

Energy magazine

Subscriber  
Bonus Content


Nov/Dec 2021



# Receive the Gifts and the Lessons of Covid:

## Practical Nature Guidance for Families Moving Forward





*I would contend that young people can learn to make their way through the inevitable and entirely natural periods of loss and contraction that occur in our lives by cultivating their awareness of other cycles that are simultaneously occurring.*

Renee Baribeau

**H**ave family tradition, ritual, and ceremony gone south with the wind? Over the past few decades, the pews in our religious temples have emptied, children spend less than an hour a week in nature, and the definition of family has become diverse and complex. The married, two-parent with children household model of the twentieth century has been remolded, and according to the Pew Research Center, “Four-in-ten births occur to women who are single or living with a non-marital partner.”<sup>1</sup>

An African proverb states: “It takes a village.” Do you have a village of support? When the schools closed due to the global pandemic, it became apparent that overworked parents would need to double down on their efforts to raise healthy, happy, thriving children - becoming teachers as well as caregivers. Scheduling was completely rearranged. Time and energy reallocated. While I can’t provide you with extra childcare or deliver additional hours of sunlight, I believe simple shamanic wisdom can help parents succeed.

Nature is filled with cycling energy. I would contend that young people can learn to make their way

through the inevitable and entirely natural periods of loss and contraction that occur in our lives by cultivating their awareness of other cycles that are simultaneously occurring. While it is autumn and the leaves are now falling, there may be areas in your family life where the energy is more springlike, such as with the arrival of a newborn baby or the start of the school year.

Adaptation and resilience remain the key components of our human makeup necessary for survival. We live in a time when consumerism, combined with technology, is pushing us toward the brink of extinction. On August 9, 2021, in Geneva, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a report containing scientifically sound, dire predictions about increased global warming. As a small silver lining, the report said, “Human actions still have the potential to determine the future course of climate.”<sup>2</sup>

Society has spent the past year and three quarters in a state of isolation and fear. Your family, just like all other families in the world, could use an energy boost and some healing work. Although ours, sadly, is the age when the human presence has created



lasting, probably irreversible damage to the planet, with this knowledge at the forefront of our minds, let us be motivated to spend more time engaged in gratitude, ritual, ceremony, and walking on tree-lined paths together to establish new family and healthier systems and norms. This may be the best place to begin making the shifts that will promote the healing of the planet.

You can start the healing and build your awareness of your resources by asking: Has our family arrived at the onset of the Anthropocene Epoch without a working compass, guidebook, and support? It is time to get real about your condition. X marks the spot. This is where your journey begins.

In the not-so-distant past, communities were usually comprised of people who spoke the same language. The bond of commonality was the spin axis for the community's wellbeing, longevity, and survival. Family traditions and rituals, like Sunday dinner or gathering for births, holidays, marriages, and funerals, remained the glue for extended families until the late 1960s and early 1970s. In some contemporary families, this is still their social glue though the bonds between parent and child often weaken upon adulthood.

By 1920, more Americans lived in urban cities than ever before in history. Prior to this economic shift from farming to industrialization, 90 percent of families lived in the countryside tending to the earth. During the mass migration from Europe to America in the late 1800s, many of the rituals and pagan spiritual practices were left behind. The agrarian villages in regions in northern Europe had shamans whose prestige and position was earned by maintaining harmony with nature employing a magical skillset. Shamans had a direct connection with the spirits of the underworld, the elements of nature, and the heavens. These spiritual intermediaries negotiated with the unseen realms. The goal was prophecy, health, well-being, abundant food, and the fertility of clan members and livestock. Harmony was understood to be the key to a healthy, happy village. Children organically joined into the hunting, fishing, and farming activities as their maturity permitted. In time, as Europeans colonized the

lands of Indigenous peoples, the role of the shaman was replaced by the role of Christian clergy.

