

THE

5

DIRECTIONS

**A GUIDE TO
CONNECTING WITH
SELF**



THE 5 DIRECTIONS:

A GUIDE TO CONNECTING WITH SELF



Many spiritual traditions embrace variations of the “directions” to evoke wisdom from different stages of our life cycle, our connection to nature and all living beings, the cosmos, the earth, and the soul space within ourselves. The directions speak to the need for balance. In connecting with each direction, we can engage in a process of gentle inquiry asking ourselves what’s needed to restore and reaffirm our connection with our soul space, our inner wisdom, our authentic selves. Referencing teachings shared with me in my healing journey, Indigenous Mexican and Native American wisdom, and the influential book “Trauma Stewardship” by Laura van Dernoot Lipsky, I developed this guide for the directions connecting us to the elements, the earth, the cosmos, and ourselves.

I hope this guide serves you in your journey of centering self and reminds you that you are not walking this path alone. Note: Different traditions associate different elements with each direction, however, the intention remains generally the same. I will offer one interpretation of an element connection with each direction; however, I welcome other interpretations that create greater resonance for you.

“I SAW A PATH TO HAPPINESS & LIBERATION AT A GLANCE. IT WAS INSIDE MYSELF.”

Alice Walker

In the early morning, before the sun rises, we find ourselves encapsulated by the quiet darkness of the new day. We turn to the north, the direction of the sun at its coldest darkest point, before sunrise. In the crisp air of the early dawn, we find a slowness to our being creating space for gentle introspection and inquiry. **The north represents the ancestors, wisdom, clarity, and the air element. The north brings the cold and wind beckoning us to slow down and come into the present moment. We find ourselves coming to a pause.** The stillness may feel unsettling in the fast-paced world we have become accustomed to. However, **“through the sacred art of pausing, we develop the capacity to stop hiding, to stop running away from our own experience. We begin to trust in our natural intelligence, in our naturally wise heart, in our capacity to open to what arises,”** (Tara Brach).

PRACTICES TO ENGAGE WITH

Journaling: In the pause take a moment to connect with yourself. Ask yourself “what is my why”? Write down your why and your intentions. Regularly check-in with yourself asking these questions. Once you’re clear on your why ask yourself, “Is this working for me?”

Meditation: Meditation has its roots in ancient India and is a spiritual practice originating from Hindu and Buddhist beliefs. Different forms of meditation are found in almost all spiritual traditions and systems of belief. Contemporary meditation is not necessarily tied to spirituality or mysticism. Meditation can build our mindfulness practice and strengthen our connection to our consciousness. Below are some additional resources for building your meditation practice.

- [Ram Dass Guided Meditation](#)
- [Healing Labs: Mindful Meditation](#)
- [“Yoga teaches us to live in consciousness” by Meesha Sharma](#)
- [Mantra Meditation by Crystal Raypole](#)

Yoga: Yoga is an ancient practice that originates in Egypt and the Indus Valley. Yoga can help us build our mind, body, spirit connection and increase our presence. Below are some additional resources to build your yoga practice:

- [“A Decolonized Guide to the 8 Limbs of Yoga” by Meesha Sharma](#)
- [35 Minute Gentle Vinyasa Flow w Mel Douglas](#)
- [10 Minute Chair Yoga w Tejal](#)

Connecting with our ancestors: Many of us have experienced a break in our connection to our ancestors, often due to histories of forced migration and colonialism. This break divides us from our ancestral knowledge and can leave us feeling isolated and lost on our path. Reconnecting with our ancestors is a powerful way we can honor our lineage, heal generational wounds, and connect deeper to ourselves. “What heals ancestors is understanding them ... They can only be healed inside us” (Alice Walker). Connecting to our ancestors can take many forms. **Below are some ideas that may resonate for you:**

- **Talk to family members**, ask them to share what they can remember about growing up, their parents and their grandparents. Record these stories and reflect. You may see parts of yourself reflected in the stories they share about loved ones that have passed on. This is one way our ancestors live in us.
- If it is accessible to you, **learn about the homeland of your people**. If it is already known to you consider taking a DNA test. Learn about the land your ancestors grew up on. Learn about their relationship to nature, healing, and wellness. Think about the beliefs that guided them in their relationships. How could this knowledge apply to you today?
- **Read literature or engage with art from creators that share ancestry or identity with you**. Through reading literature of people who share identity and ancestry with me, I have felt seen and understood in ways I didn’t think were possible. This reminded me that I wasn’t alone in what I was experiencing and that living as my authentic self was possible for me because I had footsteps to follow.
- **Learn a form of expression from your culture**. This could be the language, music, art, food, or dance from your culture. Through learning a form of expression from your ancestors you develop an intimate understanding of how life was thought of, conceptualized, understood and expressed.

