

# THE WARDROBE WITHIN: JOURNEY INTO FASHION VIA SPIRITUALITY

REVASTRA BY BHAWANA PINGALI  
& SLOW FASHION MOVEMENT

 REVASTRA

SLOW FASHION MOVEMENT

# PREFACE

A wardrobe is not just a collection of clothes. It is the quiet archive of our lives, storing fragments of memory, belonging and identity. Within each lies a story waiting to be rediscovered – a map stitched from a cloth, practice, ritual or emotion.

In this ebook, fashion writer, author and yoga teacher Bhawana Pingali, gives a peek into her book *The Art of Decluttering: Ancient Practices of Modern Living* [Penguin Random House / Ebury Press] and her work with spiritual fashion platform Revastra. It invites us to look beyond fabric and form to go into the unseen threads that weave healing and meaning into what we wear. Its chapters talk about fashion, spirituality, earth, sacredness, decluttering, healing, reduce-reuse-recycle, rituals, practices and more. They are both gentle resistance and sacred offering – a reminder that in reimagining our wardrobes, we may also reimagine ourselves.

The sections are interspersed with art by Bhawana herself. Edited with care by Rachel Humby and designed by Chloé Arfeuillère, this ebook opens a contemplative space within the global Slow Fashion Movement. It shares how garments are not consumed but cherished; not discarded but remembered. It is an exploration of how fashion can be more than a trend. It's a spiritual practice, a mindful ritual and a path toward self and collective transformation.



**“We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.”**

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J., French Jesuit, Catholic priest, scientist, paleontologist, philosopher, mystic and teacher



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**“As consumers, we have so much power  
to change the world by just  
being careful in what we buy.”**

Emma Watson, actor and activist



# CHAPTER 1

**Fashion & Spirituality – When Fabric Meets Soul**

“I couldn’t spin yarn or weave a yardage but decided to stitch leftovers, instead. I used some white, cambric cotton fabric, like what Nannamma (paternal grandmother in Telugu, a language from South India) wore. Dip-dyed it in an infusion of malli and kamala puvvulu (jasmine and lotus flowers), which almost dramatically whispered, ‘. . . and above the muddy water, my friend, my vanity rises . . . but below the elemental water, my friend, my humility roots . . . and yet in this duality of polar opposites, I never once suspect my own power . . .’ I watched the textile simmer with the flowers. It was a tribute to her resilience. Then I sun-dried the whitish panel in my balcony and sat under it like a rabbit. Later, I attached the piece to another leftover blue fabric – a zig-zag tie-dye that I picked up from Jaipur (Rajasthan) – representing my alter ego of a consumeristic urban-nomad. Adding a few hand stitched, fabric origami (orinuno) flowers to its pallu ended the story and stood for my love for everything Japanese and wannabe-globally evolved. Wearing the sari the split way later with a white ribbon-applique shirt gave it a mixed nativity. I also requested a sari lover friend to wear it her way. And a photographer friend captured this beauty on camera. The contentment that came with seeing my handcrafted chera in various avatars (including a Nivi beyond kacchakattu) was immense. It almost felt like a lofty return to what a lot of fashionistas would term as new-age spiritual fashion clothing”.

Chapter 4, Page 118: ‘Can you breathe in this sari?’ Wrapping an unstitched piece of cloth as kacchkattu cheera liberates constriction  
*The Art of Decluttering: Ancient Practices of Modern Living* by Bhawana Pingali [Penguin Random House / Ebury Press]



We know innately that fashion is not just about appearances – it is a reflection of the soul and an outward expression of our daily activities, beliefs and spiritual journey. In this, the convergence of fabric and spirit creates a space where style becomes emotional and intentional, not merely incidental. It ensures that the garments we wear hold the power to communicate meaning and evoke energy.

Yet today, the words ‘fashion’ and ‘spirituality’ often seem like opposites. To many, this pairing appears as an oxymoron – one linked to surface, the other to depth; one concerned with appearance, the other with essence. But a deeper understanding reveals that clothes are much more than mere materials woven or stitched together. They carry our lives, memories, energies and intentions. In doing so, they embody our spiritual being, often without our conscious awareness. It is a fusion of the aesthetic outside with the ascetic within.



It is important to note that this concept goes beyond the familiar visual language of religious attire or 'spiritual fashion' adorned with prints of gods, goddesses, mythological figures, chakras, Sanskrit texts, sacred geometry, inspirational quotes, tantric shapes, shamanic symbols, meditation motifs, yogic wisdom and even interpretations of demons and devils.

Here, when conscious fashion intertwines with practical spirituality, it becomes more than a physical construct – it transforms into a tangible, creative expression of inner growth, ethical responsibility and shared values rooted in purpose. On a broader scale, it cultivates a sense of community among like-minded people and contributes to collective spiritual consciousness. On a personal level, it encourages mindful, ethical choices like selecting organic materials, fair-trade products, sustainable manufacturing, and embracing reduce-reuse-recycle principles. At its core, when fabric meets soul, fashion shifts from mere performance to prayer, serving as a daily reminder of who we are becoming rather than just what we are wearing.

