FAMILY PROCESS

Rituals in the Time of COVID-19: Imagination, Responsiveness, and the Human Spirit

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Following the format put forth by Imber-Black and Roberts, I examine daily rituals, family traditions, holidays, and life cycle rituals during the pandemic of COVID-19. Marked by symbols capable of carrying multiple meanings, symbolic actions, special time and special place, and newly invented and adapted rituals are illustrated through stories of couples, families, and communities.

Keywords: Rituals; COVID-19; Symbols

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Rituals paint indelible pictures in our minds and in our hearts. Rituals greet us, unknowing, at our birth and follow us through our daily lives, childhood birthday parties, family and religious holidays, First Holy Communions, Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, sweet sixteen celebrations and Quincineras, proms, high school and college graduations, weddings, anniversaries, funerals, and memorials. Rituals may provide us with a steady resource of connection, whether as daily rituals for partings at the start of a school and work day, greetings when we return to one another, meals, and bedtime; family traditions on each family's "inside" calendar, including birthdays, anniversaries, family re-unions, and days that may be idiosyncratically special to a couple or family; holidays, on a given culture's calendar including religious, ethnic, national, or secular; and life cycle rituals, marking key events, and developmental stages, including birth, adolescent rites of passage, graduations, weddings, and funerals. Rituals are an enormous resource for families and for therapists (Imber-Black & Roberts, 1998). And when these rituals go missing, there is something resourceful and insistent in the human spirit requiring us to create rituals anew.

COVID-19 came upon us, unanticipated, without planning and unimagined by all who were not scientists and medical doctors. Children were unexpectedly required to be home schooled by parents who were either suddenly unemployed or working from home while hoping to keep their children learning. The masters' level classes I teach were swiftly moved on line, along with undergraduate and graduate classes everywhere. Therapy sessions went to Face Time, Zoom, or Doxy.me. Illness and death walked along side us daily on our television screens and the internet. Not a week into the shutdown in New York, I was urgently called—"what do you recommend people do for funerals when only two or

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I thank the people who generously spoke with me or wrote me about the rituals in their lives during COVID-19, including Herb Bar-David, Patricia Colucci-Coritt, Roua Eltayeib, Lisa Gajda-Maiolo, Somer Saleh, and Amos Wolff.

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three people may be allowed, and no one could be with their loved one when they died?" I had no response. The loving inventiveness of those who lost a mother or father, or spouse, or lover or brother or sister or child to COVID-19 would attempt to answer this profound question, some with innovative and some with unsatisfying rituals.

CREATING NEW RITUALS DAILY RITUALS AND FAMILY TRADITIONS

First, the Children

The shutdown had barely happened on the east coast when teddy bears suddenly began appearing in windows, on fire escapes, and porches. Differing from mere routine, the rituals in our lives require symbols, capable of holding multiple meanings (Imber-Black & Roberts, 1998). And what symbol could communicate comfort more to a child than a teddy bear? Rituals necessitate symbolic action—all of the movement, words, songs, and interactions that contribute to ritual making (Imber-Black & Roberts, 1998). In one town, a fire truck came barreling down the streets, blaring their siren, and displaying a huge teddy bear for the children to see and excitedly wave to in a new ritual moment, temporarily replacing fear with joy.

Daily rituals, such as meals often eaten on the run or in front of a television before the shutdown, became a time to gather children and parents at the end of a day to check-in and listen to children's questions and comfort their fears. One gay male couple opened their home to another couple—they alternate who cooks each night and set the table with cloth napkins to create an atmosphere of specialness. One night a week, one of the men bakes a cake, adding a paradoxical touch of celebration in a national time of sadness and fear. One family invented an "eat anything you want day," for their 8-year-old son as a monthly ritual. This quickly became devouring as many cheddar goldfish, pizza, and gummy bears as a little boy could consume. Lending humor to the atmosphere, coupled with a special day to look forward to in a time when time itself seems endless, provided a lift to everyone's spirit.