As the sun rises, we turn our attention to the east. ***The east represents new life, inspiration, creation, and originality and is associated with the fire element. In the words of Laura van Dernoot Lipsky, "As we move to the east, we call upon new life and enlightenment of the fire element, which is revered in many cultures as the keeper of truth and originator of all energy. We ask ourselves where we're putting our focus, and we expand our range of possibilities."*** The rising sun shines light on what was obscured in the darkness of the night. With everything brought to light, we are exposed to new perspectives and ways of thinking previously hidden to us. As our awareness expands, we gain a new sense of freedom by recognizing our ability to shift our perspectives, opening ourselves to inspiration, and reigniting our passions. ***In the words of Marcel Proust, "The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking landscapes but in having new eyes."***

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Journaling: Think back on a difficult situation in your personal or professional life. Write what was challenging about it. Think about who or what supported you or gave you hope during this time. Write what you learned from it. Reflect and ask yourself, "Where are you most likely to focus and why?" and "Where does my focus best serve me?"

Affirmations: Stand in front of a mirror and look at yourself. Notice the first three things that come to mind. Are these thoughts positive, loving, kind? If not, try again. Remember our words are powerful, "We are what we think. All that we are arises with our thoughts. With our thoughts we make the world" (Buddha).

◦ *If negative self-talk is a present struggle for you, I suggest saying, listening to, or writing affirmations for yourself every morning. Here are some resources I like to use for affirmations, please engage with what resonates for you:*

- *Powerful affirmations for self-love and self-acceptance*
- *Affirmations: what they are and how to use them*

Weird Walk: If it is accessible to you, go for a walk. Allow yourself to wander in your environment, taking in your surroundings with a sense of curiosity. See what calls your attention and ignites your sense of wonder.

Vision board: As we engage with the energy of the east, we can become inspired to envision new ways of living in community with ourselves and others. Make a vision board for the way you want to exist in the world and honor yourself. This vision board is an artistic interpretation of the vision you have for yourself. Use any medium that calls to you. While making the vision board think of what you can do to bring more joy into your life, more laughter, more ease.

Smoke Cleansing: The burning of sacred herbs in ceremony is a common spiritual tradition in many cultures. Incense burning originates in Egypt and smudging originates from Indigenous communities in the Americas. In Indigenous Mexican culture fire is believed to be a purifying force. The smoke from incense or an herb bundle is believed to be sacred and has the ability to absorb negative energies and take them to the heavens where the energy can be released and transmuted. As we open ourselves to new perspectives, we can take a moment to release beliefs that are no longer serving us. As you burn the incense or herb bundle speak an intention, hope, or prayer for yourself. Focus on the energy you want to bring in, let go of what no longer serves you. **For more information, please see these resources:**

- *Smudging: An Issue of Ethics and Sustainability by NW School of Aromatic Medicine*
- *Smoke Cleansing Around the World*

The sun continues to rise to its highest point in the sky. **The south brings warmth and is associated with childhood play, relaxation, emotions, and the water element.** We call upon the peace and renewal of the water element by developing relationships with self and others that sustain us. Isolation is an underpinning of oppression, by remaining connected we engage in a radical act of community and self-care and compassion. **"Umuntu, ngumuntu, ngabantu" is a Nguni, a cultural and ethnic group of South Africa, proverb that translates to "I am because we are and we are because I am".** This belief is known as Ubuntu. In the words of Fania Davis, "Ubuntu unites the self and the world in a web of reciprocal relationships. It's one's caring relationship with others that enhance their humanity and self-worth." **Compassion and humility are core values in living in reciprocal relationships as we acknowledge the ways in which we are both powerful and vulnerable and how we are held and hold others in our communities.** When we lack compassion, we can become stifled in our capacity to connect with ourselves, and others.