To make this esoteric concept practical, here are some ideas for transforming clothes from material objects into sacred body-mind spaces:

**View clothing as energy fields:**

Every garment we wear carries vibration. Just as ancient traditions regard religious objects such as crosses, idols, prayer beads or sacred ash as spiritually charged through faith, clothing can hold energy that influences our aura and psyche. Take, for example, a monk's robe or khadi fabric woven during India's freedom struggle – they are not merely worn but lived, for both wearer and believer.

*To try:* Hold a garment before wearing it, breathe deeply, and sense its story – the story of its makers – and how it makes you feel, beyond just how it looks.





**Observe your wardrobe as an inner mirror:** Our closets often reflect our emotional landscape and mental state. A long-neglected heap of clothing may mirror neglect of self, emotions and environment. Conversely, a sari draped or a shirt folded with care signifies self-love, respect and presence.

*To try:* Step back and create distance from your wardrobe. Then look at it with fresh eyes. What do you see – clarity or clutter?

**Use garments as vehicles of self-expression:**

Fashion allows us to visually communicate life, spiritual beliefs and values, turning clothing into a personal statement of identity and inner disposition. What we wear can align us with a tribe or community or set us apart. It all depends on belief and perception.

*To try:* Ask yourself: Who do I see when I wear this, and does this reflect my true self or a perceived, inauthentic image? Find ways to reconnect with your ancestral or lost identity by infusing parts of your past, present and future into your garments and accessories.



An article on the now-closed HuffPost Contributor platform (2018)[1] discussed the spiritual side of fashion by CODE Magazine Contributor. It mentioned an exhibition by New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET) and the Costume Institute entitled *Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination* that showcased ecclesiastical utensils, artwork and designer clothing inspired by Roman Catholicism and other religious dogmas. It displayed creations by Versace, Dolce & Gabbana, Valentino, Chanel, Rodarte, Elsa Schiaparelli, Lanvin, Christian Dior, Cristóbal Balenciaga and Madame Grès. The idea was to “explore the limits of the sacred which becomes human and intimate”. The piece suggested that such showcasing could “certainly raise heated debates”. Overall, it bridged art, spirituality and fashion, illuminating the enduring power of Catholic symbolism in contemporary culture. Let us say, this was religion-spirituality-fashion having a moment.



[1] [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-spiritual-side-of-fashion\\_B\\_5A56518AE4B088F20C3958EA](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-spiritual-side-of-fashion_B_5A56518AE4B088F20C3958EA)



In a news story by WWD[2], the entrepreneur Marlene Vargas described spiritual fashion as a “trend (that) is here to stay... it's a movement”. Alongside Alex Naranjo, he founded the L.A.-based chain of metaphysical superstores “House of Intuition”. Vargas believes the now-generation or “children of today” are “seeking something different than traditional religion”. They do not visit ancient places of prayer and expansion like churches. They have more creativity, are connected to the earth and their bodies. That is why both consumption and selling can be transformative for them. Back in India, the urban and semi-urban brigades are almost replicating this behaviour. Secularism drives them, meaning they seek spiritual growth over religious practices. But they need the practices to get back into the spiritual loop – one that may just be in a new form.

[2] [HTTPS://WWW.COM/FASHION-NEWS/FASHION-FEATURES/SPIRITUALITY-IN-FASHION-KANYE-WEST-CRYSTALS-120323367/](https://www.wwd.com/fashion-news/fashion-features/spirituality-in-fashion-kanye-west-crystals-120323367/)

A report called Welcome to the “New Age” of Spiritual Luxury, written by Christopher Morency for High Snobesity[3], called out fashion as a new vessel leading the way in this increasingly spiritualised world. According to Pew Research Center associate Claire Gecewicz, 27% of the US population thinks of themselves as spiritual and not religious. Additionally, about 80% of millennials in the US and UK feel a sense of spirituality. The ones who say their religion is “nothing in particular”, or self-identify as atheist or agnostic (a.k.a. “nones”) amount to about 23% of the US adult population (2018). The story also hyperlinked an article by Huffpost[4] about musicians, rappers, songwriters and composers like Kanye West, Chance the Rapper and FKA twigs using Christian iconography to define 2019. It also talks about how new-age fashion by Gen Z-ers and millennials is becoming closely linked to spirituality according to Boston Consulting Group.



BCG says the group (that will take up approximately 61% of the global personal luxury goods market by 2026) will seek help from spirituality, while the luxury fashion industry will use the same to design and market their products.

[3] [HTTPS://WWW.HIGHSNOBIETY.COM/P/WELCOME-NEW-AGE-SPIRITUAL-LUXURY/](https://www.highsnobesity.com/p/welcome-new-age-spiritual-luxury/)

[4] [HTTPS://WWW.HIGHSNOBIETY.COM/P/KANYE-WEST-RELIGION/](https://www.highsnobesity.com/p/kanye-west-religion/)



**“We are using too many resources to make fresh garments, buying and discarding too fast, things that just don’t simply go away”.**

Kriti Tula, fashion designer of Indian sustainable fashion label Doodlage



# CHAPTER 2

**Earth & Sacredness – Dressing in Rhythm  
with Nature**



Have you ever considered what might happen if we align our daily fashion choices, including how we dress at home, with the sacred rhythms of the natural world?

