

The Storm Gathers

By Starhawk

We are out in the backyard of the Pagan Cluster House, holding a training for the cluster. I'm tired, and my right shoulder blade is tied in a tight knot that all the massage therapists at the Unitarian ritual were unable to undo, but I'm grateful to have a slightly relaxed morning, where we can train in our back yard instead of running off to deal with a crisis somewhere.

We do a quick role play--the police are raiding the house--what do you do? The group is scattered, confused, but makes some good decisions and some not so good. Juniper and I play the cops, run around to the doors and bang on them. The cluster locks the doors and doesn't let us in. A small group comes out on the sidewalk to negotiate with us. I send Juniper off to the side, tell them, "Look, I'm your friend here. There's no problem unless you create one. Officer Juniper, she gets a bit out of control. I wouldn't want to let her loose in your house. But all we need is a bit of information...."

They don't buy it, demand to see their lawyer, claim they are just visiting and have no keys. Then Scott walks up, late, walks up to the house, and pulls out his key. I snatch it out of his hand and head for the door. Song grabs it away from me and I beat her with my baton, made of rolled up newspaper. It doesn't actually hurt, but the point is made. We stop the role play and debrief, about what to do if the police were to come, why it's not a good idea to talk with them (and a worse idea to snatch things out of their hands!), teach the magic words: "I am going to remain silent. I want to see a lawyer."

We do some of the grounding and awareness techniques, then move on to some energy work. I put people in pairs, to speak for a moment or two about something they feel passionate about, and silently cheer for each other. Then I talk about how that silent cheering is energetic support, and it's a gift we can

give each other and give to our groups, a way to create an atmosphere of support and appreciation and joy.

We form a circle and I suggest we create a space in which we consciously support each other's strong emotions, whatever they are. We might visualize that as cheering, or as sending a flow of water, or a beam of light, or whatever each person wants--but as a group we create an energy base that can give us room to express the feelings we haven't yet had time to deal with, grief or fear or rage. Even as we begin, a few people are crying. One by one, people step into the circle and speak from the heart. "I'm new to this, and I'm completely terrified." "I'm absolutely enraged that we have to be doing this." "I feel this incredible fear and incredible hope, and I'm overwhelmed with the responsibility of helping to make this transformation happen. There's so much at stake." Some just cry, others ask for a song, Around the circle we are sobbing. Something has happened to me since Cancun: I'm not stuck in the state of calm fatality that is so useful when preparing to go dance into a line of riot cops. I'm fully feeling my own well of grief, the pain that I can so easily stir up if I let myself think too much about Genoa or Palestine or just the everyday level of force I've seen used against us. Or if I let in the pain of the homeless woman on the street or the millions, the billions, she stands for. I want to go into the center and say that I spent weeks of the summer crying alone every day about what I'd seen in the spring in Palestine, releasing the grief I'd held from supporting the teams who'd been with Rachel Corrie when she died, and Brian Avery when he was shot, and Tom Hurndall when he was shot in Rafah. I'd trained Tom, just a few days before, running him and the group through role plays, teaching them to ground and stay in wide awareness. I know rationally that nothing we might have done in the training could have kept him safe, running into gunfire to save some children who were being shot at by snipers from an Israeli gun tower, but I still feel some deeper link of responsibility, a grief so sharp that sometimes I feel as if my bones were literally aching with it. Someone steps into the center and says, "The worst that could happen to me is that I would die in this action, and I'm okay with that." And I think, "No, no--that's not the worst."

And with the grief comes the fear, and with the fear the rage that I never, never get to fully express. Finally I step into the center, grab a newspaper baton, and simply beat the ground. I'm beating with the wide swing of a drummer, knowing the power comes from freedom of motion, and the rage, which is after all just energy, is flowing freely through me and it feels so, so good. And I want to stay in the center and say, "Yes, I feel

an overwhelming responsibility, I've exerted all my influence and persuasion to bring people here, to nurture this mobilization and help provide its infrastructure and make it possible for people to be in the streets in a strong and coherent way. And I feel like we are diving into the rapids, and one slip in steering, one falter at the oars, and we'll be swamped. And I'm scared, too."

