



INK SACRAMENTS: TATTOO RITUALS FOR EVERY BODY



IN THIS PRESENTATION

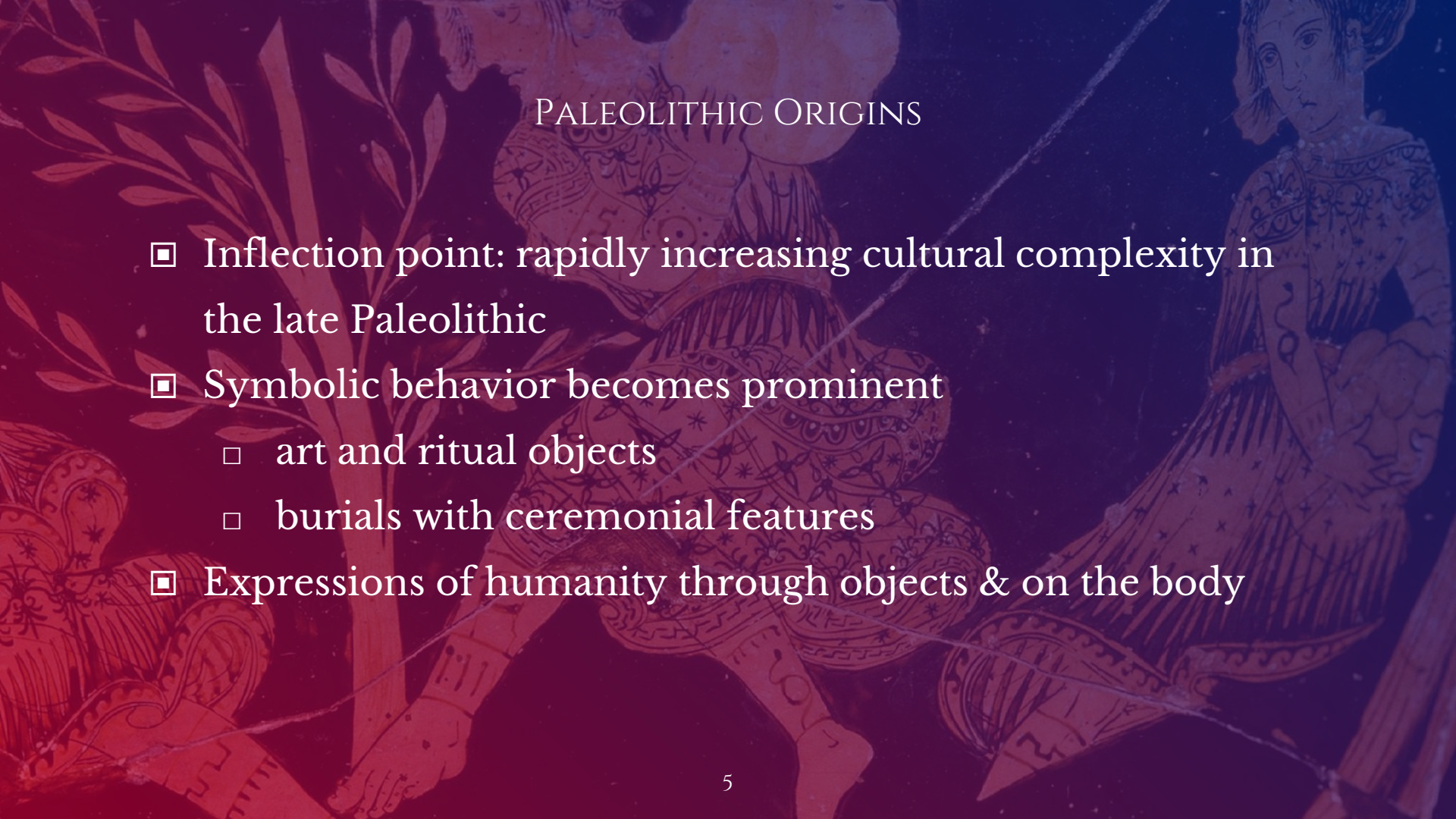
- ▣ A *very* brief sketch of the origins of tattooing
- ▣ Notes on tattooing and embodied ritual
- ▣ Practical concepts for tattoo rituals anybody can do

