

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

© Thanks are due to the following for permission to reprint material copyrighted or controlled by them.

Janet Morley for two prayers from *Celebrating Women and All Desires Known*.

Diane Mariechild from *Mother Wit: feminist guide to psychic development*. The Crossing Press, Freedom, CA, 1982, p146. (it is also found in *Women at the Well*)

Winter Miriam Therese *Women Wisdom*, (NY. Crossroad, 1991). p154.

PA Sandle, Dunedin, 20.2.92 for *SHEDDING Psalm of a Rape Survivor*.

Liturgy of Healing from Abuse for Women

**A pastoral liturgy produced by
The Liturgical Commission of the
Anglican Church in Aotearoa,
New Zealand and Polynesia**

Resources

Suggestions Of Readings

Psalms 13, 27, 22, 55, 118, 140,
(Omitting portions that seem to continue the cycle of violence)

Isaiah 61: 1-3 The Spirit of the lord is upon me
Jeremiah 31: 1-13 Joyful return of the exiles
St Matthew 19: 13-15 Little children blessed
St Mark 5: 25-34 The women with the haemorrhage
St Luke 13: 10-17 The bent over woman
Romans 8: 35-39 Nothing can separate us from God's love
1 John 4: 7-21 God is love

Short readings

Isaiah 51: 1-3
54:4-5, 11-14,
55: 12
65: 17-19

1 Cor 3: 16-17
2 Cor 5: 17
6: 16-17
1 Peter 2: 9

Books

Keene, Jane A. *A Winter's Song: a liturgy for women seeking healing from sexual abuse in childhood.* New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1991.

Ward Hannah and Wild Jennifer, *Human Rites*, London.. Mowbray, 1995

McRae McMahan Dorothy, *Echoes of our journey.* Melbourne: JBCE, 1993.

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REFLECTION SELF-BLESSING

Gather together a white candle, a small bowl or cup of water and a stick of incense. Pick a quiet time and space. Light the candle and incense and sit quietly, letting all tension slip away and all worried thought leave your body/mind.

Dip your fingers in the water and touch your eyes saying, 'Bless my eyes that I may have clarity of vision.'

Dip your fingers in the water and touch your mouth saying, 'Bless my mouth that I may speak the truth.'

Dip your fingers in the water and touch your ears saying, 'Bless my ears that I may hear all that is spoken unto me.'

Dip your fingers in the water and touch your heart saying, 'Bless my heart that I may be filled with love.'

Dip your fingers in the water and touch your womb saying, 'Bless my womb that I may be in touch with my creative energies and the creative energy of the universe.'

Dip your fingers in the water and touch your feet saying, 'Bless my feet that I may find and walk on my own true path.'

Quietly reflect on the words you have spoken and feel yourself filled with a peaceful, loving energy. When you feel complete, put out the candle. Empty the bowl and wash it carefully.

This exercise is from Diane Mariechild, *Mother Wit: a feminist guide to psychic development*. The Crossing Press, Freedom, CA, 1982, p 146. (it is also found in '*Women at the Well*').

**God, if, in remembering too much,
I do not know what Healing means:
Show me the way forward.**

Generous God, who made me your perfect creation,
Who programmed my good body for self-renewal,
Thank you for giving me the gift of shedding.
I know I can never forget what happened:
But I know that, with your help, I will get well.

Show me the way forward.

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INTRODUCTION

Because of the complexity of personality, the varieties of context of the people who have been abused and the differences in the abuse experiences it is not possible to write a single liturgy which, unaltered, will help all people who are abused. -

Abuse includes physical abuse, rape or other sexual abuse, emotional abuse and mind control (brainwashing) abuse or any combination of the above. It may occur any time, and for any length of time from birth to the very recent past. It is the effect that it has on the person that is important not the comparative severity as perceived by a third party.

Abuse has a whole range of effects on a person. Liturgy may help mediate the accepting and healing love of God for any of these individual effects. The effects include:

- terrible memories which have devastating emotional effect
- anger at having been abused
- feeling unacceptable or unclean
- grief at a loss of self image or self esteem
- shame at having the experience
- anger at having the responsibility of having to work through all the garbage, at having to do all that hard work, at having to put a lot of energy and resources into dealing with the effect of someone else's behaviour
- guilt at a feeling of having contributed to the abuse
- anger that others appear to live such surface immature lives when there are people whose lives have been devastated by abuse
- feeling isolated or marginalised as a result of the experience
- anger towards those who did not prevent the abuse
- anger and grief at family or community response to the abuse
- conditioned responses to stimuli – thoughts and behaviours which come automatically without awareness of how they start. Even when they become aware of the triggers they are not able to change their responses.

- Anger at God.

- Alienation from God.
- Rejection of God.
- Alienation from the Church.

Although it is recognised that for some women any kind of liturgy would be quite inappropriate and even intrusive, for others liturgy could be the life support that makes it possible to continue to function from day to day. For them it is a very powerful means of healing. Still others will be somewhere in between these extremes.

