

Autistic people often have atypical spiritual practices and experiences.

Something I have noticed about autistic people is that we often have unusual relationships with religion and spiritual practice, that fall outside the realm of mainstream organized religion.

I grew up Christian and then my family became Unitarian Universalist, **but I have always been drawn to shamanism, paganism, and nature-based worship, starting as young as kindergarten and first grade.**

When I was a Christian, however, I was extremely devout. **My understanding of God and Jesus didn't necessarily fit the mainstream understanding, however.** I felt that God was just another word for love in pure form, and that Jesus was a person who put that love into practice. I didn't really buy the whole "big man in the sky" thing, because it made no logical sense.

My spiritual practice over the years has changed and evolved, but there are several core things and ideas that guide me and make me feel connected to the universe, which have never changed:

- nature and natural elements (running water, trees, rocks, bones, animals)
- my inherent passion for social justice
- my understanding that change is the only constant and that spiritual practice is to work with nature & not against it
- my desire to connect with the universe through nature
- my desire to heal myself and others

I know many autistic pagans, witches, and shamans who have felt called to spiritual practice that is more connected with the Earth and natural world than typical organized religion usually is.

And I think there's a reason for that.

Autistic people are hypersensitive. **We connect with our senses in a way that's extremely powerful, meaning that when we interact with nature, its beauty, purity, and energy is often overwhelming and obvious to us.** We find joy and peace in the simplest things, like a shining leaf or curling grass, or chirping birds and a slowly flowing creek.

I think that autistic people have a tendency to connect with spiritual things by going about it in a tangible way that's grounded in the senses. By incorporating natural elements into our spiritual practice, or by engaging with the spirituality of nature itself, we're able to *physically sense* the profound, unspoken truths of existence.

The thing that draws me to nature-based spirituality is its lack of reliance on "God" or "gods," as conscious entities that tangibly exist somewhere inaccessible to humans. In that sense, I consider myself an atheist. **The atheist label is one that many autistic people have adopted. That makes sense, because many of us don't "believe" in things we don't physically experience through our senses.**

Which is to say, at least in my own life, autistic spirituality takes the form of a heightened sensory connection to nature. Nature, in all of its patterns, fractals, and symmetries. The universe, in its conservation of mass and energy, which can only be changed, not created or destroyed. Nature in the form of the human body, which moves and spins and feels the forces that govern all existence.

And so, for autistic people, **stimming can be an inherently spiritual practice & experience.**

Think of Catholics praying with the rosary, Buddhists and Muslims meditating with prayer beads, Sufi mystics spinning in circles, monks chanting the same phrases over and over again, and the way people rock back and forth when they're moved by prayer.

Autistic people stim like that all the time. **And who is to say that an autistic person chanting an echolalic phrase, spinning in circles on their front lawn, or silently rocking back and forth, is not having a profound spiritual experience?**

I have entered trance-like states while stimming, multiple times. I have felt the power of gravity and the weight of my limbs while spinning so fast I broke blood vessels in my arms and hands.

And in those moments I was not consciously connecting with “God,” or the abstract “divine.”
But I was connecting with my body, with my environment, and with forces that connect
everyone and everything.

Today, I’m going to leave you with a poem I wrote. The working title is “**Stimming.**” You
decide if it is spiritual.

Body is mind, body is emotion
Constant motion, sensing space,
The tangible world sets my heart ablaze
with changing colors and strong winds.
I jump at everything and nothing at the same time,
Fingers flutter to their own logic.
My voice breaks free, clear and loud
In sounds without words, only feeling.

Digging deeper into the soil,
I breathe the echoes of earthworms,
Inhale networks of mycelium.
Body is clay, body is Earth
I leap to crash into myself, discover solid bones
Dance with gravity and the pull of spheres
Run and flap to discover the bond
Between bodies that sing and planets that spin.

~Eden 🐸

