

Ritual and Ceremony in our Daily Lives

“Genuine, heartfelt ritual helps us reconnect with power and vision as well as with the sadness and pain of the human condition. When the power and vision come together, there’s some sense of doing things properly for their own sake.”

Pema Chodron, *The Thundering Years: Rituals and Sacred Wisdom for Teens*

by Ali Baker

Do you want to see more healing in the world, of the human species and Mother Earth? Do you wonder what you can do, or how you can make a difference? In this article, I invite you to consider the role of ritual and how incorporating it into your life in a more conscious way can initiate the healing process of the planet as well as effectively contributing to the collective task of raising consciousness - a task that is so urgently needed to save the earth.

Healing starts with each individual and with how intentionally we lead our lives. When intention and consciousness are combined, a process is created to transmute the power of the mind – we could call this ‘changing consciousness at will.’ The desire to introduce a new reality often demands finding different approaches for focusing the attention and letting go of out-dated behaviour before paradigm shifts in consciousness can take place.

Intentionally created rituals offer us a place to start aligning our conscious will with our unconscious, as well as with our physical and emotional self. When we undertake a ritual we are saying that we are here, present, caring and honouring. They mark special occasions, celebrate achievements and are times to share experiences and express emotions. Ritual is a direct experience that we can have as individuals, create for others or participate in as a collective group. Partaking in rituals involves being an empowered individual.

When Ritual is Vital

There are certain times when life asks us to do something differently. We know that we cannot ignore a situation, dream or changes any longer, but how and where to start can feel unfathomable. The enormity of such an undertaking can be overwhelming, even paralyzing. This is where performing a simple ceremony can provide a powerful starting point from which to initiate changes: if your consciousness is aligned with the task, yourself and the universe, often life flows with greater ease.

Performing a simple ceremony is conscious time: *something* that can often feel elusive in the chaos of our daily lives. Finding ways to carve this out for ourselves is where the role of ritual comes in. When we do this on a microscopic level, in however small a way, it is a powerful message of what we want to see in a larger sense, out there in the world. Intentionally created rituals are *'in themselves, a kind of mandala of the whole universe.'* (Molly Remer, *Restoring Women To Ceremony: The Red Tent Resource Kit*)

How Can Ritual be Incorporated on a Daily Basis?

The most important aspect of the process to consider is how to personalise a ritual, without following fixed guidelines or steps. The components are yours to choose depending on the situation. For it to be effective, *a ritual must achieve something*. This might not be a tangible or a quantifiable result. Instead, it may be that a meaningful sense has been introduced into your life or created by you.

On the following page are some points to consider when incorporating ritual as a new approach into your daily life.

Purpose: *this is the intention that is decided upon and consciously present behind your ritual, not according to a formula or to somebody else.*

Theme: *what is needed in your ritual? To be in nature? To honour your body with dance or touch? Will it be a word-based, or meditative ceremony to ancient goddesses to affirm and accept life and bodily changes? Take a few moments to connect with the type of ceremony you need and see what you're told to do next.*

Structure: *like a story, there is a beginning, middle and an end to every ritual, from its invocation to its closure. You are consciously doing something. Start with some centring breaths. Becoming grounded in the Now, perform your ritual, and then say thank you to close and honour the process.*

Activity: *when we kinaesthetically use our bodies, along with gestures and props, to facilitate ritual, it makes it an active process. It is likely to be more effective than when we passively consume something or someone else's ideas. Consider ways in which you can bring in movement and action.*

Celebrating/Expressing Gratitude: *rituals offer time to celebrate the reality of being alive in this moment and space. They remind us to give thanks for all that life gives us today.*

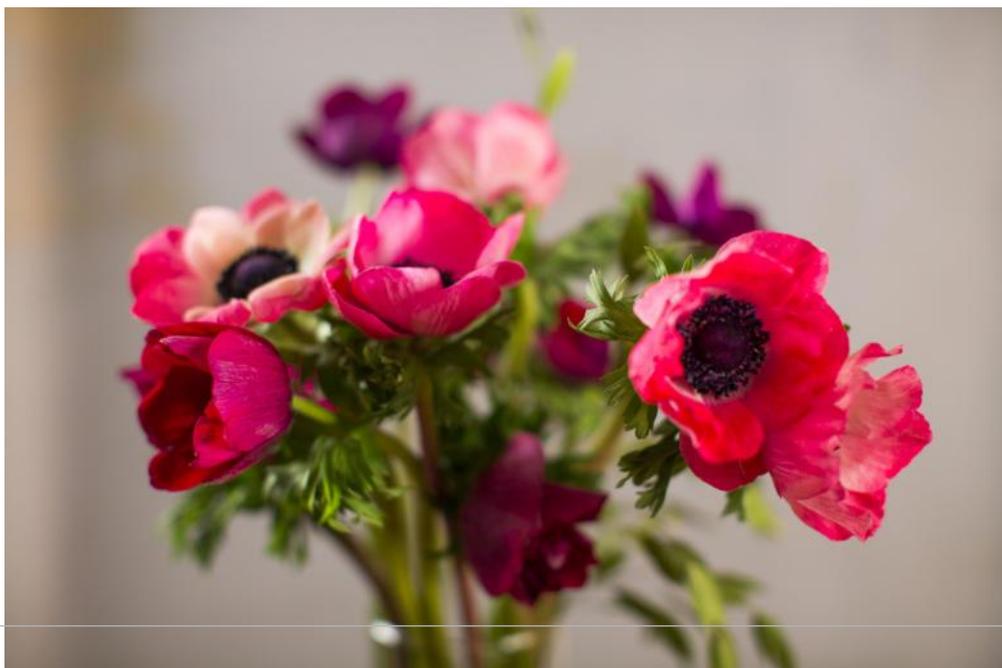
Simple offerings and presents to reciprocate someone else's generosity, to express gratitude or just for their own sake are particularly symbolic. Any accompanying words and physical contact can enhance this personal connection and can be as powerful - or more so - than the actual gift itself. You've consciously decided to give something to someone and taken care in its selection. Can you take an extra few seconds to present your gift with conscious thoughts, time and words?