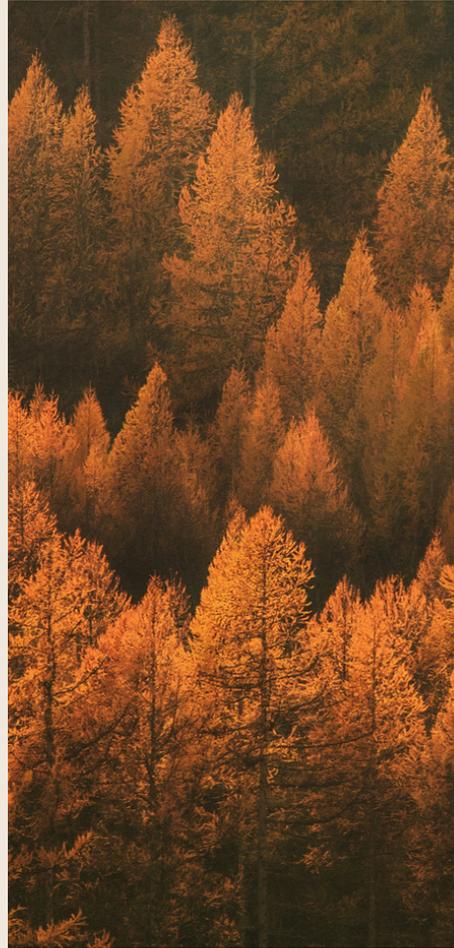
Some believe it can foster harmony, reverence and a deep spiritual connection to the Earth – our first and only true home beyond our bodies. While others may overlook or dismiss this idea, it embodies spirituality by linking personal actions like dressing to the natural world.

This alignment can take many forms: synchronizing daily routines, festivals, seasonal cycles, solstices or equinoxes with our own body-mind energies; or cultivating ecological awareness and stewardship through sacred rituals, practices and ceremonies that bring a sense of sacredness to the ordinary. In fashion, this translates into wearing seasonally appropriate attire; choosing materials, colours and styles that are comfortable for the body, eco-friendly, community-centered and that resonate with natural elements.

Here are some tips for earth-focused slow fashion wellness – both for the self and the planet:

**Build seasonal wardrobes consciously:**

The Earth communicates through animals, plants, trees, soil, climate and seasons. When we attune our fashion choices – such as shape, cut and fabric – to this wisdom, we can thoughtfully shift our wardrobes. Here, ‘seasonal wardrobes’ doesn’t mean adhering to the fashion industry’s Spring-Summer or Autumn-Winter collections; rather, it is about mindfully playing with what you already own. For example, some ancient cultures like India recognize six seasons: Spring (Vasant), Summer (Grishma), Monsoon (Varsha), Autumn (Sharad), Pre-winter (Hemant) and Winter (Shishir). All of these influence how clothing is used regionally. Ultimately, there is no one-size-fits-all fashion blueprint globally.



*To try:* Instead of buying new clothes, experiment with layering or delayering existing garments and fabrics according to your culture and environment.



### **Study sacredness in fibres:**

Natural fabrics such as cotton, silk, khadi, linen and wool (when naturally harvested and handmade) are living textiles and ecosystems. These fibres grow from the soil, and their embellishments and dyes come from plants, roots, flowers and other natural materials. Our skin connects daily with the breath of these fabrics, which carry the lore of nature, animals, plants and humans woven together. Wearing these textiles may emit subtle energetic and cosmic frequencies beyond our conscious understanding. When we honor fashion as part of Earth's heartbeat, we dress in a way that carries the Earth on our bodies.

*To try:* Take a scrap piece of cotton and dip-dye it using natural dyes like tea, turmeric or flower infusions (many tutorial videos are available online). Incorporate this artwork into your wardrobe and observe how it feels on your body.

**Align breath with form:**

Fashion awareness includes allowing your body, mind and wardrobe to breathe together through fabric and form. While we know to wear breathable fabrics like cotton in summer and warmer ones like wool in winter, the shape and fit of clothing also affect us. Can a garment's form constrict or liberate? What happens when we connect the movement of clothing to our breath, as in yoga?



*To try:* Next time you wear very loose or tight clothing, become conscious of how your body feels, moves and breathes. Alternate between the two and take mental notes.



“...it is about fit. No, not the tightness of the fabric but the way it settles and slides on the contours of your body. A sari when draped right, which is neither too tight nor loose, brings ease. Only when it hugs you well do you move with courage. This is probably why several ancient spiritual and religious purists believed that saris when tied tight or other clothing worn tight blocked prana (life force or energy) in our bodies. If you browse, you will find a bunch of yoga and ayurveda experts endorsing this thought. USA and Kerala-based, fourth-generation ayurvedic practitioner Salila Sukumaran says tight clothes create toxin build-up, which in turn can cause physiological and psychological imbalances in your body. Sukumaran endorses comfortable and well fitted clothes for yogic practices. And saris if you can for flow and meditative ease”.