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Journaling: Recall a time when you were particularly hard on yourself. Ask yourself what your deepest fear was at this time. Close your eyes and replay the situation in your mind, imagine how you could have responded to yourself more compassionately. Notice how this shift feels to you.

Qigong self-massage: Qigong, a Chinese healing system, sets forth the primary intention of transforming all thoughts, feelings, and experiences into compassion. Qigong is a practice that involves different exercises to strengthen overall wellbeing. **Below are additional resources:**

- [Healing Labs Qigong Self Massage Handout](#)

Sound bath: Sound bath is an experience where you are immersed in deep sound vibrations. The vibrations or frequencies correspond to specific energy centers in the body and can assist with healing in those areas. Sound healing has roots in Greece, Egypt, and India. Sound baths help to reduce stress, release muscle tension, relax the body, relieve pain, improve body awareness, and improve sleep quality.

Below are some videos of sound baths available to you:

- [Sound Bath for Imagination, Creativity, & Visualization](#)
- [Spiritual Healing Sound Bath](#)

Platica: La platica is a heart to heart. It's a space we create to share emotional intimacy, hear and be heard, and engage in healing in community. In Indigenous Mexican and Central American teachings la platica is an important step towards healing. By giving voice to our feelings we can be seen, heard, and cared for. Do you hold back from sharing with loved ones for fear of burdening them? We often feel like our struggles are unique to us and that we must solve them alone to not burden those we care for. This way of thinking isolates us in our hardships. Think of someone you love and trust. Ask if they have space to share a platica with you. In being open and vulnerable you deepen your relationship, create space for understanding, and allow others to be vulnerable with you. Trust in those you love to hold you. They may also have things they've been needing to voice but haven't found the space to say. See if this is a space you can regularly hold together.

Joy: In our work to be more compassionate with ourselves, we must find space to engage with things that bring us joy. Think back to your childhood. What were some things you loved doing? What were some things you always wanted to do as a child but lacked the financial or social support to do so? Try it now. See how it feels to play, be creative and expressive. Ask yourself if there are ways to incorporate more joy and play into your daily or weekly routine.

As the sun sets in the west, we take a moment to embrace the strength and introspection that brought us to this point of our journey. ***The west is associated with the harvest and the earth element. It represents our intuition and our dreams. "By striving to achieve balance in our lives, moving energy through, and reminding ourselves of all that we are grateful for," we attend to our most basic needs and ground ourselves in our intentions and values*** (Laura van Dernoot Lipsky). The earth sees many cycles of life and transformation. Landscapes change and mold to best support and sustain life. Even in the face of harmful human interventions, the earth remains resilient. Although all of what was lost cannot be restored, something new emerges that serves us in the present, ***"we see the impermanence of everything understanding the beauty of being awake for the here and now"*** (Laura van Dernoot Lipsky).

PRACTICES TO ENGAGE WITH

Nature bath: Many cultures have recognized the importance of connecting to nature in maintaining our well-being. Forest bathing or shinrin-yoku was popularized in Japan in the 1980s and is the practice of immersing yourself in your natural surroundings to awaken your sense. As time passes, we find ourselves increasingly spending more time inside and online as our lives, social and workspaces become driven by technology. Finding time to disconnect and unplug from technology and reconnect with nature can be incredibly restorative for us. In a natural space that is accessible to you and that you feel connected to take some time to tune in with yourself and your surroundings. Sit and allow yourself to be encapsulated by the natural environment. What do you see? What do you hear? What do you smell? What do you feel? Take a deep breath and allow yourself to be fully present in the space. **Below are some additional resources:**

- [14 Beautiful Spots to Escape to Nature in NYC](#)
- [How to start forest bathing](#)

Gratitude: Remembering who and what we are grateful for can be a powerful way to bring balance in our lives and shift our perspectives in moments of distress. Think of someone or something you're grateful for. If you are thinking of a person, reach out to them and express your gratitude. If this person is no longer with us, write them a letter. You can do the same for the something you are thinking of. Gratitude is a practice we can engage in daily and strengthens our ability to appreciate those around us and acknowledge the community that supports us in a tangible way.

