

RENEWAL

NOVEMBER 2025

ISSUE 2

CONNECTION

growing community in a fragmented world

SACRED SPACE
PERSONAL
SHRINES

connecting 101

with Karen Molenaar-Terrell



BIRD'S-EYE VIEW | WORK IN PROGRESS | TOOLS FOR THE JOURNEY

CONNECTION

5

THRESHOLD

Fanum

Exploring
RENEWAL's
roots and purpose.

6

SACRED SPACE

Shrines

Connecting to
ancestors, mentors,
the Divine and our
future selves.

12

THIS MONTH'S THEME:

CONNECTION

Shannon Willis 14

Karen Molenaar-Terrell 16

BIRD'S EYE VIEW

10

WORK *in* PROGRESS

20

TOOLS *for the* JOURNEY

22

CLOSING CIRCLE

23

ON THE HORIZON

24

Welcome



I'm so glad you're here. My name is Constance and I create RENEWAL, a monthly digital magazine, to help bring more presence, meaning, and purpose to life—yours *and* mine.

With this month's theme of CONNECTION, we begin with a threshold moment before **Sacred Space** and a look at how shrines help us connect. In **Bird's-Eye View**, we learn how birds connect using voice and plumage. In **Deep** explores how to connect in a fragmented world. Animist/ritualist **Shannon Willis** shares how story can connect us, and author **Karen Molenaar Terrell** shares her experiences of connecting with strangers. **Work in Progress** documents the evolution of creating a tradition from scratch. **Tools for the Journey** helps us connect with our heart space. **Closing Circle** offers a few last words and a digital hug. **On the Horizon** gives you a sneak peek at next month's issue, ILLUMINATION. Enjoy!

RENEWAL

“What you encounter, recognize, or discover depends to a large degree on the quality of your approach.”

~ John O'Donohue

In ancient times, people traveled hundreds of miles to visit temples in the wilderness.

To reach the remote sites, one had to pass through a consecrated buffer zone such as a wide meadow or sacred grove. The consecrated area was called a *fanum*. You couldn't get to the holy place without passing through the fanum.

The word *profane* stems from this idea: *pro* meaning “before” + *fane* = “fanum.” Profane literally means “everything before the fanum.”

RENEWAL acts as a digital fanum, weaving ancient ideas and modern technology.

This page marks a threshold. You notice a change in tone: more birds, a breeze and quiet. You sense a reverence not often found while scrolling. A bell rings in the distance, calling you to bring your presence to this moment. Now.

Breathe. Drop your focus from your head to your heart.

This is a tender place in the wilderness to remember and connect with the holy place at the center: the temple within you.

PERSONAL SHRINES



1. A personal shrine to my matriarchal lineage, including my mother, Mary Mears; her mother, Julia Duffy Kane; my grand-daughter; and women-folk on my father's side.
2. Janene Giuseffi-Ritchie created a fall-influenced ancestor altar for Samhain, including her mother, Kathy Giuseffi; father, Jerry Giuseffi; and dear friend Pete Krabbe.
3. A seasonal shrine honoring Earth and a call for wisdom from the High Priestess.

SHRINE: from the Old English *scrīn*, meaning cabinet, chest, or reliquary.



This year, following Mexico's Day of the Dead tradition, Karen Echeverria created a shrine for her beloved grandmother, Sandra Luz Romero Garcia, who passed away this summer.

Connection with the Unseen realm can often feel abstract. As humans, we like recognizable forms with distinct outlines we can see, bumpy textures we can touch, and conversations we can hear. Humans across time and cultures turn to symbolism to try to bridge the gap.

Shrines help direct our attention and make our intention for connection visible. They can be created to indicate reverence for a deity, to commemorate an event, or to show esteem for a mentor or saint.

Again, the quality of our approach affects and flavors everything we do.

If you want to create a shrine, do it. Not everyone wakes up and thinks, "Today, I'd like to create a shrine to express what feels meaningful to me."

Any human can create a shrine from earnest intent, guided by intuition and imagination. In my experience, each is beautiful in its own way. Given a focus, a person's authentic expression unfolds like a flower. We are as much nature as the flowers, or birds, or fish. When we connect to and embody our animal self while at the same time connecting to and embodying the spiritual essence inherent within us, what we create is exquisite. Holy.

