



A YEAR IN PRACTICE

Seasonal Rituals and
Prompts to Awaken Cycles
of Creative Expression

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All Nature

i.

Oh great city, when this woman
escapes to the forest
she *still* feels the presence
of your weight.

She leaves town
and surrenders to Angeles Crest,
sitting below a giant oak,
stones and acorns in her pockets.

Maybe she is healed by the cleaner air,
maybe she sees a cougar or hears
the call of an owl above Chantry Flat.
Can she understand each omen?

She falls asleep, leaning against the trunk,
and only dreams of darkness.
Then she makes her way back down—
forgetful, recharged, new.

ii.

All of our choices continue to be animal.
Our apartments are like dens
packed close together.

In proximity we need to recall
the rhythmic seasons: summer
for openness, fall for gathering,
winter for solitude, spring for rebirth.
Yet, we forget.

We let our minds take the position
of the North Star, we get used to being
our own guides and miss out
on the wisdom of the inner voice—
*Hear the murmur of the planet
beneath all that clatter.
Like a river, like a slow and steady birdsong.*

The connection seems to have gone silent,
leaving us with our hard streets
and doors pulled shut.
High tips of buildings
mimicking mountaintops,

persuading us into awe
while we try to brush off a feeling,
an old memory like a spider
or tick behind the ear.

iii.

Whatever we make with our hands
will forever be terrestrial, blood and bone
built into our intellect, particle upon particle
to construct the dirt, the byway,
the apple and the cave.


We will forever be of it, this place,
even as we chip away at its foundation,
even as we long for the hills
where no other humans reside.

Natural rebirth, the city undone
and done again as flesh, as leaf,
or as waves washing away the shore.
Earth will swallow us up.

INTRODUCTION

If you picked up this book, if you're drawn to its title and concept, you're likely interested in the intricacies, possibilities, and cycles of creative practice. I'd go so far as to say that you're an artist, but that title doesn't sit well with everyone. It's hard enough to carve out the time in our busy lives to explore our imaginations, let alone give ourselves permission to fully embody our artistic leanings. As fulfilling as it might be to show up for imaginative work in a consistent way, I know it can also be exhausting to fight for an inch of time that allows for the beauty of artistic process, to figure out when and where to be creative, to see the outlets and opportunities to concentrate on expressive methods.

I've dedicated my entire life to artistic practice, and somehow, beyond all odds, the result of this focus is that I get the honor of having a career that invites me to write every day. But I know in the center of my heart that my career is an added gift that supports my process because I'd write every day even if no one paid me to. This is because I'm an artist. This is because I need and want to receive the messages of the universe.



The world we've constructed, the human system we're all part of, the old, silly, and at times horrific structure of our society doesn't often support a framework that highlights the importance of creative practice. But you know, because this book is in your hands, that there must be a way to weave imaginative process into the rhythm of our days. You know that it's crucial we spend time dreaming, crafting, and resting in a state of reverie. Without creative customs or playful applications of explorative whimsy, we'd be entirely without progress.

I yearn to observe and witness the subtle and major details of the world. I crave the tradition of translation and the act of creation. I'm inspired to discover and explore, to expand and grow. I'm compelled to collect and compile my findings, to share them and expose everything that moves me. I can't ignore this innate desire to explain and describe, to express and reveal, to play with this process and enjoy the experience. I see the way ideas bring possibility and revision illuminates perspective. I can't help but want to figure and learn and know more. I understand how healing it is to dig deeper and how transformational it is to reflect upon all aspects of myself and the privilege that is my life.

My practice, in all of its configurations, helps me keep track of time, stay organized, get unstuck, gather material and inspiration, keep clear and grounded, stay healthy and grow, and it gives me the ongoing affirmation I need to continue creating. Creativity brings about personal expansion and cultural transformation. Art-making, like

storytelling, poetry, theater, music, filmmaking, drawing, painting, cooking, woodworking, and pottery, helps us remember our capabilities, our origins, our needs, and our responsibilities.

In order to fully embody my devotion to the craft of poetry, I've always needed a rhythm, some guidance to show me the how and when of practice. I'm interested in methodologies that might enrich my process and reveal how I can best express my visions. I've read interviews with some of my favorite artists about their schedules, learning the ways they maintain their discipline and focus. It's really fun to see what works for whom, and it's entirely different for everyone. Each creative person has their own desires, restrictions, style, and pace. At the time I was reading those articles, I began to wonder if I might be missing some information. I felt a deep weariness as I worried about burning out. I was tired from trying to figure out and construct a ceaseless practice on my own. This is when I turned to the seasons for guidance.

