



**By Jaime Meyer**

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The audience arrives to find big drum covered with solstice starry cloth, surrounded by other drums, sticks, rocks, or other percussion instruments on their chairs. Everyone drums. Great Wahoo fills the space.

## NARRATIVE

Tonight I'll tell you some stories about the how we are blessed by darkness and by light. Act one will take us into the blessing darkness. After intermission we'll be ready to move into the blessing light, and welcome the winter solstice through the power of the Great Reindeer Goddess.

As we move along, I also want to offer you some opportunities to enter into ceremonial space, to ask for help from the Holy Spirit of darkness, or the Holy Spirit of light, or from the Spirit World, or Sprit, Oversoul, or higher self, or God or Goddess – whatever you want to name it. When it comes time to go into ceremonial space, you are free to approach it any way you like. I'll have more to say about that later. Please keep in mind as we move along that you are not in the least required to believe a word I say from here on out.



Now since I brought up the word—God—I think it's good to define my terms a little. Meister Eckhart, the 14<sup>th</sup> Century wild man mystic says that all language has taken a vow to be mostly wrong about God. I take that to mean that whenever someone opens their mouth and starts yammering about God—no matter how eloquent, how schooled they are, how passionate and certain, how many verses of scripture they have memorized, how wide and excited and bright their eyes, how high the evangelist's hair—they will be mostly wrong about God. This does not diminish the human impulse to describe God—it only is a way of acknowledging the vastness of the mystery and the fact that our tongues are just these small, clumsy, mucous-covered flappy things and human language is just a very small tool with to grasp the Ungraspable.

The Koran speaks of the “99 names of God”—names like The Hidden, The Fashioner of Forms, The Bestower, The Reinstater Who Brings Back All, The Magnificence. The Producer, Originator, and Initiator of all. And 93 others.

In the book of Genesis, the very first name for God, five words in—“when in the beginning, God created the heaven and earth...” the name for God in Hebrew is *Elohim*, and it is plural. There's a lot of theology buried in that, and I'll leave it alone.

Modern theologians who are responding to people's dislike and distrust of religion and their desire for science-sounding definition offer depersonalized descriptions like the

creator is that which “initiates the process and permeates all processes.”<sup>1</sup> The Germans go even farther, as they always do, and have a word: *fliessgleichgewicht*. (the flux-equilibrium that systems contain within themselves — the ability to allow a flow-through of matter-energy and information, the flow-through that makes for a self-stabilizing system.)<sup>2,3</sup>

Drummers have the same word--pronounced in a low, gravelly, flirty, sensuous, kinda naughty sounding tone of voice: *Groooooove...*

In Scots Gaelic, the word for the Creator is *Cruithear* (pronounced coo-tea-r).<sup>4</sup> It means *shaper*. The Shaper. The Irish name for Creator is *Duileamh* (DOOL-yev) which translates roughly into “the one who is inside the elements.” That word, *Duileamh*, also has the root in it of the word for *desire* and *fondness* and *yearning*.<sup>5</sup>

Taken all together, I like to say that the creator is the one inside everything—the one who shapes everything from the inside, who brings everything together and binds everything together through the power of yearning. When I say God, that’s who I am talking about: the one inside the elements who shapes everything from within, through the power of yearning, who is plural, who can dress anyway it wants to dress in order to move us, cajole us, heal us, and love us.

That’s as close as I can get right now with this little mind, and these little words, and this flappy mucousy thing. And I am the only human ever alive who is NOT mostly wrong about God.

And if we open ourselves to that One, and we listen, not just with our ears but with our skin, and our animal bodies and our humans minds and our spiritual imagination, we can be taken into the Groooooove, to be changed and made better and dare I say, wiser, more loving, we can develop what Wu-Wei calls a heart ready for anything. We can be taken into what I like to call *groovelicious rhythmicity*, or the shorthand: the Wahoo.

