

Libation

There is no set way to do a Libation. A Libation is simply honoring your ancestors, those who came before you, those who laid the foundation.

There are many examples and ways to honor the spirits of our ancestors through Libation. Even the brothers on the street corner drinking wine give Libation by pouring wine on the ground and saying “This is for the bothers that ain’t here!” As witness in the movie *Cooley High*.

Webster's Dictionary describes Libation as, “The act of pouring out a liquid as a religious offering.” Most times water is used in Libation ceremonies. However, some Libations are done with alcohol or other substance. I have even seen salt poured as a Libation substance as well as honey.

Usually liquid is poured from a glass onto the earth or a plant. If no plant is available you can sprinkle small amounts of your Libation liquid directly on the carpet or floor. Like I said, there is no set way to do a Libation. It is up to you, your creativity and the materials at your disposal.

Permission to Speak

In the African tradition it is customary to ask an elder for permission to speak. I can remember doing a Libation ceremony at the Milwaukee Brotherhood of Fire Fighter's College Scholarship Program. Having worked with many of the attending Fire Fighters, I knew the ages of most of the guests in the room. My ex-wife, who looks young but is actually older than me, was also attending the function.

When the time came to give the Libation, I looked around the room and saw no elder to ask permission to speak. Fearing the obvious, I leaned over to my Ex and whispered, “I need to ask an elder for permission to speak.” “Ok,” she said, “Who is the oldest in the room?” “You are,” I reply. Needless to say that part of the ceremony was skipped.

Greeting

Having been granted permission to speak, I suggest you give a welcome greeting and a brief explaining of the Libation ritual as explained in the beginning of this document.

Explain that you are going to pour Libation to the spirits of our ancestors and those who came before us. You should make statements that honor our ancestors and tell about our history. After each statement, instruct the audience to respond with a confirmation of what was spoken by saying ASE' (*Ab-Shay*), which means...*So Be It*.

Examples:

Hello, my name is _____ and I have the honor of pouring Libation. Libation is giving honor, reverence, respect, and recognition to our ancestors whose shoulders we stand on and our elders whose shadows we walk in.

I greet you my brothers and sisters in the ancient language of Kemit (which the Greeks call Egypt).

HOTEP, which means Peace.

We pour Libation to honor the past, so that we may learn from it. We use water because water has no enemies.

We use water to freshen the road our ancestors traveled to be here with us today. We use water as a symbol of the continuity of life, to purify and to nourish our souls...let us say ASE'

Honoring Your Ancestors (Opening Libation Acknowledgements)

It is customary in Libation ceremonies, as water is poured and acknowledgements are spoken to the ancestral spirits, that names of those that have passed before us are called out, names of persons who were instrumental in our lives. These could be historians, relatives, friends, co-workers, children or strangers whose presence somehow made a difference...someone truly special.

Examples:

We pour Libation to GOD, for all that GOD has done and for all that GOD will do...let us say ASE'

We pour Libation to Mother Africa, the birthplace of all humanity...let us say ASE'

We pour Libation to the great civilizations of Africa...let us say ASE'

We pour Libation to the remembrance of our ancestors who died during the Middle Passage (the trip from Africa to the Americas), ancestors who suffered enslavement, who were uprooted from their homes and homeland and who were set sail on a horrifying voyage. We do not know their names but it is because of them that we are here today...let us say ASE'

We pour Libation to the men and women who fought and resisted enslavement to help free our people. Men and Women like:

- *Harriet Tubman, a runaway captive from Maryland who became known as the “Moses” of our people.*
- *Denmark Veazie of South Carolina, who in 1822 formed a complicated and tremendous plan for the liberation of his fellow men.*
- *Nat Turner, an American captive who started the largest slave rebellion in the southern United States in Southampton County, Virginia.*

...let us say ASE'

We pour Libation to the brothers and sisters of the 60's who understood what it meant to struggle and fight for civil and human rights, those who had the courage to exercise BLACK POWER...let us say ASE'

We pour Libation to those yet unborn, our future leaders, our future heroes and heroines that will continue the struggle to be a free, proud and productive people, those who will not let our legacy and our efforts for progress die...let us say ASE'

Let's now call out the names of those that have past before us...let us say ASE'

Weddings

Many African-American couples incorporate a Libation ceremony into their weddings as a way to honor their African ancestors. The Libation ceremony can also be used as an opportunity to honor the elders in a family, asking them to pass on their wisdom and guidance. For weddings I pour to matrimony and the joining of families.

Examples:

We pour Libation to honor the importance of family...let us say ASE'

We pour Libation to celebrate the coming together of the families of these two people. It is said that through others, we are somebody. Through this marriage, we broaden our family circle, remember our heritage and recall those who gave us life...let us say ASE'

We pour Libation to our family members who have passed over and could not be here today. We ask that they be with us in our thoughts...let us say ASE'

We pour Libation to the bride and groom, that they may always find prosperity in love and devotion. We ask that this couple be blessed by children, because children give glory to a home...let us say ASE'

We pour Libation to our friends whom we are blessed to have in our lives...let us say ASE'

We wish everyone to leave more blessed than when they came...let us say ASE'

Funerals

If the Libation is at a funeral I pour to the person who is deceased. I include specific information about that person and may mention his/her importance in my life.

Examples:

An African proverb tells us that people who lack the knowledge of their pasts are like a tree without roots. So, in the spirit of remembrance, we pour this Libation...let us say ASE'

We raise our cup to GOD to show our reverence for the original source of our lives...let us say ASE'

We pour Libation to GOD our creator, for GOD is the staff that we can lean on during these times of sorrow...let us say ASE'

Family Gatherings and Reunions

For family gathering or reunions I put emphasis on the importance of families working together, respecting and loving one another. I reflect on the past and offer hope for the future.

Examples:

We pour Libation to our mothers, grandmothers and great grandmothers, our fathers, grandfathers and our great grandfathers, uncles, aunts and cousins -- the foundations of our families, immortalized in our thoughts...let us say ASE'

We pour Libation to our elders, whose wisdom we seek in all endeavors...let us say ASE'

We pour Libation to our parents who guided us along the road to adulthood...let us say ASE'

Organizations

For organizations I pour Libation to the spirit of the gathering and what the organization has done for its members and the community.

Closing

Remember, there is not set way to do a Libation. I consider Libation to be a sacred and serious ceremony. But by all means, honor your ancestors in the way you feel most comfortable.

SHAM HOTEP and ASANTE SANA
(go in peace and thank you)

Libation

Honoring Those That Came
Before Us

by
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