



---

# *Ritual Design Kit*

*A method for any individual  
or group to create meaningful  
acknowledgment of any life event.*

---

**“Rituals are the core of every strong community’s life. They are the bones of a body’s skeleton, the framework that holds things into shape, giving form to a community’s values and relationships. The familiarity, structure, and rhythm of rituals creates a container that can hold the conflicts and tragedies that touch every life and every community.”**

Rita Nakashima Brock  
Rebecca Ann Parker







# ABOUT RITUALS

## WHAT IS A RITUAL?

A process used by an individual or group which allows each participant to increase health through further understanding, celebrating, grieving, or taking action. Although the structure is planned, the outcome for each person can be different.

## Rituals build resiliency by:

- encouraging individual health to build group resiliency
- structure for working through difficult events
- bringing people “home” to their group
- planned time for gaining strength
- supporting various viewpoints on a topic or event
- release of emotion, tension, and reducing toxicity
- each person accurately seen by others

## Ritual Criteria

1. Designed by participants
2. Stated purpose is health of group
3. Frequency determined by group
4. Everyone is involved
5. Not focused on customers or product issues



# Rituals for Regeneration

## Theme Areas

### **Focus Area One: Celebrating and Grieving**

Activities which acknowledge both accomplishment and loss for individual members of the group, entire group, or surrounding environment/community.

### **Focus Area Two: Community Engagement**

Activities which reinforce purpose of group and clarify specific group and individual responsibilities, roles, and agreements.

### **Focus Area Three: Personal Identity**

Activities which result in individual members becoming more well-known and belonging to each other.

### **Focus Area Four: Learning**

Activities which increase the knowledge, experience and gifts useful in carrying out the purpose of the group.

### **Focus Area Five: Spiritual**

Activities which increase the groups connection to the great mystery's, awe, and wonder threaded through all creation.

# Getting Started Designing a Ritual

Ritual is designed to provide a turning point in our individual or collective lives. Sometimes referred to as “time out of time”, a ritual should, through its design, move us towards understanding and commitments that are difficult to come by in the rush of our everyday life. To accomplish this, ritual needs to be creative, a little dangerous, and also doable.

On the next few pages, you’ll be guided through the steps of designing a ritual. This process is only one way, and is offered as a place to start from. You may or may not choose to do all of the steps, depending on the complexity of the ritual you are doing.

There are five basic steps:

One: Tell the story that caused the ritual opportunity to surface

Two: Identify elements you’d like to include in the ritual

Three: Visualize the design of the space where you will do the ritual

Four: Design the ritual process

Five: Initiate the ritual and evaluate

## **Step One: Tell the story that caused the ritual opportunity to surface. Define the ritual purpose.**

Tell it from all sides, from the origination to what happened recently, and give everyone a chance to be heard. The purpose of telling the story is to get ritual designers into the memory of the story so they can use it as inspiration for the best ritual symbols and activities. Out of the story, clearly define the ritual purpose.

## **Step Two: Identify the elements you initially would like to consider using in this ritual.**

On the next page are traditional ritual items to choose from, but you may also have other items that aren’t on this page. Circle the items that stand out to you, and also put a \* next to items that are particularly symbolic of the purpose for this ritual. For instance, if you are ritualizing the beginning of a new career, you may want to have a symbol of the career as an element. If you are ritualizing the passing of a young person into adulthood, you may want to have symbols of the gifts he is bringing.

This step in the ritual process is very, very important since the elements will be the inspiration for the design of the ritual space and the steps in the ritual process. The elements are the seed imagination for the ritual.

# Step Two: Choosing Ritual Materials

What are the symbols associated with this ritual purpose?  
Would any of these traditional ritual materials be helpful for you to use? What other materials might be useful?

