

# The Power of Family Rituals

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Over the years I've had numerous conversations about the benefits of family rituals. This one in particular has been very helpful.

## **Saying Goodbye**

This first ritual is one very personal to me. It is based on helping with the mourning process when someone passes away but can be used in a variety of other transitions. It is very simple. When a loved one (person or even pet) passes away there is a finality that can be overwhelming. Often there are many things that went unsaid or new insights or experiences you would like to share. One way to deal with this is to write a letter. The ritual for the family goes like this: Soon after the funeral rites, whatever they may be, are completed the family (including friends if appropriate) each write a letter to the deceased saying anything they feel necessary, good or bad. The letters are sealed and then the family assembles and the letters are burned in an urn or other container outside. The letters are not shared unless someone chooses to share theirs privately. Absolute privacy needs to be present so each member can say what they need. Everyone watches as the smoke containing their thoughts and words drifts up and away. This ritual combines both a shared and private experience. It can be repeated as a group or privately as feels necessary and appropriate.

One caution. This involves fire so be very careful not to burn anything down. I recommend doing it outside rather than in a fireplace. Watching the smoke drift away is an important part of the experience.

This ritual can also be used to say good bye to the old year and bring in the new. It can be used to send thoughts and wishes to countries and people in trouble. It is a way a family can gather and share in a unique experience.