It’s good for you come up with your own 99 names for God. Because it staves off spiritual constipation. Spiritual constipation comes when your theological imagination shrinks, and then your religious images become hard little stones that lodge inside you,

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<sup>1</sup> Sallie McFague, *The Body of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1993), 77

<sup>2</sup> Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown, *Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World* (New Society Publishers 1998), 40

<sup>3</sup> No wonder theologians have to get tenured at seminaries. They’d never survive outside that little world, talking like that. Imagine a theologian ordering a #2 meal at the McDonald’s drive-up window. Seriously, they’d starve. Okay here’s my try at the joke: “Hmmm, yes. I believe I’d like a post-embodied, non-pneumatic bovine coagulation implanted between dome-shaped yeasted baked goods, with colorful condiments of medium viscosity binding syncretistically the whole into a unity, which bears an unchanging ontology without regard to its physical location in the created universe or self-identity of the preparer. And super-size it.”

<sup>4</sup> Frank MacEowen, *The Mist Filled Path* (New World Library, California, 2002) 127

<sup>5</sup> Tom Cowan, *Yearning for the Wind* (New World Library 2003) 32

heavy and painful. Spiritual constipation makes you real, real cranky. The number one cure to spiritual constipation - and this has been true for as long as humans have been able to mumble - is imagination. Spiritual imagination is the antidote to spiritual arrogance and spiritual warfare. If you open your spiritual imagination you cannot go to war for God. And the reverse is true, in order to create warriors for God the first thing you have to is shrink their spiritual imagination.

And so we are here tonight to honor the spiritual imagination and to activate it, to juice it up, and use it and to descend into its lush, loving, birthing and rebirthing darkness.

Do not analyze music.

Do not explain dreams.

Do not clarify desire.

The Elusive surrounds all

The Elusive permeates all

You must know:

Everything Rhymes.<sup>6</sup>

### 1. Winter Solstice

At this time of year my friend Eileen starts to come to life. Giddy with joy over the winter solstice. But not for the same reason as most of us.

Eileen hates people. She told me a dream she has last summer: The angel of the Lord came to her like he came to the Virgin Mary and said “Hail Eileen, full of grace I give you the power of god to do one act. One act. What will you do?” And she said she summoned all the crows from this world and the other world to come and pick up all the humans and carry them north and feed them all to the wolves. She said “That next day I woke up with a smile so big everyone I met thought I’d spent the whole night humping Justin Bieber.”

About December first she starts her annual grumbling about all of the winter solstice ceremonies that are going to be performed all month long, where lithe women in swishy skirts left over from last summer’s renaissance festival jaunt around with tea candles held aloft, praising the goddess of light and prattling on about new life, and rebirth and hope and optimism. Ah, man, Eileen HATES that.

She says our culture is obsessed with the light, and it’s really because we have this bizarre theology that says you have to choose one side of the polar opposites to love and you must hate the other. So if you have light and dark, you must love the light and hate the dark. So we do, and we live in constant light—that is our theological paradise. But as Eileen says, one of the first ways we torture people is to put them in unending light. She says “it only takes three days before they go bat-shit crazy.”

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<sup>6</sup> These words are from 1950’s German painter and photographer Wolfgang Schulz, known as Wols. Found in Michael Tucker, *Dreaming With Open Eyes: The Shamanic Spirit in Twentieth Century Art* (Aquarian/Harper San Francisco 1992), 36.

Eileen just doesn't want us to forget the blessing darkness, that the dark is the mother of all life, that everything that ever came into being began in the dark womb, and was held and loved and nurtured by darkness. By the way, Eileen is an Irish name, coming from Evelyn which means "light." Don't tell Eileen that, or she'll feed you to the wolves.

The poet Wendell Berry says:

To go in the dark with a light is to know the light  
 To know the dark, go dark. Go without sight,  
 and find that the dark, too, blooms and sings  
 and is traveled by dark feet and dark wings.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Skeleton Woman and Drum Man<sup>8</sup>

### **Jaime drums under story:**

The Inuit, who know a lot about the dark and cold, have this story:

Once there was a young woman who refused to marry. Man after man tried to court her but none were good enough. None had that PIZZAZ. One day an exotic stranger wandered into the village. She took one look at him and thought: Oh Yeah....

