

CEREMONY- CRAFTING GUIDE

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Ceremony is an accessible, ancient technology of meaning-making that can be customized for anyone & any occasion. In this guide, I outline the basic steps for thoughtful ceremony-crafting that you can readily implement for yourself, your friends & family, and your community. May it inspire you to create beauty and to illumine the sacred in everyday human life.

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CEREMONY TYPES

rites of passage

Whether or not we choose to celebrate them, human beings all undergo transformative life passages. We are born. We go through adolescence. We enter into significant social bonds like marriage and parenthood. We change status after making vows and accomplishing milestones. We become elders. We die.

Rites of passage are ceremonies that support us as we undergo these transformations. Baby blessings, weddings, graduations, and funerals are all popular examples of rites of passage. When crafting such a ceremony, include the these three stages*:

Separation - find a way to separate the participants from other attendees and from ordinary life. Think about using space and dress creatively.

Transition - acknowledge the transformation taking place.

Incorporation - declare the change in status and have participant(s) be accepted into community as such.

*drawn from anthropologist Arnold van Gennep's *Les rites de passage* (1909)



SEASONAL CEREMONY

This category of ceremony meaningfully acknowledges cycles of nature and the passage of time. While seasonal (or sustenance) ceremonies do not revolve around the human lifecycle, they greatly nourish us. Some examples include moon ceremonies, seasonal holidays, and anniversaries. However you choose to mark these occasions, bear in mind the intention of connection to the natural world, to ancestors, history, and the cosmos.

SUPPORT CEREMONY

There are many times in our lives when we face extraordinary circumstances and are in need of support. We may not have completed a rite of passage, but are in the beginning or middle of a big shift. Perhaps you are undergoing a major surgery, getting divorced, or are moving far away. Whatever the challenge may be, support ceremonies must be structured in a way that the participant feels seen, held, and well supported.

STORY & SYMBOL

Simply ask yourself, or the ceremonial participant, what matters to them.

Instead of looking to a sacred text or instruction manual, your materia prima is the person or people for whom you are crafting ceremony. Design a simple questionnaire to find out more about them. Use ceremony typology on Page 1 and story structure such as The Hero's Journey to guide your questions. What you learn will serve as the basis for your ceremony script - not only in narrative content, but also in mood and tone.

Symbols may emerge organically from the interview process, or you may want to ask more targeted questions. Listen closely for meaningful objects, colors, elements, and concepts. Dig deep and approach poetically. Think about different levels of symbolism - personal, familial, cultural, and universal - and how they apply to the ceremony participant(s).



RITUAL ELEMENTS



You now have all of the raw material you need to begin creating ceremonial structure. In this process, you will infuse the story and symbols you've collected into ritual elements, which are in service of the purpose of the ceremony: to mark a rite of passage, acknowledge a moment in time, or to hold supportive space.

Here are just a few ritual elements you may consider:

- **music** - performed live, played from a recording, or sung by attendees
- **poetry** or **prose** readings
- **storytelling** or **reenactment**
- exchanging of **gifts** or **vows**
- declaration of **intentions**
- **cleansing, clearing, or releasing**
- **offerings, invocations** and **honoring** of elders, ancestors, others not present, benevolent entities
- guided **meditation** or **silence**
- **movement**

Remember that this is not about you. Your choices should be inspired by the participant and what is meaningful to *them*. Keeping your rituals highly personalized will help you avoid issues of appropriation. When in doubt, remember to make ample use of the elements and the senses.

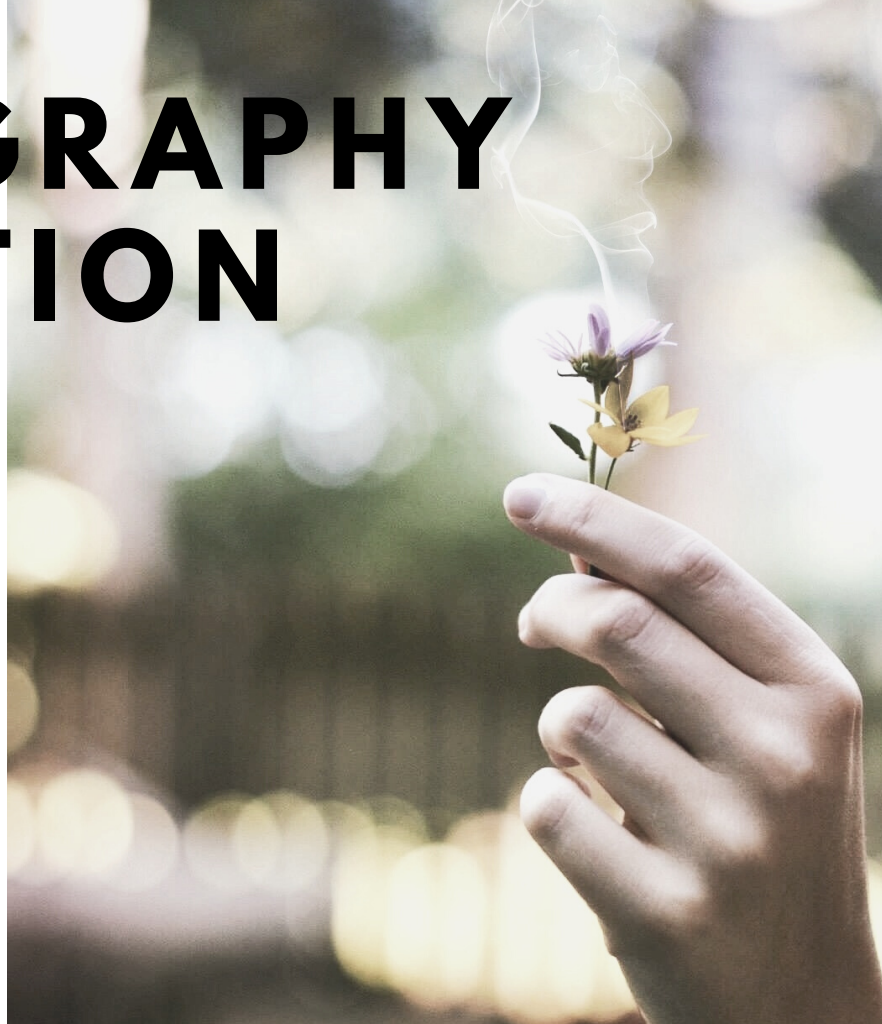
earth - air - fire - water
touch - taste - sight - sound - smell

CHOREOGRAPHY & EXECUTION

To finalize your ceremonial script, simply order your ritual elements in a way that most logically and/or powerfully tells the story of your ceremony participant(s). For rites of passage, recall the stages of separation, transition, and incorporation. Otherwise, be creative and (most importantly) serve the needs that are at hand - whether it's remembrance, connection, celebration, or support.

You may want to include a brief introduction for some or all of the ritual elements. Remember that your voice is the connective tissue woven throughout the ceremony, grounding & guiding both participant(s) and attendees.

Your final script is a fully-fleshed outline which you will use to facilitate the ceremony. Ensure that any other facilitators or relevant parties (e.g. musicians, lectors) have a copy as well. For general attendees, you may want to provide a program that contains an abbreviated version of your script. In the program, be clear about when attendee participation is encouraged - movement, song, response, etc.



Ceremony-crafting and facilitating, at its best, is a practice in deep listening, a public service, and an art form. If you are called to this work, consider beginning by creating a rite of passage for yourself. How will you initiate yourself into the fellowship of ritual specialists and priest/esses across time and space?



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