1. PALEOLITHIC ORIGINS



PALEOLITHIC ORIGINS

- Tattooing requires only basic survival technologies
 - Soot from fire, or naturally occurring mineral pigment
 - Blade or point to pierce skin
- MAY have been discovered through early medicine
 - Ash, botanicals rubbed in wounds to prevent infection may leave a pigmented scar



PALEOLITHIC ORIGINS

- ▣ Inflection point: rapidly increasing cultural complexity in the late Paleolithic
- ▣ Symbolic behavior becomes prominent
 - ▣ art and ritual objects
 - ▣ burials with ceremonial features
- ▣ Expressions of humanity through objects & on the body

PALEOLITHIC ORIGINS

10,000 BCE
MAS D'AZIL, FRANCE

Proposed tattoo toolkit with
needles, grinding tools, ochre
Not definitively proven to be
tattoo related

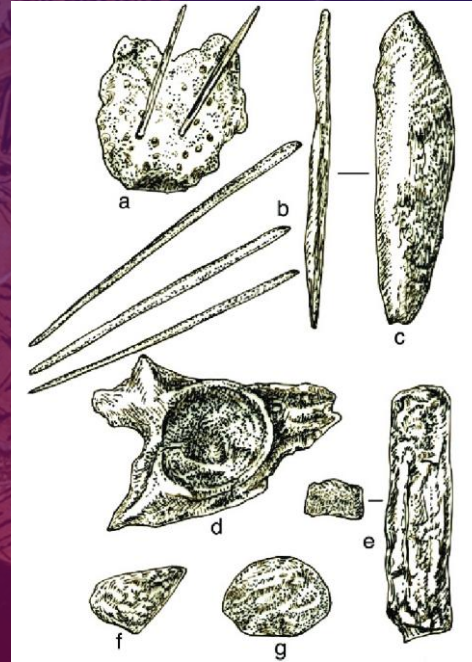


Image: Della Casa
& Witt. *Tattoos and
Body Modifications
in Antiquity.*

PALEOLITHIC ORIGINS

- Becoming widespread from the Neolithic
- Rapid population growth & increasing social complexity
 - Body modification helping to express communal identity
- By the Bronze Age, tattooing is happening in almost every inhabited continent

2. TATTOOING & THE SACRED



TATTOOING & THE SACRED

- Some definitions
- Sacred: set apart from the ordinary
 - From root meaning to set apart, to dedicate, or to sacrifice something for a special purpose
 - Tattooing is inherently sacred even without overt ceremony

The background of the slide features a dark, textured illustration. On the left, a figure is shown from the waist up, heavily tattooed with intricate patterns. To the right, a woman with long dark hair is depicted, also wearing a garment with detailed patterns. The overall color palette is dark, with shades of blue and purple, and the text is in a light, contrasting color.

TATTOOING & THE SACRED

- Ritual: symbolic actions infused with meaning
 - In ritual, actions bring a heightened experience of meaning & a change to the interior state, spiritual condition, or relationships of participants
 - Ritual deepens, focuses and helps articulate the sacred qualities of a tattoo experience

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The body is a primary mediator of religious abstractions. Religion utilizes a multiplicity of “incorporating practices” to clothe its conceptions with “an aura of factuality” and to bring a new level of genuineness to these ideas. Ritual, clothing, objects, images, codes of comportment, and the inculcation of striking affective and sensory states are essential to the “corporalization of the sacred”... Marking the body through tattooing is an intrinsically effective way to materialize the sacred, as it lodges an image and its associated meanings directly into the skin.

Pagliarini, Marie A. “Spiritual Tattooing: Pain, Materialization, and Transformation.” *Journal of Religion and Violence* 3, no. 2, 2015.



