

## CHAPTER 11

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# Diana's Grove: An Emergent, Integrative Spiritual Movement

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Our spiritual practice is dedicated to developing healthy communities and relationships. Magic, for us, is aligning ourselves with life-sustaining practices so we can invoke within ourselves the ability to act according to our deepest values and live our dreams into reality.

—Cynthea Jones

In February 1993, Cynthea Jones and Patricia Storm attended an intensive weekend in Chicago with Starhawk, one of the leading spokespersons on neopagan movements.<sup>1</sup> During a session led by Starhawk, the two women were asked to envision their shared spiritual dream in the future. Neither of them found themselves in Springfield, IL, teaching in a brick center on a corner lot. Instead, they were in a magical grove, surrounded by gently rising hills and woods with firelight dancing on the faces of persons they had yet to meet.<sup>2</sup> Soon after, Cynthea and Patricia began a search for what was to become Diana's Grove, a 102-acre retreat center, located in Missouri at the foothills of the Ozarks. As the opening quote suggests, the purpose of the programs at Diana's Grove is to provide a space for the expression of Earth-based spiritual beliefs and to offer instruction in leadership development, with the goal of creating an intentional community where spiritual practice engages and enacts the values of inclusion, healthy group process, and shared power. In working toward this goal, the leaders and participants at Diana's Grove represent the qualities of what we see as an

*emergent, integrative spiritual movement* that offers an alternative to traditional, hierarchical, dogmatic forms of religious expression. The characteristics of integrative spiritual movements are:

- the promotion of an inclusive, spiritual world view and practice that values the connections between the domains of mind, spirit, emotion and body
- the reclaiming of *nature* and the *natural* in each of these domains
- the cultivation of wonder and recognition of the magical and mysterious in life
- a focus on personal spiritual growth and societal transformation

In this chapter, then, we explore the ways in which Diana's Grove exemplifies an integrative spiritual movement that illustrates alternative ways in which women, in particular, express their world view and practices. To provide a context for this exploration, we begin with a description of the spiritual practice and the people of Diana's Grove.

#### WHAT HAPPENS AT DIANA'S GROVE?

It's a warm night in May, and the sun is just going down. The moon and her bright friend Venus rise above the hills as the group of 30 women and men walk in silence to the Water Path for the evening's ritual. The group has gathered from all over the United States to live together in community, focusing on personal growth and leadership development in large and small groups, for a week. Learning sessions in the great room of the main house are intermingled with fabulous meals, free time to wander the land, shop in the camp store, walk the labyrinth, relax in the hot tub, chat, or nap. Some participants already know one another upon arrival; many do not, but it's hard not to feel welcome and embraced by this group of people so committed to openness and inclusion. As the group assembles around the fire, some standing, some sitting, two members of the community step into the center of the circle to gather the group together with sound and movement. Some voices are calm, toning one note; others mimic the buzzing sounds of nature, or the call of the whippoorwill. Some stand in place or remain seated, some move around the circle. Together, the group begins to come together, in nature, for a sacred ritual.

Once the Gathering is complete, other community members step in to ground the participants in this moment, to leave the day's work, conversations, or tensions behind, to focus on what is happening here, now, around us and inside us. The circle is cast, the presence of the elements of air, fire, water, earth, and center are acknowledged by the community, the invocations

led by still other community members, assisted by the entire group. A particular goddess or god is called to assist with the ritual's work. In this process, members of the community act as "priestesses," a term which, at Diana's Grove is inclusive of both women and men, and in ritual, we are all priestesses, everyone an integral part of the experience.

That is not to say that everyone knows exactly what will happen; only a few are privy to the entirety of the evening's ritual plan. Leaders of various aspects of the ritual know the intention of tonight's work, necessary equipment has been gathered, a fire built, but what the ritual turns out to be depends on the alchemy of the plan, the energy of the participants, and the demands of nature. During the day, we worked to create a vision of the future self each of us wants to become; tonight's ritual will lay a pattern in each of our souls to guide us to that becoming.

After the invocations, Cynthea and Patricia step into the center, invite us to sit or stand, and get comfortable. Cynthea begins talking, slowly, powerfully, about the possibility of claiming the potential of the future self. Patricia drums quietly on the frame drum, creating a hypnotic rhythm; both of them speak, sometimes apart from one another, sometimes at the same time. This is the part of the ritual known as the trance; it is a tool that allows participants to ignore the constant little voices in our heads (it's hard to listen to two people talking at once!), to get in touch with our unconscious desires, our unconscious dreams for the future. Distract the conscious mind, and the unconscious mind can do the work.

After the trance is complete, we move together to the creek. At the creek's entrance each of us receives a candle that is then lit and placed on a thin piece of wood; we walk into the shallow creek, or stand on the shore, holding our lighted candles, our future selves. As we release our future selves to the waters of life, we sing together a chant we have learned earlier in the day: "I am flowing, shifting, changing, moving beyond the edge of form . . ." We watch the candles flow down the creek, and sing for awhile; then we leave the water, return to a roaring fire, acknowledge the elements, open the circle. After ritual, some stay and sit quietly around the fire; others walk back to the barn by moonlight and torchlight, and the blinking of the fireflies. Back in the barn, we eat dessert and laugh and talk about the day. Some stay up late, drumming, dancing, and singing, while others fall exhausted into bed after a full day.