When he left the village, she followed him. Farther and farther out into the vast icy expanse he walked and she followed. He began to run, and she ran after him. When he began to change his shape, bend over and run on all fours, she still ran after him. He transformed into a Polar Bear running across the ice, and she followed, running as fast as she could. He dove through a hole in the ice and disappeared into the dark water. She paused at the hole, looked at the black water - and jumped in. She saw him swimming ahead of her, flashes of white moving through the dark current. She saw him swim up to a light filled hole, and climb back onto the land. She swam up to that light filled hole. She tried to climb out but couldn't. Her hands slipped and slipped again and she cried out "help me!" But all she heard was thick paws thumping away into the distance.

Now she slips down, down into the darkness. As she sinks, thousands of tiny fish with teeth like scissors cut away her clothing. And she sinks down. Thousands of tiny fish with teeth like sharp knives cut away her flesh. And down, down she sinks, nothing left but a skeleton in the dark cold water at the bottom of the sea.

But she notices that without her clothes and flesh, she is a little more buoyant. She starts to float upwards, more and more until she reaches that hole in the ice and climbs out.

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<sup>7</sup> *Farming: A Handbook*, Poems by Wendell Berry (Harcourt 1971)

<sup>8</sup> This is my retelling based on a telling by Laura Simms, in *Parabola Winter 1998* (Volume XXIII, No. 4, 1998)

“I should have never followed that man.” She mumbles with her bony jaws. And then she clatters into a heap of bones right there on the ice.

She wakes up wrapped in warm furs, lying in her bed in her house, by a flickering fire. She looks around. Ah, it was all a dream, she smiles. She reaches her hand out from under the covers to feel the fire—and she sees it is all bones. She tosses off the covers. She is a skeleton woman.

Skeleton Woman’s house is far away from all the other houses and she sits outside it, alone, staring across the empty expanse of ice. Skeleton woman is so lonely.

One day two young men wander by. She calls to them to come in and warm themselves by the fire, to take shelter from the cold. They smile and step toward her. But then they see that she is a skeleton woman and they run away in fear and disgust. Skeleton woman hides her bony face in her bony hands and cries in shame.

The two young men get back home and tell their father about what they have seen—a skeleton woman far out at the edge of town, calling to them. There is a skeleton woman in a house far outside the village. She beckoned to us. She wanted to eat us. He listens without saying a word. He puts on his coat, picks up his drum and leaves the house.

Now Skeleton Woman sees Drum Man coming across the snow toward her house. She hides herself. He knocks and knocks and says “Well aren’t you going to invite me in?” When she does, he comes in, sees her and says, “Okay then.” He blows out the candle, casting the house into darkness. He says “I’m going to play my reindeer drum and sing. You dance.”

“I can’t dance” says Skeleton Woman, “Can’t you see? I’m just bones.”

“Yes. I’ve been like that before,” says Drum Man, “Now I’m going to play my reindeer drum and you dance.” And he begins playing his reindeer drum and sing. And Skeleton Woman lumbers and stumbles around clumsily her bones clicking and clacking. And then she sees her flesh beginning to grow back. And she sees her skin growing back. And as she dances, her hair grows back, dark and thick and black. And she dances and dances and her eyes glow like hot embers in the fireplace, like two little dawn suns on solstice morning.

And she takes the reindeer drum from the old man. “All right, old man, now you dance and I’ll drum and sing.” And the old man dances and his white hair turns black and he grows young again.

And then Drum Man and Skeleton Woman go to the man’s house and greet the man’s two sons. The sons don’t recognize them. So the couple leave, hand in hand, giggling and singing and dancing away across the snow. They place the drum on the fresh white snow. They jump into the drum and vanish.

## Drum Stops.

So let's drum our magic drums for awhile and if you need to drum for someone, drum them back into life, drum the flesh back on their bones, drum them a new story, new clothing, feel free. Or if you need to, drum for yourself. If anyone wants to dance the flesh back onto their bones, please do!

