

ON TRAIL PRACTICES

Since I do a lot of hiking and backpacking, I spend a lot of time walking on trails. And since my goal is to begin each day with a personal spirit practice, I am always curious about how I can merge the two. My partner and I also have developed our own version of practices we do together while hiking.

It's quite useful, especially while solo hiking, to do something that causes you to speak out loud on a regular basis. You're not going to surprise a bear on the trail if they hear you praying out loud a mile away! And it's a sweet opportunity to seed spirit in the world - when I run into other hikers and they see me talking to myself, I often tell them I'm doing a gratitude practice and I invite them to say out loud one thing they are thankful for. It is always well received.

Simple Directions / Elements Prayer

My partner and I do this together almost every time we are hiking, though I do this when I'm solo as well. We have a simple song we sing to the grandmothers by way of beginning.

Grandmothers I see you sitting in the (insert direction)
you are sacred, you are looking at us
We call to you. Pray to you. Honor you
You are sacred. And you are looking at us

We then proceed to have sweet conversation with the spirits of the elements and the directions, and what they represent in our lives. We offer prayer and gratitude to the East/Air, South/Fire, West/Water, North/Earth, and Center/Spirit.

One important part of this game is to let it take the time it takes. If we have a long hike that day, we may spend an hour with each direction, bouncing from gratitude to prayer and back again. We may call in guardians we associate with that direction, telling them why we need their help, what we are fearing, how they can protect us. We may speak of an attribute or quality we assign to that element and how it's relevant to our prayer, or something we are striving towards in our life. We may offer songs or poems about the element/direction. When all has been said that needs to be said, a final acknowledgement is offered and we move on to the next direction.

I have learned a lot about both myself and the person I am hiking with by doing this practice. It's an awfully sweet way to spend a morning.

Praise Walks /Battery Charge

I have a sense that one thing I am meant to do in this world is offer reparation for harm my North American settler ancestors caused. I think for thousands of years, the indigenous ones “fed” the spirits of the land where they lived and traveled. They fed Her battery in many ways, with their songs, prayers, attention, honoring, ceremonies, food blessings, gratitude, etc. When they were separated from the land (which happened in so many ways), that feeding of the land spirits was interrupted or completely cut off. One of the reasons I felt called to walk the length of Cascadia in 2021 was to connect with my bioregion at human speed. To literally let each step of the walk be a prayer for Her. Maybe this would feed Her and, even in some tiny way, offer some reparation for what was lost. May it be so.

One way I like to do this is with a Praise Walk. As I hike, I start to consciously notice things. I begin to pay careful attention, speaking out loud about what I see and feel. I begin praising these Others in front of me for their beauty, specific traits, interaction with the light at this moment, sounds I hear, colors or patterns that are pleasing. I may riff in praise of the cycle of photosynthesis, offer gratitude for the great giveaway dance of breath between the green bloods and the red bloods. Maybe I can shift my gaze into “animist consciousness” and wax poetic about interbeing with the web of humming animacy.

This practice is a beautiful, two-way, win-win. She and the land spirits get fed, offered to, and lavished with devotion and praise. And I get to be fully present with the ecosystem, the land, and creature spirits. I'm not just zoning out, thinking about grocery shopping or who said what at the last town council meeting. I am encouraging myself to be radically present and pay attention to what is actually happening, right here, right now.

I Spy With My Devotional Eye

This is a trail game I usually play alone. There are very complex rules, which change often and capriciously, of course. The basic premise is this - I am on the lookout for certain things. Every time I see one, I do a certain devotional practice. For instance:

- Every time I see running water cross over the trail, I stop and sing a short water song like "water spirits, healing cure, water spirits flowing pure, purify this body, sanctify this soul, water spirits, making this place whole"
- Every time I see a slug, I continue walking but say a slow prayer to Obatala, reminding me of the power in slowing down, being less busy, letting it take the time it takes.
- Certain bird calls may trigger a certain song or a spoken blessing to find and use my most authentic voice.
- Switchbacks will trigger certain practices. For example, if I have a choice to make, I may voice possible outcomes based on a choice made, each new switchback another possible outcome.
- Seeing a big glacial erratic might mean one minute of recognition to the rock people.
- Finding ripe berries along the trail makes me offer thanks for some of the many ways the Mother's abundance fills me with love

You get the picture.

Rummaging Through the Chakras

This trail practice is like the Directions practice above, but using the chakras. This is one I normally do when I'm solo, but you could figure out a way to make it a group game.

I invented this game when I began trying to heal my HDHD (half dead heart disease). I had no idea what it meant to "feel feelings in my body." I *thought* all my feelings; they all felt like they originated in my head. Maybe I could use the chakra centers as a sort of filing system to learn to feel feelings in my body. I did some research, along with my own intuition, to come up with a basic idea of where in my body certain feelings would live. When I would "think" a feeling, I would "file" it in the corresponding chakra/area of my body. I could open the file and try to feel the "thought" in my body in that place. It may sound goofy, especially if you are a person who has easy access to feelings in your body, but it really helped me.

The trail game was a way to practice feeling feelings. While I was hiking, I would start at the root chakra and work my way up to the crown, practicing what it was like to feel. Feel the fear of being vulnerable, feel pleased when I did something well, feel uneasy that a boundary was not being respected,

feel pissed off at a verbal slight, feel satisfied when a conflict was settled in a healthy way. The game developed over time to have a wider scope. As I learned more about the chakra system, I also learned more about my own intuitive hits on the energy centers in my body. I could do prayers, gratitude practice and acknowledgements using the chakras to guide me. A short example

Being in my root chakra might sound like this:

I am grateful for being in this body. Noticing how my legs feel strong walking up this hill. Thank you, dear sweet body, for the gift of health and aging gracefully that I feel today. My root is the place where I find the feeling of security. This is how it feels in my body to know I belong. As I walk today, I will remember that I am part of all this. I am connected intimately to this web of life, this shimmering hum of animacy. I am grateful to be a part of so many thriving communities. I would like to offer a prayer to you Mother, may we both ripple outward to offer hope to someone today who feels isolated and disconnected. May all beings find a point of safety in their bodies. Support me, spirits of the plant people as I learn more and more about growing food and feeding the people. Help me pull away from the industrial food system, into deeper self-sufficiency and appreciation of the abundance of the natural world. This growing season, I vow to explore a deeper knowledge of seed saving by...etc etc etc.

It may take me all day to move through the energy centers in my body. It helps me feel connected to myself, to the land around me, and to the feelings that I now can actually feel coursing through my body. So may it be.