

A person is captured in a dynamic, blurred pose, suggesting movement or dance. They are wearing a white, short-sleeved top and a long, flowing orange skirt that billows out around them. The background is a desert canyon with reddish-brown rock walls and sparse green vegetation. The sky is bright and cloudy. The overall mood is artistic and evocative.

Rituals ELENA BROWER
for Reality

A flight of simple rituals for your week; short practices to welcome more thoughtfulness, patience and steadiness into your world.

Everything is changing, constantly. Chronic states of stress suppress our systems of healing and calibration. Simple rituals of love, compassion and altruism with ourselves and others can fortify those systems of healing within you.

All of daily life can be seen as a healing of a sort, and healing can be messy.

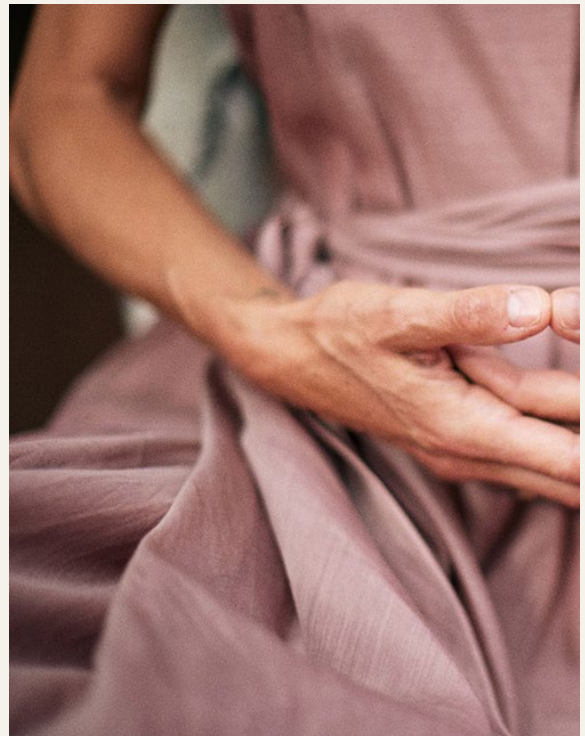
When things are especially charged and complex, rituals can help because they don't operate in typical, chronological time. Rituals make space in which we learn how to engage with, and live with, circumstances that bring confusion and challenge. Ritual opens our perspective, guides our emotions and helps us locate options for response and renewal, moment by moment. And while meditation can help create space and time, ritual helps when meditation just isn't possible.

"Spirituality doesn't necessarily look like sitting down and meditating. Spirituality looks like folding the towels in a sweet way, talking kindly to the people in your household even though you've had a long day."

-Sylvia Boorstein

Over the next seven days, you'll receive brief, daily notes on the simplest rituals that inform my ways of being with myself, my household and the world in which I work and move.

May these simple rituals serve your equanimity and kindness—with yourself, with others and in the world in which you live.



DAY ONE

Meditation is a time to open space within yourself, to investigate the subtlety within your most prominent, recursive thoughts. It's a time to practice being curious about the nature of those thoughts, and to return, again and again, with kindness, to your breathing.

Just for today, sit in stillness (and in silence if your environment allows) for 5 minutes or more if you wish. Choose to sit on a chair, sitting upright (rather than leaning back) to stay attentive; if you have a cushion (zafu), sit on the floor, to arrange yourself so your hips are higher than your knees.

Begin by brightening your posture, and then slowly counting your breaths, gathering your attention inward. As you notice inevitable thoughts rising and falling, filling your mind and dissolving, continue counting softly, allowing thoughts, mental constructs to fall away.

Watch that process as you continue returning your attention, simply and as smoothly as possible, to your breathing. Be kind with yourself. If you wish, this can become a short, daily ritual in which you create that investigative, generous space within yourself.

Meditation needn't be relegated to the cushion on which you're sitting. Have patience to see how your meditation can happen in any household activity, and watch for how your meditation in that moment changes the quality of your attention.

From *The Deepest Peace*, by Zenju Earthlyn Manuel, p. 55 and p. 57

"Sitting with silence, listening, is my way, my life. It has nothing to do with Zen, nothing to do with Buddhism. It has nothing to do with pleasure or joy, It has everything to do with being awake to this life and how I come awake. Being in the great awareness of the earth brings peace."

"Is sitting enough? It's enough when it presents itself as the thing to do. It's enough of a response to the world, in the moment, though perhaps not exclusively. It's enough to bow in recognition of our relationship as human beings. It's enough to leave worldly professions outside, ideas and opinions, teaching, and ancient stories. There will be other places and times for these things."

DAY TWO

Movement is your medicine today. For any length of time, move your body until you feel any heavy, dense sensations dissipate. Or, move until you sweat, even a fast walk.



Moving transforms physical, emotional and mental density into pure strength, and creates a connection with yourself that is unshakable. When you're moving regularly, creating conditions for your body to be working a bit harder than usual, you're creating the chemistry of spaciousness within your body, you're creating the conditions for healing on the cellular level, and ease in your emotions.

