

***TIKKUN ADAMAH W POLSCE:***  
**(Healing the Mother Earth in Poland)**

An Ancestral Journey Into the Heart of Fear and Into the Arms of  
Matka Ziemia (Mother Earth)

By

Maura Singer Williams

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Ancestors, Life forces of the Universes, Healing powers of the Earth— wellspring of blessings are you! You have sustained and nurtured us and unfolded our lives in such a way that we have arrived at the gift of this moment and this place. *Toda Raba.*

## Introduction

It all started with a dream I called, "The House of Life." In the beginning I am in the attic of a three-story retreat house in Northern California (where I now live). The rooms are being used by three women engaged in a Tibetan-style three-year retreat. I make my way down from the attic to the first floor. Next, I am transported to the West Village in New York (near where I used to live). There is a tremendous rainstorm and a group of us are taking shelter in a basement restaurant. In the last scene I am with my maternal grandmother, Grandma Rosia. As I watch her cook and do other household chores, I instinctively know that she is the matriarch of the family. There is, as there was when she was alive, a tremendous bond of love and understanding between us. She imparts a message to me: "Build an earth shrine in Poland."

When I woke up that morning, something felt different; an alchemical change had taken place. This dream began a series of events that I never could have predicted. Since my Bat Mitzvah I had lost all interest in Judaism and had been studying and practicing Buddhism and Yoga since I was thirteen. The dreamscape's journey down from the third floor "attic": from the non-dual, esoteric heights of my current spiritual practices, and into the "basement" of my genetic ancestral blood body, has brought me back into contact with my indigenous Jewish roots and set me on a path of reconciliation and healing in Poland. The key questions guiding this journey would become: "What is an "earth shrine"?" and "How do I go about building one in Poland?"

"Tikkun Adamah w Polsce" uses both Hebrew and Polish in the title. *Tikkun Adamah* means healing or mending the earth in Hebrew. *Adamah* is a feminine noun and the name for Mother Earth. W Polsce is Polish for "in Poland." By using both Hebrew and Polish in the title I want to show the link between these two languages and these two peoples that exists in history and in the present. Inherent in the title is a yearning for healing. It imagines a future where Poles and Jews have mended the earth that they shared, healed the Polish land from the horrors of the past. "Tikkun Adama w Polsce" is a chronicle of the call to and preparation for this journey as

well as a travelogue of the journey itself, and a summary of the fruits of the journey. In the narrative, Hebrew is italicized and I have underlined Polish words.

The title of the first section, "Meeting Adamah," represents the unfolding of my connection to Mother Earth through indigenous earth-based Jewish practice. The miracle of truly meeting *Adamah* is that She is nurturing and loving on all places of the earth, regardless of national borders. It is this wisdom that would serve me in my ancestral journey in Poland. In "Meeting Adamah" I also explore the history of the Polish side of my heritage, my maternal family. I recount what I could learn of their life in the "old country," and how and why they came to America. I talk about uncovering both a woundedness as well as a connection to Poland I inherited from my grandparents that I never knew existed. My dreams became the gateway into this discovery. I outline the auspicious connections that began to happen once I said yes to the journey and set my intention to allow Spirit to guide my path. Also documented are the rituals and work with my mentors that prepared me to go to Poland, to a place whose name alone inspired tremendous fear in my heart.

In the title of the second section, "Adamah is Matka Ziemna," I again deliberately use the Hebrew and Polish words for Mother Earth. Matka Ziemna means moist Mother Earth in Polish. It is the name the indigenous, pre-Christian Poles used for their Earth Goddess. She represents the universal life source, the very fabric of being.<sup>1</sup> Doing ritual on the earth in Poland I experienced first-hand the power of Matka Ziemna. I was awed by the revelation that there is absolutely no difference between the life source, healing and nurturing energy of *Adamah* and Matka Ziemna.

The format of this section, "Adamah is Matka Ziemna," is a travelogue. Each chapter was written in a different place during the journey itself. "Adamah is Matka Ziemna" chronicles the

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<sup>1</sup> Okana's Web, "Gods, Goddesses, Faeries and Spirits of the Polish Realm," 22 Feb. 2004. <http://okana.org/page.html>.

rites of passage in each place and explores the resonance that I felt almost immediately upon coming into contact with the Polish land, particularly with the rocks, water and wildlife.

One of my mentors encouraged me to share detailed information on the rituals conducted and how they might be used by someone making a similar ancestral journey. Upon my return I understood the transformative healing power of the indigenous path of earth-based Judaism and felt utterly committed to the dissemination of the teachings. They appear in both Parts One and Two.

In the final section, “Polish Ancestral Healing”, I reflect on how this ancestral journey has changed my life through the reintegration of my Jewish soul. I discuss my call to facilitate the kind of indigenous, earth-based healing that I experienced, with Jews and non-Jews on Polish soil. And I touch on the work of the Polish Ancestral Healing Project, a non-profit organization that was birthed through the journey.

# PART ONE

## Meeting Adama

### The Singers and the Segals

I was raised in Brooklyn in the 1960's and 70's. We lived 10 minutes away from my mother's parents, Grandpa Leo Singer and Grandma Rosia Singer (nee Segal), and were with them much of the time. Their home was our second home and had a quality best described with the Yiddish word, *hey mish*: meaning homey, cozy, snug, warm, intimate, comforting. My grandmother cooked traditional Jewish/Polish dishes, and we had every holiday, Jewish and American, at their house. I knew my grandparents were from Poland, but their experience of their homeland was so filled with grief, anger and sorrow that they rarely, if ever, talked about their lives before coming to America. I was fortunate that my grandfather agreed to make a tape with me, answering questions about his life and what he knew of my grandmother's life in Poland. But his focus was on how well he did at school, how much the Jews were hated by the Poles and even more by the Ukrainians. It didn't give me much of a feeling of life there, I still had trouble picturing it. It wasn't until I became interested in their towns, *shtetls* in Yiddish, and going back to Poland, that my mother showed me a book from my grandfather's library. It was a *Yizkor* (memorial) Book entitled: *Swastika Over Jaworow: The Tragic Chronicle of the Jewish Community*.

From the introduction:

About fifty miles west of Lemberg, nestling in a heavily wooded area of great scenic beauty and hugging the banks of the Shklo River, lies the town of Jaworow. Its total population during the period between the two World Wars was approximately 11,000 distributed as follows: Jews, 2,500; Ukrainians, 6,000, and Poles, 2,500. The town was a noted center of Jewish learning. Its tradition of scholarship dated back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century . . . The time separating the two world wars, was not too happy for the Jews of Jaworow. In the main they were traders in dairy products. Some were lumber merchants since the region abounded in forests and woodland. The post-war crisis quickly impoverished them. Young Jews had no place where to emigrate and were compelled to remain in the small town without means of earning a livelihood regardless of university degrees. Before the outbreak of World War II, Jaworow Jews continued to live in accustomed ways. Day by day they sunk deeper into poverty, and looked

forward toward better conditions with serene hopefulness. Meanwhile the rise of Hitler darkened the world with gathering war clouds and forever shut out the sun for the Jews of Poland and for the Jews of Jaworow.<sup>2</sup>

I found myself wondering if my grandfather had this book since its publication in 1950. Why had he never shown it to my mother or me? Was he a member of the Jaworower Association, people from the town, those now settled in Israel or America who kept in touch with each other? Did he meet up or correspond with other survivors from his town? By the time I received this book and was interested in my ancestors and the “old country,” my grandmother had been dead for 31 years and my grandfather for 16. How is it possible that I didn’t know to ask them when they were still alive? I know this question has tormented my mother as well. Her whole childhood was marked by silence around Poland, what her parents went through to leave, and the unimaginable suffering of those who could not leave.

When I read these words in my grandpa’s *yizkor* book, a whole world opened up for me. I wanted to see the banks of the Shklo River and the beauty of the forests. I began to try to imagine what life must have been like for my grandparents, growing up in towns near each other in Poland, but never meeting until they were in America. The book actually mentions a number of Singers (my grandpa’s name) in the chapter that describes how the Nazis tortured and killed the townspeople. By then, my grandfather had been gone from that place for 18 years. The remaining Singers were humiliated and murdered. A “lucky” few were arrested by the USSR army and taken to a prison in Siberia where only my three of my grandpa’s cousins survived by escaping and walking hundreds of miles through the frozen forest to safety. They eventually made it into Cuba, the only country allowing political refugees at that time. One year at a family gathering, one of these cousins, Mila, told me the story of her return to Poland. The man who was living in the house that had belonged to her family told the cab driver who brought them never to bring Jews to his house again. After telling me this story, Mila said, “Don’t ever go to Poland; there’s nothing there, only pain and sorrow.”

On the tape I made with my grandpa he told me that his father, Moses, had owned a clothing store in town. After his father’s death in 1920, the family no longer had a means to

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<sup>2</sup> Samuel Druck, *Swastika Over Jaworow: The Tragic Chronicle of the Jaworow Jewish Community*: (New York, First Jaworower Press, 1950), 1-2..



support themselves in Jaworow. Ironically it was this family tragedy that precipitated the emigration of him and his mother Celia, his two brothers, two aunts and three cousins to America in search of opportunity. As the elder Ukrainian woman whom we met when my mother and I went to Jaworow remarked, this was a blessing from God.

My grandpa had also told me a little about my grandmother's family. They came from another *shtetl*, about 70 km away called Mosty Wielkie, which, I learned on my travels, means Big Bridges in Polish. Her family name was Segal, and like my grandfather, her entire immediate family had left Poland after her father, Pesach, who was a forest ranger in Hungary, died. Her mother, Sarah, as well as her two brothers came with my grandmother. The story goes that they both arrived in New York on the same day in 1921, on different ships.