This is a description of a typical ritual at Diana's Grove. The ritual has a pattern, with various parts, organized into a coherent whole, like the rituals found in many other religious traditions. The focus on the four elements of nature—air, fire, water, and earth—and the invocation of goddesses and/or gods, however, points to the fact that Diana's Grove works out of an earth-based or earth-centered spiritual tradition. Such traditions are commonly

called pagan, neopagan, or wiccan, and come with negative cultural associations of witches who ride on brooms or people linked to satanic cults. Yet, such stereotypes do not describe the focus of most earth-based spiritual traditions. Using the word "witchcraft" as an umbrella term to describe such traditions, Starhawk writes, "witchcraft is a religion, perhaps the oldest religion extant in the West. Its origins go back before Christianity, Judaism, Islam—before Buddhism and Hinduism, as well, and it is very different from all the so-called great religions."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the negative connotations of the word "pagan" go back to ancient struggles between the older polytheistic religions and the newer monotheistic traditions, primarily Christianity, that became dominant in the early centuries of the Common Era in the West. We can see these struggles in the transformation of the meaning of the Latin word "paganus," which originally meant "country dweller." As Christianity spread through the cities of the Roman Empire, people who lived in the country continued to practice their traditional religions, and were often the last people to be converted to the new religion; hence, "pagan" came to refer not simply to country dweller, but to those who were godless, or unbelievers.<sup>4</sup> Instead of thinking of those who did not convert to Christianity as people practicing a different spiritual tradition, pagans were denigrated and feared. Polytheistic traditions that celebrated both the male and feminine divine were replaced by a monotheistic tradition that focused on the importance of a singular, male God, and religious leadership became the sole responsibility of men.

Contemporary pagan movements that attempt to reclaim these ancient polytheistic traditions often do so in order to revalue the feminine divine alongside the male divine, and emphasize the importance of women as religious leaders. The Reclaiming movement, a feminist group founded by Starhawk and Diane Baker in 1979, turned to pagan traditions "in order to heal experiences of estrangement occasioned by patriarchal biblical religions."<sup>5</sup> Along with its focus on women's spiritual experience, Starhawk emphasizes that witchcraft or paganism "is not based on dogma or a set of beliefs, nor on scriptures or a sacred book revealed by a great man. Witchcraft takes its teachings from nature, and reads inspiration in the movements of the sun, moon and stars, the flight of birds, the slow growth of trees, and the cycles of the seasons."<sup>6</sup>

The spiritual practice of Diana's Grove is, as Starhawk describes above, not based on dogma or scripture; rather it is based on the cycles of nature, on the ebb and flow of the seasons, on the cycles of birth and growth, decay and death found in nature. Diana's Grove values the feminine and the masculine divine in many different forms that often refer back to Greek mythology, like Demeter and Persephone or Pan and Hades, each representing actual states of nature and psychological states of being. For instance,

the Greek myth of Persephone explains how the natural cycles of spring and summer, fall and winter came to be, but the myth can also help us explore common human experiences of joy and productivity, sorrow and loss. Earth-based spiritual traditions, like that practiced at Diana's Grove, see nature as a valuable spiritual teacher. In addition, an important part of the work of Diana's Grove is to develop skilled and professional leaders who understand group process and facilitation. Finally, as Eugene Gallagher points out, organizations like Diana's Grove that can be described under the heading "neopaganism" are incredibly diverse, improvisational, and are nonauthoritarian and nondogmatic.<sup>7</sup> This is a world view that attempts to avoid categorization and labels, a stance that resonates with the leadership of Diana's Grove.

### THE PEOPLE OF DIANA'S GROVE

So, who are the people who participate in Diana's Grove programs? The bulk of the work of Diana's Grove is focused on Mystery School, the focus and intention of which is "self-realization, self-actualization . . . in the context of building relationships and sharing your life with others."<sup>8</sup> The 2007 promotional brochure describes Mystery School this way:

What are the Mysteries? Birth, growth, life, death, love, passion, divinity . . . . The Mysteries are all things that, even when explained, can never be consigned to reason. They are moments of transcendent awe when we are touched by the divine and discover ourselves to be one with the world . . . . Mystery school is a year of myth, magic and community. Personal growth, professional development, the art of creating healthy communities; that is what a Mystery School year offers you.

Monthly Mystery School retreat weekends are supplemented by online discussion lists and classes that usually center on a myth or a story told for the entire year. Many of these myths are Greek, like the myth of Demeter and Persephone, or the Labyrinth and the Minotaur, though Mystery School has also focused on the legends of King Arthur, and the Scottish "Ballad of Tam Lin." Each month, Cynthea, (sometimes along with other staff members), takes a piece of the story and illuminates its meaning in the contemporary world.<sup>9</sup>

Mystery School began in 1995 with 22 participants; in 2008 more than 225 people are in Mystery School. Most of the members of Mystery School range in age from mid-twenties to mid-sixties, and most are Caucasian. There are lesbians and gay men, heterosexuals, and bisexuals. They come from a variety of traditional religious backgrounds, including Catholicism,

Mormonism, Unitarian Universalism, and a variety of other Protestant sects. Jews, Buddhists, atheists, agnostics, and Christian pagans find their way to Diana's Grove. Many of the participants are college-educated and some have Masters degrees and Ph.D.s. There are teachers and college professors, counselors and therapists, corporate trainers, computer information specialists, artists, stay-at-home parents, massage therapists, writers and editors, retail sales associates, engineers, construction workers, small business owners, health care workers, and students.

#### WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES ON DIANA'S GROVE

The vast majority of Mystery School participants and Diana's Grove staff are women, though Diana's Grove is not a women-only organization. Yet, Diana's Grove does have a particular appeal for women, for a number of different reasons. It is a place of physical and emotional safety, a place that accepts the variety of beliefs and practices of its participants, a place of healing and personal growth, and a place where women's opinions, skills, talents, intellectual capabilities, and leadership abilities are valued and celebrated.

