

# DAILY OFFERINGS AND DEVOTIONS

In the context of this article, daily practice is a self-designed ritual to deepen our connection to who and what we hold sacred. At the core of ritual is a central focal point – an entity or force we honor, recognizing how this act of honoring also strengthens our own selves. The repetitive nature of daily practice (notice it is “daily” practice, not “occasional”) creates a friction that builds energy and depth.

This daily ritual can serve as a continual reminder to reconnect with the animate forces around us. Because we love this world, because the holies fill us with awe and reverence. Because we want to align ourselves to that sentience, that focal point at the center of all.

## Making Offerings

Offerings are a way of feeding spirit and honoring the sacred. Over the years, I have struggled with feelings of worthiness around my offerings. If the one at the center of my ritual is the Divine Mother of the Whole Freaking Universe...how could anything I have possibly be worthy of offering to Her? The worth of my offering lies both in its seeming insignificance and its profound meaning. My offering is worth almost nothing - and absolutely everything.

Accept this offering, Mother, from this body that kneels within your love. Let my very existence be an offering to you. Let me feed these relationships, asking the holies, what is something tangible I can do to strengthen these connections today? Often, this takes the form of offering beautiful food grown in my garden and prepared with love.

### **Offering Food:**

An animate world is alive, and all living beings need to be fed. Across cultures and eras, humans have made offerings to spirit, almost always including offerings of actual food. We participate in a cycle of gifting and re-gifting. The food comes from the Mother, is a manifestation of Her, and in offering it back, we acknowledge our dependence and vulnerability.

As a human heterotroph person, I am dependent on taking the lives of others (be they plants or animals) to continue my own life. This recognition helps me experience food as intimate, nurturing, a deeply connective force. Others are dying so that I can live – which makes me want to *really* live. May the lives of those others power and energize this body, that I may bring my gifts and service to all beings today.

I want to ritually make offerings of food, full of gratitude and reverence. I do my best to make the offering plate a beautiful work of art. Because I cannot live without this food and you, Mother of all beings, are the source. All this is you, Mother; you are all this.

### **Other Offerings:**

Traditions worldwide include offerings of the elements – air (incense, smoke, breath), fire (candles, flames, energy), water (water, milk, oil, honey, wine) and earth (flowers, dried herbs). You might light a candle as offering to a deity, do a pouring ritual, offer flowers from your garden or burn herbs you collected in the mountains.

Heat and sweat are offerings. Maybe you heat yourself up through dancing, singing, or some other physical activity. Anything that takes you into a state where your mind can gracefully surrender can be seen as an offering.

Art is an offering. Maybe you offer praise songs, poetry, drawings, mandalas, or create a gorgeous shrine or altar. This universe is infinitely artful, flagrantly beautiful. The offering, the ritual, can be as beautiful as the source it is honoring.

Prayer is an offering. Not asking for something for yourself, but prayer that is an honoring. After you cultivate a long-standing reciprocal relationship with that being at the center, then you might ask for something, but maybe not before.

### **Making it pop:**

If your practice feels dry or boring, bring more to it! Bring flame, smoke, music, oil, pouring and dripping liquids, chanting. This is meant to be vibrant, loving and very much alive. Maybe you can incorporate somatic prayer or praise dance to liven things up a little? Make your offering plate divinely beautiful, rich with colors, textures and flowers.

What would happen if you were to go WILD in your daily practice, in your offering? If you felt free enough to let your altar space overflow with life and richness and abundance? What if you smeared everything with rich red ochre paste or freely poured ghee or milk over a devotional object? What if your devotional prayer was sung at the top of your voice while you danced wildly around a tree? What if you acted, not like a detached worshipper, but like an intimately woven strand in the web of animacy?

## **Devotional Practices**

I took a yearlong class with Josh Schrei (host of The Emerald podcast). In the Mythic Body class, we were asked to find an “object” of devotion. Some physical “thing” that would act as a central focal point while we formed a dedicated daily practice of offering and devotion. It wasn’t necessary to have the object represent a deity or spirit entity, but that was certainly possible. I chose a huge cedar tree outside my bedroom who, for me, represented the one I call the Great Mother. And there I sat...every day...devoted to this tree.

I had been a practicing witch for 30 years, so why did this feel so damned awkward? I see now that most of us who are living in bodies shaped by modernity have lost easy access to the conjunctive state. Recovering my relationship with devotion was to recover intimacy with awe, wonder and belonging. Devotion became a form of magic, of choosing to leave the realm of the mundane and enter the realm of Her, to touch something way bigger than my normal reality.