TATTOOING & THE SACRED

- Body art makes the spiritual material thru enmeshment in the living body
 - Allows spiritual powers or beings to dwell in the body, partake of its living
 - Represents a profound commitment to spiritual realities
 - Reiterates the spiritual truths encoded in it daily



TATTOOING & THE SACRED

- Body art and transformative ritual
 - Communication at the boundary between self & world
 - Creating a new way of being in the world
- Initiation & mystery experiences involve the creation of a new self thru transformative ordeal
- Gender embodiment or gender transition
 - Construction of a more fully gendered self

TATTOOING & THE SACRED

- Body art as ritual ordeal
 - Pain & endurance
 - Surrender & trust in a specialist guide
 - Follows some classic phases of rites of passage
- Ordeal pain pulls awareness into the body, creates surrender to a new experience of selfhood
- Sensory intensity of ordeal creates indelible memories

“

“Pain creates an embodied ‘absence’ that makes way for a new and greater ‘presence’... [The more pain that is applied to the body,] the less output the central nervous system generates from the areas that regulate the signals on which a sense of self relies. Modulated pain weakens the individual’s feeling of being a discrete agent; it makes the ‘body-self’ transparent and facilitates the emergence of a new identity.”

Glucklich, Ariel. 2001. *Sacred Pain: Hurting the Body for the Sake of the Soul*. New York: Oxford University Press



TWO INVITATIONS

- ▣ Tattoo artists - let's develop our ritual skills!
- ▣ Tattoo enthusiasts - what can you do to create ritual for yourself?

3. TATTOO RITUALS





TATTOO RITUALS

- Spiritual preparation
 - Spiritual alignment practices
 - Invite gods and spirits along
 - Meditation and divination to guide and focus your process
- Trust and intuition

The background of the slide features a dark, textured illustration. On the left, a person is shown from the waist up, heavily tattooed with intricate patterns. To the right, a woman in traditional, patterned clothing is depicted. The overall color palette is dark with hints of red and blue.

TATTOO RITUALS

- ▣ Ritual cycles can begin days to weeks ahead of time
 - ▣ Purifications or blessings each day
 - ▣ Devotional rituals or magical practices
- ▣ Power builds over time with ritual repetition
- ▣ This can continue in the days after tattooing as well

