
The Power of Ritual



Spore Studios



Ritual

takes many forms: sacred or profane, joyous or grieving, private or public. Yet the impulse to create something meaningful and transformative, that acknowledges our shared vulnerability and suffering as well as celebrates our rites of passage during the life course, is deeply human.

Ritual is nourishment for the soul just as food is nourishment to the body. Here are some foundational elements to help you create everyday transformative rituals so you may live a more intentional life.

Photos: (Upper left); Transgender folk, normally shunned, enjoying an 18-day festival in India (Upper right); Buddhist men and women pray for peace during the grueling 60 mile "Gochak" ritual.



Elements of Ritual

1. Create a Physical Sacred Space

Creating a home altar or space devoted to your practice allows you to enter your ritual with total presence. Your space can be devoted exclusively to suit the expression of your ritual whether it be meditation or prayer, reflection, journaling, dance/movement or creative arts. Consider what you'll be doing and how much space and privacy you will desire as you contemplate its design.



Choose your talisman, an object(s) that symbolizes what matters to you

Your altar of inspiration may contain offerings of gratitude (flowers, seeds, honey), talismans or objects that symbolize qualities you admire or wish to cultivate, nature elements that represent fire, earth, water, air and an object or image that represents your Shadow.

Choose your Wise Guides

You may also want to include framed photos or drawings of your Wise Guides. These are inspirational mentors or spiritual leaders, present in your life or alive in your memory or through their teachings, who you perceive as embodying the qualities you wish to grow and nurture in yourself.

A few of mine are on the next page:

Upper left; Vandana Shiva, Indian physicist and Creator of the seed bank, Right; Jane Goodall, primatologist and peace ecologist and Lower left; Tamara, a global health activist and doctor whom I met in Haiti and presently practices medicine in Detroit, Michigan.



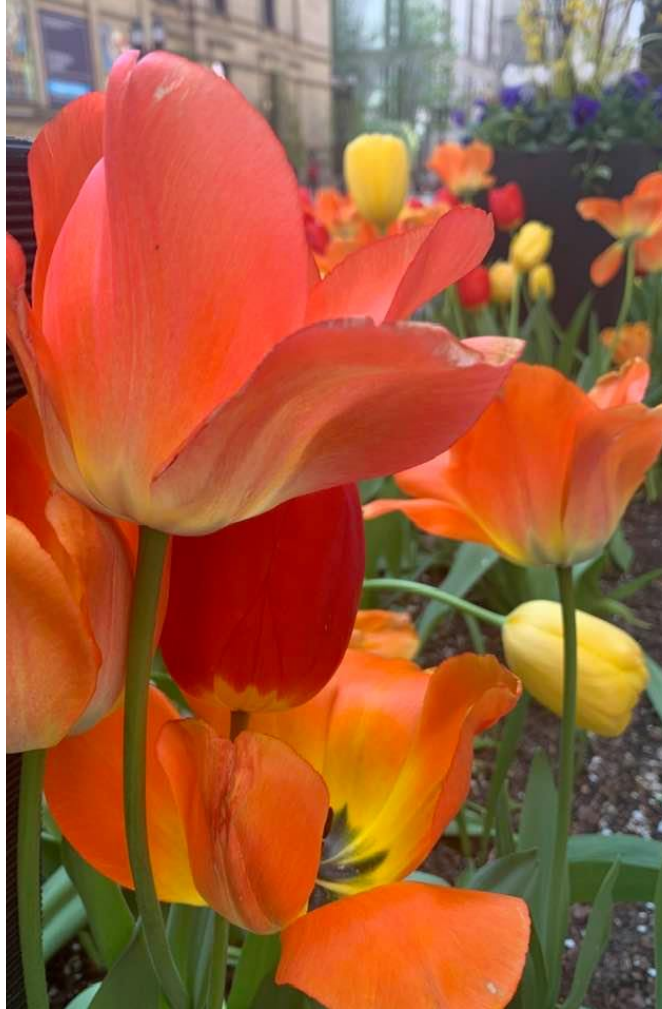


2. Cleanse

Clear your space of negative energy and 'smudge' your body or smooth your magnetic field with a cleansing, purifying medium.

