

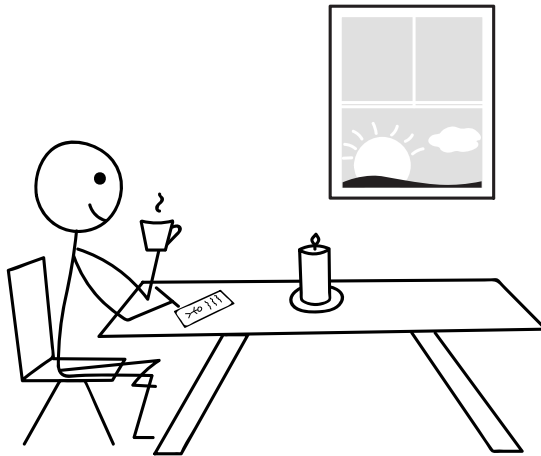
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## Morning Minutes

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Caring for myself is not self-indulgence. It is self-preservation.  
And that is an act of political warfare.

—AUDRE LORDE



Do you know how most Americans wake up? They jolt awake to an alarm, flip on bright lights, reach for their electronic devices, then dive directly into their day's activities and responsibilities. They check email and texts, scan social feeds and news headlines to see what they might have missed while they slept. Seconds after their feet hit the floor, they switch on the television or radio to hear the familiar prattle of morning-show hosts or the dire pronouncements of news anchors; they turn on loud, hyper-intense music or hop on treadmills to get their blood pumping. Others jump into productive tasks, returning emails and calls, responding to requests for information, finishing up last-minute assignments before they have to go to work.

Typically, before most U.S. adults have had their first cup of coffee, their bodies are already in a state of high alert. Their bloodstreams are awash in an inflammatory cascade of cortisol and adrenaline. Their brains are flooded with new information, buzzing with new things to think, do, and react to.

As a Healthy Deviant, you're going to do your morning a bit differently. For your sanity, for your health, and for the benefit of everything you hold dear, you are going to consciously reclaim the first few moments of your day—for you. Rather than abruptly throwing some big industrial on-off lever into the “ON” position, you're going to turn your delicate dials at a pace your body and brain can handle. And for that, you will be richly rewarded, because from here on out, every single part of your day is going to go better.

The Morning Minutes practice is a simple, three-minute, day-starting routine that will help you stand strong in the face of whatever challenges, stresses, temptations, and consciousness-shutdowns the mass-culture machine has to throw at you today. If you are going to initially dabble with just one Renegade Ritual, I would start with this one, because it will give you an immediate sense of how one simple act of Healthy Deviance can create a wedge between you and the unconscious, automatic habits that hold most in their sway.

Waking more gently lets you take advantage of the important theta-brain-wave state and ramp up more gradually toward demanding tasks. Regularly adhering to a Morning Minutes practice also helps you build self-efficacy, develop mindfulness and equanimity, and start the day on your own terms. So let's do this thing!

## Morning Minutes Basics

### HOW?

- First thing on rising, before you do anything else (especially looking at your phone), choose any low-key, feel-good activity and just enjoy

it for at least three minutes, or for as long as you find rewarding and doable (see more step-by-step tips on the next page).

- Before and during your Morning Minutes practice, avoid all exposure to electronics, media, and other sensory distractions or stressors. No email, texts, social media, or news until your body and mind have had a chance to come gradually and peacefully into their relaxed waking state.
- Some good Morning Minutes practice options include meditation, yoga, stretching, reading poetry or wisdom literature, journaling, or playing a musical instrument (see list below for more options).
- Consider using the last few moments of your practice to set your intentions for the day and visualize how you want it to go or to reflect on the things you are most grateful for.