Chapter 4, Page 110: 'Can you breathe in this sari?' Wrapping an unstitched piece of cloth as kacchattu cheera liberates constriction  
The Art of Decluttering: Ancient Practices of Modern Living by  
Bhawana Pingali [Penguin Random House / Ebury Press]

**Explore symbolism and colour in garments:**

Shapes in nature such as leaves, shells, flowers, insects and animals all emit quiet wisdom and power. When these forms are reinterpreted as motifs or designs with culturally significant colours, they carry deep meaning that connects us to traditions and belief systems. For example, in yoga, many ancient Indian philosophies, chakras, days of the week, seasons and planets correspond to specific colours. Wearing clothing aligned with this cosmic system can influence our body-mind connection, according to yogic experts.



*To try:* Study the patterns and emotional effects of colours in clothing. Observe how wearing certain colours at specific times of the day, week or month affects you. Consulting a colour expert, psychologist or yoga teacher can enhance this practice.



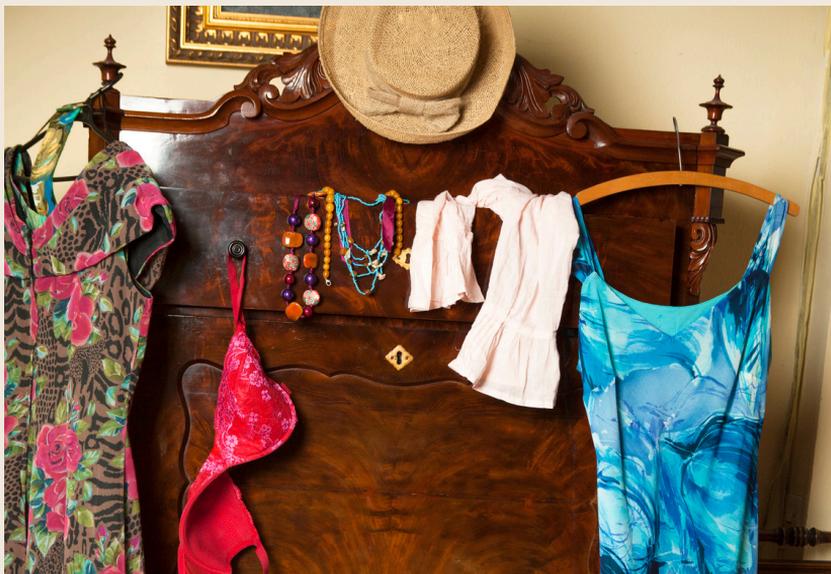
**“Think deeply about each piece you own or are looking to own, and find a memory connected to it. This will encourage you to keep it and wear it longer, repair it when it’s worn, add more stories to it, and might make you more likely to hand it over to a new owner when you’re not in love with it any longer”.**

Simone Agius, founder of sustainable label *Simétrie*



# CHAPTER 3

**Cluttering & Decluttering – What Old Wardrobes  
Teach Us**



“Eta neikiki nijeku pocha. Aaram lagiba. Mu janichi bhala lagu na thiba [Take this and wipe yourself. It’ll feel restful. I know you aren’t feeling good],’ the lady says with a kind smile, while handing over a soft, crumpled, red-checked towel. S was drenched in rain while hopping on to a bus and a shared auto after work. Even before she could say no or ask why ‘restful’, the lady’s handwoven, cotton gamcha floods her with memories of childhood— Tathagaru (grandfather in Telugu), tugs of war, clothes flapping flimsily on lines in backyards, and wrinkled dhobuni ayi (laundry granny in Odiya). Ayi always wore a sari sans blouse and knotted a similar towel as padding on her head to carry a big bundle of clothes. A few days after this, S’s aunt hand stitches a kaftan and a matching neckpiece using similar fabric scrap and stray shells. The ancient, ritualistic wipe becomes a conversation starter in S’s social circles”.

Introduction: Page xiii: *The Art of Decluttering: Ancient Practices of Modern Living* by Bhawana Pingali [Penguin Random House / Ebury Press]



**Today**, the pieces in our wardrobes and how we reduce, reuse and recycle them reveal much about our emotional, psychological and spiritual states. Wardrobes hold memories, emotions, past identities and future selves, making them not just physical spaces, but sacred repositories of personal history, feelings and aspirations.

Many ancient traditions suggest that a cluttered wardrobe often reflects inner chaos, unresolved attachments and mental overload, while a decluttered closet can symbolize clarity and peace. Though exceptions exist, particularly with some mental health conditions, this principle broadly holds

Reusing garments in diverse ways can be a powerful antidote to clutter. Instead of owning five separate pieces for five different activities, using one garment creatively for multiple purposes can transform clutter management into a soulful, mindful practice. Take the example of a gamcha – a simple unstitched cotton towel in India – which can effortlessly become a towel, pillow, scarf, sleep mat, belt or head support for carrying a load. Changing a garment's form on demand allows it to serve varied functions, challenging consumerist habits and fostering a respectful, intentional relationship with possessions. This approach turns everyday wardrobe management into an act of decluttering, self-care and spiritual renewal.