Continued on next page

Traditional shrines

Trying to emulate a *traditional* shrine can be problematic. Of course, you can Google the details of anything, but I would advise against that approach.

First, it underestimates and disrespects the complexity of an ancient practice.

But more importantly, it bypasses the essential aspect of tradition: the transfer from human to human through time. Mimicking another culture's tradition misses the key ingredient: connection.

Unless you have relationship with someone from that culture, there is no

magic power in performing certain actions. Many of the details evolved over centuries, rooted in the specific place from which it sprang.

The power in a tradition comes from and is transferred through *relationship*. In relationship, a third element is amplified. Some call that unseen element Love, or the presence of God, Life Force, or Mystery.

The power in tradition has little to do with the way you light the candle. Protocol demands it, but only as a means to an end. The power—a palpable sense of the sacred—stems from the accumulative effect of relationship. It leaves an energetic residue, like trailing threads that weave into the fabric of a community. Modern people want to don the fabric like a cape, without understanding what it means to be woven into it.

Being woven means to learn at the elbow of one who has learned at the elbow of another. It requires humility and patience — nothing that interests the ego.

If a particular tradition calls to you, honor it. Contact an elder willing to teach you.

If it's the sacred *feeling* that calls, tune inward. Amplify that Love—that substance present in the relationship with the Divine—and what you express will reflect that connection. And then, share it with someone else.



Left: A seasonal shrine with an image of Our Lady of Sorrows assembled by Deborah Martin near Whistle Lake, Wash.

In a world such as ours, invoking *Our Lady of Sorrows* is an initiation into grief. She has seven swords, all of them pointing to her heart. Symbolism.

And yet next to her, a nest reminds us of the architecture of renewal. After the storms, birds collect the blowdown—the dead wood, what's been stripped away, ripped away—and use them to create a vessel for something new to come into being.

Our Lady reminds us that grief is sacred. It accompanies the first stages of the death or collapse that precedes renewal.



Tradition is like the tunic, the paper over the spring bulb. It protects the surface from moisture and damage.

As the bulb grows, it splits the paper, which then begins to decompose, releasing stored nutrients. The paper has a purpose, but the power of the bulb is not in the tunic.

The power, the life force, resides in the fleshy bulb itself, packed with DNA codes and the inner guidance it will need to flourish in its mission of renewal.

FIND your FLOCK

PLUMMAGE + VOICE = VIBE

If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together. ~ Burkina Faso proverb

To find your flock means looking with the eyes of the heart to find resonance, not necessarily resemblance. Your flock may be a stand of trees, or the ancient poets, or the humans in your carpool. They may be kin or simply kindred spirits, what the Celts call *anam cara* or “soul friend.”

The power of plumage

Our plumage speaks for itself. It's comprised of how we show up in the world—the visible cues we reveal in every interaction we have.

When we ruffle our feathers, we're giving blowback in a visceral way. Our wardrobe gives off a vibe, revealing who we think we are. Peacock? Crow? How and when we preen tells a story. How we molt when we're going through

a transition looks different than our plumage in mating season.

This month, notice how you're showing up. Are you signaling (subconsciously) that you're a wren when inside you know you're a swan? Are you showing up in mating season still molting from a rough transition?

Our voice attracts

Our voice carries stories and songs rooted generations back, all talking at once. We talk in terms like “mother tongue” because we inherit the stories embedded in our DNA.

Birds understand the power of vocalization to attract a flock or a mate. Each species has a range of calls, and each bird has a repertoire that it learns

“You find your voice by talking about the things you love.”

~ artist Austin Kleon

over time. You know a hummingbird from a rooster without even looking.

This month, try talking about what you really love with the depth of passion and enthusiasm that you feel. Go deeper in conversation or on social media. Say what's really on your mind. See who shows up. See who lights up. See who drops off.