My grandfather's *yizkor* book is one of thousands of such books, published in New York or Israel for each of the many towns where the Jewish population was completely decimated, murdered, shot into mass graves—as in my grandparents' towns—or shipped off to death camps. Since there was a *yizkor* book for *Jaworow*, I wondered if there was one for my grandmother's town too. I explored and found it through an Israeli website that specializes in memorial books. Within a few weeks, the book called: *Mosty-Wielkie Memorial Book: The Life and Destruction of a Jewish Community* arrived. From one of the remembrances:

Through the years of my life in Mosty, the persecution of the Jewish population never diminished. In spite of it, the Jews maintained a cultural life, as they always seemed to do. It was not the organized cultural activity of modern urban society, and there were neither theatres nor auditoriums. Culture was expressed in conversation and intellectual discussion. A man could walk along the streets of Mosty with a friend, talking all the while and discussing an issue of the day, and take long walks lasting for hours and carrying us many kilometers into unknown parts of the woods surrounding Mosty. One could sit and consider on the banks of the Rata River.<sup>3</sup>

And another remembrance shows the closeness to nature as well as the dichotomy of suffering and joy:

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<sup>3</sup> Moshe Starkman, *Mosty Wielkie: A Monument on the Ruins of an Annihilated Jewish Community*: (Israel, Mosty Wielkie Societies of Israel and USA, 1972), 41-42.

Towards the end of World War I, life in Mosty became hard and full of tears. Food was difficult to obtain, and clothing was not available for love or money. My father was a prisoner of war in Russia. The Poles were meanwhile taking over their newly acquired land and, in the process robbing the Jews of their valuables and of their last crust of bread. My grandmother however, always deemed herself a millionaire. In her daily prayers, she thanked the almighty for her good health, for giving her everything that she needed to live, and for her grandchildren in whom she took such pride and joy. In those days, my sister and I used to rise at dawn. On tiptoe, we would sneak out through the back door, while everyone was still asleep. We would run down a slope covered with grass, to the River Rata. Everything seemed so peaceful at that early hour. The air was filled with the delightful fragrance of weeds and flowers, and the shining dewdrops looked like diamond, especially those hanging from the branches of the trees and mingling in the sunlight with all the colors of the rainbow. We swam and splashed in the velvety soft water, and were filled with delight.<sup>4</sup>

These stories reflect the lightening quick changes in the circumstances of the Jewish communities of this part of the world, depending on who had conquered whom at the moment. Both Jaworow and Mosty Wielkie, which belonged to an area known as Galicia, were conquered in different years in the early Twentieth Century by the Poles, Austrians, Hungarians, Russians, Ukrainians and the Germans. The political instability of the region deeply, and more often than not, tragically affected the lives of the Jews who—even though they were a community unto themselves with their own social support networks and governance—were at the mercy of the larger political and social climates of the era.<sup>5</sup>

The effect of reading my grandparents' memorial books can be summed up in one word: longing. I not only longed for my grandparents to still be alive—to fully share their childhoods and young adult pasts with me—but I longed to be intimate with the world of my ancestors, a time and a place that they inhabited, the era of the *shtetl*. That the *shtetls* of their childhoods had been so thoroughly obliterated that not even a trace of them could be found now, made the longing even stronger.

What was I hoping to find or regain in traveling back to Jaworow and Mosty Wielkie? Was I looking for healing? For the face of someone to blame? Or was it simply first hand experience of

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Webinfonet, "History of the Jews in Poland," *Webinfonet Heritage and History*, 3 Feb. 2003. <http://webinfonet.net/heritage/history.html>.

the land and the people still left that I was after? Eduardo Duran writes that my generation has the potential to heal the wounds of the ancestors, and that these wounds are often revealed through dreams. <sup>6</sup> I recognized that my precious grandma Rosia had called on me to act: to use my healing potential and power for positive transformation. This became my intention as I undertook my ancestral journey: to activate what healing was available, for me, for my mother (who would accompany me on this trip), for my family and for past and future generations. As I prepared, I came to realize that I had no idea whom this work would touch, but simply the resolve to be of service to a greater healing.

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<sup>6</sup> Eduardo Duran quoted by Dr. Kimmy Johnson in a thesis project advisory meeting.

## The Magic of My Ancestors

In order to crack open something in yourself to allow you to be aware of the presence of the ancestors' spirits, you have to walk into nature with your emotional self, not with your intellectual self. You need to open wide your heart so that you can become moist and drink deeply from the emotional echoes that you receive from the frown of a gnarled tree or the twist of a branch. Seen in this way, nature, the dwelling place of the ancestral spirits, is a vast field of grief. I say this because every harmful thing done to the earth is registered in nature. Nature is the place where the real work of healing takes place slowly and gradually. This is because nature cannot ignore the wounds that humans inflict on one another and on her.<sup>7</sup> —Malidoma Some from *The Healing Wisdom of Africa*

The Jewish people have long been separated from our land. This happened many thousands of years ago. Since then, we have been wanderers, staying for a few hundred, perhaps a thousand years in a place and then being forced to leave or be killed. But our tribal place, the nature that birthed us, was lost. In each place that Jews have been allowed or managed to stay for at least a few hundred years, the connection to the nature spirits returns. It happened in Spain, with movements started by Rabbi Luria, in Poland, with the Bal Shem Tov, and it is happening today in America and Israel as the Jewish people look for ways to drink deeply from the emotional echoes and wisdom of the earth. Finding the connection to the mother earth in my own indigenous tribal roots was an answer to a spiritual yearning.

After the “House of Life” dream, a series of auspicious events began to take place. It was as if I had aligned with the flow of my ancestors and they had work they wanted me to do. First I met my soon to be friend and Poland traveling partner, Atava Garcia Swiecicki, in a class on Jewish mysticism. We immediately recognized the potential of our collaboration. Atava is half Polish Catholic, had already been to Poland on her own ancestral journey, and knew she wanted to go back. We saw the path of healing that we could take together, a Polish Jew and a Polish Catholic with our own bodies and souls, and the blood of our ancestors running through

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<sup>7</sup> Malidoma Somé, *The Healing Wisdom of Africa: Finding Life Purpose Through Nature, Ritual and Community*: (New York, Jeremy Tarcher, 1998), 54.

us. We could be a template of a healing path that other Poles: Jewish, Christian, those of other faiths or no faith, could walk.

The common ground we shared was the land that had been home to our ancestors. I was accustomed to the perspective of Poland as a vast Jewish cemetery. I had never considered that the Polish soil had nurtured Jews for hundreds of years. There is a Jewish prayer that is recited daily and in many other circumstances that says: *Barukh atta Adonai, Elohayno melekh ha-olam, she-hekhyanu, vekiyemanu, ve-higiyanu la-zeman ha-zeh* (Wondrous is the Infinite Being, Life Force of the Universes, who has sustained us and supported us and unfolded our lives in such a way that we have arrived at the gift of this moment and of this place.) That this prayer could ever have referred to the sustaining and nurturing place of Poland was a revelation.

Atava's teacher, Apela Colorado, the founder and director of the Indigenous Mind concentration at Naropa University's Master's program, suggested I study with Gershon Winkler, one of a small number of Jewish teachers steeped in the earth-based tribal ways. In his book, *Magic of the Ordinary: Recovering the Shamanic in Judaism*, he writes:

My ancestors were a tribal people, they lived and practiced a Judaism that in very few ways resembles the more urbanized Judaism of today. Once upon a time, my people enjoyed a relationship with the earth that was more about spirituality than about commerce or industry. Our visionaries came not from rabbinical seminaries and academies of higher learning but from solitary walkabouts and vision quests deep in the wilderness and far from the reaches of civilization. They were masters of sorcery and shamanism, dancing comfortably between the realms of spirit and matter, celebrating the magic of the worlds around them and the worlds beyond them. They knew the language of the trees and the grasses, the songs of the frogs and cicadas, the thoughts of horses and sheep. They followed rivers to discover truths, and climbed mountains to liberate their spirits.<sup>8</sup>

When I connected with Gershon I knew I had come home: home not only to the nearly 6000-year-old tribal tradition that was my birthright, but also to a way of understanding and practicing with creation, something I had been longing for in my spiritual life. I had been called by my grandmother to engage in a healing process on Polish land, and here were the rituals and teachings that would instruct me in doing this work. Since childhood I had been exposed to

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<sup>8</sup> Gershon Winkler, *Magic of the Ordinary: Recovering the Shamanic in Judaism*: (Berkeley, CA, North Atlantic Books, 2003), xix.

various normative Jewish traditions. Here was a Judaic practice that illuminated and exalted the Mother Earth and her healing potential. This stream had gone underground. Gershon explains:

Not unlike other aboriginal peoples, the Jews have for centuries been whipped into conformity to the religious standards and values of oppressive host cultures. The disappearance of the aboriginal Jewish mindset and wisdom is easily traced to the deadly campaigns waged against sorcery and witchcraft that cost the lives of millions since the Crusades. Clearly the Church did not tolerate any other form of spirituality than its own. In order to survive, the Jewish people had to compromise. Jews had to tone down the roles of their women in religious life and function to avoid suspicions of witchcraft. Jews had to fold up much of their mystical tradition and practice and stow it either in the disguise of innocent hymns or in cryptic oral transmission confined to a select few.<sup>9</sup>

Gershon and his teachings allowed for the integration of my Jewish soul into the healing journey to Poland. In preparation, as a way to heal myself into the earth and with his guidance I performed the “Earth Ritual,” explained in a later chapter. I also began working with a local Jewish teacher, Hana Matt, to whom I was guided by one of Gershon’s students. Hana supported and inspired me to live into my Jewish self. She became my spiritual director, worked closely with me in preparation for my journey and taught me the songs, prayers and practices that would be useful in Poland. Two of these: *niggun* (a song that comes from the soul) and *mikveh* (water cleansing) would be most essential for stability and sustenance during the trip. The ancient ways of the tribal Jewish people in communing with the elements would be the key to healing the wounds of my family and my people. As Malidoma Somé said, “Every harmful thing done to the earth is registered in nature. Nature is the place where the real work of healing takes place slowly and gradually. This is because nature cannot ignore the wounds that humans inflict on one another and on her.”<sup>10</sup> I would need to understand the “language of the trees and grasses . . . to climb mountains to liberate my spirit” in order to make peace with my homeland—a place where the grief of the earth is profound, a place where almost every inch of soil has witnessed atrocity.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

<sup>10</sup> Somé.

