Soil, Stars, and Sexuality: Regeneration as an Embodied Spiritual Practice

Toya L Walker

The garden gives me a place to ask what it means to belong to a living world. In Boston, where my growing space occupies roughly 1,000 square feet, that question takes practical form. There is soil to tend, water to carry, a season to understand, and a body doing the work. My grandparents cultivated land in Jamaica. Returning to Jamaica helped me recognize how deeply that relationship to land mattered to my own life. Growing in the city became a way to carry that relationship forward under different conditions.

In my book, Growing in a Concrete Jungle: From Soil to Soul, I approach the garden through food, cultural memory, everyday wellbeing, and seed stewardship. Here, I extend those concerns into a spiritual question: What changes when we understand regeneration as a practice that includes our bodies, our relationships, and our capacity to receive care?

My argument is that regeneration becomes an embodied spiritual practice when tending life teaches us to attend to the conditions that sustain it. Soil invites responsibility for what supports growth. Stars invite awareness of time and of a world beyond our control. Sexuality invites reflection on desire, dignity, intimacy, and bodily autonomy. Together, these themes offer a way to consider our overall being: how we work, rest, remember, connect, and make room for change.

This is a reflection rooted in one garden and one family history. Its spiritual meaning emerges through interpretation and practice. The garden provides concrete experiences through which I can think about the sacred without claiming that every grower shares my beliefs.

Soil: care begins beneath the surface

A harvest draws the eye toward what is visible. Soil asks us to consider what makes that visibility possible. A tomato can become the centerpiece of a meal, while the conditions supporting its roots remain largely unnoticed. My garden continually brings me back to those conditions. What am I adding? What am I taking away? What will support this space through another season?

These are also spiritual questions. A person can appear productive while the conditions of their life are being depleted. We can praise achievement while overlooking hunger, loneliness, exhaustion, or the absence of support. Thinking from the soil upward changes the order of attention. It asks us to care about foundations before demanding more growth.

In the book, holistic care means attending to the grower, the food, the soil, the surrounding habitat, and the community. The person carrying the watering can belongs within that account. A garden that consistently exceeds the grower's available energy needs a different plan. Recognizing that limit is an act of care, and it can become a

spiritual discipline: the willingness to acknowledge what a living being actually needs.

Compost offers another image for this discipline. Plant material can enter a process through which it contributes to future growing. Spiritually, that process helps me consider how experience can be revisited and given a different place in our lives. A disappointment may become a question. A mistaken assumption may become useful knowledge. A season's notes may change the next season's decisions.

The analogy has limits. Human pain does not automatically become wisdom, and people should never be required to make suffering useful. Some losses remain losses. Regeneration, understood ethically, leaves room for grief and for experiences that cannot be repaired. It asks what care is possible now, without making renewal a condition of a person's worth.

My record of Egyptian walking onions makes this humility concrete. I planted 60 and observed 18 emerging. That count did not establish why the others had not appeared, or whether additional growth would come later. It gave me an observation to revisit. I could remain attentive without inventing certainty. The same patience matters in spiritual life, where an unanswered question can deserve continued companionship.

Stars: living within a larger rhythm

The stars in this title stand for the larger world within which our days unfold. They suggest orientation, wonder, and the experience of looking beyond the immediate task. The night sky can remind us that our schedules occupy only a small part of time. In a life organized by deadlines, that shift in scale can be spiritually significant.

My garden has taught me to translate intention into a local season. Jamaican growing knowledge carries meaning for me in Boston, but its timing cannot simply be transferred. Warmth, light, weather, and the particular growing space shape what becomes possible. A plant familiar to my household still needs conditions suited to its growth. Belonging requires attention to where we are.

That lesson helps me understand rhythm as a relationship between repetition and responsiveness. A calendar gives structure. Observation tells me when to adjust it. A care practice becomes more useful when it can respond to what is happening, including what is happening in the person who practices it.

By rhythmic tone, I mean the felt quality of that relationship: the pace of a day, the room between tasks, the movement between effort and rest, the way a familiar action gathers meaning through return. A rushed visit to the garden and an unhurried one can involve the same chores yet leave different impressions. Rhythm concerns how we inhabit time as well as how we measure it.

Lunar imagery can belong in this reflection as a language of change. The moon's changing appearance offers an image through which someone might contemplate emergence, fullness, withdrawal, or renewal. That symbolism does not establish that a person's bodily cycle must synchronize with the moon. A spiritual metaphor can help us notice our lives while leaving biological claims to appropriate evidence.

Nor does every cycle end in a return to its beginning. Each garden season arrives with changed conditions and accumulated knowledge. Human lives also contain transitions that alter what return can mean. Aging, migration, grief, and changing responsibilities can transform a familiar practice. The spiritual task is to recognize the present season rather than force it to repeat an earlier one.

Sexuality: dignity within embodied life

Sexuality belongs in this conversation because our bodies participate in how we experience intimacy, desire, vulnerability, and connection. A spiritual account of overall being should make room for those experiences. It should also make room for a person's right to privacy, their uncertainty, and their choice about whether or how to share this part of life.

I use sexuality here to open reflection on embodied relationship, including sexual orientation, pleasure, consent, and the meanings people attach to closeness. These experiences vary. Some people understand them through religious commitments; others through personal ethics, community, or another language of belonging. A person can also experience little or no sexual attraction and still have a rich spiritual life.

An ethic of regeneration asks whether a relationship supports the people within it. Does it permit honest communication? Can a boundary be expressed and respected? Is care reciprocal? Is someone allowed to change their mind? These questions make consent central to any account of sexuality as spiritual practice. Sacred language must never override a person's autonomy.

