

# SHABBAT DEVOTIONAL 2021



# FIRST AFRIKAN CHURCH



## Per Ankh 2021 Study and Sermon Series

### Annual Theme and Series Title: God-Centered, Future Focused

### Memory Verses: Mark 12:29-31

*<sup>29</sup> Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; <sup>30</sup> you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' <sup>31</sup> The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."*

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## PREFACE

The First Afrikan Shabbat (or Sabbath) was conceived and developed by the First Afrikan staff in the Fall of 2003. As we thought and prayed together about ways to further empower First Afrikan members spiritually, it occurred to us to develop and provide First Afrikan families with a resource that would:

- 1) Assist them in growing spiritually;
- 2) Build stronger familial bonds;
- 3) Provide periodic times of rest throughout the year;
- 4) Teach the First Afrikan liturgical calendar called Afrikan Rhythms;
- 5) Reflect on the church's Theme for the year; and
- 6) Further empower the church membership as a whole to achieve our collective vision of "Building Beyond our Years."

The First Afrikan Shabbat is different from and similar to the Shabbats we read about in the Bible and observe among our sisters and brothers of the Jewish faith. The First Afrikan Shabbat is different from those we read about in Scripture or observe in the practices of contemporary Jews because of the proposed time sequences. At First Afrikan we observe Shabbat during the month of January. In Judaism, Shabbat is a weekly observance that begins at sundown on Friday evening and ends at sundown on Saturday evening. Further, contemporary Jews do no work on the Shabbat whereas members of First Afrikan must work due to the length of time our Shabbat lasts.

First Afrikan's Shabbat is similar to the Shabbat we read about in scripture and observe among our sisters and brothers in contemporary Judaism because it is a time for families and close friends to come together to remember their ancestral past, celebrate their collective covenant with the Creator, sing songs of the faith, reflect on the church's theme for the year, and share a common meal.

A key feature of First Afrikan's Shabbat is family time. Shabbat is a time during which parents should be intentional about reconnecting with their children and, assuring that their children understand the importance of spiritual growth and development as it relates to their life's purposes. The fact that Shabbat is family time does not preclude its importance to single people who live by themselves. Such persons should use Shabbat time to reconnect with close friends and family members around the spiritual principles and practices offered in this document.

**Harambee!** Shabbat is a time to come together spiritually, that we might live, work and play together physically.

*Pastor Lomax*

## Rationale for the Season

The phrase Per Ankh means “House of Life.” It is an ancient Kemetic (Egyptian) institution run by priests and often attached to Temples. The House of Life is the center of cultural endeavors to preserve and ensure the ongoing process of cosmic, political and social life.

From its inception First Afrikan Church has struggled to be a sanctuary – a place where peoples of Afrikan descent can come and find a sense of “home,” a place where their true thoughts and deepest feelings can be honestly expressed, and a place where they are surrounded by images and energies that help to heal and affirm their Afrikan identities.

At First Afrikan January is the month we rest and dedicate time to spiritual, relational, political and cultural enrichment; rededicate ourselves to the pursuit of cultural and spiritual knowledge and set the tone for the rest of the year through reflecting on the church’s theme.

During this Per Ankh series of sermons First Afrikan will investigate the idea of God-centeredness and how a God-centered life equips us to engage the future. Moses, as a God-centered person, envisioned a Promised Land for oppressed people; Rehab envisioned a reality in which oppressed women could make considerable contributions toward their people’s march to freedom; Martin Luther King Jr, saw a world boundaries dividing human beings would one day be broken down and ultimately overcome; John the Baptist and Jesus envisioned an alternate reigndom, one in which the power of empire is neutralized and those left in the margins of the socio-economic and political order would be brought to the center.

Per Ankh and God-Centeredness are perfect compliments. The whole earth should be the House of Life and the only way such a thing is possible is by returning the Creator to the center of our consciousness. After all, human beings were created to worship and enjoy God forever.

# The First Afrikan Theological Statement

## **Birth/Creation (Red- Ankh)**

We believe in the living Creator, who fashioned the Universe, The one who gave life to this galaxy, solar system and planet, more specifically life here on mother Earth, and the most ancient presence of humanity that originated within our Mother, Africa. We were formed in the image of our Creator, male and female. And this is very good.

## **Life/New Life (Gold – Mmusuyidee)**

We believe that the living Creator, who was called by many powerful names in Africa and throughout the world, is not only the source of life, but also the one that sustains and liberates humanity and all of creation from the destructive powers of oppression and death.