In many cultures it is quite common to purify or cleanse the body and environment as a way to prepare and protect the ritual space and your body. Cleansing may be through smoke from burning sweetgrass or white sage. It could be through crystals such as amethyst, obsidian, golden tiger's eye, and hematite. Or via healing hands through Qi-gong massage, sliding the hands down your Yin and Yang meridians.





3. Set your Intention

Dive deep into your heart space and intuitive wisdom to direct your ritual to this word, image, quality or energy that speaks to you.

Now that you've created your space and are free of limiting beliefs, fears or cynicism, it is time to uncover your true authentic desires, grounded in your values and ethics, directing your practice toward purpose.

Sometimes it takes awhile to connect with our intention. Do not fret. Try accessing your subconscious through "soul work" such as collage, writing or mandala-making. If you are blocked or encountering resistance, try the "Caring Quilt" activity, take an "affirmation bath" or practice "metta" meditation.

Photos of Tulips by Leslie Knight

4. Soul Dialogue

Trusting the space made sacred by your intention, close your eyes. Now take three deep breaths. Inhale and exhale. As you exhale, take the thought "I release all fear of this inner journey." Repeat this thought on the next two exhalations. Breathe in . . . breathe out. "I release all fear of this inner journey. " And so, the journey begins.

I'd like you to visualize a long path which stretches before you. It may be a place known to you or it may be a new terrain. It may pass through a dark wood or across high mountains. At some point, you see before you an ancient iron gate. The gate is locked and vines cover it. You reach deep into your pocket and find a key. The key is large and rather heavy. Place the key into the lock, turning it in a complete circle so that the gate swings open. Now take another deep breath releasing any residue of fear, and walk through the open gate.

