

There's a thing soothing about rituals. Maybe we're doing them to celebrate, honor, or comfort the burden of grief, having a range of motions to go through can be comforting and assist anchor us in a time of change – whether that change is joyful or tragic.

However, a lot of traditional rituals in contemporary society have a religious basis, even if they have been excessively commercialized, such as Christmas or Halloween. Also, if we don't share the beliefs or opinions behind those rituals, we may not feel easy or interested to participate in them.

This can allow us to yearn for means to celebrate the milestones of our life through other, nonreligious rituals. Nevertheless, forming a community through shared celebrations is a human necessity, irrespective of our faith or culture. However, the reality is that all of us possess the power to make our own rituals – from small day-to-day routines, we share with only one other person to the yearly celebration that gathers our tribe together. All it needs is some time to think about what's significant and to connect with the awe of the universe we live in.

## Chapter 1 - Celebrating birth is a method to accept the remote probabilities that we even exist at all.

The majority of us have experienced marveling at a newborn baby. It's amazing to reason that each person who's ever lived begins life as a small bundle. If we're fortunate, we get to maintain that life for about 80 to 100 years; however, compared to the lifespan of our universe – presently believed to be 13.8 billion years – our lives are hardly a chapter in time. Understanding this even makes them more valuable.

If we think about the incidences that caused our existence, every human's on Earth is apparently amazing. It has been calculated by scientists that up till now, there have been about 7,500 generations of Homo sapiens. This signified that for you to be in existence with your exceptional mixture of genes, thousands of particular sexual rendezvous between your ancestors had to happen. When we factor in mortality, historical incidences and natural disasters such as war, the probabilities of you being you are very remote.

Also, Happenstance has a role in our presence on this small green planet. In 1938, author Sasha Sagan's grandparents saw each other on the E train in New York City. Harry, Sagan's grandfather was reading Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* While he flipped the page of his book, the woman sitting next to him put her hand on his arm. She was still reading the page and hadn't finished.

That woman turned out to be Sagan's grandmother. If she'd sat in another seat or used a different train line, Sagan's grandparents might have never come across each other, and Sagan would never have been born to two generations after.

It's not a surprise then that, as a species, we have numerous rituals to welcome babies to Earth. In the Western world, baptisms and naming days are common. Chinese families have a feast when a new baby clocks 100 days old, celebrating that the child has confronted premature death. A lot of cultures –like the Balkans to Jamaica – plant seeds or trees.

Although traditions differ, they usually focus on a hopeful wish for the exceptional person that has gotten into the world. You can make your own important ritual to give this for your newest family member. Your ritual can be something as simple and intimate as reading a special poem to your baby or it might be something big, such as throwing a party to present them to the people that will become part of their lives.

## Chapter 2 - Adding regular social rituals into your life forms community and connects you with the people you love.

If you're not a religious person, you may wonder that your life doesn't have regular rituals. Nevertheless, you won't be praying the salat, hosting Shabbat or going to church services. However, if you see rituals as a means to connect with your community, you may find out that you already a lot – a drink every weekly night with your associates, a monthly volunteering shift or a regular gym class.

Regular rituals form patterns in our lives, which offer us ease. Simple day to day rituals, specifically, can assist us to tolerate life's unavoidable doubt. For instance, Sagan feels at ease

every morning when Jon her husband, takes a cup of coffee to her to enjoy in bed. While drinking her coffee, Sagan thinks about not just Jon's compassion; however, on the several factors that brought about the steaming drink in her mug: the beans that have developed in the earth; their roasting, grinding and harvesting; the purification in the kitchen. This thought offers Sagan a sense of wonder while at the same strengthening her connection with her husband.

A lot of religions make use of weekly worship to strengthen the connections within their gatherings. The timing of a weekly ritual is perfect – it's common enough to feel special; however, not really uncommon that we deprioritize it. Say you're religious or not, you can form any kind of ritual to increase structure and comfort in your life. It can be as deep or whimsical as you decide.

As newlyweds, a coincidental meeting with a taxi driver – who thought that playfulness was the solution to a successful marriage –formed a weekly ritual for the author as well as her husband. Taking the advice of the driver's, every weekend they both sing the alphabet song together. They use this chance to reflect on their love for each other, irrespective of their mood.

