

Dancing in the Shadows

by Laura S. Bryannan

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Preface

Please note that when I wrote Dancing in the Shadows I was actively facilitating healing workshops for survivors of incest and sexual abuse. This is no longer the case. However, rather than rewrite the book to change phrases like, "In the groups that I run..." to past tense, I decided to put it up on the Web as it was originally written.---Laura Bryannan, 1996.

This book was written to support women who are seeking to explore and begin healing their experiences of incest and sexual abuse. In my work with women survivors (and as a survivor myself) I have found that activities involving the body, the emotions and the spirit often bring the greatest awareness and healing.

The mind protects the survivor of trauma and abuse; it locks the experience away in a safe place so the child is not overwhelmed. However, one of the consequences of the mind taking this action is that it often becomes the paramount ruler in the woman's psyche--the body and the emotions become blocked, the woman has trouble knowing how she feels and often has little regard for her body or its needs.

By adulthood, when the survivor seeks to heal the wounds of her childhood, it is often the mind that provides the greatest resistance to growth. It reasons, "The structures, blocks and barriers I've set up have kept her safe so far, so I must thwart any attempt to change them." Thus, old and untrue attitudes about the self and the world stay entrenched. Some survivors can talk to a therapist for years without any of the emotions or body awareness of the abuse coming to the surface.

Body-oriented exercises that utilize art, dance, play, ritual, story, mythology, meditation and guided visualization often bring transformation earlier and easier simply because the mind is not as engaged. These kinds of right brain activities require imagination and creativity, not rational thought. They reach beyond the mind's protections into the heart and soul of the woman seeking healing--sneaking in the back door, so to speak--and bring change before the mind knows what has happened!

This is more subtle and gentle than the "lets get together, tell our stories and cry and scream about them" approach. In fact, telling one's story is never a requirement in my groups. Bits and pieces of her past the woman feels comfortable sharing will come out during the various processes as the weeks go by. It is a way of allowing healing to occur without creating another abusive environment.

There is enough material in this book to provide at least ten weeks of

activities for a group meeting once a week. Most of what is written here can also be utilized by individuals working on their own. The exercises are not presented in any official kind of order, nor is it required to explore every exercise presented. However, I have found that the "Woman Ritual" works best with women who know each other well, so wait until you've had six to eight sessions together before you try it, or use it at your last meeting as a wonderful send-off experience.

Turning your attention to the pain in your past is never an easy thing. The exercises and meditations in this book come from the position that "rubbing your nose" in your abuse is not the answer. You can approach the abuse gently and lovingly, reverently aware of the spark of Holiness in you that kept you alive and sane. Choosing to work with this kind of healing is incredibly brave--please let yourself acknowledge this. Congratulations! I wish you all the best in your search for wholeness and happiness.

Chicago, 1992
Laura Bryannan

Chapter 1

SURVIVOR "CHECKLIST"

Did you know that many incest and sexual abuse survivors are not aware they were abused? The psyche effectively blocks the trauma from the conscious mind so the person can continue to move forward and function in life. However, the trauma is never completely erased from a survivor's experience. Some survivors who have no conscious memories of abuse have always had a feeling something happened to them but, because they can't remember anything specific, they tell themselves the feeling must be wrong. If you are one of these people, there is a good chance that you are right-- something did happen to you, even if you can't remember exactly what. So, don't let the fact that you have no solid memories or "movies" keep you from exploring this issue.

Incest and abuse survivors often develop telling "pathologies" as they grow up. These pathologies are actually the various ways a survivor learned to cope with the abuse as a child, and were extremely healthy (perhaps even lifesaving) at the time, but are now in the way of their becoming a fully-functioning adult. So, if you've been working on a specific problem in yourself for some time and haven't been able to get anywhere with it, it's possible that you haven't been asking the right questions about it.

The book *Secret Survivors*, by E. Sue Blume (John Wiley & Sons, 1990), has a checklist of some of the many symptoms that can develop from sexual abuse. Of course these kinds of symptoms can develop from other causes as well, but if you see yourself in the discussion below, it's worth asking yourself the question, "Is it possible that I am this way because I experienced incest or sexual abuse as a child?" I'd like to summarize some of the most relevant points below. Do you have issues with your body? Problems such as swallowing and gagging sensitivities, eating disorders, addictions to drugs or alcohol, skin carving or

other self-abuse, the need to wear baggy clothes, or a fear of removing clothing even when appropriate (swimming or bathing, for example) often have their roots in childhood sexual abuse.

Survivors often have trouble expressing their anger, or live in constant fear of the anger of others. Some survivors, on the other hand, find anger and violence extremely erotic. Others are rage-alcoholics, and have trouble seeing the damage their outbursts have on the people around them. Another path survivors take is to become obsessed with suicide and death, or they spend their life in and out of depression. Many survivors remember being terminally shy and afraid as a child and, as adults, get very nervous when being watched; extreme cases border on paranoia.

Constant hand washing, lock checking, and other obsessive-compulsive behaviors are often unconscious attempts to clean what feels defiled, fix what feels broken, or secure what feels unsafe. Unexplainable fears about particular rooms or people are another clue. Abuse often leaves one feeling different from the rest of humanity, or even crazy.

One of the biggest red flags is loss of memory. If you find you can't remember anything before the age of six, for example, it's possible you've blocked out something painful to know about. Some survivors get more specific in their block-outs: they can remember being little but not their childhood bedroom, or the kitchen, etc. Sometimes a survivor will only block out a specific person. If grandma lived with your family as a child but you can't remember any interaction with her, this is an important clue.

The pattern I've noticed to be most prevalent in otherwise healthy persons who do not remember being abused is a sexualizing of the identity. Survivors are taught that the way to get love is to "put out" sexually. So, when survivors become teens and young adults they often do just that! Are you someone who has had a long and somewhat promiscuous history of relationships with people who just aren't right for you--people who are unstable, substance abusers, violent, emotionally-withholding or unfaithful? It's possible you've simply been acting out what you were taught as a child.

Another clue can be found when the above-described person finally breaks that pattern and finds a healthy, loving partner to be in relationship with. A woman who has been a "hot mama" in unhealthy relationships often finds that, in a loving relationship, she loses her interest in sex entirely! Or, she wants to be sexual but finds that, instead of arousing her, her usual turn-ons now bring uncomfortable, icky or scary feelings.

The converse of this issue also occurs. I have seen many survivors let go of otherwise loving relationships because their partner's sex drive was not as active as theirs (the sex drive of an abuse survivor can be like a bottomless pit of need, by the way). Since people who were sexually abused often have their entire self-worth wrapped up in their sexual performing, a survivor has a hard time believing that their partner can really love them if they're not having sex as often as the survivor needs to feel safe.

A tangent to this problem is the woman who experiences her loving, kind and

supportive partners as boring. A woman coming out of an abusive background will generally feel attracted to people that mirror the energies of her abuser. If her abuser was angry and violent, only these kinds of partners turn her on. If her abuser was distant, keeping her always at arm's length, she can only fall in love with distant, emotionally-withholding partners. If you are someone that thrives on emotional turbulence and high drama in your relationships, and are bored to tears with the loving folks you've met, you may be stuck in a self-abusive pattern that began in your childhood.

Another path abuse survivors take is to become totally asexual. These people often gravitate toward the myriad religious and philosophical systems which teach that sexual expression is a hindrance to one's spiritual development. This, of course, is the ultimate safe place for many abused people. Survivors in this environment are encouraged to spend their entire lives cut off from their bodies; freedom from sexual impulses is seen as a high spiritual goal. Thus, the survivor will never have to confront the awful memories that lie beneath the surface of their consciousness.

These are only some of the more obvious ways sexual abuse survivors "act out." If you don't see yourself in any of the above descriptions, but still feel that something happened to you, please continue to explore this possibility. Incest and sexual abuse experiences are as varied as there are humans on this planet, and not all damaging experiences ever involve actual sexual activity. Sometimes all it takes is one inappropriate touch or glance--baby sitter fondling little girl's crotch, or uncle watching niece in the bathroom--and a child can be permanently shamed. Parents who tease their daughter about the size of her breasts (or who allow other family members to do so), a divorced father who tells his daughter all women are "whores," are often setting up patterns in their little girls that may never be healed. These things are also abuse, even though intercourse never occurred.

The fundamental rule you should remember when reviewing your history to look for clues of abuse is this: There is usually a good reason for every strange thing you notice about yourself. If you have phobias, sexual kinks, behavior glitches, etc., there is a very good chance someone taught them to you! These kinds of things did not come from the Original Manufacturer, they developed from misuse-of-product. No matter how bizarre the behavior or phobia, I have yet to discover a woman who did not ultimately find that it was produced by some corresponding form of abuse.

So, if you have fantasies of being tied up and sexually tortured, there's a good chance someone did that to you and you've blocked it out. If going into the bathroom after dark gives you anxiety attacks, there's a good chance that something horrible happened to you in a bathroom at night earlier in your life. Give yourself permission to believe that these kinds of behaviors have a reasonable and rational cause and you'll find that your life is full of clues about what may have happened to you.

Chapter 2

WHY GROUP WORK?

Even though most of the exercises presented here can benefit individuals working on their own, this book will be best utilized by women who work together with other women to support each other through the difficult but often joyful process of healing. Survivors working together in a structured way can safely accomplish many things that cannot occur alone or in a one-on-one therapeutic environment. Being in the same room with other survivors satisfies a deep longing to know you are not alone in this experience; you are not the only one in the world who suffered as you did. Hearing other women talk about their foibles and problems helps you understand that you are not crazy--that others, too, share your troubled relationships, self-criticism and abuse, space-outs, unexplained physical symptoms, etc.

Survivors are often cut off emotionally from their experience. Being with other women and listening to their stories can usually help you get in touch with, and move through, your own pain. It is often easier to cry (or get angry) for another person than it is for yourself.

Twelve-step programs for abuse survivors can provide women with the kind of companionship noted earlier. However, the feedback I have received is that most survivors eventually decide they want to move into a group environment that is more structured. They want to work in a survivor's group that is facilitated in some way and is actually doing something besides socializing.

Traditional therapist-based groups are often expensive. In addition, some therapists seem to feel that a confrontational approach to abuse recovery is the way to go. I've heard tales of therapists brow-beating, terrorizing and/or ignoring folks in their groups, telling them it's "for their own good." Some therapists have even gotten romantically involved with a member of their group! Thus, the environment created is almost as abusive as the survivor's home. If you've had a negative experience like any of the above-mentioned, don't give up on the potential of group work. You just need to try it another way!

Finally, a group of women working together can create an environment that provides each participant with a substitute family. For those women who feel they have lost the support of their own families, a survivor's group can provide the requisite nurturing to enable one to feel loved and cared for again.

Chapter 3 FORMING A GROUP

It's possible you have friends and acquaintances who might be interested in doing this work with you. If this isn't the case, yet you know you would like to work in a group, don't be afraid to reach out to strangers to pull a group together. You certainly do not have to be an expert on sexual abuse to work with the exercises in this book.

In addition, don't let a lack of leadership experience keep you from initiating

a group. There are so few resources for survivors out there, the women in your community may simply be waiting for someone like you to come along and organize things! Running an ad in local metaphysical, body work, or healing magazines (if there are any) may work. Check to see if your community offers adult continuing education classes. Such an organization may be willing to support your group, or perhaps you could advertise in their brochure. Flyers in groceries, health food stores, bookstores or women's self defense classes are another idea.

I've found that if you're pulling a group together with women who don't know each other it's best to start with at least eight people. There is always a certain drop-out factor involved that should be taken into consideration: if you begin your group with five women and two drop out, will the remaining three feel comfortable enough together to continue?

Group work, in general, takes a critical mass of people involved to be the most productive. The exercises in this book work best when there are enough women in the group to provide feedback, insights and support to each participant. If you want to keep your group low pressure, and allow for times when folks may not want to talk or share their experiences, you'll need at least five women participating to gain the most benefit from this work.

One consideration to think about if you choose to work with friends: our friends know us and love us--that's why they're our friends, right? However, since the intent of this work is to move beyond what we understand about ourselves and our world, it is possible that the friends we work with will have problems supporting this kind of change in us (and in themselves). When we receive positive feedback from a stranger it carries a certain amount of weight. When we hear the same kind words from a friend we think, "Well, she's my friend. It's her job to be supportive of me!" and immediately dismiss it.

If you decide to do this work with friends, choose them carefully. Think on these things: Are they all interested in change and growth--can you truly support each other becoming "new" women? Will you be able to drop your usual relationships and allow something new to develop within the context of your work together? Do you have a relationship with any of them in which you maintain a particular role (for example, are you the outgoing one and she the shy one)? These roles may get in the way of new pathways and insights. Will you be able to work out the issues of group leadership in a constructive way? Can you receive positive feedback from these women and really get it? Will you be able to share insights with each other without getting defensive or angry?

It may seem scary to think of working with women you don't know, but don't sell the idea short in lieu of working with your pals. My personal bias is that you'll probably be able to move farther and faster working with a group of strangers than with a group of friends, simply because there is no past history to get in your way. Because we don't view strangers as having any vested interest in us, we can often hear them and share with them in ways we couldn't with our friends. However, if you choose carefully and structure the group properly, friends may indeed be able to provide the insights, support and love necessary to productive group work.

Chapter 4

GROUP LEADERSHIP

Issues of leadership often make women uncomfortable, but a decision about how your group will be facilitated should be made before you begin working together. The exercises in this book require someone willing to introduce the ideas, and explain the processes to the group; the meditations and visualizations require someone willing to read them out loud. Questions such as How many weeks will we meet? Where will we meet? How long will each session last? Will there be a cost to participate? and Who is responsible for buying supplies? should be addressed.

If you have created a group in which the women do not know each other, you will probably want to assume the leadership role yourself. This can be done informally if you choose, with you participating in each process along with the group. As I mentioned earlier, your group can provide a real service to survivors even if you are not an expert on group facilitation or sexual abuse. Chances are, your own personal work on this issue has given you enough "expertise" to facilitate a group and do just fine! Let the women who inquire about your group know that you are not an expert but a seeker like themselves and you'll avoid any misunderstandings.

If you're working with a group of friends, you may be able to share leadership. Each participant can decide which exercises they would like to facilitate, and then take responsibility for leading the group that day. Since few women have had the opportunity to be the point of focus in a group situation, experiencing oneself as a leader can be a healing experience for those participating. However, this work is about abuse recovery, not self-assertiveness training, so those uninterested or unwilling to lead the group should not be forced to do so.

In addition, if you are sharing leadership, one person must be willing to take responsibility for where the group will meet. Issues of emotional safety are very important for survivor work. Meeting in a different place each week will make it much harder for the group feel secure and protected. Thus, make sure the group has a permanent home for the number of weeks you decide to work together. Whoever is "tending hearth" should promise to make sure the space is reasonably clean, quiet, and protected from the eyes and ears of mates, children or other non-participants when the group is meeting there.

