

Incense

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Every morning, I light five sticks of incense. One goes into an incense holder I have. A carved wooden holder that has been darkened and stained by daily smoking. Two sticks each go into potted plants that stand by my front and back doors respectively. Depending on the way the early morning breeze travels, the curls of smoke sometimes move into or away from my home. It does not matter to me which way they go, but truth be told I like it best when the breeze shifts around a little, so that I can catch a wisp rather than be besieged by its scent.

There's something therapeutic about lighting incense sticks which I cannot altogether fathom. Maybe the ritual appeals to my basic need to observe such a daily gesture in my life. I often water the plants, hose down the floors and then reach for the incense sticks. Maybe it marks the completion of a task with a nod to the divine. An offering and a prayer. Of sorts. Whatever you conceive Him to be.

My dogs and birds seem to agree with this little ritual. They often sit calmly around me after the incense is lit while I have my coffee. And together, we pause and reflect on the day ahead. Their thoughts I cannot decipher, but I imagine what shuffles through their minds. Food, sleep and play. Not necessarily in that order. My mind follows a much more varied and complex path, but I surmise that they are more able to decipher my emotional state than I, theirs.

And all this while, the curls of scented smoke rise around us. At times, embracing us, at times just drifting imperceptibly by our nostrils. Reminding us of the delicious possibilities of life. These scented notions.

When I was a child, my mother followed such a routine too. We were Taoists and the burnished altars in the back and front of the house held large urns where the josticks were placed daily. I remember the scents drifting through the house early in the morning. I remember the small billows of smoke that rose by the front altar, assuming presence and a

certain authority against the clear morning light. And my mother of course, faithfully lighting those jossticks after she had cleaned the meatsafe and brewed her morning coffee in that slightly chipped green enamel pot.