



Celebrant Foundation & Institute Library

National Pet Memorial Day Annual Animal Ceremony

Hamilton Pet Meadow
Hamilton, New Jersey

September 9, 2007

Debra Bjorling
Linda Makkay
Hamilton Pet Meadow

Dorry Bless, Celebrant

WELCOME

Celebrant

Welcome. My name is Dorry Bless. I am a celebrant. I am delighted to see all of you. May I remind you to turn off your cell phones and beepers. Debra Bjorling and Linda Makkay of Hamilton Pet Meadow, invited me to participate in your gathering today. I am touched to be here with each of you.

Many people are unfamiliar with what a 'celebrant' does. I help my clients create meaningful and satisfying ways to celebrate and mark their personal achievements, transitions, and life events. I write and perform weddings, home blessings, and adoption ceremonies; as well as memorials and funerals. Each ceremony that a celebrant composes is unique and is customized to serve our clients' needs and beliefs.

One of the main reasons that I chose to study celebrancy, was to design and offer ceremonies -- specifically -- those that would honor animal lovers and their relationships with their beloved animal companions. Today, we gather to remember and pay tribute to our dear animal friends and the lives we shared with them. We have come together to joyfully acknowledge how they made our lives rich, our hearts full, and our smiles wide. Our tears and laughter express the depth of our love for our four-legged, feathered, beaked, winged, scaled, crawlers and all other animal friends. Whatever feelings come up for you throughout our ceremony is welcome here.

You have come to Hamilton Pet Meadow because you feel the loss of your animal friend deeply-- whether she passed on yesterday, last month, or years ago. Perhaps for some, your animal was able to gently guide you through your feelings of grief and loss and help you explore your own relationship with death and mortality. Maybe you continue to struggle with these feelings and emotions. Unbeknownst to them, our animals are a window to our own soul and point to our capacity and our willingness to give and receive love, joy and one of the most precious gifts of all -- to celebrate and live life!

Irving Townsend said:

“We who choose to surround ourselves with lives even more temporary than our own, live within a fragile circle, easily and often breached. Unable to accept its awful gaps, we would still live no other way.”

One important aspect of celebration – possibly the very essence of celebration itself -- is that we share and rejoice with others during any significant life transition. We gather together to celebrate our animal's lifetime – and we celebrate with others who understand. Even if you don't know the person sitting near you – it is safe to assume that they're a friend. They are here for the same reason you are – they loved their animal too. So in this spirit -- we join together to act as both witnesses and participants. We open our hearts, our minds and our souls to this experience and express our joy for the gift of relationship we shared with our animal companion. We reflect this truth for one another.

Another aspect of celebration is that we stop. We remove ourselves from the daily rhythm of our lives and invite our souls and hearts to partake of the richness that is available to us in ritual. We light candles. Share memories. Read poetry. Today we will tie a red cord around a new friend's wrist in a physical act of memory and protection for our sweet animal friend. We will take time to stop and savor the beauty and deliciousness that is available to us when we allow ourselves to speak to the soul.

RINGING OF THE TIBETAN BELLS

Celebrant

And now, I invite you to stop. I invite you to welcome the beauty of silence as I ring the Tibetan bells. Tibetan tingsha (ting-shags) are small cymbals used in prayer and rituals by Tibetan Buddhist practitioners. Two cymbals are joined together by a leather strap or chain. The cymbals are struck together producing a clear and high pitched tone. Today, tingsha are used along with singing bowls and other instruments in meditation, music and sound healing. Traditionally, tingsha are used as part of specific Tibetan rituals; one such ritual serves as an offering to those who have passed on – to support them and assist them in finding their way in the afterlife.

Pause (Dorry will ring Tibetan bells 3 times)

We dedicate this service to the homeless animals everywhere and the animals that die in shelters everyday.

READING

Celebrant

The following poem was written by Anthony F. Chiffolo

Could I name them all,
My kindred spirits?

Wolves,
Husky dogs,
Deer,
Kingfishers—
 These thrill my soul.
Dolphins,
Swallows
 Gladden my heart;
Seahorses,
Giraffes
 Amuse, and
 Awe.

Yet why these?
Is not the grizzly as noble,
The hummingbird as graceful,
The kangaroo as queer?

