



# A Place to Land

## Summer Solstice

*On steadiness, the nervous system, and the longest day of the year*

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*Dr. Brittany Rice • [drbrittanyrice.com](http://drbrittanyrice.com) • The Shape of Becoming • 1*



# Welcome

There is something quietly beautiful about the summer solstice.

For a brief moment, daylight reaches its fullest expression. The hours feel expansive, the evenings linger, and many cultures have marked this turning point with celebration for thousands of years. Yet the solstice also holds a quieter truth. Even as daylight reaches its peak, the season has already begun to change. The longest day is also the day that reminds us nothing remains fixed.

Human experience follows a similar rhythm.

There are seasons when life feels spacious and connected. There are seasons that ask more of us than we expected. Often, joy and sorrow exist together. We celebrate milestones while grieving what has changed. We feel gratitude for what we have while carrying concern for what lies ahead. The nervous system does not require life to fit neatly into one emotional category. It is remarkably capable of holding complexity.

That complexity can become difficult to navigate in a world that rarely grows quiet.

Many of us spend our days moving from one responsibility to the next while absorbing a continuous stream of information. News travels instantly. Our phones bring distant tragedies into our hands within moments. We are asked to care about our families, our work, our communities, and a world that often feels uncertain. It is little wonder that so many people describe feeling overwhelmed without always understanding why.

From the perspective of the nervous system, this makes sense.

The brain is constantly scanning the environment for cues of safety and cues of danger. It does not distinguish particularly well between a threat unfolding directly in front of you and one that repeatedly enters your awareness through headlines and notifications. Over time, the body may begin to behave as though it must remain prepared for danger, even while sitting safely in your own living room.

This guide is not an invitation to disconnect from the world.

It is an invitation to reconnect with yourself within it.

My hope is that these pages offer a place to pause, to understand a little more about the remarkable intelligence of your nervous system, and to practice returning to moments of steadiness that can be carried with you long after the summer has passed.

## A Question to Carry

As you begin reading, pause for a moment and ask yourself:

*What has my nervous system been carrying that I may not have fully acknowledged?*

Don't search for the perfect answer.

Simply notice what comes to mind.

# Community

Human beings are remarkably adaptive, but we were never designed to navigate life in isolation.

Long before we had language, our survival depended on one another. Safety was not simply an individual experience. It was something communicated through relationship. A familiar voice, a trusted face, shared work, a meal around a fire. The nervous system evolved in environments where belonging increased the likelihood of survival.

Although our world has changed dramatically, our biology has not.

Even today, the nervous system is constantly gathering information from the people around us. We notice the pace of another person's breathing, the expression on a familiar face, the tone of a loved one's voice, often before we consciously realize we have done so. These subtle exchanges shape how safe, settled, or vigilant we feel.

This process is known as **co-regulation**. It describes the ways our nervous systems influence one another, often without words.

Perhaps you've experienced it yourself.

A conversation with someone you trust leaves you feeling lighter. Sitting quietly beside a close friend feels more restorative than spending an evening alone. A genuine smile from a stranger softens something in you after a difficult day. None of these moments erase hardship, but they remind the nervous system that it does not have to carry it alone.

Community is built through these ordinary moments.

It grows in shared meals, neighborhood gatherings, volunteering, conversations after church, checking on a neighbor, lingering a little longer after an event, or introducing yourself to someone you've seen many times but never met. Relationships are rarely transformed by grand gestures. More often, they deepen through repeated moments of presence and attention.

The summer solstice has traditionally been celebrated in community. People gathered to mark the changing season, to share food, music, stories, and gratitude. While our traditions may look different today, the impulse remains the same. We are drawn toward one another because something within us recognizes that the hardest parts of life become more bearable when shared, and the beautiful parts become richer, fuller, and more colorful when experienced together.

Perhaps one of the kindest questions we can ask ourselves is not simply, *Who supports me?*

It is also,

**Who experiences greater steadiness because I am present in their life?**



**Reflection:**

- When do I feel most connected to others?
- Who helps my nervous system settle?
- How do I know when I feel safe with another person?
- In what small way might I strengthen a sense of community this week?

There is no need to answer them all today.

Sometimes simply carrying a thoughtful question is enough to begin noticing the answer.



# When the World Feels Heavy

There have always been difficult seasons in human history.

What has changed is the number of experiences our nervous systems are now asked to hold at once.

In a single day, we may care for our families, respond to work demands, navigate financial concerns, read about natural disasters, witness conflict across the world, absorb hundreds of headlines, and scroll through carefully curated images of other people's lives. Information moves faster than our biology evolved to process it.

The nervous system is remarkably adaptive, but it remains grounded in a much older reality.

Its primary task is not to determine whether something is politically significant, geographically distant, or statistically unlikely. It is continually asking a simpler question:

**Is there something I need to respond to right now?**

When signals of uncertainty accumulate without opportunities for resolution, the body may begin to remain in a state of readiness. Muscles tighten. Sleep becomes lighter. Attention narrows toward potential problems. Rest feels more difficult, not because we have forgotten how to rest, but because the nervous system has learned that vigilance feels safer than relaxation.