Some people will want to write their own liturgy as they may feel that conforming to someone else's words is another form of abuse. Some will want to take part in a way that makes it their own while others may feel that it is something that needs to be done for them by a representative(s) of the community of faith - they may be unable to speak at all during the service.

Any particular person may be in a different place on the continuum at different times and each time the liturgy is used different elements may be chosen.

Likewise different symbols will be helpful under different circumstances and to different women. Symbols are vitally important and may include the use of all five senses within the liturgy.

Where possible the woman should be involved in the choice of words and symbols, or at least the liturgy should be individually compiled for each person. It is probable that extensive conversations will precede any liturgy so that it is in tune with the women's present reality however uncomfortable that may be for others.

For some women safety is the first priority. This will affect the setting, the language, the choice of people present (if any), the gender of the priest or lay person conducting the liturgy, and all other symbols used. A

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For I am not ready, yet, for good manners;

Keep away from me those who, for their own comfort,
would urge on me the beauty of fairness and tolerance:
For I am not ready, yet, to be calm;
Nor by those who would counsel forgiveness too soon:
For I am not ready, yet, to forgive.
You and I, God, have first a repair job to hand:
Into that work I would channel the energy born of my anger.

**God, in my rage I do not know what Forgiveness means:
Show me the way forward.**

Indwelling God, work with me now:
For we are collaborators in my healing.
I am made to your plan, this vivid spirit, this good body:
Skin and stripped muscle, bone, hair, blood,
The chambers of heart and cochlea, the labyrinth of lungs,
Smooth moistness of eyes and orifices, tough lacy net of nerves:
I am indeed most fearfully and wonderfully made!
And nor am I made once for all:
I am not made quiescent, I am constantly renewed.
Beneath my bruised skin, my mind's agony,
Are vast, deep regions unaware of torment;
Where, cell by cell,
our unceasing work of repair and renewal goes on
Even as I cry to you, God, for healing
Even as I shed terror, tears, laments, grief and loud anger
The bruises fade, the fabric of my good body is renewed -
Hair, skin, the delicate soft membrane of unseen inner fastnesses
- And the heavy load of violation shrinks:
The cells that knew the outrage live out their time and fall away,
their history expunged,
And the thing that I know was done to me is shed:
Cell following neutral cell, in passionless tiny death,
Back to the common storehouse of your endless re-creation.
I am made new when I am ready to be new.

SHEDDING - Psalm of a Rape Survivor

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God this is serious:

This is the worst thing that has ever happened to me.

I am torn and sore, I am violated.

I have suffered an outrage.

I am reduced to my elements.

I am stripped of courtesy, social graces, theory, conscience,
the oughts of a lifetime;

I am shattered by grief at the loss of myself

And nothing can ever be the same again.

God in my grief and loss I do not know what Wholeness means:
Show me the way forward.

God, contain my fear:

For I have been very frightened, and I am still afraid.

In the middle of the night I wake up trembling;

My dreams are full of menace.

Some days the good light of your beautiful world is
suddenly dimmed by the colour of terror.

There are times when I cannot bear to be alone;

Yet I no longer know whom I can trust.

I mourn the enjoyment of solitude, God:

I grieve for my self -assurance,.

I mourn the death of the confidence in the good will of men.

God in my fear I do not know what Trust means:
Show me the way forward.

God license my anger;

For I am your perfect creation, and I have been broken.

Do not stifle my cries of rage and pain;

For they are my rallying-cry to my shattered self.

Do not let me deny my anger to meet the requirements of others,
however distressed they may be, or however dear;

I need all my own resources for my own re-assembly.

Do not burden me with those who would frown on my want
of ladylike self-control;

church may not be safe, nor the vicar's study, nor being alone with a
male priest.

Some people want to connect closely with the traditional formality of
Anglican worship. There is a safety in the anonymity of being a part of
the whole. In this case the use of vestments can be important.

For others this may well prove too confining. They may prefer the
type of ritual described in "Women Church" by Rosemary Redford
Ruether (Harper and Row, New York, 1985), used within the gathering
of a group of friends.

The choice of language needs special consideration. For some any
idea of masculinity in God is too difficult, for others God is Father.
God language needs to be discussed during preparation for the
liturgy. perhaps terms like Shaddai and Shekinah could be useful but
their unfamiliarity may well be a barrier. Some will want the
companionship of Jesus, others a more distant and less masculine
Christ, others the pervasive empowering Spirit and still others a less
specific God described in a variety of ways.

The physical setting

Choose a safe space.

Consider the use of, for example, the following: altar, table, white
cloth, candles, flower(s), cross, bible, icons, water, vinegar, earth,
stones, oil, salt, incense, potpourri, music, vestments, white veil,
individual personal symbols.

The elements of the liturgy

The liturgy may include: an invitation; an invocation; psalms, scripture
or other readings, (perhaps affirming the goodness of creation and the
inherent goodness of the person); personal statement by the woman
or the priest/lay person on her behalf; a time of letting go (may or may
not include confession and forgiving); silence: blessing of the woman
which may include laying on of hands, anointing, symbolic washing;
dance; a eucharist: listening to music; formal conclusion.

A LITURGY OF HEALING FROM ABUSE

Invitation

God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit
who he been given to us.

