

Life's inevitable changes: Finding your way with ceremony and ritual

"It is in change that things find rest." - Heraclitus

By Dorry Bless

John F. Kennedy said, "The one unchangeable certainty is that nothing is unchangeable or certain." Still, given this undeniable reality, our common reaction to change is to oppose it. Sometimes we get lost in magical thinking believing we can bend reality to our own whim. We are taught to think ahead and resolve problems. Rarely do we consider the gifts gained when we sit with change and embrace the unknown. Doing so would insist we rest in an uncomfortable space. We are conditioned early on to dry our tears and get on with it. Our first impulse is to contract around the very nature of life; often resisting its' everyday unfolding and stunning mystery.

Nevertheless, life persists and rises up to greet us in each brand new moment. It invites us to welcome it in all of its' expressions. Most people look to attend to life-change in the really big moments: a birth, a wedding, a death. However, when ceremony or ritual become part of the ordinary business of life possibilities abound. There, freedom awaits in the simple act of recognition and acceptance which ceremony evokes.

Chilean poet, Pablo Neruda says, "Everything is ceremony in the wild garden of childhood." As children we intuitively open to each moment. Ritual is one of the customs humans from all cultures make use of to tell their stories, send their signals and attend to celebration and loss. It has always been so since the beginning of time. We come to realize ceremony is one of our most fundamental and loving ways to respond to change. It's one of the things we already know. It is the language our heart, soul and body speaks.

Ceremony allows us to open as we navigate the unknown in times of transition, or even in day to day living. It invites us to ask questions, and then live into them. It encourages us to welcome the journey and then supports us in charting our passage all the way through to the next landing. Ceremonial tribute offers a meaningful context for the soul to experience the precious mystery of life and share this experience with others. The language of ceremony gently advocates for us to be the change we seek, laboring with our turmoil from the inside out.

Native American writer and author, Sun Bear, said, " When humans participate in ceremony, they enter a sacred space. Everything outside of that space shrivels in importance. Time takes on a different dimension. Emotions flow more freely. The bodies of participants become filled with the energy of life, and this energy reaches out and blesses the creation around them. All is made new; everything becomes sacred."

Celebrancy, originating in Australia in the 1970s, now an emerging trend in the United States, is founded upon celebrating life-cycle passages and transitions with meaning and significance. By utilizing world traditions, old and new rituals along with pertinent readings; life-cycle celebrants® attend to those tender times with great care. A heartfelt collaboration ensues and brings the individual to a safe and sacred space, where family and friends gather mindfully; allowing the journey to lovingly express itself within the ceremonial container.

A life-cycle celebrant® listens deeply, as a non-judgmental guide who is certified to support one through distinct life passages. Besides personalizing weddings, vow renewals, milestones, funerals and baby blessings; a celebrant will also work with you to create ritual and ceremony to acknowledge the 'smaller' or 'in-between' moments; mending a friendship or family relationship, job loss, a 'coming of age' for teens, middle-aged or elders, parenthood showers, divorce, animal end-of-life tributes, a caretaker's tireless dedication, or a ritual that centers around forgiveness.

Life-cycle celebrants do not ascribe to the idiom that one size fits all. Each ceremony is one- of-a-kind reflecting the truth, personality, beliefs and uniqueness of the individual. The client sees every word beforehand adhering to a gold standard that assures accuracy and suitability of tone. In creating ceremony, we put our faith in poet and songwriter, Leonard Cohen: *"Ring the bells that still can ring, Forget your perfect offering. There is a crack, a crack in everything, That's how the light gets in."*

And the light carries you to a place of complete and abiding rest even in the midst of change.