As an ecstatic earth worshiper, I tend to look to the planet for instruction in my daily life. Because this place, our only home, offers us everything we need and then some, there's often a perfect answer right below our feet or in the sky above us. I was searching for a creative rhythm to rely on that I didn't have to make up myself, a natural foundation to support me as I prioritized creative practice in my life. After decades of turning my attention to the earth, I began to recognize an essential tempo, a fundamental guidance that showed me when to begin,

when to sit down and work, when to share my creations, and when to rest.

In the ongoing effort to better my writing and as I began to closely examine the seasons, I realized how much my practice naturally responds to the rhythm of winter, spring, summer, and fall, and I uncovered a built-in, creative cadence. Over time, I discovered a dependable routine for artistic output that relies on seasonal energy. It isn't something I fabricated; it's something innate that I needed to get back in touch with in order to continue creating my work. Each season is a Muse that evokes a particular artistic possibility if we take note of the instructions offered.

The four seasons are a framework for our experience on earth, and they provide us with phases of creative contraction and expansion and supply us with specific moods and sensations. Each season connects us with our timeline of life. Our memories are aligned with holidays and our bodies with certain types of weather. The seasons directly affect us in so many ways, but overall, it's the character and lesson of each yearly chapter and how each phase influences me that I'm most fascinated with.

As humans, we're caught in a long cycle of forgetfulness. There's so much in our current culture that distracts us from the inherent information the earth provides. We've replaced the cyclical gifts of the seasons with controlled temperatures, ceaseless production schedules, and year-round access to always-ripe fruit. We've cut so many of our roots that connect us with the ebb and flow of earthly process. These changes have brought us comfort and a

sense of advancement, but they've also disconnected us from a natural pattern of rest and revitalization.

How are we to conjure up new visions and possibilities for the future if we don't rest when the season says rest? If we don't practice mindfulness when the wild energy of spring shoots through us? If we don't engage in the communal direction of summer? If we don't embrace the preparation of fall? Each chapter of this book serves as a seasonal prompt, an earthly gesture that says now is when you sit still, then let it all rush out, then share it, and then collect the outcomes and loose ends for another round of creative gestation.

This rhythm isn't strictly about the time of year; it's about the spirit that each season evokes. Sometimes I find myself needing to bring elements of summer into my winter state. Sometimes I return to the boosting vibrancy of spring as summer wanes. Humans have always responded to the seasons, as they are our nomadic guideposts, our cues for pace and celebration. These reliable periods offer us a rhythm that is built into our being, and we can access this information anytime we want to get ourselves back on track.

Our bodies, minds, and spirits require the rest of winter. We need the charge of spring in order to reap the bounty of summer. We must engage with the feeling of fall to gather and harvest accordingly. Yet, we often forget the power and importance of the seasons and the way they affect everything in life, including creative practice. The earth gives us consistent prompts, quarterly

counsel, and dependable recommendations on a month-by-month basis. It shows us when our creative reserves might wax and wane. We just need to remember to listen and follow its lead.

As artists building our own schedules, we often feel adrift, wondering what to do next and where to put our energy. When I teach, at least one student always asks me how I know when to begin and when to finish a project. "It's intuitive," I say, "but when my intuition feels faint, I turn to the current season and ask for clarity." We can't expect our practice to be high-powered or vibrant all year-round. We, too, are animals following an unseen lead, even when we overlook the formula. For all of our creative desires, there's an obtainable map that leads us to hibernate, to spring forth, congregate, and stockpile.

This book illuminates some of the ways each season requires us to pay attention, showing us the actions it needs us to perform and the practices that fit its specific disposition. Each chapter asks us to remember that we are gifted with a time to begin, a time to ponder, and a time to recharge. By exploring the traditions and motivations of each season, I remember the venerable schedule of the earth and aim to show how each season offers me its own version of this schedule. In one way or another, I continue to reflect, generate, revise, share, and rest. The next season I meditate, write, edit, contribute, and restore myself. After this, I contemplate, engage in creative response, redraft this response, show it to others, and then recharge. Then I deeply consider, I make something

of my considerations, I review everything I've examined, I offer it up, and then I relax, breathe, and make room for the next rotation. In short, this book is a guide of remembrance mapped out by the four seasons.