There are two women-only events every year at Diana's Grove—Women's Spring Equinox and Lunacy Women's Week. When Diana's Grove first opened, Cynthea and Patricia wanted to offer events for women only because, as many women who attend these events confirm, the energy of a group of women together is different than when there are men in the group. Women-only events continue to be offered because they create an alternative space for women, where the focus is solely on themselves, not on their spouses, children, parents, friends, or jobs. Cynthea maintains that women-only events create opportunity for a special kind of intimacy and relaxation, where women can step away from societal expectations that they tend first to others, and not to themselves. For some of the Grove's regular attendees, these are favorite events. Susan describes the importance of the women-only events for her in this way:

As a child growing up in Utah, I was part of a very close spiritual community. In my early 30s, I left my childhood religion to follow my longing, a deep longing within my heart to find a community centered in female spirituality. My longing led me to discover Diana's Grove Women's Spring Equinox Celebration in March of 1997.

Diana's Grove has become my spiritual home. A community in which to share the sacred, to sing and chant together, to share sacred ritual, to laugh and cry together, to walk this sacred land . . . to honor both mine and your place in this sacred web of life.

Susan's experience of Women's Spring Equinox led her to become a member of the Diana's Grove community.

There have periodically been questions from men involved in the community about how an organization that claims to be inclusive could have events for women only. Yet, Cynthea maintains that Diana's Grove can be "inclusive and non-sexist and still offer events for individuals." As with all of the other events at Diana's Grove, participants make choices about whether they attend, so women who do not want to attend women-only events are certainly not required to do so. And, there have also been men-only events at the Grove when there has been interest, so there is a recognition that men, too, may desire to have space where they can spend time focusing on themselves and not their spouses, children, parents, friends, and jobs.

Most events at Diana's Grove, however, are open to both men and women. Yet, what happens at Diana's Grove has, as far as numbers of participants goes, appealed far more strongly to women than to men. One reason for this is that Diana's Grove is a place of physical safety. Tucked in the Ozarks, far away from any large cities, women can walk the land at all times of day or night without fear for their personal safety. While physical safety is important to everyone, it is especially important for women, who in the course of daily life may spend more time than most men focused on bodily self-protection.

While the remote location of Diana's Grove offers participants physical safety, emotional safety is perhaps even more important to the women who come to the Grove. Over and over again, women like Amy, who come often to Diana's Grove do so because, "in the safe container of the Mystery School community I can try on new ways of being that are more authentically me." Sue says that "the Grove is a place of comfort and safety where each individual's talents and abilities are fostered and appreciated, where personal quirks are amusingly accepted, and where working through the inevitable community tensions is a sacred duty." Jo says that the personal work that she does at the Grove happens

in an environment that encourages and supports a very open spirit, one where it becomes unusually safe to wrestle with therapeutic personal issues. Grove rituals ask us to consider universals like "loss," leaving it to each individual to decide whether that references a death, a broken relationship, a dream that died, or whatever else speaks to their lives in that moment. This personalizes each ritual, even as we weep and vow to go on in community. And other daily non-ritual events, like circles of support and post-ritual dessert, provide a way for me to ease back from those intimately vulnerable places in a useful, responsible way.

The kind of emotional safety that women experience at Diana's Grove allows them to focus on spiritual growth in a way that allows them to feel safe while working on challenging emotional issues.

Another reason for the Grove's appeal to women is that it offers opportunities for leadership development and empowerment in ritual and community contexts that other religious organizations often do not. At Diana's Grove, for instance, the word "priestess" is an inclusive term for both women and men, and in ritual, we are all priestesses, everyone an integral part of the experience. Rare is the case outside the Grove where a word associated with women is made applicable to both women and men; usually those words believed to be inclusive, like "mankind" for instance, put men first. This conceptual shift denotes a world view that values women and their skills in a context of cooperation and empowerment for all members of the group. While training in these skills is open to all members of Mystery School, women may feel especially validated and valued for their abilities and appreciate the chance to make mistakes, learn from them, and still remain valued community members.

Indeed, the opportunity for leadership development is crucial for many of the women who participate in the community at Diana's Grove. Leadership development happens in a context that values the integration of mind, spirit, emotion, and body, and thus stands in contrast to many established religious systems in the West, where mind and spirit have been seen as opposites, never to be reconciled. Moreover, throughout Western history, women have most often been defined in terms of their procreative, bodily functions, while men have been identified with spirit and intellect.<sup>10</sup> One effect of such identifications is that women have been shut out of important leadership roles in church communities, a situation that has only been reconciled in some Western religious traditions in the last 200 years. Another effect has been a consistent conceptual privileging of the spirit over the body, a notion that excludes a holistic perspective on human life in which sexuality, spirituality, emotional expression, and intellect are seen as harmonious aspects of human existence. At Diana's Grove, becoming a good leader requires attention to all aspects of human existence. As Shauna puts it,

The deep work at Diana's Grove has changed me personally, professionally, and spiritually. I remember one workshop in particular, Embodying Psyche, where a circle of women met to discuss our issues around our bodies and how the words of others had shaped how we saw our bodies, as well as how this impacted our sense of self. Sharing my pain, and releasing some of it, helped me to become stronger and healthier, but I was amazed at how these old pains and old stories of myself and who I was helped me to become a stronger leader. Diana's Grove helped me

to step out of old patterns that did not serve me, and into new patterns of greater success, through embodied, experiential work in ritual, the rituals of being witnessed in group conversation, and other processes.