But the act of swinging and beating is enough. I don't want to belabor it with words, or take more than my fair share of time. I step out, others step in. Lisa is not here--she's off at the Convergence Center at a meeting, and Charles is there coordinating trainings, and I'm sorry they both are missing this. Lisa, especially, has been carrying so much for so long. It would be good for her to receive some of the true love that is flowing in this circle.

On Sunday the New York Times ran a long profile of her, with a full page picture, and while the article was accurate, and captured some of the true breadth and subtlety of the work she does in organizing and alliance building, it's worrisome because it could so easily set her up as a target. And nothing any journalist writes can truly capture all sides of a person. The article shows one facet of who she is--the tough, bright, incredibly dedicated organizer of deep integrity. But it doesn't show her sweetness, or how she loves to garden, or how she will squat down and play with any child and become a kid herself again. So it makes her both more and less than human, and it's like painting a target on her back, saying, "Here's a leader--come and get her." And while we don't have leaders, we do have bottom-liners, as we say, people who stand below and pick up all the pieces, and Lisa picks up a lot.

And just as we are completing this phase of the ritual, Ruby comes in to take Juniper aside. The Feds are at our other rented house where some of the EcoBloc are silk screening T-shirts in the back yard, and they need Juniper to come with the lease to prove they have legal occupancy. I step aside and tell her to stop for a moment, let's think. We don't have to show them the lease. We don't have to show them anything or say anything to them and maybe shouldn't even go over there. But the EcoBloc are alone there and want her support. She and Ruby go. I decide to finish the ritual before sharing the information with the group, and we continue by building a shared image of power, the rising of a mighty river that is flowing over Miami now, reclaiming the earth. Then we sit down and tell everyone that our role play has become real. We review the security plans for the house, and decide to collect all our

support information now. In the middle, we get a call from Juniper that the Feds have left. She and Ruby come back with Lisa, and we hear the story.

Our visitors were from the FBI, and they claimed to be responding to complaints from the neighbors, just checking that we have legal occupancy, just wanting to go in and make sure we're not making weapons. They are doing us a favor, trying to save us from a visit from the Miami police who can easily get out of control. We laugh, wondering if they took their script from our role play, or vice versa. Juniper and Ruby didn't give them information, just sat and said they would wait for their lawyer to appear, and finally the FBI got bored and left.

The incident confirms what I saw in last night's vision--eyes watching us. Being here in Miami is a bit like being under the red, all-seeing eye of Mordor, a sense of continuously being under a hostile gaze. We always assume they are watching us--and there's actually nothing we're trying to hide. Goddess knows, all they have to do is check my website to find out everything I'm doing in Miami. I've been a public person for twenty-five years, a writer whose trade is the exposure of my own most intimate emotions, and that's just not compatible with clandestine actions or weapons production. We know they know who we are--if we had any doubts, the five customs agents who met my plane coming back from Cancun and took me off for a special search were a hint. It's the kind of welcome that makes a girl feel real special!

At any rate, we go off to the Convergence Center, where I do another training, hang out for a while, and manage not to go to any meetings. The state has not approved our use of the field for housing, the city has not come through with anything and we have nowhere for thousands of people to sleep.

Then Lisa and I head down to the fence to see the Root Cause march come in, ending their thirty-four mile trek from Fort Lauderdale. Root Cause is the coalition of people of color, the Immokalee Workers, Power U, and the Workers' Center, who want to draw attention to the FTAA's impact on farm laborers, immigrants, and the working poor.

The march is still some blocks away, so we walk down to the fence where squads of riot cops in full regalia are practicing their moves, running out in front of the fence to guard it. They look frightening at first, until we realize they are trying and failing to get their spacing just right, trying to get exactly an arm's length from each other and messing it up, so it becomes

a bit like watching a rehearsal of a chorus line all dressed in boots and body armor and balaclavas that hide their faces and black jackets with no visible badges or names. The wind is rising and I feel the presence of Oya, orisha of the whirlwind, of fire and storm and revolution, sudden transformations and wild, chaotic change. Great forces are gathering here: beneath the outward mobilization I sense a confluence of enormous energies and powers, and nature herself feels angry, enraged at the continual violation. The clouds roll in like a drum roll, and the stage is set for Oya to dance.