Many first responders did not enter their own homes or apartments, lest they bring COVID-19 to their family. Rituals for children whose parents are first responders often became the simple, yet so meaningful, pressing hands together through a glass window. Bedtime rituals that previously involved a story read by a parent at bedside became a zoom or face time story. Technology enabled the re-invention of old rituals and the creation of rituals never before experienced.

Birthday parties quickly shifted from gatherings of young children to play games, eat cake and open gifts to peering out a window as friends, walking with signs held aloft or cars, decorated with streamers and balloons came slowly driving by, horns honking—"Happy Birthday, Jason!" A toy store, closed by the pandemic, made a video of the entire store for a neighbor's child to choose one special toy for his 6th birthday. A client of mine, a single parent, herself sick with COVID-19, and mother of a young adolescent managed through her very serious bout of illness to create a video for her daughter's 14th birthday, replete with all of the special markers of her young life and various views of her possible future. The surprise for her daughter was streamed on Zoom for siblings, grandparents, and dear friends. "My daughter knew I was quite sick, and told me she expected her birthday would be forgotten. Her appreciation for what I was able to do ran so deep," this mom told me.

SPECIAL TIME AND SPECIAL PLACE

Our rituals occur in special time and special places (Imber-Black & Roberts, 1998). Special time demarcates ritual time from regular time, enabling us to look forward to a ritual,

whether it is daily, seasonal, or yearly. Special place may be a church or a hotel or restaurant or graveyard—or it may be a backyard, a kitchen table, a living room, all transformed by a ritual to become a special place.

Post-it notes altered both apartment building mailboxes and hospital bulletin boards with daily messages—most anonymous and with an unspecified recipient—of gratitude, humor, or hope. This very simple ritual lent inspiration to a heavy time. (Personal communication, Herb Bar-David, LCSW).

The pandemic reached Italy a bit earlier than New York City. In the midst of unspeakable loss and grief, we watched on the nightly news as Romans and Florentines and Milanese began to throw open windows or come out on their small balconies or on rooftops to play musical instruments, sing, clap hands, bang pots and pans, all to applaud first responders. "It was from our hearts, to say thanks and show we can get past this," said a grandmother clapping with her granddaughters on a balcony in Rome. Soon Friday evening, at the exact time when the nation was updated about those sick or dying or dead, Italians threw open their windows to sing and play the national anthem (Horowitz, 2020). As the death toll began to rise in New York City, mirroring what we witnessed in Italy, and altered for our own requirements, a spontaneous 7 pm nightly ritual began—windows flung open, applause ringing out for first responders.

RE-INVENTING SPRING HOLIDAYS WITH ZOOM

The total shutdown in many communities came simultaneously with the annual spring religious holidays—first Nowruz, followed by Passover, then Easter, and finally Ramadan. A time normally marked by joyous celebrations, possibly traveling, and large family and community gatherings were suddenly shrunk to those in an immediate household, coupled with those on a Zoom screen. The insistence on spring rituals, coupled with the re-invention of their details speaks to the significance of these holidays in our cultures, religions, families, friendships, and lives.

Nowruz

Nowruz, the Iranian New Year's festival, began the third week of March, coinciding with the shutdown in many places—Iran had already been hit hard by Covid, and the United States was beginning its' quarantine. A nearly two-week-long holiday, replete with rituals of poetry reading, dancing, and jumping over bonfires at family feasts, was the first of the spring celebrations to be profoundly altered by COVID-19. Poetry was read over voicemail, banners in windows replaced visits to relatives, recipes were texted, and nuclear family members jumped over candles (Qiblawi, 2020). Whether in Iran, which had been hit very hard by COVID-19, or major cities in the United States where Iranians live, gathering the Haft-Sin, seven items including wheat, barley or lentil spouts grown in a dish, wheat germ, Persian olive, vinegar, apple, garlic and sumac, all symbolizing nature, were set up in some homes with their closest replacement items. Rather than sitting together in large family groups as the young brought sweets to their elders, candies were left on doorsteps. "While we may not be able to celebrate as we normally would, the core tenets of Nowruz transcend even a global pandemic," said Zafar (2020).