Here are practical methods to identify emotional and body-mind-wardrobe clutter, and to help you declutter with ease and joy:

**Identify emotional clutter in your garments:** Clothing stores stories and accumulated energy. Some garments bring lightness and joy, while others carry heaviness and unresolved emotions. This clutter exists not only in wardrobes but within our minds and bodies. For example, a dress tied to grief or guilt (perhaps linked to loss or betrayal) or a sari left unworn due to neglect or sorrow can harbor emotional residue. Conversely, a garment associated with joyous moments – such as love, weddings, childbirth or graduation – holds uplifting energy. Recognizing and respectfully reusing these garments is the first step toward healing.



*To try:* Practice a ritual of focusing on and thanking clothes that carry both negative and positive emotions. Release the stuck energy by honoring the memory and allowing the garment to move on through donation, recycling or transformation. Remember, release is not rejection.



**Weave body-mind-wardrobe presence into your clothing:**

Every garment has a purpose and stays with you for a reason – unless you choose to hoard it and stagnate its energy. Ask yourself if the garment is aligned with your current energy or present self. This mindful pause echoes the KonMari method: does the garment spark joy? Does it energize or drain you? This quiet self-check is profound.

*To try:* After reflection, keep the garment for a few days or weeks longer and explore creative ways to restyle it to fit your current fashion desires. If it no longer resonates, consider donating or swapping it with someone you love or appreciate.

**Declutter in the morning or evening:**

These transitional times in the day offer natural windows for anchoring intentions. Starting or ending the day with the same act, like decluttering with gratitude, slows the mind and creates closure. This ritual clears the day's energy and opens space for stillness and healing.



*To try:* Identify a sweet spot in your morning or evening routine to declutter one item from your wardrobe, body or mind. Even a simple act like folding a garment mindfully, releasing any attached emotion through conscious breathing, and thanking the garment or your body part can nurture presence and renewal.



**“Fast fashion isn’t free.  
Someone, somewhere, is paying.”**

Lucy Seigle, journalist and broadcaster on environmental issues



# CHAPTER 4

**#RePhilosophy & #FashionHealing – From  
Material Objects to Healing Threads**

There is currently no widely recognized or formal definition for both in either academic or popular sources. The terms do not appear in established philosophical glossaries or dictionaries, nor are they associated with a specific movement, concept or method in mainstream philosophy or healing. They are experiential terms derived from the work of spiritual fashion platform Revastra.

The first one is a conscious process of reunderstanding, rethinking, renewing or redefining one's personal or collective philosophy around reduce-reuse-recycle of clothing, style and wardrobe choices. It emphasises a reflective shift from habitual or consumer-driven approaches to a more mindful, purposeful and value-based fashion perspective.

**Thus, #rephilosophy in fashion signifies an intentional return to the foundational “why?” of personal style, aligning outer appearance with inner evolution, and inviting a thoughtful relationship with the act of dressing.**





The second is about applying the idea in our daily lives through simple 3Rs, 5Rs, 7Rs methods of fashion for looking and feeling good. It then becomes a system of #fashionhealing. This approach includes redefining and using ancient (Indian or other) fashion rituals and practices that were originally slow and earthy in nature. We are encouraged to use them more when struggling to declutter. In other words, it can be used when we are stuck with false fashion identities, personas or images that in turn result in unused, underused or hoarded clothes.

Thus, #fashionhealing refers to the use of fashion and personal style as a conscious tool for self-expression, emotional well-being and psychological healing. It recognises that what is worn can significantly influence mood, confidence and overall mental health, transforming daily dressing into a ritual of self-care and empowerment.