## Audience drums.

### 3. I'm in love with Walter Brueggemann (Sometimes this story gets deleted and elements of it appear in other parts of the evening.)

I'm in love with Walter Brueggemann. Officially Walter Brueggemann is an Old Testament scholar and professor at Columbia Theological Seminary. But I think he's a prophet of the imagination. He wrote a little book decades ago called *The Prophetic Imagination*.<sup>9</sup> It's one of those thin little books that you'd skip over on the shelf because it's so small, but it's one of those books that can change the direction of your life.

Brueggemann describes the stories of the prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures – what Christians call the Old Testament. And in these stories of the prophets there is always a king. A Pharaoh, or a king. And it is the job of the king to convince the people that the universe is small and closed. Small and closed. That here is how God made the universe. Here are its boundaries. And it's never going to change because this is the way God made it. And I guess it's no surprise that in this universe, God wanted this king to be king.

The effect of the small and closed universe is that it drains the spiritual energy from the people. And the people become *numb* and *compliant*. Those are Brueggemann's words. Numb and compliant. I don't think are two better words to describe my state of consciousness while watching TV. And the king can do whatever he wants to the world using us as to build his pyramids. Or his palaces. Or his paradise of global corporations.

The modern day Buddhists call that numb and compliant place *The Trance*. It's what Tara Brach calls that shrunken place where we identify with the part of us that is the *defender* or *blamer*, or *wanter* or *ignorer*. That small place where we are shrunken by the powers of craving and fear. The goal of mindfulness and meditation is to move out of that shrunken place and re-establish a direct connection to our larger Self, to The Immensity.<sup>10</sup>

In Islam, this trance place, this shrunken cosmos, is the place ruled by the *Nafs Al Amara*, the lower self, or my favorite translation: the Wanting Creature. It's that creature that all advertising tries to excite, feed and strengthen in us. The Wanting Creature. The advertising industry's job is to urge us to connect with the Small Self, the insecure, wanting creature in us, and then sell us a cure to it. It's not unlike the western church's

<sup>9</sup> [The Prophetic Imagination](#), Augsburg Fortress Publishers

<sup>10</sup> "Evolving Consciousness" Tara Brach podcast, 2011.

message to convince us that we were born sick, with this condition called original sin, and then sell us the cure – salvation, in the story of Jesus. That’s only one version of the Jesus story by the way. It became the most popular through advertising.

So, in the Biblical tradition, the kings always align themselves with the light. That’s why they wear gold and silver and jewels that reflect light. Images of light and darkness are the shorthand of the king. Universally, the King markets himself as an embodiment of light. Whatever the king likes is full of light. Whatever threatens the king’s ability to shrink the cosmos and make the people numb and compliant is darkness.

The role of the Holy Spirit and the prophets, who embody and proclaim the Holy Spirit, is to come and shatter the king’s falsely closed and small universe. To shatter that universe. And the effect of this is that spiritual energy flows into the people, and there is a re-birth of immensity and mystery. And all possibilities are back on the table—all possibilities—imagined, unimagined, and the ones that cannot be imagined in our current state of consciousness. And all hope comes from all possibilities being on the table.

The Holy Spirit comes to re-open our religious imagination, to open us again to Immensity and possibility, and with openness, we regain spiritual energy, and gain the strength to fight the king and his small, closed universe.

I mean, WOW! That’s why I’m in love with Walter Brueggemann. Walter Brueggemann. Say it loud and there’s music playing. Say it soft and it’s almost like praying. Say it with me... Walter Brueggemann. Walter Brueggemann. Walter BrUUUUUegemannnnnnnnnn.

#### **4. The old bone mother**

We are given two great gifts in life. The gift of being created. And the gift of being uncreated. Throughout time, throughout culture, how we respond to these two gifts becomes our religion.

She is the uncreator. The un-shaper. The remover. The sweeper. She is known throughout old Europe, and she is one of the 99 names. The Old Bone mother.