<sup>11</sup> Winkler, xix.

## Earth Ritual

The second-century Rabbi Shim'on bar Yochai is recorded to have journeyed into the earth by weeping, curled up on the earth, face toward the earth, sinking himself deeper and deeper into the earth for healing and mystery wisdom, then kissing the earth when he was done.<sup>12</sup> —Gershon Winkler, from *Magic of the Ordinary*

In *Magic of the Ordinary* there is a chapter called “The Soul Knows” which talks about the elements of the earth ritual. Gershon also talked about this ritual in a workshop I attended, but didn’t actually do it with us. From the first moment I read about the earth ritual I knew I wanted to do it. For many years I had been trying various practices to come into closer contact with the earth and my own groundedness, but never from my own tradition. Gershon writes:

The inspiration to re-learn my people’s shamanic ways . . . came as I became aware of how this ancient wisdom was so urgently needed for the healing of the planet, for the restoration of her life force in the face of increasing toxins and crud that was beginning to impede her life flow. I also became aware that many people were flocking to shamans of other traditions in a transdenominational quest for personal power and enrichment, and for the expressed purpose of fine tuning their relationship with the earth and her beings. As a rabbi, a spiritual teacher in the Judaic spirit path, it pained me to watch Jewish people flock to these wellsprings not knowing that their own tradition, too, is replete with the quality of wisdom.<sup>13</sup>

The earth ritual is not fully explained in his book for it should not be undertaken without the guidance of a teacher. Here I offer only a basic outline of the ritual. Gershon guided me in the planning stages. When I told him I didn’t think I was trained to do this alone, his comment was “Don’t be so sure.”

I gathered together a group of people, Jews and non-Jews, all of whom had done some form of ritual and were interested not only in connecting to the earth in this way, but in supporting me to do so. Atava was there. We had plans to see how it went this time and replicate it when we were in Poland. We gathered at a sacred spot in the wilderness near the ocean in northern California. We would perform the ritual at dusk and then camp out and do dreamwork in the

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., xxi.

morning. There were ten of us, a *minyán* (group of 10 needed for various observances in the Judaic tradition). We opened the six directions, asking Spirit and the ancestors for guidance. We brought objects and pictures to create an ancestral/Spirit altar and then created a ritual space in the campground. We then walked to the beach where the earth ritual took place. On the way to the beach *netz*, (hawk) who is the bringer of vision, circled overhead. And even though it was still daylight, *yanshuf* (owl), who is a soul guide called to us. The ritual space was created by drawing the *mahggen*, Shield of David—this became the ceremonial center. The score of the ritual was as follows:

### EARTH RITUAL SCORE

Call in directions, ask for blessing for this work.

Gather in a circle and create ancestral healing altar.

Individual prayer for each participant.

Slow circle dance to this prayer:

*Barucha ha makom*, (wellspring of blessing is the place)

*barucha hee*, (wellspring of blessing is she)

*Ey'ma De'ela'ah* (great mother)

Walk to the ritual space on the beach.

Gather in circle.

Recite "Blessing Prayer for the Earth" together (each person reads a part, see prayer below)

Create the *mahggen* with the seven sacred symbols and recite:

"My essence was not hidden from you, creator, when I was made in secret and mysteriously formed in the deepest parts of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance."

Those who will be in the center come forward.

Move those in the center in the 8 sacred movements—this includes the 4 directions:

*t'safon* (north), hidden

*kehdem* (east), beginning/before

*ma'arav* (west), blending

*nehggev* (south), cleansing

After the eight movements, people in center of circle rest on the ground in child's pose position.

### THE JOURNEY:

Chanting and drumming begins now (7 names of the Earth Mother): very fast at first then slower and slower until it is like the heartbeat of a sleeping person.



Leader circles seven times counterclockwise praying for those journeying.

Everyone else covers those in child's pose with sand until they are a mound. Those who will journey with them then sit at the south point of the star facing away from the center.

And journeying begins:

As you journey into the earth, inhaling from the lights behind your eyelids, you come to the seven chambers corresponding to the seven attributes of the earth. At each passageway you surrender yourself to these attributes of the Earth Spirits:

*Adamah*: peace

*Eretz*: wisdom

*Ar'kah*: love

*Char'vah*: aliveness

*Teh'vel*: fruition

*Yabasha*: dreams

*Gey'*: power

At some point when the chanters and drummers feel the journey is complete, they ask the people journeying on the outside to join them in circling seven times clockwise.

The people in the center are uncovered and the leader performs the *hak'balah* movement, pushing them out into the waiting arms of friends.

They are brought to the ocean and dipped three times, or water is poured three times.

Everyone kisses the earth.

Then they party.<sup>14</sup>

When I got down on my hands and knees in child's pose and began to journey into the earth, the first thing I touched was my sister, Sara, who had died 18 years before. Her presence was so palpable, and I missed her so much, I began to sob, my tears mixing with the sand and the drumming and chanting. After a while, my grandfather, who had died 16 years earlier, was there, giving me strength and nurturance. There was a sense of being squeezed into myself, into the Earth Herself, and also of profound love and belonging. I'm not sure how long this period lasted, but at some point all of us in the center who were feeling cramped and cold began to move and unearth ourselves. Each one of us had a partner who was guiding us through. There was a thrill of leaving the circle, an anticipation of the next step of the ritual. My partner helped me up and guided me to the ocean. The waves were huge. It was completely dark and foggy. As

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<sup>14</sup> Teaching given me by Gershon Winkler.

I was led into the freezing cold water, naked except for my socks, there was only exhilaration and joy. Yes, I was cold and sandy, but I felt connected and free. I dipped three times. And then we all danced and yelled and drummed.

That night I slept well, which is unusual for me out in the wild. And in the morning, as we were getting out of our tent, we were astounded when a magnificent *ayal* (buck) came very close to our camp, closer than I have ever been to an *ayal*. These animals are particularly sacred in the Judaic tradition because the attribute of the deer is passion or fervor. According to Gershon, "Hesitation is the antithesis to shamanic action. And so is the lack of passion. Passion, the Jewish mystics taught, is the essential divine life force in all things." Deerskins were worn by Jewish shamans.<sup>14</sup>

The Earth Ritual was the first large-scale ritual that I had attempted. It felt like a rite of passage into seeing myself as a holder and maker of sacred ritual and as a student and facilitator of Jewish ritual. It was the first step in being willing and able to undertake the journey of ancestral healing. This Blessing Prayer for the Earth, given to me by Gershon, was the beginning of my healing, of me being able to pray "Wellspring of Blessing is the Place, Wellspring of Blessing is She" on the land in Poland.

Here is the full text of the prayer:

"Blessing Prayer for the Earth" spoken during the earth ritual

*Barukha ha'makom, ba'rukha hee*

Wellspring of Blessing is the Place,

Wellspring of Blessing is She.

*Ey'ma D'ela'ah! Great Mother!*

We call upon you,

you Who dwells above us

and below us

within us and around us

May it be your will

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<sup>14</sup> Winkler, 175.

that the Earth will evoke  
for those who dwell upon her  
beauty, meaning, wisdom, harmony,  
and the knowledge of how to live upon her.

May the four winds who carry your gifts  
grace this earth and its inhabitants  
with clarity from the south,  
balance from the east,  
illumination from the north,  
and healing from the west.

*Ey'ma D'ela'ah*, Great Mother, we ask you humbly  
to bless this earth with rain and dew,  
and with beauty and healing.  
And may we merit to see you,  
and to experience your mystery  
across your veil that is our earth.

May the Source of Powers gift to you  
of the rains of sky and the dew of earth,  
and grace you with sustenance as you have graced us;  
of that which will nourish your spirit and body  
and inspire all who sojourn here.

Wellspring of blessings are you!  
Infinite Being, Life Force of the Universes,  
who has sustained us and supported us  
and unfolded our lives in such a way  
that we have arrived at the gift of this moment  
and of this place.

May we always remember the gifts that  
*Adamah* brings us through her Peace;  
*Eretz*, through her Wisdom;  
*Ar'kah*, through her Love;

*Char'vah*, through her Aliveness;  
*Yabashah*, through her Fruition;  
*Teh'vel*, through her Bounty;  
*Gey'*, through her Power.

*Barukha ha'makom, ba'rukha hee*  
Wellspring of Blessing is the Place,  
Wellspring of Blessing is She.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Teaching given me by Gershon Winkler.