This kind of integrative spiritual practice has also been helpful to Shaun. She describes her experience of Diana's Grove in this way:

I came to Diana's Grove for a friend whom I thought could benefit from the personal healing work it offered. The friend came once, and six years later, I am on the Grove staff. The community has given me the ability to communicate effectively and honestly—as a storyteller, a teacher, a workshop presenter—and most importantly, as a healthy human being. I want to be present to this world in this my one life—and I can be with the skills I have learned here.

These testimonials that what happens at Diana's Grove creates opportunities for personal growth and leadership development suggest the importance of integrating mind, spirit, emotion, and body when doing such work. As a place that provides physical and emotional safety, that is a place of healing, Diana's Grove allows individuals to work on personal growth and leadership development. It creates opportunities for all of the members of its community, while offering women opportunities that they may not so easily find in other spiritual traditions.

### DIANA'S GROVE AS INTEGRATIVE SPIRITUAL MOVEMENT

In the introduction, we proposed the following as characteristics of an integrative spiritual movement:

- the promotion of an inclusive, spiritual world view and practice that values the connections between the domains of mind, spirit, emotion and body
- the reclaiming of *nature* and the *natural* in each of these domains
- the cultivation of wonder and recognition of the magical and mysterious in life
- a focus on personal spiritual growth and societal transformation

In this section, we focus on two examples that show how these characteristics are put into play at Diana's Grove. The first example centers on the idea that the "focus on the world of nature [is] a way to focus on the nature of the world."<sup>11</sup> Specifically, we examine the ways in which Diana's Grove uses the four elements of air, fire, water, and earth to expand our awareness

of the world around us in ritual, to enhance self-understanding, and to develop leadership skills. The second example focuses on the idea of individual and communal transformation using magic, ritual, and mythology as the people at Diana's Grove understand them.

#### THE FOUR ELEMENTS: NATURE, HUMANS, LEADERSHIP

The four elements of air, fire, water, and earth play an important role at Diana's Grove not only because of the focus on earth-based spirituality, but because the elements can be used as conceptual tools to increase psychological self-awareness and work on leadership skills. The Diana's Grove Web site explains the importance of understanding the multilayered meaning of the elements in this way:

**Do we worship the earth? Not necessarily, but we believe that any sustainable spiritual philosophy must include respect for life.**

It must encourage us to develop practices that enable us to live in a respectful relationship with the world that sustains us.

**Our approach to our spiritual work and to ritual is earth-based rather than humanistic.** We look at the elements—air, fire, water and earth—as if their primary gift is to invite us to be aware of the world around us, rather than to provide us with metaphorical keys to the world within us.

**Yes, the elements give us clues to our “elemental” nature, they are associated with aspects of our humanness.** Yes, the world around us does give us clues to the world within us, but with the blessing of sacred land and abundant nature, we focus on the world of nature as a way to understand the nature of the world. The elements invite us to deepen our connection with nature.<sup>12</sup>

Here we see again the effort to integrate mind, spirit, emotion, and body in the context of defining earth-centered spirituality. For the Diana's Grove community, earth-centered spirituality provides the tools for strengthening our connections to ourselves, to one another, and to the world around us.

#### THE PHYSICAL WORLD

As an earth-based spiritual tradition, one of the most crucial beliefs at Diana's Grove is that humans must learn to live more harmoniously with the natural world. Images of colorfully clad people cavorting in a green meadow adorn the publicity materials put out by Diana's Grove, but a more serious question arises: What is “nature?” What do we mean when we speak

of being “natural?” There is, of course, the literal sense of the word “nature,” the fact that when people go to Diana's Grove, nature is everywhere. If we pay attention to the elements, we become more aware of the world around us, and can better understand the ways in which we, as humans, are a part of nature. The elements are honored at the beginning of each ritual and create a context for spiritual work.

Each of the elements is associated with a direction: air is associated with the east, fire with the south, water with the west, and earth with the north.<sup>13</sup> These directional connections draw attention to nature as a whole, as well as emphasize the cyclical character of nature and the links between each of the elements. Highlighting each of the elements may seem a bit obvious, and ordinary, but focusing on the elements allows us to realize the importance of the obvious. What happens when we actually pay attention to our breathing, to the breeze on our skin, the buzz of the insects, or the flight of the bird? Focusing on all of their natural manifestations can give us insight into and appreciation for the authentic significance of the elements in our lives. Fire is a hot summer day, a warm bonfire on a cold night; fire is candle flame and volcanic eruption. Water is a soft summer rain, a gently rolling river, floods, glaciers, snow. Earth is the ground upon which we walk, caves and fields, mountains and valleys, earthquakes and mudslides. All of the elements are necessary for human life; all of the elements are powerful enough to take human life. In honoring and respecting the forces of nature, we can understand the sacredness of the world around us. In a world that is increasingly subject to the human exploitation of natural resources, refocusing our attention to the value of the world around us can encourage us to live more harmoniously with our environment.

#### THE ELEMENTS AND THE HUMAN PSYCHE

Yet, nature is not simply trees, plants, and animals. Nature beckons us to join in identity with its otherness. Like everything in life, becoming *a part of* is only achieved by overcoming selfishness and finding commonality and resonance with “the other.” To love nature is to find oneness with nature. Therefore, our “problems” with nature are fundamentally spiritual problems. From this perspective, ecological awareness is a powerful indicator of a transformation in human consciousness that is necessary if we are to change our behavior towards nature and each other. Interestingly enough, the Greek root of the word “ecology” is *oikos*, which means “home.” The psychologist Thomas Moore writes,

ecology is not earth science, it is home science; it has to do with cultivating a sense of home wherever we are, in whatever context. The things of the world are part of our home environment, and so a soulful ecology is rooted

in the feeling that this world is our home and that our responsibility to it comes not from obligation or logic but from true affection.<sup>14</sup>