TATTOO RITUALS

Seclusion

Many cultures use seclusion from daily life to enter sacralized time

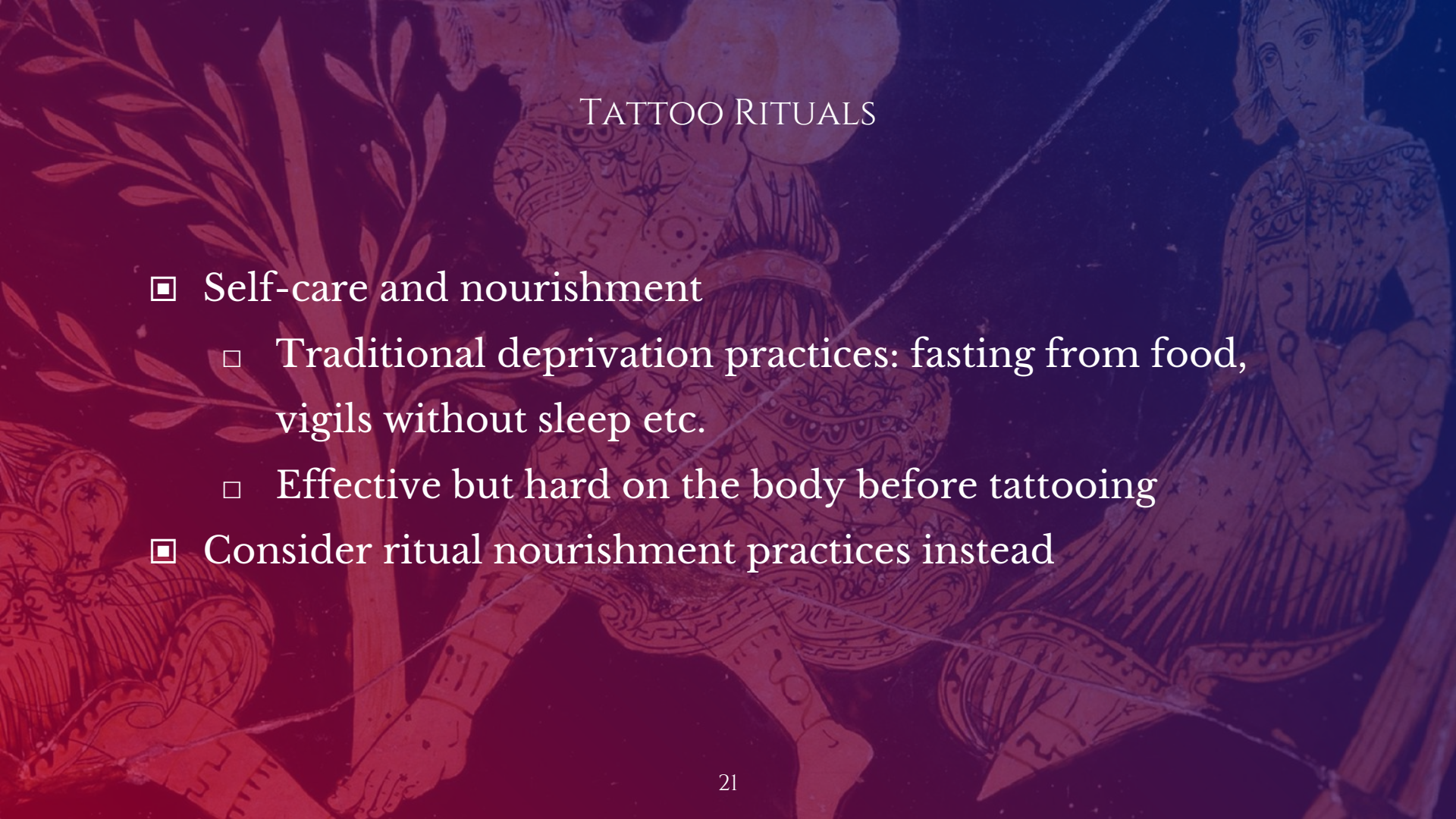
Can continue through healing period

Some options

Take a day or two off work
Fast from activities that scatter attention or draw you away from the sacred

Social media, screen time, chores, habits etc.





TATTOO RITUALS

- Self-care and nourishment
 - Traditional deprivation practices: fasting from food, vigils without sleep etc.
 - Effective but hard on the body before tattooing
- Consider ritual nourishment practices instead

TATTOO RITUALS

Sleep rituals

Bedtime rituals the night before a sacred tattoo

Wind down with meditation or prayer

Take a ritual bath

Drink soothing nighttime tea

Journaling or reflective practice



TATTOO RITUALS

Feeding the body

The ritual of a
nourishing meal before
a sacred tattoo

Choose healthy to prepare
your body for its ordeal

Pray over or bless your
food

Visualize its blessings
strengthening your body

Drink plenty of water



TATTOO RITUALS

Purification

Cleansing to remove
spiritual & physical
residues

Especially important in
tattooing - harmful or
predatory spirits are
drawn to blood

Your regular purification
practices

Burning incense or
aromatic herbs

Blessed water or spirits

Sound purification, bells
etc.



TATTOO RITUALS

Spiritual baths

For purification and blessing

Poured spiritual bath, blessing yourself in the shower, or a full soaking bath

Or bathing at a sacred site

Take herbs, oils, other magical additives

Place in a bowl, pour hot water over

Pray over while it steeps

Use this to wash and bless the body



TATTOO RITUALS

Anointing rituals

Blessing with a consecrated fluid, traditionally oil

Often practiced after a ritual bath

Consecrate oil with prayers to your holy powers

Use a few drops to trace the impression of the tattoo

Visualize the blessings you are inviting entering the skin





IN THE STUDIO

- ▣ How do we keep sacred space in a noisy, busy, commercial tattoo studio?
- ▣ Strategies for staying connected regardless of what's going on around you

TATTOO RITUALS

Ritual clothing & regalia

Wearing consecrated items to wrap yourself in ritual space

Colors, types of clothing to connect you

Jewelry or talismans can live on an altar when not worn

Some practicalities

Where are you being tattooed? Will you need to remove items?