---

## Environmental

- Time of day
- Physical location
- Inside/Outside
- Threshold/exit & entry points

## People

- Types of people present
- Touch
- Dance
- Arrangement of people at the ritual
- Bowing
- Hands on heart
- Kneeling
- Clothes (colors/types/designs)

## Language

- Poems
- Writing
- Personal readings
- Stories
- Quotes
- Ideas
- Songs

## Earth elements

- Fire/candles, smoke, fireplaces or pits, ash
- Water/lakes, rivers, sea, fountains, libation bowls
- Stones/small stones, boulders
- Earth/dirt, sand, mud
- Plants/Vegetation/Seeds
- Wind
- Sun

## Other Materials

- Cloth
- Tables
- Chairs
- Animals
- Paint
- Bells
- Musical instruments
- Personal ancestral/spiritual/token objects
- Offerings
- Hair
- Boxes, containers, vases
- Items unique to this situation

## Art

- Photographs
- Drawings
- Impromptu graphics/art

## Spiritual

- Readings
- Breathing
- Imagery
- Prayers
- Chants
- Silence

## Food

- Symbolic food
- Water
- Wine

## Other important symbols:

- 
- 
-

## Step Three: Creating the Ritual Space

Describe how you'll organize the space where you will hold the ritual. Refer to the items you circled on the Choosing Ritual Materials sheet as you design the space. Sometimes the ritual space is just a table in a room with people sitting around it. Other times a great deal of time is spent decorating a room, creating a symbolic table with ritual elements on it. Sometimes the ritual space is simply two people walking down a sidewalk telling a story to each other. People can have a tendency to over-design and over-decorate a space to the point that the space is distracting. Simple, powerful symbols in a space will focus the ritual and draw people in. As you consider the design, you may want to think about the following:

Where is the best place to do this ritual?

Will there be chairs, or will people be standing?

How will the people be arranged in the space? If there is a focus person, where will they be? Will people be in a circle, in rows, in a line?

Will there be a focal point in for ritual symbols? Will there be an entrance/exit point?

Will the space be decorated in any way?

**Make notes to yourself below that describe how you'll organize the ritual space. If you are a visual person, make a sketch of the space.**

# Step Four: Designing Our Ritual

**Name of Ritual:**

**Purpose:**

For help completing this sheet, refer to the “We Become One...” article on the next two pages which further explains the purpose of each of the nine ritual steps. *Important: You may or may not choose to include all of the steps in your ritual design.* For instance, if the ritual is two people walking outside telling each other a story, you may only choose to do Steps 1, 5, and 9. Other rituals may not be successful without using all nine steps. Use the steps that will create the most meaningful ritual for your situation.

***Describe What happens and who will do each step included in your ritual:***

---

**1. Stepping over the line: How will participants enter the ritual space?**

---

**2. Alignment: How will we center and align participants as one?**

---

**3. Invitation: Who or what will be invited to stand by us in this ritual? Who will we invite?**

---

**4. Statement of Purpose: Who will speak a 1-2 sentence ritual purpose statement?**

---

**5. Core Ritual Activity: Describe the primary ritual activity. Who will do each step?**

---

**6. Acknowledge Gifts: Who will ask for participants to speak to the personal impact of the ritual?**

---

**7. Thanking: Who will thank who or whatever we invited in Step 3?**

---

**8. Alignment: How will we center and align participants as one before leaving?**

---

**9. Stepping over the line: How will participants exit the ritual space?**

---



# Nature-Oriented Ritual Theme Areas



Caution:

The above ritual theme areas cannot be assumed as a "standard."

There are many, many nature-oriented ritual design elements represented in different indigenous, spiritual and more modern cultural cosmology's.

There are also many different interpretations of the meaning of each element which cannot be fully understood if you are not part of the story of that group. For instance, in some cultures fire represents a doorway to Spirit. In other cultures fire represents the duality of anger and inspiration.

Four and five element designs are common.

Earth, water, and fire are common. In 4 element designs, Air is used frequently in place of stone, often representing themes of Spirit, breath, energy, life, purity.

# **We Become One:**

## **Designing Rituals for Individuals and Groups**

**by Bruce Anderson**

Ritual is the human experience of marking a passage of any kind. Although there are as many different ritual designs as there are unique cultures in the world, there are similarities to how different cultures design the steps in a ritual. The nine-step process described below is one typical pattern for ritual design, and can be adapted and modified to meet the needs of the person or group participating. Do not be put off by the number of steps and the seeming complexity on first glance. Using these steps, you can design a process that will take anywhere from a few minutes to a few days, depending on your needs.

A ritual can 1) be repeated for each community member going through a similar passage, 2) mark the repeated experience of a group, or 3) can be designed to acknowledge a unique experience of an individual or group. Rituals can be planned ahead or designed in the moment.