Flowers as Expressions of Love

To offer personally selected living flowers is, for me, a deeper way of expressing gratitude and love. Birthdays, marriages and funerals are all ceremonial occasions where we hold and present flowers in their natural beauty in order to honour the essence of who a person is or was.

Are you able to do this for yourself too - to buy yourself flowers? When we take time to choose and arrange flowers in the home or garden, it is both a powerful action and an affirmation that we appreciate and value ourselves.

Do you enjoy the moments when the flowers catch your eye with their perfect or disorderly symmetry? I love how the stems of anemones bend in s-shaped curves with their upturned violet and magenta heads defying gravity. Or when, on their peak days, the luminosity of flowers is so intense they stop you in your tracks, showing their complete shape and pure energy. I have an orange lily plant in a pot on my balcony that was a supermarket mother's day present: it survives inches of snow every winter to produce fiery spectacular flowers. For only a handful of days, they demand my attention and I willingly give it.



Creating Our Own Ceremonies

More and more people are creating their own ceremonies to mark rites of passages and periods of transformation in a public way. If we can't find an existing ritual that strikes a chord with us, we can devise our own ceremonies and explore the creative potential to tend to our emotional selves through do-it-yourself practices. Recently I was privileged to participate in a friend's 40th birthday celebration - a celebration of herself. We performed a simple ceremony honouring her as the Queen that she is, by bestowing upon her flowers, words, music and dance. The journey that she has lived, to date, merited this dedicated and sacred celebration as a marker of the past and of all that she hopes to invite and live in the future. She was able to organise and give this gift to herself, and those of us who share her life were fortunate to participate in the occasion.



Places in Nature

Creating your own rituals - whether for weddings, naming children, funerals, rites of passage (such as the start of menstruation or when a child becomes an adult) - means the ritual is unique to you, embodying values important to you. This personalising of the process is important. It reconnects you to your original intention and supports you through doubts or tough times. Finding places in Nature creates a reciprocal emotional relationship with the earth itself and with where you live - as our ancestors did. Without this relationship, it becomes difficult to co-create our lives, as we do not see ourselves as part of our surroundings in a greater existential way.

To start this practice, find places in Nature that speak to you and go to them, whether that is in a city park or a rural setting. Deciding to spend time in Nature is physiologically beneficial for the body - the heart rate slows down and the nervous system quietens - but it also expands your consciousness of the present moment.

Walking across this bridge is a ritualistic activity for me in that I do it consciously to notice how I feel and enter a different state of mind, seeing it as a passage from one place or thought to another. At other times, the fear of slipping and tumbling to my death feels like the journey of crossing the River Styx into the Greek underworld, wondering if I'll need to pay Charon for the trip. Within this supportive bowl-like space, with soaring trees above and the meandering stream below, I'm consciously able to carry out whatever performance my body and emotions demand whilst spending quality time in nature.



Ritual and the Seasons

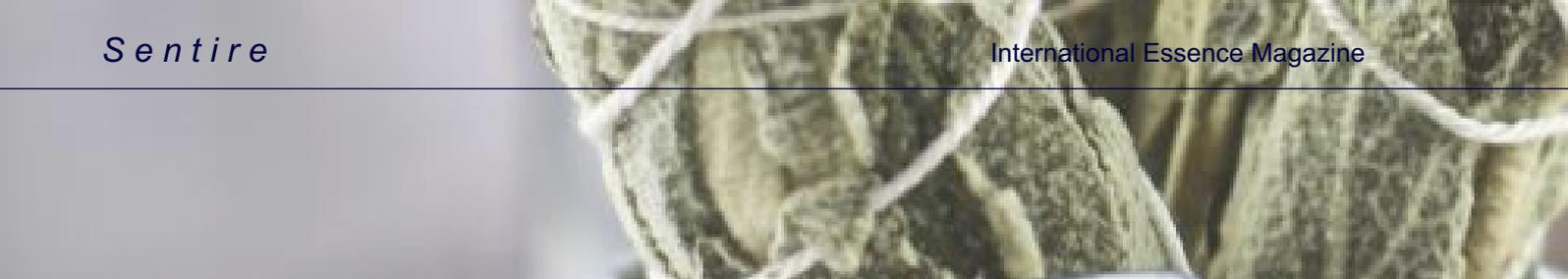
Are you aware of the seasons? Do you welcome or inaugurate them in a marked way? The Summer Solstice is, for some, a specific day to be honoured. I acknowledge the power of the sun and summer's arrival in the silhouetted mountains and pine trees still to be seen late at night during this time. Others go to Stonehenge to be part of a more formal gathering of people. Here, they consciously welcome the season and move into the transitional phase of harnessing the energy of the summer and all that it represents.