This book is also an exploration of the balance between my personal connection to the planet and my guidance for creative practice after working as a professional poet since 2009. To investigate both sides equally and find the strange and beautiful bridges between them, I had to vacillate freely between body, mind, and spirit. This is a major part of what it is to be an active artist. Above all, this was an open listening process, and although the seasons definitely guided me, I wasn't inflexible or overly strict, and that's my main point here: I don't want you to be either. A framework can be fluid. It's mostly about figuring out how you can give yourself the time and space to be attentive and respond to the intricacies and beauty of life. The rhythm of the seasons wants to remind us that this time and space is naturally built into life on earth.

To be clear, I'm not a master of any of this. I'm a student of the seasons. The practices I discuss in this book are ones I've built over time with some research, but mostly by way of intuitive response, and each one continues to evolve in my life as I read about new methodologies and keep practicing and discovering what works for me. I meditate differently in the winter than I do in the summer. I move differently in the spring than I do in the fall. When something changes, I take note, but I let it change. If there's one thing I'm sure of with creative practice, it's

that it doesn't like to be forced, grasped, or squeezed too tightly. It likes to come and go, arrive and fade, lie dormant, and then reveal itself fully once again.

Even during the creation of this book, I found myself fully adjusting my practice. I've never written anything quite like this before, and the way it unfolded, season by season, was a direct result of the fluid exploration I allowed myself to play with throughout the process. I wasn't rigid; there were no rules, but I did try to notice patterns, follow strong hits of intuition, and turn to the seasons whenever I felt stuck. I practiced, I wrote, and I practiced more. I spent a lot of time outside and a lot of time with my nose deep in my collection of poetry books. When I didn't know exactly what came next with this project, I looked to the earth and the special selection of books I've been accumulating for a few decades.

I let myself be drawn to whichever collection called to me, and I flipped through the index in the back, looking for signs of spring, summer, fall, or winter. It was so much fun, like an unusual scavenger hunt—and my word, do poets love to write about the seasons! It felt like a good dose of proof during my process. Artists we love are the most helpful guides, no matter the season, and we can always turn to each other, dead or alive, whenever we're in need. This is one of my favorite things about being a creative person; there's this wildly extensive community of freaks, dreamers, craftspeople, makers, builders, and weavers who left us with their beautiful bounty of work and so much inspiring, accessible information.

Gathering information from the earth is a similar process to my instinctive poem choosing. I just move toward whatever calls to me, whichever flower catches my eye, whatever path looks inviting, whichever scent is the most alluring. Then I let those things give me information. My intuition is my imagination, so if you're wondering whether or not I actually hear messages from the trees, the answer is yes and no. Yes, I give myself time and space to create the voice of the tree as I imagine it singing or whispering or slowly laughing. No, I don't care if I'm just making it up or if the spirit of a tree is truly speaking. That isn't the point, so I don't dwell on it. I just let the earth give me its lessons without overthinking where they come from, and I do my best to translate whatever wisdom lands within me.

With our shifting climate, the seasons are changing, and I recognize that not everyone lives in a place where these transitions are obvious. But as their dependability fades, as winters harshen and summers grow hotter, as rainfall diminishes and the sea levels rise, we continue to live under their ancient structure. As the seasons become less recognizable and more nuanced, it feels even more crucial to follow their lead and adhere to their lessons while we still can. It's less about remembering the weather and more about the flow, the pattern, and the creative tempo. Noticing the intricacy of the seasons wherever you live is akin to tapping into a well of details, subject matter, and lessons that might otherwise go overlooked. This type of observation is always a plus for creative practice.

So, imagine with me for a moment: What happens when we slow down and let the planet tell us when to dive into the depths of the mind, when to relax on the surface, when to share our work, and when to hole up with our brilliant ideas so they can grow steady and safe? Maybe we build something incredible and bring something much needed into fruition. Maybe we mend some major wounds and reconnect with a sense of collective direction. The method of the seasons is available to all, and as this great configuration encourages us, it guides our creative flow and reminds us of all we have access to if only we pay attention, if only we practice accordingly.