

The Use and Explanation of Ritual

*The goal of community is to form a diverse body of people with common goals and empower them to embrace their own gifts, selves, and nature. Community holds a space for all its members to work at becoming as close to their true selves as possible. (from **Welcoming Spirit Home: Ancient African Teachings to Celebrate Children and Community** by Sobonfu E. Somè, p. 29)*

The following definition and components of a ritual are adapted or quoted from the source cited above.

Ritual

With respect to the Umoja Community, a ritual is a ceremony or practice that allows members of the community to connect with self, others within the community, and with ancestral forces. For a ritual to be meaningful it must have a clear intention and purpose which must be stated (pp. 23-24).

Ritual Elements

***Fire** is about dreaming, passion, keeping our connection to the ancestors, and keeping our visions alive.*

***Water** is peace, focus, wisdom and reconciliation.*

***Earth** elements are responsible for our sense of identity, and our ability to nurture, to be rounded and to support one another.*

***Mineral** elements help us to remember our purpose and give us the means to communicate and to make sense out of what others are saying. It is the element that brings people together.*

***Nature** helps us to be our true selves, to go through major changes and life-threatening situations. It brings magic and laughter. It takes our masks off. It is the element of transmutation, changing form one state of being or stage to another, just like a butterfly changes from a caterpillar into a cocoon and finally into a butterfly (pp. 22-23).*

Components of a Ritual

Bathing

Many African rituals either begin or end with bathing. Bathing symbolizes washing away old habits and old wounds. It is a way to renew one's spirit—a way of taking a new step, of embodying healing energy and moving from one stage to another. It also symbolizes rebirth and a state of purity (p.112).

Note: In western society, this component of a ritual can be represented symbolically through words or through cleansing body parts such as the hands. The important concept is the renewal of spirit and moving from one stage of life to another. Umoja Community staff can use their own ideas and creativity in how this component is represented.

The Initial Prayer

The first step in any ritual is the initial prayer, which sets the intention and purpose of the ritual. Your initial prayer must be clear, uncomplicated, and specific. It is a way to invite your spirit guides to help you reconnect and remember key elements of the ritual that allow you to heal and connect with the self, the natural forces around you, and community. It must come from the belly and the heart, and often it is done by the community on behalf of the people for whom the ritual is being performed (p, 112).

Creating a Sacred Space

A sacred space embodies healing energy and holds together the energy of the ritual. It is a place of beauty and a place where spirit and the ancestors dwell. Creating a sacred space is a collective activity.

In creating a sacred space, you may or may not need to use all the five elements: fire, water, earth, nature, and mineral. It depends on the ritual being performed and your specific need...Here is a list of other tools you can use when creating sacred space using the different elements:

- *For **fire**, you can use a mask. Masks represent something old, ancient, including the ancestors. You can also use ash, which is the remnant of fire, or even better, fire itself.*
- ***Water**, in a blue bowl if possible. The blue bowl also represents the color of water.*
- *A bowl of fruit and/or a bowl of soil to represent the **earth** element.*
- *A small potted plant, flower, or twig to represent **nature**.*
- ***Mineral** can be represented by bones, stones, and metals.*

...If you are unable to locate any of the five elements, you can use a colored candle to bring the vibration of a particular element into your sacred space. Choosing a colored candle that fits the purpose of the ritual you are about to do is important because the energy from each colored candle will be different (pp.112-114).

<i>Candle Color</i>	<i>Element Represented</i>	<i>Vibrational Energy</i>
<i>Blue or Black</i>	<i>Water</i>	<i>Promotes peace, reconciliation, and focus</i>
<i>Red</i>	<i>Fire</i>	<i>Enhances vision, the ability to communicate with the ancestors, and dreams</i>
<i>White</i>	<i>Mineral</i>	<i>Facilitates memory, remembering and a connection to people</i>

<i>Green</i>	<i>Nature</i>	<i>Allows for easy transitions and magic to take place</i>
<i>Yellow</i>	<i>Earth</i>	<i>Creates a grounded energy, sense of identity, and fertility</i>

The Closing Prayer

When closing a ritual it is necessary to thank the spiritual guides and the ancestors for their guidance in showing you obstacles that you could not see and for bringing healing. You also want to thank anybody who has joined you in your healing journey (p.114).

Contributor; JM 2008