

Ceremony Checklist

1. Create a Sacred Space

- You may want to physically create sacred space by forming a circle, delineating the boundaries with ribbons or flowers or...
- Flowers, fabrics, music, scents (be careful of people's allergies) are all tools to create sacred space.
- Altar space/construction

2. Four Principles of Ceremony

- Intention
 - What is the purpose of the ceremony? Theme? Vision?
 - Mark a transition? To honor and celebrate? Healing? To remember?
 - Spend some time reminding yourself of past experience with ceremony.
 - Think about ceremonies you love and don't like. Think about what works for you about ceremony and what doesn't. Notice if patterns emerge.
- Timing and Location
 - Choose a location – inside, outside, sitting on floor/pillows/folding chairs, around a table....
 - What will happen?
 - Who will witness it?
 - How will they know what has happened?
 - What change is taking place?
 - What will be different after the ceremony?
 - Consider amount of time; comfort zone is 30-45 min. for simple ceremony.
 - Time needed for set-up?
 - Clean up?
- Progression – Beginning, Middle, End (Separation-Transformation-Incorporation)
 - Make the transition from the outside world to this special moment.
 - Think about which elements are central; think about the movement of the ceremony and keep it short and meaningful.
 - Less is more. Giving the elements you have chosen the time they deserve is more important than including everything that could be included.
 - Write out a script for the event and design an organic flow chart.
 - Rehearse or practice the script. Everyone has a speaking role.
 - **BRING COPY OF YOUR ORGANIC FLOW ON DAY OF CEREMONY**
- Structured or Free-form
 - Balance the personal and the communal. A successful ceremony is both.
 - Participants – Usually it is the act of witnessing by a community that gives ceremony potency. Consider free form participation by attendees.
 - How big or small a group you gather will affect the nature of the ceremony and how it will feel for you.
 - Consider also how you invite those present to participate.

3. Select Components for the Ceremony

- Candle lighting.
- Food or blessing special foods: first fruit of season, ceremonial foods.
- Spices or herbs or incense, watch for allergies.
- Giving a gift of charity.
- Making a vow of service or good deeds.
- Reading, or interpreting a text from Bible, classical texts, poetry, literature, other sacred texts.
- Storytelling, one person tells a story, or starts the story and each person adds a piece to the story.
- Exchanging gifts or giving gifts.
- Creating amulets.
- Dancing. Remember some of your guests may not be able to dance.
- Prayers and blessings, both familiar and newly created.
- Use of water or oil, i.e. put some on eyelids, say "I bless your eyes that you may see visions of peace," on ears, "I bless your ears that they may hear the sounds of music and of joy," etc.
- Guided meditation or guided visualization.
- Silence. Don't be afraid to use silence. It can be very powerful.
- Create a document guests will take away from this ceremony?
- Music/Songs – Some kind of music, singing, or chanting is an essential aspect of most ceremony. Chanting in English as well as other languages.
- Instruments of any kind?
- Language –English/other who does the talking?

5. Sacred Objects

- There are myriad ritual items that you might want to incorporate into your ceremony in traditional and non-traditional ways. These elements might include candles, symbolic foods, ritual clothing.
- The use of ritual objects, garments, or other treasures from family members or friends, which have historic or nostalgic connections.
- Create your own ritual object as part of the service: e.g. a bowl or cup that the participants can take home, a paper-cut, a blessing written on special paper... use your imagination.
- Ritual symbols
- Any artwork or images displayed

A successful ceremony should be relatively self-explanatory, like a work of art. While some explanation is probably necessary, think about when and how you explain things. You might want to introduce the ceremony and explain what you will do before you begin and then go through the ceremony without interrupting the flow. In general, you will need to strike a balance between helping people understand the ceremony and letting the ceremony flow and speak, as it were, for itself.

Have fun! Be your own wizard! Don't be afraid to make "mistakes." And remember: ceremony is one of the most powerful tools we have for facing the chaos and joy of life. Use it!