

Incorporating (and actualising) Physical Sigils and Patterns into Ritual Design and Movement

Part Two: Elemental Balancing Rituals for Small Groups

By Blayze

Part two of this workshop examines how we can work with basic sigils and magical shapes to create physical patterns in our rituals. Focusing primarily on an Elemental Balancing Ritual designed for small groups, participants will encounter participatory ritual practices including movement, energy sensing and projection, gestures, visualisation, inspired utterance and the layering of all of these practices to build up complete and flexible rituals.

Up to four variations of the ritual will be presented, a simple solar cross formation for 5 people, a double circle and solar cross formation for 8 people, an eight-spoked wheel and cord ritual for 9 people and a 9 person double circle / solar cross that incorporates the Tattwas and gestures.

Attendees should be prepared to participate in at least one of these rituals, which range from basic to advanced, as the rituals can be run concurrently as numbers and space allows.

Have you ever danced a wheel, woven a web or explored a labyrinth? Have you ever inscribed a pentagram, sat inside an Akashic egg or joined the Sefhira with a lightning bolt? These shapes not only have meaning on physical and magical levels, they can also stand as metaphors for how we approach the journey along our spiritual paths.

From the simplicity of a Circle to the complexity of the Tree Of Life, we enrich our spirituality with shapes and patterns. They are the symbols we scry for, the keys to unlocking mystery and the representation of our own cosmologies. These shapes and patterns exist and are understood on many levels. Their use and interpretation can change from person to person, path to path and even from era to era.

Most Wiccan and Wiccan-based rituals have the shape of a circle (or sphere) as their basic form. However, there are various ways that we can layer other shapes upon the circle to aid in ritual movement, and to enhance or change the energy flow.

Think about some of the shapes or sigils that are common in your own practice. They may be symbols used to represent elements or the planets and other heavenly bodies. They may be symbols drawn from various divination systems or complimentary magical systems such as Ceremonial Magic, Hermetics or the Qabala.

We often incorporate physical symbols into our ritual decorations, where an object has additional meaning to us within our spiritual or magical path. An egg at Ostara is an egg, but it is also a symbol of birth and regeneration. It is a container that holds the potential of life within. So physical objects become symbolic representations with layered meaning, depending on the circumstances and our understanding of their use.

We can use this idea of physical representation to relate it to the physical movement and placement of participants within the circular ritual space. I am sure there are many of these shapes that you have already experienced within circular ritual.

We explored pentagrams in the first part of this workshop. Now we will look at Spirals, 8-Spoked Wheels, The Solar Cross and The Six-rayed star.

Spirals

Think of a spiral.

QUESTION: WHAT CAN A SPIRAL REPRESENT IN RITUAL?

QUESTION: WHAT ARE SOME OF THE WAYS THAT WE USE PHYSICAL SPIRALS IN RITUAL?

- Spiral dance
- Spiral journey – travelling inwards and outwards

Think of the common pagan practice of the Spiral Dance. Do we use it just to raise energy, to move between worlds, as a spiritual quest or as a bit of fun exercise?

READ: SPIRAL JOURNEY. PARTICIPANTS TO CLOSE THEIR EYES AND VISUALISE THE SPIRAL

When we dance the Spiral, we actually begin with a circle, we explore and experience the cycles around us and within us, each turn brings a new insight, a new harmony if you will. Then we break away from the comfortable form, we begin to move towards the Otherworld. We are still making that circular movement, still experiencing the cycles, but the Spiral becomes tighter with each new turn. We become more focused as we are forced to concentrate on the forward motion. As we journey we glimpse the layers that are forming as we weave past the tail of our serpent. Previous journeys are acknowledged but the force of the Spiral pushes us ever forward.

The Spiral becomes tighter and tighter and our focus shifts again until we reach the centre and what we thought was our goal. But the Spiral never ends... and as we whirl around we find ourselves moving in the opposite direction. We have entered the Otherworld and a new perspective is gained as our awareness expands along with the ever expanding rings of the dance. Again we weave past our former selves, but this time we see our journey with another eye. We see from the perspective of one who has entered the Otherworld and dances within its boundaries.

