



ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES

"Oh my God, that's my acupuncturist's breathing instructor! I have to say hello," yells a bright-eyed blond from across a crowded waiting room. The shift to alternative healing has arrived and continues to spread from New Age hippies to mainstream urbanites. **Karen Robinovitz** hits the road to wellness and discovers a few curious therapies worth a detour.

Enter the ritual. Barbara Biziou, author of *The Joy of Ritual* and *The Joy of Family Ritual* (St. Martin's Press), believes that rituals improve your life. "It can take five minutes, five hours, or five days," Biziou says, sitting in her warm apartment full of Buddhas, candles, fresh flowers, and the luscious scent of sage. "There are so many ways to celebrate, ease a transition, mark a special moment."

Biziou, who runs women's retreats and has hosted rituals for Donna Karan and Oxygen Media, designs rituals for everything from abundance and creativity to visions for future, new seasons, and love. At a recent prosperity ritual, I sat in a circle with 15 strangers, throwing play money around the room, declaring what we wanted our riches for (me, a new loft and a shopping spree), venting our money issues, and setting our intentions (New Age speak for "having a purpose").

At a ritual for the spring solstice, I cleaned out my emotional clutter by releasing everything that holds me back, burning a list of my issues in a caldron. Then, after meditating, walking in a circle to the beat of primal, African music, I sat down and decorated a paper plate, using stickers and glue to represent my new, creative energy.

Special occasions, ranging from bridal showers and births to seasonal changes and career moves, can be celebrated with a ritual involving meditation, prayer, and music.

Biziou designed a bridal shower ritual for one of my best friends, where we blessed her marriage with music, prayers, love, candles, and a blend of cultural traditions from all over the world. In addition to monthly group rituals, Biziou does private ceremonies to bless new homes, baby showers, new careers, or anything your mind, body, and soul craves. ■

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