Passover

The Jewish holiday of Pesach or Passover came next, starting on April 8 for eight days. A holiday marking the Jews emancipation from slavery in Egypt, and celebrated with a Seder (meaning "order" in Hebrew), Passover often brings large extended families and close friends together to tell the story of the Exodus, drink four cups of wine, eat matzah

or unleavened bread, and share a large celebratory meal. Seder is the most widely observed Jewish ritual. Passover is a home and family holiday, and so the fact that synagogues and temples were shuttered did not largely matter. Families prepare a Seder plate filled with symbolic items—salt water representing tears, greens to dip in the saltwater, bitter herbs, usually horseradish, and charoseth made of apples, cinnamon, nuts, and wine to symbolize mortar used by the Jewish slaves, a shank bone, and a roasted egg representing spring and new life. Finding all of the Seder plate items this year was not always possible; depending on where one lived, a family likely improvised—a chicken leg for a shank bone, (or a beet or a carrot in a vegetarian home), whatever fruits and nuts were around for the charoseth, and in our home, hot mustard stood in for bitter herbs, an avocado pit for a roasted egg. On a separate plate is the matzah or unleavened bread, symbolizing the Jews' swift departure from Egypt, with no time for the dough to rise. Three matzah are placed on the Seder table, and the middle matzah is broken in half. One half, called the afikoman, is the "dessert," finalizing the end of the Seder. In some families, the children hide this portion and ransom it back, while in other families, the leader of the Seder hides it and the children must find it and return it in exchange for a gift.

This year, Passover Seders were either very small, containing just nuclear families, or they were bigger Zoom or Google or Facebook gatherings, including extended family and friends, or they were huge, involving hundreds from across the U.S. and other countries, all celebrated over Zoom. (Highly religious Orthodox Jews would not use Zoom or other technology on the holiday.) In our own Zoom Seder, I turned the screen away and hid the afikoman, requiring our now young adult grandchildren to repeat a ritual we have done for decades and guess, from one to two hundred miles away, where I had hid it in familiar spaces they could imagine in their minds. And once they discovered it, their gifts were sent via the CASH app on my phone!

The Haggadah, a small book that sets forth the order of the Seder and retells the story of the Exodus, has always had wonderful flexibility—families and communities write their own, incorporating new symbols and meanings. As Passover fell shortly after the Covid shutdown, people had time to adapt their Haggadahs and send them out by email before the holiday. In my own family, we used a new Haggadah, created by HIAS, an organization that works for and with refugees, enabling us to think beyond our own "lockdown," to know more about the suffering of others and how we might contribute to their well-being.

Families had to adapt their Seder meals this year—a traditional brisket may not have been available, matzah ball soup may have been missing the matzah balls and gefilte fish were likely not obtainable. The phrase in the Haggadah—"How is this night different from all other nights?"—was replaced in many families with "How is this year different from all other years?"

Easter

On April 12, 2020, Easter arrived. Traditional Easter rituals did not disappear because of the virus—rather, people sought new ways to maintain much of the familiar. A holiday that is both solemn, as Christians remember the final days of Jesus, and celebratory, as people mark the resurrection with church services, flowers, family gatherings, big dinners and playful games for children, instead was marked by nuclear families or couples in the shutdown without extended family or friends. There would be no big community Easter egg hunts. Instead many families created their own—in a yard, or a living room or a studio apartment. And while egg prices skyrocketed due to coronavirus panic buying, some communities invented a paper egg hunt ritual, taping colorful paper eggs on the outside of houses for children, walking with their parents, to discover (Whiten, 2020). In some communities, a costumed Easter Bunny made a socially distant visit. People were baking hot

cross buns at home. Easter parades, an annual and highly anticipated event, were cancelled. The tradition in many families of buying and wearing new clothes to large family gatherings went missing, replaced by wearing favorite dressy clothing and taking photos to text to families and friends.