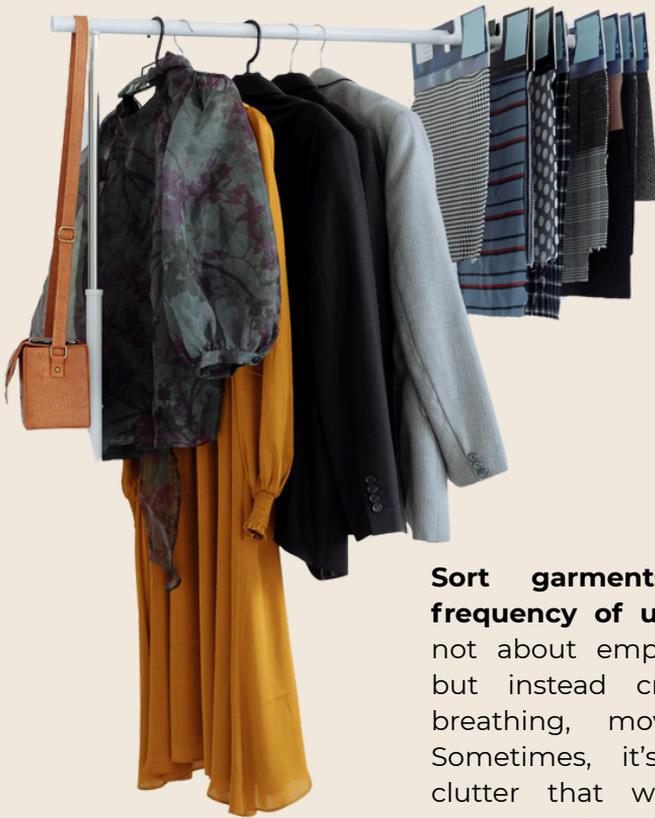


Here are three #fashionhealing suggestions, drawn from #rephilosophy you can try everyday to look good and feel better:

**Dressing meditatively, everyday:**

To many reading it, this point may sound esoteric. But getting dressed is a pause, not a project. It can be turned into a daily moment of contemplation by choosing outfits guided by intuition and emotional needs, not just fads and trends. This ritual grounds the body, cultivates presence and allows for authentic self-expression – transforming dressing into a nourishing ceremony for the mind and soul.

*To try:* Let one item of clothing or accessory from your wardrobe guide you to create a look for the day. It can be a piece of jewellery or a colour. Weave your other items around this single piece and see where it takes you...



**Sort garments according to frequency of use:** Decluttering is not about emptiness or austerity but instead creating space for breathing, moving and being. Sometimes, it's only by facing clutter that we truly begin to declutter. So, create A, B and C categories. 'A' could be for special occasions (Indian, your ethnic or traditional wear, or party/eveningwear). 'B' could be regular wear for work, working out, meeting friends and socialising. That leaves 'C' to be items for sleeping, lounging and generally relaxing at home. Note: you can overlap a few pieces here and there.

*To try:* Reorganise your wardrobe to store these new categories, using boxes or other organisational tools. You do not have to do this overnight. It can be a process over a period of time.

## **Prequel to reducing your clothing:**

- Focus on taking stock of your clothes or saris. Count them. Say “I am grateful to these garments for having served me”.
- Begin the declutter process by saying “I let go of all the energies that no longer serve me for the highest and best”. Write it down a few times.
- Segregate your clothing into three or more piles, e.g. daily, occasional, special, never.
- Put aside your ‘Never’ clothing for donation. Say “Find a new home or a wearer for this garment who will use it joyfully”.
- Check, refold or roll and store your ‘Special’ clothing with small handwritten story notes. Add dry neem leaves that help to ward off insects and stale smells.
- Count your ‘Occasional’ clothes and come up with at least two looks for each (including accessories such as jewellery and shoes). Write the ideas down on a tag and tuck it with each item. This will save time when you’re next in a rush to dress up or feeling uninspired.
- Colour-code your ‘Daily’ pile by rolling and keeping them in full view. You may not wear these every day, but try to shed your discomfort and increase frequency of wear.



**“There is no beauty in the finest cloth if it makes hunger and unhappiness.”**

Mahatma Gandhi, Indian lawyer, anti-colonial activist and political ethicist who employed nonviolent resistance to lead the successful campaign for India's independence from British rule.



# CHAPTER 5

**Rituals & Practices – Everyday Spirituality  
in Fashion**

We've explored how fashion and spirituality can be connected; both vast and profound topics in their own right. Yet it is only when we transform routine actions into meaningful rituals that this connection truly comes alive. Spirituality need not remain abstract or distant; it can become part of everyday living.



"This following of local rituals or practices in cultures, communities and countries is an innate sensibility. A knowing that exists silently everywhere and flows quietly like blood. It is a cognizance thriving inside their people for generations. It is never discussed, documented, questioned or analysed—apart from some of it being mentioned esoterically in various local religious scriptures, texts and epics. It is an 'unspoken' sense of being—something like what British Japanologist and author Beth Kempton uses to describe wabi-sabi, a Japanese philosophy that merges the two words and worlds of wabi and sabi. Wabi is subdued taste (with roots in adjective wabishi—wretched, lonely, poor) and sabi is a patina of antique and elegant simplicity (with roots in sabishi—lonely, lonesome or solitary). Both have a slightly dark connotation. But when they are conjoined, they become serene responsiveness. Kempton says the Japanese (young or old) may not talk of this abstractness but live it every day".

Introduction: Page xxi and xxii: *The Art of Decluttering: Ancient Practices of Modern Living* by Bhawana Pingali [Penguin Random House / Ebury Press]

Here are practices from my book on how to engage with our bodies, minds and garments (like saris) through daily ritual:

**Draping a sari, scarf or stole unusually as a ritual:**

“Talk to yourself once a day, otherwise you may miss meeting an intelligent person in this world” – Swami Vivekananda, Indian monk, philosopher and disciple of Ramakrishna. Similarly, ‘talking’ to or interacting mindfully with an unstitched piece of clothing and then draping it with intention (guided by movement, mantra or breath) can deepen awareness of your body and fashion choices. Techniques such as draping, tucking, folding, pleating and knotting become meditative acts in themselves. For example, tucking the sari between the legs to turn into a bifurcated garment. It travels around the body (sometimes organically) to support it.