Chapter 5 GROUND RULES

Once your group has formed, it's most important to set up some ground rules on your first day before beginning your actual work together. Ground rules provide structure and guidance to the women participating in the group. Without the proper structure, women will not feel safe enough to let their hair down and open up to each other. Here are some basic ground rules for a survivor's group. An expanded discussion follows.

*Ask the group to resist the temptation to skip meetings.

*Establish what the policy is for missing sessions.

- *Consider your work together to take place in sacred space.
- *Ask everyone to let the group know when they're upset, scared or angry.
- *Express problems with "I" statements rather than "You" statements.
- *Tell everyone that attacks on group members will not be tolerated.
- *Initiate a policy of "Rescuing Only by Request."
- *Keep a notebook.

All members should understand that there will be times when they will want to skip group. This urge should be resisted if at all possible. Explain that there are powerful forces at work trying to keep them stuck in their fear and pain. The old ways may not bring happiness but they seem familiar and safe. Processes like the ones described in this book will certainly stir up one's psyche in unexpected ways. Thus, staying with the group can literally become a battle between the part of you that wants to grow and the part of you that wants to stay stuck.

I've seen women who stomp into group that evening, grumbling and enraged they are there: they're mad at their abusers, they're mad at themselves that they need help, they're even mad they didn't skip group! In my experience, the resistance these women are feeling is a signal that something big is going to happen for them that night. Some of the most important breakthroughs I've seen have been in women who pushed through great obstacles (sick relatives, car breakdowns, getting ill, intense apathy or anger) to get there that evening. So, all the women participating should understand that making a commitment to the group will not always be easy, but the payoffs will be there if they can stick it out.

It's very important to create an atmosphere of safety in a survivor's group. This is hard to achieve when women are popping in and out and not participating regularly. Thus, there should be some understanding about what the policy is for missing sessions. Life happens, and it is not always possible for everyone to attend each session. When friends are working together, this may not be a problem.

However, when working with a group of strangers, I've found it best to ask someone who has missed two sessions in a row to leave the group. Usually, if someone has missed two sessions they are not really ready to work on this issue--something very understandable considering the amount of pain involved. The safety, love and intimacy levels of a group intensify after each meeting. After a few sessions the group's energy will leave the straggler behind, so to speak. Thus, it's not useful to either the straggler or the group to attempt to reintroduce someone after a period of absence.

The environment in which you conduct the group should be considered sacred space (sacred in this context means a special space set aside for the undertaking of healing, development and maturation--indeed sacred things!) Let everyone know that the stories and experiences expressed in this space should remain there and not shared with lovers, friends, etc.

Ask everyone to take responsibility for alerting the group when they're feeling scared, angry, or experiencing a flashback. Sometimes the group will go off in directions that are upsetting to someone. If that person sits and stewes about

it, the group has no chance to remedy the situation. The upset person has also lost a chance to explore the feelings in her body within the context of the group.

Tell the women to express their problems with "I" statements rather than "You" statements. For example, "I just got scared when you said that," rather than, "You scared me." This keeps everyone in touch with their own experience and reduces the chance of perceived criticism.

Verbal (and, of course, physical) attacks on group members should never be tolerated. Whether your group has shared leadership or one person facilitating, someone must be willing to step in and intervene should something like this occur. It often helps to remind the angry person to direct their feelings toward their perpetrator(s), not the group.

Initiate a policy of "Rescuing Only by Request." State that if someone is feeling scared or sad and would like a hug or other loving touch they should ask for it; otherwise, the policy should be "Hands Off." When a fellow group member is crying it is very hard not to give them a hug, touch their hand, stroke their hair, or offer reassuring words to them. In fact, women are taught that if we don't do this we are somehow being remiss as compassionate people.

However well intentioned, this kind of intervention often takes the person right out of their experience. Instead of exploring and releasing their pain, they're now paying attention to you. It may take that person years to get back in touch with that particular bit of pain that you "compassionately" pulled them away from. In addition, many survivors have a great aversion to being touched, so don't assume that hug or caress will be welcome unless the woman tells you so. Finally, each woman should bring a notebook with her to the group's meetings. After a process is finished, each woman should make notes on the experiences, insights and ideas she received before sharing with the group. Doing this will help ground these experiences and give them permanent physical form; sometimes we get so wrapped up in another woman's discussion of her process we forget what happened for us! The notes made after each meditation or exercise can be referred to between sessions, and can serve as a testament of your group work for years to come.

Chapter 6

BREAKING THE ICE

If you've formed a group of survivors who are strangers, it's a good idea to spend some time at the first meeting just getting to know each other. Providing name tags for the first session or two also helps.

Partner Exercise

*Have each person take a partner. If there are friends in the group, they should partner with someone they don't know.

*Have each woman take a few minutes to ask the name of their partner, where

they're from, and one other bit of interesting information their partner wishes to share about herself.

*Each woman then introduces their partner to the group.

My Favorite Things

Having each woman share a few things they like: favorite movie recently seen, good books, music, etc. can provide more ways for women in the group to connect. There's always a fondness in our hearts for folks who like the things we like.

Prop Exercise

*Put up a large piece of cloth and have some blank name tags on hand.

Each woman should think about a particular item or prop that, if she could, she would like to have with her throughout the course of the group.

*It could be something she would like to have with her for support, security or protection, such as a sword, wings, teddy bear, or magnifying glass.

*It could be something that stands as a declaration of the woman herself, such as The Cauldron of the Goddess, an Amazon's bow and arrow, a Priestess' wand.

*Have each woman write her prop on the name tag and place it on the cloth, telling the group what she has chosen and why it is important to her.

*Tell the group that if they have a real representation of their prop to feel free to bring it with them to each session.

*Women who own a prop chosen by another may feel moved to bring and share it with that woman for the duration of the group.

*You may want to hang the cloth with the props up somewhere in the room for each session.

Rose Exercise

*Bring out a large piece of paper for each member of the group and a box of crayons.

*Tell them, "If you were a rose, what would you look like?" Ask them to draw a picture of the rose they would be.

*When everyone is done, have everyone hold their pictures up so that all can view them. Isn't it interesting how many different interpretations can be made of a rose?

*Are some roses in pots and some out in nature? Are some big and others small and timid-looking?

*Do some have thorns and others not? Did some women draw an environment for their rose or is the rose alone in the picture? Are some roses growing by walls, trees or some other protected situation?

*Now ask each member to present their picture to the group, telling the others why they drew the rose the way they did.

*How the pictures are drawn can provide clues to each woman's self-image. What insights can the group provide about each picture? (P.S. This is not an art contest, look at content rather than how "well" the pictures are drawn.)

*Let the group have fun with their interpretations, but each artist should have the final say about what her picture means.

*You may want to put the pictures up around the room for each meeting of the group.

Chapter 7

CREATING SACRED SPACE

In order to create the sense of sacred space, it is useful to do some sort of ritual at the beginning of each meeting to consciously set aside the mundane world and create the time and energy for healing. Here's an example of such a ritual (this ritual also asks for protection of the space and the people within it):

Opening Ritual

- *Close your eyes.
- *Stretch your arms over your head, tense and then relax.
- *Stretch out your legs, tense and then relax.
- *Take a deep breath, filling your lower belly first, then slowly expanding your upper lungs. Repeat twice more.
- *Find your consciousness. (If you're not sure where it is, pay attention to your left big toe. What's going on there? That's your consciousness in your big toe, telling you how it feels. Now tune into your left knee. What's going on there? Now tune into your stomach, your throat...)
- *Move your consciousness up over your head and out into space. See if you can feel what's going on out there.
- *Identify the direction North. North represents the energy of earth, for grounding, stability and persistence.
- *Call into the room friends, fictional characters, goddesses, angels, or any beings that epitomize the qualities of earth for you. Ask them to be present in the space to support, guide and protect the group during this meeting.
- *Identify the direction West. West represents the energy of water, for purification, nurturance and intuition.
- *Call into the room friends, fictional characters, goddesses, angels, or any beings that epitomize the qualities of water for you. Ask them to be present in the space to support, guide and protect the group during this meeting.
- Identify the direction South. South represents the energy of fire, for initiative, anger and creativity.
- *Call into the room friends, fictional characters, goddesses, angels, or any beings that epitomize the qualities of fire for you. Ask them to be present in the space to support, guide and protect the group during this meeting.
- *Identify the direction East. East represents the energy of air, for a clear mind, communication and adaptability.
- *Call into the room friends, fictional characters, goddesses, angels, or any beings that epitomize the qualities of air for you. Ask them to be present in the space to support, guide and protect the group during this meeting.
- Come back down into the body.
- *When ready, open eyes.

Creating an Altar

Groups with a solid spiritual bent may decide to bring items to each session with which to create an altar. An altar can provide a place of focus in meditation. It can also be an acknowledgement of the inherent spirituality of the healing process and the greater power that guides ourselves and the universe. An altar can be viewed as a gateway for Spirit to enter the room. At the least, it is a tangible representation of the great archetypal energies present in our world.

The basic altar has items representing each of the four elements: earth, water, fire and air. Most often, altars contain crystals, dirt or salt to represent earth, or physical energy; a chalice with water or wine to represent water, or emotional energy; a burning candle to represent fire, or creative energy; and incense or feathers to represent air, or mental energy. Each element is placed on the altar in its proper direction: earth, north; water, west; fire, south; air, east.

Women may decide to bring items that represent the elements they are most in touch with (for example, students work with the mental energies of air; an artist is probably in touch with the inspirational energies of water and the creative energies of fire). It can also be useful to bring items that represent energy one needs more of (for example, are you a spiritual woman who can't get it together to pay her bills? You need earth energy to ground you in the world). Other personal or meaningful items can round out the display, such as baby pictures, totems, favorite ritual belongings, etc.

If you decide to do this, you'll find that your altar will change every session. It could even be part of your group's process every week to have each woman explain what she brought and why it was meaningful for her to bring to that session.

CAVEAT: Whether or not to create an altar is something each group should decide together. Some women were victimized by priests, ministers or nuns and have a serious problem with anything that smacks of "church." Although an altar such as I've described belongs more in the metaphysical or Quabbalic tradition than Christian, please honor the possibility that someone in your group may be very uncomfortable with this and discuss before deciding whether to do it or not.

Ending the Session

After your group's work together is done for that session you should do something to officially end the meeting before socializing. If you began the session with a ritual, you should end it by "breaking the circle," returning everyone to the mundane world. Here's an example of such an ending:

- *Have everyone stand and hold hands in a circle.
- *Formally thank and release any otherworld beings you may have called in for support and guidance.
- *You may want to say a few words about the meeting, or state some hopes or goals for the coming week.
- *Squeeze the hand of the woman next to you, then she squeezes the hand of the woman next to her, passing the squeeze around the circle until it returns to

the facilitator.

*When the squeeze has returned, the facilitator says, "The circle is broken," and releases the hands of the women on either side, officially ending the meeting.

*The group is now free to leave, chat, etc.

Chapter 8

ALLIES

The safest way to explore the experiences of abuse in your past is to insure you have some strong support mechanisms in place. The best form of support is to put yourself in the hands of a loving and knowledgeable therapist or counselor. However, not all women can afford professional therapy. If you are one of these women, try to find at least one friend you can tell about your experiences. Just knowing there is someone you can call if you're feeling out of control can create enough safety in your life so that healing can occur much faster. Friends and allies come in all shapes and sizes, and they don't have to be people! There are many sources of support survivors can call on both from within themselves and without. All of the beings and energies invoked from the meditations listed below can be called upon during times of duress and need. Different ones may be better suited to different situations. Experiment with how they feel to you and you'll know who to call when you're needing some help.

Highest Self Meditation

Your Highest Self is what you might call your Heavenly Blueprint. She is where you came from and where you will some day be returning. She is the part of you that remains perfect, Holy and forever in touch with Spirit--the defilement of your abuse never touched her. Various teachings label this part of us in different ways but the labels are unimportant. The only thing you need to understand is that she is there for you any time you need her. She can give you solace, support and hope in ways that no one else can.

If you only do one process out of this book, this is the one to do. Make a promise that you will go to visit your Highest Self in meditation for five or ten minutes at least once a day. As you get to know her, you will re-experience some of the light, love, wisdom and peace that you have had all along (but have lost touch with). The more you get to know her, the more she will be able to shine through you. If you can truly let her manifest in your daily life, you'll find that nothing will ever be the same again!

CAVEAT: Some survivors have trouble with this meditation. Their self-image is so damaged, they project it onto their Highest Self so that she seems intimidating in some way. One friend said to me, "I don't think my Highest Self likes me very much." Some report seeing her on the other side of a river, or from a great distance. Some survivors can't let themselves experience their Highest Self at all; nothing comes to them when they try to find her. If you encounter such a woman in your group you can help by telling her it's okay to make up what her Highest Self might be like if nothing comes to her by itself. Such a woman will

have a hard time letting herself imagine a beautiful, strong, and loving Highest Self, so you or the group must support her in not putting limits on her imagination.

- *Get comfortable.
- *Close eyes. Take a few deep breaths.
- *Imagine an environment of incredible beauty and complete peace. It could be a beach, a forest, a beautiful room...it may not even be on this planet. See every detail. Note the colors. How far off in the distance can you see?
- *Look behind you; what is there?
- *What does it smell like?
- *What sounds are all around you?
- *What are the textures and shapes nearby?
- *Feel the peace of this place entering you.
- *Now imagine yourself in your highest, most complete, most perfect form; the form that is connected to Holy energy.
- *See this image coming toward you now.
- *What does she look like? Can you see her light, her beauty?
- *What feelings do you get about her? Can you sense her love, her playfulness, her wisdom, her strength?
- *What qualities does she personify? Is she a musician, a scholar, a healer, an administrator, a mother, a warrior, lady-of-the-beasts?
- *Does she have a message for you? Ask her and let yourself receive it if she does.
- *Is there anything you want to say to her? Requests for help, information, healing?
- *After you're through with this exchange, thank your Highest Self for her help, say goodbye, knowing that you can return to her and this place any time you wish.
- *Come back into this room, into this body, and when you're ready, open your eyes.
- *Take a second to jot down anything that seems relevant or important from this meditation into your notebook.
- *Take a partner and describe your perfect environment to her. (Or share with the entire group).
- *Share what your Highest Self was like. What was it like to encounter her? What was one surprising thing you discovered about her?

Animals

It has been known since ancient times that the animal kingdom contains wise, loving, and healing energies. Each animal "tribe" works with different powers and abilities, most of which make good sense if you study the characteristics and habits of the animal in question. For example, the bear, who "dies" and is reborn each spring at the end of hibernation, has been known all over the world as a bringer of transformation and healing. Bear cults were some of the first forms of prehistoric religion.

Survivors can utilize the various animal energies as support when struggling with various issues. One of the easiest ways to get to know the various animal energies is to invest in the *Medicine Cards: The Discovery of Power Through the Ways of Animals*, by Jamie Sams and David Carson (Bear & Co., 1988). The Medicine Cards were created to be an oracle like the Tarot, however they contain a wealth of information about many North American animals that can help you get to know

what realms of life each animal works best with.