Churches, with the exception of those refusing to follow the states' stay at home edicts, were closed by the virus. Easter services were live-streamed online. Many churches begin the Easter celebration in the late hours of Saturday night—again, this was streamed. Vatican City, always packed on Easter, stood empty.

Pope Francis delivered his Easter message over television and the internet, where he spoke of a different contagion—the contagion of hope. His message combined gratitude to nurses and doctors and other health care workers worldwide with an imperative that we care for others and eschew selfishness and division.

Easter brunches and dinners, normally large extended family rituals, were replaced by small household gatherings, connected to the wider family via Zoom or Facebook message or Google. Traditional menus changed as some favorite foods were simply unavailable or too large for a much smaller gathering, such as an Easter ham. The sharing of food and conversation went virtual rather than disappearing.

Ramadan

Finally, Ramadan, the Muslim holiday celebrated this year in North America from April 23 to May 23, arrived. A time when Muslims bring out every special dish, family games, gifts, prayers, and large family and community gatherings, Ramadan this year was going to need to be different.

One mother of a seven-year-old girl was surprised by her daughter's request to fast, as children do not observe this ritual. In response to her mother's query as to why she wanted to fast, the little girl responded, "Because mama, so we can know what it feels like to not have food like the people who don't have food and are hungry." Responding to her daughter's empathy, this mother agreed that she may fast for as long as she chose, be it thirty minutes or longer. Wanting her daughter to know that fasting without reflection is simply starvation, together, they created a new ritual of "reflection prompts" that mother would write on folded pieces of paper for her daughter to open with her at every iftar in order to generate a new reflection every day (Shakir, 2020). Mosques were closed due to COVID-19. The tradition and requirement of praying together in a mosque or masjid five times a day became inaccessible. Large nightly community gatherings to break the daily fast became impossible. One student told me, "When we saw that Covid was not going away before Ramadan arrived, everyone in my family felt sad. We did the Taraweeh prayer, the prayer at night after we break our daily fast, as an immediate family - this was especially difficult for my grandfather. My grandparents cherished this ritual the most as a time to be together, in our larger community, to pray for the world, and for peace. In the past, at the end of Ramadan, during the three day Eid celebration our entire family and community came together. My grandfather would speak with the police and organize space in the park for all of us. This year, it was just our household– we tried to be happy, but the ritual of physical connection, hugs simply cannot be replicated on line. I hope we don't have to experience this again." (Personal communication, Somer Saleh, 2020).

A very different experience occurred as a large group of New York Muslim women formed a Ramadan Sisters Program daily on Zoom to examine a chapter of the Quran in depth. Another student said, "By the end, we felt so united—women who had never known each other before. We built a sisterhood bond. Each of the masjids set up drive-through opportunities for children to receive candy and toys. Some wore animal costumes to entertain the children in the drive-through. We dressed up in our finest clothes and had mini-

photo shoots. We used social media to help families who were losing members to never feel all alone. We set up charity programs to build projects overseas—a well, a school, a masjid. I learned by witnessing that there were so many ways for people to connect that did not require physical contact. I always heard people say how sad they felt when Ramadan ended and I never understood until this one, because I really got in touch with the blessings of this month." (Personal communication, Roua Eltayeib).

LIFE CYCLE RITUALS

Life cycle rituals accompany all of our life cycle transitions (Imber-Black, 2016). So many planned for life cycle rituals either did not occur or were on Zoom or held in cars in a drive-in theater. A long-anticipated baby shower, a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, a confirmation, an engagement party, graduation, or wedding—thousands of such rituals were cancelled or postponed at the start of the shutdown. As time went on, however, people's ritual-making inventiveness began to awaken.