The rings of the Spiral expand until the dance returns to a circular form once more. Hands are joined and the boundary completes. Outward facing we can rest awhile and observe that which lies outside ourselves. As we dance the Circle once more we can add the experience of the Otherworld to how we react to our environment. The land outside our small circle of knowledge is different now. Can you see the changes, or is it only we who have changed?

So we assimilate this new view and the Spiral begins to wind inward again, we focus once more as we move towards the centre in smaller and smaller rings, we narrow our view once

more to gain the Mystery that the Otherworld reveals to us. Once more to the Centre we dance, face to face, passing that which we have learned, remembering it.

At the Centre we experience a brief union of understanding, we have seen the Otherworld from the inside and the out, but before we can truly know the Mystery, the dance whirls us in a new direction and we head back to our own realm. Once more the rings expand as our awareness encompasses the whole, the light and the dark, the beginning without end, the world and the hidden worlds. We pass our former selves for the final time and then, joining hands, we leave the Otherworld behind. Facing inwards and dancing the Circle, we too dance the cycle of life that is contained within our own journeys.

Try laying your own spiritual journey along the Spiral Path. Have you journeyed within the Otherworld and returned? Have you truly looked at yourself as you weave your way to the Centre? Have you gazed boldly within and without as well as above and below? Do you try to recognise and experience the layers, twists and turns of your path?

The Spiral can leave us somewhat breathless, somewhat empowered and somewhat changed.... but then again, isn't that what a journey is all about?

So here you can see that there are many layers of meaning that can be incorporated into a single physical act of movement within the circle. Using a physical representation of a symbol can not only layer energies but can aid the practical movement of participants within a circle.

Other types of spiral rituals can include:

- Spiral storytelling / meditation
- Spiral divination patterns
- Spiral sabbat journeys

Spiral Storytelling

The spiral pattern is particularly useful where you have a storyteller walking along the spiral pathway, or someone leading a guided meditation. This is especially useful in a large ritual as it means that everyone can hear what is being said as the speaker is not calling across the circle space.

As with the spiral dance, participants start in a circle and then the leader breaks away and leads the participants towards the centre. However, instead of completing the turn around and double back, the leader stops at the centre point. Everyone is then standing in a spiral. Participants can be instructed to sit or stand as dictated by the needs of the ritual. The act of walking the spiral begins to change participant's awareness, as there is a different kind of concentration involved in slowly and methodically walking a spiral, than dancing it. Participants are close together in the spiral, facing in different directions, but they are also creating a pathway. If the spiral moves, the perspective is changed.

Once the meditation or story is finished, the leader can then complete the turn and lead everyone back into the circle formation.

HANDOUT: SPIRAL STORY EXAMPLE – OSTARA AWC 2006

Spring Maiden walks the circle. She carries the scarf. When she has made her choice she ties the scarf to the Youth's wrist. She stands next to him in the circle and takes his hand. Everyone else to join hands as she leads them in a slow spiral walk.

When she reaches the centre (and the HP who is standing there) she stops.

The HP says:

HP: *Halt. To walk the spiral you must first have the knowledge of where you have been. Life is danced upon the wheel, past and future come together in this moment. I ask all of you to sit in your spiral. Close your eyes.*

All sit.

HPS walks the spiral and begins to tell the tale. Maiden withdraws down the spiral and is given the cloak, spear and helmet for the Young Stag. He is crowned during the story. Goddess now joins the end of the line as her mortal self and the Maiden takes her place sitting before the altar.

HPS tells the story which ends with the crowning of the Young Stag.

At the end of the story the HPS asks everyone to open their eyes.

In the centre of the circle now sits the Young Stag, crowned, cloaked in green and cradling the spear in his lap. The scarf of the maiden is tied around the spear.

Young Stag: *The moon goes round the earth, the earth goes round the sun, when day and night are equal, the greening has begun.*

He stands up, taking the hand of the person next to him. He begins to walk the spiral back out to the circle, he leads the circle around once and then spirals back in, then returns to the circle once more. Everyone is now facing inwards again.