## Mikveh (Ritual cleansing, renewing, purifying with water)

About a week before Atava and I left for Poland, Hana suggested that we do a *mikveh* to be fresh and open for the journey. For me, *mikveh* was something that only orthodox Jewish women did and only when they were “unclean” and had their menstrual period. But as I soon learned, this was an ancient ritual (in fact, it was the template for Christian baptism), practiced by all Jews as a way to tap the elemental healing power of water. *Mikveh* was traditionally done in *mayim chayim* (living waters) meaning lakes or streams or oceans, but it became common as well to use communal baths specifically designed for this purpose, or showers and baths at home. Rachel Adler, a contemporary Jewish teacher, describes how we are reborn each time we immerse in the *mikveh*:

The *mikveh* is what is referred to in the Torah as ‘*mayim chayim*’ –living waters— as opposed to stagnant waters. The *mikveh* stimulates the original Living Waters, the primal sea from which all life comes, the womb of the world, the amniotic tide on which the unborn child is rocked. To be reborn, one must re-enter the womb and immerse oneself in Living Water.<sup>17</sup>

Another contemporary teacher, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, teaches that the *mikveh* “is an enactment of death and resurrection. It is a re-entry in to the womb and re-emergence. Immersing yourself fully you are like a fetus in a womb. When you come out of it you are a new creation.”<sup>18</sup> The *mikveh* was a way to re-birth Atava and me into beings who not only would be able to take on the descent into the shadows of Poland, but who were prepared to transform this energy and renew it. Six women gathered around a friend’s hot tub in a secluded wooded area. Hana asked each of our friends to bless us with something we would need on our journey. She gave us her blessing. Unlike the earth ritual, *mikveh* is a practice that can be used freely by anyone desiring purification by water.

The Rejuvenation *Mikveh* Ritual as transmitted to us by Hana Matt:

Gather in a circle and walk to left, bowing forward and backward in a swaying motion as the circle moves around:

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<sup>17</sup> Hana Matt, *Rejuvenation Ritual Based on Mikveh*, handout, 1997.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

*“Mikveh Kol Echad Shekhinah, Mikveh Kol Echad Shekhinah, Shekhinah is the Mikveh of each one, Shekhinah is the Mikveh of each one.”* (This chant can be used both before and after the *mikveh*.)

Each person to be renewed by the *mikveh* completes the entire ritual before the next person goes.

1. Let the water cover your whole body completely.

Say the traditional *mikveh brakhah* (blessing [Hebrew]) after immersion:

*Barukh ata Adonai Elohaynu melekh* (or *Brukha yah shekhinah eloyanu malkat* [in the feminine pronoun]) *ha olam, asher kiddishanu bemitsvotav, ve-tsivanu al ha-tevilah.*

Blessed is the source of all powers that has sanctified us with your enjoyment and asked us to immerse ourselves.

2. Again allow the water to totally cover you.

Say this traditional *brakhah*:

*Barukh ata Adonai Elohaynu melekh* (or *Brukha yah shekhinah Eloyanu malkat* [in the feminine pronoun]) *ha-olam, she-hekheyanu, vekiyemanu, ve-higiyanu la-zeman ha-zeh.*

Wondrous is Infinite Being, Life Force of the Universes, who has sustained us and supported us and unfolded our lives in such a way that we have arrived at the gift of this moment and of this place.

3. Now say this: “In the name of *Shekhinah, Adama, Elohim, Ha Shem, Rachamana*, (use whatever name or word signifies for you the divine, or transcendent power / spirit / energy), I (your name) want to let go of (a quality or state: e.g., anxiety, worries, doubt, troubles, sadness, an unwanted behavior pattern, an energy you have taken on.)” Then fully immerse yourself. If you have enough space in the water, form yourself into a fetal position and imagine that you are leaving whatever you want to let go of at the bottom of the *mikveh* and it flowing away and into the earth and being transformed. Uncurl and emerge. Everybody chants “*Amein.*”

4. Now say this: “In the name of *Shekhinah, Adama, Elohim, Ha Shem, Rachamana*, (use whatever name or word signifies the divine, or transcendent power / spirit / energy), I (your name) want to draw out from inside me (a quality of state: e.g., openness, balance, compassion, clarity, empowerment, wisdom, insight, ability to set limits.)” Then fully immerse yourself. If you have enough space in the water, form yourself into a fetal position and imagine that you are drawing up from yourself or from the *mayim chayim* what you want to embody. Uncurl and emerge. Everybody chants “*Amein.*”<sup>19</sup>

In Poland, Atava and I did the *mikveh* every day, wherever we were. Our first one was in the shower of the hotel room in Warsaw; the next, in a drenching rainstorm in the countryside near a tiny town called Jaktorow. In each place we sought out the *mayim chayim* to see if we

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Ibid.

could do *mikveh* there. If not we would improvise in a shower, or in the rain or in a tiny stream. Once while staying with farmers, high in the Tatra Mountains, we found an ideal spot. The woods were lush and alive with mushrooms, animals and birds. There were no people around. The deep mountain stream tumbled down into the valley and was cold and pure and clean. I thought about the description of the woods in my grandparents' memorial books. This must have been the way the forests were then. And that thought, like so many I had in Poland, was followed by, "I wonder how many Jews were shot in this forest or tried to escape from the Nazis by hiding here?" and, "How long could someone hide in this forest through the terribly harsh winters?"

There was a constant onslaught of grief as I touched into the pain and suffering of Jewish history. It was the daily performing of the *mikveh* that sustained and renewed me on the journey in Poland.

## **Festival of Jewish Culture in Kraków**

My travels were broken up into four parts. Atava and I spent the first part together, doing our healing work, staying mainly with farmers and being close to the land. Then we traveled to Kraków where the Festival of Jewish Culture was being held and where we met up with my family: my mother, her partner Richard and my partner Claudia. My mother and I continued on alone together to my grandparents' towns—which now lay in Ukraine—the border being moved as part of the post-war settlement with the USSR. And finally, my mother returned home and I traveled for a while by myself, back to the farmers and the countryside.

Atava and I made the Festival of Jewish Culture the focus of the planning of our trip. We were excited to experience Jewish music, art and film in Poland, and to take part in the dancing and craft workshops. And when we read the description of the aspirations of the Festival, we thought it would also be a good place to meet other like-minded people and draw inspiration and support for our own journey. From the Festival of Jewish Culture's website:

The festival's celebration of life commemorates the Jewish past, traces of which can be still be found in Kraków. . . The festival is a span of the symbolic bridge where Jews and Poles meet to strengthen the process of understanding and reconciliation. The Festival is a symbol of tolerance, pluralism and the faith that we have a chance, though the celebration of Jewish culture and the celebration of life to build mutual relations based on truth and respect.<sup>20</sup>

We were inspired to submit a proposal to teach there, to introduce the ways of ancestral healing that we were using in our own lives. We submitted a proposal to conduct a modified version of the Jewish Earth Ritual, and though the organizers expressed interest in our work, they felt it was not in the scope of the current festival though it might be in the future. This proposal is included below. Even though we couldn't teach at the Festival, we still felt that it was a good grounding point for our group, a way for my mother to enter into the experience of her parents' homeland, joined by Jews from all over the world who were coming to celebrate the rich history of our culture in Poland as well as wrestle with the tragedy and pain of that history.

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<sup>20</sup> Festiwal Kultury Żydowskiej, "History of the Festival," 20. April 2005.  
[http://jewishfestival.pl/glowna\\_en.php](http://jewishfestival.pl/glowna_en.php).



Jewish Cultural Festival, Kraków, Poland, 2004  
Workshop Proposal for Jewish Earth Ritual  
Instructors: Maura Singer and Atava Garcia Swiecicka

## Jewish Earth Ritual

### INTRODUCTION

"The second-century Rabbi *Shim'on bar Yochai* is recorded to have journeyed into the earth by weeping, curled up on the earth, face toward the earth, sinking himself deeper and deeper into the earth for healing and mystery wisdom, then kissing the earth when he was done."

—Gershon Winkler, from *Magic of the Ordinary: Recovering the Shamanic in Judaism*

This workshop is based on the teachings of Rabbi Gershon Winkler. His work is an attempt to restore recognition of Judaism as an ancient shamanic path—one that has been largely lost or suppressed over the centuries. Jewish shamanism, like Native American spiritual traditions holds the earth and our connection to the earth as deeply sacred. The Earth Ritual is a healing journey for each participant and for the Polish soil itself. The Polish earth has been witness to countless atrocities. It has also given birth to rich mystical traditions, both Jewish and indigenous Polish. The Earth Ritual is a gateway into healing and reconciliation. By addressing the wounds of the past using ancient Jewish earth-based traditions we help restore the health and well being of future generations. This workshop is an opportunity for both Jews and Poles to embrace their mutual source—the spirit of the Polish land.

### FORMAT

This is an experiential ritual. It will include traditional Jewish chanting, drumming, sacred movement and visualization as a way to guide participants into a connection with the earth. The ritual space is created by drawing the *mahggen*, Shield of David—this becomes the ceremonial center.

Within the *mahggen* the sacred earth is gently poured on each participant. The leaders guide the participants on a journey into the healing powers of the earth. After the journey is complete, the participants are anointed and blessed with water.

### WORKSHOP INSTRUCTORS

This workshop was borne out of a Polish/Jewish encounter. The workshop leaders met in the Traditional Knowledge graduate program at Naropa University and were immediately drawn to collaborate to find creative ways to embrace and heal their common Polish heritage.

**Maura Singer**, MA, Applied Theology, is an ordained Jewish Interfaith Chaplain working in the Spiritual Care department at Mt Zion/University of California at San Francisco Hospital on the oncology units. She has practiced in Buddhist and yogic traditions for over 13 years and has taught meditation, yoga and art throughout the San Francisco Bay Area since 1995. Maura has, through the dual process of being ordained as an interfaith chaplain and getting a Masters in Applied Theology at Naropa University, been led back to the practice of her ancestors. She is now a student of Rabbi Gershon Winkler and Hana Matt and is deeply engaged in using the wisdom and healing practices of the shamanic Jewish path to illuminate her work and teaching. Traveling to Poland is part of Maura's reclaiming and healing of her heritage. She was raised in Brooklyn, NY by her parents and maternal grandparents who are from Yavorov and Mosty Wielky, in Galicia. Her paternal grandparents are from Riga and Vilna.