However, rituals don't need to be limited to just family members along. Yearning for the kind of community that usually naturally develops within a religious gathering, during the autumn of 2010, Sagan started a monthly Ladies Dining Society in New York City. She had witnessed that she generally saw her friends one on one and understood that they might gain from connecting with each other. What began with few of her friends and their friends meeting on a weeknight has developed to a ritual that now happens in three various cities, as members have moved to a new place. Those who attend gain from the support that accompanies the regular meeting with a community.

## Chapter 3 - Celebrating the seasonal change assists us to accept and deal with the recurring nature of life.

Even though you are not a fan of maths, you'll probably understand that a 23.4-degree angle isn't really huge. And still, an angle of this magnitude has a deep influence on your life: if Earth's axis wasn't tilted by only this extent, there won't be seasons. Our planet's little tilt signifies that

as we travel around the Sun during the course of a year, the distance between it and Earth's two hemispheres also changes, leading to the difference of temperatures that we understand as seasons.

The roots of a lot of religious celebrations can be dated back to the change of seasons. If you look at religious calendars with connection to the Northern Hemisphere, you'll discover a pattern. Spring – that pleasing season that reminds us that we've endured winter – hosts events such as Passover, Easter and Kanamara Matsuri which is Japan's Festival of the Steel Phallus.

At first look, it's difficult to notice the association between the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the freedom of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, and defending naive penises from demons concealed in vaginas, aside from the fact that these festivals fall in the same season. But, in their own traditions, each is a celebration of rebirth – and by extension, fertility. And what is the best to celebrate fertility than during spring!

But, seasonal celebrations aren't usually joyful. Fall with its shortened days and turning leaves reminds us that winter is forthcoming. Although fall is the season of the harvest; also it is celebrated by numerous cultures with rituals for the dead.

This tradition can be dated back to the Iron Age Celts, who made use of the movement of a star cluster to know the center between the fall equinox and winter's solstice. When the center was gotten to, they celebrated Samhain by having a feast for their dead people.

Centuries after, a lot of cultures still pay homage to their dead around this period of the year. Mexicans observe the Día de los Muertos, Catholics celebrate the All Souls' Day, and Cambodians honor their ancestors with Pchum Ben. Others will put on a witch or skeleton outfits for Halloween. These rituals –be it religious or cultural –assist us to explore our fear of death, and in some situations, even underestimate it.

The longest night of the year is Winter solstice. After that, the days gradually lengthen, bringing about spring. This is the season of, Jewish menorah candles, Christmas lights, and Punjah bonfires when a lot celebrate the unavoidable return of warmer days. Irrespective of faith or culture, celebrating the end of winter has been an act of hope for humans for eras– hope that is given to us not essentially by a deity or prophet; however by the orbit of our home planet.

## Chapter 4 - Confessing and looking for atonement isn't only a religious experience; but also a means for development and connection.

Every one of us is human whether we're religious or not. It's unavoidable that one day, we'll harm someone –may be unintentionally or deliberately – and we'll feel guilty about that. Although the concept of transgression is usually viewed as a moral idea, guilt works as an evolutionary purpose. Without guilt, we would never attempt to fix our issues with members of our communities – people whose support assists us to make us alive.

Humans have created several rituals to atone for sins. For instance, Catholics go for confession. During Yom Kippur Jews pound their chests and ask for forgiveness from other people. Hindus carry out penance during Prāyaścitta. A lot of native tribes of the Americas see physical disease as an outcome of violating social norms. By revealing their mistakes to their medicine man, patients can get better.

While a lot of people would debate that confessing your sins can't heal disease, it does show the significance of taking charge of our errors, to relieve ourselves, and grow as people. Alcoholics Anonymous makes use of this model to support alcoholics that are recovering. Step Five of the 12-step program they abide by comprises reading a list of their wrongdoing out to a witness. They will apologize at Step Nine to the people who were affected by their actions and attempt to make amends.

Another modern and secular iteration of confession is therapy. On a daily basis, a client will reveal their deeds and feelings to a therapist who –similar to a priest – has sworn confidentiality. And definitely, for lawbreakers, confessions are done to a court, which will choose what actions the sinner needs to do to clear themselves of their crimes.

Sometimes our offenses are small. However, just small harm can separate us from a loved one. Sagan remembers that immediately after the birth of her daughter, she was annoyed at her husband Jon for folding a vital document. She chose to confess to him that she'd been

controlling and to apologize. He as well apologized, for not keeping the paper flat. Both of them kissed, forming a small ritual of reconciliation.

Regardless of that, all of us make mistakes, acknowledging our faults is never easy. But, when we seek the courage to apologize, we relieve the burden that our guilt forms and mend our bonds with others.