When you're feeling in need of support on a particular issue you can relax, quiet your mind, and call on the animal that works with that issue and receive guidance from it. For example, according to some Native American traditions, the Elk works with stamina, the Deer with gentleness, the Skunk with issues of reputation, the Butterfly with transformation, and the Otter with woman medicine. These animal's energies are freely available to those who seek their support. The instructions that accompany the Medicine Cards also provide many different ways you can work with them in order to get in touch with the particular animal's energies that are present for you at any specific time.

Another way to work with animals, if you don't want to purchase the Medicine Cards, is to think of the animals that you are drawn to. Do you love cats, horses, dogs, birds, kangaroos? What characteristics do you admire about the animals you are drawn to? For example, cats are sleek, curious, mysterious and independent. Are these qualities you like about yourself, or qualities you would like to acquire more of? Chances are, the animals you like have attributes that you either contain yourself or are learning about. You are probably, on some level or another, working with these animals already. Try calling on the energies of the animals you like the next time you're down or scared. You may be surprised at how tangible their response is.

Inner Child vs. Inner Animal

There has been much talk recently about getting in touch with your inner child: to re-parent and champion her, and to help her release her fear, sadness, pain and anger. For survivors, this is ultimately a necessary thing. However, many survivors are very angry at their inner child, for she represents the part of them that "allowed" the abuse to occur. It may not matter that the woman was abused as a baby or young child, obviously unable to do anything to stop it; she may still feel that the little girl she was betrayed her. This kind of thinking allows all sorts of self-abuse to occur in a survivor, and it may be very hard for her to be kind to her inner child in any way.

If you feel that this is the case with you, try imagining your inner child as a small puppy, kitten or other animal you're fond of. The next time your inner child is scared or sad, think of her as a lost baby animal scratching at your back door during a rainstorm. What would you do in such a situation? Well, you'd probably let her in, snuggle her in warm towels, and feed her some milk. You certainly wouldn't scream at her to shut up, tell her she has no right to be afraid, or tell her she's stupid to be trying to get in from the rain.

It's not unusual for survivors to like animals better than people. Thus, you may find that it's much easier to treat your inner child kindly, listen to her fears or troubles, and find ways to help her if you imagine her as a woebegone little beastie rather than yourself as a little girl.

Animal Champion

All of us are connected to the animal kingdom by virtue of our own wild and instinctual natures. We may have lost touch with the parts of us that know how to be alive in this way, but such awareness is never erased completely. Even the most civilized "good" girls feel the urge sometimes (even if it's only in secret) to play, create, fight, run, get dirty, growl, and howl at the moon. The following exercise is designed to help us reconnect with the animal that can be our teacher, protector and champion. This animal will often turn out to be different than the animals we like.

- *Give each participant a large piece of paper and have a box of crayons or colored pencils handy.
- *Present this proposition: "Word has come down from on high that tonight at midnight every human on the planet will be turned into an animal. However, everyone can choose the animal they wish to become. What animal will you be?"
- *Remind the women that, because it is the Universe causing this change, one can become any animal one imagines, whether it is a beast out of mythology or perhaps from another planet. We are not limited to the animals from our known world.
- *Have each woman draw the animal she wishes to become.
- *When all are finished, have everyone hold up their pictures so that all can view them.
- *Now ask each woman to present her animal self to the group and explain why this particular choice was made. What does the choice say about each woman? For example, a woman who will turn into a beast of prey will be different from the woman who chooses to be swift of foot or wing.
- *Can the group offer any further insights as to the meaning of the animal chosen?
- *After everyone has finished, have the group move into meditative awareness.
- *Ask the group to go to their place of perfect beauty and peace. In this environment, have each woman invite her animal champion to join her.
- *Does your animal look different from your drawing in any surprising way?
- *Introduce yourself and ask it its name. Is it male or female (or something else)?
- *Can you pet, snuggle or hold this beast? Do so. Feel the texture of its fur, feathers or hide. Get close enough to smell it. Familiarize yourself completely with your animal friend.
- *Does your beast have any information about itself you need to know? Does it know why you chose it over another kind of beast?
- *What are the unique skills of this particular animal? Do you have these skills too or do you need to learn them from this beast?
- *Ask it if it will be willing to help you. Will it come and comfort you when you're sad or scared?
- *Will it help teach you how to show your claws and growl when you're threatened?
- *Will it help you to romp and play when it's time to have fun? Ask if there's a signal or word it would like you to use when you need to call on it.
- *Is there anything else it wants you to know? Is there anything else you want to share with it?
- *Spend a few moments saying goodbye to your animal champion, knowing that you may return or call on it any time you need its support.
- *Come back into this room, into this body; when you're ready, open your eyes.
- *Write down anything you wish to remember about this meditation into your notebook.
- *Share with the group what you discovered about your animal champion.

Archetypes in Oracles

Learning to work with a particular oracle can be another way to give yourself support when you need it. Each oracle has a different kind of personality. For example, working with the I Ching is like talking things over with a wise Chinese grandfather. Each of the sixty-four hexagrams in the I Ching represent a different stage of life's unfoldment. You can meditate on a hexagram that illustrates a particular struggle in your life and get new insight into your problem. One of my favorite translations of the hexagrams is Sam Reiffler's, *I Ching: A New Interpretation for Modern Times* (Bantam, 1974). He has taken the often arcane and mind-boggling traditional interpretations and translated them into modern English, which makes them much easier to apply to today's life.

The major arcana of the Tarot represents twenty-two different archetypal energies. Each one can be called on during meditation for guidance and support. The Empress, for example, represents the energies of the Great Goddess in her aspects of mother, creatress, and nurturer, whereas the High Priestess represents the Great Goddess in her aspects of keeper-of-the-mysteries. Depending on what you're trying to accomplish, the archetypal energies represented in a Tarot deck can be there to strengthen and advise.

The Motherpeace deck and accompanying book by Vicki Noble, *Motherpeace: A Way to the Goddess Through Myth, Art and Tarot* (Harper & Row, 1983) can be a good place to start if you're unfamiliar with the Tarot. The book provides women-oriented explanations of the major arcana that are superior to many other more traditional books on Tarot interpretation. The deck itself is a wonderful celebration of women in all cultures.

CAVEAT: I am not talking here about using oracles in the usual way--that is, to predict the future. I am talking about meditating on the archetypal energies represented in any particular oracle and using them for emotional support. It is very easy, especially when upset or scared, to obsess over a Tarot or I Ching reading and take it much too seriously. In fact, asking questions of an oracle when upset or scared is the worst time to consult it, as you will probably end up with a reading describing your distress, not the issue you asked the question about.

Another way to receive support is to pull out a favorite book of spiritual teaching, whether it be the *Bible*, the *Gita*, *Course in Miracles*, or a book of beloved poems. Sit quietly and get in touch with the issue at hand, then open the book randomly. Chances are, there will be something worthwhile and relevant to your concerns on the pages you've opened. Let yourself be open to the wisdom of the teaching in that particular book.

Chapter 9 STORY WORK

The stories, tales and shows we loved as children often contain clues about the needs we had at that time. We might not have been in touch with our needs on a

conscious level, but they were there nonetheless. Immersing ourselves in particular realms of story and fantasy met some of these needs, and you can look at the kinds of stories you loved to see what those needs might have been. Some women loved the Nancy Drew books. Nancy Drew had no mother, and a supportive father who didn't require her to be a proper lady to receive his love. Nancy got into all sorts of adventures, some of them dangerous, and she got herself out of them every time. Can you see the clues here? A little girl who loved Nancy Drew probably felt a lot stronger inside herself than her family allowed her to be. She wanted to be independent and adventurous, with supportive parents capable of seeing her abilities. No matter how victimized such a little girl might have been, Nancy Drew books might have kept her in touch with her Highest Self.

Some women loved stories about animals or horses. Animals can certainly represent our innocent and instinctual selves, and horses are powerful, beautiful and swift--we could jump on their backs, ride away, and no one would be able to stop us! Animal stories are often about how the animal encounters harrowing adventures or mistreatment, with the animal surviving to become free (or back in the arms of a loving caretaker) at the end. It's not hard to see how a traumatized child might cling to the messages in such stories, identifying with the struggles and adventures of the animal. Loving arms to rescue us from our pain might not have been there in real life, but reading about our favorite animal friend's happy ending was certainly better than nothing.

Analyzing our favorite childhood stories can help us understand what our hopes, dreams and secret needs were when we were young. Exploring our childhood through these stories is also a safe way to get back in touch with feelings long-buried. Since we're exploring beloved stories rather than the abuse itself, the mind will allow important emotions from this time in our lives to arise, perhaps for the first time. For many women, this is an eye-opening exercise: it can be quite a shock to see how your favorite story, long forgotten, fit quite exactly with the circumstances of your childhood now that you remember the abuse.

Stories from Childhood

- *Ask everyone to take a few minutes to remember their favorite story, movie, or TV show from childhood (before ten years old)--the one that they couldn't get enough of.
- *Have each woman tell the group what their favorite story was. Describe the story if others are not familiar with it.
- *What did you like about it?
- *Does this story provide any clues about what you needed?
- *Ask the group to offer any insights they may have concerning the needs this story reveals.
- *How did you get support, strength, information from this story or character?
- *Did you internalize any of its positive qualities?
- *Are you still in touch with the positive gifts this story or character gave you?
- *Did you fall short or forget any of these qualities?
- *What can you do to reintegrate with this story or character?
- *Are there any qualities that you have outgrown?
- *Write down any insights about your favorite story--its meanings and

implications for your life--in your notebook.

Stories from Adult Life

The next step, for those interested in carrying this exercise further, would be to look at the favorite stories of your adult life.

- *How do they differ from the stories of your childhood?
- *Are the needs revealed in these stories different from the ones in your childhood?
- *What are the differences? Are some childhood needs no longer there? Are there new needs that were not there as a girl?

Exploring the differences in story line, tone, and the personalities of the characters can give you clues as to what you're consciousness is still working on and what it has handled.

Fairy Tales About Abuse

Reading and researching myths and fairy tales provides a wealth of information about the pathways in and out of abusive situations. Creative thinkers can play with the symbolism in these stories and find new ways to approach their own story. Rather than give you any techniques about what to do with these fables, I'd simply like to provide an outline of how to get started. The following fairy tales are from the Grimm brothers. If you want to play with this, try to get a recent translation of the fairy tales you want to read. *Grimms' Tales for Young & Old*, translated by Ralph Manheim (Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1977) is a good place to start. Older versions were often Christianized and sanitized, and lack the juice of more accurate translations.

- *Issues with the father: Rapunzel, The Girl Without Hands, Rumpelstiltskin, Thousandfurs, Old Rinkrank, Maid Maleen.
- *Issues with the mother: The Three Little Men in the Woods, Mother Holle, Darling Roland, Ashputtle (Cinderella), One-eye, Two-eyes and Three-eyes, Little Brother and Little Sister, Hansel and Gretel, The Lamb and the Fish.

If you wish to explore different ways to interpret the symbolism in stories and fairy tales, I would recommend seeking out the following books: *The Wounded Woman: Healing the Father-Daughter Relationship* (Shambhala, 1983), *On the Way to the Wedding: Transforming the Love Relationship* (Shambhala, 1986), and *Meeting the Madwoman: An Inner Challenge for Feminine Spirit* (Shambhala, 1993), all by Linda Schierse Leonard, Ph.D.; and *Women Who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*, by Clarissa Pinkola Estes, Ph.D., (Ballantine Books, 1992). Although each of these books explores different areas of life that may be of interest to survivors, all of them utilize the symbolism in modern and ancient stories to explore the life-affirming pathways and options that have been available to humanity since the beginning of time. All of these books can help you learn how to work with the symbolism in fairy tales (and in your own life), and are wonderful healing tools in and of themselves.

The myths of the Sumerian Goddess Inanna and the Greek Goddess Persephone are

two of the most famous tales of interaction with the shadow side of life--something all survivors experienced. The stories of these two Goddesses can almost be seen as timelines or maps, marking the inevitable downward descent into grief, the most effective approach to healing, and the upward ascent into new life. They can provide guidance and support while you're on your path to healing, helping you see where you've been and what you have left to accomplish. Survivors are encouraged to research these myths and explore the lessons presented there.

To explore the myth of Inanna, a good place to start is the book *Descent to the Goddess: A Way of Initiation for Women*, by Sylvia Briton Perera (Inner City Books, 1981). A wonderful exploration of the Goddess Persephone can be found in *The Goddess Within: A Guide to the Eternal Myths that Shape Women's Lives*, by Jennifer Barker Woolger & Roger J. Woolger (Ballantine Books, 1987).

Chapter 10

MASK MAKING

Making masks can be a good way to get in touch with hidden emotions and awareness buried in the psyche. As you contemplate a particular "face," new ideas and feelings will come to the surface. Some survivors are quite amazed at the power of the masks they have made. The mask can be drawn on paper, created with paper mache, or painted on a ceramic one bought at a craft store. There are several different ways to go, depending on what you want to explore.

Spend a few minutes contemplating the ideas presented below. Which mask seems the most appealing? Which one seems the most uncomfortable? Pick a mask you want to create; go with the idea that has some energy for you--one that seems exciting or fun, or scary and disturbing. Feel free to go with any other mask ideas you may think of. If you let your imagination have its way, you may be surprised at what wants to appear on it. A mask of yourself as the abused child, for example, may not want to have a mouth or eyes. The mask of your abuser may not even look human!

Whatever mask you decide to create, make sure you also create its counterpart to stay in balance with yourself. So, if you make a mask of the parts of you that you don't like, make a mask of the things you do like in yourself also.

*Make a mask that represents the parts of you you're most unhappy with: the parts you most want to get rid of, the parts that seem to be hanging on no matter what you do.

*Make a mask that represents the parts you want to enhance in yourself: the parts that represent the highest aspects of yourself that you are aware of.

*Make a mask that represents your abuser's negative emotions.

*Make a mask that represents your abuser's positive qualities.

*Make a mask that represents the energies of your enabler(s), the people who knew about your abuse but did nothing.

*Make a mask that represents the energies of someone who supported and strengthened you.

*Make a mask that represents you as the abused child.

*Make a mask that represents the aspects of you that enabled you to survive.

*Make a mask that represents an emotion you have a hard time expressing in your life, such as anger, determination or grief.

*Make a mask that represents an emotion that has allowed you to carry on in your life in a positive manner.

*Make a mask that represents one of your own "masks": a false persona you fall back on when in stress or anxiety, such as the "know-it-all," the "ditz," the "hysterical."

*Make a mask that represents an aspect of your "true" self.

Chapter 11

MYTH WORK

The writing of Jean Houston, Ph.D., is bursting with valuable exercises and meditations that can be of use to anyone seeking to explore mythology and sacred psychology. One of her most important contributions, as far as survivors are concerned, is an exercise called "The Sacred Wound" from her book *The Search for the Beloved* (Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc., 1987).*

Ms. Houston discusses the importance of reframing experiences of abuse in more hopeful and meaningful ways. She sees these woundings as necessary to our soul's development. "Our woundings tell us that old forms are ready to die, however reluctant the local self may be to allow this to occur, and that hitherto unsuspected new forms are ready to flower."