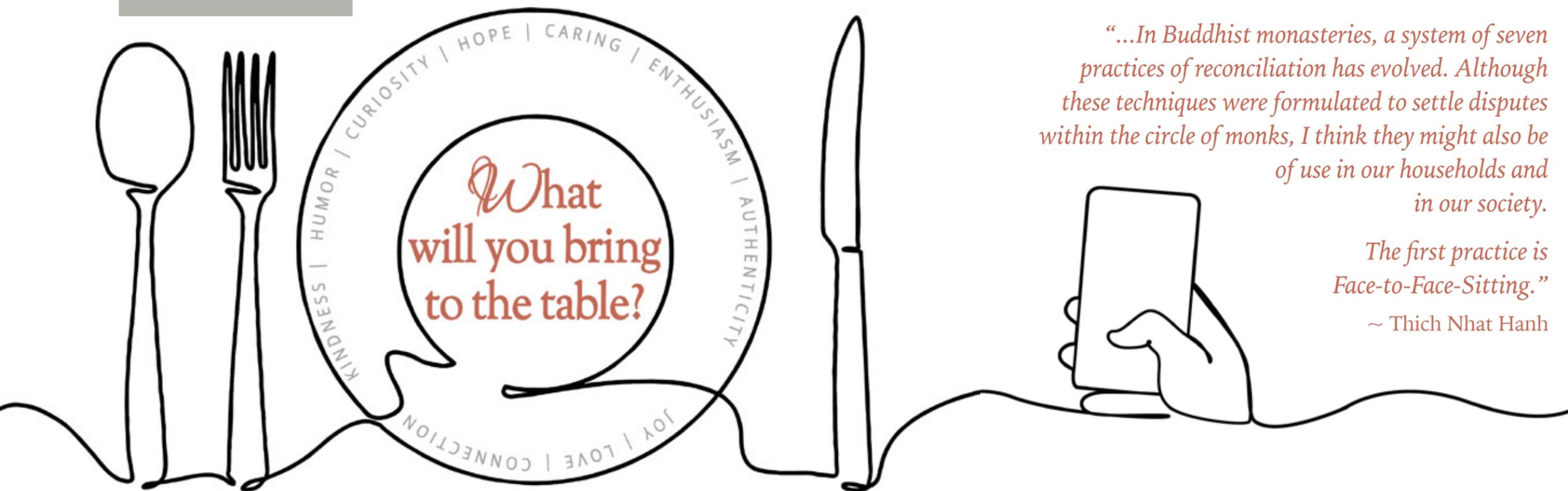
Author Jim Rohn said, “You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with.” Practice curating a flock with intention. Connect with those who get you and are headed in the same direction you are.

Which bird resonates with you most?



Think of the five people you spend the most time with. What kind of bird do you think they are?

An owl, a crow, and a hummingbird may each be writers, but with very different values. Owl will write a nonfiction book with copious amounts of research. Crow will attract a following with its style and provocative topics. Hummingbird will post 25 short and sweet memes everyday.



"...In Buddhist monasteries, a system of seven practices of reconciliation has evolved. Although these techniques were formulated to settle disputes within the circle of monks, I think they might also be of use in our households and in our society.

*The first practice is Face-to-Face-Sitting."
~ Thich Nhat Hanh*

"There is more that unites us than divides us."

Compassionate Listening Project

[Compassion Circles](#)

Monday, Nov. 21, 4 pm PST

Saturday, Dec 13, 7 am PST

An online sacred space where people come together across all divides to listen, share, and connect at the level of our shared humanity.

In a world torn by polarization, Compassion Circles create a refuge of understanding where every voice is heard without judgment.

Supported by skilled facilitators, 90-minute gatherings strengthen our listening capacities, provide breakout groups, and nourish the soul.

Donations welcome.

By noticing changes in daylight or the angle of the sun, birds know when it's time to congregate.

For humans in the U.S., we have other signals. The shelves morph from Halloween candy to Christmas decorations overnight. Black Friday ads start popping up in our feed.

Here's an alternative. Let the new moon and this issue of RENEWAL be a mindful way to kick off the season of socializing. Place the kettle on the stove, and let the whistle call you to that deep place within you, the part that longs for belonging and authentic connection.

Sitting face-to-face

For some people, gathering for dinners with extended family may feel tenuous at best. How do we break bread with people with whom we don't see eye to eye?

Months of open hostility online may make it hard to imagine coming to the table, much less any agreement. For others, dealing with healing, grieving, or hardship may make socializing difficult.

Of course, every situation is unique. Offering a one-size-fits-all approach here feels trite and would minimize the complexity.

Part of my process of Approach is to ask contemplative questions. That's not to arrive at a perfect answer, but to consider a thing from various directions. Here are a few:

How do I *feel* when I consider this gathering?

What values am I bringing to the table?