Now, many contemporary families in the developed nations have left organized religious practice for spirituality. The phrase *spiritual but not religious*, which many of us check off when we're setting up our Facebook pages, is, however, meaningless without acting upon our values. What was crucial for the community survival of agrarians remains essential to the community survival of urban dwellers and denizens of the suburbs, too.

In 2003, while on a trip to Peru, an elder shaman spoke to my group. He said, "You are in preparation for the time when the world will turn itself over (the *pachakuti*). This turning over will be the start of a time when the condor and eagle will fly together again, and that people will come together in harmony upon our earth. I call this inside-outside, right-relationship living." By *inside-outside* living we will begin to take personal responsibility for all our actions and choose harmony over discord. *Turning over*, meant we would likely face a catastrophe that would wake us up and get us back on course, like turning over the soil in a field that has been sown to make it fertile again before another planting. Those words were a prophecy.

Since then, western society has faced many critical events, including the most recent viral warfare; we are essentially at an apocalypse of time, space, and separation. Rapid communication and travel has shown us that we inhabit one small world and live a wind's breath apart. We need to keep choosing the better path forward for our families. Ritual and community are the path of sustainability and longevity that we need right now.

As family leaders, it is essential for you and your mate to become conscious role models for your children. Your behavior has a direct impact on your family's future. (If you're without a coparent, then your role is even more significant.) But remember, you are prepared for the job of raising your children, because, from a shamanic perspective, you and your family chose this appointed intersection of space and time to

come together. All experience counts and every choice matters. Parenting comes with increased responsibility to temper your actions and to moderate your ambitions.

## RESTORE MAGIC TO YOUR FAMILY BY PLAYING WITH THE FOUR CARDINAL WINDS

Nature is alive with Spirit and so are you. Implement some shamanic strategies and principles for working with nature to help your family bond and move forward with more grace and ease. Here are a few activities you can do with your children to bring more ritual and gratitude into your life.

To restore the magic to your daily routine, begin by creating a Wind Map.

### Family Activity #1 Draw a Large Wind Map for Your Family

For eons, the wind has had the authority of holding up the four quadrants of the sky. The cardinal winds of the East, South, West, and North represent different energies and meanings. You and your kids can consciously engage with these winds daily to restore your family's harmony with nature and instill your home with magic, which is something children love.

One member of the Wind Clan I lead set up a four-direction family altar in her yard with her two children. Each member of the family blew their intentions into four rocks, one for each direction. She would routinely see her daughter tending to these sacred spots, whistling to the wind spirits. I am asking you to do something similar.

You will need a large sheet of paper and some crayons or colored markers for this activity. Once you have created it, it can serve as a centerpiece in your home for conversations, game night, or part of a family altar.

First, draw a large circle on a sheet of paper. Divide the circle—your Wind Map—into four quarters by draw-

ing one line through it from the top to the bottom and a second line through it from left to right. At the top, write NORTH. On the right, write EAST. On the bottom, write SOUTH. On the left, write WEST. Have your children decorate each sector to honor that the landscape and energy in it is unique and valuable. Lead the conversation.

In nature, the sun rises in the East, so the top right-hand square of your Wind Map is designated as the region of new beginnings, new ideas, new friendships, new marriage, pregnancy, and infants. The East Wind, which emanates from this region and is blowing westward, holds the energy of the mind. As you decorate it, discuss what you love about it.

At midday, the sun is in the South. On your Wind Map, the bottom right-hand square is the region associated with grade-school kids moving toward adolescence, projects that are halfway done, skills being integrated, afterschool jobs, and awards being won. The South Wind, which emanates from this region and is blowing northward, holds the energy of the emotions. As you decorate this area of the map, talk about what you love about it.

The West is where the sun sets, so the bottom left-hand square on your Wind Map is designated as the region of teenagers, graduation, college applications, driving, puberty, death of aging relatives, and notable physical changes in the body. The West Wind, which emanates from this region and is blowing eastward, holds the energy of the physical body. As you decorate this area of the map, talk about what you love about it.