If you are moving energy or objects into or out of the otherworld, then having participants standing in a spiral tightens and directs the energy flow as the object or energy is passed up or down the spiral. As a form of ritual movement, the spiral can also add fluidity to the ritual, as it moves from the outer circular form, breaks and turns in on itself as the spiral moves and then eventually returns to its original circular shape.

PERFORM: SPIRAL WALK (NOT HOLDING HANDS). HAVE ONE PARTICIPANT WALK UP AND DOWN THE SPIRAL AS IF THEY WERE TELLING A STORY.

HANDOUT: YULE SPIRAL

Laid out upon the centre of the circle is a spiral of unlit candles. At the centre of the spiral is a small cauldron decorated with holly. It contains a large unlit candle.

HPS lights a taper from the God candle upon the altar.

Everyone begins to chant as she walks the spiral. When she arrives at the centre she invokes and lights the flame of the central candle at the appropriate moment. She kindles the flame as the Child Of Promise.

Slowly the spark that is the Child Of Promise is born from the otherworld as the HPS walks back along the spiral. As she walks, she stops to light one of the candles that form the spiral.

The next person to walk the spiral takes a candle and some greenery from the basket. They give a gift of greenery to the cauldron, meditate and light their candle from the central one. They walk back out of the spiral, lighting one of the spiral candles on their way.

This continues until all participants have walked the spiral and lit the spiral candles and the Child Of Promise is born into this world.

HANDOUT: OGHAM SPIRAL RITUAL 1

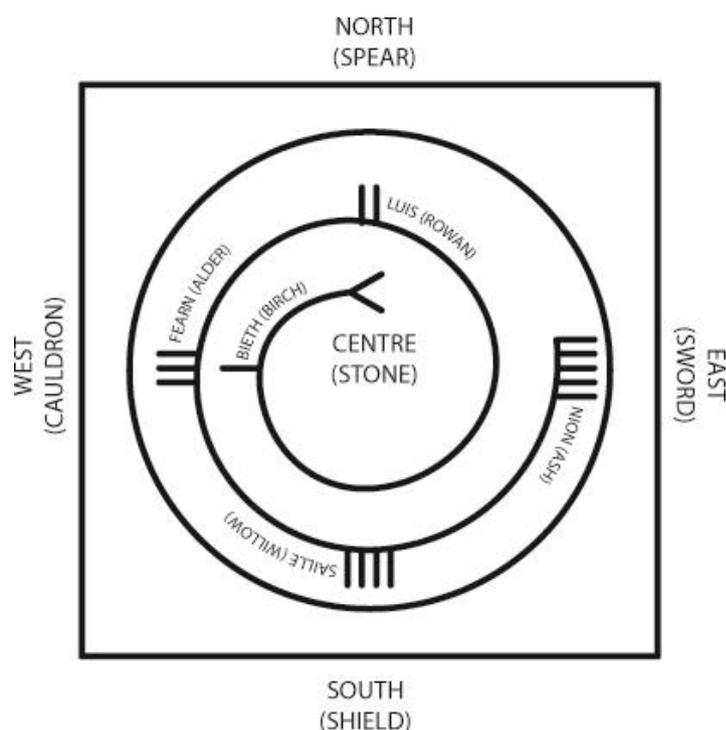
This ritual is used to gain insight from a different perspective for five different oghams. This is done after participants have completed the pathworkings for the oghams. It works as a kind of living divination, as each participant invariably finds themselves being challenged in their pre-conceptions of their relationship to a particular tree.

This is an example of a ritual pattern. It doesn't matter if you are familiar with the oghams or not. Just understand that each tree can be worked with from five different perspectives (in this example). This is akin to the different perspective and meaning that you receive regarding a tarot card, depending on where it appears in the layout.

Ogham Spiral Ritual: The First Five

This ritual is to be used after the first three sets of Ogham Pathworkings, i.e. between Ruis and Ailm. It is designed to be used by five participants and lead by one Priest or Priestess.

