

For people who lose a child from miscarriage, still birth, termination, failed fertility treatment or cot death, there is often no ceremony to be conducted, no ritual to perform to assist in coming to terms with the trauma.

For women the physicality of the experience adds a further dimension to that experienced by the father of the child. Conversely, the male partner's grief can be overlooked at a time when they too are struggling with the loss of their son or daughter, and are bereft, not knowing what to do. As shamanic practitioners we may be able to offer a way through.

My work as a shamanic practitioner and acupuncturist allows me the gift of working in the weaving and un-weaving of the energetic blocks and holes we humans weave, pragmatically assisting people with their grief. The shamanic roots of acupuncture use needles as 'arrows of intent', to move *qi (chi)* which may be blocked. Energy which was lost can be returned and energy which is misplaced can be removed - direct parallels to classical soul retrieval and extraction work.

Linda was a 42-year-old child protection social worker who had suffered three miscarriages, two failed I.V.F treatments and had undergone successive surgery to remove endometriosis, a painful condition that leads to heavy menstruation. She loved children and dedicated her life to the protection of children in a system fraught with under-funding and bureaucracy. The fact she had no child of her own led to her taking time off work with depression. Her marriage was in jeopardy as her husband refused to participate in more fertility treatment, as he couldn't stand the emotional pain for himself, or see Linda go through the process again. Linda remarked that she "didn't feel herself anymore" and felt "lost."

During our work together, Spirit showed me how each loss she experienced with the miscarriages and I.V.F treatments, led to parts of her soul leaving with the soul of the unborn child who so desperately wanted to incarnate with her.

She was severely diminished. The holes in her energy web were filled with the energy of the souls of the children she had attempted to protect in her social work, providing

sanctuary for them in her womb at the cost of her own soul loss.

The ceremonial work we did took place over a year and a day, retrieving those parts of herself which she had placed in non-ordinary reality, and extracting and returning that which she had been given and taken. Her health

