

chapter 17

Healing Meditation for Meeting Your Past Selves

*I take pleasure in my transformations. I look quiet and consistent, but few know how many women there are in me.*

— *Anais Nin*

I'm continually amazed at the healing power of simple rituals and have been playing for some time with rituals that involve meeting a former self to clear things I feel stuck with. I want to insist on the *simple* aspect—nothing needed beyond intention, imagination, and words. Some of mine happen spontaneously when I'm lying in bed at night (or in the wee hours) and notice something that needs to be addressed. In other words, no props, no prep, no nonsense.

Let me give you an example. It came to my attention at some point that I was divorcing myself from certain past versions of myself. I would have memories come up that made me cringe and shudder and go into some kind of internal muttering that I was glad not to be that person today. Actually, I am that person. I noticed this, and noticed that this unconscious disowning of self I was engaged in constituted a shame response. I'm not an advocate of letting shame have its way. Because shame is the most potent of self-destructive emotions, I believe it's best to face and clear it as soon as it comes to awareness.

So one night, I lay in bed with the idea that I needed to embrace each version of myself that I've traveled through in this fascinating lifetime. I've moved through so many phases, experimenting with some version of spiritual seeker in every one: sad child burdened with her emotions and everyone else's, the one who lived in France, the one who came from France, the one with nothing interesting about her whatsoever (*What? How'd you learn to speak French like that?*), born-again fundamentalist Christian, raging feminist and card-carrying lesbian, Waldorf mom and wife in traditional nuclear

family, divorced single (lesbian again) mom working as a life coach. ...

I decided to progress year by year, beginning at the first age when I could find any crumb of belief there was something wrong with me. This put me starting at age three. There was this scene of showing a grown-up that weird vein in my inner thigh and she was horrified by the frog-leg spread of my little legs. Too much revealed: oh, the shame. I then went progressively through the years, watching whatever visions of myself I could call forth from each one. With each character I took in (the three-year-old, the four-year-old, the five-year-old, and onward through teens, twenties, thirties, forties), I repeated the same words, which went something like this: *You have been part of my journey. I thank you and embrace you. I love who I have become, and I extend that love to you. You are part of me.* Note that this repetition of the same declaration infused the process with a ritual quality and also facilitated the integration I was after.

It was a powerful exercise. By the time I got up to my age at the time (forty-nine), I felt cleansed. I felt relieved, and calm, and whole—integrated. In the wake of this ritual, my mind cut way down on playing that mean-spirited teasing game of randomly visiting a shaming memory on me. I don't want to say never, but it's pretty much gone. Before clearing it, I hadn't been fully conscious of this habitual mind pattern of reaching back in time for something to shame myself with in the midst of a happy, connected present time. (In the absence of current shame, let's see what we can dredge up from way back when!) Sometimes those random mind-bombs can still happen with more recent things, coming to show me what's not fully cleared. I go in as quickly as I can and clear it as best I can and continue to vote for standing fresh in each moment. Sometimes the smudge on the glass needs just one more wipe. I believe in profound and lasting transformation.

I guided a client to go back to herself at various ages when she was engaged too early in sexual activity with peers who, typically enough, weren't looking out for her well-being. She talked to her younger selves to help them see what was protecting them even though they weren't being protected

from sex. She also gave them hope by telling them about herself now and letting them know about the wonderful partner she would end up with.

I find it's very powerful to go back to a former self if you believe it's still in there holding trauma. Just today, someone told me about the sad and scared five-year-old inside her who still believes ... I hear this all the time. It's both crazy-easy and hugely potent to step in as your older, more evolved self and give these young aspects of you what they didn't get in the past. In your imagination, you can hold the child you used to be and tell her it wasn't her fault that someone was awful to her; it didn't mean she was awful or deserved it; it didn't mean her whole life would hold nothing but the same. Give the child that thing Byron Katie calls the turnaround: if she felt unsupported, let her know all the ways life would support her over the years (from her age to yours in the present moment). Give her a lot of concrete, specific evidence. Tell her some good and true stories from your life, her later life.

I also think it's especially useful to let your younger selves know who they get to become—tell them things you love about yourself as you are now, or some of the marvelous, unexpected things you've gotten to do, or the stunning ways grace found you at various times and landed you in just the right place, with the right people, doing the right thing. Let them know how much you like who you've become; invite them into the wonderful-me club.

These rituals don't have to be bare-bones simple: I just want to insist that they can be, and their power is in no way diluted for that. If you want, however, you can add candles and incense or sage, music, creative actions that symbolize clearings and completions—whatever you dream up that's doable. Invite allies and witnesses. If you have access to some healing modality—if you can do Reiki on yourself, or know EFT techniques, or use ecstatic dance to express shifting rhythms—it can be a great integrator to end a ritual in such ways. Just don't stop yourself or even stall by concocting something too complex to realize. If something's up for you, follow the energy that brought it to light and go for the clearing.

Finally, I urge you to hold a consciousness of transformation. This sort of ritual has the potential to fully release something you've held on to and identified with. In no way are you stuck with your past identities unless you continue to claim them. (Remember Richard Bach's "Argue for your limitations, and sure enough they're yours"?) Allow your intention plus the power of simple ritual to bring you fully, and fully grounded, into the present.