Write a letter to self: For many of us, self-love and appreciation can be a struggle. Take a moment to write a letter to yourself expressing your gratefulness for the person you are. Think about the journey you have had so far, acknowledge your resilience, give yourself grace for your mistakes. Know that the person you are today is enough and deserves to be celebrated.

Movement: In traditional Chinese medicine, there is a belief that dis-ease in part comes from stagnant energy in body. In our workday and daily interactions, we can find ourselves using a lot of energy in our head space. To achieve balance, we need to engage in practices that move the energy from our headspace into our bodies. Try to incorporate movement into your daily practice. Movement can take many forms, like a morning walk, a bike ride, yoga, dance, exercise, or a body shake out. See how you feel after moving your body.



As the moon rises, we are encapsulated by the darkness of nighttime. Reflecting on the journey we took following the sun we find ourselves subtly becoming more in tune with our intuition. ***The four directions, like the four chambers of our heart, are a part of us sharing their wisdom and guiding us back to our center, our most awakened self.*** The practices we engage with in each direction and in our journey to return to our center will change over time, ***“but what is important is that you prioritize this communion with yourself enough that you come home to yourself daily, if not several times a day”*** (Laura van Dernoot Lipsky). We find our power in our ability to be fully present as our authentic selves. ***In taking time to connect with and heal ourselves, we strengthen our ability to show up for others.***

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Set an intention: Setting an intention for your day or week can be a powerful way to check in with yourself and align yourself with your values. Speak and intention you have for yourself. Think about how you want to feel as you set this intention. One practice you can engage with for setting intentions is candle burning. Prayer, chime, and penny candles are commonly used to set intentions. Each candle color has a specific meaning. In selecting your candle, think about your intention and choose the color that best aligns with that. Put the candle in a safe location and allow it to burn completely.

Below are some additional resources:

- [How to set powerful intentions](#)
- [The Meaning of Candle Colors for Magic and Rituals](#)

Worry Dolls (Muneca Quitapena): In the tradition of the Indigenous Mayan communities of the Guatemalan highlands, each person receives a box of six worry dolls. Before bed they share one worry with each doll and then place the dolls back in the box or under their pillow. The doll holds the worry for them, allowing them to sleep peacefully. In the morning they wake up feeling refreshed with their worries being alleviated. They then take a moment to express gratitude caressing each doll for taking their worry. This practice can be powerful in helping us release stress impacting our wellbeing. Before bed, ask yourself “What can I put down? What am I ready to be done with? What do I not need to carry with me for another day?” Allow the doll to take what no longer serves you. Allow yourself to sleep peacefully. **Below is more information on worry dolls:**

- [La leyenda de los munecos quitapesares figuras que alivian las penas](#)
- [Worry Dolls Explained](#)

Take a rest day: As life becomes increasingly fast-paced and opportunity seems to be around every corner, we can find ourselves feeling pressured to always keep moving, doing, and creating. However, endless movement or creation without stillness or rest leads to burnout. Designate one day every week that is completely dedicated to rest. This is a day of zero obligation. Allow yourself to slow down, breathe, take a nap, and just be. Remember laziness does not exist.



We hope you found this guide helpful in your journey of healing and centering yourself. We **would like to leave you all with this poem by Maria Sabina a curandera and poet:**

*“Heal yourself with the light of the sun and the rays of the moon. With the sound of the river and the waterfall. With the swaying of the sea and the fluttering of birds. **Heal yourself with mint, neem and eucalyptus. Sweeten with lavender, rosemary and chamomile.** Hug yourself with cocoa bean and a hint of cinnamon. Put love in tea instead of sugar and drink it looking at the stars. Heal yourself with the kisses the wind gives you and the hugs of the rain. Stand strong with your bare feet on the ground and with everything that comes from it. **Be smarter every day by listening to your intuition, looking at the world with your forehead. Jump, dance, sing, so that you live happier. Heal yourself, with beautiful love and always remember...You are the medicine.**”*