



Healing Ritual for Reproductive Loss

On the Longest Night of the Fear

Dear Fertility Sister,

The holiday season is filled with joy, light and celebration. However, for those on a difficult fertility journey it is often a challenging time of year. You may be bearing the weight of grief, loss, depression, anxiety, financial stress, a diagnosis, hopelessness, and uncertainty. The public tone of the season does not resonate with your private experience, leaving you feeling isolated during a time of year when everyone seems to be celebrating connection.

On this longest night of the year, I offer you an invitation to create some space for yourself. Set aside some time to be honest about your grief, to feel and express it, and to honour exactly where you are today, released from the expectation of where you “should” be or what you “should” be feeling. It can be scary to open yourself to the pain. While acknowledging and naming the loss of hope or the loss of a baby can bring healing as you work with rather than against your emotions, if the idea of sitting with the pain is too overwhelming allow your overwhelm to become your guide in seeking out support from a friend, family member, support group, or caregiving professional. This journey can not and need not be walked alone.

I hope that this simple ritual reminds you that though the night may be long, you are not alone. I pray that these words bring some measure of peace this night.

Sincerely,

Rev. Alicia

*Winter is a lesson about the fine art of loss and growth.
Its lesson is clear; there is only one way out of struggle
and that is by going into its darkness,
waiting for the light, and being open to new growth.*

-Joan Chittister-

Set aside 15-30 minutes for this ritual and ensure that you will not be disturbed. You may do this on your own, or invite your partner or close friend to join you.

You will need a candle, either one you already have around the house or one that you've purchased specifically for this occasion. If you've experienced a loss or multiple losses, you may choose to have additional candles.

Begin by turning your attention to your breath – breathing in and breathing out naturally. Take as much time as you need to centre yourself. If tears emerge at any point, welcome them as the healing companion that they are. Continue to breathe easily.

If it feels okay to you to sit in the dark or with dim lighting, I invite you to turn down the lights and welcome the night; acknowledge the presence of the dark. Does the night feel unfamiliar and disconcerting, or safe, comforting and nurturing? Notice your relationship with the night.

There are likely things that you carry with you that rarely or never see the light of day – grief over failed cycles and early losses, the punch in the gut feeling at another pregnancy or birth announcement, the crippling fear of the unknown... Notice what it is that you have been carrying in your depths that may wish to emerge now. Feel into the painful places, the lost places, the hidden places. Trust that if you are strong enough to carry these things in silence that you will be able to handle whatever comes. However, if it feels too overwhelming, assure yourself that you will reach out for more support from a doctor, therapist, partner, family member, friend, support group, pastor, or some other source of support that you trust.

Once you have acknowledged the heavy burden of grief that you have been carrying and when you are ready, light your candle. This light may represent God, the Universe, the loving presence of someone dear to you, or some other comforting presence. Acknowledge the presence of this gentle, flickering light – it doesn't erase the grief but rather illumines it. Notice how the light seems to breathe and even dance. Take a few moments to contemplate and get curious about what the light might say to you if it could speak...

Light any additional candles that you wish to light if you are marking the losses in your life, honouring the love that is still present in the midst of your grief. You may even choose to whisper a prayer of gratitude for the little one(s) who was(were) here and went too soon.

While you may not always feel strong, it takes a great deal of strength and courage to put one foot in front of the other each day and continue on your journey. With hands over your heart, offer yourself gratitude and love for all the things that you are doing to nurture your dreams and live into your desires.

Notice if there is anything else that you would like to do in this space of quiet reflection - write in your journal, listen to a meaningful song, pen a letter, light another candle, sketch or paint, choose an affirmation, say a prayer, etc. You may also want to incorporate a reading that resonates with you from the following pages.