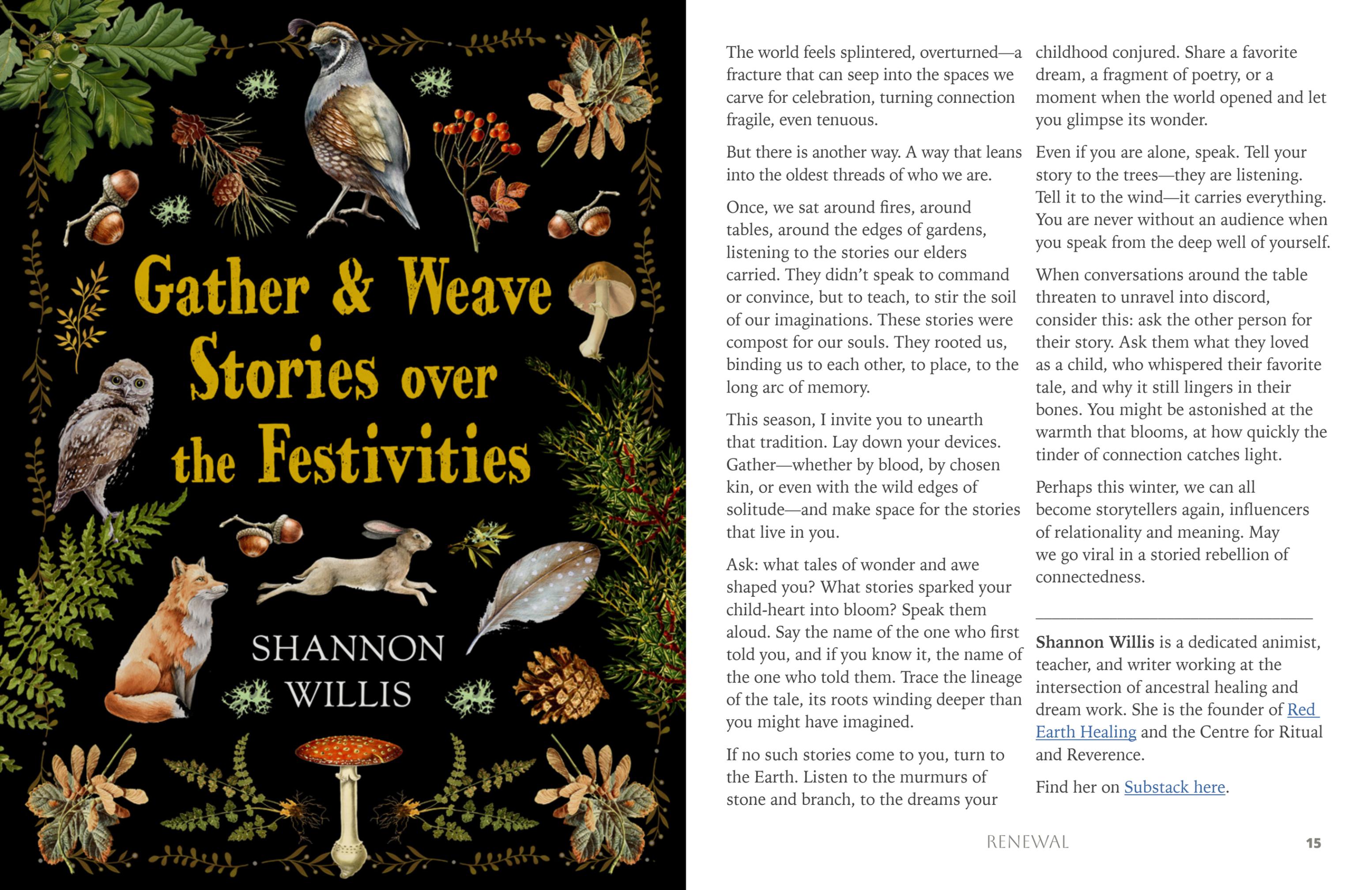
Can I simply *choose* Love over fear?

Can I bring curiosity rather than judgment?

Can I stay attuned for common ground?

If I show up in authenticity, will I feel safe? Do I have an exit strategy?

Is there another way to celebrate the meaning of and intention of the holiday?



Gather & Weave Stories over the Festivities

SHANNON
WILLIS

The world feels splintered, overturned—a fracture that can seep into the spaces we carve for celebration, turning connection fragile, even tenuous.

But there is another way. A way that leans into the oldest threads of who we are.