From this perspective, our affection for nature should have a transformative effect; it should not only help us take care of the earth itself, it should lead us to greater self-awareness. Believing this to be the case, Diana's Grove uses the elements to enhance participants' awareness of themselves so that they can create healthy communities. In this context, air is associated with conversations, mental processes, and learning. Fire is associated with passion, courage, and creativity; water with emotion, love, and nurturance. The earth is seen as hearth and home, manifestation, the body, birth and death. Each of these elements, then, makes up a part of human life and human interaction. To experience the elements in human life, every year members of Mystery School can choose to focus on one of the elements. This dedication to an element is a way to intensify one's personal practice by devoting specific attention to the role of a particular element in one's life. For instance, if I want to improve my relationships by being more attuned to my feelings, I might dedicate myself to water. As Laurie writes about a water dedication, "water fits any container without losing its integrity. And water rules where it has no container at all, flooding and bringing fertility to the land it temporarily destroys, shaping the earth as it goes. What do we learn about emotions when we notice the power and flexibility of water?" As this example shows, thinking about the ways that the elements can help us understand human life allows us to become more at home in the natural world of which we—and the others with whom we live in community—are a part.

#### LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT: THE ELEMENTS IN COMMUNICATION

In addition to developing greater self-awareness by focusing on the elements, one can use the elements to enhance leadership skills. For nature, a revealing definition is: "the *essential characteristics and qualities* of a person or thing." Definitions for *natural* include "having an *essential relationship* with someone or something." So, when we speak of nature, we are referring to *identity*, those essential characteristics that make something or someone what they are; and *natural* configures *relationship*, our fundamental human activity, relating to the environment, the world around us. David Abram, in his book *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More Than Human World*, opens with a powerful quote about human relationships. In the first lines of the preface, he writes,

Humans are tuned for relationship. The eyes, the skin, the tongue, ears, and nostrils—all are gates where our body receives the nourishment of

otherness . . . . For the largest part of our species' existence, humans have negotiated relationship with every aspect of the sensuous surrounds, exchanging possibilities with every flapping form, with each textured surface and shivering entity that we happened to focus upon. All could speak . . . to which we replied . . . . And from all of these relationships our collective sensibilities were nourished.<sup>15</sup>

Nature is everything with which we have relationship; it is the quest for knowing thyself, the necessary component; nature is environment; nature requires communication. Because of this, the elements can be used to teach leadership skills. One specific focus in this context is using the four elements to understand how and why we communicate. For instance, when I speak from the element of air, for instance, I speak in order to give information. Communicating information can be both positive and negative, for when we communicate from air, we can both provide and withhold information. Air communication can thus reveal a certain kind of power dynamic found in communication. If I speak from the element of fire, I speak to establish my identity. Speaking from fire, I can tell you what I believe and what I've accomplished. I can also be boastful and arrogant. If I speak from the element of water, I am communicating to express emotion. This kind of conversation can build bridges between people and invoke intimacy. It can also create more emotional distance, if I'm not careful. Earth is the place of silence in communication. The silence that earthy communication provides can allow others to speak. It can also be punishing if I withhold information or exclude others through my silence.

To think about communication in this way requires that I think about my intentions for speaking. Am I trying to communicate information? Am I trying to allow space for others to speak? Am I trying to tell you how I feel? Are my intentions appropriate for the situation? Am I using the appropriate method of communication for the situation at hand? Mystery School participant, Amy, reflected online about her awareness of the ways in which this model reflects her communication skills:

Through this model I'm learning to pay attention to what my intention is when I speak. Is what I'm saying serving my intention? Am I speaking just to hear myself talk? Is what I'm sharing relevant? I tried paying attention to which element I was speaking from at a given time. I find I speak from air a lot. Trying to share or gather information. For me this can slide into bossiness and trying to tell others how to do something, even if my opinion is not asked for. Maybe that is a blend of fire and air? Sharing what I know to establish my identity as someone who is intelligent? Hmmm, something to ponder.

As Amy suggests, recognition of one's own communication styles can lead to self-awareness and the possibility of improving communication with others in our daily lives, thus enhancing our spiritual connections with the world around us.

These examples of the use of the elements in ritual, in understanding the human psyche and social interactions, and in learning to communicate skillfully, reaffirm Diana's Grove's holistic approach to spirituality and its role in human life. Being attentive to the sacredness of nature enhances awareness of the world around us. That recognition, in turn, can lead us to insights about ourselves, our place in nature, and how we deal with others. The use of the elements in all of these ways thus exemplifies the four aspects of the integrative spiritual movement: an *inclusive spiritual world* that *integrates mind (air), spirit (fire), emotion (water), and body (earth)* through a recognition of *nature* and the *natural*, the *cultivation of a sense of wonder* about the world around us and the spheres of personal interaction, and a focus on *personal spiritual transformation* through a deeper engagement of the levels of meaning that the natural elements provide.

#### MAGIC, MYTHOLOGY, RITUAL, AND TRANSFORMATION

While the elements provide layers of meaning with which to grasp the connections between the natural and human worlds, another way of understanding the work of Diana's Grove is to see the connections between spiritual practice and individual and communal transformation, as they are found in mythology, magic, and ritual.

The Diana's Grove Web site explains its perspective on magic in this way:

**Dion Fortune defined Magic as the art of changing consciousness at will.** We agree with that definition and, to it, we add: *the only consciousness that any of us can truly change is our own* (emphasis added). What do we change from? What do we change into? We change from who we were told we were and who we were told we should be into the self we choose to be. The work that we offer at Diana's Grove is based on our belief in the spiraling process of self-discovery and self-creation. That process can be called individuation.