The North is like the night, a time when activity shuts down and nature does a refresh. On your Wind Map, the top left-hand square is the region of college-bound children, marriage, and spirituality. The North Wind, which emanates from this region and is blowing southward, holds the energy of spirituality and community. As you decorate this area of the map, talk about what you love about it. Even young children can be engaged by teaching them about the mystery and everyday magic in nature, such as how a caterpillar





transforms into a butterfly.

The objective for creating the Wind Map is to use it to do age-appropriate cardinal wind activities that can help your family move from the linear work-until-you-drop model of time into a sacred cyclical journey whereby you begin to live in harmony with the earth's magnetic field and rotating cycles of experience.

A very simple, fun activity you could have your kids of every age do every morning is to spin around three times with their eyes closed and then throw a bean bag at the Wind Map. Wherever it touches the paper is the energy they can look out for that day.

On an occasion when you are gathered together, either right after you draw the Wind Map or another time a day or two later, you and your kids can visit the quadrants one by one, expressing how the energy of the quadrants is affecting you personally. As the parent, you can guide your kids by asking simple questions that apply to the cardinal directions. Make a weekly activity date on the calendar when everybody can get to share and create and bond.

### Family Activity #2: Celebrating Sacred Reciprocity (Anyi)

The West Wind holds the energy of harvest and physical endings—even deaths. A shaman experiences many deaths before the final wind exhale and endings are a part of every cycle of nature. In a family system, the big picture ending may come after a twenty-year cycle of child rearing when the kids leave home. But Zephyrus also blows through a family when a grandparent or a beloved pet passes away. Or when the leaves in the yard need raking. Any time there is harvesting to do, it is helpful to come together in unity.

There is a powerful shamanic principle practiced in Peru of *anyi*, which can be expressed: “Today for me, tomorrow for you.” According to a *paqo* (mountain master) in Peru who is a friend of mine, when the potatoes growing along the steep slopes are ready to harvest it is a tradition for the community to take turns picking each other's crops. The local people climb up

and down the mountainside, going from farm to farm, until every village family's crops are harvested.

Imagine your family implementing this principle as a way to create more bountiful yield for everyone. Invite each family member to write down a project on a piece of paper. Then do a time trade. Put the slips of paper in a bowl and have someone pull one task. One by one, take turns helping each other to achieve everyone's goals in the order they were selected. For example, tending to the windfall in the backyard. Colorful fall leaves need to be gathered and mulched. Imagine the impact of everyone working together to complete one goal. Not only do you get a bigger yield on your harvest, but everyone also spends time together in nature. And Mom and Dad, remember, you don't get to invent all the chores. The kids get to design some projects too!

Today for you, tomorrow for me. I like to do this activity with my good friends too.

The dancing fall leaves remind us, time for action. Another way to honor the West Wind is to take a Wind Walk and explore what is happening in the autumnal landscape as you go. A friend of mine and her partner have walked together almost every day for thirty years. Walking brings you present, which will naturally improve your parenting skills.

Encourage your children to walk too. If you begin this practice early in their lives, then being in nature will become an essential part of their routine. Establish wind walking dates and times in your family calendar. This intentional, nature-based activity will help your relationship to nature the whole year long.

Bonus, you will receive intuitive guidance from the wind when you listen. Be sure to do part of the walk in silence. Teach your children to rely upon nature for answers to their most pressing questions.

### Family Activity #3: Honoring the North Wind with Family Storytelling and Communal Meals

Perhaps because their winter climate is so harsh and the corresponding chilly nights so long, the legends of many far-northern cultures speak of a hero who must defeat a monster in order to rescue a captive spring and return it to its rightful place among the people.

In the Scandinavian folktale “Saving Spring,” Old Man Winter who lives beyond the North Wind captures and imprisons spring. Oscar, a witty young man, volunteers to make a treacherous trek to rescue it, despite a warning that all his predecessors were transformed into wild animals. Oscar is lulled into a deep sleep by the bitter cold of Boreas. Upon waking, he realizes he has shape-shifted into a tiger. Driven by ravenous hunger, he forgets his original mission and pursues a rabbit, but then, during a moment of clarity, he wakes from the spell, remembers his mission, and recognizes the rabbit as his ally.