## **Ritual Repetition**

In studying common aspects of devotional practice in world traditions, we were invited to dream into our own ways of practice. It takes time and repetition to develop this sort of transformative personal ritual. We repeat rituals regularly within certain cycles (like lunar months or solar years). Within the rituals themselves, we use repetitive friction to raise heat and energy. For example, if you are in devotion to a sacred cedar tree, you probably won’t just say “oh, cedar tree” one time and that’s it for the day. It might sound more like this: oh cedar tree, cedar tree, you who are cedar tree, you with your roots, your roots disappearing into the soft soil at your base, your roots that spread beneath me, your roots that sink down into the rich earth, oh cedar tree, you of roots and of peeling bark, cedar of roots

and peeling bark, you cedar with skin that flows in waves and curves over your body, your bark with the smell of rich earth and beautiful resin...etc.

Devotional practice is not a one and done thing. It takes time to get it going, repetition to ripen it, and commitment to allow it to bloom into fullness.

### **Devotional Practice Ideas:**

Here are some ideas you could experiment with in developing a practice of devotion to a deity or an Object of Devotion (OOD):

- Speaking (out loud) the attributes or adornments of your OOD (see cedar tree above)
- Offering of repetitive prayer or praise song – see more below
- Offerings of food or other things (see above)
- Anointing your OOD with some substance meaningful to you (such as ochre, turmeric, chalk, compost)
- Pouring or drizzling your OOD with milk, wine, water, ghee, oil etc.
- Lighting a flame in offering
- Dancing or movement in offering
- Assuming postures of reverence – if you are in a state of not feeling much devotional pull, one of the quickest ways to get there may be to get down on the ground, face to the earth, hands outstretched, palms turned up (some variant of full pranam). Or try kneeling, arms spread wide, palms open and up, gazing upward, consciously bringing a gaze of awe and wonder to your face. Find the things that facilitate your journey into that state of reverence and awe.

### **Prayer and devotion:**

As a young witch, I picked up the mistaken belief that “witches don’t pray”. I was in partnership with my deities, not supplication. Prayer, as a former Catholic, was either used as a form of penance or a way to beg for things from a disembodied God. It wasn’t until I started solo distance backpacking that I began to connect with the art and craft of prayer. The Mythic Body course encouraged me to bring the practice to my home altar. Now, my devotional prayers are a wonderfully intimate, rich, two-way dialog with Her. Prayer is where I enter the presence of the Divine.

Starting this active prayer practice was hard for me. I tripped over my own tongue, didn’t know what to say, it didn’t flow naturally at all. Here are a few things that helped me:

- I memorized a few “opening lines” so I had a way to start the practice and something to revert to when I found myself tongue tied and at a loss for words
- It helped me to do devotional practice after (or during) physical exercise or any practice that helped me reach a flow state
- Somatic prayer practice really helped me – moving my body along with (or in place of) left brain words. (see the article Somatic Prayer under Personal Practices on my website)
- It was helpful for me to have something in a language other than English, so I made a very simple prayer in (probably non-grammatically correct) Irish Gaelic.  
 Breo Saighead (fiery power)  
 Bandia mo sinsear (Goddess of my ancestors)  
 Oscail mo chroi (open my heart)  
 Beigh reigh gach amreigh (unravel what is tangled)  
 Is tu mo gra gheal (you are my bright shining love)

### **Ishta Deva**

I began devotional practice knowing that my object of devotion was representative of the Great Mother. Along the way, I learned something. It was difficult for me to develop a “human scale” intimacy with someone/something so vast. What came naturally was to offer devotional practice to what a Hindu Bhakti might call my Ishta Deva – my “preferred, or personal deity.” These are not separate gods, but more like their different faces that might resonate more clearly within our hearts.

My devotional practice shifted, increasingly coming to focus on my Ishta Deva, the Irish/Celtic goddess Brigid. Though I would consider myself to be more an animist than a deist, sometimes I want “a name and a face”, someone who is not quite so vast and unknowable. As Levi Rowland says in his beautiful book *Mother: Within the Goddess we name and specify* is the Goddess beyond all names, beyond all specifications. The names are doors to teachings and experience, not cages.

### **Wild Devotion:**

What if you were to go WILD in your devotional practice, breaking your own personal taboos, moving past your fears, losing your inhibitions in your practice? What if you tried shouting your prayers in a strong and powerful voice (not worrying what your neighbors might think)? What if you let go of the fear around how you appear during devotion, and you let yourself

dance...really dance, moving your body in ways that may even feel silly at first. It probably won't be easy but keep at it. It will get easier.

Being embodied in these rituals of transformation invites us to cross the dark river of our inhibitions and taboos. Maybe the more doubt and shame and self-consciousness we can let go of, the closer we come to authentic connection with the ecstasy of the divine.

Outside the controlled environment of modernity, in the wildness at the fringes, is where I find devotion as an animate practice. That is where I can give myself permission to open to that which I long for the most. I was distanced from ecstasy – my spiritual practice (especially when I was alone) was controlled, full of thinking, more serious. But as it turns out, the animate force cannot be known through rational thinking and ideas. Those ideas can tell us about some of her attributes, but they don't tell us who she is at her gooey center