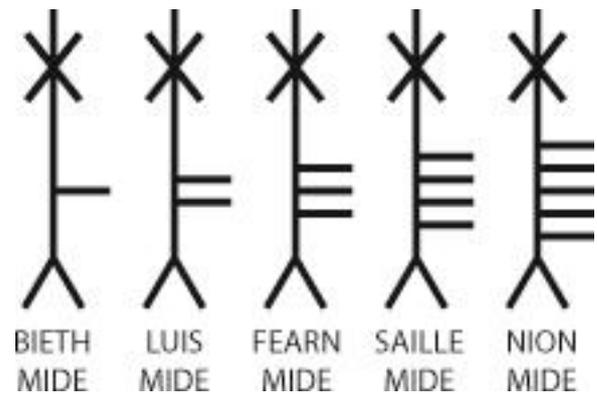
A spiral is drawn upon the floor of the temple. Oghams are marked along the length of the spiral at appropriate intervals. At each quarter is placed a ritual weapon. A stick of appropriate wood is placed upon each ogham on the floor. A bag containing ogham sticks of Birch, Rowan, Alder, Willow and Ash is placed upon the altar as well as a pot of paint and a paint brush.



North: Spear | West: Cauldron | South: Shield | East: Sword | Centre: Stone

Sacred space is formed in a ritual manner by casting the circle and invoking the directions with the weapons. Whiskey is offered at each of the cardinal points. The space is made sacred by Earth, Sea and Sky and dedicated to Lugh, Mannanan Mac Lyr, Ogma and Brigid.

When the sacred space is formed, each participant is to draw one of the five oghams out of a bag. This ogham will determine where the participants will stand for the first round of the ritual. After drawing an Ogham, each person goes to stand upon spiral at the mark that matches their Ogham.



MIDE: Focus / Centre / Sovereignty

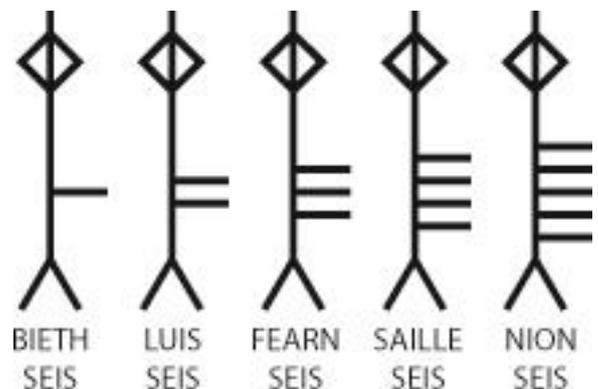
They then pick up the stick of wood and hold it in one hand. With their other hand they hold the Ogham. They are instructed to attune to the wood.

The Priestess then goes to each person and using the paint and brush, marks upon the participants' faces the Ogham they hold and the sigil for Mide. She whispers to them the name of the Ogham and the tree. She then asks them to think about the tree represented by their Ogham in Mide : focus, centre and sovereignty. This is the heart of the tree. She touches them on the forehead and sends them into trance to meditate.

After a period of time the Priestess gently calls each person back from their meditations. They are asked to hold out the stick when they are back.

They are then instructed to place the Ogham and stick upon the ground and move along the spiral to the next Ogham. Bieth moves to Luis , Luis to Fearn, Fearn to Saille, Saille to Nion and Nion to Bieth.

SEIS: Past / Harmony



They then pick up the stick of wood and hold it in one hand. With their other hand they hold the Ogham. They are instructed to attune to the wood.

The Priestess then goes to each person and using the paint and brush, marks upon the participants' faces the Ogham they hold and the sigil for Seis.

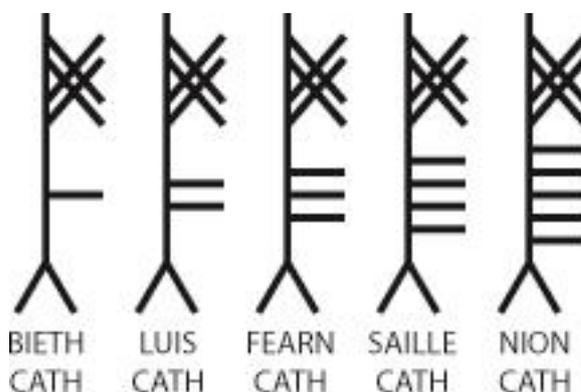
She whispers to them the name of the Ogham and the tree. She then asks them to think about the tree represented by their Ogham in Seis : past and harmony. The aspect of the tree which brings harmony. She touches them on the forehead and sends them into trance to meditate.

