

# Solstice in Calgary

By Starhawk

In Calgary's Olympic Plaza, across from City Hall, stands a grouping of statues honoring the Famous Five: Five women who in the early '20s brought the landmark court case which officially established that women in Canada are legally, persons.

They sit, somewhat larger than life, caught in bronze, drinking tea. One lifts a glass, one peers forth earnestly, one stands and looks on and another points as one lifts high a scroll proclaiming "Women are persons!" They are older women, white, affluently dressed in a bronze rendition of the clothing of the twenties, sitting in oversized chairs and drinking from giants' teacups. Within their grouping, a circle is inscribed bearing their names.

It is here we decided to do our impromptu Summer solstice ritual, our affinity group that has just grown to eleven with Rusty's safe arrival, joined by a few of our organizer friends, mostly from the legal collective. We gather late, after the meetings and trainings are over, spend time chatting among the statues who seem alive. I am tired, I admit to myself.

Finally we make a circle, do a short grounding, cast a circle from within the statues who seem to be alive, observing us, raising a their cups in a silent toast. We call in the directions, the moon and the sun. I make an offering of Waters of the World to the spirits of the land, ask for permission to do our ritual there. The opera house is letting out across the street, and a few people stop and stare. A few homeless people wander by, and a couple of teenage boys who stand and laugh. A bearded homeless man who looks like a worn-out version of an ancient prophet wanders to the edge of the circle. As I ask the spirits for help and support in the action, the prophet beams at us, raising a hand in benediction. I am thinking about fairy tales where the gods appear as beggars. I know that our prayer has been answered.

We have decided to work two pieces of linked magic: to create a vortex, a drain for fear, here in the center of Calgary, to siphon off the fear that is being dumped on the city daily, the warnings about protestors being terrorists, the warnings by the police to people who would rent to us that their houses will be bombed if they do, the instructions to all teachers and school personnel not to talk to us, the whole usual boring campaign of criminalization. And the larger fears perpetrated on all of us to justify the crackdown on all of our rights and freedoms.

As a counterforce to the drain, we need to create a wand or opposite pole, something which can draw in and ground positive forces, hope, vision, courage, justice, love of

liberty, truth.

We begin chanting, the wordless A O O A chant which opens the gates between the worlds. Charles steps out of the circle to walk the edge, guard us and our possessions as we slip quickly into trance.

The vortex opens up immediately. It's like a giant whirlpool, flowing both clockwise, like water down a drain, and counterclockwise, the direction of releasing. It's sucking fear out of us, out of the city, out of the rest of the world. I suddenly become aware of how much fear we walk through every day, how it clouds our vision and slows our steps, like walking through a heavy, gray, toxic snowfall. And what it would be like to be fearless, weightless, dancing in a world of clarity, doing what we needed and wanted to do without the clutching sense of dread. Earlier in the night, during our direct action training, we were discussing tear gas, pepper spray, rubber bullets, tasers, cattle prods, and all the other weapons that might be used against us. "Remember, they are all weapons of fear," Charles had said. If we truly drain the fear, if we don't respond out of fear, all the weapons are disarmed.

"If you are fearless, you are invincible," I hear. I am thinking of the ride to Nablus a few weeks back when I was in Palestine with a group making our way into Balata, a besieged refugee camp. We were talking about what level of risk we were willing to take. "I'm willing to die," Neta had said. We'd had a long talk the night before, about her month in Arafat's besieged compound in Ramallah, with little food or water, together with other internationals committed to peace and with Arafat's own security forces armed with Kalashnikovs and prepared to fight a war. She had been telling me about one of her friends, how much he loved and enjoyed life, and how completely he was ready to die. They all were: they faced the daily, moment to moment reality of their imminent death, and her face is glowing and her eyes are shining as she describes how they fed the wounded first and shared the food they had and the love they felt for each other.

"And after enough time expecting to die," she says, "you start to want to run out and meet it. To grab a rifle and go out under fire and just say, 'Okay, kill me.'"

Caoimhe, who was also there, hated it, felt trapped in the place she was not supposed to be, unable to get out and be with her own close friends who were being massacred in Jenin. She is far, far more cynical about what was going on, insists that Arafat and his close guard were eating well upstairs. The others in our group in the van to Nablus agree that we are willing to risk our lives, that we have accepted the possibility that we could die in this work. "But I'd be really, really pissed!" I say. "I am willing to give my life for the cause, but I would take a lot, lot, lot of convincing that my death would be anywhere near as valuable as my life. Or yours, Neta, or yours or yours..."

All of this is swirling in my mind as the vortex grows, and I think about the suicide bombers, who are also fearless because they seek death, and so become unstoppable. And how much trickier it is to become fearless while seeking life. And yet that is what I believe we are called to do. I am still in a state of awe and gratitude and wonder just from the kids in the training-some of them totally new to any form of protest, and scared, and some of them veterans of Quebec City or even Genoa who are back, again

and again, as if some cosmic hand has tapped them and said, "You! I want you as one of my agents of transformation."

The chant swells and ebbs and I think about the pole, the wand of the ancient wizard I saw in a dream. He was teaching a group of us how to use a wizard's staff. It had to be thick, wide, he warned us, not a skinny little branch that would break under pressure. "If you think this is powerful when it's not activated," he'd said, "when it's awakened it can move mountains!" We need some mountains moved, desperately. "Where I'm going, I can't take a staff," I had said to him in the dream, thinking about actions and jails. "You can use mine, as an inner image," he said.

I picture it rising out of the vortex. It becomes a pillar of fire, that becomes the trunk of tree, its roots a web of fire in the core of the earth, its branches reaching up beyond the highest heavens, alive to draw down sunlight and moonlight, alive with squirrels and birds and animals. I look around the circle. We are all having the same visions.

I sense movement behind me. Two homeless people are standing there, an aboriginal man and a slight, old woman with short gray hair who is holding Charles' hand and dancing to the music. Suddenly I feel that she should come into the center and dance. She starts to come into the circle and Charles starts to gently guide her away but I shake my head and he lets her go. She begins to dance.

She is completely, utterly drunk but her dance is clear and graceful and beautiful, an uncensored movement of the energies we are raising, a spontaneous ballet. Her face is still, enraptured, her hands and arms become precise, expressive; her feet keep the rhythm as her hips sway. I am thinking of a ritual long ago when I took on the aspect of the Baba Yaga, the ugly old hag witch of Russian Fairy tales, who told us, "Once I had a beautiful face!" I think that it has been a long time since anyone has seen this woman's beauty, and I am silently cheering for her, because she has become the hag who when embraced becomes the beautiful goddess of the land, the crone, the ancient unloved broken hurting drunk and battered Earth herself, taking visible form for us, drinking in our attention and admiration and love.

When the chant ends, and the dance is over, she throws herself into Laura's arms. "It's been so long," she sighs. "So long since I've been loved." She tells us she is going to change her life. I am old enough and wise enough to know this may or may not last, that the woman in her finite, human life may or may not take this love and go the tremendous distance she would need to go to heal. "This looks bad," her husband is murmuring as he leads her away. But she has become, for a moment, the Goddess in visible form for us. That is the promise, after all, of the Pagan gods, that they will actually manifest if we have eyes to see them. We have witnessed a true miracle.

We ground the energy. I look up, and catch the eye of the statue of one of the Famous five who was a pillar of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. I tell the others and we all laugh.

So here we are, in staid, conservative Calgary, with a vortex established, the gates between the worlds propped open, the military massing, the action gathering, on the longest day of the year.

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