Back at the Convergence Center, we hold our spokescouncil. Some representatives from the AFL-CIO have come and I show them around the Convergence Center. "Who organizes this?" they ask, and I explain the amazing self-organizing process at work. The room is packed, and the roll call of affinity groups shows over five hundred people represented--and that's probably a very low estimate. The big item on the agenda is to confirm our mutual assurances with labor, the agreements we've come to so that their legal, permitted march and our direct action can occupy the same day and roughly the same space. The labor representatives speak, offering their support and solidarity to us, and everyone claps and cheers. We understand that this is an historic moment, as leftie groups are fond of saying--that we have a strength and a solidarity going into this action that we've never had before. That's the result of a lot of people's work, including Lisa's, who bridge both worlds, and if we can make it work here, it will be a powerful alliance, one that could potential change the face of politics in this country.

The sticking point is whether the direct action people will agree to leave the fence or cease action when the march begins. After a bit of dialogue, I suggest that a few of the people who feel most strongly about the issue, and a few of the people who have been involved in the ongoing negotiations, go off and hammer out a proposal. They do. Meanwhile we continue with the meeting. Sara makes our proposal--that at the 5:00 p.m. reconvergence for actions after the march we stage a Witches and Anarchists Masquerade Ball, bringing brooms and drums and pots and pans, and march back to the fence. A number of groups seem interested in participating.

At the end, the negotiators return with a simple proposal. We get consensus quickly that the part of the fence the march will come by at Flagler and 2nd will remain a low-risk spot throughout the day. The labor/direct action alliance takes another step forward.

And then we bring everyone out to the next-door field which just today Lisa has secured for us to use, for an Anarchist/Pagan ritual. This has come out of discussions a few of us have had over the last few weeks, and is another odd alliance that has grown over years, now, of trust building. Harry stands up and says that anarchists have sometimes received support and sometimes not, but one group that always been there for them is the Pagans. Everyone cheers. And they want to repay us, he says, by doing the best goddamned ritual anyone has ever seen!

So we move to the field with a dozen bucket drums and big plastic barrels and a few sticks to hit them with, and begin a drum circle. We've decided to just do the whole thing drumming and moving energy and not do all our usual preludes and talking and invoking and singing and the kinds of solemn things that can put people off. The drumming is hot and it brings the energy of the crowd together, probably eighty or a hundred people. Part of the intention of the ritual is to open up a space to express rage and transmute it into a form that is powerful but sustainable, and opens up our compassion which is rage's sister. I put a big plastic barrel in the center, pick up a cardboard tube, and begin whacking it as hard as I can, letting the energy flow until the tube disintegrates. I do it consciously, as a symbolic statement that if I can let loose my rage, anyone can do whatever they want, and because it feels so good. My shoulder is no longer hurting. People do amazing and creative things with that barrel--some whack it, some crawl into it, some roll it around, some hug it, one woman sits on it like a horse and whips it behind her. Then someone claims it as a drum, and Lisa brings in a pan of fire and begins burning paper and cardboard. We move in and out, burning paper, stomping out smoldering ashes, burning cardboard, playing with fire.

Then others begin to unroll black ribbon, and weave a web between us. We add in white yarn and red, tying and twisting the strands together, and people move into the spaces and dance. The Pagans have begun a chant under the drumming, and the Anarchists join in--"No army can hold back a thought, no fence can chain the sea, the earth cannot be sold or bought, all life shall be free." The chant builds and the drumming slows and strengthens and everyone is having an incredibly good time in the freest, most fluid, best goddamned ritual I've ever seen--or at least a damn strong candidate! Then the chant begins to shift into wordless singing, voices rising with a sweetness and a harmony and a powerful love that imbues the web and the night and the stars and all of us with a fierce and

powerful love. At the end, we break the web apart, twine pieces of it together as the Koreans twined their rope, tie them around each others' wrists as a symbol of our twined power. And the night ends with singing.

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