

Everyday Herbs in Spiritual Practice

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How can you use some of the ideas and activities in this book to enrich your own faith and your ongoing spiritual practices?
2. How can herbs and herbal practices be used to find common ground among peoples of different faiths?
3. A good meal feeds our bodies. How can herbs be used to feed our souls?
4. Many herbs are associated with love and connection, with beauty and attraction. Why do you think there is such a strong correlation between herbs and these two aspects of our beings and life experiences? What are some of the traditional ways that herbs are used for events along the Circle of Life, such as for courtship, during weddings, at births, and for memorial services?
5. Herbs are often used during ceremonies and celebrations that mark points of passage in the circles of our lives. In what ways have you used herbs to honor or signify an event within your family? What about your religious community?
6. If you could plant only one herb in your garden, what would it be? What about that herb do you find so compelling?
7. What is the connection between herbal healing and spiritual health? What do indigenous people mean when they refer to a state of health as an outgrowth of “living in balance”?
8. What is the spiritual meaning of medicine? How can herbs be used to heal our spirits?
9. What is the connection between the beauty and pleasure herbs bring into our lives and the desire to live a virtuous life? Do you personally feel a connection between aesthetics and ethics? Why, or why not?
10. Herbs are often used by indigenous peoples in ceremonies for giving thanks. How can you incorporate the use of herbs into your spiritual practices to show gratitude to the people and plants that nurture your life?
11. How are herbs used during holidays in your own spiritual tradition and/or practices? Which herbs are especially important and what do they symbolize?
12. Why do you think so many herbs are used for purification and protection? What is the connection between these two aspects of our spiritual growth?
13. In what way is a garden like Paradise? How can you design an herb garden to enhance the qualities you associate with the concept of Paradise?
14. What about herbs makes them such a perfect medium for fostering reflection and meditation? Explore what I mean in chapter 6 when I refer to “weeding the Buddha.”
15. When is preparing and drinking a cup of herbal tea a spiritual experience, and when is it simply a cup of tea? What makes the difference between a simple daily act and a spiritual practice?

16. What is the spiritual element inherent in the act of preparing herbal creations for spiritual use?
17. How can the act of creating herbals help to build family, friendships, and community?
18. If you create an herbal gift and present it to someone, does that act become a means of using herbs for spiritual practices? How so?
19. Why do you think a shamrock is only good luck if you find it when you are not searching for it?
20. Why is the symbol of a circle divided into four equal quarters such a common image for representing creation among so many religious faiths? Where did the image originate from? Where have you seen it in other forms of expression, such as artwork, architecture, and garden design?
21. Hildegard of Bingen was a visionary and mystic who lived in the twelfth century. As you read her writing and learn about her life in this book, what themes begin to emerge? Why does Hildegard write so much about herbs, and how does this connection to plants feed her own faith?
22. Early Islamic gardens were designed to reflect a particular image of Creation. Describe the basic elements of that image and discuss what they share in common with the images of creation found among other faiths?