

WORKSHOP: The Use Of Silence and Gesture In Ritual

By Blayze

1. Introduction

This workshop will examine how we use gesture, movement and silence in our rituals to create a language without spoken words. We will examine why we would perform silent ritual as well as break down the various actions that are commonly used within our Wiccan-based practice. These include acts of offering, layering of energies and the use of physical cues.

The workshop will conclude with a practical Earth Healing Dance that combines the majority of the silent ritual techniques discussed today.

2. What are rituals of silence and gesture?

Rituals of silence and gesture are rituals performed without, or with minimal, words. They are usually performed in small groups that work together regularly, as these types of ritual require planning, preparation and practice. They also require access to a good group mind as there are no verbal cues available to move the ritual forward.

When performed well, these silent rituals combine standard ritual gestures, movement and energy weaving techniques to create a ritual dance. The focus of the ritual is on the flow of energy rather than on spoken poetic beauty.

Q. HAS ANYONE EVER PERFORMED A SILENT RITUAL? DISCUSS:

3. Why would we perform rituals of silence and gesture?

There are many reasons that a group would choose to perform a ritual of silence and gesture. Some of these include:

- a) As an exercise in training and using group mind.

For example: When working with a group it can sometimes be a challenge to get all participants to work together with perfectly timed and harmonious energy manipulation. When the group becomes used to the feel of raising energy together, when they can notice the subtle changes in a syncopated dance step or the emphasis in a drumbeat – then they can feel those non-verbal cues to release the energy of a power raising or spell. They can see a visualisation building and when it is complete.

Silently practicing different types of energy raising, and release, as a group can be very beneficial for honing a group mind and creating an awareness between all of the individuals in the group during rituals.

Further reading: Document: [Energy Sensing by Blayze](#)
Document: [Energy Sensing Exercise 1 by Jo Dunster](#)
Document: [Energy Sensing Exercises 2 by Blayze](#)

- b) To explore ritual goals or scenarios that may be overwhelmed by words
- c) To force the group to concentrate on the agreed intent
- d) The silent ritual can be a precursor to a main ritual to create focus amongst participants.

For example: In large group rituals we have sent individuals into a small bushland setting where they are to silently concentrate and commune with the landscape, flora and fauna. They are also instructed to find a piece of wood or a leaf or other object that represents the space they were in and the journey they undertook.

At a pre-determined signal, usually a bell ringing, all participants take up their object and make their way to the gateway of the main ritual area. They are then sent down one of three paths (the paths making up a pre-determined sigil that represents the ritual) to emerge on a spiral path. They may meet guardians on the paths that give them additional objects. At the centre of the spiral is a cauldron of water or an unlit brazier. They are to place their object(s) as an offering into the cauldron or brazier.

Further example: The Tribal Ritual (Applegrove Gatherings opening ritual)

The main point of using such a ritual structure that begins in silence and involves meditation, physical silent journeys and offerings, is to allow participants to enter the main ritual space in a reverent and tranced state. They have been on an individual journey that is about to become a group journey with shared ritual experiences. Participants are already working on an inner level and are able to give of themselves to what is to come.

- e) The majority of the ritual can be silent and so when words are actually spoken the words have greater impact
- f) Practice a ritual silently to work on the energy flow and then return the words to the ritual later on

This makes the ritual that much more intense, and the group mind can be exercised and the intent increased. This enhances the ritual practice of the group.

We have found that this technique can work really well when a small group is getting ready to present a ritual for a large group. Being aware of, and practiced in, the energy patterns of the ritual means that it is much less likely that the ritualists will be overwhelmed by the increased / added energies of the new participants. This can be especially true where the ritual is designed to have multiple layers of energies built up with concurrent dance, music, gestures, intoning and drumming etc. Larger groups can produce much more energy than a small group, but if the small group are practiced in the ritual energy flow, they should be able concentrate and feed it so that it may be focused appropriately.