## Chapter 5 - Yearly celebrations such as birthdays – reconnect us with the people we love and also with the universe.

Nothing celebrates time more meaningfully than the passing of a year. Due to our planet's orbital path, every anniversary puts us in the same astronomical spot that we were in a year before. And it's unavoidable that over the course of that year, our lives and the lives of our loved ones will have transformed.

The repetition produced by astronomical incidences—such as Earth's orbit around the Sun – is really compelling to humans since our brains are made to look for patterns. This is partially the reason why astrology fascinates a lot of people. Anniversaries connect us to the movement of planets, and so, to something beyond ourselves.

However, not every anniversary is a joyful event. Celebrating the death of a loved one or someone we respect is a bittersweet issue. The English language doesn't have a brief word for the day a person has died; however, Yiddish has—yahrzeit. In spite of her secular opinions, Sagan has discovered great ease in doing the tradition of lighting a yahrzeit candle to honor the deaths of her family members.

Sagan got to know about this ritual from her mother when she was still a child. She loves it since watching the candle's flame makes her feel that a little part of that loved one is still present with her on Earth, just like how we can still see the light of a star that may have died.

However, the lighting of candles isn't only a ritual connected with death. A lot of us decorate birthday cakes with candles to celebrate the passing of a year. This ritual can be dated back to the ancient Greek goddess Artemis. Along with being related to the moon and hunting, Artemis

was thought to ease birth. To accept Artemis as the provider of light and referencing her connection to the moon, her cult members might have been the first people to stick small torches into flat cakes. And due to her role in birth, this ritual may well have developed into the cause that a cake with candles shows in a lot of birthday celebrations.

Irrespective of how we rejoice, birthdays are a time to celebrate in our ongoing life – a life that has been shaped by the generations of ancestors who came before us. We have challenged death for another year and can keep on partaking in the joys and trials that make our existence on Earth really special.

## Chapter 6 - Accepting that weddings are social rituals provides you the liberty to make your own traditions.

Rings exchanging, rice throwing and white dresses: if you've been to a Western wedding, you've probably seen these traditions. However, where did they originate from, and what is the reason we still do them?

Weddings reveal how extremely humans love to make and respect traditions –maybe they are cultural, historical or religious. A lot of these rituals are linked to fertility, which is not surprising because of the long-held role marriage has had in sanctioning sex. Food is usually used to bring a little bit of couple luck in conceiving, which is the initial cause for pouring couples with rice. For instance, the Muslim couples are given eggs; also, for Hungarian brides, wheat is woven into their braids. If peradventure you are a Greek, someone might put a baby in your matrimonial bed before you get there, to increase your probabilities of conception.

Although, not every tradition is about reproduction. For instance, in Germany, the couples use a two-person saw to divide a log, which signifies their pledge to cooperation. And putting a ring on your fourth finger goes back to the ancient – and false– belief that a vein in the fourth finger is connected back to the heart. By putting on a ring, you were saying to others that you were officially taken.

When Sagan, as well as her partner Jon, were preparing for their wedding, they drew on a series of traditions across Jewish, Christian, and also the ancient Greek cultures. Their rituals entailed standing under a Jewish wedding canopy called a chuppah; lighting a unity candle which is a twentieth-century Christian tradition; and reading a section about divided lovers looking out for each other out, gotten from Plato's Symposium.

However, maybe the rituals that were most significant to Sagan were those that merged her father into the ceremony. The author's much-loved father – well-known American scientist Carl Sagan – died when she was only 14 years. Sagan tied one of her father's neckties around her bouquet, therefore he was symbolical with her while she walked down the aisle. Also, she and Jon's wedding took place at the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, which hosted an art installation known as Cosmos, a tribute to Carl Sagan's work. This assisted Sagan to process the huge sense of loss that came from her father's absence.

When preparing for your wedding day, feel empowered to add any traditions that speak to you, irrespective of their roots.

## Chapter 7 - A lot of our rituals surrounding sex are defined by religious and social conventions.

Sex – it's not really a thing you want to picture your parents doing; however, it's amazing to reason that the huge majority of people came to existence because of sex. Despite sex being just as natural as eating or sleeping, it's been burdened with shame since ancient eras.