Once, we sat around fires, around tables, around the edges of gardens, listening to the stories our elders carried. They didn't speak to command or convince, but to teach, to stir the soil of our imaginations. These stories were compost for our souls. They rooted us, binding us to each other, to place, to the long arc of memory.

This season, I invite you to unearth that tradition. Lay down your devices. Gather—whether by blood, by chosen kin, or even with the wild edges of solitude—and make space for the stories that live in you.

Ask: what tales of wonder and awe shaped you? What stories sparked your child-heart into bloom? Speak them aloud. Say the name of the one who first told you, and if you know it, the name of the one who told them. Trace the lineage of the tale, its roots winding deeper than you might have imagined.

If no such stories come to you, turn to the Earth. Listen to the murmurs of stone and branch, to the dreams your

childhood conjured. Share a favorite dream, a fragment of poetry, or a moment when the world opened and let you glimpse its wonder.

Even if you are alone, speak. Tell your story to the trees—they are listening. Tell it to the wind—it carries everything. You are never without an audience when you speak from the deep well of yourself.

When conversations around the table threaten to unravel into discord, consider this: ask the other person for their story. Ask them what they loved as a child, who whispered their favorite tale, and why it still lingers in their bones. You might be astonished at the warmth that blooms, at how quickly the tinder of connection catches light.

Perhaps this winter, we can all become storytellers again, influencers of relationality and meaning. May we go viral in a storied rebellion of connectedness.

Shannon Willis is a dedicated animist, teacher, and writer working at the intersection of ancestral healing and dream work. She is the founder of [Red Earth Healing](#) and the Centre for Ritual and Reverence.

Find her on [Substack here](#).

Connecting 101

KAREN MOLENAAR-TERRELL'S LAB CLASS ON LOVE



Karen Molenaar-Terrell learned a lot in her many years as a middle-school teacher.

"I was shy and kind of socially awkward as a teenager," she said. "I think it was becoming a teacher that brought this 'outreach' out in me. Being able to laugh together, and connect with my students, was a huge part of creating a successful classroom."

Imagine needing to "connect" with 25 people for hours every day. You learn a few things.

"I wanted all my students to feel recognized, seen, appreciated, loved," she said. "I guess it was natural for me to take that desire for people to feel seen out of the classroom and out on the road with me."

No matter where she goes—to the store, the cafe, the local park—she comes back with stories (and photos) of connecting with strangers. Enough to fill a book. OK, three books.

In the introduction to her book, *Cosmic Connections*, Karen explains that one smile works like magic. Talk about going viral. One garden-variety smile starts a chain reaction that multiplies exponentially.

*This is fantastic!
Great job! 😊*

Brilliant!



Karen Molenaar-Terrell

"That quick exchange has the power to brighten my whole day—and I hope theirs, too," she said. "And if I can find someone who knows how to laugh with me, then I feel like I've found the motherlode of connection."

She even uses her name—the meme-plagued "Karen"—as a punchline at the Customer Service counter.

She points out that connection is free.

Besides a ready smile, it helps to have an eye for finding the extraordinary in ordinary moments. She gets plenty of practice on her near-daily walks with her camera.

"Sometimes I'll see something I want to share—a heron sitting in a tree, or otters scrambling on a beach—and I'll find whoever is nearby and bring them into that moment with me."

Continued on next page



Karen Molenaar-Terrell

“Sometimes I’ll see someone wearing a cap or a shirt that has the logo for a school or sports team or a travel destination—and bingo! Connection!”

Trained by the algorithms to find our differences, people these days often talk about building community. Often though, they make it complicated: programs and grants and facilities.

Karen just focuses on one-to-one or one-to-one-plus-a-dog connections. “I’ll see a baby about my granddaughter’s age, and I’ll have to stop and share baby stories.”

Even the math adds up. Connecting with five people almost every day means she

engages with roughly 1,750 strangers a year. That’s a lot of smiles.

“I’ve found I can find some connection with pretty much everyone I meet.”

This consciousness of cosmic connection goes beyond basic friendliness. For Karen, it’s informed by her beliefs as a Christian Scientist.

“Metaphorically, meeting strangers is meeting other cells of my Body: connecting with other rays of the same sun; connecting with other drops in the same ocean. We can’t help but be friends.”



