

Ceremony



When you pray alone, you are doing a ritual. When you pray with others, you are creating a ceremony. Ceremony is an essential component of the practice of shamanism, and the key to creating it is your intention. You should not consider doing a ceremony unless you are perfectly clear what you intend to create.

Remember the old adage, "Be careful what you pray for." While a ceremony can create miracles, if your intention is not clear, you may not like the miracles that you create. So, be clear as to what you are doing and why before you begin. Do your homework. Understand the energies that you are playing with and its effects.

The components of a ceremony are:

- Creating Sacred Space
- Smudging
- The Work Itself
- Habitual Practices

Since a ceremony is a natural outgrowth of ritualistic work, the best way to create it is to have a regular practice. When you share your practice with a friend or two, you are creating a circle. A circle is always more powerful than doing ritual alone. A circle is how you create a ceremony. Because more than one person is involved, someone has to create the circle, the Sacred Space and hold the energy.

What does it mean to create Sacred Space and hold the energy?

Creating Sacred Space

Sacred Space is any real or imaginary area that you set aside for spiritual or religious purposes. Sacred Space can have physical or mental boundaries. When you are in it, you are full of reverence, awe, and respect. It is a place where you can pray and do rituals like meditation or yoga, a place where you can create a circle and be alone or with others who wish to practice with you. It can be a place in your home, outside in nature, or inside your mind.

Once you decided what and where that space is, place one or more object(s) in it to signify its sacredness. You then want to cleanse it and invite spiritual help. Smudging is the best way to cleanse and calling in the directions is the best way to ask for help.

Think of it as throwing a party. You lay the finest tablecloth and china you have and make the best meal you can. When you create Sacred Space, you are laying the table for the spirits to visit you. You begin by putting down a fabric as small or as large as you wish. It may be a square or round scarf, a small tablecloth, or a piece of cloth or leather that you create for the occasion. Then you set it with your best china. You create your altar.

On the altar, place objects that are representative of each of the cardinal directions you are inviting: The East, South, West, and North. If you ask in the vertical directions, you can place something symbolic of the Above, the Below, and Center. Select objects symbolic of each of these directions and meaningful to you. There is no hard and fast rule as for what element represents each direction.

The Directions

East - Air

The East is the direction of inspirations, all beginnings, the place where the Sun rises, a story begins when you take the first step of a journey and watch the seed of your dream start to sprout. A feather or an air instrument, such as a flute, can represent this direction. If you want to keep things simple, make an altar cloth with four sections, and the color Yellow can represent this section.

South - Fire

Symbolic of the South, and the generic color red, this direction represents the community. The South shows how we interact with society, the give-and-take game we play with it. People congregate in the South, and here the Sun is at its highest and warmest, the thick of a journey unfolds, the plot of a story appears and dreams manifest. Any symbol of fire can symbolize this direction, a candle, burning incense, the color red.

West - Water

Water is the symbol for the West and the place of healing. It is in the West that the Sun sets, life and other endeavors come to an end, complete, and conclude, so it is appropriately represented

by the generic color black. In the West, we reap what we sow and deal with the results of our actions. The West is a place of deep introspection and meditation. A flower in a vase, a container with water, a shell, ocean glass, or a shark tooth can represent the West.

North - Earth

The North is the realm of wisdom. The color white signifies this direction, reminding us of the gifts of our ancestors, the wise ones that came before us. A stone, a crystal, a container with sand, amber, a wood carving, a branch or a plant will represent Earth.

Not everyone calls in the next three directions, the Above, the Below, and the Center. Some individuals and groups include only the four and the Center. Some only include the Four Directions. Because I like to create an all-inclusive space that is sacred, a bubble of security, I've included these three additional directions.

The Above

The Above has no color associated with it. It is the ceiling of our life, where the Sun, the universe, and the stars keep us safe—physically and metaphysically. The Above shelters us from the realms we cannot control, the rain, the snow, and storms, as a picture of the Sun, or a carving to represent this direction.

The Below

This direction represents our home, our mother, who keeps us safe. It represents our real home and all the social structures that shelter, feed, and provide us with clothing on this earthly realm. Use a picture of the Earth, or a house, or something that symbolized home to you for the Below.

The Center

The Center reminds of all we do not know and never will. Here we come to terms with our concepts of God, Goddess, or the Creator. If you are an atheist or an agnostic, your higher power source is here. You can find a small statue of your symbol of God/ess and place it in the Center. Or you can place a heart or a beautiful crystal, or you can leave it mysteriously empty. The Center is also a place that draws you to it.

If you are preparing the altar, make sure that the objects you lay on it have been smudged and cleansed. If you do not want to use sage, you can use, copal, sweet grass, Palo Santo, Lavender, or myrrh. You can also use a rattle. You will use these objects over and over, so it is wise to find a basket or another decorative container where you can keep them. Regardless, do not lay any Sacred objects on your altar until you have prepared the Space and the base.

Note: Be mindful and not use Abalone shells to burn sage. People of the First Nation have pointed out that it is not appropriate to use an object from the water to make a fire. Use a seasoned piece of pottery that can sustain warmth without cracking or a metal container.

The Power of Intention

Setting your intention involves conscious thought and helps you fashion what you wish to create. All ritual work begins with declaring and focusing your intention to visualize the future you want

to create. In energy work, making an intention is the equivalent of using a GPS or a map. If you do not know where you are going, you will have a hard time getting there!

The following guidelines will help you to set your intention:

Focus: Be present for all energy work. Hush your inner dialogue and stay in the here and now.

Get Clear: Decide what you want to do. In the beginning, it will help you to write and rewrite your intention. Later, you will rely on your own experience and intuition. As it gets more comfortable, you will be tempted to cut corners. Don't. The critical component of spiritual work is setting your intention, so you need to be clear about it.

Voice It: Speak your affirmation aloud.

Release It: Once you voice your intention, let it go. Let the Universe and its creative Energy handle the details.

Example of an Intention: To give an example, a good affirmation for smudging—which you would state aloud—would be: "I am cleansing myself and my space to create Sacred Space and to ask for spiritual guidance." Once your intention is clear, you are ready for smudging