In autumn, around Halloween, she comes out, or wakes up, and moves through the land. And the jubilant colors of summer drain away and become the subtle colors of autumn. And the warm air turns cool, and the darkness grows, and she moves through the land choosing what must be taken away to the other world, what cannot live in this world any longer. She takes what –and who–needs to be taken, whatever has served its purpose and so, must go, or whatever has too much death force in it, and so needs to go so it doesn’t fester and infect this world, and she moves through the land collecting what needs to be taken to the other world where it becomes food for the spirits, and is recycled by them back into this world as food for us.

There's a story of her in Ireland that she moves through the land in autumn collecting the bones of all those who have died during the year, and she takes them down into the hollow hills, and at the winter solstice, she knits them back into life, by singing—she sings them in their next shape.

And we ask her to pass us by—we say not yet, not yet. But maybe old bone mother, will take something from you that needs to be taken—something in you whose time has come, something that has lived in you long enough, and now needs to go, some bit of death in you that doesn't belong in you anymore, some toxin, some spiritual festering, something that has served its purpose and you are done with it, something that is holding the sun down, something that has death in it and so needs to go.

Well, now we are ready to have the old bone mother come into our circle. And as we enter into ceremonial space, I want to emphasize that each of you should feel comfortable approaching this however you wish. You might enter into this seeing it as theatre—as play without spiritual content of any kind—sort of on the level of “Well, I never saw that before.” Or you might look at it as psychological—that it is a enjoyable and perhaps therapeutic thing to go into the unconscious—maybe that Jungian collective unconscious—and stir up dream imagery, because it helps us make sense of life. Or it helps to balance our psyches—but that it is a completely human activity born from inside u, in the human imagination. Or you may look at it as the spirits from the other world coming into the circle—that the human imagination is the point of meeting, the place of translation where our humanity meets those spiritual energies that are not human, and it is in the imagination where the human and the non-human, the divine, can translate messages to one another. Or you can look at it as the Holy Spirit dressing up in any costume it wants to in order to shape and re-shape us. Whatever angle you approach ceremony, what matters most is the yearning. What makes ceremony effective is the level of yearning you bring into it.

Maybe you have something in you to let go of, and maybe you know what it is. Maybe it's a fear, a regret, an anger, a hatred, a confusion, a pattern, a habit, a sadness, a grief, a toxin. If you know what it is that is in you that needs to go, feel free right now to give it up to the old bone mother as she passes by. Maybe you don't know what it is exactly, but you feel there is something that should be taken. Offer that up to the old bone mother if you wish. Maybe you just want to leave it up to her to decide what needs to be taken away from you. She's coming now.

Goddesses begin drumming- a straight, steady monotonous beat. Two goddess bring out the wrapped bones. Jaime puts on the black hood, and lifts the bones out. Jaime unwraps the bones, and passes the bones over the heads of the audience—slowly, touching some who are asking to be touched. It may take 10 minutes, maybe longer. Jaime puts bones away, sings to them. Takes off hood. Leads audience in drumming for about five minutes.

## **Intermission**

## Act Two

The brightly colored prayer rug now has a white and gray reindeer hide spread out across it. On top of the hide, antlers, curving in toward each other at one end, making a small cage—like ribs. Several rattles made with reindeer antler handles are spread out on the hide. The audience drums for a few minutes.

The singers enter, singing.

### 5. Reindeer

The more you know about Siberian shamanism, the cooler Santa becomes. Get this: The Siberian shaman does a ceremony where he or she journeys to the Sky Father to bring back gifts of knowledge and power for his community. He dresses in a warm, fur-lined, ritual costume, with a thick belt with bells hung all around. There are also ceremonies where the community sets up a pole inside the yurt. The yurt is a round hut—like our round place right here, with a smoke hole in the top to let the smoke out from the fire. So they cut down a tree—with all kinds of ceremonies and gratitude—and they drag the tree into the yurt and set it up.

Most of the following text was deleted for 2011:

And the shamans gather in and they eat these hallucinogenic mushrooms called fly agaric (*Amanita muscaria*).<sup>11</sup>

It has a bright red cap on top of a white stem, and it looks—well, really jolly. In the shamanic world, when a plant spirit comes to talk to a human, it often looks like the plant. In the Amazon, the hallucinogenic brew called Ayahuasca is made by a complex distillation from two long vines. And you drink this really stinky brew and you get sick and barf and then have these wild visions. It's great.

