

**THE SEVEN ESSENTIAL STEPS TO CREATING A  
FENG SHUI JOSS RITUAL**

**By**

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**(Excerpt from “Joss Papers: A Feng Shui Journey”)**

During a joss ritual, one is paying homage to the spirit world that exists around one's being and asking for assistance from the spiritual realm. We ask for help in purifying any negative energy in a home or business, for bringing a sense of abundance and harmony to our most precious relationships. We ask for our health to be energized thereby creating a smooth and peaceful life. We ask benevolent spirits to come to our aid to help and protect us.

Traditional Feng Shui modalities such as locating building sites, design of interiors, clearing clutter and creating flow may be performed once the joss paper ritual clearing of a site has taken place. Regardless of the Feng Shui system one uses, a ritual joss burning will insure appeasement of the nature spirits and a cleansing of any negativity that may be left from previous uses of the property. Joss rituals for energizing health, inviting abundance and harmony to close relationships, and for invoking peace and safety can be performed at any time an adjustment is felt needed. (Other auspicious occasions will be discussed below.)

A joss paper ritual should contain these basic elements; the **Creation of a Sacred Ritual Space, Ritual Ingredients, Offerings, Sound, Movement, Intention, and Timing**. When each of these elements are combined in ritual you invoke the highest aspect of your spiritual nature. There is a saying that dreams are a way the unconscious mind communicates with the conscious and that ritual is a way of communicating back. In ritual we set in motion the symbolism that will, in turn, affect our being on many levels.

The following are the basic elements that insure a successful joss paper ritual. (Blessed Joss Papers can be found in most Chinatown areas or Chinese markets).

### **THE CREATION OF A SACRED RITUAL SPACE**

There are many unique kinds of traditional joss rituals. For a successful joss ceremony it is important to create a sacred space where you will invoke the Divine. Taking the time to create this space solidifies your intent to make positive changes in your life and sends a message of respect to the deities and/or spiritual energy you invoke. Before a ritual space is created though, it is important to follow a few traditional purification rituals.

It is important to purify (cleanse) your body. This shows the highest respect to the spiritual realm. If a shower is not possible, you should at least wash your hands and sprinkle a small amount of water over your entire body.

According to tradition, women who are menstruating or pregnant should refrain from performing joss rituals, although someone else may perform the ritual for them and they may be present. My teachers explained to me that these are the most powerful times in a woman's life to focus inward, a time to meditate and seek the serenity of enlightenment. Ritual is a time of expanding outward and interacting with external forces. Remember, everything in nature has its season. The cycles of human life are powerful when given the respect they deserve.

Also according to tradition, beef or beef products should not be consumed the day of the ceremony, as they are believed to attract malevolent energies.

It can be extremely helpful to completely clean the entire house (or business) before the ritual to help clear out any obstructions. Remove any clutter, water houseplants (or give them a shower, they will love you for it!), vacuum rugs, mop floors, and air out the home. A spritz of rose or sandalwood essential oil (9-18 drops essential oil diluted with 3 oz. purified water) to a room adds love and spiritual energy.

Any tools to be used during the ritual (if not already blessed) should be cleansed with pure, cold water (again a few drops of rose or sandalwood essential oil may be added to the water). Any items that cannot be safely cleansed with water can be exposed to the sun. Ritual tools should be kept, when not in use, in a protected and sacred place such as a home altar.

When creating a sacred space for joss rituals, remember to accent all of your five senses: sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. If there is something in the environment present that is not pleasing to one of your senses, either remove it temporarily to another location, or place something to counteract it. For example, if the only place in your yard to perform the ritual is close to an odorous area that is impossible to relocate, use aromatherapy, fragrant flowers, incense, etc. to mask the unpleasant aroma.

Following are the basic ingredients you will need available for performing joss paper ritual.

### **1. LOCATION:**

- The back yard of a home or business is the most appropriate place for a joss paper ritual. If a back yard is not available, a balcony, porch, or lastly, inside the home is acceptable if you have a fireplace or wood burning stove.

### **2. INGREDIENTS:**

- An incense burner (a medium sized, round brass burner is best).
- A fireproof container that is only used for ritual joss burnings. A fireplace or wood burning stove may be used if you will be performing the ritual inside the home.
- Offerings of candles, incense, fruit, water, flowers or other specific personal items related to your chosen ritual.

\*Note: Use a lighter to ignite candles - do not use matches as it is believed that the scent of sulfur may attract malevolent energies.