Therefore, what is the reason why a stress-relieving action that floods us with happy hormones and connects us strongly to others have that kind of social stigma? Firstly, sex is powerful. It can change the most stable among us into heady, unpredictable beings. Secondly, sex can be harmful. It can cause disease and it can lead to unwanted pregnancies among heterosexual couples. Also, even if you wanted the pregnancy, childbirth can still be dangerous. These reasons are possibly the cause why humans have made a lot of social more around having sex.

One of our most popular rituals around sex is marriage. Traditionally, and in some societies nowadays, a wedding sanctioned sex between a couple and approved reproduction. Although a lot of doesn't share these beliefs anymore, couples still usually enjoy a honeymoon after their wedding. They may not be aware that this ritual was formed during the 1500s to aid conception. Newlyweds were provided a month in privacy to lose their virginity, have a little fun with the assistance of some honey mead, and probably make an heir.

However, monogamy isn't the only sanctioned place for having sex. In defiance of the guilt that a lot of cultures enforced on sex, some communities publicly celebrated it. For instance, the Oneida Community, which was founded in upstate New York in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, believed that sharing was a method to conquer social injustice. Just like how they didn't believe in ownership or private property, they also didn't believe in marriage. Their communal living even created useful time-savers, such as lazy Susans and mousetraps.

There are still a lot of polygamous communities in existence and they flourish such as the animist Muria people in Chhattisgarh found in India. This community promotes teenagers to live in ghotuls – a type of dorm –therefore, they can have a sexual experience before marriage while learning about wedding and funeral rituals.

Irrespective of our drive for having sex, there's no disputing its transformative power. Since the dawn of life on Earth, sex has formed our existences, influenced our roles in society and also transformed our relationships.

## Chapter 8 - Ritualizing death assists us to process grief and show sorrow.

Cremation, mummification, and burial – death has encouraged human rituals since our earliest times. Even the Neanderthals which are our ancient cousins buried their family members. According to some schools of thought of anthropological, the ritualization of death indicates the start of humanity.

Although our most popular modern rituals are cremation and burial, these aren't the only ways of placing a loved one's body to rest. Mummification is still being practiced in Tana Toraja, Indonesia. The dead people aren't buried; however, they are kept in the open and treated as if they're sick rather than dead. Also, although digging up a grave would be considered by a lot of people as a terrible crime, in societies scattered across the globe from Vietnam to Madagascar, exhumation is seen as a loving ritual. After sufficient years have gone by for a body to decompose, the bones are exhumed, cleaned, and cautiously reburied.

Funeral rites are only one part of the death rituals in which we engage in. Over the centuries, humans have formed special rituals to assist them to accept the loss of a loved one. Mirrors are covered in Jewish homes so that the people mourning won't see how grief-stricken they appear.

Also, in some areas of modern Bulgaria, posters describing a dead person beloved's life are hanged around town for each year on the anniversary of their death. This reminds the community of the people they've died and avoids the grieving from mourning alone. As Sagan notices, routines such as these have a bit to do with religion and have a lot to do with our shared humanity.

Death makes our lives dangerous; however, at the same time, it also makes them valuable. We won't live for life. However, this doesn't divert from the fact that we are alive at the moment. Even if we are not remembered by the generations that come after us, our lives are still real. Although we are just here for the fastest chapter, every one of us is part of the amazing experience of life on Earth – from its darkest moments to its most beautiful joys.

Rituals are means we can navigate through the incidences that happen during our lives and connect with the people we care about. We don't have to be part of a specific culture or religion to gain from their healing effects. By reinterpreting present traditions in a reasonable manner, we can celebrate the milestones of our lives with our own exceptional rituals.

## For Small Creatures Such as We: Rituals for Finding Meaning in Our Unlikely World by Sasha Sagan Book Review

We as humans, naturally yearn for the community and relationship that rituals offer. For secular people, it can be really hard to find significant, nonreligious rituals in our lives. However, if we track the roots of such as like marriage or weekly communion, it becomes obvious that the majority of rituals are not embedded in a specific faith or culture. They are created on the phenomena of nature and our common humanity. Because we're all human, we have the liberty to participate in these rituals to honor the significant instances in life – tweaking them to make them significant to us personally.

Make your own spring ritual such as Blossom Day.

Celebrating the emergence of spring is significant after a long, gray winter. Sagan's mother created Blossom Day for Sagan when she was just a small girl. Each day as winter came to an end, Sagan would go to her garden to inspect the dogwood tree there for the first blossom. When it arrived, her mother would host a small tea party, fully with gifts. If you there's no garden at your place, your form of Blossom Day might entail going for a walk to the local park.

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