Karen’s Cosmic Connection

Karen describes a moment during the pandemic when she felt the unifying presence of Love. Beyond logic, labels, or ego, it felt to her like a coalescing of energies.

“I woke up in the middle of the night and I felt myself in the presence of Love. I could feel Love quivering around me and through me. I felt myself connected by love to the body of Love.”

“A voice said, ‘You are not a body. You are a part of My Body.’ And I saw that all of creation was connected to this Body, and in this Body, embodied in Love.”

“I saw we are all cells of the same Body. That phrase, ‘We’re all in this together,’ became literal for me. We’re all in the universal body of Love together.”

“Connection is the energy that is created between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment.”

— Brené Brown

Connect (and maybe laugh) with Karen here:

[Substack](#)

[Her Author Site](#)

[Audio of Recent Talk](#)

Karen is the author of 16 books. Her stories have appeared in *Newsweek*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, and *Pack and Paddle Magazine*. She enjoys hiking and photography, and lives with her husband, Scott, in Bow.

work in progress



Creating a tradition from scratch

When I created the “Thanksgiving Book” in 1990, all the pages were blank. It was just an empty notebook I’d bought instead of a turkey. I had to cajole my teenage son to write a few lines of gratitude. Far from extended family that year, it was just him and me at the table. It wasn’t even a proper

kitchen table, just an art table I had covered with a sheet. I’d been given the chairs by someone just about to donate them to the second-hand store. Besides our beds, they were all the furniture we had.

Still, there was a lot to be thankful for. We were safe.

The next year’s entry is blank, which is shorthand for the shit year 1991 was. But within a few years, the tiny roots of a tradition took hold. Within a few more, “the Book” had established itself as “the quirky thing she does.” I had managed to carve out the expectation that sometime before the tryptophan kicked in, the Book would be passed around.

The further into the notebook we got, the easier it became. Folks started to see the beauty of it, a meaningful collection of things we appreciate; a marking, a milestone from year to year of what we thought was important.

It’s become a collaborative work of art, all these entries in various handwriting and even multiple languages. The scribbles of four-year olds morph into sophisticated lists over a decade. It documents their growth, in the same way pencil lines on a door jamb measure their height over a span of time. Now my son, with kids of his own, helps pass the book around.

Each year has its own constellation

of humans who have been willing to put aside self-consciousness and NAME who and what is awesome in their own very particular life. They oblige, knowing that they, like the snapshots that accompany some of the pages, will likely look different next year.

Some words and themes repeat year after year: family, job, food, remission — and the eternal favorites: God-Spirit-Divine-Life.

It’s not even half-full, so there’s room for great-grandchildren’s entries and maybe even beyond.

Things I’ve learned by creating

- The hardest part is starting.
- Then, starting over when it doesn’t take off right away.
- It’s important to let creations take on a life of their own. Let them be what they become, not what you had originally imagined.
- Realize and celebrate the value of creating, regardless of others’ validation.
- Share it with others.



HEART MEDITATION

In Sacred Space (pg4), we showed expressions of our feelings—reverence, honor, desire for connection with—displayed in physical form. Here, we use the imagination to visualize sacred space, not outside of us, but within.

This is a non-traditional visual meditation that calls upon the deep imagination. Tailor it to suit your beliefs.

Not all people see images in their mind's eye. If that's you, this won't be of much comfort.

Mark this time as sacred.

Unplug.

Breathe.

Center yourself. Hold this presence until the meditation ends.

Imagining The Temple Within

An 11-minute guided meditation to imagine a visual tour of the sanctuary within your heart.

CLOSING CIRCLE



In focusing on **CONNECTION**, I lost sight of the coming descent into the last days of fall. Not a word about the dark afternoons, ferocious wind or the shadow work stirring in the basement.

As darkness encroaches, instinct tells us to gather for mutual support. The owl, woodpecker, and crow mentor us on resilience. The darkest hour provides a systems check on our psyche and soul.

The dark is exactly when our light is needed.

Be kind. Be forgiving. Be easy with what unfolds. Each season brings its own gifts.

I hope in the coming weeks, you feel authentic connection: to feel seen, heard, and appreciated and to graciously bestow that gift to others.

I hope you feel a deep connection to yourself and your innate value.

And I hope you take time to deepen your connection with the Divine in whatever form that takes for you.

