

Everyone knows that seeds are magic. From Jack and the Beanstalk to the Biblical grain of mustard to marigolds in paper cups on a kindergarten windowsill, they provide a common and predictable miracle, a metaphor for potential, and a symbol of hope. They hold a sacred place in many religions, and humanists find them useful and evocative in expressions like 'seed money,' 'the germ of an idea,' 'finding fertile ground,' and so on. By working and playing with seeds, we touch the living future of the material world.

I'm sure many of us are gardeners. Many of us have personal rituals involving seed catalogs, sorting saved seeds, and visionary dreaming during which seeds connect us to the lush plants in the late summer gardens on the other side of the year. They bring us back to the previous season when they were harvested, and carry us forward to the time when they will bear fruit and form seeds themselves.

Ancient agricultural and foraging traditions have plenty of seed rituals; perhaps you have inherited a few... if so, they are treasures. Some of these traditions and practices are 'open' or shareable, for the benefit of all beings. Others come from 'closed' practices, and cannot be safely used or properly understood by people not raised or initiated to them.

Traditions were made by others in the past, and each generation re-tells the old stories, throwing in something of themselves. This happens on a genetic level, with each unique, unrepeatably individual being true to their species type. It happens on a personal level as we make decisions about what to teach and what to keep secret. And culturally, we see it play out in societal struggles to answer and re-answer questions like: 'what does it mean to be human right now?'

One of the ways some of us have decided that we want to alter our traditions moving forward is to do as little as possible of the kind of theft or cultural appropriation or colonial thinking which has formerly been our forte. Instead, we want to build integrity and educate ourselves and the children in ethical, purposeful activities, sometimes called right livelihood, such as expanding cultural and biological diversity and rebuilding ecosystems. In my view, these worthy and essential endeavors definitely require community gardens, seed sharing, and clean, unstolen seed rituals for our times.

These rituals will naturally be inspired by our many ancestral traditions, especially those indigenous to the land where we plant and are planted, but like a new generation of seeds, we are facing conditions unlike any our ancestors saw, and we need to be prepared to deploy all the creative and adaptive powers at our disposal.

A number of traditional cultures have practices which involve exposing seeds to saliva, either by spitting in a bowl of water in which the seeds are soaked, or by holding them in the mouth right before planting. Many pass the seeds through smoke, or sing to them. The

effectiveness of these three elements, spit, smoke, and song, has been confirmed by research, although there is not much funding for investigating techniques like these that can't be patented. And sometimes, from an imaginal point of view, science can seem rather limited and dense. One study said that treating seeds with the smoke of 'burning weeds' worked as well as vile, bee-killing 'neonic' pesticides to prevent seeds from rotting in the soil. The researchers didn't think it was important to take note of what kind of weeds were burned, or whether any singing or radio playing went on, or how they themselves felt, being human and holding handfuls of those particular seeds at this stage of history. The attempt to remove ourselves from the equation (and from responsibility for the results,) is becoming less and less tenable in science, thank goodness, but it is still influential. To counteract it we need the scientists and the artists and the poets and the story tellers to work together. Science and media are our society's 'magic,' and this collaboration is, in my considered opinion, the best, most honest source for effective and ethical modern rituals.

Today, I invite you to bring both your visionary, artistic sides, and your practical, analytical sides to the task of developing new expressions of our humanity – new rituals - as we co-evolve with our teachers the plants. Let's set the stage by intuitively considering an ordinary plant and its use of seediness. At each juncture in its life cycle, we see an example of the fearless renunciation of present individual wholeness, safety, and comfort in favor of feeding and providing for the needs and seeds of the future.

- Visualize a seed – waiting buried in the dark, pressure building within, it's formerly invincible hard-shelled husk beginning to soften, weaken, and split, vulnerable, it's fate unknown.

- Imagine a sprout – determined to grow and bloom and form the next generation of seeds, creating itself from nothing, according to an ancestral plan, equally eager in good years and bad.