Actually I've never used hallucinogens. God knows I don't need them. But anyway, the vision you see looks like the plant. Like when you drink the Ayahuasca, the spirit comes to you like these intertwining snakes.

So it's not a surprise that the spirit of that mushroom would dress up, shamanically speaking, as a jolly guy in bright red cap. And get this: the hallucinogen in the mushroom is so strong that it is still extremely potent even after it has been expelled in the shaman's urine. In fact it's almost as strong after seven passages through a human body.

Now how they figured this out I do not know. But I'd love to see the grant they wrote to research that.

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<sup>11</sup> Peter Lamborn Wilson, *Ploughing The Clouds*. I found this reference in an article by Ross Heaven <http://www.newageinfo.com/fly-agaric-sacred-mushrooms.htm>

So you have the shamans in the yurt eating the mushrooms and then one of them goes outside and urinates. And the reindeer would hang out around the yurt so they could lick up that urine. And that's how reindeer learned how to fly. Okay, that's conjecture.

And the shaman—he or she—drums for a while, and sings for a while, and he opens the door to the spirit world. When the time is right, he or she climbs up the tree, and he sticks his head out of the smoke hole of the yurt. The image is that he has climbed up the cosmic tree that holds up the sky, and he is piercing the boundary between worlds. His head is in the other world, and he asks for answers, or wisdom, or solace for his people. Blessings from the spirits. Then he climbs back down and delivers it all to the people.

So look at our culture—what do we do at this time of year? We cut down a tree and bring it inside and we decorate it with little flames and shiny things to make it look like the universe. And Santa comes down the smoke hole too, into the room. He comes down the smoke hole from the other world, to deliver the gift. He comes down the dark birth canal from the great mother, and into our world, to deliver to us a gift from the great mother.

What is the gift? It is the gift of communication from the spirit world. It is the gift of the life force—the light—brought to us at the darkest time of the year—the coldest, darkest time, when the presence of death is most palpable. When fear and grief are most strong.

He comes bearing the life force. He gives us an injection of the life force, to let us know that in this darkest time, when fear is around us, and when the world looks like it is going to hell, like it's going to die, we wake up after the longest night to find under our little world tree a message from the great mother: I am with you. I do not forget you. I do not abandon you. We are in our symbolically closed universe, inside the yurt. The shaman cracks that small universe open, peers out, gathers in presence and information from the Holy, and brings it back to the people to help them through the darkest time.

We are in such a dark time now, aren't we?

We literalize that gift, and make it into presents—into walkie-talkies and Malibu web cam Barbies. But if you were to change the “t” in presents to a “c”, to make it “Presence” everything about Christmas would change. Some people say they want to put the “Christ” back into Christmas—I just want to put the “c” back in presence.



Several years ago, I met Ailo, a shaman who lives in Northern Norway, from the people known as the Sámi. Ailo taught me a lot in a very brief time. To the Sámi, the reindeer is the mother of life. Their relationship to the reindeer is a little like the relationship between the plains Indians and the buffalo. In a landscape where it is barren and frozen for half the year, the reindeer keep the people alive. The reindeer provides food. It provides power pull a sleigh. The hides provide clothing, the antlers tools. The reindeer is

the life force embodied. It is the giver of life, the mother of life. Ailo told us two beautiful stories about the reindeer.

The first is a creation story. The creator made everything, but it wasn't set in motion yet. The creator calls out and says "who among my creatures will sacrifice their heart to set creation in motion? And the reindeer says I will. And the creator says of course I knew you would. So she sacrifices her heart and paces it at the center of the earth – the center of creation. And it beats and brings life to everything and sustains the life force. So when we drum, we are remembering that beating heart at the center of creation.

The image here is not that different from the idea of "God's steadfast love" found in the biblical tradition. Except that it's female, and inside everything. It is also a similar image that Christians apply at advent and Christmas to the Christ child—that incredibly powerful and silly idea that the creator cares for our well being and so implants love into the world, and we can draw on that love to make our lives better or to just make it through our day.