Conclude by breathing in these words of blessing:

*In this dark season of your life and on this darkest night of the year,
may you know the quiet presence of the absence that has touched your life.
May you be warmed and held in the Eternal Light.
May peace encircle you, both now and forever.*

*The emptiness
that you have been holding
for such a long season now;*

*that ache in your chest
that goes with you
night and day
in your sleeping,
your rising—*

*think of this
not as a mere hollow,
the void left from
the life that has leached out
of you.*

*Think of it like this:
as the space being prepared
for the seed.*

*Think of it
as your earth that dreams
of the branches
the seed contains.*

*Think of it
as your heart making ready
to welcome the nest
its branches will hold.*

- Jan Richardson -

I have learned things in the dark that I could never have learned in the light, things that have saved my life over and over again, so that there is really only one logical conclusion. I need darkness as much as I need light.

- Barbara Brown Taylor -

*To come to the pleasure you have not
You must go by a way in which you enjoy not.*

*To come to the knowledge you have not
You must go by a way in which you know not.*

*To come to the possession you have not
You must go by a way in which you possess not.*

*To come to the way you are not
You must go by a way in which you are not.*

- St. John of the Cross -

*In the depth of your hopes and desires
lies your silent knowledge of the beyond;
and like seeds dreaming beneath the snow
your heart dreams of spring.*

- Kahlil Gibran -

*Defender of the deep down hidden things,
You see the yearnings that are invisible to others,
The waiting in the darkness for a springtime bud that never came,
The waiting for a baby for year upon year,
The waiting for true love who never appeared,
The waiting for a vocation never found or fulfilled,
The waiting for healing from the long ago hurt.
Defend all who wait and wait.*

*Thank you that you do not see us as fools but cherish our heart's desire. Encircle us with dignity
and teach us to live without bitterness, and to discover the true meaning of hope.*

- Tess Ward -

*May I be gentle with myself in this tender place.
May I seek that which is nurturing and supports my well-being.
May I embrace my tears for all the healing they bring.
May I be aware of the sources of compassion in my life and willingly receive love.
May I trust the truth: (fill in an affirmation - the one that's hardest to believe right now)
May my broken heart be transformed into a more open heart.
May my faith in the wisdom of my body be restored.
May I be at peace - body, mind, heart and spirit.*

- Alicia -

*May you know that absence is full of tender presence
and that nothing is ever lost or forgotten.
May the absences in your life be full of eternal echo.
May you sense around you the secret Elsewhere
which holds the presences that have left your life.
May you be generous in your embrace of loss.
May the sore well of grief turn into a well of seamless presence.
May you be embraced by God in whom dawn and twilight are one,
and may your belonging inhabit its deepest dreams
within the shelter of the Great Belonging.
- John O'Donohue –*

Vigils is a time of exquisite beauty. It is a time for waiting and watching under the mantle of mystery. It can be a prayer of waiting without agenda, without urgency. We often wait for things we cannot change. Waiting in itself has the potential of being a prayer of faith. Sometimes we wait for growth. Like a seed resting in the ground, we wait for who we can become. The darkness that surrounds us can be an ointment for our restless spirit. If we do not turn away from this darkness, it has the potential of becoming a nurturing womb for us. Often it is in the dark times of our lives that our eyes are opened, and we see things in new ways.

*There is a difference between waiting and keeping vigil. Anxious, fretful, impatient waiting is nothing more than waiting. Waiting with purpose, patience, hope, and love is vigilant waiting. Would that all of our waiting could be a vigil - a watch in the night or in the day hours. So by all means, find a way to make your vigils sacred. Learn the art of holy waiting. Whether you choose, on occasion, to get up in the middle of the night, or whether you make an effort to turn your everyday moments of waiting into sacred vigils rather than impatient pacing, you will be blessed through this spiritual practice.
- Macrina Wiederkehr –*

*And I said to the one who stood at the gate of the year,
"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the Unknown."
And he replied, "Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God.
That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."
- Minnie Haskins –*

*A light that thrives in the depths of darkness,
blazes through murky bottoms.
It cannot and will not be quenched.
- John 1.5, The Voice -*