## WHY?

- Preserve and take advantage of the valuable “twilight” theta-brainwave state that exists between waking and sleeping—a highly suggestible state associated with insight, creativity, healing, lucidity, and deep awareness.
- Reduce the alarm response of the sympathetic nervous system and associated inflammatory cortisol spike.
- Spare your mind from exposure to stressful, distracting inputs and outside agendas when it is at its most impressionable.
- Build your capacity for self-regulation and your sense of self-efficacy (the belief that you can do what you set out to do).
- Start your day on your own terms (rather than in reaction to outside forces).
- Build your “savoring” muscles—helping you develop the neurocircuitry for experiencing and registering positive, pleasurable experiences and harvesting the downstream dopamine rewards (see research by Eric Garland, PhD, on how savoring works to counter unhealthy addictive tendencies).<sup>32</sup>
- Establish an early state of mindfulness and equanimity, making it easier to retain and reclaim that state later in the day (during your Ultradian Rhythm Breaks, for example).
- Claim an early window of opportunity to establish your autonomy and identity as a Healthy Deviant and to carry that sense of sovereignty with you as you go out to face the Unhealthy Default Reality.

- Notice barriers and attitudes that may be undoing other healthy intentions.

### STEP-BY-STEP PRACTICE TIPS

- Wake to a pleasant, non-jarring signal or sound, ideally from something that is *not* your smartphone. I prefer Now & Zen’s progressive-chime based alarm clocks and light-based, sunrise-mimicking alarm clocks (like Philips Wake-Up Light, Lumie Bodyclock Active Wake-Up Light, and MOSCHE Sunrise Alarm Clock), most of which also have audible-alarm backups), but low-key, wake-to-music options can work, too—just be sure you can easily turn off, turn over, cover up, or otherwise block any light-emitting displays.
- Go directly to your practice area, keeping house lights low, if possible. If you’re a person who loves coffee, hot tea, or water first thing, feel free to make your preferred morning beverage to enjoy during your practice.
- Avoid all interaction with complex electronics, digital devices, media (including radio, television, and newspapers)—and ideally, any complex interactions with other people—until your Morning Minutes practice is complete.
- Light a candle (unscented, natural beeswax is my far-and-away favorite).
- Set a timer for a minimum of three minutes, take a breath, and settle yourself.
- Choose any feel-good activity (see list of suggestions below) and enjoy it for the period of time you have chosen, or for as long as desirable or doable.
- Close your practice with three deep, energizing breaths. While slowly inhaling and exhaling, consider creating a brief “snapshot” visualization or holding an intention for how you want your day to go.
- Notice how your three-minute investment in your own wellbeing changes your outlook and energy.
- Notice how you did—or did not do—the practice (“remembering that how you do anything is how you do everything”).
- Track immediate and longer-term effects.

## OPTIONAL MORNING MINUTES ACTIVITIES

What you do during your Morning Minutes window is entirely up to you. What's important is that you do it for a minimum of three blissful minutes.

- Look into the candle and zone out.
- Waft some essential oils around and breathe deeply.
- Pick and read a wisdom card or a short passage in a wisdom book.
- Meditate, pray, or do breathing exercises.
- Step outside to see the sunrise or watch the clouds go by.
- Listen to birds or the rustle of wind through an open window.
- Do yoga, stretch, use a foam roller, or massage your hands and feet.
- Pet your dog or cat.
- Play a musical instrument.
- Doodle in sketchbook.
- Write a little poem or pen a love note to yourself or someone else.
- Envision one thing you'd like to see happen.
- Think about three things you're grateful for, taking one deep breath for each.
- If you are doing (or dabbling with) the Healthy Deviant Adventure program, review today's passage, peruse your Daily Deviance Journal Pages from recent days, or catch up with your Healthy Deviant Adventure Tracker.
- Just sit there, do nothing, and notice how that feels.

Remember, your minimum commitment for this practice is three minutes. You can go longer if you like (hey, if you can carve out the time, take a half hour or more!), but let three minutes be your base plan. Even at three minutes, you might be tempted to skip this apparently self-indulgent and unproductive practice. After all, you've got things to do! You are busy and important! People are relying on you!

All the more reason why this three minutes matters so mightily. How much will everyone in your world benefit from a saner and stronger you? Plenty. Keep in mind that *this* is how you reclaim your power to choose.

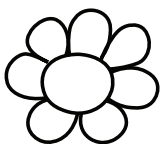
*This* is how you train your system to do something beyond the habitual and out of the ordinary.

You're going to be doing a lot of that down the road. But the path starts right here with this small, seemingly innocuous yet revolutionary act. This is your moment.