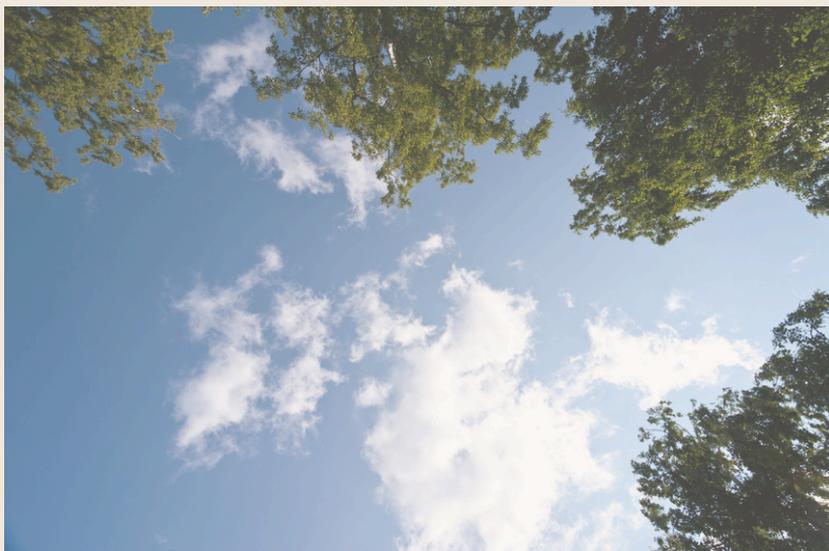


*To try:* Experiment with different ways to style a sari, scarf or stole. As you wrap the cloth, breathe consciously with each movement, silently whispering an intention for the day. Notice how the garment’s geometric or abstract form interacts with your body and breath, and observe what feelings arise in your body-mind.



**Meditating with a needle and thread:** Ripping, tearing and mending fabric can all be mindful practices beyond mere repair. Each tear and stitch is a moment of pause; a self-created ritual of devotion and therapy. You might hum, chant or breathe rhythmically as you repeat these motions. Similarly, working with a spindle to weave or tie threads, or stitching in dyeing (to scrunch, fold, or hold the fabric in place before dipping) can also hold meditative power. Another approach is to stitch your own garments creatively. Designing, customizing, embellishing and altering clothing are all forms of expressive art therapy. Treat your clothing as a canvas. This hands-on ritual offers empowerment, emotional release and deeper healing, especially when your creations carry symbolic meaning or personal affirmations.

*To try:* Layer a few cotton scrap squares and secure them together. Use simple running stitches to create lines, shapes or patterns. In India and many other countries, this upcycling practice connects us to tradition while also supporting mindful creation.



“On a soft sunny afternoon, I shredded the denims the man had bought for me. I chopped them into shorts using a pair of old-world, brass scissors (handcrafted in Mathura, Uttar Pradesh) that we had bought together at Chandni Chowk while eating Mathura ke pede (sweet from the region). Using the huge pair made me feel empowered and overcome my negativity. Shortening the length of the pants felt like I could accept the reality of the loss. I cut the waistband, too. It did not fit my mommy tummy anymore. A comfortable cotton channel with a drawstring replaced it. I made a little origami bird out of Amma’s comforting old saree fall fabric and decorated the drawstring”.

Chapter 6, Page 184: ‘Aiyoh! Why wear torn clothes?’ Mending or tearing clothes using soodhi dharam repairs ‘dishonour’

*The Art of Decluttering: Ancient Practices of Modern Living* by Bhawana Pingali [Penguin Random House / Ebury Press]

## Did you know?

Tearing fabric has long been used as a symbolic act of releasing emotional clutter. It is a physical expression of grief, anger or letting go. In many cultures, it's the first step towards healing through cloth.

The act of mending torn fabric with a needle and thread is not just repair, it's a metaphor for restoring wholeness, allowing the wearer or maker to reweave self-worth and intention into the garment. It is often meditative; many artisans describe it as a form of silent prayer, where each stitch carries emotion, memory and release.

Visible mending practices like sashiko and Kantha turn flaws into features, transforming discarded or damaged clothes into wearable stories of resilience, rather than waste to be hidden or thrown away.

Some fashion healing circles use guided tearing and mending as therapeutic rituals. Participants tear an old garment while reflecting on what they're ready to release, then mend it as a symbol of reclaiming strength and clarity. It becomes a safe space for emotional release, storytelling and community bonding, too.

By tearing and then repairing clothes, we actively interrupt the fast-fashion mindset of disposability. Instead, we invite a cycle of mindfulness, material respect and emotional decluttering.

