

# ERZULIE FREDA & THE ART OF SELF-LOVE

by Zehara Nachash

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When February rolls around, Valentine's Day chocolates appear in stores and television commercials are full of gifts to buy for your beloved—it suddenly becomes a month of romance and passion between lovers. However, we often forget that this love also includes the need to love ourselves. After a troubled marriage of three years left me hating the person I had become, my challenge was to undo the years of emotional and mental abuse and learn to love myself again; however, it was not until I began studying Vodoo in 2012 that I was fully able to restart my journey back to the reclamation of self-love.

Erzulie Freda, a Vodoo Lwa (pronounced lo-wah) spirit, became like a guiding mother to me and helped me along my journey. Despite many of the stereotypes surrounding Vodoo, Lwa are not evil entities that force people to do wicked things. Much like Pagan gods and goddesses, the Lwa are unique in

their own way; each has their own exclusive personalities, colors, and days. Additionally, Vodoo is a religion based on ancestor worship and spirit veneration and has nothing to do with malevolent beings, human sacrifice, or whatever popular myth may espouse.

Much like Wicca, Vodoo has been poisoned by negative stereotypes and misconceptions; it is truly a religion of love, compassion, and kindness. Erzulie Freda is the Lwa of beauty, love, and passion, and her colors are pink and white. Much like the goddess Aphrodite, she is the embodiment of divine femininity and compassion. Erzulie Freda's veve (a symbol used in Vodoo specific to each Lwa) is that of a heart surrounded by stars.

One of Erzulie Freda's attributes is that she often gets frustrated; not by things bothering her specifically but by things we do to ourselves. When we are in a state of self-

loathing, feeling negative, and not taking care of ourselves, Erzulie Freda gets annoyed. Like a loving mother, Erzulie Freda only wants what is best for her children. Oftentimes, when we feel bad for ourselves, we comfort ourselves with materialistic goods. We may believe that the more we have the happier we will be rather than looking inward to getting to the root cause of why we are unhappy. Erzulie Freda becomes a guide for us to reclaim ourselves again, work through the pain, and open the doors to self-compassion.

Erzulie also teaches us about how to be more passionate in life. When people hear the word "passion," they often think of highly sexualized energy. While that is true in some situations, passion can also mean finding something that you love and that makes you feel good about yourself. For me, that is dancing. Fortunately for me, Erzulie Freda loves dance! Dance is something that is passionate and freeing; it's something you do not need to spend money on, and it something that helps you gain self-confidence. Turn the music up and just dance. Love every part of your body, even the parts you don't like! Feel all past emotional pains and hurts leave your body when you dance. You will make Erzulie smile!

Another of Erzulie's traits is the desire for freshness and cleanliness. What does this mean in terms of self-love? A ritual bath, of course! To help you reset yourself, light some candles, burn some incense (I like burning cinnamon incense because the warm rich smell reminds me of Erzulie), and drop some rose petals into the tub. As you sit in the tub, you can ask Erzulie to help guide you. Ask her to help you regain your empowerment and to learn to love yourself. I do a weekly ritual bath and ask for anything that is preventing me or no longer serving me to wash away and be replaced with love and a higher purpose. Of course, I always ask Erzulie's guidance and blessing as well.

In Voodoo, to call upon any of the Lwa, one must first ask Papa Legba to open the gate. Papa Legba is the keyholder to all the other Lwa. For those out there that do practice Voodoo but would like the assistance of Erzulie, you can simply ask Papa Legba to open the gate. You can do this with sincerity, saying, "Papa Legba, open the gate, open the door, open the road so that I may work with Erzulie Freda to learn self-love and to love others." Once that is done, leave an offering of water, cigars, or rum on your altar for Papa Legba, and thank him.

If you want to continue working with Erzulie Freda, you can easily set up an altar dedicated to her in your home. Since February is the month of all things love, you can purchase pink and white candles, boxes of chocolates, pink roses, and rose perfume for your altar. Make this a place that you visit often and always leave an offering. Cool, fresh spring water is a great offering to leave for Erzulie—just remember to change the water daily! If you are having a day when you feel bad about yourself—emotionally, mentally, or physically—sit in front of the altar and tell Erzulie your concerns. She will help you in the journey back to self-love.

No matter the month or day, remember to honor yourself, your body, and your spirit. Drink enough water, exercise, and remember that you will always have a loving mother in Erzulie for the times you have self doubt!