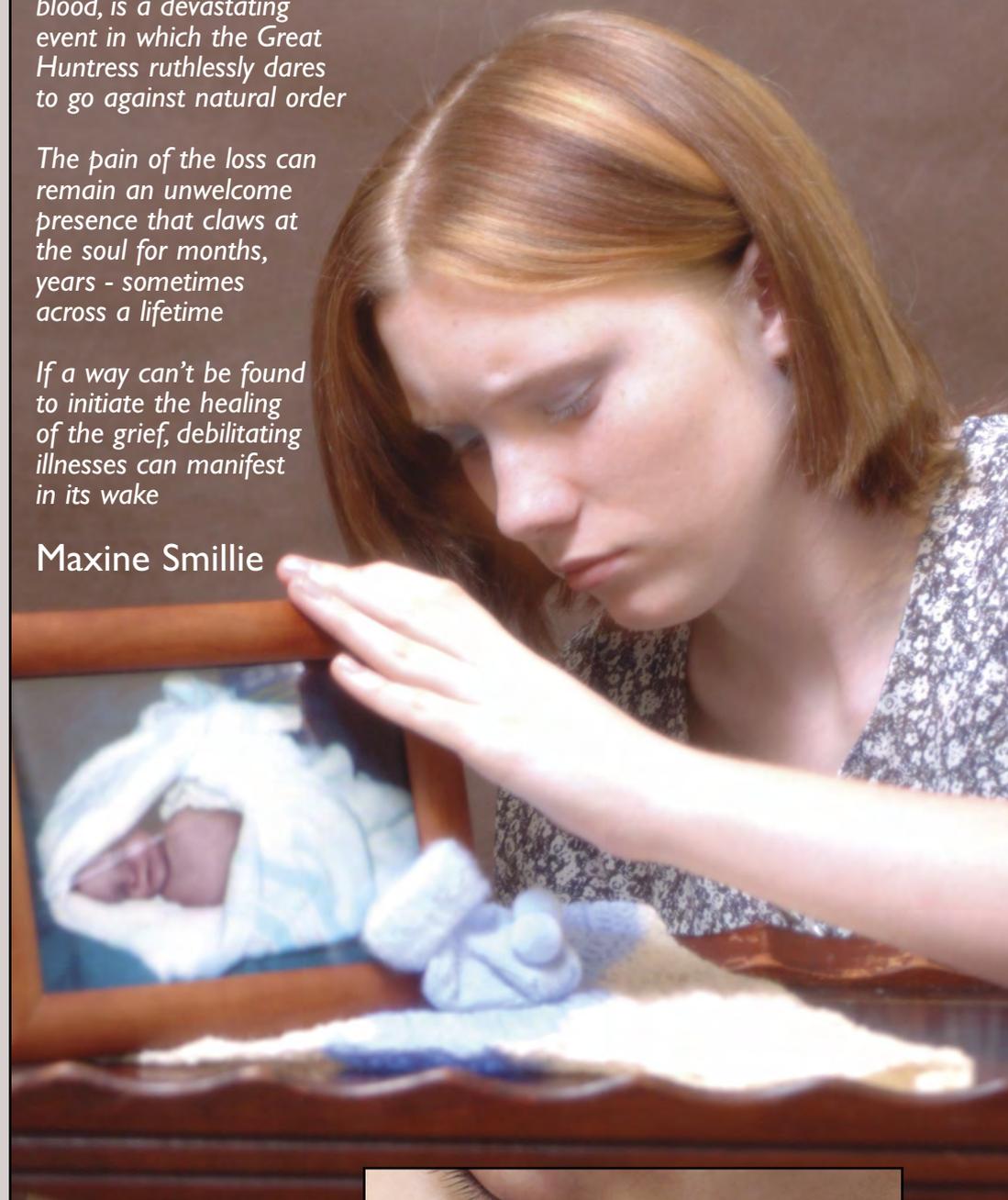
# RELEASING INTO Grace

*The death of one's own child, one's own flesh and blood, is a devastating event in which the Great Huntress ruthlessly dares to go against natural order*

*The pain of the loss can remain an unwelcome presence that claws at the soul for months, years - sometimes across a lifetime*

*If a way can't be found to initiate the healing of the grief, debilitating illnesses can manifest in its wake*

Maxine Smillie





*When I am initially contacted by someone who is seeking a way forward through their grief, I am struck by how often the conversation starts with the words “I know this sounds silly-odd-weird, but...!”*

improved vastly and her husband, Rob, also came, intrigued by the changes he observed after his initial cynicism.

At the time of writing, Linda and Rob are awaiting the birth of their second child, their son being born nine months after their healing work with Spirit.

For some, the loss of their child makes them want to try for another straight away, whilst others wish to wait. Many women who come to work with me carry a great deal of fear around the issue of their fertility, often experiencing illnesses of the womb, such as menstrual pain, infertility, fibroids, or the ceasing of menstruation altogether. Men may discover a diminished sperm count, lack of sperm mobility, or erectile dysfunction.

Infertility in both women and men in the West is increasing. The use of assisted fertility treatment has become 'normal' in a society which is out of balance, no longer feeling the 'pulse of the Earth', her fecundity within us. Much of the fertility treatment I undertake for patients is based on the release of pain in the body, supporting the person to come into balance, and seeking a newfound definition of their divine femininity and divine masculinity. To discover one's potency as a fertile, sensuous being empowers one to move forward, planning a spirit-driven, sacred conception.

The healing ceremonies for individuals and couples that I facilitate tend to be simple ritual forms, with the use of my voice and the ancient shamanic ally - the drum. Several years ago Spirit showed me a beautiful image of the very first drumbeat we all experience, being the moment when the sperm meets the egg, the moment of conception-creation, life.

Each individual has to decide at what point life begins for them, and many I work with feel it is at different stages of pregnancy. For some it is when the baby takes its first breath. One must be sensitive to the differing feelings on this subject when people are coming to terms with death.

Spirit always fills the room with so much love and compassion it is tangible. During one family ceremony a two-hour candle burnt brightly for nearly five hours. I was informed by the nine-year-old present at her mother's healing that a "very shiny angel came and kept putting love in the flame, so we can always see in the dark".