**Atava Garcia Swiecicki**, on her father's side of the family, is third generation Polish-American. Her ancestors on her mother's side are Navajo, Mexican and Hungarian. Atava has been practicing herbalism, acupressure and holistic health care in the California Bay Area since 1988. Her most cherished teachers have been traditional healers and elders from North America, Mexico and Hawaii. Her graduate work in the Indigenous Mind Concentration at Naropa University Oakland has focused on the spiritual and cultural heritage of her Polish Slavic ancestors. Atava continues to work with the Indigenous Mind program as an administrator and faculty member. Her work is dedicated to honoring her ancestors and Mother Earth, and to helping other people connect to the earth-based traditions of their ancestors.

Atava was raised Catholic, although she has spent most of her adult life participating in Native American ceremonies. She is excited to participate in this interfaith exchange with Maura, as they creatively embrace their common Polish heritage.

The same Polish earth blessed and sustained both their Polish Jewish and Christian ancestors, and they believe that the power of the earth can help heal and mend the wounds of the past.

#### CLOSING PRAYERS

We pray that our work brings blessing and healing to our ancestors, families and future generations. We pray for healing to come to the Jewish people, to the Christian people, to the Polish people, and to the Polish land itself. We ask that our ancestors and the Infinite One guide us in all that we do.

We dedicate this Earth ritual in the way of Atava's Navajo ancestors:

With beauty before me I walk,  
With beauty below me I walk,  
With beauty behind me I walk,  
With beauty above me I walk.

It has become beauty again,  
It has become beauty again,  
It has become beauty again,  
It has become beauty again.

All Our Relations

We dedicate this Earth ritual in the way of Maura's Jewish ancestors:

*Barukha ha'makom, ba'rukha hee*  
Wellspring of Blessing is the Place,  
Wellspring of Blessing is She.

*Ey'ma D'ela'ah!*  
We call upon you,  
you Who dwells above us  
and below us  
within us and around us  
May it be your will  
that the Earth will evoke  
for those who dwell upon her  
beauty, meaning, wisdom, harmony,

and the knowledge of how to live upon her.

*Ey'ma D'ela'ah*, we ask you humbly  
to bless this earth with rain and dew,  
and with beauty and healing.  
And may we merit to see you,  
and to experience your mystery  
across your veil that is our earth.

Wellspring of blessings are you!  
Infinite Being, Life Force of the Universes,  
who has sustained us and supported us  
and unfolded our lives in such a way  
that we have arrived at the gift of this moment  
and of this place.

## PART TWO

### Adama is Matka Ziemna

*As Indicated in the introduction, this section contains excerpts from my travelogue, which were written during the journey.*

#### Seventh Day—The Buddhist Center

Traveling 45 minutes by commuter train out of Warsaw, Atava and I arrived at this tiny town and the Tibetan Buddhist Center. A kind man met us at the station and drove us the bumpy three miles to the Center. There was a Polish Lama there and other friendly Buddhists. The Polish Buddhists are just like other western converts: full of the joy and freedom of this amazing practice and enthusiastic and adoring of the Tibetans, Lamas and all things Buddhist. Very beautiful to see the *dharma* (teachings/truth in Sanskrit) flowering in this place that needs it so badly.

I was being as “out” as I comfortably could about being Jewish. It was either not a big deal or people were a little unsure of what to say. No one ever asked directly, “What’s it like to be Jewish and traveling in Poland?” People were polite and respectful, but I noticed some awkwardness and that people often expressed dismissive sentiments like “anti-semitism and the Holocaust are things of the past” or “we are open and certainly not like that.” I read in the guidebook about the Polish anti-Semitic purges of 1968 in cities like Warsaw, Lublin and Kraków. If Poles are so accepting, why did this happen? The pamphlet we got at the Jewish History Museum in Warsaw, put out by the current government called “To Jewish Friends”

includes a letter from the president. He blames the 1968 pogroms on the communist authorities.<sup>21</sup>

Time at the Tibetan Center was a chance to be on the land, to feel safe and anchored for the journey. I was grateful for this. The land, called Jaktorow, was very flat and windy and a bird and frog paradise. We saw storks and eagles and swans and magpies and so many other birds we didn't have names for. Gershon says "When you see an eagle hovering nearby, it is a sign that in this very moment healing and compassion are being made available so pray for it with all you've got. Seize the moment. According to another tradition, it is the stork who is an omen for compassion."<sup>22</sup> Even with all these omens of compassion, I felt a particular struggle with the sorrow of history that sat just on the surface of my mind and heart. It came up often just before sleep or when I felt connected to the beautiful nature in Poland. I was in the bumpy process of adjusting to this new environment. I did see a routine, a flow emerging: sitting at the pond with the frogs, ducks and storks; walking in the woods; chanting, writing and studying. We found a sacred place by the frog/duck pond to do our first ritual where we asked for protection and blessing from the many spirits and ancestors and Buddhas and Rabbis and rocks and plants and animals and Angels and whatever other energies were available.

I had to remember to lean into the sharp points—my own and my family's pain—and acknowledge that I have carried the idea that Poles hate Jews for most of my life. I had to remember that only way to heal this was to meet the "enemy." "Otherness" happens when people don't feel safe, when there is a real or imagined fear, fear of being hurt in some way. There are few Jews in Poland to arouse any of the things that grandpa talked about: envy and otherness as the reasons why the Poles hated the Jews. I wondered if many of the Polish people I saw on the street and in the towns were happy or relieved to have their country free of Jews. On the other hand, the government pamphlet, "To Jewish Friends" calls for restitution and healing. And for me, this was a a much needed and welcomed voice.

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<sup>21</sup> Diaspora's Memory, *To Jewish Friends*: (Warsaw, Poland, 2003), 32.

<sup>22</sup> Winkler, 170.

Late at night in my tiny Buddhist bungalow I thought about what would I say—after learning about how the Jews in my grandparents' towns were shot into mass graves by the Nazis—to a German woman I met at a party long ago, the daughter of an SS officer who complained about the Jews not yet forgiving the Germans? What would I say to her when she went on to explain that the Jews did nothing to fight back and this somehow, inexplicably, supported the case for forgiveness? At the time I was incredulous. I could not believe what I was hearing. We argued for some time. I felt stunned, angry and unable to respond with the kind of knowledge and wisdom that I would have liked. This conversation has stayed with me all these years and haunted me again in Poland. She was clearly blaming the victims for the pain of her own past, present and for the crimes of her father. But my first days in Poland, I found myself wondering what allows for this grace of forgiveness? I remembered a teaching that says that the energy of creation created forgiveness first, before the rest of this world, so that it would not destroy itself.

Today at dusk we walked to the lake, couldn't find it, until one of the students at the Center, Grazyna, showed us the path through tall grass, reeds, blackberries, and nettles. We got caught in a fabulous rainstorm that Atava and I used as a *mikveh*. I let go of hope, expectations, fear and judgment. Atava let go of fear, of not being embodied and of her difficult, dark time in Warsaw. She welcomed in Baba Yaga (the wrathful Polish Earth Mother) and the nature spirits. I welcomed in Baba Yaga, Kali, Lilith, Maha Kala, Simah Mukah, wrathful, powerful protectors from different traditions who are not afraid of adversity. It was a very freeing and energizing night.

A man from Lublin named Jack came to stay at the Center for one night with his son and daughter on their way to see a Lama do a very sacred dance in Berlin. When he said he was from Lublin, I was thrilled. He was perplexed. "What's so special about Lublin?" he asked. I told him that Lublin was a sacred place where many of the most famous Jewish mystics lived and taught. Jack looked sad then and said, "Yes, there is something there, a mystical, special

energy.” But he said there were many problems, difficulties, struggles too. He asked me if I knew about the concentration camp there, Majdanek? He said this place and what happened there is not an energy that is easily healed. Majdanek is located 4 km from Lublin city center. The guidebook explains that Majdanek was no semi-hidden location that people could claim or strive to remain in ignorance of—a plea that is more debatable at Auschwitz and Treblinka. Over 200,000 people from more than fifty nations were murdered there, most of them Jews. Majdanek was one of the “most efficient” of all the death camps. Unlike Auschwitz, there were almost no survivors.<sup>23</sup> Last year Jack and their small Buddhist group took some of Dilgo Khense, one of the highest Tibetan Lama’s ashes and interned them at Majdanek. He said it has may have helped a tiny bit, but that the decimation of one of most holy places in Poland is not erased overnight— or in over 60 years. He also talked about the fear and closed-mindedness that their Buddhist group faces. The Catholic Church and many people feel threatened by anything different. I marveled at this story. It helped me understand that it is not just the Jews that inspire suspicion and animosity, it’s anyone different or in some way threatening to the status quo.

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<sup>23</sup>

Mark Salter and Jonathan Bousfield, *Poland*: (London, Rough Guides, 2002), 307-308.

## Polish Farmers and Magdalena

We traveled by train to Kraków. The experience of being on a train in Poland brought up the same fears that I felt when I was on a German train for the first time. These fears are ungrounded in today's reality, yet completely ancestrally explainable. This fear of being physically harmed, which has been with me since I was a child, was finally making sense as I absorbed the memories of the Polish land and exposed my ancestral wounds. We were picked up at the train station by the son of a family of organic farmers, the Masters, with whom Atava stayed on her last trip. The Master's farm lies in another differently beautiful countryside in the hills outside of Kraków. They are warm and welcoming and see many visitors from other places who come to tour their farm. Still, I was nervous to tell them of my reason for visiting Poland. How would this devout Catholic family feel about having a Jew in their house? So at breakfast—after only one meal where I didn't "come out"—I told them about the Festival of Jewish Culture and about going to my grandparents' towns. They didn't say much. Did they feel neutral or unsure of what to say? I'm not sure how this information was received, but I was happy to be clear and not hiding at all (except for being gay! Oy!).