Sit still after you've moved to notice how that movement feels.

Studies have shown that movement is actual medicine for our bodies. In one study, regular physical activity for older adults could lead to higher brain volumes and a reduced risk for developing dementia.

Apparently, movement affects the size of the hippocampus, which controls short-term memory, and is protective against aging of the brain. Dear friend and colleague Dr. Gabrielle Lyon's teaching revolves around muscle: the largest organ in the body.

Tending to the health and sustenance of your strength improves your metabolism, strengthens your neurology, builds better body composition and combats diseases associated with aging. So muscle provides not only our physical architecture and locomotion but our physiological infrastructure as well. Nurturing your muscle health through nutrition, lifestyle, and proper exercise will lead to improved energy, more steadiness emotionally, improved cognitive function, more balanced body composition, improved metabolism, and greater mobility. Especially when you're feeling at odds with yourself or the world, move your body.

DAY THREE

Is there a certain prayer that's been in your mind or heart for some time? A few words you can recall from childhood, or something you've recently read that helps you elevate your listening?

This moment of prayer needn't be longer than a minute or two. It can be words, a movement, a color, or a few breaths.

Most days, my prayer involves offering myself empathy, a few moments of recognition of my fragile, fallible humanity. A hand on my heart, a whisper: "How human of me."

Prayer inclines us toward a more soulful, thoughtful connection within, especially when we've been living with more haste. See how this feels at the end of your movement practice if you're building your rituals atop the previous days.



"Prayer for the Earth" by Barbara Deming

*Spirit that hears each one of us,
hear all that is—
Listens, listens, hears us out—
Inspire us now!
Our own pulse beats in every stranger's
throat,
And also within the flowered ground
beneath our feet,
And—teach us to listen!
We can hear it in water, in wood, and even
in stone.
We are earth of this earth, and we are bone
of this bone.
This is a prayer I sing, for we
have forgotten this and so
the earth is perishing.*

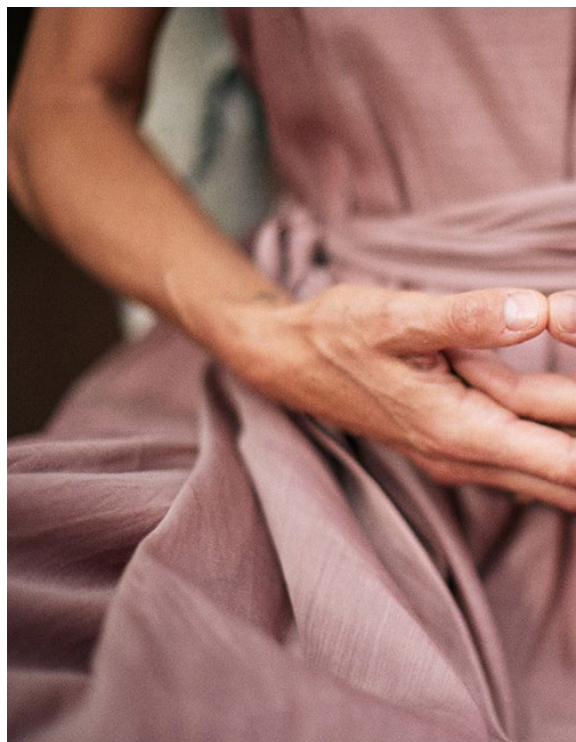
DAY FOUR

Compassion for yourself comes through deep acceptance for all that you are.

Conscious doses of forgiveness for any behavior that feels unforgivable expands your view on what's possible creatively, and leads to the upwelling of compassion for others, for their suffering, naturally and readily.

Can you create a brief, small expression of this acceptance and forgiveness for yourself today? A haiku, a mini collage, a tiny painting on a little scrap of watercolor paper?

This expression reflects your compassion for yourself, becoming a gift to yourself that will keep on unfolding; set it on a special shelf or altar to remind you of this intentional, inward connection.



From *The Fruitful Darkness* by Roshi Joan Halifax, pp. 197-8

"In her display as Avalokiteshvara, she has six heads with which to perceive the world in all its forms and a thousand arms and hands to help those who are suffering. She has given herself to the world to be shaped by its needs. All her hands hold instruments of effective action. Like the Mother of the World, she is outside us, but like our own mother, she lives inside each of us as well. In fact, she lives inside each thing. She can found everywhere—in the falling rain that nourishes the Earth and eases the summer's heat, and in the starving child who awakens our compassion. She is the part of us that enters the body of communion without hesitation. She enters this body naturally and fearlessly.

"This kind of responsiveness is pointed to in the eighty-ninth case of the Blue Cliff Records when Yunyan asks Daowu, "How does the Bodhisattva Kanzeon use all those many hands and eyes?" Daowu replies, "It is like someone adjusting their pillow at night." In the dark, reaching with feeling, beyond conception and the rational mind, compassion is a natural response to the world, not mediated by thought or rule or law or vow or intent, not regulated by religion or social duty."