Diana's Grove's definition of magic provides a significantly different approach to the idea of magic than the stereotypical notion of magic using spells, potions, and mystical manipulations of the world around us. Indeed, magic at Diana's Grove is not about the manipulation of people and the world around us; rather, it is about self-transformation. The art of magic, then, is the art of becoming an individual. As the Web site puts it:

**Individuation, becoming an individual—there are natural steps in the process of becoming.** There are natural steps that lead us into being more fully who we are. Self-awareness, self-honesty, clear communication, self-responsibility, realizing that we have an impact on each other and being willing to be aware of that impact, accepting the challenge to become who we choose to be: these are the aspects of personal growth that are essential to the magical work at Diana's Grove.

**As we become more fully who we are, we move beyond ourselves into a relationship with a greater whole.** That whole might be a community. It might be a political movement. It might be an experience of transcendence, of opening to the mysteries of wonder. As each of us becomes more fully who we are, the world around us and within us is richer. That is the work we do at Diana's Grove. The philosophy is that, by becoming who we are, who we choose to be, we will change the world . . . one person at a time.<sup>16</sup>

Magic, then, is about changing one's self-consciousness, one's approach to the people and the world around us. Creating magic requires that we see the world in a new way, as happens when we use the elements to investigate multiple layers of human experience. Another way is through the use of mythology. Each year's Mystery School explores a myth or folktale in depth; as the Web site says, "live a myth as a year-long adventure in personal growth."<sup>17</sup> Each month, participants can download a packet of materials on a different part of the story that raise issues about choices made, challenges met, ethical dilemmas faced. Monthly workbooks give participants the opportunity to work on similar issues in their own lives through journaling, creative art projects, or meditative exercises. In this way, mythology comes to life, for us, here and now. Cynthea explains the way that Diana's Grove uses myth in the following way:

"Facts don't change people, stories do." A member of the Mystery School community jotted this line down on her way home from the Grove. She heard it in an NPR interview. I made note of it without writing down the name of the speaker. I share it with an apology to the speaker. Truth, like myth, doesn't require the author's credentials to validate its authenticity. Howard Sasportas said "A myth is a story that has never happened and is always happening." A myth is a story told by a culture. It is a story told by a generation or for generations. The myths we tell in Mystery School aren't our stories. They don't come from our culture. They don't come from our time. They don't dwell in our landscape, and yet, they do. Joseph Campbell said, "remnants of the Greek myths line the wall of our interior system of belief, like shards of broken pottery in an archaeological site."



These stories live deep inside us. We need to retell them because a forgotten place in us that never forgets believes them. We need to rehear the old stories. We need to hear them again and hear them differently. We need to find new conclusions, ones that support life and growth. We need to grab the thread and travel the maze. And when we do, we can place a different possibility at every turn.

Telling ancient stories helps us make a connection to a past that is always already with us, embedded in our culture. The stories that are used at Diana's Grove would not be considered sacred texts in the context of monotheistic religious traditions, for they are not believed to be of divine origin or inspiration, but like the texts of those traditions, these stories stand as important touchstones of belief. These texts reflect universal human experiences that continue to be relevant today. As Cynthea puts it,

Mythology is a word that we apply to past religions and past truths but not to present ones. In common language, it applies to other people's gods but not our own. At Diana's Grove, myth doesn't mean fiction; it refers to a larger-than-life truth.

Myths are the great stories we live by, even if we haven't heard them. They create the archetypes and the patterns that we embrace as the blueprint for how things are, for who we really are. *Archetype* means *original pattern*. Myth is the home of the archetypes. Myths give the archetypes a place to live, rooms to walk through, a closet full of cultures to dress in, a variety of personal histories and personalities to use as decoration. Myths give the archetypes daily life dramas and interactions—a hall of mirrors that lets us see them and lets them see themselves. The archetypes—the gods, goddesses and the mortals who live in myth—are the keepers of the blueprints that tell us about life.

Myths let us peek into our own psyche and walk around in the subconscious of the collective mind. They let us interact with beliefs that we didn't know we had. They tell us about the nature of nature and about the secret life of divinity. If we are going to enter the subconscious of the collective mind of our culture, then I say, let's rearrange the furniture. Let's make some changes while we are there. If we can tell a story differently, we can "story" our lives differently.

To understand a Greek myth, we have to be willing to look at the Greek culture. A myth contains the sediment, the settlings, of the culture that shaped it. Pour a Greek myth into a glass, drink it and you will find the dregs of the Greek culture. You will find the remnants of lingering beliefs. Like tea leaves, those dregs are prophecy. The Greek culture is present in modern religions. It lives in your subconscious. Those forgotten stories tell

themselves over and over again in your dreams. You can find it in our language and in our collective psyche. We can recreate these stories. We can replace the devaluation of women with respect. We can add healing. We can take out blame.

The importance of reimagining ancient myths, of retelling ancient stories, is that, in doing so, we can change ourselves. We can make magic happen by changing our own consciousness through this retelling. In this way, magic, myth and ritual come together. Ritual lays patterns in the soul, that is, rituals help us to embed our desires for change and self-transformation in our souls and our bodies. Ritual helps to make our beliefs and our values more concrete, more certain. As Cynthea explains,

At Diana's Grove, we take a myth and retell it; we bring it to life and into community through ritual. Song, movement, color, action, interaction; ritual is a multi-sensorial prayer. My favorite myth about the word *ritual* is that it comes from a Sanskrit word that means *Art*. The same word also means *Order*. *Art and Order*. Regardless of the spiritual tradition, ritual is repetitive. It has an order to it. That order tells us what we are doing next. Repetition enables us to relax and slip out of attention's tight suit and shoes.