The other story about the reindeer that Ailo told us was this: at the winter solstice, the great whiter reindeer—the mother of life—goes to the underworld and retrieves the sun the sun brings the sun back from the darkness, bearing it in her antlers. You know in the far north, the winter solstice is like this—you have the horizon, and then a little blip of sun pokes up and then boop, it's gone. That's it. You missed it. But data after day, as the sun—the source of life that calls the crops out of the ground, and the milk into the animals—as it creeps up above the horizon day after day, that's the great white reindeer carrying the sun back from the underworld.

That image sunk deeply into me, and somehow it changed me.

Reindeer are the only species of deer where the females have antlers. Reindeer mate in the autumn, and males shed their antlers at mating time. Probably a really good idea when you imagine two beasts with horns like this really getting into the holly jolly joy of the rutting season. It's all about testosterone. The higher the level of testosterone in the reindeer, the sooner the antlers fall off. So the studlier the guy, the sooner he loses his head covering.

Kind of like guys who begin losing their hair. These are the real men, the men with high level of man-juju in them, the rut-masters, the men who slowly and steadily begin to actually resemble a walking phallus. All praise to the hairless, the real men.

So reindeer at the solstice that have antlers are female, not male as we have imagined them. And they have the antlers because they are pregnant all winter. They are carrying the life force, the next incarnation, the next generation, all through the dark, cold brutal winter. And the antlers are these visible signals that they are protecting and defending the life force, the next generation. It's a signal to the wolves that's ay "Sure, you can try it, but you're likely going to get killed."

So we have our images of the reindeer at this time of the year too, but they are these shrunken, twisted images. We have the little Rudolf with this glowing orb, vaguely between the antlers. Is this a repressed and transformed image from ancient times?

When I first learned this about female reindeer and the antlers, it turned my mind around about this time of year. We are used to thinking of Santa and the reindeer as an all male team. But if the reindeer are female, it turns it around and Santa is in service to her. It's more like he's just the delivery boy of the life force that she sustains and carries and defends. "Okay it's time—get in the sleigh, delivery boy."

And that's why we need to look more closely at Mrs. Santa Clause. We see her as the kindly old lady always at home humming and knitting by the fire. She's about as passive and obedient as the early church fathers would expect. She's June Cleaver of the North Pole. What is she knitting? What is she knitting all the time? We assume she's knitting socks for all the elves. Right?

But I think Mrs. Clause is the old bone mother. Yes. The old bone mother. She moves through the world, doing her job to collect all that dross that needs to be taken to the other world. She gets home, and she says to Santa: Okay I've got to knit these bones into their next shape. Now go do your job. And she sits down and begins knitting the bones into their next shape, singing all the while, probably a song that if Santa heard it he would die from its sheer goddess power, so it's a good thing he's off flying over Brazil.

### **Pause**

Well, that's all a lot of fun, but it's time to tell you how the reindeer came to live inside me. And it's a story I really would rather not tell, because even now maybe fifteen years later I can barely make my way through it, but it's why we are here together, because she wasn't me to tell you this, and so I have to tell it.

And after I've told you this story, we will ask this reindeer spirit to come into the room, and to bring a blessing to those who want to receive one. You don't have to, but you can if you want.

Ailo led us through a ceremony. He asked some people to be drummers and some people to lie down and dream. I was one of the dreamers. My job was to—as best as I could—dream this dream: You are tied to the world tree. The white reindeer comes across the vast landscape. She approaches you. And when she gets a little near, she'll lower her antlers to you and she will stab you in the heart with her antlers. And when she pulls them out, all your life force drains away from you. And you see your life force sinking into the earth. And you will die. And he said: no matter what happens, stay with the dream. Stay with the dream.

