

**Ep #392: Ritual vs. Routine:
Why Meaning Matters More Than Productivity**



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Ep #392: Ritual vs. Routine: Why Meaning Matters More Than Productivity

This is *Feminist Wellness*, and I'm your host, Nurse Practitioner, somatics and nervous system nerd, and life coach Béa Victoria Albina. I'll show you how to get unstuck, drop the anxiety, perfectionism, and codependency so you can live from your beautiful heart. Welcome, my love, let's get started.

Hello, hello, my love. I hope this finds you doing so well. Okay, so the other day I was coaching someone I absolutely adore, and I recommended she bring more structure into her day, and she goes, "Oh no, no. Hold up. Hold up. I don't do routines." And I go, "My sister in Artemis, I hear you. And here's the magic. You don't have to do routines to get the magic of routines."

A much better framework for getting it done is, in fact, available. Now, this is great news, especially if you have spent any portion of your precious life feeling like something is deeply wrong with you because you cannot maintain a morning routine, let alone an afternoon one. You cannot make yourself do the same sequence of tasks in the same order every day without eventually, inevitably, lying facedown on the floor, moaning. Or probably, more likely, doom-scrolling the morning away. I want you to know that the problem was never you. The problem was the framing.

So, listen, routine is phenomenal for some folks. But if this is resonating at all, then it's fair to say that routine was probably not built for brains like yours. And I say brains like yours, meaning brains like ours, because a significant portion of the people who find their way to this show and into my work are what I lovingly call "neuromagical." My word. Trademarking it in my heart right now.

Neuromagical means your nervous system, like mine—well, it's not your nervous system, it's your brain—but you are not neurotypical. It is magical, offering you a different and often wildly creative, deeply sensitive, beautifully nonlinear way of moving through the world that if you are me, comes with a constant jukebox. And just a quick aside because we're talking about neuromagicalness, why not diverge in the first two minutes? I

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didn't realize that everyone doesn't have a jukebox and isn't constantly vocal stimming at the slightest provocation. Like this morning, Billey was like, "Here I go." And my brain goes, "Here I go, here I go, here I go again. Girls, what's my weakness? Men." Okay, then. And it just went and played all of "Shoop," every single word.

So anyway, that's an aside I didn't know. I was like, "Billey, what goes on in your head?" And she's like, "It's just quiet. It's just quiet." And I was like, "You mean just when you're meditating, right?" Because she's a practicing Buddhist in the Tibetan tradition. She meditates a lot. And she's like, "No, girl. Like when I'm making a sangwich, it's just quiet." And I'm like, "You're not going, 'Put the cheese in the sandwich, put the ham in the sandwich, where's the mayonnaise?'" I don't know, I'm just making it up, but huh. So that's... I mean, it's different.

And I'm not just talking about those of us with ADHD, ADD, autism, anxiety, sensory processing differences. I'm talking about the whole gorgeous constellation. And if any of that sounds like you, stay with me because this one's especially for you. And if none of that sounds like you, stay anyway because routine has also been failing a lot of neurotypical people who were just too darn polite to say so.

So, routine, as we know it today, a rigid clock-driven sequence of tasks was profoundly shaped by the Industrial Revolution's factories where fixed shifts and repetitive workflows synchronized human labor to machines for scalable efficiency. But it did something else too, something we talk about less. It didn't just regulate behavior, it colonized the experience of time itself. Before the factory, time was seen as cyclical, seasonal, relational. It moved the way bodies move, the way harvests move, the way grief moves. Not in a straight line, but in a spiral, returning to similar places with new understanding each time around.

The Industrial Revolution flattened that spiral into a line, a line with a clock at one end and a productivity score at the other. Fixed wake time, assigned

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task, strict sequence, day after day, after day after day. And we've been taught ever since that struggling to maintain it reflects personal weakness rather than a mismatch for modern, varied lives and brains and spirits and hearts that don't do so goodly with strictness like that. Like get up at 5:00 and hydrate and journal three pages and cold plunge. Ugh. No, thank you. Take 17 supplements, including the ones that taste like aquarium sediment. No complaints. Then read nonfiction and move your body and meditate, and then be grateful and run 45 miles and do all of this before 7:00 a.m. And I am tired just saying it. And then comes the time-blocked work schedule. Yikes. No, thank you.

The belief under all of it is this: My natural, unoptimized, unmarked self is insufficient. That without external structure enforcing discipline, I will dissolve into unlovableness. The version of me who exists before she's performed her productivity for the day is not yet a real and valid person. She's a draft. She needs to earn her realness. And if you're neuromagical, routine doesn't just fail you; it pathologizes you because your brain is not a factory, it's a fireworks display. It runs on meaning and novelty and depth and sensation, not on identical repetition. Asking a neuromagical brain to perform the same sequence in the same order every day forever is like asking a river to flow in a straight line because straight lines are more efficient. The river will find another way. The river always finds another way, and then we call the river disordered.