When we first arrived, Atava and I walked down the road through the rolling hills of farms and stopped in a little wooded area. We made offerings to the trees and we prayed. It felt so good to pray together on the land—my prayers felt immediate and authentic. I was grateful that the nature spirits were alive and present to us.

We did a lot of eating on the farm. I wrote down one meal: the best borscht I've ever had; yummy boiled and then baked potatoes with dill; roast chicken, incredibly good; salad and broccoli from the farm with awesome dressing; fresh warm strawberry juice, also from the farm; handmade strawberry rhubarb coffee cake. It was strange to be eating my grandmother's food with Polish Catholic farmers, but it tasted just as good and made me feel as if I were home.

One night the eldest son who works in the museum at the monastery in the Pope's hometown came to dinner. The youngest son and I were practicing his English and he had me



ask him a question. Assuming that there is an accordion player in every Polish family, I asked “Do you play the accordion?” He jumped up and went to get the accordion. His older brother played and the whole family sang Polish folk songs. It was like that here with the farmers, easy and warm.

No, not always. There was also a very dark, depressed, gray rainy day when Atava and I both woke up after disturbing dreams and felt weighted down by some heavy force. That day we planned to do a pilgrimage up to the Mary Magdalena shrine at a monastery in Kalawaria, just a short bus ride away from the farm. Kalawaria Monastery houses the second holiest and loved of the Madonna images in all of Poland.

The town of Kalawaria felt scary and unsafe. We were both struggling with an unnamed sadness and weight, but as we climbed the hill to the monastery, things started to shift. We entered the monastery grounds, found our way to the Cathedral and sat down in front of the Madonna. In that moment, I felt that it really was possible for her to take away my sadness, my grief, my fear; to lift all the burdens from my shoulders. We prayed there for a long time, and I felt the presence of the universal, the transcendent Mother pervading that space, lightening my heart. I feel it even now just writing this. Then we climbed up to the Magdalena shrine at the very top of the hill. It was shocking. All the other stations of the cross and the Cathedral itself were meticulously maintained. This shrine had been looted, was filled with garbage and was in a state of complete decay. No image, no gold, no vaulted ceilings. You couldn't even get into the shrine; it was boarded up. Magdalena has been forgotten. Atava did a ritual, a memorial service for her Polish American friend Barbara who died last year and who, on their trip in Poland, found a spiritual home at this Magdalena site. We both wrote messages to the Spirits of that place, made offerings, and it was good. I felt they were accepted. Coming down the hill we wondered, how is it possible that life felt totally different, the sun shining through the clouds, children laughing and playing around the courtyard fountain? It seemed hard to believe, but it was like that.

I came to stay with the farmers with such strange, old fear—fear of strangers, of the Polish people—and left feeling completely and totally welcomed by gracious loving hosts. What a relief and a revelation. My own and my family's deeply held fear and aversion—how easily it could vanish when I felt accepted and held, when the story was rewritten.

## **Doemem (still beings, rocks) Ritual at the Concentration Camp**

Before I left for Poland, Gershon sent me the ritual he thought would be good for this healing journey. Since the moment I arrived in Poland, I had been waiting for signs, dreams, and understandings of when and where to do this ritual. It had been unclear and confusing and I had wanted so badly to KNOW. Also in Kraków, everything was different again. There was a way my focus felt gone, the clarity of my own personal journey lost. But I knew another, perhaps more complex part of the journey was beginning. My mother Elissa had joined us. She came representing the first generation that grew up in the safety of Amercia, but carrying the most vivid memories of her parents and their relationship to Poland. In the midst of all the uncertainty, a friend sent me these words via email: “So much of walking the path of remembrance is remembering to let go of personal goals with the journey and surrender to spirit. I found that when I did that it opened wide and my vision cleared.” And you know what? She was right. Each *mikveh* I had done in the last little while (all in the shower because there was no stream or lake or river that was clean near there) had been about letting go of the idea of “my” journey, especially of getting my journey right or deep or perfect. And then all on its own, with the help of this small, wonderful community I was with—my partner, Claudia, my mom, my mom’s partner, Richard and Atava—it was about to become clear.

There was an ancient pre-Christian mound just a tram ride away. And while I was practicing letting go because my body made sure I did (I had a sore throat and had been quite tired) by watching Wimbledon and resting, praying and singing *niggunim* (wordless melodies of the soul), Claudia and Atava went to this mound. Claudia stayed for a long time meditating in a certain direction and journeying with this mound of earth. She came back and said that yes, it was a good place to do the *doemem* ritual. She had opened her eyes and was led to a rocky area where she saw real live geodes just sitting there. This mound, she said, was a geode mound, made of rocks and when you looked inside they were twinkling with the light of the stars. Amazing.

In the morning we found out that the direction Claudia had been meditating on, the one that drew her attention, was also the site of a concentration camp where many of the Jews from the Kraków ghetto were taken. It's not a famous place like Auschwitz because there were no survivors to tell about it and it was destroyed by the Nazis in retreat. It is now just an eerie overgrown field of rolling hills with one column of the gate still standing. Its name is *Plaszów*. Being guided this way, to *Plaszów* was a small miracle. Since the beginning, Atava and I had been waiting for signs about going to Auschwitz. Should we go? Should we not go? Why should we go? Why should we not go? Like this. And while I was sick, it became clear that I could not go, that I did not have the necessary resources. But then—in that weird, wild way that Spirit works—we found ourselves preparing to do the ritual of the *doemem* on an ancient indigenous site that is literally a stones throw away (this is in fact part of the ritual) from an “unrestored” concentration camp.

The journey was like a dream. The five of us took the tram to where the guidebook said to get off for *Plaszów*. We wandered around in an industrial district outside of Kraków for a while, climbing hills and peeking into factory yards. Finally, we walked a little farther along the street and there it was, with the familiar sign, a flame that denotes a Polish site of remembrance. There were few tourists, mostly people from the neighborhood using it as a park to walk their dogs. And that is what it was like, or looked like: a park. But here and there you saw the brick ruins of an archway or the side of a building or a rusted piece of metal sticking out of the ground. This place was a killing factory. Although Polish citizens, and members of the resistance were killed here, the majority of those who were incarcerated and died in *Plaszów* were Jewish.<sup>24</sup> We wandered around in the eerie atmosphere. On the one hand the horror of the past was palpable, but on the other, it was a bucolic spot. Nature had taken over its regeneration process, filling in and covering the old with new growth—grasses and wildflowers, trees and shrubs abounded, masking the old horrors. The retreating Nazis blew up everything here, nothing standing. It is in stark contrast to Auschwitz, its exhibits tended and thought out with care and precision as to how they will affect the viewers. Auschwitz is a place created by man, first the Germans, then

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 445.

the Polish communists, now the current Polish democratic government, to meet each of their own ends. *Plaszów* is a place taken over by nature. Maybe both are needed, monuments and museums, human's prayers against forgetting as well as Mother nature's prayers of constant change and renewal, of growth and covering over. The earth however, never truly conceals the suffering of humans on it and the grief was still there at *Plaszów*. We found ourselves crouching in one spot at a crossroads of two paths. No one said a word. We began to gather stones and branches and plants to make a shrine. All of us did this as if we were following instructions given to our hearts. After it was finished, I started singing a *niggun* and everyone joined in—a wordless melody of lament. We gathered again at the memorial stone set up by the Jewish community, detailing in Hebrew the numbers of people killed there and listing the crimes of the perpetrators. As per Gershon's instructions, we had each been carrying six stones we brought with us from our homes, rocks that were from a peaceful place that held joy and ease for us. Intuitively, instinctually, we picked this site for the *doemem* ritual. Here were the instructions:

Take the six stones that you have brought with you from a peaceful place.

Collect six stones from Polish soil at the site you have chosen.

Mix them up with the ones you brought and place three stones in the four directions. Gather together in a circle within this place, surrounded by the stones.

The leader chants:

*l'shem yichud kud'sha b'reech'hu u'sh'cheentey*

for the sake of the unification of the Sacred Wellspring and the Shekhinah

*ahl y'dey ha'hu*

through this ceremony

*beed'chee'lu ur'chee'mu*

in awe and in love

*l'ya'ched shem yah b'wah*

to unify God transcendent with God immanent

*b'yichudah sh'lim*

in complete unification

Leader turns to the North and chants:

*Su'gee'el Su'gee'el ta'vee ha'shefa mee'tsa'fon*

*Su'gee'el, Su'gee'el, bring forth divine flux from the North*

Leader turns to the East and chants:

*Ar'gee'el Ar'gee'el ta'vee ha'bracha mee'meez'rach*

*Ar'gee'e', Ar'gee'el, bring forth spirit blessing from the East*

Leader turns to the South and chants:

*Gar'gee'el Gar'gee'el ta'vee ha'matanah mee'da'rom*

*Gar'gee'e', Gar'gee'el, bring forth spirit gift from the South*

Leader turns to the West and chants:

*Mar'gee'el Mar'gee'el ta'vee b'ree'yut mee'ma'arav*

*Mar'gee'e', Mar'gee'el, bring forth healing from the West*

Before Creation and Creator

Before all who are gathered here

In the presence of the Four Beings -

Still Beings, Sprouting Beings, Wildlife Beings, and Talking Beings -

May the sanctity of this moment

May the sanctity of this circle

Empower, heal, and bless this soil, this land, and its people.