This is one reason many people describe feeling exhausted even when they have not been physically active.

The body is working.

It is monitoring, anticipating, adapting, and preparing.

Understanding this does not remove life's challenges, but it often changes the way we relate to ourselves.

Instead of asking,

*"Why can't I keep up?"*

we might begin asking,

*"What has my nervous system been responding to that I have not fully recognized?"*

That shift matters.

Curiosity interrupts self-criticism.

Understanding creates space for compassion.

Neither changes the world overnight, but both can change the way we move through it.

One of the most meaningful forms of nervous system care is not withdrawing from the world entirely. It is learning to move toward life with discernment. We can remain informed without becoming consumed. We can care deeply without believing we must carry every burden ourselves. We can acknowledge suffering while continuing to notice beauty, relationship, and moments of genuine safety.

The nervous system does not ask us to ignore reality.

It asks us to remember that reality is always larger than fear alone.



**Reflection:**

Consider the past week.

What has your attention been asked to hold?

What has nourished your nervous system?

What has depleted it?

Are there sources of information, habits, or rhythms that leave you feeling more connected to life?

Are there others that leave you feeling further away from yourself?

You do not need to change everything at once.

Awareness is often the beginning of wiser choices.

# Returning to Your Body

Much of modern life invites us to live from the neck up.

We spend our days thinking, planning, solving problems, remembering, anticipating, and making decisions. These capacities are remarkable. They allow us to create, build relationships, care for our families, and imagine the future.

Yet the body is not simply carrying the brain from one task to the next.

It is continuously gathering information about the world around us.

Long before we consciously recognize that we are anxious, overwhelmed, or at ease, the nervous system has already begun responding. A slight tightening in the shoulders. A quicker pace of breathing. A clenched jaw. A sense of restlessness that makes it difficult to settle into the present moment. These are not inconveniences to ignore. They are information.

One of the remarkable qualities of the human body is that it is always communicating. The question is not whether the body is speaking, but whether we have learned to notice its language.

Returning to the body does not mean withdrawing from thought or abandoning reason. It means allowing physical sensation to become part of the conversation.

As awareness grows, many people begin noticing patterns they had previously overlooked. Certain environments leave them feeling energized, while others quietly exhaust them. Some relationships invite a deeper breath; others create tension before a single word is spoken. The body often recognizes these patterns before the mind has fully explained them.

Developing this awareness is less about becoming hypervigilant and more about becoming gently attentive. Curiosity is far more useful than criticism. There is no need to judge what you notice. Simply noticing is where understanding begins.



## A Practice

Before moving on, pause for just a moment.

Without trying to change anything, notice your breathing.

Notice the places where your body makes contact with the chair beneath you or the ground under your feet.

Notice whether there is warmth, coolness, ease, tension, movement, or stillness.

There is nothing to achieve here.

Only an opportunity to become a little more familiar with the place you have lived your entire life.

The body is not asking you to become someone different.

It is simply inviting you to notice what has been there all along.



# An Invitation to Notice

One of the most reliable ways of supporting the nervous system is also among the simplest, though it is often overlooked. It begins by allowing ourselves to pause, not as a way of withdrawing from life, but as a way of participating in it more fully.

Many contemplative traditions have understood for centuries what neuroscience is only beginning to describe with greater precision. The quality of our attention shapes the quality of our experience. We spend much of our day anticipating what comes next or reflecting on what has already happened, and the present moment can become little more than a bridge between one responsibility and another.

Yet the nervous system is always experiencing the present.

It responds to the warmth of sunlight on the skin, the movement of air across the face, the changing light filtering through trees, the rhythm of our own breathing, and the subtle sense of being part of something larger than ourselves. These experiences may seem ordinary, but they provide information that the body has relied upon for thousands of years.

The summer solstice offers a gentle invitation to practice this kind of attention, not because the day itself possesses unusual power, but because seasonal transitions naturally encourage us to notice what is changing both around us and within us. To notice is not merely to observe. It is to receive experience before immediately evaluating, categorizing, or moving beyond it.

Receiving is a practice that modern life rarely encourages. We are often taught to improve, optimize, and accomplish. Far less often are we invited to simply experience. Yet there are moments when allowing ourselves to fully receive the warmth of the sun, the fragrance of summer air, or the presence of another person becomes its own quiet form of nourishment. The nervous system recognizes these moments, and they become part of its ongoing understanding of what safety, beauty, and connection feel like.

## A Seasonal Practice

If time allows, spend a few minutes outdoors today.

Rather than looking for something extraordinary, become curious about what is already present.

Allow your attention to settle on one small detail, perhaps a patch of sunlight, the texture of bark, the movement of leaves, the sound of birds, or the warmth held within a smooth stone. Stay with that experience just a little longer than you normally would.