She notes that you will find such woundings in all the great myths of heroes, heroines, gods and goddesses. "All of these myths of wounding carry with them the uncanny, the mysterious, the announcement that the sacred is entering into time. Each prefigures a journey, a renaissance, a birth or rebirth, a turning point in the lives of gods and mortals."

Houston challenges all who have suffered woundings in their lives to see the great potential for growth and change inherent in these experiences. It is my personal belief that those of us who suffered childhood sexual abuse had souls who decided to take on an important challenge in this life. The destruction of the old self, the penetration of the archetypal "dark" energies, the phenomena of rebuilding one's self from scratch, has set the stage for the attainment of great compassion, creativity, healing, psychic ability, and strength.

"The Sacred Wound" exercise asks survivors to place the story of their abuse into a mythological context. This accomplishes two very worthy goals: First, it encourages you to question the "truth" of your story as you now understand it. It can show you the larger pattern playing itself out in your life. Second,

telling your story as a myth is a way to examine the abuse in your life from a safe vantage point. As your myth unfolds it provides a strong container that protects you from being overwhelmed. Personal energies are replaced by larger, archetypal energies, and the abused little girl can become the Maiden-to-be-Rescued or the Magical Child.

Jean Houston provides a thorough and rich discussion of this process in *The Search for the Beloved*. Anyone choosing to work with this exercise (and I highly recommend it) should seek out the book and read it before beginning. The directions below are a thumbnail sketch of the complete process. As the search for healthy and balanced love (both from others and toward themselves) is a goal of many survivors, this book has many other wonderful exercises that will prove invaluable in healing.

The Sacred Wound

- *Have everyone in the group choose a partner.
- *Ask everyone to review silently the woundings in their life and choose an important one.
- *Each partner takes five minutes to answer these questions:
 - What happened? How were you wounded?
 - What did you feel when you were wounded?
 - What were the full consequences of this wounding in your life, for good or ill?
 - In the light of this, what do you want?
 - What does all this mean? What pattern is playing itself out here?
- *Now ask everyone to re-remember their story as a myth, building upon the answers from the above questions.
- *When creating a myth of your life, you must keep yourself well away from the mundane--something of a trick to do. Houston provides some insights into the approach: "Each figure and situation in the myth is archetypal. Thus a soldier becomes the Warrior, a young girl is the Maiden-to-Be-Rescued, an animal may be the Ally, and a serpent the Guardian of the Gates. The child is always Holy, if unrecognized, the circumstances of birth extraordinary; the family always poor but honest, or of the highest nobility (there is no bourgeoisie in the land of myth); an elderly person is the Wise One; the one who yearns is the Lover, the one who seeks, the Hero or Heroine."
- *Everyone has fifteen minutes to tell their story: One partner says to the other, "Tell me your story as a myth, beginning, 'Once upon a time...' and taking the story past the wounding to the place of transformation."
- *Taking your story to the place of transformation is important. Too often we limit ourselves, even in our own imagination, by saying something like, "Well I can't say that because it's just not realistic; I could never be that brave, smart, rich, etc." This is a myth, it's not supposed to be "The Truth"! So, in other words, don't forget to let yourself live "happily ever after."
- *After everyone has had their turn telling their myth, ask the group to dance the myth they just told, enacting the stages of their myth in the dance.
- *Take ten minutes to allow everyone to physically get in contact with their new story.
- *Remind everyone to take a few minutes to write down their answers to each question, as well as the outline of the myth they created, before too much time goes by and it's forgotten.

*Material from The Search for the Beloved used with permission.

Chapter 12

CLEANSING

A survivor must work with many different levels of healing in order to free herself from the negative aspects of her abuse. Therapy can address mental and emotional trauma. Spiritual practices can cultivate soul-level healing. The one area that often gets neglected during all this work, however, is the body itself.

Poisons from fear, anger, disgust, shame and pain often get stored in the cells of the body, there to sit for years and years, untouched by the survivor. It is important for anyone who has suffered abuse or physical trauma to understand that the body may be holding immense amounts of stuck energy.

Anyone who has witnessed this energy coming up to be released knows how bizarre this kind of healing can be at times. I call this type of healing a "body flashback": the cells and muscles of the body take control temporarily and produce all sorts of behaviors and symptoms that the survivor cannot stop.

I've heard tales of strange rashes that erupt on the mouth or the genitals, blood blisters and bruises on the genitals that come from nowhere, uncontrollable throat spasms when the tongue behaves as if it's being forced to give oral sex, and total body convulsions that appear (I imagine) like epileptic fits. In fact, if you're a survivor and have been seeking medical attention for something the doctors can't figure out, it is possible your body is simply releasing cellular-level trauma and there is nothing seriously wrong with you physiologically.

Of course, nothing can help body issues more than finding a worthy massage therapist, shiatsu or acupressure practitioner. Try to find one who understands the energy system of the body and has knowledge about healing blocks and knots of stuck energy. Having a safe and loving person touch you in a healing manner can break down more barriers and armoring than any amount of traditional discussion-based therapy.

The following exercises are aimed at helping survivors identify and eliminate poisons from the abuse they received that is being held in the physical structure of the body.

Create your Shadow

This exercise involves making something physical that will represent all the pain, shame, anger, darkness, guilt, grief, etc., you can feel in your body. The idea is to take everything you're feeling inside your body and put it into the object you're creating. Then, after sitting with your creation until you feel

neutral about it, you destroy or bury it.

The healer who shared this exercise with me told me this story: "I was working with a client who had been sexually abused by her father, her mother and her older brother. She made three representations of these people, creating them to look as dark and evil as she had experienced them. When she finally felt ready to let the statues go--they no longer upset her--she dug a hole to bury them. She put them in the hole, and as she threw the first pile of dirt on top of them her bowels and bladder voided. The healing involved in this activity was so powerful that her body responded in this literal way."

This extreme example shows how a little bit of time, effort and attention can pay off big in terms of cellular-level healing. In the groups I run, we spend one session beginning this project. Participants then continue to work on it at home. If someone finishes theirs before the end of the group, they are encouraged to bring it in to share with the others--always a very moving experience.

- *Spend a little time tuning into your body.
- *What is in there that you don't like?
- *What is in there that feels like it doesn't belong to you?
- *What is in there that constantly feels dark, yucky or bad?
- *What is in there that feels scared, enraged, ashamed?
- *Put some thought into what these feelings might look like if they had shape.
- *Will they be a blob? A face? A picture of some kind? A sculpture?
- *If you can get in touch with a shape or image, what kind of materials would you need to create it?
- *Some survivors want to use clay or playdough; painting a representation works for other women; I've seen powerful creations filled with razor blades, saran wrap and barbed wire; one woman bought a ceramic mask to paint her "good" face on the outside and her "shadow" face on the inside; collages made with pictures and phrases cut from magazines work well too.
- *Assemble your materials and create the representation of your shadow. This will probably take you anywhere from a few days to a few months.
- *Put in every negative element that comes to you. Don't be in a hurry. As you continue to work on it more may come up for you that wants to be added to your creation.
- *Be as imaginative as you can be. Some women choose to use pictures of their abusers, dead (but real) bugs or spiders to represent the creepy-crawly feelings inside themselves, blood, pubic hair, shit--you name it. If a powerful feeling inside of you requires an equally powerful symbol in your creation, be sure to use it.
- *Creating this representation with consciousness will stir up long-buried emotions and feelings in the body. One survivor began to have her first solid memories of her abuse while working on this project.
- *When your creation is finished, keep it nearby where you can view it until you feel completely neutral about it: it no longer makes you clutch inside, scares you, makes you sad or angry.
- *Once you feel neutral you may then decide what to do with it. If you want it destroyed, you must give it away to a friend to destroy for you. (Because your creation contains your own energies, destroying it yourself is like cutting off your own arm. Giving it to a friend is like giving a gift. It is now your

friend's property to do with as she pleases.) If you want to bury it, throw it into a lake or river, etc., you can do this yourself.

*Know that when your creation is gone it has carried away much of your physical-level poison.

CAVEAT: You may get to a place in which all negative reactions toward your shadow project are gone and you feel proud of what you have created. If you have urges to keep your shadow project as a testimonial to your healing and creativity, please honor these feelings. What is important is the change of feeling tone in your body. This may be achieved through the process of creating your project, and not in the destruction of it. Trust your intuition, and know that destroying your creation may not be correct or appropriate in all cases.

Take it Back

Sometimes survivors get swamped with painful emotion in reaction to certain activities that remind us of our abuse. One minute we're feeling fine, the next minute we've got a knot of shame in the pit of our stomach. Often, these kinds of emotional reactions are amped up by psychic residue dumped on us from our abusers. Survivors pick up their abuser's guilt, shame and blaming energy as children and often experience it in adult life as if belongs to them.

For example, during the course of gentle love-making you suddenly begin to feel grossed-out and afraid. You know there is nothing happening in present time to cause these feelings, so what can you do? Chances are, your consciousness has just hit a pocket of energy that belongs to your abuser. The best thing to do is to get rid of it!

CAVEAT: Some survivors feel uncomfortable about sending energy back to their perpetrators, no matter how horribly they were treated. This is a concern that should be honored, as this technique is very effective and powerful. Survivors are usually carrying incredible amounts of toxins and crap for their abusers, which enables the abusers to live longer and be happier or saner than they might otherwise be. Sending their own toxic energy back to them when you become aware of it may indeed have a negative impact on the health and well-being of your abuser.

Those survivors who would like to dump the energy but don't want to send it directly back to their perpetrator can imagine it going out into the universe. You can ask the Universe to transmute it into positive energy for the good of all concerned. The Angel Healing technique following this one may also be appealing.

*Tune into your pain, wherever it may be.

*Imagine it coming out of your body, flowing away from you. Some people see it as blobs of gunk, ropes of turds, a stream of dark energy, etc.

*Say to yourself, "I am sending this energy back to (your abuser)." Affirm to yourself that this energy is going back to the person it belongs to.

*Inwardly chanting, "Take it back, take it back, take it back (your abuser)," rhythmically like a football cheer can also do the trick.

- *It may help to turn in the direction toward where your abuser lives while doing this if they are alive (if not, send it out into the universe).
- *Inwardly affirm that you no longer wish to carry your abuser's pain in your body; that sending the energy back to where it came from is only fair and right.
- *You will probably feel a positive shift in your body as you let go of this energy.

Angel Healing

- *When you become aware of pain or emotion in your body that doesn't want to budge, close your eyes and quiet your mind.
- *Imagine a spiritual entity: a beautiful angel, a favorite Saint or Goddess, the Virgin Mary, Jesus, Father Abraham, etc.
- *Inwardly call on that entity and then imagine him/her coming down to stand behind you or hold you in their lap.
- *Ask the entity to hold his/her hand hovering over the place in pain.
- *Now send the pain into their hand, while asking the entity to pull the pain out. Know that you can safely give the entity all your pain, they will know how to dispose of it; all spiritual entities are capable of acting as healers if so called upon.
- *When you are feeling better, thank the entity for their help.

"Ask and ye shall receive." The above meditation rests upon this truth. There are many, many beings willing to help around us at all times. Because of the law of free will, no higher entity can interfere in the life of a human being without being invited. But, once asked, they can then give us the support and guidance we need.

This meditation works best if you call in an entity you love and feel safe with (or already work with in some other way). Some survivors have a hard time believing that the energies of the Christ, the Virgin Mary, Isis or Muhammad are accessible to us, but they are! Sometimes it takes trying a meditation like this for someone to get back in touch with the loving help that is out there for all of us.

Shower Healing

One of the simplest ways to cleanse energy from the body is to take a conscious shower. One of the reasons we feel so refreshed and renewed after a shower is because the water is cleansing our more refined and subtle bodies (our aura) in addition to our physical body.

- *Stand under the shower and imagine the spray washing away impurities from your emotional, mental and soul bodies.
- *If there is a particular place in your body holding discomfort, let the water focus on that part.
- *Imagine the water penetrating into that stuck place, loosening and dissolving the "glue" holding the discomfort in your body.
- *Imagine the poisons and pain flowing out of your body and down the drain.
- *Now imagine sparkling golden, pink, green or blue light coming at you along

with the water.

*Let the pure light shimmer and splash around you. Focus the water again on the place that was in pain.

*Imagine the light filling the "hole" that was created when the poison went down the drain.

Chapter 13

BODY LOVE

All abuse survivors come away from these childhood experiences with various levels of fear, loathing and confusion toward their bodies. For many women, the way to stay sane was to remove awareness from their bodies up into their minds or even higher into their soul energies. As adults, the success of this strategy begins to wear thin, as one realizes one is disconnected from life, love and physical-level enjoyment. Existing as one of the "living dead" may seem to have its merits: if you can't feel, you can't be hurt. However, if you can't feel, you take no joy out of what you create, no pleasure in the giving and receiving of love, and you have no hope of reaching your heart's desire because you have no way of knowing what it might be or recognizing it if you found it.

Survivors of any physical trauma can begin to apply gentle strategies to help reconnect the soul and mind with the heart and body so that the energies can flow freely back and forth in a more integrated way. Once seen as a betrayer or enemy, we can teach ourselves to experience the body as it was truly meant to be: the glorious vehicle of our higher energies, able to express love and compassion in a way that is tangible and real. Here are some exercises to help you connect with your body in a more positive way:

Grounding

Quite often, the reason survivors avoid placing their awareness in their bodies is due to the uncomfortable feelings they discover in there when they try to do so. Setting up a permanent means to release negative energy and stabilize the body's energies can make life with your body much easier to take.

*Have the group move into meditative awareness.

*Imagine a natural substance--a cord, a tree, a waterfall, a mountain--beginning in the inside of your abdomen (behind your belly button), coming out the base of your spine, and running to the center of the earth. (Everyone can pick the substance they feel most comfortable with.)

*Ask everyone to get in touch with this connection to Earth Mother. Remember your grounding cord when you feel spacey and disconnected and, like a kite string, it will help you find your way back to yourself. When your body is feeling uncomfortable, you can send the energy down your grounding cord into the earth and help your body feel better.

*Now ask everyone to stand up slowly, keeping their awareness on their grounding cords. Does it feel different to be connected to the earth in this way?

*Put on a fun piece of innocuous dance music (Beatles songs from the "I Want to Hold Your Hand" era work great).

*Have everyone shake it up, trying to stay aware of their legs, hips and grounding cord as they dance.

*If the dancing gets silly or exaggerated, that's fine. The name of the game here is to enjoy the feelings in the body, and to reacquaint ourselves with the strength and power of our often-despised lower halves.

Women in our culture have been helped to forget that the natural shape of a woman is bounteous of hip, thigh and bottom. If you look at any happening or hot movie made before 1965 you'll see how drastically the images of beauty have changed. The sexy women in those movies had round hips and thighs! If you've looked at any of these films, or at pictures of movie stars such as Marilyn Monroe or Ann-Margaret and thought to yourself, "Boy, is she fat," you know you've gone into agreement with today's false standards which state that women should really look like boys, not women. Let's all let go of the idea that the only good butt is a little one. Dancing is really much more fun when you've got a good booty to shake, strong thighs to shimmy, a round belly to undulate, and feet firmly planted on the ground.

