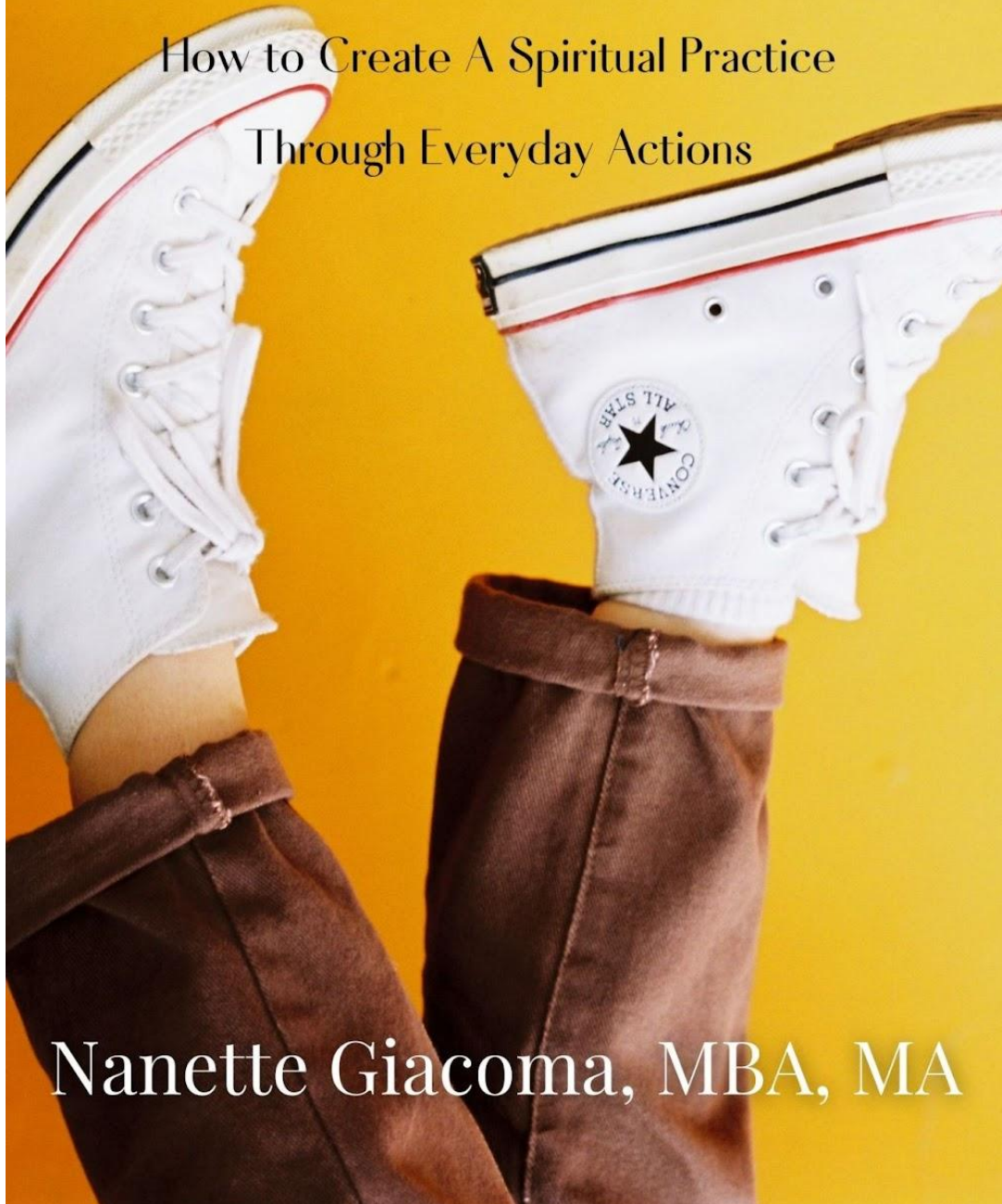


Walking a Mystical Path With Practical Shoes

How to Create A Spiritual Practice
Through Everyday Actions



Nanette Giacomma, MBA, MA

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INTRODUCTION: BET YOUR BUNIONS!

I've got bunions.

"What?"

You don't think this is how a book about a mystical path should begin? Well, bunions are part of my mystical path. You see, in my younger years, I didn't fully understand that the shoes I was wearing were stylish but not very foot friendly. Like many women, I spent years wearing shoes with three-inch heels and pointy toes. In the course of twenty years, I went all over the place with my high-heeled horrors. I walked across college campuses. While living and working in Manhattan, I traipsed to the train and subway and back again. I stood hours and hours and hours in them when I was in retail management. As a health care administrator, I click-clacked through the halls of many institutions in my pointy-toed torture chambers.