I have something better. Enter ritual. Ritual is as old as humans are. Older than writing, older than agriculture, older than the concept of productivity. Every indigenous culture on earth, every ancestral tradition, every elder who's ever marked a threshold with her body and her breath. They were all working with the same fundamental understanding that modernity tried very hard to bury: that time needs to be marked, not just managed. That a day without ritual is a day that floats, that sloshes, a day you move through without quite being there for it.

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This wasn't just a regional insight. It wasn't one group, one civilization figuring something out that others missed. It was a shared knowing that crossed every ocean, every climate, every language. The Lakota, the Arrernte and Aboriginal Australians, communities throughout Mesoamerica and the Andes. Shout out to the Wadani, the Mapuche, and other original communities of my homeland, the land we now call Argentina. The Celtic people of Northern Europe, the specific practices are as varied and particular as the lands and gente they came from, which matters because these are living traditions with specific histories and specific peoples, not an aesthetic indigenous mood board.

Crucially, none of them understood time as a line, moving directly from past to future with productivity as its destination. Time was a spiral, a cycle, or in its way, a sloshing thing. And so the day turned, the season turned, the year turned, and humans turned with it, not managing time, but moving inside it, in relationship to it. The shared understanding underneath all of them: The sunrise is worth acknowledging. The meal is worth blessing. The threshold between one chapter of the day and the next is worth marking with your body, your breath, your full, momentary attention.

The sunrise acknowledgment, the offering before a meal, the storytelling at dusk, the ceremony that marks a season's turn, these were vital declarations. I am here. We, together, are here. This moment is real. I exist in relationship to something so much larger than the running list in my head. I am a part of community, a part of collective. And we together, marking time together, this is what matters.

Women specifically have often been the keepers of this kind of time. A grandmother who lights a candle before she cooks. The midwife who says certain words at certain thresholds. The healer who understands that how you enter a space is part of what happens inside it. The elder who marks seasons, moons, and the passages of those she loves with specific, repeated, embodied acts of attention.

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Women's wisdom traditions the world over have understood that life is a series of thresholds to cross, not a line to optimize. The way you stay yourself while time moves around you is by marking it, saying, "This moment, it's different from the last one. I'm here and paying attention. I am here."

What those threshold prayers and candlelit kitchens were doing, whether anyone called it this or not, was nervous system medicine. Your nervous system, that beautiful, ancient, context-hungry thing is doing a very fast, below-awareness scan essentially all the time. Where am I? What's happening? Is this safe? Do I belong here? Does any of this mean anything? Faster than thought, before you've consciously registered how you feel, your nervous system is already reading the room, reading your body, reading the cues around you, connecting with nature, and collaborating accordingly.

Here's what it cannot do on its own. It cannot tell that the workday is over. It cannot detect that Monday morning is different from Sunday afternoon. It cannot distinguish this cup of tea is rest from that spreadsheet is work unless you give it a signal, unless something says, "We have crossed a threshold. The chapter is different now, and you can land here." And that's what ritual does.

For every brain, and perhaps especially for neuromagical ones because a neuromagical nervous system that is not getting clear threshold signals will simply keep going. Keep scanning, keep working, worrying, spinning, producing because nobody told it that this part of the day means something different. Ritual is the signal, a small, consistent, embodied act that says to your whole system, "We are somewhere different now. You can regulate accordingly."

Here is what makes ritual genuinely different from routine, the thing that matters for our specific brains and our specific lives. Ritual doesn't require sameness, it requires meaning. Routine says, "Do this exact thing in this

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exact order forever." Ritual says, "Mark the threshold." How you mark it can shift with the season, with your mood, with what's true today. The commitment is to the act of marking, not to the specific choreography. Your brain, which gets bored with identical repetition and lights up for meaning and sensation and novelty—ritual was made for it.

For those of us who have also spent years orienting our sense of safety and belonging to what other people need, reading every room, providing what's required, tracking everyone else's emotional weather, while our own interior goes largely unmonitored. Ritual does something else entirely. This is the pattern I call emotional outsourcing, the habitual pattern of sourcing our sense of safety, belonging, and worth from external sources. Everyone and everything rather than from within, which shows up as codependent patterns, people-pleasing, and perfectionist habits.

One of its quietest signs is a loss of the felt sense that your own moments belong to you, that your mornings are yours, that your evenings are yours, that your time is yours, that you get to mark your own thresholds with your own meaning before the day claims you. Routine, ironically, often reinforces this because routine is external by design. It's a checklist you're accountable to. It still asks you to perform for something outside yourself, even if that something is a habit tracker you built. Ritual asks you to be present for yourself, just that. For someone who has spent years being present for everyone else first, that's a pretty darn radical act. Even when it looks from the outside like a person standing at a coffee maker with her eyes closed for four seconds before she pushes the button.

Before we get into remedies, a note from past me. My beauty, what I'm about to describe is going to sound almost insultingly small, especially if you're new to my work. That smallness is the point. Right? This is the whole shift, from some complex routine that's this external thing to giving your nervous system the smallest signal. That's what it needs, not some

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complex production, not a million checkboxes, but this small, little kitten step of a signal. Stay with me.