Sing a *niggun* and dance. Leave the stones in place. If that is not possible, pick them up and throw three into each of the four directions with intentions of blessing and healing.<sup>25</sup>

I led our little group in the ritual. There was a sense of newness to be doing this together with my mom and Richard, but also a feeling of powerful commitment and resolve to do anything we could to bring about healing for ourselves, for the memory of those who had been murdered here and for the land. We offered incense in the center of the circle, including some

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<sup>25</sup> Teaching given me by Gershon Winkler.

pinemap that I had collected from the mountains weeks before. Just after the ritual ended it began to rain, lightly, just a fine drizzling mist. We all lay down in the circle of mixed stones from home and this place and let the water wash us, revive us. It was yet another moment where water arrived to cleanse and heal.

We had come to these outskirts of Kraków to go to the concentration camp and do the *doemem* ritual at the ancient pagan mound. Spirit guided us to do the ritual at the camp, the place that needed the healing of its stones. This working of spirit was such magic, and such a blessing to receive. Mom and Richard went back to the hotel. Claudia, Atava and I walked up to the pagan mound and threw ourselves on her beauty. She was shaped exactly like a breast. We drank in the sustaining power of this ancient place, and allowed more healing, more letting go to happen. We walked up the steep path to the top. In the distance we could see a nuclear power plant. We screamed out our prayers of rage and frustration into the distance, "Stop the killing, the violence, the suffering of the earth and her children." We cried into the ground.

## Ancestral Lands and Mass Graves

The strange former Soviet Union land of Ukraine: a painful place for so many people—those who lived through, or were killed in, the almost continuous wars, border and regime changes—not to mention the murders of hundreds of thousands of Jews shot into pits in the forest. We went to such a place with a guide—the one in *Jaworow*, where the rest of my grandfather's family was killed. No words, just the pain, and all the absence of pain—the numbness, the void. I felt both these things arise almost simultaneously. I felt as if I was in a dream or a play. I knew these things were real, that they happened in the very place where we were standing. In fact, being in Poland and Ukraine there is almost no place you can go where there was once and now no longer is a thriving alive Jewish community. This experience is best summed up by the elder Ukrainian woman who remembered my family. She told us: “It is a blessing from God that your (immediate) family got out before the horrible, horrible things that happened here. Before the nightmare that we couldn’t believe was real.”

Down a small road in the middle of the forest about 3 km outside of Jaworow there is the mass grave where the people from that town and some neighboring towns were brought, 4,000 Jews. They were shot into a big pit that had been dug by Polish prisoners of war. And this was the end of a long line of horrors, all of which are recounted in the memorial book. First slave labor camps were set up. Descriptions of the cruelty of the guards and commanders are harrowing. Then there are successive chapters that chronicle the various ways that the Jews of Jaworow and neighboring towns were murdered, humiliated and tortured. The chapter names give a basic idea of the series of atrocities: “Charnel House”, “The Ghetto”, “Forest of Blood” and “In Vain the Blood”.<sup>26</sup> Here is the description of the how the Jews were rounded up and carted to the forest:

That April afternoon was particularly sunny and mild. More women and children arrived. The tragic procession seemed endless. Their faces pale and

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<sup>26</sup>

Druck.



drawn, hair disheveled, eyes reddened and pleading not to be forgotten, bidding farewell, burning with hatred. The SS set fire to the wooden houses and the whole ghetto soon leaped into crackling flames. The few remaining Jews, forced out by the fire started to run for their lives, but the gleeful Nazis turned them back with flying bullets, and they were quickly transformed in frantic flaming screaming torches until they sagged in heaps of burning flesh.<sup>27</sup>

And finally, here is part of the description of the Forest of Blood itself:

On that lovely day in April, the Germans slaughtered approximately 4000 Jews, men, women, and children in the Porundo forest and buried them in previously prepared mass graves. Before execution they “coaxed” them with painful blows to undress completely, and lie down in rows of ten on wooden planks placed across the graves which were 24 meters long, 12 meters wide and 10 meters deep. As they lay whispering and chanting their last prayers, SS gunners sputtered bullets into the prostrate. The plank was then tipped and the dead and wounded dropped into the grave and three Jews covered them with dirt. On top of them another row of riddled bodies were dropped, and other, row upon row, until they filled the graves to the brim. Out of their depth faint, muffled moans floated upward and echoed mournfully in the forest of blood. The trees stood still, the forest was petrified. When all was over the SS raked the graves with hand grenades in order to pack the corpses tighter. The blood of the buried came seeping through to the surface and made big lurid stains upon the earth. No matter how high they heaped the graves, the spectre of the welling blood would not be consoled.<sup>28</sup>

My mother and I were at this place in the Porundo forest. Like the death camp Plaszów, the forest had taken over. In the sixty years since, there was no more blood or flesh, just bones. We met one of the Jews of Jaworow, Lev, who had survived the war because he lived in Moscow. He was relocated by the communists to work as an engineer in Jaworow. He set about the task of making a monument in this site. There was no marker or trace. He raised money somehow from Jews in America to create a memorial site. When the workers were forming the mounds, digging and pushing the earth, there were bones everywhere, a sea of bones.

When you know what happened, how do you heal or forgive? When you witnessed what happened, or survived what happened, how do you heal or forgive? Or how about, if you were one of those who perpetrated what happened. How then do you heal or forgive?

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 29-30.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 31-32.

Meeting Lev and his wife in Jaworow was the saving grace of our journey. Besides making the mass grave a memorial site, he is also the town's Jewish historian. He wrote a little booklet that lists the events, the atrocities of the town before, during and after the war, which he read to us. He invited my mother and me into his house. I was a cozy and warm. There was a virgin Mary on the wall so at first I assumed he wasn't Jewish, but later found out he was a Soviet Jew who was sent to Jaworow to work in 1950. He knows nothing about Judaism, but he feels bound to the Jews of Jaworow, to their history, and is pained by the fact that the two cemeteries have been ruined and some of the cemetery land given to local people to use as part of their property. Some of them respect the old cemetery and refuse to use the land, while others use the land and disregard the cemetery. Lev was like an angel, sent to us out of the huge cold rainy depressing world of Ukraine. He changed everything about our visit. He brought the warmth and immediacy of connection. He felt like family.

Lev took us to meet one of the few people who is still alive from the time when my family lived there. She came out of her house and met us on the street and we stood in a circle as she remembered everything like it was yesterday—the horror, the abject fear she and her family experienced thinking that they too would be tortured and killed. She said something so clear. She said, “We would have hidden Jews. They were our neighbors, good neighbors. But we were so afraid.” She told a story she must have been telling for 60 years, of her friend Juta. They were little girls together. Juta took poison (her father was a pharmacist) before the Nazis could take her. As she was telling the story, we were all crying. She held onto my mom. I don't know if the story the Jaworow elder told was the absolute truth or whether she changed it to help her own healing and woundedness, but this is the power of stories. We need these stories, to give our lives meaning. For me the meaning of her story was to realize more deeply than I ever had before the blessing and protection that my grandparents had. It was a blessing that many of their relatives were not so fortunate to have. This story of Juta, also led my mother to tell me a story I had never heard. She remembered being very young and watching my grandma read the letters she received from her family still in Poland (now Ukraine). My mother watched her mother read and cry, read and cry. I tried to imagine what it was like for my grandma to be safe

and assimilating and doing well in America. I tried to imagine, but it broke my heart. My grandma's unbounded, joyous love that I always felt wrapped in was part of this legacy. She had to live and love for so many people who were gone.

The history of my grandmother's town, Mosty Wielkie reads almost verbatim to the one of Jaworow. There was a method of extermination the Nazis were using all over this part of southeastern Poland. The day my mother and I visited the sad, tiny Mosty Wielkie was miserable and rainy. The one wall of the synagogue—the same synagogue where they burned hundreds of the town's Jews—was being used as a garbage dump and a toilet. How could it be that this was the place that my grandmother grew up? The place described in the beginning of the memorial book as one of joyful swims in the river and beautiful forests was no more. It seemed to me and mother to be a wasteland. I never wanted to see it again.

When my mom and I got back to Kraków after being in the Ukraine, we both felt the strange sense of coming home. The place we had lived in community for the Jewish Festival for only one week already felt a little like home. My mother was more tired than I had ever seen her, exhausted in the deepest part of her soul. She, who usually has the best sense of direction, could not remember how to get from the train station back to our hotel. I had to guide her. At first I was worried—what had I done? Bringing my mother to her parents' towns in an inhospitable place and having to remember the horror of our family. Would she recover?

My mom and I did the *mikveh*—did our best to cleanse and release what we had seen that was not helpful to keep. And we did our best to draw up the tiny bits of reflected light and healing from our journey. I felt grateful to Hana for giving me the *mikveh* ritual. My mom said that the *mikveh* chanting evoked the same feelings of comfort and peacefulness that she remembered when she was with her father in synagogue. And that with these feelings, came a crucial sense of purification after our trip to Ukraine. The ritual also bound us tightly together. We had journeyed into the shadow of our family's past, and come through it together. The

water cleansing and renewing was consistently the most powerful balm for our lost and wounded spirits. Before my mom left the next day, she had recovered her strength. She was happy to be going home and to have taken the journey to her homeland.

## Prague, Warsaw, and More Buddhists

I spent a week in Prague; a kind of “vacation” from Poland/Ukraine. On the train returning to Warsaw, two lovely young Czech Tibetan Buddhist men on their way to a retreat shared my compartment. We remarked on how auspicious and unusual our meeting was. They were, of course, interested in Buddha-dharma, but also in the work of ancestral healing and earth-based spirituality. This meeting was another confirmation that this generation of Central and Eastern Europeans is yearning to find ways to heal their ancestors and the violent pasts of war and communist occupation. I felt inspired by this meeting and protected by Spirit and by the extended community of spiritual seekers.