After a period of time the Priestess gently calls each person back from their meditations. They are asked to hold out the stick when they are back.

They are then instructed to place the Ogham and stick upon the ground and move along the spiral to the next Ogham. Bieth moves to Luis , Luis to Fearn, Fearn to Saille, Saille to Nion and Nion to Bieth.

CATH: Conflict / Battle

They then pick up the stick of wood and hold it in one hand. With their other hand they hold the Ogham. They are instructed to attune to the wood.



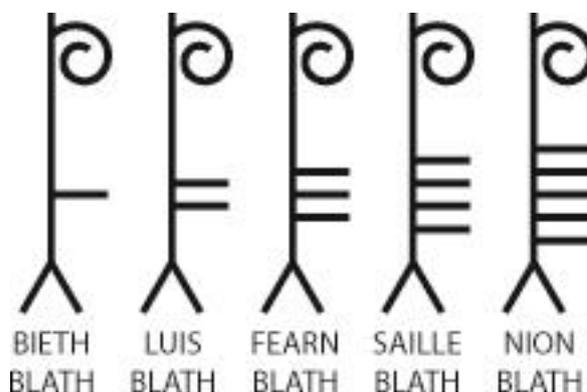
The Priestess then goes to each person and using the paint and brush, marks upon the participants' faces the Ogham they hold and the sigil for Cath. She whispers to them the name of the Ogham and the tree, She then asks them to think about the tree represented by their Ogham in Cath: conflict and battle. The conflict aspect that the participant has with the tree. She touches them on the forehead and sends them into trance to meditate.

After a period of time the Priestess gently calls each person back from their meditations. They are asked to hold out the stick when they are back.

They are then instructed to place the Ogham and stick upon the ground and move along the spiral to the next Ogham. Bieth moves to Luis , Luis to Fearn, Fearn to Saille, Saille to Nion and Nion to Bieth.

BLATH: Learning / Awareness

They then pick up the stick of wood and hold it in one hand. With their other hand they hold the Ogham. They are instructed to attune to the wood.



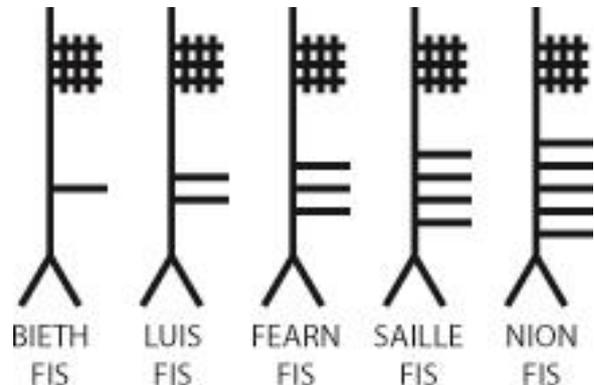
The Priestess then goes to each person and using the paint and brush, marks upon the participants' faces the Ogham they hold and the sigil for Blath. She whispers to them the name of the Ogham and the tree. She then asks them to think about the tree represented by their Ogham in Blath: learning and awareness. The learning aspect of the tree. She touches them on the forehead and sends them into trance to meditate.

After a period of time the Priestess gently calls each person back from their meditations. They are asked to hold out the stick when they are back.

They are then instructed to place the Ogham and stick upon the ground and move along the spiral to the next Ogham. Bieth moves to Luis , Luis to Fearn, Fearn to Saille, Saille to Nion and Nion to Bieth.

FIS: Manifestation / Prosperity

They then pick up the stick of wood and hold it in one hand. With their other hand they hold the Ogham. They are instructed to attune to the wood.