When we know the order, the spiritual rhythm of our prayer, our deeper knowing enters the moment. *Order* is the form. It lulls the analytical mind and calls your deep-self out to play. *Art* in a ritual: each individual is the art; we are the art. Each person, what we say and share, that is the art. Honesty, vulnerability, our willingness to be and to create together, to sing, play, pray and dance together; we are the art.

Because of this perspective on ritual, a group's ritual practice should ritualize a group's values. A group that values shared power, as Diana's Grove does, should have a ritual pattern that shares the power. Diana's Grove rituals break the pattern of priestess/performer and a passive congregation/circle that observers found in so many traditional religious contexts. Indeed, a significant part of the practice of Diana's Grove is to teach ritual arts—drumming, chanting, trance—to those who wish to become more adept at the art of priestessing. As Cynthea writes about the ritual style of Diana's Grove, "we involved people in an inclusive invocation, elicited community involvement and interaction, and began group planning for invocations. The motto is, 'What you do is more effective than what you watch someone else do . . . no matter how skilled or talented that someone else is.' If we want a ritual to end with interaction and with the group coming together to sing, dance and raise energy through involvement, then the pattern of the ritual needed to begin with interaction and involvement as well." Cynthea points out that,

[In ancient times], the whole community was involved in creating the prayer that ensured the success of the hunters or enabled the shaman to commune with the spirits of the plants and animals. Every person was involved in the rites and rituals that ensured the survival of their families and their clan. Such intentions invoke involvement. Involvement invokes energy. Energy, life force, makes magic. When we step fully into magic for ourselves, we will create magic for each other.

In this way, Diana's Grove rituals create a pattern in the soul that engages values of inclusion and interaction, values that create the foundation of the Diana's Grove community, and invoke myth and magic. Thus, Diana's Grove rituals both express and form a way of understanding community that is transformative.

These ideas about the transformative power of myth, magic, and ritual dovetail with ideas about community developed at Diana's Grove. Indeed, at Diana's Grove, magical practice and community agreements are inextricably linked to one another. The conceptual foundations for this community were developed in 1999 and are known as Cornerstones of Community at Diana's Grove. Understanding the cornerstones is essential to understanding the goal of spiritual practice at Diana's Grove.

The first cornerstone is that of **Choice**.<sup>18</sup> Diana's Grove understands that each of us is a "being with choice." That is, we have the power to choose, to make decisions in our lives. At the same time, our power to choose has limits, for we cannot entirely control what happens to us. The cornerstone of choice enables me to take responsibility for the choices that I can and do make in the context of the communities of which I am a part.

The second cornerstone is **Thinking Well of the Group**. Thinking well of the group begins as simply as choice. If you choose to be in a group or community, you choose it because you think well of it. Thinking well of the group is easy when everything runs smoothly. When something is "off" we are challenged to continue to "think well of" instead of make assumptions based on influences from other experiences or our fears. Thinking well of the group allows each of us to understand that we are all trying to do the best that we can.

A cornerstone equal to and parallel with thinking well of the group is **Thinking Well of Yourself**. What if, in your interactions with your group, you were to build your relationships on the cornerstone that you are a worthwhile being in the process of becoming whole, and so is everyone else? Thinking well of ourselves allows each of us to embrace the responsibility of living up to our worth, expressing our integrity in our actions and interactions with others.

In addition to these three cornerstones, there are two others. The fourth cornerstone is **Stewardship of Self**. This cornerstone suggests that it is our

primary responsibility in life to care for the skills and talents that we have been given. We are all individuals who have unique talents and skills that can be used in service to the community. To think of ourselves in this way suggests that we are participating in a community that appreciates the variety of talents offered by community members, and that understands that we each bear the responsibility for taking care of ourselves.

The final cornerstone is that of **Sacred Wound**. We each enter this community wounded. Our individual wounds are a part of who we are and of our unique vision of the world. They are a part of our becoming and a part of our mythic journey, the great story that we live. Our wounds, although unique, don't set us apart from each other. They are one of our common bonds. They are a piece of our common heritage. We all have stories of pain and heroism. We all can define ourselves by the violations to our soul, the impact on our bodies, or by betrayals that have wounded our hearts. Our wounds are unique, but that we are wounded is not. It is because of them rather than in spite of them that we each enter this community as whole beings. At Diana's Grove, these five Cornerstones of Community are revisited again and again; they provide the foundation for communal intention. In times of confusion and disharmony, the key to the difficulties in interpersonal relationships is that one of these cornerstones is "out of place." Engaging the cornerstones is a tool that can allow community members to realign our self-perceptions and the perception of others when there is conflict or disagreement. To understand that we have choice, to think well of self and others, to take the responsibility to steward our gifts, and to recognize that each of us has been wounded: these cornerstones go a long way in creating healthy and functioning community, and in turn, creating healthy and functional individuals.

Diana's Grove Cornerstones of Community thus provide the communal context in which the spiritual practices that use magic, myth, and ritual to enhance spiritual and personal growth can occur. The idea of magic as "changing (self-)consciousness at will" is supported through myths and rituals that "lay new patterns in the soul." Learning about ourselves in relationship to others takes a lot of work, work that needs to take place in the context of a community of shared values and intentions. Magic, and the cultivation of wonder, can assist in maintaining a commitment to such difficult work. As Robert Fuller suggests, wonder "strengthens our capacity for moral conduct ... by making it possible to envision general orders of existence in reference to which we might make moral judgments. Secondly, wonder motivates prolonged engagements with the surrounding world. By imbuing life with an alluring luster, wonder sustains our desire to connect with the surrounding world."<sup>19</sup> At Diana's Grove, magic, ritual, mythology, and individual and communal transformation are all of a piece; each of these ideas is dependent upon

and works with the other. Spiritual practice is about individual and communal transformation. It is this interconnectedness that reveals the holistic and integrative spiritual quality of the work and practice of Diana's Grove.