You are in the midst of us, O God;
and we are called by your name.

Spirit of God you call us to freedom
You call us to wholeness.
Power of the powerless
Give us courage to take our next steps into freedom.

Break the chains that bind our hearts
and hold our spirits captive,
O One who sets us Free.
Too long have we been prisoners of the past
and all its precedents,
sacrificing a brave new world
to maintain what used to be.
Liberate us, O Great Spirit,
from our captivity. *Woman Wisdom, p154*

Spirit of God you call us to freedom
You call us to wholeness.
Power of the powerless
Give [Name] courage to take her next steps into freedom.

Or
O God, Giver of Life,
Bearer of Pain,
Maker of Love,
You are able to accept in us what we
cannot even acknowledge;

poured into the bowl the person will name the feelings that they have
taken on as a result of the abuse.

The vinegar in the bowl can then be tipped onto the ground (or into a
sink) signifying a 'letting go.'

Anointing:

The laying on of hands and the anointing of oil, preferably a fragrant
oil, would then proceed. p.741 and 742 NZPBHKMoA.

Silence:

A time of silence may happen as the priest/minister continues to pray
with the person. The music may still be playing in the background.
(Total silence can be uncomfortable.)

Blessing:

The liturgy ends with a blessing.

A SIMPLE LITURGY
TO ENABLE THE HEALING PROCESS
TO TAKE PLACE FOR A PERSON
WHO HAS BEEN SEXUALLY ABUSED.

The setting for this liturgy would be informal, and could take place in a room with simple furnishings, with perhaps a vase of flowers placed on a small table. A candle could also be placed on this table as well as the bible. The priest or minister who is facilitating would have few words to say in this liturgy, so would not need to have any other books apart from the bible. It may be helpful to incorporate the use of all five senses.

The person is given some time to become accustomed to their surroundings and the fact that they are facing a difficult challenge, which may indeed be helped by the use of liturgy when the person can encounter God, but which is nevertheless painful.

The candle is then lit, and a tape played softly in the background. The music would be the person's own choice.

Reading:

A sentence from the bible may be said and a short prayer.
e.g. Isaiah 43. 4'God says you are precious in my eyes and I love you.

Prayer:

O God our comforter and healer, we come before You
trusting in your love.
We pray that your Holy Spirit may guide us on our way,
especially during this time of pain. Amen.

Naming and Letting go:

The person may then be invited to talk about their hurts as a result of the abuse, or the priest/minister may continue with the liturgy. At this stage a cup of vinegar could be brought forward. The person is invited to taste it and to pour some of the vinegar into a bowl. Each time the vinegar is

you are able to name in us what we
cannot bear to speak of;
you are able to hold in your memory
what we have tried to forget;
you are able to hold out to us the
glory that we cannot conceive of.
Reconcile us through your cross to
all that we have neglected in ourselves,
that we may find no part of your creation
to be alien or strange to us,

and that we ourselves may be made whole.

Janet Morley's Prayer for Wholeness, (Celebrating Women, p31)

Or

God of all compassion and grace,
we bring you our prayers for [Name].
In Christ you have revealed the depths of your constant love,
and in the presence of your Holy Spirit
you give us fullness of life.
Be with us as [Name] struggles with her confusion and pain.
Free her from the prison of self doubt, fear and despair.
May we know your living presence with us,
bringing the love and healing you alone can give
in the power of *Jesus Christ* our Saviour.

Adapted from JA Keene's A Winter's Song

Or

O God,
you have searched the depths we cannot know,
and touched what we cannot bear to name;
may we so wait,
enclosed in your darkness,
that we are ready to encounter
the terror of the dawn,
with Jesus Christ, Amen.

Janet Morley's collect for Easter Eve (All Desire's Known p 16)

A Psalm

eg 13, or 22, 27, 55,118,140 *(omitting portions where appropriate)*

A Reading

A personal statement

by the woman, or someone else on her behalf leading into spoken prayer or silence

And/or

A time of letting go and/or forgiving.

Silence

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ.

(Romans 8. 38-9)

Invocation

p 741, ANZPB/HKMOA

Like the first disciples
before the coming of God's power at Pentecost,
we wait in faith, and pray.

Silence

Be with us, Holy Spirit;
nothing can separate us from your love.

Be with us as of old,
fill us with your power,
direct all our thoughts to your goodness.

Be present, Holy Spirit:

Bring faith and healing and peace.

Silence

Anointing perhaps with laying on of hands pp742-3 ANZPB/HKMOA (perhaps omitting "forgiveness"). The use of fragrant oil can be helpful.

And/or

The woman writes out her feelings on paper and burns -these in a fire proof dish, with or without a piece of dry rosemary.

And/or

The woman washes her hands in scented water.

And/or

The woman is offered a taste of vinegar/dry red wine followed by sweeter white wine or honey.

one of the short readings could be used here. (See Resources)

And/or Music

And/or Incense

And/or Dance

And/or Eucharist

Blessing of the woman

May our Sister God, who held us at our birth,
who stands beside us in our joy and grief
and who gathers us up into her life-giving embrace,
be with you now and always.