The garden helps me think about conditions, attention, and responsiveness, but plants cannot provide an adequate model for human consent. People speak, refuse, negotiate, and define their own relationships. Their desires cannot be read from a metaphor. The value of the garden analogy lies in the questions it prompts about care; its limit lies in the distinct dignity and agency of persons.

Pleasure deserves thoughtful attention within that ethic. Enjoying a meal, a flower's color, a familiar scent, or freely chosen intimacy can lead us to consider what it means to receive something with appreciation. Pleasure need not prove usefulness to deserve a place in life. It does, however, ask for attention to the wellbeing and freedom of everyone involved.

Regeneration also invites a wider understanding of generativity. A person can sustain life through teaching, friendship, making art, tending a garden, preserving knowledge, or caring for a community. Spiritual worth does not depend on fertility or parenthood. The capacity to contribute and belong takes many forms, and the freedom to choose among them belongs within embodied dignity.

Our cycles and the permission to listen

The garden makes it difficult to ignore change. Spring preparation differs from summer care. Autumn brings overlapping work: harvesting, saving seed, returning suitable materials, and preparing for what comes next. Winter gives planning and review a different place. A useful practice recognizes these changes in its demands.

Our bodily lives also include patterns of energy, appetite, sleep, desire, and recovery. For some people, menstruation is part of that experience. Its meaning may include spiritual reflection, discomfort, inconvenience, or little particular significance. No single interpretation should be imposed. Bodies deserve attention in their specificity, including when their patterns are irregular or change over time.

To connect spirituality with our cycles, I begin with permission to notice. What is my capacity today? What needs care? What can wait? What kind of company would help? These questions can become part of an ordinary reflective practice. They do not require a perfect pattern or a calendar that explains every feeling.

The book asks growers to include their own capacity in the garden journal. That invitation can extend into embodied spiritual reflection. Alongside a note about watering or flowering, a person might record that the task felt manageable, that they needed help, or that they had taken on too much. Over time, those observations can inform a more humane routine.

Listening also requires material support. People cannot always rearrange work around fatigue, afford nutritious food, or find a safe place to rest. A spirituality attentive to cycles therefore has a communal dimension. It asks how schedules, shared responsibilities, accessible spaces, and practical assistance can make care possible. Personal awareness matters, and so do the conditions in which a person must live.

Overall being is relational in this sense. The state of my body affects what I can do in the garden. The design of the garden affects what that work asks of my body. The people around me affect whether help is available. Spiritual reflection deepens when it holds these relationships together.

Ancestry, food, and the practice of belonging

Growing Jamaican callaloo and red okra in Boston gives cultural memory a practical place in my garden. A familiar food can connect a growing decision to a meal, and a meal to a story. That connection becomes especially meaningful when it is carried across climates and adapted to the conditions of a new home.

My grandparents' relationship to Jamaican land helps shape why I grow. It does not authorize me to speak for every Jamaican family or to claim a single shared spirituality. The meaning I draw from that history is situated and personal. Honoring it means keeping the people and particulars visible, rather than turning ancestry into an abstract symbol.

In that spirit, the garden can become a place of remembrance. Choosing a crop, learning its needs, preparing its harvest, and sharing what I have learned can keep a relationship

active. Spiritual continuity takes form through repeated acts of attention. It can include adaptation: a different planting window, a smaller scale, a changed method that allows the relationship to continue where I live now.

Sharing carries responsibilities of its own. My book encourages growers to ask what someone needs before offering support, to credit knowledge, and to respect the work behind expertise. Those practices matter spiritually because they make reciprocity concrete. A gift should leave room for refusal. A story should retain its source. Community requires agreements about who will carry the work.

An urban garden also exists within unequal access to land, time, resources, and food. Its meaning grows stronger when those conditions remain visible. A small garden can offer food, learning, beauty, and connection while leaving larger structural needs unresolved. An embodied spirituality can value what happens in that space and remain accountable to what is needed beyond it.

A practice of returning

Regeneration becomes a spiritual practice through actions we can return to: observing a plant, making a meal, asking for help, respecting a boundary, recording an uncertainty, or resting when the work must wait. Repetition gives those actions a rhythm. Reflection helps that rhythm respond to changing needs.

The sequence at the heart of my book is simple: Observe. Experiment. Learn. Adapt. Repeat. In spiritual life, that sequence can support humility. Observation asks us to notice before deciding. Learning asks us to remain open. Adaptation asks us to change a practice when it no longer serves the life entrusted to it.

Soil, stars, and sexuality bring different dimensions of that life into view. Soil asks what sustains us. Stars ask how we orient ourselves within time and mystery. Sexuality asks how we inhabit desire and relationship with dignity. Their connection lies in the quality of attention we bring to being alive.

I return to my Boston garden carrying family history, unfinished questions, and the limits of my own body. The work remains ordinary: tending, harvesting, making choices, and trying again. Within those actions, I find a spiritual possibility. We can practice belonging by caring for the conditions of life, including our own. We can let our rhythms teach us when to act, when to receive, and when to make room for another season.

SOURCE NOTE

This essay draws on Toya L Walker's Growing in a Concrete Jungle: From Soil to Soul—An Urban Garden Guide and Workbook for Northeastern Growers, particularly its discussions of family history, soil care, seasonal observation, cultural crops, holistic practice, garden journaling, and community support. It develops those gardening themes into a reflective argument about spirituality, embodiment, and sexuality.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Toya L Walker is a Boston educator and urban grower whose work connects gardening, Jamaican family heritage, cultural foodways, and everyday care. She is the author of Growing in a Concrete Jungle: From Soil to Soul and grows under the name Organically Grown Queen.