is often very similar to the opening. It's time to say goodbye to Brigid for now. But not to worry, she is never far away. Prayers of thanksgiving might be made, and any energies invoked should be released with gratitude and reverence. It is also good to eat something to assist with the return to normal consciousness, which allows for further less formal feasting and celebration in Brigid's name.

Writing a ritual with an opening, a verb/intention and a closing is not difficult. Ritual is the ballroom in which we dance with the gods and goddesses. When Brigid is called into the room via a personally inspired and designed ritual, she comes ready to dance. Then the goddess is alive and magic is afoot.

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A Review of 50 Years of Research on Naturally Occurring Family Routines and Rituals: Cause for Celebration?

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