When I am initially contacted by someone who is seeking a way forward through their grief, I am struck by how often the conversation starts with the words "I know this sounds silly... odd... weird... but...!"

People seek a language for that which they are experiencing, but have none. To find words for the sadness and rawness they feel, to put into words and admit to themselves the depth of despair at 'not feeling able to move on' is difficult for them. Often women come to me who have been through counselling, and yet well-meaning friends and family still say to them "well, you should be over it by now", which simply adds to and exacerbates their distress.

Ceremonially, with shamanic journeywork as preparation, my spirit allies and I design the healing work appropriate for each person to 'Release into Grace' that which no longer serves them.

Over the years I have developed a body of work that I call 'Reclaiming the Womb', which culminates in a ceremonial gathering for women to explore the power of the womb and their connection to the Earth and Moon, exploring the stages of menstruation, fertility, menopause and beyond the menopause - a sadly neglected area of our elder women. There is an equivalent for men too, 'Sun, Moon and Earth - on being a man'.

Often women who participate in this work find they have used their womb as a kind of warehouse to store a whole range of negative emotions, from rage to despair. Past abuse, grief, trauma, rape and painful childhood issues can



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be held deeply, as women in modern Western culture are no longer taught how to release and heal these blocks through the menstrual cycle.

Ceremony brings the unique healing that is tailor-made by Spirit for them at that moment in their lives, extracting blocks and returning their soul essence. If we can support women to re-connect and remember the phenomenal potential of their womb - the true holy grail and void of creation - and harness their creative energy, they can dream into being for themselves, a life of balance and beauty. This not only brings healing and beauty to the women involved, but also gifts it to their families and the wider community, forming an energy which is truly 'environmentally conscious'.

On listening to the story of the death of a parent's child I am amazed at the human capacity to endure. I feel privileged and blessed to bear witness to these individuals who have been brave enough to step out of their usual experience in the quest for healing.

When I explain to them how I work as a shamanic practitioner - retrieving what is theirs but has been lost, or placed somewhere safe by themselves in order to survive, and releasing that which should not be there - people understand. Tears come from a place of primal knowing, a relief that someone can put into words that which they feel but are often scared to utter for fear of being judged or thought crazy.

We must never forget how big a leap this can be. Many women say that they feel, or see out of the corner of their eye, the child that was with them, or is waiting to be conceived. Many dream of their child, often the child in spirit, wanting to come to their chosen parents in preparation for their arrival. An embryologist told me that as he mixes sperm and egg during fertility treatment, he often feels a 'cold whoosh' go over his hands, so he silently says, "Welcome".

Sometimes the healing work is concerned with someone coming to terms with the realisation that they are not going to be a parent and physically birth their own child, but that doesn't mean they cannot create and nurture. It is just going to be done in a different way. Spirit often insists during the time of integration after the healing ceremony, that people make things; embroider, write, carve - a practical, tactile, grounding form of healing in itself. In follow-up sessions I am constantly amazed at the gifts people find within themselves, the beauty which is created much to their own amazement.

In my maternal Romany family, when a father lost a child, he was strapped to the back of his horse and would scream and shout to release his grief as the horse galloped, the horse's hooves drumming his pain out of him as they rode together. This was undertaken for up to 40 days or until the ancestors said he was free.

Not having this community support available, Rob, whom I mentioned above, borrowed a motorbike after his healing and went off for two weeks - just riding the motorbike where his nose led him. On his return he shared how he spent most the days crying and shouting as he rode, after having conversations with the son he always believed he was going to have, and his grandfather whom he never knew. He was amazed at how the process had shifted him.

My fellow shamanic practitioners, there is a growing need for us to offer this system of healing to our community. Be bold in your advertising, adventurous in your networking as people are looking, yearning for the sacred to enter into their lives.

Maxine Smillie has an acupuncture and shamanic healing practice in Wales and also in the Forest of Dean. She has been working with spirit since childhood, facilitating individual sessions and workshops.

She co-founded Divine Women Workshops with Sally Randell to promote ancient healing arts in an easy accessible and relevant way, weaving the pragmatic with the poetic.



Above: ICSI (Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection) is a form IVF that involves the direct injection of a single sperm into an egg

