

The Portals

Specific to the Sacred Fire events, are the portals. There is a portal for each of the four directions. The portals help us to engage in the community and with the energy of the Sacred Fire Circle. The four portals are Voice, Music, Movement, and Service.

Each is a doorway through which you can access the deep magical potential of the Circle. This document hints at ways to open these portals for your own fulfillment! Bring a willingness to risk and become SOURCE for these creative modalities. You will soon depart the domain of spectator, animated by the synergistic potency of contributing your inventive essence to the organically unfolding rite. Let's explore each of the portals individually.

Portal of Voice -East/Air

"Find where your breath begins. Sing from there."

The voice portal involves speaking your truth, reading poetry, singing chants or songs, telling stories, lending your voice to someone who is finding the courage to use their voice. It is moaning, sighing, laughing, or screaming. Open yourself and let your beautiful voice be heard.

One easy way to energize the Circle is by singing. Simple chants will emerge throughout the night – *please join in!* Part of our adventure is devoting the attention needed to learn the words “on the fly”. If it takes a while to pick up all the lyrics, so be it – we have ALL NIGHT!

We generally chant in English, allowing us to connect emotionally with the meaning of the songs. It is understood that anyone can start a chant, and that we'll all dive in and make it soar! You might cluster up with a couple of friends, making it easy for them to learn the song, and then bring it out together to share with the group.

Some of us were conditioned to think that our singing voices aren't “good enough.” *Release that limiting belief!* Sing with gusto, and without fear. Spiritedness is more important than perfect pitch. Our hearts and voices bring energy that empowers everyone in the Circle.

Some of our chants have multiple parts. If a second song layer begins, new people are encouraged to continue on the original chant line, riding the magical wave as the two melodies interweave. New chants are often invented around the Fire – feel free to contribute to the lyrics as ideas and themes blossom from the group mind.

The Portal of the Voice has many other expressions – humming, howling, whistling, moaning or laughing with delight! You can share a poem, recite a quote, invoke spirit or ancestors, or spontaneously speak from your heart. Feel free to bring ritual theatre celebrating deities, seasonal cycles or sacred days, transition rites and more. Spoken word segments tend to be brief, allowing us to return to shared group expressions such as chanting, music making or movement.

Portal of Music -South/Fire

"Add your fire to the Prime Rhythm. And Play from there."

The music portal involves the making of music in any manner. It is keeping a heartbeat on a drum or with your feet, playing a rhythm on the drums, shaking a rattle or playing with the other instruments from the percussion altar. It is stomping your feet or clapping your hands. It is playing a singing bowl, flute, violin, didgeridoo, or accordion. The music may be fast or slow, quiet or loud.

Our Circle is not a “drum circle” – it's a time and place of personal discovery through artistic interaction and self-expression. The musician's role is to be in *balanced, harmonious relationship* with people accessing the Movement, Voice and Service Portals. Sound is the one pervasive element throughout the night that directly affects everyone. We embrace musical diversity – fast and slow, soft and loud, different “feels” or styles, and most of all, the DEEP STEADY GROOVE that is foundational to trance.

Fire circle music is predominantly percussion or drone oriented. Occasionally a melody instrument may contribute spice to the sonic swirl, accenting a chant, or offering a brief interlude before the return of chanting or dancing. In addition to djembes and dununs, we also value distinct periods showcasing frame drums, doumbeks, congas and other Sacred Sounds! We cherish immersion in the softer musical magic of didgeridoos, crystal singing bowls, gongs and chimes, temple bells, berimbau, mouth harps, conch shells, shruti boxes and rainsticks.

When playing an instrument, remember that you are in Service to the Circle. Please allow everyone ample time to learn the chants before adding rhythm. When you start to play, enter quietly – carefully *accompanying* the singers. We avoid abrupt starts and stops in order to nurture trance, allowing the music to gently fade away into silence. Let complete stillness hold us for a while in rich anticipation of the next offering to emerge (Silence is fertile soil from which new chant seeds sprout!). One drum played thoughtlessly can short-circuit the birth of a delicate new song. Music making is a mindful practice requiring focus and sensitivity.

The Rattle Altar has shakers you are welcome to play. Please ask before using anyone else's instruments. Be sure to remove rings or bracelets before drumming to prevent blistered hands or damage to the drum-head. Remember to return any instrument you use.

The seats are set in an arc to allow all players to easily see and hear each other. When someone in the front row departs (remembering to take their instruments with them), move forward into the vacant seat. This is especially important for inexperienced players, as it brings them into closer, supportive relationships with the other musicians. Please leave your gear bag at your nest, avoiding clutter in the musician's area – just bring the instrument you want to play.