Graduations: Marking Accomplishments

In suburban Dallas, Texas, Principal Virdie Montgomery, accompanied by his wife, drove over 800 miles and 12 days to deliver an individually hand-written note and a Snickers candy bar to each student, repeating, "Someday you will look back at this time and snicker." He reflected on how important it was to him to see each of his 612 seniors, to know they were doing well, and to let them know how much each meant to him.

In Chesterton, Indiana, the school delivered yard signs to the graduates—"Class of 2020," while in Salt Lake City and other locations, teachers placed yard signs on graduates' lawns for them to discover. Padilla (2020) and using $4,000 that students fundraised since 6th grade and that would have paid for prom, a senior trip, and other fun happenings to mark graduation, a graduating class in New York transformed these rituals with compassion, voting to give the money to a regional Food Bank.

Colleges and universities had a mix of graduations—some cancelled, some postponed and some held virtually. In some locales, graduating students refused to leave their ceremony to administrations and created their own graduation rituals—Arizona State used virtual robots walking across the stage with photos and videos to represent every student; graduates at the University of Pennsylvania built the campus and a stage via the video game, Minecraft to hold their graduation ceremony (Meisenzahl, 2020).

Weddings: Starting New Lives

The enormous contrast of sheer disappointment versus creative ritual making comes alive in cancelled weddings and wedding ceremonies, and celebrations made anew. In the wake of the shutdown in March in the United States, the news was packed with stories of closed wedding venues, bridal shops, florists, bakeries, and deeply disappointed brides, grooms, and families. Many had planned for a year. Some places gave no refunds, while others made arrangements for a deadline or a shift to the following year. But, as the reality of postponed weddings began to fully penetrate, some couples decided on a different direction.

One clerk of courts in Florida quickly set up drive-thru wedding ceremonies for a bargain $30.00, while in California, the governor allowed online weddings with video conferencing to enable the couple to assemble a witness, family, and friends. Some cities began permitting couples to have outdoor weddings in parks with no more than ten guests, all standing and social distancing, with a one-hour time limit. And in this age of technology, apps arose quickly to meet the need—*Just Elope* and *LoveStream virtual weddings by*

Bustld are but two examples of sites enabling guests from afar to participate in a wedding with no danger of contracting COVID-19.

In the Middle East, couples in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Lebanon rushed to beat the deadline of Ramadan, when weddings are rare. Replacing the normally large weddings of several hundred or many thousands of guests, small weddings of no more than ten guests, social distancing over a lunch, took place. In countries and cultures where weddings involved two large extended families, and not just two individuals, couples wed foregoing normally enormous celebrations, music, traditional foods, and cash gifts meant to start a couple on their new life. Going against all custom, one groom picked up his wife-to-be on horseback for a two-person celebration and congratulations on Facebook (Walsh & Yee, 2020).

One Brooklyn couple was determined to marry on the date they had originally planned —May 10, 2020. The bride-to-be said, "I am marrying you on 5-10-20. It may have to be right here on our stoop. And I might be in sweats. But we are still doing this, come hell or high water." For this African American couple with deep ties to their large extended families and strong bonds in their community, figuring out how to have a virtual wedding on the front stoop became their project. Local friends dressed in white and wearing masks and gloves agreed to line the sidewalk. Their stoop, rich with prior symbolic meaning, became the centerpiece. Previously, a place to dance, talk, or just think alone and together, this stoop was filled with significant memories from before COVID-19. Playing music on their stoop brought out neighbors and children dancing. They wanted that spirit for their wedding—social distancing as their whole block danced. Neighbors donated items that quickly grew rich with symbolic meanings of generosity and caring. One made a delightful floral arch to frame the front door. Everyone living nearby joined in the spirit from their own stoop, and 200 relatives and friends joined on Zoom. The sidewalk had six feet socially distant circles drawn in chalk. The bride's mother made gift bags with bubbles and seeds to plant and homemade brownies from a family recipe. When the music began, people poured into the street to celebrate the bride and groom. A pastor officiated on Zoom from the couple's home church in California. After their vows, the couple danced in the street. They had sent their playlist to all their invited guests, so people could dance with them from afar. During their first dance, a police car approached, but when they saw the maintenance of social distancing, they moved on—and the whole street roared with joy and relief. Their DJ started the first dance once more, and the bride said, "We got to do it over the way we planned—this time with all the love and energy of our whole community cheering us on. It was nothing short of magical." (Macon, 2020).

