



Reclaiming-style Rituals: What to Expect

“What is a ritual? Why would I want to be a part of one?”
“What if I feel uncomfortable? What if I want to get -out- of one?”
“So, what exactly happens during a ritual? How do I take care of myself afterwards?”

.....and some extra credit questions:
What’s a trance journey? Why would I want to take one?
What is a Spiral Dance?

What is a ritual? Why would I want to be part of one?

At camp, a ritual is a space in time carved out for deep work, usually involving set forms to create and contain the energy of that moment. We use rituals to formally connect to the Gods and Spirits/Energies (of the land, ourselves, etc.). We also use rituals to perform acts of magic, to "change consciousness at will".

What if I feel uncomfortable during a ritual? What if I want to get -out- of one?

First and foremost, your responsibility is to yourself. If you feel uncomfortable during a ritual, or disagree with the intention of a ritual before it even starts, please do take care of yourself. Feel free to ask for clarification, or any other questions. If you decide to leave, you will not be shunned; rather, you will be respected for knowing your needs. If you happen to be in the midst of a ritual, and feel the need to leave (due to moral, physical, or other discomfort), please do so using the following form:

1. Go to the edge of the ritual circle (see “3. Casting a Circle” for more about that).
2. Imagine that the edge is something solid.
3. Now imagine yourself either cutting open a door, unzipping a zipper, what-have-you, then stepping through that opening to the other side.
4. Once "outside the circle", close the opening you just made. If you want to return to the circle, repeat these steps.

Formally cutting yourself into or out of the circle helps maintain the energetic boundaries of the circle (see “3. Casting a Circle” for more about that). For some reason, animals and small children don’t seem to affect the circle boundaries if they wander in and out.

So, what exactly happens during a ritual?

Rituals in the Reclaiming tradition tend to use a set form, although the means and words used in this form can vary widely. In general, these are the components you will experience:

Basic Reclaiming-Style Ritual Outline:

1. Explanation of intention, teaching of chants
2. Grounding/purifying
3. Casting Circle
4. Calling Quarters/Elements/Guardians
5. Inviting/Invoking Deity
6. Body of Ritual
7. Cone of Power
8. Thanking/Devoking Deity and the Quarters
9. Opening the Circle

1. Explanation of the intention of the ritual, and then teaching any chants/songs.

One of the ritual facilitators will speak to the "why's and wherefor's" of the ritual. This is a great time to ask questions if you need more clarity. Another facilitator might also step up, and teach folks the words/melody of the chants that will be used during the ritual.

2. Grounding/purifying.

This usually takes the form (altho the specifics will vary) of someone saying "imagine you have roots in the bottom of your feet, and feel them growing down into the earth. Soak in that energy from the earth into your body. Now release any cares or worries back into the earth, so it can be recycled as energy". Grounding and purifying helps clear your mind, focus your attention, and establish a solid "energetic footing".

3. Casting a circle.

Reclaiming starts to cast in the North quarter, then goes around to the East, South, West, and back to North - then to the center, from Above to Below. This casts a sphere, which will hold the energy that's raised during the ritual. Tools for casting are sometimes wands, sometimes blades, sometimes just one's hand, or group voice. Imagine the rest of the world dropping away on the outside as the circle is being formed.

4. Calling the Quarters.

Reclaiming calls the Quarters in order from the East, to South, to West, to North, plus Center. Calling the Quarters is done in order to call in the qualities represented by those Quarters, qualities that will assist us in the work to be done.

East/Air: thinking, speech, clarity, dawn, "to know".

South/Fire: passion, excitement, life-force, noon-time, "to will".

West/Water: emotions, subconscious, tides, dusk, "to dare".

North/Earth: rocks, bones, our bodies, mountains, soil, midnight, "to keep silent".

Center/Spirit.: the hub of the wheel, our own presence that contains all elemental qualities, the Creative power within us all, the well of All Possibility, the Void of Emptiness. Paradox.

