

A Sample Ritual for Individual Healing: Letting Go of Losses

Joyce Rupp in her book *Praying our Goodbyes* suggests a process for healing losses that she calls the Four R's:

1. Recognize or name the loss.
2. Reflect on it, which can take time because we often resist facing losses.
3. Ritualize it by creating a ceremony for yourself or one you will do with friends.
4. Reorient yourself, start to move into the future.

The first two steps are to allow yourself adequate time to recognize and reflect on your losses. When these steps are completed, consider how you might ritualize it through a ritual or ceremony such as the following process, which is a way of memorializing and enacting the letting go:

- Make a list of the losses you have identified or named in the first two stages of the process.
- Decide on a symbol to use in ritualizing the losses, such as stones, leaves, paper to burn, other natural items, etc.
- Determine the best place to have the ritual. It might be a river or a stream or some nearby body of water. Maybe you have access to a fire pit or fireplace, a windy hilltop, or other suitable location for releasing your losses either physically or symbolically.
- Plan the elements of the ritual. Do you have a song, poem, or reading that speaks to you about these losses?
- To whom do you want to address the ritual? God, Higher Power, a beloved ancestor, someone close to you, your own spirit?
- Script the words you want to say, making them as positive as you can. For example, instead of saying "rid me of this terrible loss" you might say: "as I let go of this object I am healed from my sense of loss."
- Plan the order in which you want to use the words and other elements.
- Is there a certain time or day that works best to perform the ceremony?
- When you are ready to celebrate the ritual, you may want to use the symbols one by one. For example, release each leaf into the water one at a time as you name the losses, or add each slip of paper to the fire and allow it to be consumed by the flames.
- Allow yourself some quiet space for your feelings, reactions, prayers, and reflections. Stay in the ritual place for as long as feels right for you.
- Upon completion of the ritual, sit with the feelings it engendered for a few days or weeks. If you decide there is still some "unfinished business," plan to use the ritual again including what still remains to be processed.

When you are ready, begin focusing on the present and future as you move forward with the next steps of your own life journey.