Do we all have our favorites?
You prefer cheetahs, swans, and starfish---
What do they have
 In common
 One with another,
 Each with you?

Is the connection mere experience—
The swallows, when I was a girl, built nests
Beneath the eaves
Outside my bedroom window –
Or a matter of aesthetics?
But I know no giraffes in person...

Something speaks to us—
The wolf's wildness in me, perhaps
The starfish's symmetry to you –
Maybe a longing

For something missing
From our narrow lives,
Something important,
And terrific,
Which we cannot name,
Yet still recognize
 Within,
 At the surging of our blood
When we,
 By chance,
Spy a butterfly
Flutter past.

CANDLE LIGHTING and the SYMBOLISM of ELEMENTS of NATURE
Celebrant

(Dorry will point out 'symbols' on the ritual table of water, fire...and point to air and earth)

Our animal friends serve as our most important and primal connection to nature and remind us daily of that aspect within ourselves.

There is a blaze in the human heart that illumines who we are, where we came from, and why we are here. In the warmth of this blaze we feel our belonging to this world, for it burns not just in us, but also in every human, plant, animal, mineral, and situation. In the rugged Sierra Madre of Mexico, the Huichol people are living as they have for thousands of generations: in communion with sacred fire.

Now we will light out candles to bring forth the blessings of sacred fire and reflect on the symbolic meaning of the four directions and the four elements of nature as given to us by the Native Americans.

The four directions – north, south, east and west relate specifically to one of the four elements of nature: earth, fire, air and water. The elements are powerful symbols and the qualities they embody are significant in every relationship.

The element of **Earth** is located in the north and associated with the season of winter. Earth is matter, rock and soil. It grounds us. Earth brings tenderness, happiness and compassion. We experience these emotions daily in caring for and being cared for by our animal friends.

The element of **Fire** is located in the south and associated with the summer season. Fire is light in the darkness and warmth from the cold. It is the traditional focus for the home, where the hearth is attended to. It also acts as a purifier. Fire brings harmony, vitality, and creativity. We experience these sentiments daily in caring for and being cared for by our animal friends.

The element of **Air** is located in the east and is associated with the spring season. Air is breath – the inhale and the exhale. Air brings communication and wisdom. We experience greater access to our own wisdom and inner knowledge by engaging in our relationships with our animal friends.

The element of **Water** is located in the west and is associated with the autumn season. Water is life, always changing, always the same. Water brings friendship, intuition, caring, understanding and love. Our animals bring unconditional love and understanding into our lives each and every day.

Each element embraces **Spirit**; that which pervades and abides in all and everything. Spirit lives in each of us, and, of course is here with us now as we remember our beloved animal friend.

FINAL RITUAL AND CONCLUSION

Celebrant

Thank you for those beautiful and touching readings. Our ceremony is about to come to a close with our final ritual.

First we will take a breath and blow out our candle. In doing so, you will be blowing out air. Remember air is associated with spring and spring is the season of re-awakening after a long sleep. Please be aware that as you physically blow out this candle, you're the gifts of the life you shared with your animal friend stays lit in your heart.

Please pass the basket with red cords. Take one and pass them on to your neighbor and friends.

Ask your friend to tie the cord on your left wrist. As he or she does so, please say the name of your animal or animals aloud. Now, do the same for your friend with your friend saying her animal's names aloud. This red cord, is a reinterpretation of the Tibetan Buddhist ritual and is a protection and blessing cord. Traditionally, the lama ties a knot in the cord, prays over it and blows his mantra into the cord. Instead, today we have placed our animal's name and memory into the cord. The Venerable Kalu Rinpoche said in 1973 to his student that the cord is symbolic that his compassionate embrace remains even after his physical form has departed. And so it is – our animals' sweet essence – remains with us always.

The word 'animal' means to have the breath of life, from the Latin *anima*. It is related to *animus* which means of mind, spirit. Our animal companions breathe life into our very own existence and reflect the fundamental nature of our own spirit. They bring us closer to our own truth. Even though they have left us in form; we continue to celebrate their life and our lives with them. Go in peace. Thank you.

*Final ringing of Tibetan Bells and conclusion of ceremony
(Dorry will ring the bells 3x)*

THE END