The Priestess then goes to each person and using the paint and brush, marks upon the participants' faces the Ogham they hold and the sigil for Fis. She whispers to them the name of the Ogham and the tree, She then asks them to think about the tree represented by their Ogham in Fis: manifestation and prosperity The manifestation of the tree. She touches them on the forehead and sends them into trance to meditate.

After a period of time the Priestess gently calls each person back from their meditations. They are asked to hold out the stick when they are back.

They are then instructed to place the Ogham and stick upon the ground and move along the spiral to the next Ogham. Bieth moves to Luis , Luis to Fearn, Fearn to Saille, Saille to Nion and Nion to Bieth.

At this point in the ritual, all participants should be back at their first Ogham.

This concludes the main part of the Spiral Ogham ritual. Now is a good time for participants to write down what they have experienced with each Ogham.

When participants are ready, they can ground out by eating and drinking. All deities and spirits are then thanked and farewelled, the sticks and Oghams are collected and the sacred space is closed.

After the ritual has been completed, participants may wish to discuss their insights into each ogham and what they experienced within the ritual. They should then write up their notes and place them with their notes from the meditations.

Wheel Dances / 8 Spoked Wheel

One of the major symbols used in wiccan-based practice is that of the 8-spoked wheel. It can represent the 8 sabbats and 8 directions as well as many other layers of meaning.

It is an interesting physical form to use.

Ways that we have used the 8-spoked wheel in ritual include:

- Power raising
- Having 8 people positioned around the circle, each holding a cord. Each cord represents a sabbat. The cords are woven together into the wheel shape. The wheel is danced to empower each cord to be used in a sabbat ritual for the coming year. Each person that will write a sabbat ritual stands at the point in the wheel that represents their sabbat.
- Working with the 8 virtues of the Charge Of The Goddess, Honour and Humility, Beauty and Strength, Power and Compassion, Mirth and Reverence and weaving these into cords which are bound to a hoop.
- We often work with the elements aligned to a particular direction. Whichever directions your particular tradition or path assigns, working with the 8 spoked wheel also allows you to explore the elements in relation to each other. For example, if you have Fire in the North and Water in the East, North East combines Fire and Water. You can have people stand in particular points of the wheel to explore the mix of the two elements.
- This also works with physical divination and can bring a fun “children’s game” feel to a ritual,
- You can have 8 people dance in a wheel and when they stop dancing (to music etc) then they go to the point they stopped at, to receive something, explore an idea, have a reading done etc.

PERFORM: 8 CORD WHEEL DANCE

HANDOUT: EXTRACT OF SPRING PHOENIX RITUAL

Power raising is performed as a cord dance with 8 golden cords/ribbons looped together in a wheel. The Maiden stands in the West with the Hoop.

The dance is performed to the Witches Rune. Those not dancing the wheel can drum, stamp and chant.

At the end of the cord dance the wheel is lowered to the ground and then lifted back up after everyone has grounded. They still keep hold of their cords whilst this happens.

When they raise it back up the introductory poem is spoken

The witch who will become the Maiden, then places the hoop over the wheel. Each person then binds their cord ends to the vine woven hoop.

Now each witch, in turn moves to the cauldron that is placed in the west. One at a time they spiral out from the Wheel and move to the West. As each person moves, the Maiden takes their place holding the wheel. The cauldron is full of spring water and floating upon the surface are flowers that have either ribbon or florist wire bound to them. There is also a chalice that sits on a small stand within the cauldron. It should be half in and half out of the water. The chalice is filled with either spring water or herb infused white wine or mead. Each witch takes their flower or leaf from the cauldron and returns to bind it to the wheel.

Any participants not holding the cords then go to the cauldron and take a flower – which they can bind to the hoop.

The Sun Wheel is complete and the Maiden having stood at each place on the wheel, now moves to the Cauldron.

Elemental Balancing Ritual

HANDOUT: ELEMENTAL BALANCING RITUAL

PERFORM ELEMENTAL BALANCING RITUAL

HANDOUT: ADVANCED PATTERNS FOR ELEMENTAL BALANCING RITUAL