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Title: *Revisiting the Everyday Ritual: Midsummer Edition*

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The Pagan calendar, largely influential in the study of witchery, holds a number of holidays, observances, and rituals intended to honor, as well as invoke, the benevolent forces that inhabit and pass between our realm and the other. But what if the everyday ritual found an equally sacred place in one's own Book of Days?

I moved to Northern Italy in February of this year, and it recently occurred to me that I've performed a certain ritual of my own since early spring:

A few times a week I try to go for a walk in the mountains above my house and find one of the many little waterfall lagoons to sit by, read, and now that summer has arrived, swim in. I bring a book, some of my stones for recharging, sometimes a drink (*la dolce vita, baby*) and a bag of leftover veggies accumulated throughout the week—and nope, they aren't my lunch.

A ten-minute walk up the winding cobblestone streets leads to the medieval promontory of San Martino, which acts as a kind of gateway to the mountains. You can go up the church drive, bordered by chapels and poplar trees, or cut through a more rural path that follows the impressively named Inferno River, taking you over a bridge and up a series of stone steps. I usually choose the latter. At the foot of those steps, overlooking the first waterfall, stands an alter dedicated to the Virgin Mary. I pause and give thanks to her Pagan likeness Brigid, goddess of healing and poetry, and keeper of the sacred flame. Touching her steepled fingers, I ask for protection and a pleasant afternoon.

I then begin my ascent, and upon reaching the top I'm greeted by a family of pygmy goats, partitioned off in a large pen that makes up one side of the leveled path. I absolutely adore these little darlings, and feed them the assortment of unused (and goat-friendly) vegetables, herbs, and fruit. It began as a fairly thoughtless act, a kind of a casual composting, but soon became a self-imposed obligation. Not because they were ridiculously cute and had come to recognize me (I mean, who could refuse a pygmy goat?), but because it felt like the proper thing to do. Like an intrepid trekker from a fairy tale, I couldn't imagine passing them or Brigid without paying my respects and appropriate toll, and giving thanks for my permitted intrusion.

Last but never least, I always pour out a little of what I've brought to drink into one of the lagoons. Because these waters are ancient, and carry a myth and mystery of their own, and I've no doubt that something dwells within them that allows me to swim undisturbed and emerge rejuvenated, and why wouldn't I want to honor that?

The online Merriam-Webster dictionary defines ritual as thus:

1. **:** of or relating to rites or a ritual : ceremonial *a ritual dance*
2. **2:** according to religious law *ritual purity*
3. **3:** done in accordance with social custom or normal protocol *ritual handshakes, ritual background checks*

—and yet none of these seem to fit. I view personal ritual as the oldest and purest form of self-care, the kind that isn't packaged and promoted as a trendy or exclusive luxury. I believe that personal rituals are the ways in which we reinstate order and a narrative in our lives, by way

of taking a moment to consciously appreciate what we value, be it spiritual or corporeal, great or small.

I lived in NYC for eight years, and took terrible care of myself on all fronts. I neglected my physical, mental, and emotional health, did not manage my time or money or energy or talents, ate whatever was on hand, and exercised by way of running around three boroughs all day. I pursued toxic relationships, and ignored my mind and body's cries for help—repeatedly. I had no ritual, but ate and slept and loved at random, savoring the meaningful but hardly finding a way to sustain it. I hurtled like a cannonball through the years without a clear path or plan, often taking out chunks of the lives I passed along the way. I was in my 20's, and pursuing a lifestyle that was anything but kind, and yet I noticed that the most resilient of my peers possessed a set of self-fortifying mechanisms that rendered them impervious to whatever blows life dealt them. Of course they got their hearts broken, experienced tragedy and failure; they were very much human. But they were humans who were able to endure more and recover much faster than this one, and were never displaced from their helm for long.

I began to honor the everyday ritual when I moved to the Pacific Northwest for a year, and the transformation was subtle but extraordinary. I would wake up early, make coffee, go out onto the terrace of the house I rented a room in, and meditate. I would walk along the docks before going to work, and at night when I returned home I'd sink into the sarcophagus-sized bathtub, savoring every second. In between there was socializing and to-dos and the usual responsibilities and struggles, but I held fast to those everyday rituals and what's more, genuinely enjoyed doing so. Because ritual shouldn't feel like a chore, and when it starts to then by all means allow it to evolve into something you can look forward to.

I'm not saying *everything* has to become a ritual—sometimes a cigar really is just a cigar—but imagine taking a moment to consider the things you do on the regular, and genuinely enjoy doing, and valuing them as ritual, rather than routine. Would this enrich your experiences and interactions, and heighten your sense of gratitude? And, just as importantly, would it allow you to weed out the practices that no longer provide sustenance?

There's a part of me that wants to cite the current state of the world as an argument for why ritual is so important but you know, that simply doesn't hold up. Our ancestors lived through innumerable wars and plagues and societal abuses and still honored their daily rites and acknowledgements, that in turn lent meaning and value to their lives. In the temple or by the hearth, they tended to that sacred flame. Wherever and however you reside, the world is unruly and unpredictable, and we control very little in comparison to what we don't. You can rage against that, or direct your anger at unwitting targets, or demand restitution from a wounded sense of entitlement, OR curate a place for yourself that lends order and grace to the chaos. Don't get me wrong, I'm no Galadriel; there are mornings I can barely drag myself out of bed and launch myself at the tasks ahead. For many of us there are children to care for and second and third jobs to hold down and demands that leave little room for anything but blessed sleep.

There are still days I shirk all but the bare minimum, due to depression or stress or sheer lack of stamina, and the effect ultimately feels like a neglected pet sadly eyeing me from the corner.

In the end, will a do-not-disturb tea break, evening stroll, hour in the garden, or moment of meditation change the world? Probably not. But it will surely make yours just a bit more inhabitable. And that, kindred spirits, is where magic takes seed.