Sensing and Safety

One way to help relax the body and teach it to trust is to show it some of the resources it has at its disposal. This exercise can help us learn to let go and trust another person, as well as show us how aware we really are. Women are often surprised to experience how finely-tuned their body's antennae can be. In fact, survivors are often extremely psychic--when it becomes a matter of survival to be able to read the vibes of the household or one's abuser, the soul will develop these skills pronto. It is hoped this exercise will help you experience your body's ability to accurately know what's going on out in the world.

*Have everyone in the group stand up and take a partner.

*Bring out some scarves or some other things which would serve adequately as blindfolds. One partner from each group puts on a blindfold (hereafter referred to as the adventuress) and the other will be their guide. If anyone feels too scared to put on a blindfold, tell them they can close their eyes instead.

*Have each guide walk their adventuress around the space (begin slowly). The adventuress can choose how they want to be guided--whether by hand on elbow, waist, shoulder, etc.--and should stay in communication with her guide about what is working and what isn't.

*When the adventuress indicates she feels more relaxed, the guide can become more adventurous about the "trip": perhaps moving faster, more twists and turns, backwards or forwards.

*If an adventuress feels very safe and relaxed, she might try to maneuver completely from spoken instructions her guide provides, with no body contact at all.

*Ask each guide to stay aware of how it feels to be so completely responsible for the well-being of her adventuress. Can she honor this responsibility and still have fun? Can she follow the requests and instructions of her adventuress to help her feel even more relaxed and safe?

*Ask each adventuress to stay aware of any thoughts or feelings that arise as the exercise continues. Can she drop any feelings of mistrust, tension or

hyper-vigilance and truly let go? If not, can she identify why? Is there something helpful the guide could do differently that needs to be communicated?

*Now have each guide bring her adventuress to a spot approximately ten feet from a wall. Have each group slowly walk together toward the wall, telling the adventuresses to cast their awareness ahead of them and let their guide know when they feel the wall with their senses.

*The guide tells each adventuress how far away she is from the wall, then tries the exercise again. Have each group experiment as they wish. Play with trying to get as close to the wall as possible without walking into it.

*If an adventuress feels comfortable and proficient in her sensing, see if she can perceive other obstacles, such as tables or chairs.

*Lastly, have each guide place their adventuress in an open space and move about ten to fifteen feet away.

*Each guide should slowly and quietly walk toward her adventuress, while each adventuress should let her guide know when she senses her near. Play with this a bit too. How far away is your guide when you first sense her?

*After about ten or fifteen minutes, the guide and adventuress should exchange places and begin the exercise again.

*When the exercise is over, have each woman note what feelings and ideas came up for during the process.

*Share anything you care to with the group.

Raindrops on Roses...

Some sexual abuse survivors actually have a healthy relationship with their bodies. However, many survivors need to make treating their bodies lovingly into a discipline complete with schedules and timetables. Feeling more at home with your body can take some practice; this is where the idea "fake it till you make it" can come into play. That is, the more you're able to be nice to your body, the more you'll come to see it as deserving of nice treatment. If this means having to schedule a decadent bubble bath in a candle-filled bathroom every evening, do it.

Bodies like lovely smells, beautiful things to look at, arousing things to listen to, comfy things to feel, yummy things to taste, and fun things to do. Have it be part of your group's process to do at least one nice thing for their bodies each day. Tell them to jot what they do in their notebooks, as well as anything that comes up for them around it (especially if they couldn't do it).

Chapter 14 THE WOMAN'S INNER MASCULINE

Jungian psychology teaches that each man has his feminine side (his anima), and each woman has her masculine side (her animus). In the simplest terms, the anima in every person is in tune with Spirit. It is the part of us which receives inspiration, knowing and guidance from the Universe. The animus is the part of everyone which acts on these inspirations. It conceives plans, creates, follows through, and protects us from

interference until the job is done. How the inner feminine and masculine elements interact together in a woman's psyche often has an impact on the quality of her relationships--an area of struggle for most survivors.

Our Highest Self contains the "blueprints" for our inner male in its most balanced and positive form. At the day-to-day personality level, however, we find that the positive qualities of our inner male have been warped, changed or stolen through interaction with the men in our lives as we grew up. Women who were abused by men, in particular, often have a cruel, sadistic or perverted inner male that tells them they're stupid, ugly, fat, they'll never amount to anything, etc. This personality-level inner male I'll call the Programmed Animus (as opposed to the True or Highest Self Animus).

Since what we harbor inside of us we tend to attract to us, it is no surprise that women abused by men when they were children often continue to encounter abusive men as adults. It is important, then, to seek out your inner male and make his acquaintance. Discovering who he is, what he wants, and the kinds of things he tends to say to you is the first step. Too often, women take what their Programmed Animus says to them in their head as reality. For example, a woman may be quaking in her shoes contemplating the prospect of an important job interview. But instead of pampering and taking care of that scared part of herself, a voice in her head screams at it to stop whimpering, tells it that it's stupid and, for all intents and purposes, kicks it down the basement stairs and locks it up. Just who is the tyrant terrorizing this woman's inner child? Her Programmed Animus.

One friend named her Programmed Animus Mr. Thor, after the Norse thunder god, because he seemed to be throwing lightening bolts at her all the time. Isolating his voice from your own true voice is a good way to begin taking back control of your life. When you know more about him, you'll be less likely to take what he says as reality.

Identifying the Programmed Animus

Check out your dreams. Are you often terrorized by police, Nazis, demons, robbers, dirty old men, punks, murderers? Your dreams could be trying to show you the state of your inner male. If you have dreams of terror, you've probably got some inner dynamics in your day-to-day life terrorizing you too. Those little voices in your head that push you to work too much, to keep suffering in a bad relationship, to keep bingeing, etc., are the monsters of your dreams. Or, in other words, if the way you're living your life is hurting you or your soul, the characters in your dreams will hurt you too.

Conversely, you may find that the male figures in your dreams show a continual pattern of helplessness or unhelpfulness. This may show that, instead of being a tyrant, your inner male is a "wimp," and lacks the will and strength to support your choices in life. If you have this kind of Programmed Animus you will have trouble finishing what you start, standing up for yourself or what you believe in, delaying gratification, etc.

More clues: do you run negative tapes in your head? Stuff like, I'm hopeless, nothing ever goes right for me, everyone hates me, I'm stupid, I'm evil, I'm

lazy, I'm ugly. Those voices are not coming from your Highest Self, you can be sure of that! She would never say anything that mean to you. Those tapes were picked up from parents, relatives, teachers, or other important people in your past.

Question everything you say to yourself that seems to "come down from on high": collective statements using "they" or "everybody" in connection to "always," "should," and "ought." Like negative tapes, these statements were picked up by authority figures around you. Since most parents and pedagogues do not see children in their own right, authorities will endow their little girls with the "true" convictions of the day which often have little bearing on the girl's personal reality.

Have you had repeated associations with a particular kind of man? Have your last three boyfriends been alcoholics? Do your lovers always two-time you? Do you have an uncanny knack of finding dictators to work for? Have the men in your life always been unemotional and withholding? You can look at the patterns of your relationships with men and get some pretty good clues as to what's going on with your internal male. Chances are, he's a lot like the men you've known!

Identifying the True Animus

One of the easiest ways to get a glimpse of your True Animus is to think of favorite male characters in stories, movies and TV shows. Try to get beyond the ones who simply turned you on sexually, but who had some sort of inner strength, compassion or wisdom that you admired. Make a list of the positive qualities these characters possessed--why did you like them so much? These positive qualities are probably contained in the male aspect of your Highest Self. You wouldn't be able to recognize them outside yourself if you didn't contain them inside yourself.

You may have been fortunate enough to dream of some positive male figures. These men are your True Animus, who have come to you straight from your subconscious mind! How they behave in your dreams and how you feel toward them can be meditated upon to further strengthen these qualities in yourself.

Animus Meditation

- *Get comfortable.
- *Close eyes.
- *Take three deep breaths.
- *Raise your consciousness up out of your body and go to your favorite place of perfect beauty and peace. Take a few moments to reacquaint yourself with it and enjoy it. Has it changed since you were last here?
- *Now ask your Highest Self to join you.
- *Ask your Highest Self to show you the male aspect of herself, your Highest or True Inner Male.
- *What does he look like?
- *How does he feel to you?
- *What is important to him? What message does he have for you? Do you have any

messages for him?

*What spiritual qualities does he embody?

*Now ask the two of them to help you look at your "personality level" or Programmed Animus. Keep this animus at a safe distance so you can explore him without fear.

*What does he look like?

*How does he feel to you?

*What is important to him? What message does he have for you? Do you have any messages for him?

*What spiritual qualities does he embody, if any?

*Ask your male and female Highest Selves if there's any advice they have for you concerning your Programmed Animus.

*Is there a name you should call him?

*If he seems frightening to you, can they show you a different aspect of him that is less intimidating? (All frightening figures have their ridiculous side; see if they'll show you that.)

*Are there any particularly insidious lies he tells you that you should know about?

*Ask any other questions you may have about him.

*When you are complete, thank your Highest Selves, come back into the room, back into your body, and open your eyes when ready.

*Write down what seems interesting or important to you about this meditation into your notebook.

*Share with the group anything about your True or Programmed Animus that feels comfortable to you.

Chapter 15 THE INNER FEMININE

Just as we have a Programmed Inner Masculine, we have also a Programmed Inner Feminine who is probably not be in alignment with our true soul purpose. As daughters, our mothers often saw us as extensions of themselves and taught us accordingly. Women, whether they are survivors or not, have internalized many of their mother's strengths, worries, fears, and dreams. We think they are ours, but often they are not; sometimes we are simply helping our mother shoulder her burdens by taking them upon ourselves. An important book that discusses how this dynamic occurs in mother/daughter relationships is *My Mother Myself* by Nancy Friday (Delacorte Press, 1977).

In addition, many women in Western culture are what Jungian analysts call "animus possessed." That is, they live their lives according to the archetypal masculine principles of order, efficiency and perfection, as opposed to allowing themselves and their lives simply "to be" as they are. These are the women who seek power rather than love--their intellectualized ambition keeping them ever-striving, with no energy left to be alive. Such a mother cannot teach her daughter about how to be a woman, since she herself is more archtypally man than woman (or more robot than human).

Marian Woodman, Ph.D., has written extensively about the ramifications such a mother can have on her daughters. If you suspect your mother is a "father's daughter," I encourage you to seek out her work; they are all excellent: *The Owl*

was a Bakers Daughter: Obesity, Anorexia Nervosa and the Repressed Feminine (Inner City Books, 1980), *Addiction to Perfection: The Still Unravished Bride* (Inner City Books, 1982), *The Pregnant Virgin: A Process of Psychological Transformation* (Inner City Books, 1985), and *The Ravaged Bridegroom: Masculinity in Women* (Inner City Books, 1990).

The meditation below is to help you separate yourself from your mother's energies. It is long, but worth the effort. You may be surprised to see how many of the problems you struggle with were (and are) your mother's problems too. Don't be seduced into believing that simply because your lifestyle is different from your mother's that your life is too!

Mother Meditation

- *Get comfortable.
- *Close your eyes.
- *Take three deep breaths.
- *Go to your favorite environment of perfect beauty and peace. Call in your Highest Self.
- *Imagine the two of you walking a ways together, beyond your usual line of sight in your imaginary environment. You now see mist arising from the ground, surrounding you. Continue walking into the mist.
- *As you keep walking the mist suddenly clears. You see a beautiful Grecian-looking temple, built with stately white marble.
- *As you enter the temple you see an altar at one end with a perpetually burning flame in the center of it.
- *Walk into the open space in the middle of the temple and sit with your Highest Self.
- *Ask your mother to enter. Imagine her coming in and sitting across from you. Ask her if she would be willing to help you do this work. If so, great. If, however, you get a sense that she is not, imagine her leaving the temple. In this case you and your Highest Self will have to do the work together without her.

- *Now, imagine the three (or two) of you discussing the following issues:
In regards to her own self-image, what qualities did your mother like about herself?
- *Was there anything about how she looked, or how she thought other people saw her, that she was unhappy with?
- *Do you recognize any of the negative self-image issues your mother discusses as things you also struggle with?
- *Explore each self-image problem you share with your mother one by one. Ask your Highest Self if these problems are truly lessons for you or if they are something you are carrying for your mother.
- *If you find that something is not really yours, ask your mother if it would be okay if you stop carrying that quality now.
- *If she says yes, imagine that quality coming out of you and flowing toward the fire to be burned away forever.
- *If not, discuss and compromise. Seek your Highest Self's help in attempting to come from your own soul path on this issue as much as possible.
- *Make a few notes in your notebook about what you discover here before continuing.

*In regards to money, what attitudes toward money and material comfort did your mother have that helped her? What attitudes did she have that got in her way; that caused her to struggle?

*Do you recognize any of the money issues your mother discusses as things you also struggle with?

*Explore each money issue you share with your mother one by one. Ask your Highest Self if this negative quality is truly a lesson for you or if it is something you are carrying for your mother.

*If you find that something is not really yours, ask your mother if it would be okay if you stop carrying that quality now.

*If she says yes, imagine that quality coming out of you and flowing toward the fire to be burned away forever.

*If not, discuss and compromise. Seek your Highest Self's help in attempting to come from your own soul path on this issue as much as possible.

*Make a few notes in your notebook about what you discover here before continuing.

*In regards to communication and thinking, what abilities did your mother have that strengthened her? Were there problems in her ability to communicate or think clearly?

*Do you recognize any of the communication problems your mother discusses as things you also struggle with?

*Explore each communication problem you share with your mother one by one. Ask your Highest Self if this problem is truly a lesson for you or if it is something you are carrying for your mother.

*If you find that something is not really yours, ask your mother if it would be okay if you stop carrying that quality now.

*If she says yes, imagine that quality coming out of you and flowing toward the fire to be burned away forever.

*If not, discuss and compromise. Seek your Highest Self's help in attempting to come from your own soul path on this issue as much as possible.

*Make a few notes in your notebook about what you discover here before continuing.

*In regards to nurturing issues: keeping a home, caring and feeding self and others, etc., in what ways did your mother fulfill this role? In what ways did she fail to provide basic love, feeding and caring to herself, you and/or your family?

*Do you recognize any of the nurturing problems your mother discusses as things you also struggle with?

*Explore each nurturing problem you share with your mother one by one. Ask your Highest Self if this problem is truly a lesson for you or if it is something you are carrying for your mother.

*If you find something is not really yours, ask your mother if it would be okay if you stop carrying that problem now.

*If she says yes, imagine that problem coming out of you and flowing toward the fire to be burned away forever.

*If not, discuss and compromise. Seek your Highest Self's help in attempting to come from your own soul path on this issue as much as possible.

*Make a few notes in your notebook about what you discover here before continuing.

*In regards to her creativity, in what ways was your mother able to express

herself? Did she create children, art, songs, writing, a beautiful home? In what ways was your mother frustrated with her ability to create?