### **3. OFFERING**

- All joss rituals should contain some form of offering. A pair of red candles and a symbolic number of incense sticks are traditionally lit to attract benevolent spirits and or deities to the pure light and sacred fragrance you offer in gratitude and honor of their assistance. You may choose to offer other items such as food (fruit, raw sugar), flowers (traditionally gladiolas of any color except white), and other relevant personal items.

#### 4. SOUND

- Sound is universally used in ritual to call forth Spirit. Drumming, singing, ringing bells and gongs are a traditional part of many ceremonies. Chanting a *mantra* or prayer is an offering of the highest form. The *mantra* sends the message of the Divine throughout the environment and calls on celestial assistance. In Sanskrit, the word *mantra* is derived from the root *man* (to think) and the suffix *tra* (tool). So *mantra* literally means “a tool for thinking”.
- *Mantras* have been employed since antiquity as a means of clarifying and focusing the mind, offering praise, gratitude and to call on help from the spiritual realm. *Mantras* can consist of pure, sacred sounds (or *bijas*) for example, “*Om*”, or words with symbolic or sacred meanings. Affirmations can also be used as a powerful mantra, such as; “ I am one with nature, I am one with God”.
- The Heart Calming Mantra from the Heart Sutra pronounced, (*Gatay, Gatay, Para Gatay, Para Sum Gatay, Bodhi Swaha!*) is considered by many to be one of the most important teachings of the Buddha. Translated, “*Gone, Gone, Gone Beyond, Gone Beyond Even the Beyond into Full Enlightenment, So Be It!*” has the powerful ability to evoke the spirit of enlightenment.
- “*O Shariputra, listen carefully to these syllabic sounds which contain the entire Perfection of Wisdom, as a vast tree is miraculously contained within a small seed. This is the mantra which awakens every conscious stream into pure presence. This is the mantra of all mantras, the mantra which transmits the principles of incomparability and inconceivability, the mantra which instantly dissipates the apparent darkness of egocentric misery, the mantra which invokes only truth and does not acknowledge the separate self-existence of any falsehood: gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha (gone, gone, gone beyond, gone beyond even the beyond into full enlightenment, so be it!)*”<sup>3</sup>
- The sacred Tibetan Buddhist mantra, the Six True Words (*Om Mani Pad Me Hum*), “Homage To The Jewel In The Lotus” invokes compassion for all beings.
- L. Austine Waddle in his study of Tibetan Buddhism wrote of the Tibetan Buddhists and the Six True Words, “And no wonder this formula is so popular and constantly repeated by both Lamas and laity, for its mere utterance is believed to stop the cycle of re-births and to convey the recitor directly to paradise.” And further: “There is no *mantra* that can be considered superior to the *mani*, which includes not only all the functions but also all the power and blessings of all other *mantras*. The learned sages of the past, like the great Karma Chagme, for example, were unable to find anywhere in the scriptures a mantra more beneficial, quintessential, or easier to practice than the *mani*; so it was this *mantra* that they took as their main practice. Even just hearing the *mani* can be enough to free beings from *samsara*.”

## 5. MOVEMENT

- Bring conscious movement into your ritual. Ritual movements put the body in motion, hence placing you (your body and spirit) in connection with a sacred trinity of Earth, Humans and Heaven. Hands held in a *mudra* or prayerful gesture strengthens your intention. *Mudra*, in Sanskrit means “seal” or “sign”. Each sacred image of the Buddha is depicted with a specific *mudra*. Buddhist *mudras* invoke the energies of protection, teaching, blessing etc. A graceful *mudra* helps to evoke a calm and centered state of mind.
- The Heart *Mudra* (Skt., *Dhyani Mudra*) is formed by placing the right palm facing upward resting on the left palm, with both thumbs lightly touching and creating a sacred circle. (In the B.T.B. approach to Feng Shui, hands are reversed; left palm is on top of right palm and is used in conjunction with the Heart *Mantra*.) Hold the *mudra* 2-3 inches below the navel (the *dan t'ien* or spiritual center) or at heart level. The right hand symbolizes enlightenment, the left hand, the realm of our conception. This *mudra* symbolizes overcoming the realm of our conception by enlightenment and the true nature of reality.
- The *Anjali Mudra* is simply formed by placing the palms together at heart level. This *mudra* is a traditional gesture of greeting in India and China. It symbolizes “suchness” or the absolute, true nature of all things.
- The Blessing *Mudra* is a portable *mandala* formed by the hands. The Tibetan Buddhist *mandala* created by the hands is an offering to be given away to all beings. The *mudra* symbolizes the ancient Indian universe. The palms of the hands represent the oceans and the golden earth. The upright ring fingers in the center of the palms represent *Mt. Meru*. The four continents are symbolized by the fingers that radiate out from *Meru*. In the B.T. B. school of Feng Shui this *mudra* is used for offerings, blessings and for showing the highest respect.
- The Ousting *Mudra* (*Karana Mudra*) is formed by pointing the first and little fingers out while the thumb holds the middle two fingers. This *mudra* is used for breaking up negative energies.

