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From Surviving to Thriving

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I have come to realize that in order to not only survive but also thrive in my life, I have to get clear on what my traditions and beliefs are going to be. These traditions and beliefs are the foundation of my faith. They are what keep me alive and have kept me breathing through the most intense and scary storms. I know for a fact that storms can be dangerous moments and that my foundation must be able to withstand them.

Acting on my traditions and beliefs manifests as practicing rituals. Rituals are personal acts of faith; they are the foundation of living with intention. I have had many great teachers to learn from, and their lessons continue to help me with developing my rituals. When I received their instruction, it was up to me to discern what worked for me.

Some of my most insightful lessons have come from being in the kitchen with my Mema. My grandmother is one of the best chefs of all time. Cooking is an energetic tool to help create meals, medicine, conversation, happiness, and love; therefore, cooking is a ritual. She taught me that no microwave could (or should) cook a meal, so I had to learn about timing, temperature, and staying present. Cooking is a creative outlet that requires us to study and learn how to care for life on the land. Through this medium, I also learned how to care for myself. My Mema taught me that everything that is needed to heal my body could be kept in my kitchen. For example, she taught me about the power of salt. Salt highlights the flavor of your dish and protects the integrity of the flavor. This lesson adds so much dimension to the statement, "We are the salt of the earth," for me. In my own rituals, salt is utilized as a protection mineral, creating barriers around my sacred spaces and as a tool to sweep out unwanted energies.

I think about the tradition of sending a prayer out into the Universe and having faith that the prayer will be answered tenfold. We have this power to materialize our blessings. What an honor and privilege to have a tool like prayer! Prayer is also our protection; it covers us in our own intentions. We pray in order to dominate the influence over our atmosphere and reality with the help of our ancestors, guardians, and the Universe. Our prayers deserve this support. This is how we guard ourselves: we *work* our prayers. Sometimes we put our prayers into a flame to move energy in our favor through a candle with no ceasing. We pray to declare our blessings into our lives. Prayer is sending for our blessings.

I have learned that the practice of unconditional love is about kindness. We replace any and all insecurities with this love. I start this practice by showing that love to myself. Everyone does not receive kindness well, but we have a duty to be kind, especially to ourselves. Next, you give that love to your family, your elders, and all those you are in community with. This is a ritual that I have struggled with and continue to struggle with. I am kind enough to tell hard truths, to be honest about my personal capacity, to end toxic relations, to apologize, to say no, to choose myself, to encourage those around me, and to be unapologetic about my gifts and purpose. It is a ritual that challenges me because it directs me to look inward. It holds me accountable because it is a tool of relation. Kindness is necessary in order to have personal integrity in this practice. I am constantly learning ways to practice unconditional love.

My rituals are a source of my faith. They are keeping me grounded in these times of lawlessness and lies. This is the work I do to ensure I have the discipline to maintain my blessings. Justice, peace, and prosperity are our birthright. The time has come for us to step into our power and rightfully claim what is ours. I am excited to do this with all those aligned in action and purpose! I have a prayer for those of us who do this radical, soul-shifting work:

I honor you, Mother Earth.

I honor the Sun, the Moon, and the endless Universe across space and time.

I honor the infinite directions across the realms.

I honor the waters; the oceans, rivers, lakes, and streams that create and sustain life.

I honor the natural forces and their great power.

I call you.

*I honor the collective African ancestors.
I honor the ancestors of the Middle Passage.
I honor all the aboriginal spirits across the lands.
I honor my ancestors of both my maternal and paternal lineages.
Ancestors, I thank you for opening the roads for my life.
To my mothers who walk with me daily, I thank you for praying me into existence.
You poured blessings over my life.
To my fathers who protect me, I thank you for giving me your strength and discernment.
Ancestors, I honor and show gratitude for your sacrifices.
I call you.
May I continue to uplift and elevate our bloodlines across time.
I honor my elders and pray for their elevation.*

*I pray for justice and peace to reign over the lands.
I speak everlasting life over the revolutionary souls.
Revolution, I pray that you bring hope and open roads.
I pray that freedom work remains sacred.
Freedom, I pray for you to reveal yourself to those of us who believe.
May freedom be a guiding force in my life.*

*I cleanse and banish away all residue that clings to me like smoke.
I wish death to all things that do not serve my purpose.
Protect, heal, and uplift my physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional bodies across the realms.
May protection be mine.*

*Open my eyes that I may see.
May I see the truth with clarity and inner peace.
Blessed be those who uplift the truth.*

May this prayer work in alignment with your highest good.

Rian Brown, a retired co-founder of Black Lives Matter (Cleveland) and a Kalamazoo College alumna, is an artist, public speaker, facilitator, anti-oppression consultant, writer, and podcaster.

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