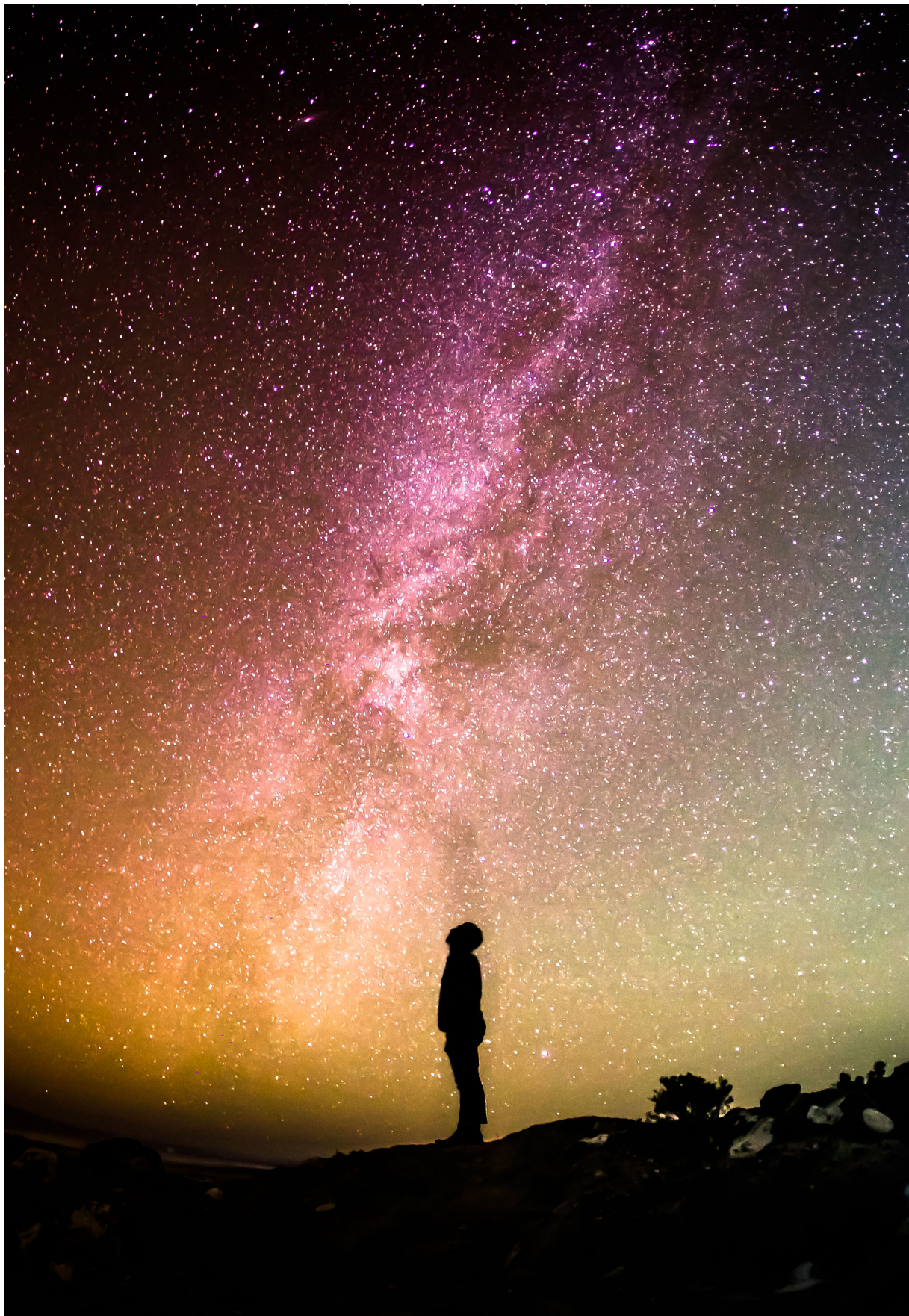
You find yourself now in a garden. It might be an English garden or perhaps a Japanese Zen garden with stone lanterns and tranquil pools of water



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with white lotus and gentle Koi fish. Or any garden of your choice. See it. The flowers are in bloom. The smells intoxicate, causing you to smile. Just ahead lies a house which you recognize as the house of your dreams. You know this house for it is your very Self. Take a moment and visualize your house.

The door is locked but you hold in your hand the key. Visualize the key to your house and taking a deep breath, open the door. Enter now and stand for a moment, taking in the profound feeling that you have come Home. Then slowly yet with purpose, walk to your favorite room. Perhaps a paneled study lined with books of favorite authors. A fireplace glows providing warmth. Now walk to a large desk which overlooks the garden,



and sit. After a moment, open the center drawer and take out paper and pen. See the pen that you will write with. Now look carefully at the virgin white page and honor it. Soon it will be time to write your first Soul Dialogue.

But first, I'd like you to visualize your Soul. It might be a bird or a butterfly or an animal. Or a jewel or some other precious object. What would be a metaphor for your Soul, your innermost being? See it. Experience it.

Now begin the dialogue. Visualize looking at your Soul in whatever form it has chosen. Then ask it, your Soul, this simple question: What do you want? This will not be the only or final answer for all time, simply the one Soul gives you today, that is now, this very moment.

For the next five minutes -- without undue thinking -- open your eyes and begin the exercise, the Soul dialogue. Simply write the question, "What do you want?" Then taking all the time you need, listen for Soul's reply and write it down. Write it all down. There is no right answer. There is only your answer. Please begin now.

5. Breathing Meditation

This is a breathing meditation that allows you to tune in and allow your body to sense and receive the type of breath you need in this moment.

In this breath meditation, you will observe your present state of being and find the breath that you need in this moment, moment by moment.

Breathe naturally. Scan your body and notice the ever changing sensations.

Now bring your attention to your breath. Observe your breath, your natural breath. Do not judge, just notice.