Consequently, at a specific time and place in history our Creator became human. Our Redeemer was born on the peninsula of Northeast Africa as Jesus of Nazareth, the Black Messiah. He appeared among the poorest, most wretched, and despised people within the Roman Empire. This African Messiah was born in a dirty manger because there was no other place for him. As our Elder Brother he grew in wisdom, knowledge and in his determination to heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out demons, and battle against all principalities and powers. Our African Messiah was arrested, tried, beaten, and lynched under the Roman Empire and with the sanction of the Jewish Sanhedrin. Our African Messiah died and descended into the bowels of the earth. But the grave could not hold him. Our mighty African Messiah rose again, conquering the final enemy of life. Our triumphant African Messiah returned to the heavens as the king of kings and lord of lords, leaving the promise of new life to all who follow the Way he himself had prepared.

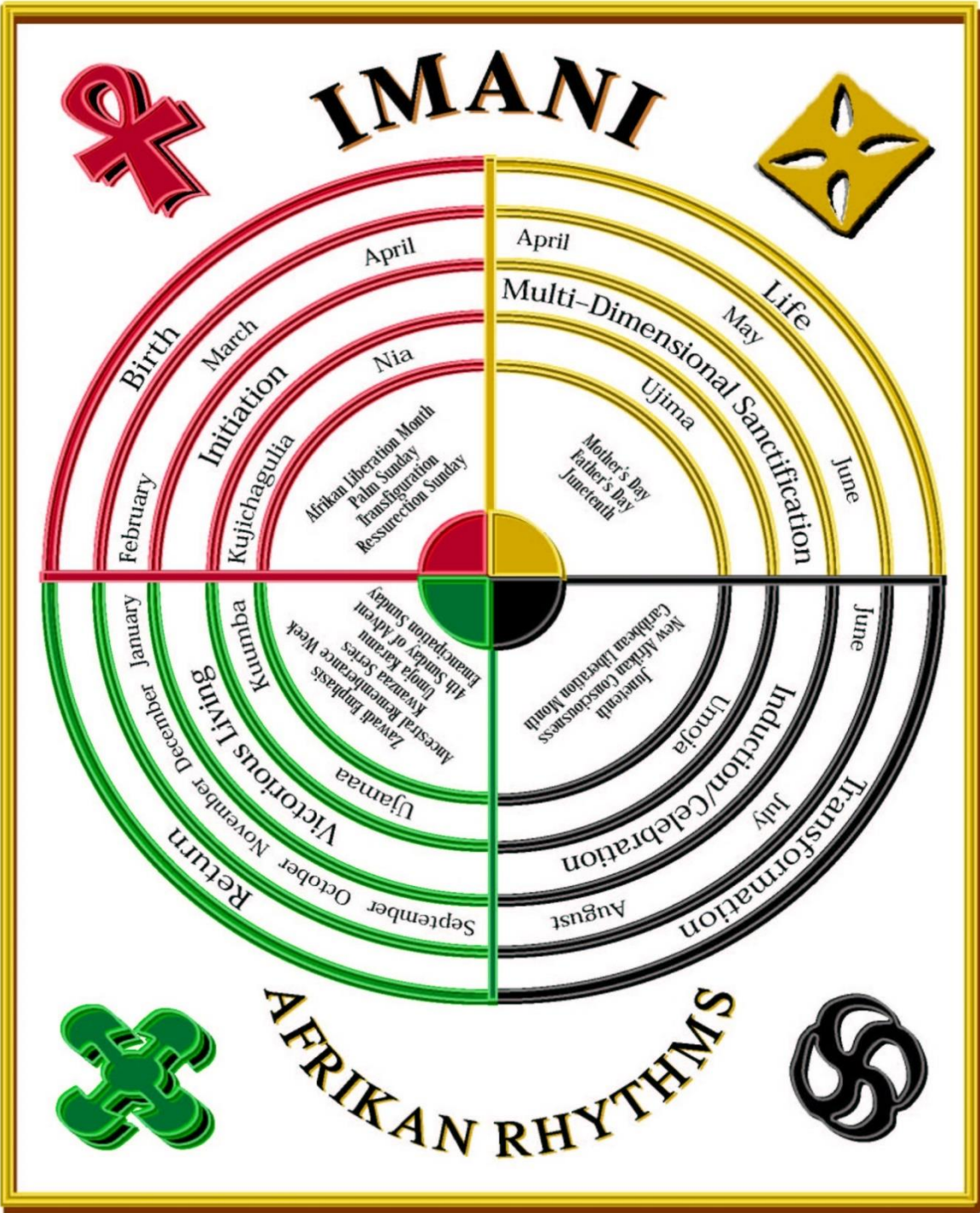
## **Transformation (Black – Nkotimsefo)**