You may think, "Well, gracious, Girl! Didn't your feet hurt?" Absolutely! But after a while, I no longer felt the pain. I distanced myself mentally, physically, and emotionally

from my feet. My bunions are the reminder of what happens when I don't stay present in my body. They are also a metaphor for how I separated myself from walking a mystical path all those years. I dulled my senses and awareness so I didn't have to feel what was happening in the moment.

And how often do we do that in our culture? Frequently! We are so busy with social media, emails, texting. So caught up in goals for the future, rehashing the past, resisting the present. Frankly, I *do* all those things sometimes, which brings me to another point. We have become humans *doing* rather than humans *being*. Being is about fully *being* in the present moment, and it's hard to *be* when there are so many potential distractions. This is where the mystical gets trampled by daily *doings*.

You may be thinking, "Walk a mystical path while wearing practical shoes!?" (Cue internal snort and eye roll.) I don't know about you, but there are times that just doesn't seem possible to me. You might think, "Yeah, right – mystical *and* practical – not in my world!" As for me, most of my day is tied up with the practical responsibilities of caring for my family, our menagerie of animals (including daily mucking of three horse stalls), chairing a non-profit board, and my professional work. You may not have my daily list, but I know you have your own list of personal and professional tasks needing attention.

Like I do, you may squeeze in some meditation, yoga, or a walk as part of your daily spiritual practice. Fantastic! But then your day takes over, and where's that inner Zen when a cranky customer gets on your last nerve or when your screaming child is tired and hungry? You might even berate yourself for not staying centered in the moment. *Deep sigh!*

But *what if* those moments are the mystical path? *What if* remaining open to the mystical amid the chaos, challenges, and pain is a spiritual practice? *What if* it's more about being present to what is than transcending your current reality?

Energetically, your spiritual connection correlates with the seventh (crown) chakra. The energetic goals of this chakra are consciousness, understanding, awareness, and a love for all. Being present in the moment and becoming more aware of your internal and external responses to situations and others is a spiritual practice.

It includes staying curious, thus aiding your greater understanding. *Why do I get defensive and blame my husband whenever we discuss money? From what subconscious beliefs am I operating? What is there in my history that triggers those disempowered thoughts?*

It encompasses bringing greater consciousness to the situation. *How can I become aware of my thoughts before I get emotionally triggered? How can I release subconscious, self-sabotaging beliefs? How can I practice more love and compassion towards myself and my husband?*

Greater consciousness is the mystical path. It's that simple. (Notice I didn't say easy.) Staying present and seeking to create awareness and understanding is the way to change your inner truth to one more aligned with your Spiritual Source. However, in the moment, it can be hard to remember to stay present.

You may have learned that the mystical and practical are divided. It helps to acknowledge that the duality between your life and the mystical is a myth. Everyone and everything in the universe consist of energy and exchange energy all the time. As such, you are a part of that Whole. There is no separation. All aspects of your life and work

are a part of the mystical path. You are an Infinite Being that is walking your mystical path every day, even as you attend to the practical details of your life.

You may be asking, “Is there a difference between mystical and spiritual?” When you experience the Divine, you step onto the *mystical path*. This may show up as inspiration, intuitive insight, a heartfelt moment, experiencing beauty, or a sense of oneness with another being. Using spiritual practices as stepping stones, mystics follow a sacred footpath connected to Spiritual Source. The *practical shoes* in the title of this book are symbolic of everyday spiritual practices that connect you to your Spiritual Source. Along the path, you will encounter many mystical moments.

Do you really need a spiritual practice? Absolutely you do! Maybe you're stumbling through life and can't figure out which shoe goes on which foot, let alone how to make time to put one spiritual foot in front of the other. Perhaps you need to set some boundaries with one or more people creating obstacles for you on your path. Instead of walking your path, you're running in circles. Or you have a vision of skipping happily down your path, but you've never learned how to skip.

A spiritual practice will help you clarify what's essential to your soul and help you navigate challenges on your life path. You will be better able to determine when you need to veer off your current path and when you need to stop taking detours. You'll discover your inner compass and learn how to use it to find your personal True North. You'll deepen your relationship with your Spiritual Source and reveal your sacred light. Your Source is always available to illuminate your way forward. Best of all, you will metaphorically know which pair of shoes to wear for all your mystical occasions.

So, ask yourself, how are your figurative shoes fitting? Are your feet comfortable, or are you getting bunions?

In the following chapters, I will explore ways to reframe beliefs about what is a mystical path and how you can step into the perfect shoes designed to help you walk a mystical path toward a greater connection with your Spiritual Source.