Comfortable layers are best

Minimize restrictive, tight, or stiff items



TATTOO RITUALS

Sacred boundaries

Create consecrated space at the studio if your tattooist is not doing so

Processional to demarcate sacred space

Carry a sacred item or just direct energy with your hand

Walk a circuit around the building or block

Pray or chant silently

Honor the consent of those within the boundary



TATTOO RITUALS

Shrines, icons, & talismans

Set up images in the studio if artist allows

Create a mini-shrine in a box or tin

Ask for a moment to pray or invoke magical intentions before starting

If the studio isn't amenable to putting up images

Holy or talismanic items can be carried privately in a pocket

Take a moment to pray quietly while your artist is setting up for session



TATTOO RITUALS

Magic in the ink

Ask your artist if you can bless the ink, or just pray silently while it's poured

Some artists may be willing to allow magical additions - ASK

Adding sacred materials to ink

Tiny quantity of finely sieved ash added using a toothpick

Commonly practiced with cremation ash

Organic materials burned fully to ash

Risk of adverse reaction



TATTOO RITUALS

Song & sound

Powerful key to ritual

Choose music to aid
ritual entrainment

Singing & chanting during
tattooing

Alternately, chant or recite
silently

Be aware of body
movement



TATTOO RITUALS

Sealing the magic

Open portal in the body

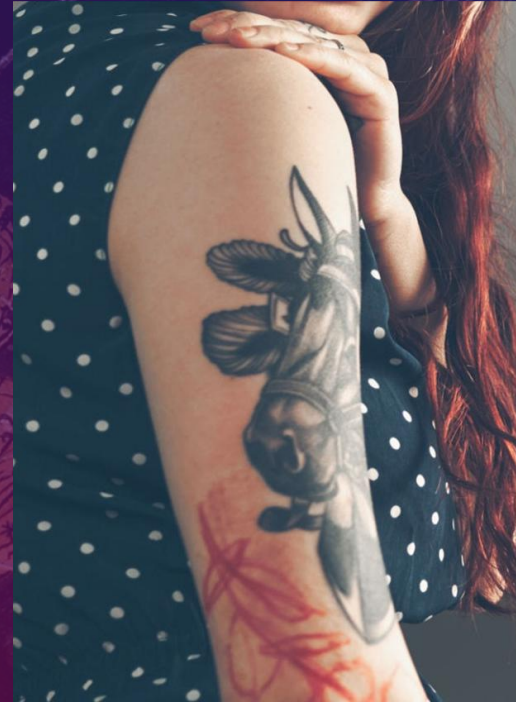
A blessing to seal the
spiritual body &
protect the wound

After end of inking &
before bandaging

Float hands over the tattoo,
or just direct attention
toward it

Visualize powers resonating
in the tattoo, skin sealing
itself to contain this power