*Do you recognize any of the frustrations your mother discusses as things you also struggle with?

*Explore each creativity block you share with your mother one by one. Ask your Highest Self if this block is truly a lesson for you or if it is something you are carrying for your mother.

*If you find that any blocks are not really yours, ask your mother if it would be okay if you stop carrying that problem now.

*If she says yes, imagine that problem coming out of you and flowing toward the fire to be burned away forever.

*If not, discuss and compromise. Seek your Highest Self's help in attempting to come from your own soul path on this issue as much as possible.

*Make a few notes in your notebook about what you discover here before continuing.

*In regards to work, what were your mother's positive attitudes towards working, whether in the home or workplace? What did she struggle with in regards to work?

*Do you recognize any of the work attitude and problems your mother discusses as things you also struggle with?

*Explore each work attitude you share with your mother one by one. Ask your Highest Self if these negative work attitudes are truly a lesson for you or if they are something you are carrying for your mother.

*If you find that something is not really yours, ask your mother if it would be okay if you stop carrying that attitude now.

*If she says yes, imagine that attitude coming out of you and flowing toward the fire to be burned away forever.

*If not, discuss and compromise. Seek your Highest Self's help in attempting to come from your own soul path on this issue as much as possible.

*Make a few notes in your notebook about what you discover here before continuing.

*In regards to her relationships and partnerships, what attitudes toward people did your mother have that strengthened her? In what ways did she create problems for herself when relating to others?

*Do you recognize any of the relationship issues your mother discusses as things you also struggle with?

*Explore each relationship issue you share with your mother one by one. Ask your Highest Self if this problem is truly a lesson for you or if it is something you are carrying for your mother.

*If you find that something is not really yours, ask your mother if it would be okay if you stop carrying that problem now.

*If she says yes, imagine that problem coming out of you and flowing toward the fire to be burned away forever.

*If not, discuss and compromise. Seek your Highest Self's help in attempting to come from your own soul path on this issue as much as possible.

*Make a few notes in your notebook about what you discover here before continuing.

*(In regards to sex, in what ways did your mother show a healthy and balanced attitude toward sexual issues? In what ways was she in denial of the body;

afraid, angry, perverse or otherwise struggling with the issue of sex?

*Do you recognize any of the sexual problems your mother discusses as things you also struggle with?

*Explore each problem you share with your mother one by one. Ask your Highest Self if this problem is truly a lesson for you or if it is something you are carrying for your mother.

*If you find a problem that is not really yours, ask your mother if it would be okay if you stop carrying that problem now.

*If she says yes, imagine that problem coming out of you and flowing toward the fire to be burned away forever.

*If not, discuss and compromise. Seek your Highest Self's help in attempting to come from your own soul path on this issue as much as possible.

*Make a few notes in your notebook about what you discover here before continuing.

*In regards to learning, studying, and teaching others, what abilities did your mother have that helped her? Were there ways your mother struggled with these issues?

*Do you recognize any of the struggles your mother discusses as things you also struggle with?

*Explore each struggle with learning and studying you share with your mother one by one. Ask your Highest Self if this problem truly is a lesson for you or if it is something you are carrying for your mother.

*If you find that something is not really yours, ask your mother if it would be okay if you stop carrying that problem now.

*If she says yes, imagine that problem coming out of you and flowing toward the fire to be burned away forever.

*If not, discuss and compromise. Seek your Highest Self's help in attempting to come from your own soul path on this issue as much as possible.

*Make a few notes in your notebook about what you discover here before continuing.

*In regards to worldly affairs: attitudes towards authority, paying bills, behaving as a role model, etc., what were the positive qualities your mother showed in this regard? In what ways did her attitudes and/or behaviors cause her trouble with the "powers that be"?

*Do you recognize any of the problems your mother discusses as things you also struggle with?

*Explore each problem you share with your mother one by one. Ask your Highest Self if this problem is truly a lesson for you or if it is something you are carrying for your mother.

*If you find that something is not really yours, ask your mother if it would be okay if you stop carrying that problem now.

*If she says yes, imagine that problem coming out of you and flowing toward the fire to be burned away forever.

*If not, discuss and compromise. Seek your Highest Self's help in attempting to come from your own soul path on this issue as much as possible.

*Make a few notes in your notebook about what you discover here before continuing.

*In regards to wishes, dreams, and friendship, in what ways was your mother able to make friends, aspire to greater things, and hold on to the magic in

life? Were there negative attitudes in her way, keeping her in a space of loneliness, desperation, and hopelessness?

*Do you recognize any of the negative attitudes your mother discusses as things you also struggle with?

*Explore each attitude problem you share with your mother one by one. Ask your Highest Self if this problem is truly a lesson for you or if it is something you are carrying for your mother.

*If you find that something is not really yours, ask your mother if it would be okay if you stop carrying that problem now.

*If she says yes, imagine that problem coming out of you and flowing toward the fire to be burned away forever.

*If not, discuss and compromise. Seek your Highest Self's help in attempting to come from your own soul path on this issue as much as possible.

*Make a few notes in your notebook about what you discover here before continuing.

*In regards to spirituality, what qualities did your mother have that helped her; strengthening qualities? What qualities did she have that got in her way, qualities she struggled with?

*Do you recognize any of the spiritual qualities your mother discusses as things you also struggle with?

*Explore each negative quality you share with your mother one by one. Ask your Highest Self if this quality is truly a lesson for you or if it is something you are carrying for your mother.

*If you find that something is not really yours, ask your mother if it would be okay if you stop carrying that quality now.

*If she says yes, imagine that quality coming out of you and flowing toward the fire to be burned away forever.

*If not, discuss and compromise. Seek your Highest Self's help in attempting to come from your own soul path on this issue as much as possible.

*Make a few notes in your notebook about what you discover here before continuing.

*When you have burned away all of the negative qualities that don't belong to you, imagine your new/improved self walking to the front of the temple stand in front of the altar.

*As you stand in front of the altar, a red beam suddenly flashes from the eternal flame, engulfing you and the temple in red light. Then comes an orange burst, next a yellow burst, then green, sky blue, indigo, and finally violet.

*Let yourself be immersed in these colors of the rainbow, one by one.

*Now all of you walk behind the altar outside of the temple. You see a beautiful pool. Imagine yourself jumping in while the others watch. Let yourself play and splash and have fun.

*When you feel refreshed, come out, and ask your Highest Self if you have a new name now that now corresponds with your new energy. If so, what is it?

*Thank your Highest Self. Thank your mother, if she participated. If you have any parting words for her, say them then bid her goodbye for now.

*Walk out of the temple with your Highest Self, through the mist, and back to your favorite beautiful environment. Give yourself a moment to enjoy this environment with your new and improved self.

*Come back into the room, back into your body; when you feel ready, open your eyes.

*Review the notes you made after each section of the meditation; add anything else of relevance that may occur to you that you didn't write down before.

*Share anything interesting with the group.

Chapter 16

FAMILY WORK

Exploring your family diagram is the first step in the family systems approach to therapy. Family Systems Theory was introduced to the world by Dr. Murry Bowen in the 1950's. Seen by family therapists as radical at the time, it is now considered to be one of the best ways to help and heal family and personal troubles. If you're a fan of John Bradshaw, you've been exposed to Family Systems Theory, for much of his teaching comes from this approach.

Dr. Bowen was the first to recognize that a family, or any group for that matter, was greater than the sum of its parts. He saw that families generate an entire field of energy that impacts on every member in it. Patterns of abuse in families are often many generations old, and it is this family energy field that contributes to the problem. If you were abused in your family, you can be sure that you are not the only one; you probably have uncles, cousins, grandparents, even great-great-great grandparents who were also abused.

The energy surrounding any family has stability and reduction of tension as its primary goal. Each member of the family has his or her role to play, and there are very powerful pressures on each individual to maintain that role in order to preserve the stability of the family unit. Often when we feel unexplainable anxiety in regards to making a step forward it is because our proposed growth will take us out of the roles assigned to us within our families. The freaky thing is, these roles remain fairly well carved in stone even if we have little or no contact with our families. For example, it's been noted that, in general, the first child will acquire the values and goals of the parents, the second child will acquire the griefs of the parents, the third child will acquire the unresolved conflicts between the parents, and the fourth child will acquire the unresolved conflicts of the entire family system; the fifth child will behave as a first child, sixth as a second, and so on.

The other way families reduce tension and remain stable is to pass uncomfortable energy down the line. So, for example, if your dad was incested by his father when he was three, he probably blocked the experience out of his conscious mind. However, the unresolved feelings remain in his psyche, stewing and festering. These feelings may emerge as depression, rage, drug or alcohol abuse, etc. Unless he makes an attempt to heal these issues within himself, his children stand a good chance of "inheriting" them from him. Here's a glaring example: a woman in one of my groups was sexually abused by her uncle when she was nine years old. When she finally talked to her mother about it thirty years later, her mother told her that she, too, was sexually abused by her uncle when she was nine!

So, one of the best ways to understand these family dynamics is to begin to

explore your own family tree. The first step is to make a chart of the system. Begin with yourself and your brothers and sisters; then your folks and their brothers and sisters; then their parents, etc. Find out when they were born, when they got married, how many children they had, what diseases they suffered from, when they died and what they died from.

You'll find that as you reach further back into history you'll have to start talking to aunts and uncles, cousins and grandparents to get the information you need to fill in the blanks. It may be hard to believe, but as you make contact (face to face, by phone or letter) with the people in your family you rarely talk to, things will begin to change in your own life and in your relationship with your parents.

The first goal here is to look for patterns of behavior. Chances are, if you explore thoroughly enough, you'll find a relative who suffered from the same problem(s) that are troubling you. As you continue to explore your family tree you'll see that, perhaps, every woman on your mother's side of the family married before eighteen; or, on your father's side, every other generation produced a suicide of the youngest child. These kinds of patterns can be very enlightening when you find them, and often they are comforting. For example, if you've been trying to quit drinking and can't seem to do so, and then you see that every first child in your family has had a drinking problem (and you're a first child) it can help in understanding why you can't seem to get this problem to budge out of your life.

The second thing to look for is cut-offs. Did your father come over from Europe in the 1920s and have no contact with anyone in the old country ever again? Did your mother feud with her sister thirty years ago and refuse to speak to her again? These kinds of situations are gold mines for the brave adventuress seeking to blow up the unspoken rules (and roles) in her family. Making contact with cut-off parts of the family produces energy-level earthquakes in the family system (and within the adventuress also). The assigned roles in every family can exist only if the family structure remains in stasis. Calling up your long-lost auntie (even if no one in your immediate family knows you're doing it) disrupts the stasis of the system. The rigid role structures loosen or dissolve and you're free to create something new for yourself both within your own life and in relation to your family.

Two of the best books using the family systems approach are written for women. They are *The Dance of Anger* (Harper & Row, 1985) and *The Dance of Intimacy* by Harriet Goldhor Lerner, Ph.D (Harper & Row, 1989). Dr. Lerner presents the material so clearly and completely that I recommend them highly for all survivors. She provides many case examples and writes in a style that is very easy to understand. She also includes a section demonstrating how to diagram your family tree.

Exploring your family from a systems perspective involves extending your connections to them beyond what is usual for you. It often means communicating with family members that have been cut-off from your parents for various reasons. As you extend your connections to your family beyond what was considered proper or acceptable to your folks, it extends your own view of yourself. Your personal role in a rigid family structure can become more fluid

and dynamic as you get to know other members of the family tree. Perhaps in your immediate family you are seemingly stuck in the role of the "dumb one." In connecting to your greater family, you may find that you can be seen (and become) something closer to your true self.

CAVEAT: Doing the work to create an accurate family diagram is not everyone's cup of tea. It seems scary to contemplate contacting people in the family you don't know, and sometimes even scarier to interview the ones you do! Many survivors will go to great lengths to keep their families out of their healing process. Even if they were abused by a family member--and, thus, it stands to reason that the dynamics of the family must be explored in order to heal--there is wishful thinking on the part of such survivors that they can somehow get away with ignoring this important part of their history.

In any event, don't force anyone to do this if they're clearly resistant. With a little adaptation, the following exercises can be utilized even without a complete diagram of your participant's family systems.

Prayer for the Family

If you want to make this exercise truly an event, you may want to read Dr. Kenneth McCall's book *Healing the Family Tree* (Sheldon Press, 1982) beforehand. Dr. McCall has written about the extraordinary healings he has witnessed when praying over a family diagram. He discusses several Christian rituals, complete with passages from the Catholic Bible, that can be used instead of this more generic metaphysical approach.

- *Have everyone in the group bring in their family diagram.
- *Place them on the group's altar, or create a sacred circle in the middle of the room and place them there.
- *Have everyone close their eyes and move into meditative awareness.
- *Ask everyone to call in their favorite beings they use for support. I personally have found that the Christ energies work very well with this type of healing.
- *Ask that the negative energies, bonds, entities and issues represented in each family diagram be released and transmuted into the universe for the good of all concerned.
- *Ask each participant to silently request that any particular problems she is aware of in her family be healed, or any particular person needing healing receive it.
- *Visualize white light coming down from the Heavens onto the diagrams. Imagine the light burning away negativity and bringing healing and protective energies to each family.
- *Know that the healing energy you have sent to the family diagram will be transmitted to everyone in it.
- *Thank the beings you have called in to help.
- *When you are ready, open your eyes.

Family in the Cauldron

Not all survivors are interested in sending healing energy to their family. For many, the anger and resentment they feel about their abuse prevents them from considering the above approach. Also, since survivors were often the designated caretakers and healers in their family, doing one more thing to heal the family's problems just seems like too much to ask. The following exercise works very well to help cleanse the survivor of negative family energy, and may seem more desirable than praying for the family.

- *Bring out a cauldron or bowl that can hold burning paper.
- *Have everyone write down the names of family members who hurt them, or whom they feel they have negative ties to on small pieces of paper.
- *Have one participant put her pieces of paper in the cauldron, then set them on fire.
- *As the papers burn, tell the woman to imagine the negative energies, issues and improper bonds going up to the universe with the rising smoke.

- *When the paper is burnt, empty the cauldron. Ashes should be given back to the participant to be disposed of as she wishes. In general, they should be thrown outdoors on the ground, put in plants, etc., not thrown in the garbage.
- *Begin again with the next participant.
- *You might have a woman in your group who's family is so messed up she wants to put her whole diagram into the cauldron. This is perfectly acceptable.
- *Once everyone is finished, affirm that the negative energies of the family members listed and burned are now as ephemeral as the smoke.

Chapter 17

GRIEF AND ANGER

Survivors seem to have things programmed in one of two ways: either they are in touch with their grief but not their anger--their grief "sits" on their anger and keeps it safely hidden away. Or they are in touch with their anger but not their grief--their anger "sits" on top of their grief and keeps it from coming up. Both emotions must eventually find their place in the survivor's emotional repertoire to reach fullest healing. Here is one meditation to help bring up these emotions.

