

ANCESTRAL CELEBRATIONS

ANCESTRAL CELEBRATIONS

Copyright © 2019 Anna M. Asbury

This free ebook may be copied, distributed, reprinted and shared, provided it appears in its entirety without alteration, and the reader is not charged to access it.

Web: chaineddolls.com
Contact: amasbury@twc.com

Introduction

Veneration of Ancestors is a huge component of spirituality in Africa. When doing research on the topic, you'll come across a lot of different ways it can be done, but the decision is up to you how you go about the practice. You may choose to use an altar that's always set up. You may choose to use your yard and only set up the altar during times of veneration. You might not even use an altar at all.

There's also a differing of opinions on how often to venerate your Ancestors. Some places say everyday, others only in times of need. Whether or not you keep a specific schedule is up to you.

I've been doing some research on different festivals/celebrations that are set aside specifically in Africa for honoring Ancestors. Coming across a few, I figured I'd at least start a booklet and add to it as time allows for more research.

Each section is separated by festival. Some background information will be given. As this file is basically for my own research, there may be notes added as well for ideas specific to myself and my practice incorporated. You can ignore those or use those as a guide for also setting up your veneration days.

Akwasidae

The Akan have a festival known as Akwasidae which is held in a cycle of every 40 to 42 days and is always held on a Sunday. The purpose is to honor ancestors.

The rites on this day relate to honouring personal and community ancestors. A gathering called Akom occurs in which drumming, dancing and singing are a normal celebration to honour Abosom (lesser gods in the Akan tradition) and Nsamanfo (spiritually cultivated ancestors). Food offerings include special items such as eto (mashed African yam), garnished with hard-boiled eggs. Every Ashanti celebrates this festival. For those Ashanti who do not observe the festival of Odwira, the Akwasidae is very important to commemorate their ancestors. - Wikipedia

Akanfo (Akan people) utilize a calendar system which is comprised of 9 cycles of 42 days. The 42-day cycles are called adaduanan. Within each of the 9 adaduanan or 42-day cycles are two days which many Akanfo recognize as sacred to the Nananom Nsamanfo (Honored Ancestresses and Ancestors) and the Abosom (the Goddesses and Gods/Divine Spirit-Forces of Nature). These two days have the suffix 'adae' attached to them: Akwasi-adae (Akwasideae or Sunday adae also Awusidae) and Awuku-adae (Awukudae or Wednesday adae). Adae is a term meaning 'to sleep' or 'a resting period'. Akwasidae/Awusidae and Awukudae are points within the 42-day adaduanan cycle where time is ritually suspended. We take a "rest" from the physical world and focus our consciousness and energy in the Ancestral Realm that we may be nourished and regenerated therefrom. When we "awaken" from our spiritual rest, we are refreshed and re-tooled to carry out our nkrabea---our Divinely allotted function (mis-conceptualized as "destiny") in Creation. - Akwamu Nation

The most famous of the Durbar Days, and also the closest to the contemporary national day in celebration, is held during the Akwasidae Festival of the Asante. As described and explained by Opoku (1970), these were days when citizens gathered together to celebrate their ancestors through myriad ceremonies and activities. - Linda K. Fuller

2019 Akwasidae Dates

- January 27
- March 10
- April 21
- June 2
- July 14
- August 25
- October 6
- November 17

Ashanti Yam Festival

The Ashanti Yam Festival is an annual celebration which symbolizes the conclusion of a harvest and the beginning of the next work cycle. This celebration has to do with honoring and thanking your Ancestors for the first yam harvest. The first offering of crop is made to the Ancestors.

The festival, a national holiday, is observed for five days starting with a Tuesday, as dictated by the local chief priest. It marks the first harvest of yams during the autumnal season, subsequent to the monsoon season. This festival has both religious and economic significance. Religiously, the festival is used to thank the god and the ancestors for the new harvest and to traditionally outdoor the new yam. - Wikipedia

Before the start of the festival celebrations, the king inspects the Dampan structure which is erected temporarily to hold the public function. On the first day of the festival, the way to the burial ground of the Chiefs of Asantis is swept clean. On the second day, the yam is carried by the priests in a colourful procession for offering to the ancestors buried in the burial chambers. Only after this offering is completed are people allowed to consume the new crop of yam. The third day is observed as a mourning day for the ancestors and also to keep a fast. On the fourth day, the chief hosts a dinner at his house for all people. On the night of the fourth day, people remain indoors to avoid witnessing the cleansing of the chiefs' thrones, symbols of the dead people's spirits, in the Draa River at Kumasi. On the fifth day, a grand parade of the chief and his family, and courtiers, all dressed in regal finery, proceeds though the streets to pay respects to the senior local chief at his residence. In the parade, some people are carried in colourful decorated palanquins shaded by umbrellas. - Wikipedia

According to [Black Demographics](#), dampans are “the open offices where high government officials conducted business. An interesting take on governmental transparency. Behind them were the courtyards and living quarters of the official and his household which could number dozens or more than a hundred depending upon his position. Access is gained through a small door off to the side in the dampan.”

The Yam Festival happens throughout West Africa under various names, one of which is Iwa ji by the Igbo.