Follow the movements of your chest as you breathe. [pause]

Tune into your state of being; your experience of this present moment. Without judging yourself, observe what you feel, both physically and emotionally. Accept what you are feeling, with ease and kindness. Take some slow, deep, rhythmic breaths. Gentle, deep rhythmic breaths. Take your time. [Longer pause]

Now, ask yourself “What type of breathing does my body and mind need in this moment?” If you feel tired, long inhalations will help invigorate. If you feel stressed, long exhalations will



help you relax. Long intentional inhalations will help invigorate, long intentional exhalations will help you relax. Spend some time breathing the way your body is calling you to breathe.

You may change your breath at any time, moment to moment. I will give you some quiet time now. [Longer pause]

Return your breath to a natural easy breath. Nice, easy and natural. After giving your body and mind what it needs, enjoy this present moment, this wonderful moment.

Observe your state of being in this moment. [pause] As you go about your day, know that you can call attention to your breath at any time, and change your breath at any time, depending on what you need, moment to moment.

6. Walking Meditation

TIME REQUIRED: 10 minutes daily for at least a week. Evidence suggests that mindfulness increases the more you practice it.

The steps below are adapted from a guided walking meditation led by mindfulness expert Jon Kabat-Zinn in his audiobook, *Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life*.

1. Find a location. Find a lane that allows you to walk back and forth for 10-15 paces—a place that is relatively peaceful, where you won't be disturbed or even observed (since a slow, formal walking meditation can look strange to people who are unfamiliar with it). You can practice walking meditation either indoors or outside in nature. The lane doesn't have to be very long since the goal is not to reach a specific destination, just to practice a very intentional form of walking where you're mostly retracing your steps.

2. Start your steps. Walk 10-15 steps along the lane you've chosen, and then pause and breathe for as long as you like. When you're ready, turn and walk back in the opposite direction to the other end of the lane, where you can pause and breathe again. Then, when you're ready, turn once more and continue with the walk.



Friends on Fernwood retreat

3. The components of each step. Walking meditation involves very deliberating thinking about and doing a series of actions that you normally do automatically. Breaking these steps down in your mind may feel awkward, even ridiculous. But you should try to notice at least these four basic components of each step:

- a) the lifting of one foot;
- b) the moving of the foot a bit forward of where you're standing;
- c) the placing of the foot on the floor, heel first;
- d) the shifting of the weight of the body onto the forward leg as the back heel lifts, while the toes of that foot remain touching the ground.



7. Mindful Eating

Mindful eating is maintaining an in-the-moment awareness of the food and drink you put into your body, observing rather than judging how the food makes you feel and the signals your body sends about taste, satisfaction, and fullness. It is also taking the time to appreciate all the hands and invisible labor that brought the food to you; as well as the ecological forces that created it.

8. Connect with Nature

A “Sit Spot” is simply a favorite place in nature that you visit regularly to cultivate awareness as you expand your senses and study patterns of nature around you.

By choosing one place outside that you visit over and over again, it teaches you to develop the most ancient parts of human awareness and gradually acquire enhanced sensitivity to nature.

With practice, this routine will facilitate a transformation of your ability to observe patterns in nature including animal tracking, bird alarms and knowledge of plants- and translate this sensory awareness to your every day life.



9. Express Gratitude

Begin each morning by savoring the first moments of your day consciously, to bathe yourself in positivity and a sense of appreciation. End each evening before you go to rest, re-affirming these gifts.

An important daily ritual to balance the negativity bias we have as humans and help us to create a positive outlook.

What are you grateful for?



30 day challenge

10. Dive in and Commit to the Process

Try maintaining your chosen ritual routine for 30 days and notice its impact on your life.

If you wish to delve deeper into creating an intentional life design that is truly nourishing and sustainable, consider joining the ten week [Compassionate Leadership Program](#).

Offered through Spore Studios four times a year: Summer, Fall, Winter and Spring.