CHAPTER 1: BAREFOOT IN THE GRASS

Have you ever had one of those days when it feels like your head is orbiting the Earth? As I write, it's been over three years since the global pandemic began. All kinds of crazy energies are floating around from this event and other national and world events. It's evident in nearly every culture around the world – economic issues, political strife, social unrest, and geo-political aggression – just to name a few. I'm beginning to think that most people are completely disconnected from their bodies, and their heads are lost in space – myself included! Whether there's a global pandemic or not, walking around disconnected from your body and Mother Earth is a sure way to remain in chaos emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, and energetically.

Mother Earth is embodied in the goddess Gaia and is the archetype for the first (root) chakra. Your feet are energetically governed by the root chakra as well. As an earth goddess, Gaia can teach you how to stay grounded in daily routines while keeping in step with the spiritual aspects of your life.

Being grounded means having your feet firmly planted in real life and knowing your spiritual path lies in what you are doing right now. As a spiritual being having a human experience, you can infuse the mundane tasks of everyday living with spiritual meaning by recognizing that each conscious step you take energetically connects you to Mother Earth. Each task you do is an opportunity to honor Her and yourself for the greater good.

In some traditions, Gaia is considered the primordial Great Mother. No matter your gender identification, Gaia can help you connect to your nurturing nature. Gaia is helpful, supportive, and giving. She is dependable and goes about her business with practical warmth. She is the ultimate *keep your feet on the ground* goddess.

If you are in a helping profession, you likely already resonate spiritually with Gaia. However, all humans, no matter what their work, have this capacity. Even if you are an accountant, you tap into Gaia whenever you take care of your children, support your elderly parents, help a client, or comfort a friend.

Gaia consciousness is another way to be in a spiritual relationship with Earth. You may be a scientist, engineer, architect, activist, or ecologist working to improve our planet's health. You also engage with Gaia consciousness when you recycle, drive an electric car, use LED lighting, compost, replace energy-sucking appliances, use passive solar energy, and make conscious food choices. Basically, you do things that help Earth. The need for better caretaking of our planet is critical and is a deeply spiritual practice.

There are other ways to connect with Gaia as well. When I was a kid, I remember going barefoot in the summer much of the time. I loved having bare feet and feeling all the sensations – the hot pavement, the cool grass, the grit of dirt under the soles of my

feet, the squish of mud between my toes, the warm flow of gutter water. (“Ewww! Gutter water!” Yeah, those were different times.) The point is that, thanks to my bare feet, I was in the moment. I was present in my body. It was Earth Magic - a mystical Gaia moment!

How can you tap into Earth Magic? Try these simple things. You may already be connecting with Gaia without really being aware of it.

1. Take a walk in nature.
2. Sit in the warm sun.
3. Walk barefoot in the grass.
4. Hug a tree.
5. Sit quietly beside a lake or stream.
6. Build a sandcastle.

The possibilities are endless. The key is to stay present with your experience. I know. Staying in the moment is no small thing! The mind is a trickster and repeatedly wanders into past and future landscapes rather than staying present. Work, the grocery store, school, laundry, housework –so many things can take you on a mental walkabout that is likely to create stress and fear and lead you further from your spiritual destination.

Be gentle with yourself. You won't be able to stop your mind from wandering. It's normal. However, refocusing your mind in the present moment is a spiritual practice called mindfulness. You may do this a thousand times a minute. Some days it will be more challenging than others to stay mindful. It doesn't matter; what does matter is the practice. Through practice, you will get better at it. Whew! What a relief, right? As you

get better at it, your connection with Gaia will deepen energetically and spiritually. See? Now you're an Earth Mystic!

Gaia energy is grounding. She is embodied in Planet Earth. She has a physical presence. When I do my morning yoga, I am spiritually connecting with Gaia. I am aware of my physicality. I am mindfully embodied. I am grounding my energy. Are you aware of your body when you exercise, walk, or do other physical activities? We often aren't, myself included. But even noticing for a moment is a mystical practice. Any conscious physical movement can be spiritual when done mindfully. When you consciously exercise, do physical labor, or otherwise engage your body, you connect with Gaia spiritually.

Gaia is very accessible in this way. It's more about being aware of when you are connecting with her. Obviously, you can't be mindful of her all the time. Our human minds just won't stay focused that long, but you can bring moments of mysticism into your daily routines.

For instance, focus on the act of folding laundry. Notice how the fabric feels in your hands, the differences in colors, the temperature of clothes just out of the dryer. When preparing food, take a moment to observe the textures, colors, and scents. When weeding the garden, feel the weeds and soil between your fingers, notice the smell of the dirt, look at the variation in colors. These are a few specific ideas, but any task can become a mindful practice.

Set your intention to be present with Gaia for a few moments every day. Commit to activities that you wish to transform into mindful, sacred acts. Then practice embracing your inner Earth Mystic with everyday actions.