The New Yam Festival is the most significant cultural festival unifying all the seven Igbo speaking States namely Abia, Anambra, Delta, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, and Rivers States of eastern Nigeria. Though there might be differences in the mode of presentation across the States, it however collectively represents the successful harvest at the end of a farming season which is usually between early August and early September every year. The natives are culturally and spiritually not permitted to feast on the newly harvested Yam until after the celebration rites of the festival.- Igbo Community Coventry

This would be a good festival for those who maintain gardens. I don't grow yams, but sweet potatoes. They usually are ready between August and September. Sweet potatoes need cured to allow a second skin to grow. That can take anywhere from 10 to 14 days.

The Ashanti festival is observed for five days and starts on a Tuesday. I'd have to time this around the end of the curing period.

Day 1: Cleaning spiritual area for the offering

Day 2: Giving of the offering

Day 3: Mourning Ancestors as well as fasting

Day 4: Dinner

Day 5: Meditation, thanking Ancestors

Famadihana Festival

The Famadihana is celebrated in Madagascar (not as much as it used to be due to Christianity). Also known as the Turning of the Bones Festival, it's "a time of dancing with the dead where many rituals are performed by the traditional heads of families to honour loved ones who have died".

Unlike many festivals that are celebrated annually, the Famadihana is celebrated every seven years. In the process of celebration, families are expected to open crypts or burial grounds and wrap the remains of the dead in new cloth. It is believed to be a way of keeping the house of the dead clean and reconnecting with them after several years. - Elizabeth Ofosuah Johnson

Fête Gede

Fête Gede is the Haitian Day of the Dead. It's the "Festival of the Ancestors". Held the first two days of November, celebrations can continue throughout the month.

Fete Gede, the Feast of the Dead, is a time when Vodouisants celebrate the ancestral dead, typically held during either or both of the first two days in November. Known as the Festival of the Ancestors, Fet Gede (Fet = Festival, Gede = The Sacred Dead) is the Vodou equivalent of Mardi Gras, the Mexican Day of the Dead, and Halloween, all in one. - Wanda

The Fete Gede, or the festival of the dead, is one of the most important celebrations on the Voodoo Calender. The annual festival is a celebration of spirits, ancestors and the dead in Haiti.

Marked on the first two days of November, it is a time for people to seek strength, protection and reconnection with the dead, especially those who died with unfinished conversations or issues with the living. - Elizabeth Ofosuah Johnson

The second day of the festival is more intense. Several sacrifices are offered and the spirits possess the bodies of the living who go into a trance amidst drumming and dancing. Families with the power of death and fertility such as the Ghede Doubye, Guede Ti Malia, Ghede Linto, Guede Nibo and many others play their role, linking the living and dead. - Elizabeth Ofosuah Johnson

I already do Ancestor Veneration at the beginning of November anyway, so this fits perfectly.

Wag Festival

Originating in ancient Kemet to honor the death of Ausir, it's one of the oldest festivals in Africa. The festival has changed some, with it now being used as a festival to honor the souls of the departed, ushering them into the afterlife.

The festival, also known as the festival of the dead, is celebrated during the season of the flood named, which usually falls between June and September when the fiends were flooded by the River Nile. In more recent times the festival has been slated for August 18th or 19th through research and understanding of the ancient Egyptian calendar.

During the wag festival, people make paper boats which are set toward the west of the Nile indicating Osiris' death. Aside from the setting of paper boats, there is plenty of wine drinking and food to go round. - Elizabeth Ofosuah Johnson

The use of the paper boats got me thinking of those Ancestors who died during the Maangamizi/Middle Passage. This would be a good way to honor them.

Sources

[*African American Ancestry: The Akan States of the Gold Coast*](#), Black Demographics. [Accessed: 20 May 2019].

[*Akwasidae/Awusidae and Awukudae*](#), Odwirafo - Akwamu Nation. [Accessed: 20 May 2019].

Fuller, Linda K. *National Days/National Ways: Historical, Political, and Religious Celebrations Around the World*, Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004, p. 103.

[*Iwa Ji Festival*](#), Igbo Community Coventry. [Accessed: 19 May 2019].

Johnson, Elizabeth Ofosuah. [*5 African festivals to celebrate instead of Halloween*](#), Face 2 Face Africa, 31 October 2018. [Accessed: 20 May 2019].

Johnson, Elizabeth Ofosuah. [*The captivating Fete Gede festival of Haiti where the living is possessed by the dead*](#), Face 2 Face Africa, 7 November 2018. [Accessed: 20 May 2019].

Simplitribe. [*New Yam Festival of West Africa*](#), International Culture & Art Fest, 12 June 2017. [Accessed: 19 May 2019].

Wanda. [*10 Things We Learned about Fete Gede “Haitian Day of the Dead”*](#), L’Union Suite, 1 November 2017. [Accessed: 20 May 2019].

Waweru, Nduta. [*The Malagasy tribe that unearths its dead every 7 years for sacred reunion ritual*](#), Face 2 Face Africa, 6 June 2018. [Accessed: 20 May 2019].

Wikipedia contributors. [*Ashanti Yam Festival*](#), Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 1 October 2016. [Accessed: 19 May 2019].

Wikipedia contributors. [*New Yam Festival of the Igbo*](#), Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 25 April 2019. [Accessed: 19 May 2019].