### **Choosing footwear that mimics barefoot walking:**

Many experts advocate barefoot walking in safe environments, a practice often called 'earthing' or 'grounding', which is believed to reconnect us physically and spiritually with the Earth. However, living in urban areas or walking on unsafe surfaces can make this difficult. As an alternative, choose footwear – shoes, sandals or slippers – that helps you stay close to the earth both literally and metaphorically. Opt for natural materials that enhance grounding, or consider specially designed shoes with copper tabs for earthing benefits. Our feet contain more nerve endings than we often realize, and many ancient ritual practitioners, healers, spiritualists and medical experts agree that being in contact with the earth is essential for restoring this lost connection.



*To try:* Walk barefoot inside your home for a few minutes each day, noticing how it feels. Then, when possible, step onto a safe patch of grass or sand and repeat the practice. Observe the sensations in your feet and how your body responds.



“Native American Indians believed the earth held cleansing secrets and healing powers. Our feet, when in touch with the earth, helped make this happen. Philosopher and educator, the late Ota Kte (Lakota Sioux tribal leader Luther Standing Bear) once said: ‘The Lakota was a true naturist—a lover of nature. He loved the earth and all things of the earth, the attachment growing with age. The old people came literally to love the soil, and they sat or reclined on the ground with a feeling of being close to a mothering power. It was good for the skin to touch the earth, and the old people liked to remove their moccasins and walk with bare feet on the sacred earth. Their tipis were built upon the earth, and their altars were made of earth. The birds that flew into the air came to rest upon the earth and it was the final abiding place of all things that lived and grew. The soil was soothing, strengthening, cleansing and healing”.

Chapter 9, Pages 266-267: ‘How Do Soles Connect With Earth? Walking almost barefoot while in natural chappal reworks on disconnection’

*The Art of Decluttering: Ancient Practices of Modern Living* by Bhawana Pingali [Penguin Random House / Ebury Press]



**“The whole thing of clothes is insane. You can spend a dollar on a jacket in a thrift store and you can spend a thousand dollars on a jacket in a shop. And if you saw those two jackets walking down the street, you probably wouldn’t know which was which”.**

Dame Helen Mirren, British actor



# SIGNING OFF...

**Your beginning**

Yes, two jackets can look the same. But what really matters is the intent: Who is it made for? Who made it? What did they make it with, and how?

Say one garment is built with threads of a conscious body-mind, while the other is made with greed and commercialism at its core. This purpose may change the way you feel, move and behave in the garment. In this sense, fashion is more than fabric. It is memory, breath, culture and even prayer. If you allow, it can have elements of spirituality as unspoken words woven deep inside its being. Quite invisibly so.

So, by slowing down your fashion consumption, by honoring Earth, by decluttering with awareness and by practicing #rephilosophy, we can discover clothing as a path towards #fashionhealing. This can be achieved to a great extent by reviving lost rituals and practices from forgotten cultures, then adapting them for a modern zero-waste way of living. If fashion and spirituality is seen through this lens, each garment can become a companion, each fold a meditation, each stitch a chant and each wardrobe a mirror.





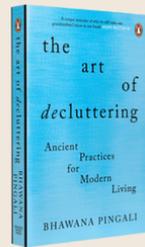
Make sure that fashion is not just what you wear, but how you live responsibly on this planet as a spiritual being.

“But, cognitive scientist, anthropologist and professor at the University of Connecticut in the US, Dimitris Xygalatas... says, ‘Even though new rituals are born every day, most of them don’t survive. (Because) during cultural evolution, those rituals that served certain functions have survived for thousands of years. (But others may not). So, from that perspective, it’s easier to adapt an existing ritual, than to create a new one from thin air.’ He says, ‘Relying on ancient wisdom, even if it’s not necessarily that of your tradition, if it feels right to you, is better than starting a top-down process of designing a ritual. Other scientists are now studying such psycho-social functions of rituals and practices as far as human behaviour, wellbeing and the decluttering process goes. They believe that having them can render strength to handle our fight, flight, freeze and fawn responses better. More so when the talk of mental health has become a daily thing in our modern living. Nevertheless, while doing rituals or practices, overcoming the initial resistance isn’t easy. It will be a slow battle hymn or a hurried war. Whatever be the case for you. Some may make you shed layers that are not needed. Others may add sheaths that can protect you. Or harm? But when it happens, the walkthrough can unfold a newer you. No, it may not be a better version, but surely an aware one”.

Page 301: ‘And It Circles Back To...’ *The Art of Decluttering: Ancient Practices of Modern Living* by Bhawana Pingali [Penguin Random House / Ebury Press]

**To know more about the rituals and practices of  
#emotionaldecluttering #ancientrituals  
#ancientpractices #rephilosophy #fashionhealing  
#spiritualfashion :**

- Read the book *The Art of Decluttering: Ancient Practices of Modern Living* by Bhawana Pingali [Penguin Random House / Ebury Press]. Order it here.



- Register for an online #fashionhealing\_course by Revastra facilitated by Bhawana Pingali by filling in this Interest Form.

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- Take your slow fashion pledge here.





**“Sustainable fashion is not a trend,  
it is a responsibility.”**

Livia Firth, founder and Creative Director of Eco-Age and a  
sustainable fashion advocate



# CONTRIBUTORS



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