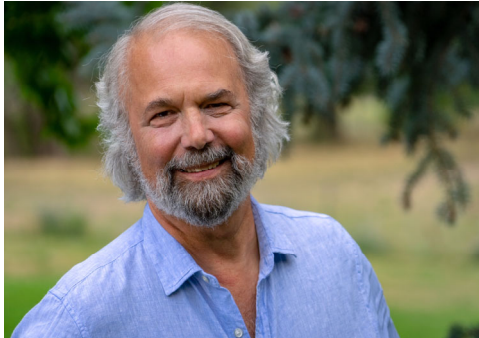


# HOLDING SPACE FOR SACRED RITUAL MADE NEW

PULSE OF SPIRIT  
MARCH 27, 2024



**DAVID KARCHERE** is a speaker and workshop leader who assists people to renew their *Primal Spirituality*—an experience that virtually all human beings know at birth, and that ideally grows as they mature.

For millennia, people have used physical experiences as gateways to spiritual ones, whether through yoga, bowing in prayer, visiting a shrine, or the Christian practice of partaking in bread and wine. Even the simple act of gathering with others in a physical space for a higher purpose can become a gateway to a spiritual experience.

This universal practice of engaging in spiritual ritual reminds me of a teaching in the Koran:

*And among His Ayat [proofs, evidences, lessons, signs, etc.] is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and whatever moving [living] creatures He has dispersed in them both.*

*Quran 42:29*

Ayat (plural) are forms in the physical world that are a sign or evidence of something spiritual. Or, as an Imam I heard speak on the subject once said, an aya (singular) is a physical form that is a window to Allah.

Physical practices with a spiritual purpose can be like that. They can open a window to what might otherwise be unknown.

In today's post-modern world, people are as likely to look for an experience on their iPhone as they are to engage in a spiritual ritual. And whatever the benefits of social media might be, it is having disastrous consequences for young people. Psychologist Jonathan Haidt just published *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness*. This is how one commentator described the book:

*Haidt makes a strong case that social media—as distinct from the internet at large—is severely harming young people. Rates of mood disorders among U.S. college undergraduates suddenly spiked in the early 2010s. The number of kids reporting depression and anxiety rose steadily every year of that decade till rates were up 134 percent and 106 percent, respectively, by 2020. Similar statistics are being seen in countries around the world. It's probably no accident that Apple introduced its first front-facing camera phone in the summer of 2010, and Instagram, which worked only on smartphones at the time, launched later that year.*

*Maura Kelly*

Haidt contends that these mental health trends are global and that there is no other reasonable explanation for them other than the use of social media.

*For several hundred years, Western civilization gradually moved away from the religious rituals it relied on for centuries. And it is not as if those rituals were replaced by new ones or that we have gone back to earlier rituals en masse. For many people, ritual has just faded away—even the ritual of a family dinner.*

*Why? Isn't it mainly because the ritual served up by religious institutions has often been accompanied by superstitious belief? And*

*a belief that people found to be disempowering? So, the practice of sacred ritual tends to be rejected altogether, without anything to replace it. Except iPhones.*

Traditionally, spiritual rituals are established by those who lead the spiritual discipline, whatever it might be. And often, the form of the ritual is set in stone, repeated unthinkingly for a lifetime by its practitioners.

What would it be like to cast off any remnant of superstition or rote repetition and participate in a sacred ritual in physical form that connects us deeply to Spirit and to one another in Beloved Community? What if we entered into such a process consciously, deliberately using it to know something deeper, more powerful, and spiritually generative together? We could make up our own ritual, starting from scratch. Or we could take a traditional ritual and recreate it so it becomes a window through which we might know something sacred and profound.

There are rituals involving water in cultures around the world. In pre-Christian Hawaiian culture, water ceremonies were used to dedicate altars, homes, and newly made canoes. The Sikhs have practiced a baptismal ceremony called *Amrit* since 1699. Muslims perform a ritual cleansing with total submersion, called *Ghusal*.

In ancient Israelite culture, there was a ritual of washing hands and also of full immersion. There is archeological

evidence in Israel of immersion in ritual basins—mikvehs—beginning in the 1st century B.C.

Immersion in a mikveh is practiced today by the Lubovitch movement. This is how they describe the experience:

*Immersion in the mikvah can be understood as a symbolic act of self-abnegation (self-renunciation), the conscious suspension of the self as an autonomous force. In so doing, the immersing Jew signals a desire to achieve oneness with the source of all life, to return to a primeval unity with G-d. Immersion indicates the abandonment of one form of existence to embrace one infinitely higher. In keeping with this theme, immersion in the mikvah is described not only in terms of purification, revitalization and rejuvenation, but also, and perhaps primarily, as rebirth.*

John the Baptist initiated the rite of baptism in the Christian tradition. Here is how his story is told in a version of the Bible translated from Aramaic:

*And in those days Yohannan The Baptizer came and was preaching in the desert of Judaea.*

*And he said, "Return to God, the Kingdom of Heaven has come near."  
Matthew 3:1,2*

There are all kinds of meanings attached to baptism in Christianity, some of them beautiful and some of them superstitious. Each Christian denomination has its own

take on it. Some favor full immersion, some a sprinkling. Some do it for infants. Others say you have to wait until a person is old enough so they can participate consciously. And some don't baptize at all.

The origin of the word *baptize* is from the Greek word *baptizein*, which simply means to "immerse, or dip in water." What if we stripped down the meaning of the act of baptism to that without any other dogma or belief attached to it? And attributed the meaning we want to attribute to it? What would that meaning be for you?

We have the opportunity to let the physical act of sprinkling with water—or a full immersion—create an aya, a window to an experience of a transcendent reality. It could bring a refreshing, and a renewing, and internal cleansing of unresolve from out of the past. The act of baptism re-created could bring blessing to the human heart. It could open a window for heavenly power to flood the human soul. As keepers of the mikveh say, it could be a purification, revitalization, and rebirth.

This past Sunday, we shared a baptism ritual made new at Sunrise Ranch. At the end of it, I spoke these words:

*May we, in this baptism, have what is old dispelled from consciousness. May we have any of the energies of the world in which we live that might drag us down cast out. May we welcome in the fresh, renewing power of the Holy Spirit. May we be washed*

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*and endued with that power all  
through us, bringing health and  
vitality, love and wisdom in and  
through us and to our world.  
So, may it be. Aum-en.*

And let the rituals we hold open a  
window to the mysterious source of  
power and light within us all.

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March 24, 2024*

Let's be a Beloved Community that holds  
the space for sacred ritual made new.



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