So, the focus of our remedies is to come back into presence. Presence, presence, presence, presence. That's what ritual does. It brings us into presence. You can't perform a ritual if you're not there. But really there. If you're not embodied, meaning present in your body, if you're not in the room, then you're just lighting candles. You're just doling out medicine. You're just taking actions. It's not a ritual if you're not there.

So, what's our first remedy? It's to start putting a hand on your heart before you do the things that tend to take you out of self, like picking up your phone, overthinking about other people, or overfunctioning. And this act of taking a half second of not just choosing yourself, but putting your own hand on your own body to come back into you, and to do that before the entire external world rushes in. Right? Taking that moment. And I recommend doing it in two ways.

At first, when you're beginning to come back into connection with your body in these new ways, setting a timer for three or four times a day to put your hand on your heart or your belly or your arm, it doesn't really matter where. Take a breath, ground into your body, and take the beauty of ritual as the gift to start to become ever more self-referential.

Because this is a thing we lose both in emotional outsourcing and when we're focused on routine. You are not the decider of what's next. The routine is, the Monday hour one, the time block, the "I should be doing." Right? And so the invitation is to come back into your body, to ask your body what the next thing is to do. We can also mark time with simple things, like the same song every morning while you make your coffee, right? And playing that same song out loud begins to tell your body, the day is beginning, and I am in it.

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I played it for a very long time. There's a Ram Dass East Forest collab. It's not a collab. Ram Dass didn't collab, but East Forest sampled Ram Dass and made some absolutely amazing music. And I would use it as my ritual marker, starting the day with those same songs, right? Having a different song that I would use to mark that I was going to do something different. This is what I'm doing. I'm here and I'm bringing in all of my senses, right? Hand on heart, pressure, warmth, connection, sound. Yeah?

Closing your laptop at the end of the workday and saying out loud, "That's enough for today," ringing a bell as you do it. Right, not as an affirmation, but as a threshold, a closing of doors between chapters. And the reason we do this is to create that marker, that delineation that helps us to mark the time, to say, "The day is done. I can allow myself to rest. I can allow myself to step out of the push and the grind of the day that's been, and I can step into rest with my full heart, with my full body." Yeah?

And while I could go on for hours giving you a whole list of rituals you can work into your day, here's the real gift. The invitation is for you to build in the rituals that support you. To listen to your body, to listen to the sensations within you, to get curious, to talk to your environment, talk to the cat, talk to the plants, talk to the crystals, talk to the clouds, talk to the sun, talk to the moon, talk to your inner guides and start to ask what do you need? What do you want? How can I be more aligned with us? And let that begin to guide you.

And if you're listening and you're like, "Girl, what?" maybe just try it. If you're like, "I can't hear myself or anything else," okay. Think about why it might be supportive to do so. For those of us in emotional outsourcing habits, we've spent our whole lives and spend our whole lives listening to, prioritizing, thinking about, focusing on everyone but us. And ritual is this way to listen in to ourselves.

Because when's the last time you were truly your own North Star? And were you under age six at the time? This is the way we deepen that

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connection with self, and that connection with self is the thing that guides us to set, know our limits so we can set our limits and set boundaries and then have more copacetic relationships. Knowing ourselves allows us to show up in our truth, in our authenticity and to call in people into our world who want to know us in our truth, in our authenticity, in our realness. It all starts with this coming home to self, listening to self, being with self.

And ritual is this magical, beautiful portal in. Another beautiful thing about rituals is that they are cumulative in a way routines are not. A routine you skip creates a deficit. Oh, crap. A ritual you return to after missing it for a week, it simply picks up because the point was never the streak. The point was the contact. And contact once established is easier to return to than it is to build from scratch. Yeah? Because listen, most of us are not going to maintain a perfect streak of anything, and I don't think we need to. Right? We just need a thread to return to. Ritual is a thread. Routine is a performance review.

The Earth has been doing this since before there were words for it. She's not once skipped a sunrise to catch up on productivity. She's not once rushed a season because the previous one ran a little long. She marks every threshold with the same absolute, unhurried devotion, every single time for approximately 4.5 billion years. Without a single habit tracker or a single morning when she stared at the ceiling wondering why she couldn't just be more consistent.

My beauty, we get to be her students. We live inside her rhythms whether we acknowledge them or not. So why not acknowledge them and be more like them. Kitten, your life is happening right now, all the way through to the edges. The question is whether you'll show up for it. The question is whether the showing up will be something you've marked or something that slips past you while you were managing everything else and thinking about everyone else.

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My love, I love you. You're doing great. Please take some time to think about what it could be like to bring ritual into your life in these the smallest of ways, in the gentlest of ways, and how it might help you to take more care of yourself and be gentler and kinder and more loving with you. Try it out. Let me know how it goes. Drop me an email to podcast@beatrizalbina.com. Let me know how it goes. I'm curious. Let's be in conversation about this. Sound good? Good.

All right, go on. I'll see you next week. You're doing great. Let's do what we do. Gentle hand on your heart should you feel so moved and remember, you are safe, you are held, you are loved. And when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be well, my beauty. Ciao, ciao.