- Picture a plant that has died away, rotted, composting back into the soil, its diaspora of seeds reaching out far beyond the decaying center. Between them, fed but not restrained by their heritage, these seeds carry forward all that has been learned.

And for our scientifically experimental sides, here are four specific techniques to access seed magic.

1) Protect the seeds by protecting the seed protectors. These are difficult times for healers, visionaries, artists, and especially for the traditional people, cultures, and lands that carry the seeds and the skills the future will need. Support them as they ask to be supported. As we build traditions consistent with our current situation, it is important to honor the past, and to thank the ancestors of the seeds themselves – because plants have ancestors too – and

those of all who kept them, and of all who willingly or unwillingly gave them away. Seeds and gratitude are meant to be exchanged. Pass it on.

2) Consider the role of seeds in daily life. For example, everybody eats – honor the nuts, grains, beans, spices, and other seeds that nourish and delight us. It may seem at first glance that these particular seeds have failed in their evolutionary purpose because they get eaten instead of being planted and reproducing, but this is not the case. Seeds have long used the digestive systems of birds, animals and insects as a means of dispersal, causing what we eat to grow around us – the first form of agriculture.

3) Garden! Seeds don't get 'saved' by sitting in a jar. They need the chance to grow and try, seed and die, repeat the old pattern to a new beat – the chance to evolve. It only takes five years of seed selection to breed a distinct new variety of most vegetables... one that is exactly suited to your garden's care and climate. Because people and plants have been sharing gardens forever, the number of activities and energies available to us there is quite comprehensive. For example, in our farm's small community garden, layered territories include plants and people, pests and pollinators. Besides producing food and providing education, there are art installations, an indigenous seed rematriation plot under the direction of Julie Vanderhoop, a dye garden, a bean house for the children, a wind telephone to talk to the dead, salad greens for the families of cancer patients and of course flowers for the hummingbirds. If you were to come by the garden, there would be room for you too.

4) When people play with seeds, we may experience magic, creative exploration, the shifting of patterns, divination, personal transformation, and healing. There's a method for inviting seeds to play with us that I learned at an herb conference from a neurologist, Dr. Rocio Alarcon. It's a very old tradition in her family of Ecuadorian curanderos, and she had to check with her elders about whether it was open or closed. They said it is open, and a good practice to share far and wide, including with children, since it is effective and powerful even when not well understood, and not likely to be dangerous in the hands of amateurs. Here's how it's done. Find a nice piece of cloth, like a bandana. Get some seeds – diversity is good but not essential. Seeds you collect or grow are nice, but beans, lentils, rice and so on from the store are fine. Keep a handful or two of them rolled up in the cloth, and when you feel like it, spread out the cloth and arrange the seeds on it. Alternatively, pour them out into a tray on the kitchen table and rearrange them over the course of several days or weeks while you consider what's on your mind. There are no rules. Sort and order them. Stir and disperse them. Form old patterns into new as you see fit. When you've had enough, thank the seeds and roll them back up in the cloth again. This practice sounds easy and simple because it is, and I enthusiastically suggest that you give it a try. It's not at all unusual for brilliant ideas and solutions to long standing difficulties to magically appear while a person is 'absent-mindedly' handling seeds.

We have co-evolved with plants for our entire existence, so much so that when they breathe out, we breathe in. Whenever I am tasked with finding balance anywhere, such as when breathing, or at equinoxes, or when synchronizing mind and body, or when making

choices between maintaining the old ways and creating something new... I look to my plant teachers, especially in their seed form. The seed is the part of the plant that interfaces between past and future, between form and formlessness, carrying within it both heritage and potential. Poised between the last generation and the next, seeds embody what will become real, acting at the shifting and permeable boundaries where opposites interact. This is the realm where nothing is decided and everything is possible, the realm of magic. As humans this is our home territory. We too are seeds. At this tipping point of spring, let's work courageously together to carry forward only what will be needed. Thank you.