Rituals are an expression of the beauty residing within the group, so it is difficult to overestimate the importance of beauty in any ritual design. The core idea is to create beauty, which may or may not require creating an elaborate crafting of a ritual space. A simple grouping of stones, swatches of colored cloth draped in just the right way, or a small mound of earth adorned with candles can be just as powerful as an ornately decorated shrine. It is also possible to create powerful rituals that do not include alteration of a physical space.

Notice in the ritual steps described below that there is an intentional “entry and exit” design. The first three steps that call people into the ritual are also repeated at the end to help people leave the ritual. This is part of the “time out of time” flow of a ritual. We bring people into ritual and then we help them leave so they can get back to their everyday life in community, still carrying in their bones a distinct memory of the ritual.

Most of us do not have much practice with the design of meaningful rituals. Community life these days has replaced rituals with short, predictable ceremonies. Give your group permission to falter in both the ritual design and the actual ritual experience. There may be laughter as people forget what to do during the most serious steps, or one part may not be as powerful or effective as you originally imagined. Just keep in mind that the intention of carrying out a ritual is, in itself, a remarkable commitment to the memory of what it takes to sustain us in this life together.

## **Typical Ritual Steps**

### **1. Stepping over the line**

Rituals are designed to be “time out of time”, so it’s helpful to have a marking point that reminds people they are entering the ritual so they can separate themselves from their other thoughts and activities during this time. Two things are important in this step: a designated space and the entry into it. Any space can be used that meets the design for the ritual, as long as it is possible to acknowledge entry into it. Examples: A simple lighting of a candle at a table, decorating a doorway to acknowledge entering a room, designating a certain place in a building or nature as a ritual space, creating barriers in a larger room that cordon off a smaller space that can be used for ritual. Creating a beautiful entry magnifies the power of the ritual and allows people to enter with their imagination inspired. Entering the ritual space as a group can also be very powerful.

### **2. Alignment**

A common and expected activity usually begins a ritual, signaling to those involved that the ritual is beginning. The purpose of alignment is to bring the separate humans into the memory that they are one. This is usually some form of song, drumbeat, repeated chant, prayer, poem, or other unifying spoken word that aligns the participants and draws them into the experience.

### **3. Invitation**

Ritual allows a person to re-acknowledge they are part of something larger than themselves, and that we have not gotten to where we are solely by ourselves. In older cultures, this step often invited ancestors and/or spirit into the ritual as an acknowledgment that we don't do anything without their help and guidance. In modern culture, particularly in business settings, this can be an awkward step because we are not a mono-spiritual or mono-cultural group. Oftentimes, there will be participants who do not feel comfortable with prayers outside of their faith tradition, or participants who do not believe in prayer at all. What avoids trouble, and still allows this step to be powerful, is for the ritual leader to ask people to sit in silence for a moment and thank whoever has helped them to get to this point in their life, or whoever has guided them in the area related to this ritual. It can also be useful to be grateful for the opportunity to do the work you are doing.

### **4. Statement of Purpose**

The ritual leader, or another designated person, states the purpose of the ritual and gives any instruction necessary for participants to complete the ritual steps.

### **5. Core Ritual Activity**

This is the activity designed to acknowledge the accomplishment, grieve, celebrate, or mark the threshold of the occasion being ritualized.

### **6. Acknowledge Gifts**

Ritual is designed not only for the person or group who is the focus of the ritual, but also for all participants to remember how they have been affected by this experience and their connection with the purpose of the ritual. For instance, a funeral ritual is not just for the person who has died, it also causes the remembering in each ritual participant of all the other people who have died in his/her life. This step in the ritual offers all participants the opportunity to reflect on and/or speak about the gifts they have received from participating in this ritual.

### **7. Thanking**

This ritual step acknowledges gratitude to whoever was invited during the Invitation step at the beginning of the ritual. Again, the process is usually for the ritual leader to ask people to speak or take a moment of silence to thank whomever they invited during the Invitation.

### **8. Alignment**

This step repeats whatever was used as the Alignment activity in Step Two at the beginning of the ritual. You repeat the song, chant, poem, etc you used at the beginning. This brings people out of their experience of the ritual as individuals and re-unites them together as a group and prepares them for the leaving.