There is no need to analyze what you notice or search for a deeper meaning. Simply allow yourself to receive the experience with your full attention. Sometimes the practice is not learning something new. Sometimes it is remembering how to notice what has been quietly present all along.

# Small Acts That Regulate

Nervous system regulation is not achieved through insight alone. The body regulates through sensation, movement, rhythm, and connection. Research on polyvagal theory and somatic approaches consistently shows that small, repeated sensory inputs can shift physiological state more reliably than cognitive reframing. These are not coping strategies so much as inputs to a biological system.



## Warmth

Thermal warmth activates the same neural pathways as social warmth. Holding something warm has measurable effects on perceived social connection and physiological stress responses.



## Grounding

Proprioception and the orienting response work together here. Contact with a surface gives the nervous system information about where the body is in space, which supports a felt sense of safety.



## Writing

Expressive writing activates prefrontal processing and can help integrate fragmented stress responses. Three sentences is enough to begin that process.



## Breath

An exhale longer than the inhale directly activates the vagus nerve and shifts autonomic state toward rest. This is not metaphor. It is physiology.



# Reflection

We often assume that insight arrives all at once, through a moment of clarity or a single meaningful conversation. More often, understanding develops gradually. It grows through repeated moments of noticing, each one adding another piece to a much larger picture.

Perhaps the purpose of reflection is not to arrive at answers, but to become more attentive to the questions that are quietly shaping our lives.

As you think about this season, you might sit with one or two of the questions below. There is no need to answer them immediately. Some questions are worth carrying for a while before they reveal what they have to teach.

- ❏ • What has been asking for my attention lately?
- When do I feel most like myself?
- What experiences leave my nervous system feeling more settled? Which ones consistently leave me feeling depleted?
- Where in my life have I confused endurance with well-being?
- What have I been trying to change that first needs to be understood?
- What beauty have I overlooked because I have been moving too quickly?
- Where have I experienced genuine moments of connection recently?
- What would it look like to receive this season of my life before trying to reshape it?

You do not need to solve these questions today.

Simply returning to them from time to time may be enough to notice something you had not seen before.

# A Stone to Carry

Human beings have long attached meaning to ordinary objects.

Across cultures and throughout history, people have carried stones, keepsakes, photographs, handwritten notes, or pieces of jewelry that reminded them of someone they loved, a promise they wished to remember, or a season of life that shaped them. The object itself is rarely the source of comfort. Rather, it becomes a quiet invitation to remember.

Our nervous systems work in much the same way.

Experiences become associated with places, sounds, scents, and objects. Over time, those associations gently influence how we think, feel, and respond. The smell of pine may remind someone of childhood camping trips. A familiar song may transport us back to a meaningful relationship. A smooth stone resting in the palm can become connected with a moment of calm, reflection, or renewed perspective.

If you happened to pick up a stone along the way, perhaps it can become one of those quiet reminders.

Not because there is anything extraordinary about the stone itself, but because there is something extraordinary about our capacity to create meaning through attention.

Perhaps it reminds you to pause before rushing into the next part of your day.

Perhaps it reminds you to look up before looking down at your phone.

Perhaps it reminds you to notice your breathing, to step outside for a few moments, or simply to remember that steadiness remains possible, even during seasons of uncertainty.

Whatever meaning it comes to hold, allow it to develop naturally. Meaning is rarely manufactured. It grows through repeated moments of attention, gradually becoming part of how we move through the world.

One day you may come across that stone again without immediately remembering where you found it.

If that happens, I hope your body remembers before your mind does.

# A Closing Reflection

The summer solstice reminds us that nature is never static.

Even on the longest day of the year, change has already begun. The light has reached its fullest expression, yet the seasons continue their quiet unfolding without urgency or resistance. Nothing in the natural world clings to a single moment. Growth and release belong to the same rhythm.

Perhaps our lives are not so different.

There are seasons that ask us to gather our strength, seasons that invite rest, and seasons that quietly reshape us before we understand what is changing. We rarely recognize these transitions while we are living them. More often, we see them only in retrospect, when we realize we have become someone slightly different than we were before.

The nervous system changes in much the same way.

It learns gradually through repeated experiences of safety, relationship, curiosity, beauty, and attention. Lasting change seldom arrives because of a single insight. More often, it develops through countless ordinary moments that slowly reshape how we experience ourselves and the world around us.

Perhaps this is why paying attention matters so deeply.

The moments that seem small are often the ones quietly shaping us.

As this season continues to unfold, I hope you find opportunities to notice what has always been there: the steadiness of your breath, the generosity of a friend, the warmth of sunlight, the wisdom carried in your own body, and the quiet reassurance that meaningful change rarely asks us to become someone else. More often, it invites us to perceive ourselves and our lives with greater clarity, compassion, and wonder.

The world will continue asking for your attention.

I hope, from time to time, you remember to offer some of it to the life unfolding within and around you.

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*May you always have a place to land.*

*With care,*

**Dr. Brittany Rice**

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