The Murder of George Floyd: Protests as Powerful New Rituals

On May 25, 2020, our nation and the world were shocked out of our shutdown lassitude by the murder of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police. Responding to the video showing George Floyd's undeserved and criminal murder, with an officer's knee on his throat for eight minutes and forty-six seconds, people took to the streets all over the world in protests that continue as I write this paper in June and will continue beyond. Lafayette Plaza in Washington D.C., running in front of the White House, was renamed by the mayor as Black Lives Matter Plaza. Black Live Matter was painted in bright yellow as a mural on the street leading to the White House, and was quickly replicated on streets in cities and towns across the country, becoming its' own ritual. The chain-link fence around the White House to keep protesters further away was speedily hung with posters marking the demonstration for genuine freedom and equality. The posters will eventually become part of the African American Museum of the Smithsonian. And in the midst of pain, sorrow, anger, and determination that change *will happen now*, came more weddings.

On June 6th, in Philadelphia's Logan Square, a protest marching to City Hall met a wedding. Groom, Michael Gordon waited for his bride, Dr. Kerry-Anne Perkins, to meet him in the courtyard of the Logan Hotel; he looked out in the crowd and found her in a sea of protesters who had stopped to applaud her. This African American couple stood together, he in his tux and she in her wedding dress, as she raised her fist in solidarity and he followed. Intending to keep their wedding a secret so they could have a celebration in 2021 with family and friends, the couple's wedding day was photographed by thousands and seen by millions as it was posted in newspapers, magazines, television, and on Instagram (Reyes, 2020). The juxtaposition of love and protest unleashed profound emotions for this bride and groom and the demonstrators.

In another wedding amidst the protests, Brad Luna and Adam Ouanes, a same-sex couple who had chosen Pride Month and the fifth anniversary of the Supreme Court decision upholding marriage equality for their original wedding for 100 guests, kept their date and shrank their list to an allowable 10. As they exited the church following their vows, they met a Black Lives Matter protest. The newlyweds began to applaud them, and, in turn, the protesters applauded the just married pair or raised their fists for this same-sex couple (Mallozzi, 2020).

Marking the End of a Life: When Rituals Go Missing

The most profound life cycle rituals are those that mark the end of a life, whether that be a funeral, a burial, a cremation, or a memorial service. Here, COVID-19 pushed us to our limits. Death by COVID-19 changed our rituals profoundly and immediately, depriving the living of any chance to say goodby or to grieve in traditional ways. With the exception of an acute and unexpected death, such as a heart attack or stroke, family members and close friends are usually at a loved one's side at the time of death, able to stroke a hand or give a last kiss. Not so with COVID-19. Due to the enormously contagious nature of the virus, spouses, children, siblings, and dear friends were forbidden to enter the hospital. Couples married fifty or sixty years were separated in death. Adult children could not say goodby to parents. Victims of COVID-19 died alone. No family member identifies a body, resulting in a profound ambiguity. And because of the requirements of the shutdown and social distancing, funerals were limited to two to four mourners. Some were too poor to even afford a burial or cremation, their loved one suddenly left to be buried in a Potters field. All of the familiar rituals connected to dying and death, regardless of faith or religious practices, were missing. There would be no wake, no viewing of the body, no sitting Shivah, no visiting to bring food and comforting hugs to the grieving, and, perhaps most important, no in-person storytelling of the person's life. Burial practices changed profoundly—there would be no passing of a shovel to pour dirt on a Jewish grave, replaced by throwing a handful of soil, no washing a body as done in Islam and Judaism. Stories of graveside services with a clergy person with no knowledge of the deceased abound. Here the juxtaposition of humor at the obvious mistakes of names and historical facts well known by the family with the unspeakable pain of unanticipated loss wrap around the burial ritual.