Nursery Meditation

- *Have the group sit comfortably.
- *Close eyes.
- *Take three deep breaths.
- *Imagine yourself floating up into space; look at all the stars burning brightly off in the distance.
- *Pick a star that looks interesting to you and move toward it.
- *As you get closer you see that it is a beautiful temple, illuminating the black of space.
- *Alight on the steps and enter the temple. There you meet a loving male and female master who take you into a special room off to one side.
- *The room is a nursery. It is decorated in pastel colors and has a soft warm mattress for a floor. There are toys, dolls, stuffed animals, blankets and

pillows all around.

*Ask the masters to help you return to your childhood self in this safe and protected space.

*Ask for help in getting in touch with the pain and grief that is within you.

Ask for help in reaching a place of pain that is important for you to release.

*When you feel you have contacted something important for you, ask the masters to help you reach a level of resolution about this experience.

*When you feel complete, thank the masters and exit the temple.

*Come back to earth, back into the room, into your body; when you are ready, open your eyes.

*Write down your insights or new awarenesses into your notebook.

*Take turns sharing what you would like to about what you got in touch with.

Others in group should sit as High Witness--no interrupting unless asked for.

As each woman finishes, ask what she would like to receive from the group--a hug, soft words, etc.--if anything.

Telling Your Story

One of the best ways to bring up repressed emotion is to tell a loving group of people the story of your abuse. This is not something to be done casually, or early in the course of a group's work together, especially if the women were strangers to begin with. However, if everyone in the group decides they know and trust each other enough, and feel love for each other, they may want to spend a session telling their story.

As in the above meditation, as each woman tells her story, the others in the group should sit quietly and listen without interruptions or interpretations. Hearing about the painful events in each woman's past will stir up strong emotional reactions in the listeners. If anyone in the group is moved to tears or anger this should not be discouraged. Since most therapists have great poker faces, this may be the first time the storyteller ever witnessed an emotional reaction to her experiences; it may be the first time she herself realizes the wrenching sadness and pain of her childhood. Experiencing others cry or get angry over their story can be a big breakthrough for some survivors--it may finally give them permission to feel these emotions for themselves.

Chapter 18

IDENTIFYING THE GOOD

This exercise works best if you do it toward the end of your group's time together. It can be a nice thing to do for your last session if you don't want to do an elaborate ritual like the one in this book. It sounds very simple, but it provokes strong emotion. Most of us are not used to having nice things said about us, especially when they're true...

*Have the group sit comfortably.

*Close eyes.

*Take three deep breaths.

*Tell the group to imagine their favorite environment of beauty and peace as completely as possible.

- *Now ask the group to ask their Highest Self to come to them and sit nearby.
- *Name a woman in the group and ask each member to invite her Highest Self into their private place.
- *Tell the group to tune into this woman's Highest Self and get a sense of what she is like, what she's about. Ask them to get their own Highest Self's impressions of the woman.
- *After a minute, tell everyone to say goodbye to that woman's Highest Self.
- *Name another woman. Again, ask each member to invite this woman's Highest Self into their private environment and get to know her a bit.
- *Continue this process until each woman in the group has been named, giving everyone at least a minute to get to know each woman's Highest Self.
- *Now have everyone thank and say goodbye to their own Highest Self, and come back into the room, into their body.
- *Open eyes when ready.
- *Begin with the first woman you named. Ask the group to share with her the impressions they received about her Highest Self.
- *Remind each woman to write down these impressions into their notebooks as each participant shares her ideas about her. Since most survivors have a hard time staying in touch with the good things that come their way, if notes aren't taken until the end of the session, much will be forgotten.
- *Continue naming each woman, until the group's impressions are given for everyone.

You'll be surprised at the consistency of the reports! Most women will see each Highest Self in a similar way. Thus, this can be a good way for everyone to experience the validity of the information they receive in meditation.

This exercise is very moving because it may be the first time a woman has had anyone else "see" her as she truly is. Since survivors are usually convinced that deep down there is something seriously wrong or evil about them, it sometimes takes an exercise such as this to change their minds (at least a little bit). It is very powerful to have eight women face you and tell you, "No, we didn't see a black widow spider in you at all, we saw you as wise, loving and shining with blue light."

There is a tendency to get into an "aw shucks" mode when receiving information about your Highest Self--it's quite embarrassing to say the least--but try to stay open and receive it. Let it in. It will warm your heart and thaw barriers to intimacy like nothing else.

Chapter 19

HEALING TECHNIQUES

These are various techniques that may come in useful during your work--just some basic ways to produce different kinds of energy shifts and healings. You can work with these meditations during a session, letting the participants know they can also be used on their own during times of need.

Creating Circles

This technique is a way of locking in a particular constellation of mind and emotion to be accessed at any time. It's best to try it the first time when you're in a particularly positive frame of mind. Since "up" or "high" states are often fleeting, this exercise will help you get back in touch with those good feelings when they are not there.

- *Keep your awareness in touch with the positive feelings in your body; try to experience them as much as possible, feeling them as completely as you can.
- *Look on the floor near your feet and picture a large circle of any color; imagine a tube of colored light coming up from the circle.
- *Step into the circle you've created on the floor and project your positive state of being into the tube of colored light, feeling the positive feelings in your body as much as you can.
- *When you feel that the circle is completely energized, step out of the circle.

Now, when you're feeling low, or scared, etc., you can visualize the colored circle on the floor, step into it, and recreate the same positive state of being you were originally experiencing. You can bring your circle with you to job interviews, first dates, visits to your parent's house--any time you need to get back in touch with some good feelings.

You can create circles for many different uses. Some survivors might like to have a library of circles: a feeling sexy circle, a feeling brave circle, a spiritual circle; some survivors cut off from their emotions might even want to create a grief or anger circle to make a safe, but contained, place to experience these feelings. Just be sure to create them with different colors.

The more you can feel the desired feelings in your body when creating them, the more energized and powerful the circles will be to use later.

If you find that you're not ever feeling up or brave or sexy enough to energize a circle, you'll have to try one of these little tricks:

Think back for a time in your life when you were feeling brave, for example. Try to remember that time as completely as possible. Let your mind replay the events leading up to your brave behavior. Let yourself feel that brave feeling as much as possible. When you're in touch with the brave feeling as solidly as you think you're going to be, imagine your circle and energize it. Any time you do something brave and are feeling it in your body, imagine your circle and re-energize it some more. If you remember any other times you were brave, re-energize the circle again.

If you're fortunate enough to remember your dreams, you can use the feelings they produce in your body to energize your circles too. Sometimes we have dreams in which we behave in ways we would never have the guts to do in real life. If you've had a dream that has produced a wonderful feeling in your body you may want to recapture later on, create a circle and energize it with the feeling while it's there in your body.

Temple Meditation

Loving and wise beings exist on all levels of creation. On more refined (invisible to most of us) astral, mental, soul and spirit levels, the Ascended Masters, angels and other beings of light have temples where they work, learn, and teach. There are temples out there specializing in practically anything you can think of: temples of music, healing, creating, power, information, cleansing and purification, etc., etc., etc. Anyone can send their consciousness out into the Universe and ask to be taken to a temple for specific kinds of help.

The following is a very basic healing and cleansing temple meditation. It can be changed in many ways to suit the meditator. I'll discuss the ways you can vary this afterward. This one works best if you have at least twenty minutes to stay in meditation.

- *Close your eyes and sit comfortably.
- *Take three deep breaths, beginning in the lower belly first, then expanding the upper lungs.
- *Find your consciousness. To do this tune into your stomach; what is going on there? Now tune into your head; what is going on there?
- *Now send your consciousness out over your head and out into space. See yourself slowly moving away from your house, above your city, and now away from the earth.
- *Take a look around at the majestic darkness of space and its diamond tiara of stars.
- *Pick a particularly interesting point of light and move toward it. You're moving so fast now that it only takes a few seconds to be very near to it.
- *As you get closer you see that it is an beautifully radiant temple illuminating the dark of space. Fly to the steps of the temple and alight on them.
- *Now you can see that there is a being waiting for you on the steps. Greet this being.
- *Ask the being for their name. They might not reply, but if they do, let yourself receive it.
- *Tell the being what kinds of healing you would like to accomplish during this particular meditation.
- *Now you follow the being as s/he enters the temple. You can see that there are many rooms along each wall of the large interior corridor.
- *The being shows you into one of the rooms. Let yourself sit there quietly, knowing that the healing you have discussed with the being will be performed on you while you are there. (If you have good spiritual senses you might become aware of colors flashing, sensations in your body, etc.)
- *After about ten to twenty minutes, or if you get a sense that the work is complete, come out of the room.
- *Walk toward the far end of the temple, where you now see a beautiful pool--it might be filled with water, it might be filled with energy. What do you sense?
- *Jump into the pool and let the refreshing water or energy swirl all around you. Feel free to dive in, do cannonballs, do somersaults--anything that feels good and fun.
- *When you feel completely refreshed and rejuvenated, climb out of the pool, stand and stretch.
- *Now you notice that there is a stream of light coming down from above, bathing you in sparkles.
- *The sparkling light contains all the colors of the rainbow, swirling down

around you and through you. Let your bodies absorb all of the light and colors they need.

*When you feel complete, move toward the front of the temple. The being you originally encountered now meets you again.

*You might want to ask the being if there is anything they wish to impart to you before you leave. Let yourself receive the answer, if so.

*If you really liked this particular temple, you might ask the being to tell you its name. Knowing its name will enable you to return there immediately, any time you wish to.

*Thank the being for his or her help, then walk to the front steps again, lift off into space and return to earth.

*Return to your city, your house, and your body, opening your eyes when you feel ready.

Okay, lets say you want to do something else in meditation besides receive healing. What if you're trying to create something in your life, a new job perhaps? When you go out into space, ask the Universe to take you to a temple that works specifically with creating. When you get there, tell the Master or Mistress what you are trying to do. While you're in the temple you can visualize the new job you're trying to create. Doing creative visualization in a temple with the Masters' help lends a lot more energy to your visualization than if you're just doing it on your own!

CAVEAT: Because visualizing in a temple amps up the juice, so to speak, it is very important not to do any creative visualization in a temple when you're feeling down, scared or angry, etc. You may think you're only creating energies for your new job, but you'll also be creating more of whatever negative space you're in too. So don't try to do creative visualization in a temple unless you're feeling up or balanced.

What if you have some questions about your life situation that you can't seem to get clear on. Again, when you go out into space, ask the Universe to take you to a temple that works specifically with information and learning. When you get there, tell the Master or Mistress what you want to know. If you ask your questions and then quietly wait, you'll often receive an answer in your mind. Don't expect a "movie" or a thunderbolt out of the blue; the response will probably be very subtle and may even feel like it's your own mind answering. Not all people are successful in trying to receive answers to life's questions from the Masters. In my experience, all questions are answered, but not all folks are ready to believe, let alone act, on what they receive. It is very easy to say, "Well, I probably just made that up." Some people have very powerful spiritual senses and are able to perceive the answers easily, most people do not. So, if the answers don't come clearly, don't be discouraged.

Psychic attunement, like any other skill, comes only with practice for most people. You wouldn't expect to pick up a violin and be able to play the first time, would you? So don't expect perfection from yourself the first time you go questing into the psychic realm!

Rainbow Technique

This technique is like a personal grooming day for your subtle energies. One colleague of mine called it "putting makeup on your aura." It refreshes the colors radiating from your energy centers, giving you that "glowing" look. Look at your face before and after doing this technique and you'll see what I mean.

*Sit with arms and legs uncrossed.

*Beginning with the left foot, imagine a beautiful shade of bright red slowly flowing up your left leg, to your knee, your hip, your left side, up your left arm, to your shoulder, then to your head, turning the whole left side of your body a gorgeous red color.

*Imagine that as the beautiful red color flows upward, it pushes any dingy and dirty red color that may be in your body ahead of it.

*Now come down the right side of your body: your right shoulder and arm, your side, your hip, your leg, and down to your foot.

*Imagine that any dark and dingy red in your body has now been pushed out your right foot. Send it into the earth.

*Take a few seconds now and experience your whole being glowing a beautiful fire engine red.

*Repeat the above process with the color orange, then yellow, green, sky blue, indigo (navy blue), and finally violet. Each time, imagine the old, dingy colors being pushed out of your right foot into the earth.

*Take a moment to experience yourself glowing as each color.

It's interesting to pay attention to how each color feels. You will like "wearing" some colors better than others. Do the colors you like feeling during this meditation correspond to your favorite colors?

You'll also notice that some of the colors are easier for you to imagine than others. If this is the case, it helps to place some object with that color in front of you so you can open your eyes and see it when you're trying to imagine that color. The colors you have trouble imagining are probably colors your being doesn't work with much. Since this technique is like feeding your aura colors, focusing on the colors that are hard for you to imagine may remedy imbalances in your energy system.

CAVEAT: Try to keep the amount of time you spend with each color roughly equal; don't spend more time with one color over another, especially red. Red is a very hot color. Giving it too much emphasis may result in increased agitation, anger, headaches, etc. Use each color in balance and it will help you stay in balance.

Here's a very basic description of the colors and their corresponding energy centers:

*Red is generated in the base of the spine and works with the survival-oriented energies of the life force.

*Orange is generated in the belly and works with sex, creating, physical activity, digestion and the overall health of the body.

*Yellow is generated in the solar plexus and is associated with the mind and thinking.

*Green is generated in the heart area. Green promotes balance, love, healing and prosperity.

*Sky blue is generated in the throat and is concerned with communication and

self-expression.

*Indigo is generated in the third eye area, the space just above and between the eyebrows. Indigo is about transformational awareness and the spiritual senses.

*Violet is generated at the top of the head and amplifies artistic, musical, visionary and spiritual awareness.

Chapter 20

HANDLING "BODY FLASHBACKS"

There is always a possibility that one or more women in your group will undergo a profound physical-level healing experience during the course of your work together. I call this kind of healing a body flashback. The odds of this occurring increase as the weeks go by, and it is always a sign that your group is doing something right: you have generated enough love, intimacy and safety for the woman to get in touch with some stored pain and let it go. Body flashbacks can be a bit scary for the facilitator and other group members if they don't understand that this is a normal part of the healing process for many abuse survivors.

What happens during a body flashback? Sometimes a woman will suddenly go rigid and begin to moan, scream or wail. She may begin to hyperventilate and feel unable to stop. Her arms, legs, head, or even her whole body may flail around out of her control. She may double over in apparent pain. If you try to ask her what's wrong, she may not be able to talk. Any number of other behaviors may be exhibited, so don't be surprised.

If a woman begins flashing in your group, the first rule of thumb is stay calm! I have never seen a flashback last more than twenty minutes and, believe it or not, the woman usually feels wonderful afterward! If the woman doesn't seem to be doing anything that may harm herself (such as throwing her arm into a mirror or window) let her be. Don't let anyone touch her or hug her unless she asks for it. However, if she is in a position to break something or hurt herself, gently guide her to the middle of the floor and let her lie down.