DAY FIVE

Connecting to your ancestors is a momentary recognition of their continued and benevolent presence in your life. This needn't take longer than a few moments.

Offer a written note that you might choose to read aloud softly, a short silent prayer to someone you love who's passed on. Acknowledge this presence in your life in order to serve that connection. Each day can be a different person, whomever feels most present for you.

This brief practice will help you attune respectfully to the presence of these ancestors in your life, to learn from their continued offerings of wisdom.

Excerpted from "Honoring Lineage" by Pixie Lighthouse

Thank you to the Ancestors for bringing us through your sacred line. Thank you for lifting us up above our family's suffering by helping from the Other Side. We feel your presence all around us.

Come to us in dreams and empower who we are, how we walk, what we speak and we what do with your spirited knowingness from the Other Side of the Mountain. Teach us all of the ways to connect with you, helping our arms reach back to you for reassurance.

Walk with us toward joy, because we need your help when we struggle. Help us in all the way you couldn't when you were here. Help us to lay down our burdens and to trust that we don't have to fight so hard anymore, because of the battles you fought for us so long ago. Help us make sense of the stories—plentiful and sometimes tragic. Show us how to connect the dots.

Be the rocks we can claim for a better view and crawl into for shelter. Show us the right medicine for our families and exactly how to administer it. Give us more reasons to grow our faith, because we humans are very forgetful creatures. You remember what it was like.

DAY SIX

Today is about gratitude; brief and shining.

Choose how you wish to offer your gratitude, just for today. Is it written, created, danced, spoken or sung? Your briefest invitation of thankfulness changes your cells, opens your acceptance and shifts your state.

Seek the daily learnings of love in your life. Sit closely to what hurts so you can ascertain the teaching it holds for you. Give shape to your thankfulness.

"What the Living Do" by Marie Howe

*Johnny, the kitchen sink has been clogged
for days, some utensil probably
fell down there.
And the Drano won't work but smells
dangerous, and the crusty dishes
have piled up
waiting for the plumber I still haven't called.
This is the everyday we spoke of.
It's winter again: the sky's a deep,
headstrong blue,
and the sunlight pours through
the open living-room windows because the
heat's on too high in here and I
can't turn it off.
For weeks now, driving, or dropping a bag of
groceries in the street, the
bag breaking,
I've been thinking: This is what the living do.
And yesterday, hurrying
along those
wobbly bricks in the Cambridge sidewalk,
spilling my coffee down my
wrist and sleeve,
I thought it again, and again later, when
buying a hairbrush: This is it.*

*Parking. Slamming the car door shut in the
cold. What you called that
yearning.
What you finally gave up. We want the spring
to come and the winter to
pass. We want
whoever to call or not call, a letter, a kiss—we
want more and more and
then more of it.
But there are moments, walking, when I catch
a glimpse of myself in the
window glass,
say, the window of the corner video store,
and I'm gripped by a cherishing
so deep
for my own blowing hair, chapped face, and
unbuttoned coat that I'm
speechless:
I am living. I remember you.*

DAY SEVEN

Toward and away.



Toward and away: this potent reckoning with yourself is one of the most efficient, effective ways to guard your energy to make choices that align with your vision for your household, your work, your creativity.

Two columns on a page. "Toward" on one side, "Away" on the other. Single words, phrases, anything that indicates the energies and project toward which you're moving, and those from which you're turning away.

Offer yourself these seven rituals individually or together on any given day: 5-10 minutes for meditation, 10-30 minutes for movement, one minute for prayer, a few minutes for self-compassion, a moment to connect with your ancestor(s), express your gratitude, and remind yourself of that which you're moving toward and away. Take as much time as you can.

May these simple rituals serve your equanimity and kindness—with yourself, with others and in the world in which you live.

Excerpted from "Reconciliation, A Prayer" by Joy Harjo.

*Oh sun, moon, stars, our other relatives
peering at us from the inside
of god's house walk with us as we climb
into the next century
naked but for the stories we have of each
other. Keep us from giving
up in this land of nightmares which is
also the land of miracles.
We sing our song which we've been
promised has no beginning or end.
All acts of kindness are lights in the war for
justice.*

Resources.

Rituals for Everyday by Nadia Narain and Katia Narain Phillips

Hello, Goodbye: 75 Rituals for Times of Loss, Celebration and Change by Day Schildkret

Prayers of Honoring by Pixie Lighthouse

The Woman who Fell From the Sky by Joy Harjo

The Deepest Peace by Zenju Earthlyn Manuel

The Fruitful Darkness by Roshi Joan Halifax

Bringing Zen Home by Paula Arai

What We Say Matters by Judith Hanson Lasater

Ritual as Remedy: Embodied Practices for Soul Care by Mara Branscombe

Study on movement and aging referenced on Day Two