

We Believe in God, Too

Ring Shout

"The body remembers ritual. The body remember movement" - Sweet, 2020

The Ring Shout, a sacred dance of Hoodoo, is the foundation of singing, worshiping, praising, and getting filled with the holy spirit in this formation of a circle, identifying the cycle of life. This ritual amongst many others became the foundation to understanding the relation between African religion and emerging African American religion today (Raboteau, 2004).

In American mainstream culture, Hoodoo, "A set of practices, traditions, and beliefs practiced in several parts of the United States various places around the world, such as Haiti and the Caribbean, that evolved from traditional religions and cultures practiced in several parts of Africa prior to the onset of the slave trade" (Marie, 2021); was rapidly commercialized secularly. The Ring Shout, became the foundation to American dances like the Big Apple, The Eagle Rock, and the Shout. African American movement went on to influence American theatrical dance dominating American urban popular dance culture till this day.

Looking back upon the foundations of the ring shout, read about how these individuals explain what it means to embody God and a higher power. To surrender and most importantly to have faith in oneself.

Image 1

"Once I was older, I started singing again at my family church. At the time I was dating my now partner. I kept my relationship secret to anyone in church. I'll never forget on Thanksgiving morning my church was a guest at another church and I was singing the solo to "Break Every Chain". I asked my girlfriend and my best friend to come see me sing. This was the first time my church would see my girlfriend, and I introduced her as my friend. The whole morning, I just felt guilt. Guilt for lying, hiding her, and putting her in this situation. During my solo I looked into the audience and saw my girlfriend and best friend cheering me on. Suddenly, while I was singing, I literally felt like God's hand was on my shoulder. At that moment, I felt like I got permission to love who I wanted to love. That day I never sang that song with so much passion that I even cried. The chains literally felt like they were broken".

Raven-Syamone Wattley (Raven) | She/Her/Hers | Pansexual

"Being a Black trans man in marriage has been a little difficult, especially considering that we got married when I identified as a lesbian woman.

Nazir L. Wattley | He/Him/His | Heterosexual/Trans

Image 2

"I remember the first time I heard God's voice - I was three days into a fast and was asking God why they don't ever speak to me, well it was more like nagging, "I want to hear your voice," "How will I ever know if you're talking," "Why won't you talk to me;" when I heard a distinct voice say, "because you don't listen." The words landed in my body like a warm hug from a loved one. It was firm and sultry, and there was just this innate feeling of knowing in my body. But it wasn't the fact that God spoke but rather what they said, "listen." In order to listen, you have to be silent - that's why they have the same exact letters".

Niyankor Ajuaj | She/Her/Hers | Queer

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Image 3

"I am a second-grade educator. I have been teaching for nine years. Within my profession I specifically work with minorities and students of color. I grew up in Aurora, Colorado with both my parents in the household. My family would go to church every Sunday, and if my parents were working, I would still go with my aunt or grandmother. My aunt even helped me start singing in the children's choir at church. Now that I am older, I do still believe in God, but I do not feel that going to church and reading the bible are my only ways to heaven. After my pastor at my family church found out that I was engaged to a woman, he told me I was going to hell if I continued with this marriage. That was the last time I went to that church or any church service. I think that it is very unfair to make any sin more important than the other. How is it that I can steal, and be forgiven, but I can't love someone from the same sex? I strongly believe that what I put out into the world will be returned, God will still love me".

Raven-Syamone Wattley (Raven) | She/Her/Hers | Pansexual

Image 4

"I grew up in Spartanburg, South Carolina. I was raised Southern Baptist but that never fit for me. My identities do not fit into what is deemed acceptable or worthy. So, I just started focusing on being a "good" person and kept the door to God open but had no affiliation to any religious group. Then I found Ifá, a West African traditional religion based in nature and a divination system. It is a spiritual system based on three distinct components; Olodumare (the supreme creator of heaven and earth), Orisha/Orisha (the spirits that make up the elements of every living thing), and the ancestors. I believe in it because it is tangible and accepts the whole person. There are many ways to reach God, and this is one of them".

Ash Ferguson | She/They/Theirs | Queer