Pray to holy powers to bless
& seal the mark & to heal
your body



TATTOO RITUALS

Ceremonial closure

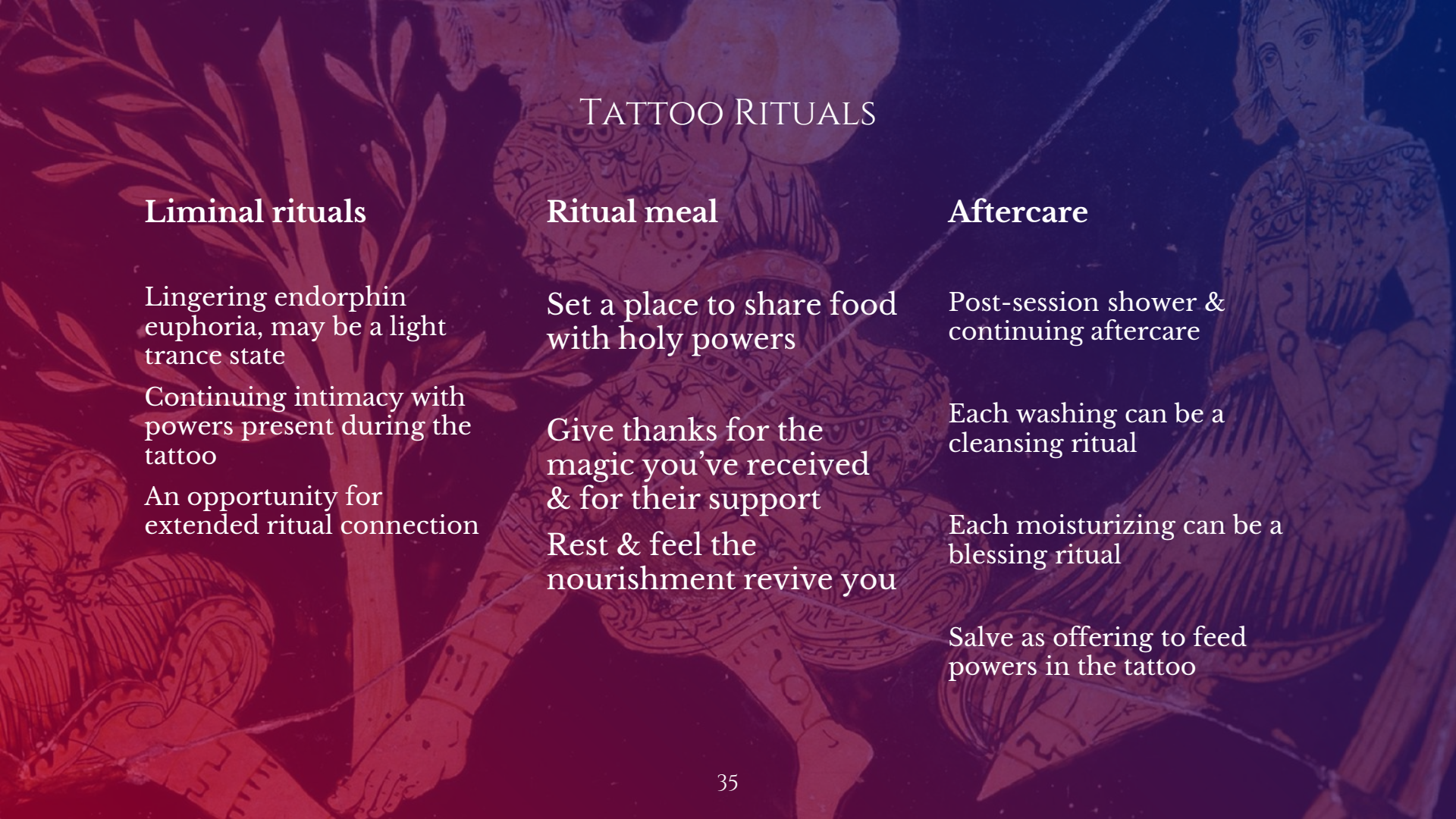
If you performed opening prayers, invocations, etc. these should be closed

Giving thanks to any powers who helped you

Release any boundaries invoked on the workspace

Ask for blessings & protections to continue as you go through healing





TATTOO RITUALS

Liminal rituals

Lingering endorphin euphoria, may be a light trance state

Continuing intimacy with powers present during the tattoo

An opportunity for extended ritual connection

Ritual meal

Set a place to share food with holy powers

Give thanks for the magic you've received & for their support

Rest & feel the nourishment revive you

Aftercare

Post-session shower & continuing aftercare

Each washing can be a cleansing ritual

Each moisturizing can be a blessing ritual

Salve as offering to feed powers in the tattoo

TATTOO RITUALS

Somatic integration

Take time for introspection during this period of somatic integration

Subliminal identity shift

Practice body scan meditations

Pigment is being received by macrophages in cellular matrix

Reflective journaling or art

Spiritual powers are taking root in spiritual body





Thanks for joining me!



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