Similarly, the power of the luna feminine force calls me to her energy with intention throughout the different phases of the thirteen full moon cycles every year. The need to stand outside and bask at the zenith of her fullness feels a simple way for me to honour something bigger than the everyday, whilst taking time (however short) for myself.

Conscious time

Ritual demands time. Not hours and hours to carry out a lengthy ceremony: just a few simple deliberately created moments can be enough depending on what is needed. My work with ritual and consciousness began when taking homeopathic remedies and flower essences. Hurriedly throwing them into my mouth without any mindfulness felt both dishonouring and disempowering to my healing and to myself. I wanted to create the most receptive and fertile centre for them to work and started the practice of giving my full attention to the energy of the medicine and my body.

Having awareness and being in the present moment invites the body to access the inner knowledge contained within, in turn enhancing the capacity to heal and know what is needed next.



Similarly, when working with clients, allocating time to create an optimal healing environment is vital. For me, this always involves ritual: I centre and prepare myself by cleansing the air, lighting a candle, burning incense, sounding my singing bowl - whatever calls to me as I begin to work with the energy of a person or group. I suggest that my clients do the same, taking a few conscious moments to connect with both their body and the energy of the essence before our session.

We can also use ritual when starting a project: a declaration of your intentions will cement what follows. This is an act of commitment, acknowledging the part you are about to play, the process involved, the journey of learning about to be undertaken, and how you hope others will feel during the experience.

Personally, this is where the power of ritual has impacted my life significantly. Listening to my intuition, deciding on a course of action and feeling all fired up, only to then experience a loss of impetus to make something happen is, I believe, attributable to me not consciously demonstrating, in practical ways, my commitment to myself and the universe. And the approach to making this conscious is through performing a simple ceremony affirming my personal choice at the outset.

A Personal Project

A few years ago, my intuition spoke to me about taking time for myself to walk the route of Saint James on the Camino to Santiago. Finally, I accepted my dream and the planning happened seamlessly. Within a few weeks I was organised and ready to go but one crucial part was missing: my commitment. I'd given myself 'get out clauses'. I wasn't sure that I would finish. I had not formally committed myself in a meaningful or profound way to honour the journey I was embarking on - either to myself or to this ancient pilgrimage. The consequence of not making a commitment was two very hard weeks on an emotional roller coaster, experiencing a great deal of physical pain and mental anguish.

The day I chose to commit myself to the adventure 100% was the day it became easier. I went on to achieve my goal, filled with determination, joy and elation.



Ideas, dreams and projects need commitment or, as Elizabeth Gilbert talks about in Big Magic, they move on and find someone else to fulfil them.

Performing a ritual can, in a practical sense, facilitate the process of truly embodying a commitment, with depth and sincerity, through reverence of your goals and dreams.



The Ritual of Emotions: Using Essences to Break Through

Throughout life we are constantly performing rituals, often unconsciously. These include repetitive emotional responses which can have a ritualistic familiarity to them. These habitual cycles are unconscious energy trying to get your attention and present an invitation to express such energy differently. It demands a container or direction. Consciously undertaking a ritual provides a vehicle for these emotions to surface, leading to personal transformation from a place of empowerment.

When an energetic shift is demanded, essences are an ideal starting point for a conscious ceremony. After intuitively selecting and taking an essence, write down how you are feeling in that moment. You could then decide to burn this piece of paper, invoking the transformative energy of fire as a catalyst for change.

When caught in the grip of emotions that are overwhelming, adding essences such as the LightBringer Combinations *Heart Balm*, *Healer's Light* or *Light Support*, for example, and a handful of rose petals to a bath full of water, is a luxurious ritual to perform for yourself. Water's fluidity assists in moving through stuck or loop-like emotions in a more conscious and empowered way, as opposed to letting them keep happening to you or taking you over.

I invite you to consider ritual as sacred time, as a conscious deed to welcome the start of something, or to mark the close of a period of time, a project or a life. Through ritual and ceremony you can properly acknowledge what has been and express a sense of gratitude for it. You can do this when the repetitive loop of certain emotions has brought you to a standstill or floored you, causing you to go deeper this time: to perform your dance, sound your drum and change your energy according to what's next for you - welcoming, honouring, creating or closing. Consciously acting in a way that befits yourself, the situation and the energy, means living life in a transformative way.

“A ritual connects us to each other, to nature, to the cycles and rhythms of life.”

The Power of Ritual, Rachel Pollack



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