Also, if scripted words are forgotten in the ecstasy of the ritual moment, the energies can still be maintained without the verbal cues. When planning the ritual, a decision should be made whether there will be scripted words, inspired utterance, silence or a mixture.

If the energies begin to change in an unforeseen but appropriate way, the ritualists should have enough knowledge of the ritual and feel for the energies to enhance that change under the group mind guidance of the ritual leader. This should be smooth enough that other participants should not notice the change and feel the flow of energy as being a natural part of the ritual.

- g) Silence allows the inner voice to be heard

Silent rituals are good for rituals of divination, offerings and pattern weaving. Even if the majority of the ritual includes verbal aspects, having a silent section for moments

of introspection, insight, channelling or receiving can be beneficial to participants.

- h) For purely practical reasons as you may not want to make noise

Q. ARE THERE ANY OTHER EXAMPLES OF WHY YOU MAY WISH TO PERFORM SILENT RITUAL? DISCUSS.

4. Using Gestures in ritual

For the purpose of this workshop, “Gestures” are movements made with the hands.

Q: THINK ABOUT THE TYPE OF GESTURES THAT YOU WOULD TYPICALLY MAKE WITHIN YOUR OWN RITUALS. DISCUSS.

Some common ritual gestures include:

- a) Drawing or inscribing of pentagrams (in the air before you or over an object)
- b) drawing of sigils in the air before you or over an object
- c) drawing of oghams or runes in the air before you or over an object
- d) invocational positions / stances (e.g. Osiris position)
- e) arms outstretched to receive or project energy
- f) joining of hands or near touching
- g) pointing with a finger or with a tool
- h) looping of hands into a pentagram formation
- i) gestures of obeisance
- j) kissing the body in specific patterns / sigils – using lips as transference of power
- k) gestures of offering

If your particular ritual style or tradition involves particular gestures or movement as part of the usual ritual script or ritual protocol, then these are a great starting point for discussion and practice within the group.

Q. THINK ABOUT HOW YOU COULD COMBINE OR LAYER THESE GESTURES TO CREATE A LANGUAGE OF GESTURES FOR YOUR RITUALS

5. Using Movement / Dance in Ritual

Q. THINK ABOUT WHAT FULL BODY MOVEMENT OR DANCE YOU TYPICALLY USE IN YOUR RITUALS.

- a) Circle dancing

Further reading: [Effective Use Of Movement And Music In Ritual](#)
by Blayze

- b) Spiral dancing

Further reading: Effective Use Of Movement And Music In Ritual by Blayze

c) Vine / meeting dance

Further reading: Effective Use Of Movement And Music In Ritual by Blayze

d) Free trance dancing

e) Rhythmic stomping

f) Processionals

Further reading: Effective Use Of Movement And Music In Ritual by Blayze

g) Making physical sigils with runes, oghams (e.g. Oghamic spiral ritual)

Further reading: Incorporating (and actualising) Physical Sigils and Patterns into Ritual Design and Movement Part Two: Elemental Balancing Rituals For Small Groups by Blayze

Handout: Actualising Physical Symbols Part Two (from the above workshop)

h) Walking pentagrams

Further reading: Incorporating (and actualising) Physical Sigils and Patterns into Ritual Design and Movement Part One: Pentagram weaving, walking and dancing by Blayze

Handout: Pentagrams (from the above workshop)

i) Spiral walks

Further reading: The Spiral Principle by Blayze

j) Labyrinth walks

k) Spinning into circle with a kiss or with cords.

Q: HOW WOULD YOU COMBINE MOVEMENT AND GESTURE? DISCUSS.

6. Gestures of Offering

Q: HOW DO YOU PHYSICALLY MAKE OFFERINGS IN RITUAL?