Families need to come together to defeat the external and internal monsters of being alive in this period. The message from the United Nations is that with awareness followed by right action we can make a difference. Acknowledge as a family that we have been facing hardships. Rather than allowing yourself to be lulled to sleep by distraction, consciously engage with the wind energies of the barren north again and again until you fully realize your family potential, which is to be of maximum service to each other. Only when Oscar overcame his fear of starvation was he able to return the vitality of spring to his village.

Chasing after the North Wind is a reminder of our frivolous human experiences. Most people chase one illusionary goal after another, and never achieve happiness. Reconciling with the cold north wind by spending time in ceremony with your family teaches you that the wind cannot be caught and contained. The goal is an invisible wind of peaceful service to those you love, your family, your village.

Invite the North Wind to stir your imagination towards the pursuit of spiritual excellence. Does your

family have a common dream or vision you are pursuing together? Shorter days in winter provides opportunities for family retreat, rest, storytelling, dreaming, and warming yourself by a central fire.

During colder afternoons when you’re indoors and sheltered, consider making a family vision board. The vision board process is a simple, creative process that can help you gather the wind in your sail to power your dreams. There are detailed instructions on my website (<https://thepracticalshaman.com/how-to-make-a-vision-board/>). Make this process a family ritual. One year I made a vision board with my sister and her family. Months later my brother-in-law called to tell me how he got the dream job, explaining that everything they added to the board came into being.

Another practice for wintertime is to restore the family meal. Eat in a full group at least once a week. Make the meal fun and important. Take turns finding and cooking new recipes.

### Family Activity #4: Celebrate the East Wind with a Spring Seed Inventory and Planting

Nineteenth-century poet James Russell Lowell wrote: “There is no good in arguing with the inevitable. The only argument available with an east wind is to put on your overcoat.”<sup>3</sup> That’s where we are with quelling the surging and resurging outbreaks of new strains of coronavirus and repairing our way of life. Time to zip up our coats and face the aftermath of the nor’easter.

To experience hope with your children, go outside. Breathe in the fresh air. Watch the grass grow in the spring. We are all connected by the wind. Your love and the molecules of carbon that you exhale travel around the world in a few short days. Teach your children that their exhalation matters, that it’s feeding the trees and plants.

Emergence of spring, nature’s new cycle beginning as the planet tilts closer to the Sun, is a time in which to create bonding family memories. This is a time to take stock of your beliefs and other seeds and ensure that you have what is necessary for the growing season ahead.





Thoughts are energy forms that turn into matter. Consider doing a Spring Inventory of yours so you can see what you're currently growing. Inventories add value as a guide for the future ideas and beliefs. It is a way to clear your well of past resentments.

On a clean piece of scrap paper begin a heart-gut-brain dump, in which you list the names of people, institutions, or principles that have hurt, threatened, diminished, or interfered with you, your family, your ideals, your beliefs, and your success in the past year. You can include your children by asking them to make their own list of hurts and disappointments from the past year; toys that broke, invitations that did not arrive, test scores.

Look at each person and situation that is nagging at you, ask first if your complaint is true, and then ask, "What would I have them do instead?"

This is a great opportunity to teach your children about forgiveness. Ask them and yourself: "How do you respond to others when you disagree with them? How do you stand up for yourself—or what do you do instead?"

Be sure to reflect on your similar behavior: "How have I done this same thing to someone else?" Do your best to find forgiveness for those you resent and to say thank you. Gratitude can be expressed privately within your heart—shifting the energy in the situation.

Another great spring activity is gardening. Plant a garden or window box. Tending to herbs and vegetables will teach you and your children conscious awareness of the food you eat and the miracles nature has to offer. There is nothing more rewarding than eating a carrot that grew under your watch. Teach your children to speak to the plants about the seeds they are planting in their lives, such as wishes they want to fulfill.