Speak slowly, soothingly and softly. Tell her it's alright, she is safe, and everything will be okay. If she's gasping remind her to breathe (if she doesn't respond to this, try taking loud deep breaths yourself; she'll often match you). If you and/or the group can quietly speak to her--even if it's nonsense, or singsongs--it may help her stay attached to the present and not get pulled downward too far.

Eventually, the woman will quiet and come back to herself. She may be embarrassed by this experience, so you and the group will have to reassure her that what happened to her is very normal. Explain the dynamics of a body flashback if she is unaware of what has happened. On a spiritual level, women who experience body flashbacks are not only healing themselves but the entire group as well. The hearts of the other group members will go out to her during

this experience and empathize with her pain. Even though it was an unconscious decision on her part, you should thank her for being willing to provide this kind of healing to the group, and she should be proud to have accomplished this level of healing for herself.

Chapter 21

WOMAN RITUAL

Experiencing incest or sexual abuse as a child has many serious effects. One of the most profound of these is the tendency for the survivor to get emotionally locked into a certain age and never mature much beyond it. The age locked into place is usually determined by the age when the most severe trauma was experienced.

Another factor contributing to this phenomenon is that survivors had their childhoods ripped away from them. They never experienced the innocence and carefree existence of the average child. Thus, many survivors tend to remain eternal children well into adulthood. It's almost as if they are determined to create for themselves the childhood they were never allowed to have. In certain respects this is a good thing. However, when it interferes with the day-to-day functioning required in adult life (paying bills or rent, raising children responsibly, keeping a job, etc.) these people need to reexamine whether their choice to remain "children" is causing unnecessary worry and pain.

Certain attention should be spent, then, on helping survivors move past the places where they are emotionally stuck. There has been much talk recently about the lack of meaningful ritual in our society. In particular, the lack of ritual celebrating the onset of puberty is discussed as a serious problem. Some speculate that the lack of a clear ritual demarcation between childhood and adulthood is a factor in the increasing narcissism, inability to delay gratification and immaturity in many adults today.

This ritual was written to be a kind of coming of age ceremony. It is about the end of childhood and entering into womanhood. Depending on the size of your group, it could take anywhere from three to six hours to complete. The ritual requires someone willing to facilitate; however the facilitator can still participate (it also works best if the facilitator is the only one who knows the ritual beforehand). There are minor costs involved in acquiring the necessary supplies. Participants can pitch in, or costs can be borne by the facilitator. It requires a little bit of homework beforehand, which can be discussed the week before you anticipate doing it:

For Each Participant

*Each woman should think about what special clothing she would like to wear to the ceremony, then come that day dressed in her ritual clothing.
Each woman should bring two different "give-aways": two little presents that she would like to give to another as part of the ritual (these should be something each woman already owns, not something purchased for the ritual).

- *Each woman should think about an accomplishment she is proud of; if it is something physical, she should bring it to the ceremony.
- *Bring any special items for the altar, if you have one.
- *Bring goodies to munch if you choose to have a celebration afterward.

For the Facilitator

- *The facilitator should purchase one roll of streamers (the crepe-paper kind strung up at parties) for each participant. I like to choose a different color for each woman, if possible.
- *A medium-sized gemstone (choose something meaningful to you) should be purchased for each participant. Pretty sea shells or other items of nature may be used instead if on a tight budget.
- *Other required items: a small cauldron or bowl that can contain burning paper, a ritual dagger (fancy letter openers work great), one small piece of paper for each participant, a pen, matches, a piece of cloth or scarf, and a chair--preferably one set apart from the rest of the furniture in the room.
- *What song to sing during the "Breaking out of the Womb" section should be decided before the ritual. The facilitator can sing to the group or the group can sing together.

Before the ceremony, the altar should be set up. Items brought as give-aways should be placed on the cloth or scarf either near the altar or at one end of the room.

Now let's get into the ceremony itself. Comments about each section are in italics. The actual text of the ritual is in regular print and is spoken, except when noted, by the facilitator.

Invocation

The beginning of the ritual may change depending on the time of year you are holding it. I'm presenting three different versions of the invocation to give you an idea of what to say.

- *We come together on the eve of Brigid's fire festival, Candlemas (Feb. 2), to seek a healing of our development into womanhood. Just as Candlemas signifies the quickening of the year, so do we seek, tonight, to be quickened from outworn childhood modes of being into the consciousness of confident, serene, intelligent and loving women.
- *We come together in the summer of this year to seek a healing of our development into womanhood. Just as summer signifies the bounty of nature's growth, so do we seek, tonight, to grow from outworn childhood modes of being into the consciousness of confident, serene, intelligent and loving women.
- *We come together in the fall of this year to seek a healing of our development into womanhood. Just as fall signifies the reaping of seeds sown, so do we seek, tonight, to gather the benefits of our growth from outworn childhood modes of being into the consciousness of confident, serene, intelligent and loving women.

Consecrate Circle

Find out the astrological signs of the women participating. Have each sit at the direction represented by their sun sign. Taurus, Virgo and Capricorn are earth/north; Cancer, Scorpio and Pisces are water/west; Aries, Leo and Sagittarius are fire/south; Gemini, Libra and Aquarius are air/east. If you're missing an element, redistribute those willing to another direction.

*We have (*name names*) at the north, gathering and transmitting the energies of the earth--for grounding, stability and persistence.

*Imagine yourself standing in your favorite aspect of earth (perhaps peat moss, sand or crystals) up to your hips.

*Feel the strength of the earth fill this part of your body.

*We ask that all the angels, masters and light beings of the element earth be present with us tonight to guide and protect us.

*We have (*name names*) at the west, gathering and transmitting the energies of water--for purification, nurturance and intuition.

*Imagine clear water running through your body from your genitals to your stomach area.

*Feel the cleansing and healing energies of water in this part of your body.

*We ask that all the angels, masters and light beings of the element water be present with us tonight to guide and protect us.

*We have (*name names*) at the south, gathering and transmitting the energies of fire--for our initiative, anger and creativity.

*Imagine the life-giving, generative energies of the universe coursing through your head.

*Feel the current of inspiration that connects you to Universal Mind.

*We ask that all the angels, masters and light beings of the element fire be present with us tonight to guide and protect us.

*We have (*name names*) at the east, gathering and transmitting the energies of air--for clear minds, communication and adaptability.

*Imagine a summer breeze blowing through your lung and throat area.

*Feel the cobwebs of stuck and unshared thoughts and emotions being blown away.

*We ask that all the angels, masters and light beings of the element air be present with us tonight to guide and protect us.

Invoke Goddesses

*We ask for the presence of the maiden goddesses--goddesses of the waxing moon--Brigid, Athena, Minerva, Artemis, Vesta, Diana, Kore (and any others you may wish to call on) to protect and keep the child and virgin within each of us.

*We ask for the presence of the goddesses of love, Aphrodite, Olwen, Venus, Ishtar, Belili (and any others you may wish to call on) to guide, heal and support the sexual woman in each of us.

*We ask for the presence of the mother goddesses-- goddesses of the full moon--Cerridwen, Demeter, Isis, Corn Mother, Mary, Anu, Inanna, Kuan Yin, (and any others you may wish to call on) to nurture and love the woman to be born

this evening.

*We ask for the presence of the crone goddesses--goddesses of the waning and new moon--Hecate, Morgana, Persephone, Kali, Lillith, Erishkegal (and any others you may wish to call on) to bring us wisdom, especially in destroying the lies we have accepted about ourselves that keep us from manifesting our true soul nature in the world.

Death of the Child

Perform this section for each participant, one at a time. Have woman lay with head pointing north; all other participants sit surrounding her.

*Search within for a positive quality of your inner child that you wish to hold on to.

*When woman names a quality, one participant kisses her, saying, "I love and honor the (*name quality*) within you."

*Search within for another positive quality of your inner child that you wish to keep.

*When woman names a quality, another participant kisses her, saying, "I love and honor the (*name quality*) within you."

*Search within for one more positive quality of your inner child that you wish to keep.

*When woman names a quality, yet another participant kisses her, saying, "I love and honor the (*name quality*) within you."

*All participants snuggle woman and say, "We cherish this little one, (name woman), who will become a woman tonight."

Place dagger on woman's abdomen, hilt facing north. (The dagger represents discriminating wisdom--the ability to cut away what is no longer useful.) Have someone ready with paper and pen to note what is mentioned in response to questions below.

*Now search within for the negative qualities of the inner child that will die tonight.

*What physical qualities does she have that need to be healed and transmuted? *Someone writes down what woman says.*

*What emotions does she have that need to be matured and/or eliminated? *Someone writes down what woman says.*

*What ideas does she hold that are necessary to let go of to grow up? *Someone writes down what woman says.*

*What issues of Spirit are no longer appropriate for you now? *Someone writes down what woman says.*

*What is the name of the child who needs to die? Write down name.

*Sprinkle with water and say, "I baptize thee, (*say name given for child who needs to die*), and ask that the Mother and the Father attend thee into the light, releasing this energy to be used for the benefit of all beings, and in accordance with Divine Will."

Wait a moment, then have woman sit up, take the paper on which her comments were written, place it in the cauldron and set it on fire. Ashes should be disposed of in some other way besides the garbage can.

Now begin this entire section again with the next woman, continuing in this manner until all participants have had their turn, including the facilitator.

Breaking out of the Womb

Have everyone stand scattered throughout the room. Give each woman one roll of streamers. At your call, the streamers should be thrown over the heads of the group (holding on to one end). When a roll falls, it should be picked up and thrown again until it is completely played out. This will eventually envelop the group in a "cocoon" of crepe paper--lots of fun! When the group quiets, continue:

*Imagine your infant womanself as a caterpillar beginning to grow. Visualize her developing her butterfly self: all shining and iridescent and full of life, love and wisdom.

*Try to get a sense about who she is and what she is like.

Take a few minutes to let everyone fully contemplate this. Then, a song should be sung. I like to sing "Never Never Land," from the musical Peter Pan, to my groups. You may have another meaningful song either to sing to the group or have the group sing together. After song is finished, continue:

*Now that you've had a chance to get in touch with your butterfly womanself, you may feel her itching to be born.

*When you feel ready, burst out of our cocoon by breaking the streamers surrounding us.

*Take as many pieces of the streamers as you wish and adorn your body with them.

Presenting the Woman Born

This section is done for each woman. Have woman sit in special chair while others sit on floor in front of her.

*Tell us about yourself, what do you look like? *Woman responds.*

*Are you willing to do what you can to manifest this image in the physical world?

*Group says, "We acknowledge the physical woman born."

*What are your emotional strengths and virtues? *Woman responds.*

*Will you give yourself permission to always feel your true feelings and honor where you really are?

*Group says, "We love the emotional woman born."

*What ideas do you hold as important? What are your values for yourself? *Woman responds.*

*Will you communicate always in honesty, both internally to yourself and externally to the world?

*Group says, "We perceive the mental woman born."

*What spiritual goals do you have? *Woman responds.*

*Will you honor your chosen discipline and make every attempt to work toward

these goals in this life?

*Tell us about the accomplishment(s) you chose to bring tonight. Why are they important to you?

*What significance does this accomplishment have for this ritual in particular (if any)?

**Woman presents and discusses her accomplishment(s).*

*Does this particular accomplishment say something to you about the woman born here?

**The group honors the woman born by giving their insights and impressions of the deeper meaning in her accomplishment(s).*

**Woman then goes to the give-away cloth and chooses a gift for herself. The next woman should now sit in the chair.*

**This section is repeated until all have presented their new self to the group.*

Naming Meditation

*Everyone should sit comfortably and close their eyes.

*Now imagine yourself rising up in the air and flying off to the west, crossing the continent. Visualize the wind burning off the last remnants of useless mental constructs and ideas.

*When you reach the ocean, plunge in and continue your westward movement, speeding through the water. Feel the water cleansing you of every last impure feeling and imagining about yourself.

*When you reach the next continent, soar off into the sky up to our sun or another star. Become aware of how the starfire burns away karma and negative bonds and vows no longer useful to your spiritual development at this time.

*Now head back to earth. Go to a place on the planet you've felt particularly drawn to in your life. Plunge into the ground and burrow deep into the earth. Experience the earth drawing all the impurities out of your body as you go.

*Now, deep in the earth, you come upon a crystal cavern, lit with thousands of candles. The candles make the crystals sparkle like gemstones.

*Enter the cavern and walk toward the far end. There you will find the representative(s) of the Great Goddess that are there particularly for you.

*Is there anything she (or they) have to say to your new womanself?

*Is there anything you wish to say or ask of her (or them)?

*Ask to be given the name of your new womanself. Who is she? What is her name?

*Thank the Goddess' representatives and exit the cavern, come up the tunnel, and back here into your body. When you are ready, open your eyes.

Presentation of New Name

This section should be done one at a time, with each woman sitting in the special chair. However, if time is running short (and it often is by this point) this section can be done as a group.

*Describe your experience with the Goddess. *Woman responds.*

*What is the name of your newly born womanself?

**Each woman then kisses her and says, "Welcome, (new name), into the sisterhood of all women."*

**Facilitator takes the gem, sea shell, or other nature item chosen and gives it*

to woman saying, "I present this gem in the name of the Old Mother, and rejoice in your becoming a woman tonight."

**Woman then goes to the give-away cloth and chooses another gift.*

**Repeat this section until all woman have had their turn.*

Closing Circle

**Stand in a circle, holding hands.*

**We thank all of the angels, masters and light beings for being present here tonight to guide and protect us.*

**We thank all the goddesses who were present tonight, energizing our birth into new awareness.*

**Let's all privately give thanks.*

**Facilitator then squeezes hand of woman next to her, and she squeezes the hand of the woman next to her, passing the squeeze around the circle.*

**When squeeze gets back to facilitator, she says, "The circle is broken."*

**Everyone lets go of hands, hugs, etc.*

It's now time for your feast, if you've planned one!

Chapter 22 IN CONCLUSION

We've spent some time looking at who survivors are and what kinds of problems tend to flow from childhood sexual abuse experiences. We've discussed why group work is so important in the healing process, and how survivor's groups can be most effectively formed and facilitated. The exercises, meditations and rituals presented here are designed to evoke hidden emotions and awarenesses. Processes such as these provide a safe container in which new realizations can be held and protected. Because we are not looking at the abuse head-on, rigid mental structures are bypassed; the emotion of fear is less likely to overshadow the positive benefits of exploring and healing one's past.

We've spent some time getting to know the parts of us that are still pure, strong and whole. We've discovered ways to call on the many sources of support that exist in the universe for everyone's benefit. By the end of your group's work together, you will perhaps find that you have a new "family," and have experienced the joy of shared work, support, healing and love. It is hoped you will find that exploring the painful events of your past need not be a horrible experience but an adventure.

It is my intention that the ideas presented here will inspire you to create your own processes, keeping yourself and your own unique group in mind. Sometimes the best exercises are the ones that arise spontaneously in response to a particular issue you or your group wants to work on. If you or the group is heading in a direction not covered in these pages, sleep on it or meditate on it; the perfect process will probably present itself to you. Trust your own creative energy and use the process; you'll see for yourself how you, too, can be a healer, bringing

light, love and warmth into the shadows. Blessed Be!