THINK ABOUT WHAT GESTURES THAT YOU USE. DISCUSS.

a) Pouring out liquid as a libation

b) Offerings of food

c) Lighting candles

- d) Lighting incense
- e) Casting object(s) into a cauldron or living body of water

Q. WHAT ARE THE GESTURES ASSOCIATED WITH EACH OF THE ABOVE? DISCUSS

Q: HOW WOULD YOU USE GESTURES OR MOVEMENT WHEN WORKING WITH THE FOLLOWING?

- a) Creating or working at Elemental altars
- b) Making offerings to deity
- c) Making offerings to self
- d) Layering of Offerings as an empowerment of an altar before beginning trance work or trance prophecy / dance.

7. Creating elementally charged and layered scrying rituals.

Creating a layered build up of physical elemental representations within a scrying object, whilst also creating magical and metaphysical layers as a focus, can be a powerful tool to use in group rituals that require trance. As each person in the ritual adds another physical or magical layer to the central object, the trance can be built with ritual gestures. The goal is for participants to actually see the energies building until the energies coalesce in a noticeable magical change that allows the participants to scry into the object.

For Example: Water Altar Scrying:

- a) All objects that will be used in creating the scrying vessel can be taken directly to the central altar or walked / passed around the circle beforehand. They can also be taken to the centre using a spiral walk, a sigil walk or pentagram walk. The pattern of movement may depend upon the nature of the overall ritual.
- b) Use a ceramic or glass bowl for earth. Something that would make a good scrying vessel (or place salt into the bowl of water). Place the bowl onto the altar with gestures and reverence.
- c) Fill the bowl with water poured with appropriate gestures of libation.
- d) Place candle into the bowl (either a large pillar candle or a floating candle) and then ritually light it. (Or the already lit candle can be brought from elsewhere in the ritual space – illuminating the darkness as it goes).
- e) Smudge or cense the layered altar scrying bowl
- f) Transform the liquid within the bowl with ink or wine. Usually the change in energy is dramatic where the empowered / enchanted scrying surface is created by the act of changing the nature of the liquid within the bowl. China Black Calligraphy ink is best for Dark Moon scrying rituals as it creates the shine of a black mirror surface when poured into the water – and then it sucks you down, and down and down into trance.

Further Reading: Applegrove Dark Moon Ritual
 Applegrove Dark Moon Cauldron Ritual
 Applegrove Waning Crescent to New Moon ritual

Fire Altar - in a fire pit or brazier make an offering of :

- a) Pinecones
- b) Dried seaweed
- c) Herbs / resins
- d) Flame
- e) Fire dance and / or trance dance around the fire.

Further Reading: [Applegrove Dark Moon Ritual – May 2006](#)

When creating either of these layered elemental altars, we can incorporate invocations, offerings, movements and gestures.

8. Physical changes and cues created with costumes / masks.

Q. WHAT EXAMPLES OF PHYSICAL ACTS CAN YOU THINK OF?

These physical acts can be used for non-verbal cues within a ritual setting. Not only will they cue the participants that a ritual has moved on to the next section, they may also be used to enact mental or magical changes upon the recipient. In most cases this change would be as part of a pre-determined cue to begin an invocation process or complete an invocation process.

- a) Crowning / uncrowning
- b) Anointing
- c) Robing / unrobing
- d) Masking / unmasking
- e) Veiling/ unveiling
- f) Cleansing (via asperging, censuring, smudging, bell ringing, drumming etc).

Layering these ideas can be achieved by:

- a) Face paint under masks
- b) Body paint or anointing oil under a robe or cloak
- c) Double veils, or crown and veil
- d) Crone to maiden with double veils, or masks / face paint / wigs etc.

9. Conclusion

Have a think about your own rituals and traditions. See if any of your usual practices may be easily adapted to be performed silently and / or with emphasis on gesture and movement.

The idea is not to turn your rituals into a full liturgical ballet, but rather to use gestures and silence to enhance the rituals where needed.

PRACTICAL: PRACTICE ELEMENTAL AND INVOCATIONAL GESTURES. PRACTICE EARTH HEALING DANCE. PERFORM ENTIRE SILENT RITUAL.