Adopt a family tree that you can visit on a regular basis. Watch as the tree goes through its own cycle this year and find the similarities with your life. Talk about the experience at your family gatherings and meals. The magic of nature expands when we place

our attention on its gifts.

### **Family Activity #5: Celebrate the South Wind with Rituals and Traditions**

Emotional support is key for a family and a village to deal with its difficulties—this is an essential part of the overall health of the community. Do you and your kids know your neighbors? Sometimes we need help.

The strife between human emotion (south wind) and spirit (north wind) has been an enduring theme in mythology. The Cherokee and Hopi peoples refer to the south wind as the Light Magician, a spirit that ushers in the summer. Hopi legend speaks of a wizard from the north that faces off against a wizard from the south by tossing frozen snowballs into his warm wind. Thus, the southern landscape represents youth, innocence, patience, forgiveness, and self-exploration, as well as an opportunity to melt away our emotional problems like eliminating doubt and fear. The playful exuberance of youth itself is the antidote to the energy of death and decay.

Rituals and tradition are the domain of the south as they have no logical explanation yet touch us at the core. What are your family's rituals and traditions? Start by making a list of holidays you already celebrate and special events like birthdays and then move on to cataloguing your daily rituals. In Orthodox Jewish households, the mother lights a candle on Friday nights at sunset. Maybe in your family, you could go to a weekly farmers market, talk about the source of the food, plan a new recipe, and cook as a clan. For some added fun, learn about a new culture and cook food from other regions.

Ritual doesn't have to be something overly serious. It can be fun. Rituals are moments for collaboration, healthy attachment, and to develop respect for cycles and significance. As you practice a meaningful ritual consistently, energy is passed between family members and the ritual becomes a tradition. Every Wind Work class begins with a group laugh. Laughing together before a family meal would lighten and shift the energy.

Everyone is facing a new world now, which is especially challenging for guardians of children and their innocence. We learned how tangibly interconnected we are during the pandemic and now, more than ever, we need to teach our young people respect for the living web that is our planet—humans, animals, plants alike.

\* \* \*

There is an order in the universe, and humans *must* regain our rightful footing. No matter what side of the mask-shot in the arm argument you are on, it is time to take individual responsibility for the state of our planet. We can create a beautiful and healthier new world based on the inherent balance of nature for our children to inherit. Gratitude and humility is the path forward. Our children are looking to the elders for guidance and hope. How will you lead the way?

As a spiritual being, you must understand, being a parent is a role you intended to play all along. There are, however, some parenting styles that will need to change in order to grow the next generation of adults who are capable of navigating the turbulent winds of earth change that are on our doorstep.

If we learned nothing else after every recent natural disaster, let us hope that we have learned how our Earth is more resilient than its inhabitants. It may tilt, thaw, freeze over, or combust, but evidence shows that it has kept spinning for over four billion years and counting already. As a family leader, you have accepted a responsibility to be the light forward. Go in Peace. €



You can learn more about Renee by visiting [www.ThePracticalShaman.com](http://www.ThePracticalShaman.com)

Renee Baribeau is an award-winning, best-selling author (Winds of Spirit, Hay House; contributor, Energy magazine) and a dynamic speaker who injects humor and practical wisdom into workshops and presentations. She's a Wind Whistler using nature as her guide to assist individuals toward transformation, awakening and true purpose. She is also the Marketing and Outreach manager for Renewal Health Group and Montare Behavioral Health, the founder-creator of the Finding Freedom LGBTQ symposium and the new Emerging Trends in Behavioral Health (2022).

#### References:

1. Parenting in America. "The American Family Today," PewResearch.org (December 17, 2015), <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2015/12/17/1-the-american-family-today>.
2. Climate change widespread, rapid, and intensifying – IPCC <https://www.ipcc.ch/2021/08/09/ar6-wg1-20210809-pr/>
3. James Russell Lowell, The Writings of James Russell Lowell: Literary and Political Addresses (Charleston, SC: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1980), 17.