## 6. INTENTION

- Inner purpose, visualization or prayer, are the unseen aspects which give ritual its highest power of transformation. It is important to clarify your intention before you begin. Spend some time visualizing in detail the results you wish to accomplish from the joss ritual. Visualization helps to focus the mind and unleash its power to manifest a new reality. Be specific in your visualization, use the names of people involved and if the ritual involves a certain location such as a home or business, visualize and recite out loud the address of the location. This mighty element brings to life the creative potency of your thoughts and dreams!
- Sound, movement and visualization form the pillars of the “*Three Secrets Reinforcement*” of the B.T.B. school of Feng Shui. These three elements represent the speech, body and mind of the enlightened being. It is said that when one is mindful, every action is a focused movement of being in the present movement. The unification of the speech, body and mind enables you to

focus completely on the ritual and give it the mystical potency that only full concentration can bring. The Three Secrets Reinforcement is an integral part to ritual and spiritual Feng Shui.

## 7. TIMING

- Timing should be taken into consideration when performing any joss ritual. Auspicious timing is a significant element in the performance and outcome of any ritual.
- Birthdays, weddings, ground breaking ceremonies, before moving into a new home or office, and the joyous occasion of the birth of a baby are other auspicious times to perform a joss ritual.
- Other times for a joss ritual would be to dispel the energy of a recent family members' illness or death. In the event of a divorce, bankruptcy or other misfortunate circumstances, a joss ritual can rid the location of negative energies whether physical or spiritual in nature. Joss rituals will set forth your new goals, wishes and aspirations.
- There are specific hours during the day or night which are traditionally utilized for sacred joss rituals. Most rituals are performed between 11:am and 1:pm, although, joss rituals dealing with clearing negative spirits or ghosts are only performed after sunset or between the auspicious hours of 11:pm and 1:am.
- For thousands of years, Chinese shamans consulted the *Tong Shu* or "Book of Myriad Things" – the Chinese Almanac for auspicious and inauspicious dates and times. It is believed that the Almanac has been in continuous use for over 3,000 years has been a rich source of fortune-telling, divination, geomancy, herbal medicine, physiognomy, palmistry, charms and talismans, moral codes, dictionaries, predictions, legends, planets, numerology, astronomical details, pregnancy charts and stories. Today, the Almanac is in wide use in Chinese communities throughout the world and can be readily found in most Chinese markets.
- Chinese festivals also play a large role in determining good days to perform rituals. Chinese New Year (the first new moon of the Chinese year) is an especially good day for ceremony. Also, the fifteenth day of the first month or Lantern Festival is another lucky day for joss ritual. The *Qingming* Festival, which falls in the second or third lunar month, is a time for families to honor their deceased loved ones with elaborate joss burnings of paper money, clothes, houses, cars and the like. This insures that the ancestors continue to live the "good life" on the other side.
- Many papers are burned at the Feast of the Hungry Ghosts in the middle of the seventh lunar month. Papers are burned so that wandering spirits will not interfere with the affairs of the living. Many other festivals throughout the year call for joss ceremonies to mark the occasion. Even Western festivals, such as Thanksgiving Day in America, can be occasions to burn joss and give thanks for an abundant year and assurance of abundance in the year to come.
- Joss paper rituals are traditionally performed on the second and sixteenth day of each lunar month to honor the statues or images of deities on one's personal or family altar.

1 Laszlo Legeza, Tao Magic, The Secret Language of Diagrams and Calligraphy (New York, NY: Thames and Hudson 1975) pp. 27-28.

2 Eva Wong, The Shambhala Guide to Taoism (Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, Inc 1997) pp. 33-34.

3 Lex Hixon, Mother of the Buddhas, (Quest Books, 1993).

4 Patrul Rinpoche, The Heart Treasure of the Enlightened Ones, (Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, 1993)