## So enjoy. For three. Whole. Minutes.

When you are done with your practice, blow out your candle. Take one more deep breath as you watch the smoke waft gently upward. When you feel complete with the experience, mark it off on your Daily Deviance Journal Page.

### Smell This



I am a big fan of plant-based aromatherapy for reasons both scientific and sensory, so I encourage you to consider using this powerful body-mind tool as an adjunct to all your Renegade Rituals.

Our olfactory sense evokes instantaneous responses in the limbic centers of our brains, prompting quick, measurable shifts in mood and mental state. If you're interested in the science, there's plenty to review.<sup>33</sup> But even if you're skeptical, I would invite you to give aromatherapy with organic, plant based oils, essences, or infusions a try.

I have used most major brands of oils and flower essences at various times, and have enjoyed them all. I have, for many years, used and loved Katie Hess's Lotus Wei products. And I have recently also fallen in love with Jenny Pao's Nectar Essences "Breathe Me" blends. I like beginning my Morning Practice with her "Energy-Mood Boost" blend (citrusy). I often start my Ultradian Rhythm Breaks with her "Focus Brain Boost" blend (spearminty), and my Nighttime Wind-Down Ritual with her "Sleep" blend (lavendery).

**Reflection:** Did you do your Morning Minutes practice? Yes? Great! How did it feel? Did you not do it? Hmmm, interesting ... notice why. Write down the reason (or reasons).

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Both Lotus Wei and Nectar Essences integrate vibrational healing strategies and combine flower essences with essential oils, something that I find elevates these remedies over many other essential oil and aromatherapy products. But you can use whatever products you enjoy in any way you like. For the purposes of my Renegade Rituals, I tap just a drop or two out of an oil or essence blend on one palm, rub my hands together to release the aroma, then cup them in front of my face and inhale deep and slow. Ahhh.

My whole body-mind responds with an immediate focusing, enlivening, or settling response, depending on what I'm after. The combined experience is one of amplified pleasure (a great savoring practice). And with repeated use and association, I've found the aromas alone become powerful triggers for the ritualized responses I've trained my body-mind to expect. I can use that to my advantage for a quick sniff before a stressful meeting or as an alternative to an extra cup of mid-work session coffee.

If you don't have access to good essential oils, experiment with scratching the skin of a lemon or orange, cutting open a cucumber, or crushing a mint tea bag and smelling that instead.

## Steal This Practice!

I developed my Morning Minutes ritual by co-opting (and then customizing) an idea from my younger sister, Andrea, a yoga teacher. Many years ago, having recently gotten her five-hundred-hour yoga-instructor certification from Kripalu, she had committed herself to doing thirty minutes of yoga each morning. It was an ambitious goal, so within a week or two, she found she was struggling (and often failing) to make that commitment work in the context of her daily life.

So instead of continuing to struggle or simply giving up, she radically re-designed the scope of her commitment. Her new plan was to simply unroll her mat, light some incense, kneel, and calmly taking three deep breaths. From there, she had the option of doing as much or as little yoga as she chose.

Of course, once she got to her mat, smelled the incense, settled in, and took her first breath, she often felt like stretching into a few asanas. From there, she might feel inspired to spend significantly more time on the mat, sometimes exceeding her original thirty-minute goal.

Envyng both the beautiful experience my sister was giving herself, and the results she was getting, I tried copying her technique for a while. Over time, though, I realized that on some mornings, I didn't really want to do yoga. I was called to journal or meditate or play my guitar instead.

For me, the central appeal and core value of the practice lay in simply taking the first few minutes of the day for myself. So I expanded the range of potential practice activities to include anything calm, peaceful, and pleasurable that happened to appeal to me on that particular day.

I decided my minimum daily commitment would be three minutes, and I've been doing it ever since—sometimes for an hour or longer. On the rare days when I miss my Morning Minutes practice, I feel the difference, and I'm inspired to return to it, pronto. So, don't be shy about improvising with your own three-minute ritual—and creating your own versions of any of the suggested exercises or practices in this book.

Remember—the goal is not for you to comply with any one set of steps or parameters that I prescribe; it's for you to establish healthy patterns you can enjoy for a lifetime. This simple, quiet, three-minute space is where all of your new patterns take root. Before the demands of the day and the Unhealthy Default Reality get the better of you.