RENEWAL

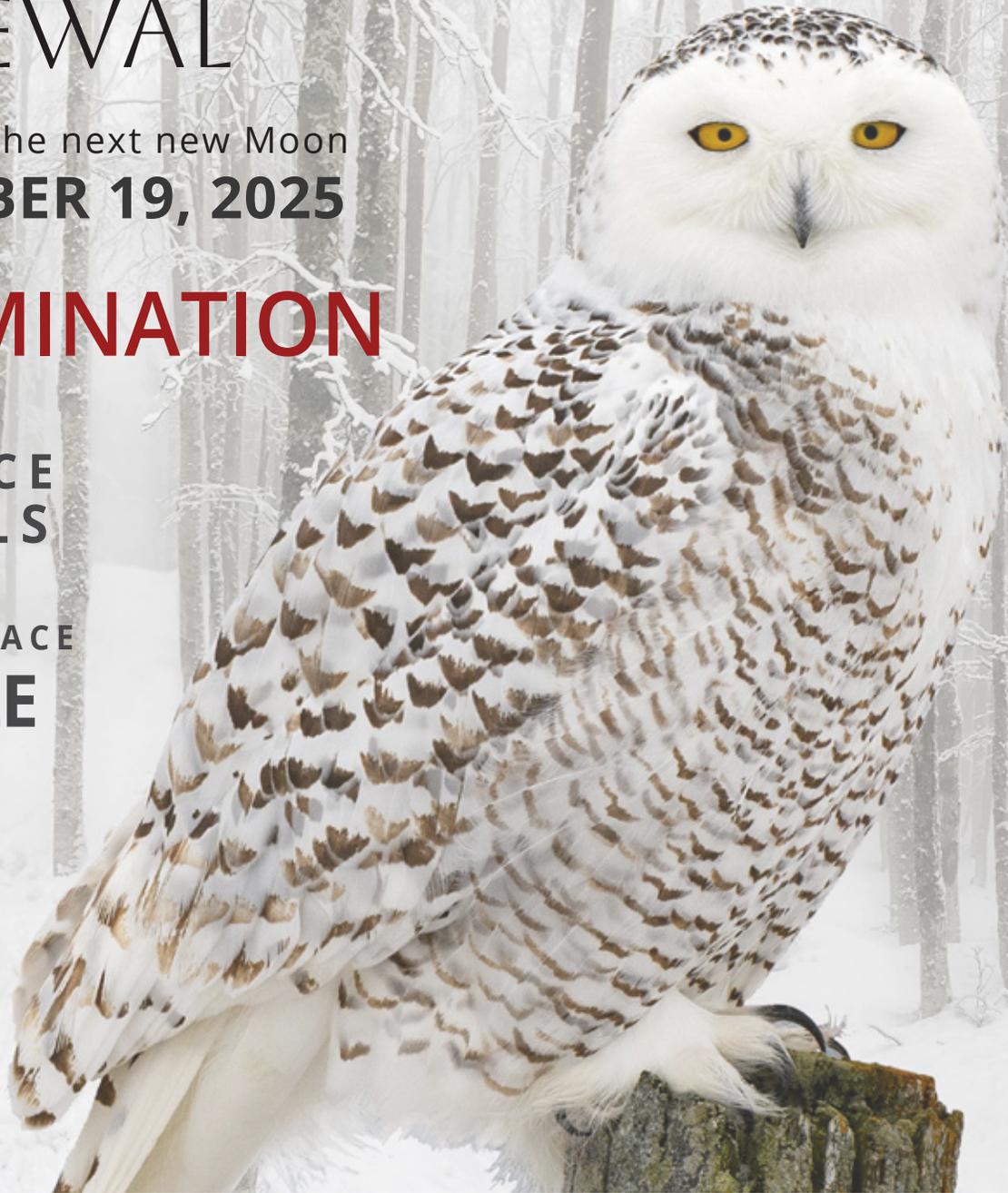
Coming on the next new Moon

DECEMBER 19, 2025

ILLUMINATION

**SOLSTICE
RITUALS**

**SACRED SPACE
CANDLE
LIGHT**



If you have a seasonal image (Solstice, Advent, Kwanza, Hanukkah, Yule, or any I've missed) for SACRED SPACES, please email constance@constancemears.com.

FIND me here: constancemears.com.

Please share this publication with anyone you think might enjoy it.

If you'd like to support this endeavor, become a \$7 paid subscriber.

PAID SUBSCRIBER