Drummers generally join each other in playing a common simple rhythm, thus creating a strong, danceable musical foundation. Take turns soloing or playing variations of the primary groove. Tune into, and interact with dancers who enter the Gratitude Zone within the arc, sending them musical love and encouragement! Relax and settle in – our rhythmic rides may last an hour or more. Each common shared rhythm will take on many new dimensions as people stick with it, reaching deep for the groove.

Finally, remember that music making is just one of many magical portals in our spontaneous ceremony. Be sure to also go chant, move and be in service to others in the Circle.

Portal of Movement -West/Water

"Find where your water flows. Dance from there."

The portal of movement is walking, moving your arms, jogging or running around the fire. It is trotting like a horse, jumping, twirling, stomping, or graceful dancing. It is moving in a choreographed way as a group or expressing a song or chant by your movement.

Feel free to express yourself through dance, moving in circles as you relax into trance. Improvise partner or group choreography; add symbolic movements to more fully express the words of a song. Mirror the steps or gestures of others dancing, or simply walk around the Circle.

Many people understand the architecture of our fire circle through the metaphor of the planets and their orbits. The Fire in the center represents the Sun, source of energy, heat, light, and transformation. Bodies near the center often move faster in their orbits.

Spin Zone – Unique to our circle is the spin zone. This is a marked attached eight foot diameter circle for rotating in sufi style. Like a comet, you can enter this area and accelerate in rotation and then rejoin your orbit if you choose.

Portal of Service -North/Earth

"Find the center of gratitude within. Serve from there."

The service portal is nurturing the community as a whole or individually. It includes holding space energetically or with a rattle to support the work of others. It is offering water to the drummers, dancers, singers, space holders or smudgers. It is taking a turn at the smudge gate or listening to someone who may want to talk. It is offering food or lending your voice to someone who is beginning a chant. It is offering your hand to someone to invite them to walk with you around the fire.

Some find the Service portal the easiest to access because so many opportunities to tend to each other's needs appear during our journey. Make a new friend, or deepen an existing connection by nurturing someone deep in the night.

For example, you can deliver food or water from the Food Altar to those in the circle. When doing so, we follow a few simple conventions, such as moving in the same direction as those circling, always offering eye contact before offering water or food (non-eye contact indicates a polite decline), and mindfully keeping water off player's instruments.

You can devote a few moments restock the food altar, light candles that have blown out, or re-chalk the Earth track. Check in with a Fire Tender and help feed the flames of our sacred Fire. Settle in at the Smudge Gate to offer purification with sage smoke to those entering the Circle.

The Wellness Nest nearby makes a perfect place to offer healing energy. You might give a foot massage to a dancer, or a hand or shoulder rub to a drummer. Help care for the entire crucible by picking up litter, sticks or stones underfoot, or return unattended instruments left in the musician's arc to the covered area nearby. *When you seek ways to serve others, remarkable opportunities will arise!*

ALL the portals

...are interconnected with one another. The movement may lead the music or the voice. The voice may inspire the music. The music may lead the movement or the voice. The silence may lead to voice, music, movement, or service. Service is the gift of nurturing to the community that supports the music, voice, and movement. Try them all our throughout the night as each one has a gift to offer to not only yourself but to the Fire Circle community.

We have found that working in these 4 portals helps us greatly to remain engaged throughout the night and throughout the weekend. We've also found that the more 'engaged' we can remain, the more magical and powerful our fire circles turn out to be. Put another Way: the more we are able to put IN to the fire circles, the more we are able to take OUT of them ...individually AND collectively. "Engaged" shows a synergistic effect on the circle ...on each of us ...and on the experience.

The fire circle can be thought of as a microcosm of the daily world we live in. We define our Circle as a unique expression of that reality by ringing the outer perimeter with prayer flags, to remind us that the space within is Sacred. Please enter through the Smudge Gate, a place to be cleansed and purified. Breathe, center, and be aware that you are entering an extraordinary realm each time you step through. Linger a moment and prepare yourself to engage artfully with others, evoke healing energy, pray, do personal magic, or simply celebrate the multitude of blessings in life.

Many cultures have healing practices or rites of passage organized around ordeals. Whether they involve pain, non-stop dancing, sensory deprivation or other mechanisms, all ordeals share a common thread of challenging the celebrants to maintain focus and participate fully for the purpose of personal and community transformation. Together we journey into uncharted territory, where mundane life can be understood from fresh perspectives.

Our Gatherings are designed to create a safe environment, free from distraction and intoxicants, within which we commit ourselves to a midnight-to-dawn ordeal of creativity and artful interaction.

Our practice is to mindfully engage with each other as a way to discover more about ourselves, our relationships, and our own highest vision.