[Above & Below is sometimes called as an Element as well.]

(Ritual outline, cont'd)



Extra Credit Questions:

5. Inviting/Invoking Deity

Specific God/dess forms are called in because of Their qualities. Brigid might be invoked for Her forging powers, the Green Man might be invoked for regenerative earth powers. They are generally called in to witness and guide our efforts.

6. The Body of the Ritual

Can contain any number of actions... guided trance-work (see "What's a trance journey?" below), labyrinth walking, ecstatic dance, chanting to build energy. Sometimes culminates into a Spiral Dance (see "What's a Spiral Dance?" below).

7. Cone of Power

Once the Spiral Dance has wound back into the center, or at some other pre-determined point, participants will gather into the center and raise a Cone of Power. This is done through movement, voice, etc. It can feel loud, powerful, scary. You can join in, or step back if you feel uncomfortable or just want to observe. Not all rituals will have a cone of power, but most will. The cone will energize the intention of the ritual, sparking the magic to happen. After "releasing" the cone of power, the ritual usually (but not always) ends. But wait, there's more; for completion and for good manners, you'll want to stay for the closing (unless you need to leave. If so, always remember to "cut yourself out" of the circle first).

8. Thanking/Devoking Deity and the Quarters

The God/esses and Quarters who were invited to witness and assist are thanked and "released" (if they so choose to go). The God/esses and Quarters are generally thanked and released in the order they were invoked.

9. Opening the Circle

The circle is sometimes "opened" with a group release, song, or by a facilitator going around and formally gathering up/dissipating the circle boundaries. After the circle is opened, the ritual is complete.

How do I take care of myself after the ritual?

Sometimes a ritual can leave you feeling emotionally shaken or energetically "buzzy". If so, put your hands on the ground, and imagine any excess energy draining easily thru your hands and into the earth - this is called "grounding the energy". Another suggestion is to eat some sort of high-protein snack: cheese, nuts, eggs, etc. Try to stay away from sweets if you still feel hyper-energetic or emotionally distraught - the sugar high might make things feel worse.



What's a trance journey? Why would I want to take one?

A trance is a deep meditative state in which you can either simply sit and "be", or can be an active, guided journey. Most Reclaiming trances are guided journeys led by a facilitator, and will sometimes include a drum-beat to help you slow down your mind. A guided trance journey is usually composed of the following:

- a relaxation exercise
- an "induction", where you will be led to a deeper trance state. Often uses the imagery of going down stairs, or walking down a path, or moving thru the colors of the (western version of) chakras.
- the trance journey itself. You might meet a Deity, find a gift, or discover an aspect of yourself. Once completed,
- a "reverse induction", where you begin to lift yourself from the trance state by going backwards thru the original induction.
- then opening your eyes, and coming back to a fully present state.

Some folks find trance journeys difficult, or have trouble visualizing what the facilitator is suggesting during the trance. You might try other methods of "visualizing" what's being suggested - perhaps using the sense of smell, imagining the scent of what's being suggested, or sensing the feel of the path under your feet, or hearing the wind, etc. If you find that you don't want to complete the trance, simply lead yourself out by using a reverse induction, and rest quietly until the trance is completed.

What's a Spiral Dance?

A Spiral Dance is a form used to connect the energy of each individual into a larger whole. It's also a way to connect with each other on a personal and community level. The dance starts with the group forming one large circle. The dance facilitator will start, dropping the hand of the person to her right, walking the group into an inner spiral, spiraling out, then back in again. During the walking/spiraling, keep hold of your partners' hands (to your left and right), and walk s-l-o-w-l-y. No need to play "crack the whip". During the spiraling, it can be a powerful experience to look into each person's eyes that passes in front of you. The constant movement and shifting can sometimes bring an awareness of community, how everything in life changes, and to be present for and cherish each moment. If you need to leave during a Spiral Dance, join the partners' hands that are in front and behind you, and then move out. Any questions?