One woman told me of her mother's death. "My mom had dementia—she was on the memory floor of a wonderful facility. She had her own room and could go to dinner with others—and I saw her at least four times a week. I brought her groceries every week—and dementia or not, she knew if I forgot her watermelon. But when the virus came, I could not see her for six weeks—even calls and Face Time were halted. Like everywhere, her place home was completely shut down. And then I was called—my mom was in the hospital with COVID-19. I was determined she would not die there. The home she was living in said if we arranged for hospice, she could come back. My mom went back to her familiar

room, with hospice, and died the next day. We were allowed three people and twenty minutes at the cemetery. The minister at the graveside had no idea who she was—and her life was dispatched in five minutes. The next morning, I wrote a long letter to my mom—when I will be allowed, I plan to go to her grave to read it to her—that will be my goodbye ritual."

For some, funeral services and memorials quickly shifted to Zoom, where mourners shared memories, played music, showed photos, art and videos, and heard speakers who shared reflections of the person's life. Yet, in a time where technology is foremost, simple gestures that reach back in time are essential. Hand-written notes or cards instead of a quick email, delivering groceries outside the home of the bereaved, lighting a memorial candle in a window, and calling on the phone rather than texting can reach across the gulf created by COVID-19.

COUPLE AND FAMILY THERAPISTS' WORK WITH RITUALS IN THIS EXTRAORDINARY TIME

As Couple and Family Therapists, this period of life contextualized by COVID-19 requires that we be vigilant, ever watching for missing rituals, for opportunities for new rituals, and for ways to re-shape familiar rituals to fit the current time. Conversations with couples and families about what typical days now look like may open queries about meals, bedtime, or other possible places to design a new ritual. Simple new rituals to keep couples connected—an evening walk to a favorite spot or a decision-making conversation, led by one partner on one evening and the other on the next evening, continuing until each is satisfied with a new decision. Using a genogram can remind us when birthdays or anniversaries may be coming, opening a conversation about new and different ways to celebrate during COVID-19, rather than letting a special day go unmarked. Conversations that enable couples and families to reflect on what worked for their spring holidays and what they wish they had done differently can lead to reflections on what is meaningful in a ritual and ways to shape future rituals. Providing opportunities to talk over the sheer disappointment of missed rituals—a daughter's college graduation, a son's postponed wedding, a special anniversary dinner in a favorite restaurant, being with aging parents for a holiday or Sunday dinner, an annual family reunion that occurs every summer, requiring travel and large groups—may open a conversation about what, if anything can be done instead, now or in the future. Reflect with clients on new rituals they may have created, whether joyfully or ruefully. Inquire about what they would like to maintain—what did a new ritual do for relationships? What may have surprised them? What rituals do they want to create going forward, both during and after the pandemic? Making room for critical conversations about the enormity of unsatisfying and unfinished rituals to mark the loss of a loved one may open new thoughts and ideas to create a ritual never before experienced.

Rituals provide us with powerful connections with one another. When we open the conversation about rituals in therapy, we provide our clients with opportunities to reflect on what they may want in their rituals, and how they may want to design totally new rituals befitting this extraordinary time.

CONCLUSIONS

Rituals bent but did not break during COVID-19. New rituals were created, designed, and invented that captured and expressed the current moment. Our rituals hold us, shape us, sustain us, and connect us. When the shutdown finally becomes a memory and some of the newly invented rituals slip away, I predict that many will maintain as discoveries of

our creativities, our capacities, and our requirement for the human connections rituals provide.

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