Back in Warsaw I was reading more in the guidebook about this profoundly wounded city—about what happened during the Warsaw uprising. This detail stuck with me: In their horrible battle with the Polish and Jewish resistance forces, the Nazis strapped women and children to the front of their tanks to prevent being shot at.<sup>29</sup> This reminded me immediately of the elder Ukrainian woman in Jaworow telling us her story, seeing in her face and hearing in her voice the re-experience of the tremendous fear when she explained to us why more people didn't help the Jews. Their terror was so great, had been so perfectly orchestrated, and the reality of torture and death so clear that it outweighed (for most people) any of the other human tendencies to want to help, to keep others from harm.

In Warsaw, I unintentionally picked a hotel that turned out to be right near the Jewish cemetery. I only had about half an hour before I left, but I went for a walk to try to visit. It was a busy, noisy street and the entrance was, it turned out, not clear on the map, but I did find the huge expanse of wall that runs the entire length of the street. I did my final ritual there at the wall, cars, buses and trams whizzing by. I left the remaining cloves of garlic I had been carrying around (used traditionally by Polish Jews on gravestones to ward off evil spirits) in the crevices of the wall and prayed that the spirits of this place would be free and able to let go of the horrific past.

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<sup>29</sup> Salter, 98-99.

Before visiting Prague, I had spent a week at another Buddhist Center in the gorgeous Karkonosze Mountains in the southwest of Poland. This Center was started by an American Jewish Buddhist dancer named Alma who welcomed me into her home and Center and taught me so much about what a paradox life is for a Jew living now in Poland. It was Alma's great grandmother who told her in a dream to come to Poland. She bought some land and began a Buddhist Center and has been there for twenty years. The last evening of my stay there, I went on a walk in the forest with Kasia and Zosia, two of the young Polish women working at the Center. While we were walking I had the strange feeling of being my grandmother as a young girl and that these were my two beautiful friends. We love this forest, know all the mushrooms and herbs and are completely natural and relaxed together.

Kasia, Zosia and I hiked to a shimmering waterfall and then sat on the side of the mountain and watched the sunset. On the way home we sang songs to the Goddess in her many forms—Tara, Quan Yin, Baba Yaga, Matka Ziemna, Adamah, Shekhinah. When I said the words Matka Ziemna (moist Mother Earth) to them, they represented something, someone, some essence that they knew intimately. The connection they had with the earth of Poland, with Matka Ziemna as the universal life source, the very fabric of being, was one they had cultivated for their whole lives.

My sense of this time together was that we needed each other, Kasia, Zosia and I. It was a yearning for connection to each other through *Adamah* and Matka Ziemna that bound Kasia, Zosia and me tightly together. Polish Jews and Poles of our generation must find one another for mutual healing. Malidoma Somé, an indigenous elder from the Dagara tribe teaches that descendants from cultures that have undergone war, atrocities, colonialism, and the like, suffer from a dangerous imbalance. This imbalance must be healed by the present generation. He writes “it is the duty of the living to heal their ancestors. If these ancestors are not healed, their sick energy will haunt the souls and psyches of those who are responsible for helping them.”<sup>30</sup> It

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<sup>30</sup> Malidoma Somé, *Of Water and the Spirit: Ritual, Magic, and Initiation in the Life of an African Shaman*: (New York, Penguin Books, 1994), 9-10.

was then Kasia and Zosia and my responsibility to heal the old terrible wounds, wounds so deep that they could never be healed in our parents' or grandparents' lifetimes. It was the responsibility of our generation to confront the sick, haunting energy that has followed us into the present.

My grandparents never wanted to go back to Poland. Their healing work was to forget, to leave the past behind and bring joy into their lives—joy as an antidote to so much death and sorrow. My grandma's joy and love of life was a way to make up for all those she lost, a way of living their lives too. She had brought me to Poland, I was sure, to meet the universal life source that had nurtured her as a girl and young woman. She had brought me to Poland to meet the shadow—to confront the fears haunting me, my family and a generation of Jews and Poles.

## **PART THREE**

### **Polish Ancestral Healing**

#### **The Story Real and Imagined of Fear, The Story Real and Imagined of Healing**

I am back in New York, thinking about where I can get Polish food, and getting ready to fly back to Oakland and come to the end/beginning of the circle. After being in Prague for a week, that I wanted to return to Poland to end my journey there. I had thought that I would be only too happy to get out of Poland and instead I felt pulled back by the intensity and desire for deeper understanding and learning. I have just scratched the surface of connection with my homeland.

I think now about my fear of setting foot in Poland and I know that I am not imagining it. It was real, as real as my mind. It was as real as my comfort in coming home to New York, to a city I know and love. Going out to the countryside and seeing Polish people I felt afraid. Traveling on the train with the Polish people who might or might not be anti-Semites, I felt afraid. And slowly getting to know the Polish land, the trees, birds, frogs and then a few people at the Tibetan Buddhist center, I started to feel less afraid. Then going to the Polish farm and feeling afraid again. Do they hate Jews? What happened in this family sixty years ago? Learning slowly to be clear and open about my own intention for being in Poland, to discover the land of my ancestors, to search for healing has created an openness and willingness to connect with others. And this openness is more often than not, met with a similar impulse in others. Although this way of connection is often complicated and combined with guilt or an assertion that the Poles don't and never did have anything against the Jews, all these moments of my trip are testimony to a Polish/Jewish connection. These never would have happened if my grandma Rosia hadn't asked me to seek out the earth of her homeland.



During the film screenings in Kraków at the Festival of Jewish Culture, there was a woman who, in a discussion after the screening of the film “Klezmer on Fish Street”, summed up an essential question. The audience and the film maker and panel had gotten into a familiar, heated discussion about the history of anti-Semitism in Poland, about the role of non-Jewish Poles during the war, about culpability. She said, this discussion could go on all night and she had been in many that had, but her questions right now were: “Can I live and raise my family, my Jewish family here in Poland? Will we be safe? Will we be welcomed and supported? Can we be happy? Is it now possible to do this?”

As I read more and more of the history of my people, I understand that for the 5764 years of Jewish tribal memory, the struggle for survival has been a prominent feature. One spring I was with a few friends discussing the various holidays that we celebrated growing up. One grew up hippy, Sufi, Hindu, new age; another grew up strict Polish Catholic, and another grew up atheist in Europe. I was the only one who, even with my cursory understanding and exposure to the Jewish holidays, grew up thinking deeply about the survival of my family, about genocide, about the possibility of everyone I knew being killed. *Purim, Hanukkah, Pesach, Tisha B'av*—they’re all about basically the same thing: someone wants to destroy the tribe, the Jews survive, or some survive.

This is what was so liberating about being in Poland. I carry in my body the genes and in my soul the memory of survivors. I have always known how close my grandparents came to not leaving Poland. It was only because both their fathers died that the decision was made by the extended family that they should leave and try to make a new life in America. My grandparents’ families, friends, neighbors and teachers were all killed. Now that I have seen their towns, seen the cities of Galicia, seen places that were literally teeming with Jewish life before the war, and now are empty of this life, I feel more grounded in my past.

My ancestors lived in Poland for many hundreds of years. In fact, traces of the first Jewish communities date back to Roman times, after the destruction of the Second temple in Jerusalem, when the diaspora began. So more than the land of America, this *Galician* land is where I am

from. The joy, spirit and will to live as well as the unfathomable suffering, torture and murder are the legacy of this land and my ancestors. In one of the books I read regarding the contemporary Jewish experience in Poland, the writer pointed out that for fifty years after the war, Jews saw Poland as a vast graveyard, nothing more, nothing less. It was a place to go only if you wanted to see where your family was killed or what, if anything was left of your town's cemetery. Now it is possible for Jews to visit Poland and enjoy themselves, attend Cultural Festivals, hear *Klezmer* music performed in meticulously restored beautiful old synagogues.<sup>31</sup> Is it possible that I am of the generation that can bring Jewish life back to the places from which it was brutally erased?

Is it possible that mine is the generation that can bring healing and forgiveness and the perspective that comes only with time? I have begun to find ways to make the Polish/Jewish land sacred. I feel a deep longing to return to Poland, to continue the ancestral healing that I was born to do. This is, I know now, what my grandma Rosia meant by "Build and earth shine in Poland."

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<sup>31</sup> Ruth Ellen Gruber, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe*: (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002), 25-27.

## Future Generations

Atava and I shot hours and hours of footage in Poland. I videotaped everywhere my mother and I went on the journey from Poland to Ukraine. Some of the footage is incredible: the emotional meeting with the elder Ukrainian woman; the drunken man who would not leave us alone near the ruined synagogue in *Mosty Wielkie*; frogs and storks and birds and burbling streams; Helena and Kasia Masters, the mother and daughter farmer team cooking delicious dishes; milking their goat; the *doemem* ritual at the concentration camp; climbing the pagan mound. These and so many other images are burned into my psyche. I can remember them as if it were yesterday, not a year ago, that I was in Poland. Currently, Atava and I are editing a video of our ancestral healing journey that we plan to show as an introduction to people interested in undertaking similar work. The video will also serve as an introduction to the work of the non-profit organization we have formed, The Polish Ancestral Healing Project (PAHP). We plan to submit the video to Jewish Film Festivals here and in Kraków.

What I am most clear about is how much this work resonates with me. I have just begun on this path of renewing my Jewish soul, reviving the accompanying earth-based practices and modeling the ways of ancestral healing. I know I will go back to Poland. It is the intention of PAHP to offer workshops in Poland that use many of the rituals described in this project. After finishing the film, Atava and I plan to seek grant money to support our work.

I still attend closely to my dreams, but Grandma Rosia has yet to give me any more detailed instructions. But I am listening. Grandma, thank you for guiding me to this path. Thank you for helping me to open to the yearning for this connection to you and all my ancestors. May healing come not only to my ancestors, but to all my relations.

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