### **9. Stepping over the line**

Ritual is "time out of time". Communities can't exist if everyone is in a ritual all the time...there is work to be done! A simple form of intentional exit is planned which acknowledges the ritual is completed and it's time to get on with daily life again. It may be important in the design to consider using the same path to both enter and exit the ritual to complete the circle of beginning and ending.

-----



# ***For Organizations: Keeping It Going***

## **Key things that will increase ritual success in your organization:**

- **A ritual has started at the moment you begin to design it.** Immerse yourself in the pleasure and meaning of the entire ritual experience, including the design.
- **Don't create a lot more meeting time for rituals!** Most rituals can be done before or after already scheduled meetings and don't require a lot of extra time.
- **The first couple times you do a new ritual,** be sure to allow time at the end for a short feedback discussion. Remember, rituals will sometimes seem silly, sometimes not work, and sometimes produce unexpected results. Keep at it until you find what works. Was it meaningful? Was it interesting? How could you change it to make it more meaningful or interesting? Rituals often need to be altered slightly, or sometimes abandoned in favor of new ideas. Be open to change
- **Don't postpone a ritual.** We're all busy, and the tendency is to say, "We'll do this next week when we're not so busy." The pattern of postponing rituals leads to the end of rituals in an organization.
- **Have a designated leader for each ritual.** Rituals won't sustain themselves without somebody being in charge and making sure it happens.
- **Everyone participates.** Everybody who can be there should be there. Be sure to have group agreements that outline the conditions under which a person may be absent. If you don't, eventually everybody will just be too busy and no-one will show up to participate. Remember, rituals are the glue that holds your group together, so the whole group needs to participate.
- **Don't continue rituals that have lost their meaningfulness.** There is nothing worse than a boring ritual. Redesign it, abandon it for something else, but don't keep doing it. Rituals can lose their effectiveness over time. *NOTE: Many groups get to a "hump" phase a few months after their initial kick-off of rituals, and have to recommit to the idea of rituals and their usefulness in the group.*
- **Periodically, review your rituals.** Groups often review their rituals each year, offering the opportunity for old rituals to be altered or abandoned, and new rituals to be added.
- **How many rituals is enough?** It's helpful to have a ritual or two in each of the five areas, but you don't have to start them all at one time. Each group will come up with the "right" amount depending on their unique culture.

# Organizations: Responses to Resistance

Some participants are likely to respond with these typical types of resistance when you begin establishment of rituals in your group. The “resistors” are not “wrong”, and often have very important contributions to make. They are important to listen to, keep including, and also to put in charge of designing and leading rituals. Most resistors will become advocates for ritualized activity if they have the opportunity to repeatedly witness the positive effects of rituals on other members of their group.

---

## No Time

Everyone is busy, and almost everyone wonders where they will get the time to participate in what may be seen as a non-essential activity. The leader(s) must designate the time, sponsor it, mandate attendance, and talk directly about why it is an essential activity. If necessary, the leader must figure out other activities taking place which can be efficiently reduced in order to allow time for these activities. Working towards group health must be valued as importantly as delivery of business services.

## Don't believe it will help

Just as with anyone struggling with hope, employees may have to temporarily carry the hope for other staff that have none. These members must be asked to attend, but should not be mandated to participate if they choose not to. Over time, they may become involved if they are not shut out from witnessing the experience happening to others. In addition, the specific purpose of each ritual must be clearly known by all participants.

## Associating rituals with spiritual/religious activity

In business environments, leaders need to make a distinction between the common practice of spiritual rituals and the equally common practice of community rituals. Team rituals are not spiritual activities designed to deepen faith, they are community-building rituals designed to promote group cohesion, identity, and strength. Although they may have a spiritual component for some, it may not be helpful to explicitly state that.

## Fear of overexposing facts or feelings

Participants need to be clearly told that their participation can be at whatever level they are comfortable with. By their design, ritual activities should not mandate excessive personal story-telling or sharing of deep emotions at unsafe levels.

## Not businesslike or professional enough

Since it is the mission of all organizations to offer products and services that help to create strong and resilient individuals and communities, it is in the best interests of those same organizations to do the same work internally with each other. Increased trust is built between co-workers when they get to know each other in more ways than solely by the tasks each completes during their workday. Rituals deepen each employee's commitment to both their co-workers and also to the mission of the organization.