### CONCLUSION

Cynthea Jones describes the Winter Solstice 2006 staff meeting as follows:

Our staff gathered on the Winter Solstice. From Ohio, Iowa, Illinois, and Oklahoma, from as far away as Seattle and New York, they came to Diana's Grove. Bunker, Missouri is a crossroads village of 250 people. Seven miles away from us, with two gas stations and a school with a graduating class of seven, it is our closest town. Driving from there down a county highway, the staff came together to end 2006 and begin our twelfth year as a Mystery School and spiritual community.

We lit a candle to honor the people who would leave us and seek another path, for those who would be taken away by the winds of change. We lit a candle for the people we have yet to meet, to honor those who live in the firelight of our imagination. We lit a candle for those who left and now, like the wave returns to the shore, would come back to us after a year or more of other pursuits. And last, we lit a candle for those who, through their consistency, have become the bedrock of our community, the soil that grows our dreams and the dreams of those who find us.

With the year behind us illuminated by candlelight, we talked about why we do it. Why are people willing to travel so far, give so much, and work, not only without pay, but at our own expense? Individual reasons weave the fabric of the group. We shape our times by what we do. That is why we come together every month to create an experience for those who come to the Grove.

Listening to the group share their reasons, dreams and visions, I knew why I want to be a part of this collection. I want to be a part of this fine work because our story is the story of many groups like us. Some larger than we are, some smaller, some with more history, some with less, but imagine us all. Small groups like ours are fighting to make room for a possibility; we are one of many. All across the country, groups like ours meet and dream and believe that we will make a difference in the spiritual climate of our times. Leaders, teachers, organizers, dreamers, unpaid priestesses all, we are deeply committed to shaping our world by creating a place for earth-based spiritual practices.

We are each individuals. No shared doctrine or agreed-upon approach to the way we offer ritual or the deities we believe in . . . and, we are the

same. Religion today is being shaped by small circles that offer a spiritual alternative. I can speak for one group and I do so knowing that I am one of many.

Cynthea's understanding of the transformative possibilities of the work of Diana's Grove suggests the importance of emerging integrative spiritual movements that provide an alternative world view to more established religious paths. Such movements resonate with the ideals of the environmental movement, for human beings do not live *on* the Earth; they live *in and with* the Earth. Whether described in scientific terms as an impersonal global ecosystem or as Gaia, the Earth Mother, the fact is that all life systems from rock to rock star are interconnected. We will do well to find the sacred right where we stand.

In addition, integrative spiritual movements resonate with the ideals of feminism in that they encourage the development of women as skilled leaders, and they encourage the integration of aspects of human life—the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual—not privilege certain power structures over others. Integrative spiritual movements are movements of inclusion in which it is recognized that maleness and femaleness are integral parts of the whole; their interplay forms the basis of all life. Integrative spiritual movements see harmonious balance, where dualistic world views envision a struggle for power between opposites.

Finally, integrative spiritual movements offer a view of the interconnectedness between humans and nature, in all of their manifestations. Personal and spiritual growth are not disengaged from one another; rather, they are necessary to one another. Integrative spiritual movements such as that found at Diana's Grove, suggest that we cannot survive, let alone thrive, without making peace with ourselves, the world around us, and each other.

### NOTES

1. Starhawk (born Mariam Simos in St. Paul, MN, June 17, 1951). Author of several books on Paganism and an ecofeminist, she lives and works in San Francisco with Reclaiming, a tradition of witchcraft she co-founded in the late 1970s.

2. <http://www.dianasgrove.com/aboutus/history.html>.

3. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess*, Tenth Anniversary Edition, Revised and Updated (New York: Harper-Collins, 1989), 16.

4. See Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today*, Revised and Updated (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 9.

5. Jone Salmonsens, *Enchanted Feminism: The Reclaiming Witches of San Francisco* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 1.
6. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess*, Tenth Anniversary Edition, Revised and Updated (New York: Harper-Collins, 1989), 16.
7. See Eugene Gallagher, "Neo-Paganism," in *The New Religious Movements Experience in America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 162–86.
8. <http://www.dianasgrove.com/mystery/index.html>.
9. A sample monthly packet can be found at [http://www.dianasgrove.com/mystery/samplestory\\_workbook.pdf](http://www.dianasgrove.com/mystery/samplestory_workbook.pdf).
10. See Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); see also, Hilde Hein, "Liberating Philosophy: An End to the Dichotomy of Spirit and Matter," in *Women, Knowledge and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*, ed. Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall (Boston: Unwin Hyman Publishers, 1989), 293–311.
11. <http://www.dianasgrove.com/aboutus/earth.html>.
12. <http://www.dianasgrove.com/aboutus/earth.html>.
13. More associations with the elements and directions can be found in *The Spiral Dance*, 251–54.
14. Thomas Moore, *Care of the Soul*. (New York: HarperPerennial, 1994), 271.
15. David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More Than Human World*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1997).
16. <http://www.dianasgrove.com/aboutus/individuation.html>.
17. <http://www.dianasgrove.com/mystery/whymythology.html>.
18. For more information about the cornerstones, see <http://www.dianasgrove.com/aboutus/cornerstones.html>.
19. Robert Fuller, "Spirituality in the Flesh: The Role of Discrete Emotions in Religious Life," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 75, No. 1 (March 2007): 41.

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