So the drummers start drumming: boom boom boom boom boom... And Ailo begins dancing around the circle of dreamers. And he's drumming, using a piece of reindeer antler as the drum stick. Boom boom boom boom. And he becomes the reindeer as he

dances, whirling around and singing, and making little noises. And I have a clear vision of a radiant white reindeer coming across the land. Her antlers backlit by the pulsating orange sun just below the horizon. I'm hanging upside down from a branch of the world tree, tied by my ankles. And bound tight all around. She comes close, and lowers her head, and she stabs me in the heart with her antlers.

I don't know how this happened, but at the same time that the mother of life stabbed me in the heart in the other world, Ailo took the sharp end of his antler drumstick and stabbed me in the chest here in this world. Hard. POW. And I cried out— AHHHHHHHHHHH! in both worlds, in pain, in shock, in grief, in loss.

Stay with the dream. Stay with the dream.

I could hear other people in the room crying one after another—"Agh!" "Arrgh!" "Ack!!"—as Ailo made his way to each and stabbed them. And in the other world, my life emptied out of my body and onto the earth. And I saw my life force drain out of me and sink into the earth. You know like when you toss a glass of water out on dirt and it pools for a minute and then all together, it is just sucked gently down into the earth, and it's gone.

And then I was standing beside my body suspended from the tree. The great mother was next to me and she motioned for me to look around behind me, and I turned around and saw lined up behind me all the people I had met in my life. And I had to say goodbye to each one of them. The ones I loved. Or despised. And envied. And feared. The ones who loved me and soothed me and healed me and taught me and the ones who wounded me. And the ones who I had wounded or humiliated or dismissed. Goodbye. Goodbye. Goodbye. Goodbye. This was her way of helping me understand that I owed everyone a debt of gratitude because whether they knew it or not they helped shape me into who I am.

And then the mother of life told me to get on her back. And I did. And she took me someplace and gave me blessing that I can't tell you about right now. But that blessing will never leave me, and it changed me, it changed me into...this.

It's time to begin our ceremony.



Highlights of explanation for the ceremony:

- Who wants to be a dreamer and who wants to be a drummer?
- Don't worry, no one is going to die here tonight.
- How you can view this: as theatre / as fantasy / psychology / or as a visitation of the spirit world/ or as the Holy Spirit. It's your choice.

- What will happen: I'll drum a little and sing to set the ceremonial space. Then the reindeer women (the singers) will come in and they will become the emissaries of the great white reindeer. They will drum and some of them will come out into the audience to give you blessing.
- Remember the international signal for "yes—bless me" is openness—palms out or eye contact. The international signal for 'stay away from me you new age kook' is arms crossed, no eye contact, a "no" look on your face. And for god's sake don't cross one arm and hold one palm open, or no one knows what will happen to you.
- To the drummers: your job is keep the beat. Support the experience. Eyes open. Don't dream. Drum.
- To the dreamers: your job is to Dream. Trust. Don't analyze. Don't worry. Just let yourself go as deep as you want to. Open. Imagine. You can close your eyes if you wish. Let yourself imagine the reindeer coming and giving you a blessing. Something that will protect you from the darkness, or will infuse you with the life force. Anything can happen. Trust the images. Trust your emotions. If you experience grief, or anger, or other hard suffering emotions, look at it as cleansing, and let it happen. If you want to cry or laugh, let it come. Let it come. If you experience joy or laughter, or calmness, trust it. Let it come. If you experience nothing, trust it.
- You don't have to believe what I am about to say: The reindeer will come, whether you feel it or not, whether you experience an emotion or a vision, or boredom. The mother of life will come. It is in her nature not to remain hidden once the door is open, and once we have called out to her.

Reindeer Goddesses circle the altar. Jaime rattles over them as a way of preparing them to bless the audience and making them safe to embody the reindeer goddess.

Drummers Drum. Dreamers Dream. Jaime lays on reindeer hide. Then eventually disappears into the reindeer, and then stands and begins dancing as the reindeer, hoisting the antlers, spinning. Women move through the audience blessing people. When they are finished, they stand at the back of the audience. This takes about 10 minutes.

Reindeer dance and blessing ends. The suaidne4c e drums. The Reindeer Goddesses begin singing.

**The end.**