



# EMBODY

By Sossity Chiricuzio

Perspectives

## **Embody – Re/Creating Traditions**

by Sossity Chiricuzio, PQ Monthly

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We are frequently creatures of spiritual habit, finding solace in grooves worn by our ancestors hands, knees, voices. Tasting their wisdom in our mouths. Giving or serving in formulas where seeing each other gains heft and mass.

In a world ruled by money and fear, those traditions can also be used to buy and sell us, to batter at each other and build a soapbox platform from, to splinter into cold silence. Where attendance is a mandatory ransom for love or money or food or shelter. Where visibility is a variable, and patterns can cut and crumple you down to a size considered more suitable. Where holidays and rituals themselves have been turned into ad copy by church and store and state, so we consume on color coded demand.

How do we celebrate the harvest while acknowledging the death and destruction many of our ancestors wreaked, leach the poisons from food grown on stolen land? How do we celebrate the passing of winter from darkness back to light without painting dark as bad and light as unattainable

grace?

In my family of origin (patchwork as it is) our holidays have always been tremendously important, and incredibly flexible. We work in the medical and hospitality industries, on call or on duty during those times when everyone is too tired to cook or too drunk to drive, so we find a window of time and make a holiday out of love tokens and being together. Turkey is important, but so is dominoes, and telling stories, and sunset walks. Presents are exciting, but so is a room full of belly laughs and that warm burrow feeling of familiar scents.

Untangling the propaganda from the truth, the history from the convenient lies, that is the challenge. Letting go of traditions, or people, or expectations that hinder growth towards a kinder sacred. A more honest ceremony. Digging down to the roots of anxiety and anger and sorrow and privilege and guilt, pulling them gently from their grip on our gut, laying them down and walking on by.

It is not simply one answer, either. There are layers of warp and weft in the cloth of family; great gaping holes that could be rent and never sewn close again if we just vanish. If they just vanish us. It is a balancing act of courage and compassion and compromise. It is a fine sharp edge of respect and witness, of self-worth and the weight of centuries. It is the dry hunger of ghosts and regret, seeking joy.

Do you hide under the covers? Sit quiet and observe from several inches behind your eyes? Run that pirate ship aground on the family table, freak flag flying?

Perhaps you're one of the lucky few that has a family of origin who welcomes you in your ever evolving self, welcomes you in with your face and feelings all naked and proud. Welcomes you into their own raw and tender and truth. Or perhaps this is the family that you've built, or long to build. Perhaps you've tried on the traditions of others, hoping for sanctuary, for solace and spirituality. For some sense of how to walk with gratitude as a footprint.

Those are things you learn from observing, not acquiring. From following the footprints of your own history, back to the bonfire of your great to the 10<sup>th</sup> grandparents and their sacrifice to the moon; to

the stag king fleeing towards destiny in a dark wood; to the great tilted rocks and their star pictures; to Sicilian sugar figures and Chilean bread of the dead, but not if it's not yours. Taking is not a tradition, it's an habit, and one it's time to break.

Can we find a way to set the table for traditions other than our own, to invite them in with clean blankets and honest food? Can we greet them without grasping, without gauging potential profit or exotic quotient? Can we admire them from afar, without having them for our own?

Some many of us just wanting to belong. To feel a sense of unity with more than our own anxious brain and ideas of what is real. To find or make some sort of faith, some sort of connection to a bigger purpose than our rent and hunger and boredom. We often slip up; buy it at a tourist trap bargain outlet whitewashed into an easy souvenir of a wistful moment; lift it from an evocative paragraph in a book meant to be feminist; stumble across it on the internet and collect it like beach treasure.

To take in this way, without history or invitation, is to scoop it hollow of meaning and magic. Worshiping false idols made of mirror shards, wrapped in the warm glow of privilege. Spirit is asking. Ritual is perceiving. Prayer is the shape of your own beating heart laid bare and plumbed deep. How can you get there without traveling inward and backward to learning?

Do you know the prayers on those flags; light a candle for Buddha; lay flowers at the feet of Isis and Kwan Yin? Do you honor the faces of the Divine you have adopted, or just adorn your space with the idea of them? Do you make room on the altar for your own ancestors, even the uncomfortable ones?

Whether it's genetic memory or reincarnation or the infinitely looping nature of energy, we will keep wrestling our way along this mortal coil, seeking meaning. Seeking home. Finding ways and days to gather, to feast, to mourn, to dance, to vision. Travel the maze of half truths and politics and history, safeguard your center, feed it well. Traditions are what we make of them.

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