We believe in the life giving, anointing Holy Spirit. It is the power of the Holy Spirit as the Sustainer of life that brings the new birth and multidimensional sanctification. This breath of life pervades the universe, sustains it and fills our lives as we dedicate ourselves to participate in the work that Jesus, the Christ, began. Through the Holy Spirit, we are transformed from a deadly state of indifference toward the oppression and death we see around us into the living, anointed and committed disciples. In the power of the Holy Spirit, we think, speak and act in ways that demonstrate the victorious living of a chosen people who know from whence we have come and to where we are going.

## **Victorious Living (Green – Akoma Ntoaso)**

We believe in the importance of remembering our ancestors and celebrating those saints throughout our ancient and contemporary histories who have become our cloud of witnesses to the reality that God is a way out of no way. We honor our ancestors and follow their examples of victorious living as we continue to struggle for the complete liberation of our people, knowing that the living Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer goes before us, works in us, and will meet us on the path of liberation.

Ashe and Amen!



## SHABBAT MEDITATION OVERVIEW:

According to the writer, the children of Israel are to be instructed to consecrate something that is not yet in their possession. But actually, they are being directed to consecrate themselves first. The land is to observe a Shabbat because it is intended to be possessed by a holy people who are in a sustained relationship with a holy Creator. *This is the real secret to the Shabbat.*

So what is a Shabbat? Why is it important to observe a Shabbat during key moments in our individual and communal lives? Fundamentally, a Shabbat (or Sabbath) is designated time that is set aside for rest, reflection, worship and renewal. It is a time for rejuvenation in all aspects of our lives. The writer of Leviticus 25:1-2 shares the same perspective as the one who penned Genesis 2:1-3. For both, the Shabbat is the crowning jewel of creation and worship. The Holy Creator is also the one who enters into a sacred promise with those who consecrate themselves and everything around them for the purpose of transforming the secular into the sacred. Indeed, from this point of view, there is no secular time or space. The cosmos is Yahweh's and all that is contained within it. But before this can be fully manifested externally, it has to be deeply rooted internally.

The observance of a Shabbat provides us with an opportunity to examine what is most important in our lives. We should ask ourselves this question in a concerted way. The ancient Hebrews realized that it is extremely difficult to do this work of self-examination in midst of the business of the daily grind of work. Therefore, they instituted the Shabbat. Shabbat was a day within a seven-day cycle to be set aside exclusively for rejuvenation, worship and reflection. Later on in their history this concept was extended to include a year-long Shabbat. This is referred to in the entire chapter of Leviticus 25. Not only was the land to observe a rest, but slaves were to be set free and interest on loans were to be waived. These were all symbolic acts of a community's reliance upon their Creator to meet the needs of the entire community throughout all of their generations.

Even though it may not be possible to fulfill the requirements of a text like Leviticus 25 in our own context, it is possible to rededicate ourselves to our Creator through the cultivation of spiritual disciplines that are practiced consistently for a designated period of time. Therefore, the devotional you now have in your hands is intended to be a guide during the next few weeks of a sacred journey. During this time of rest, reflection, worship and renewal you are invited to develop a sustained period of spiritual growth with your family and close friends. This devotional is divided into several components in an effort to facilitate your progress.

### Conclusion

On behalf of the staff of First Afrikan Church, we extend our gratitude to you, your family and our entire community of faith for your willingness to participate. Please familiarize yourself with the content of this publication and take note of additional Bible Study Series and other experiences planned throughout the year. It is our prayer that we will all be renewed in our commitment to Birth, Life, Multi-dimensional Sanctification, Transformation and Liberation.

## **SHABBAT RITUALS OF VENERATION AND WORSHIP**

Before attempting to perform the rituals, be sure to read the instructions and gather the necessary materials in advance. At the designated time - the family, or individual, will engage in a candle lighting and libation ceremony. This is important preparation that involves paying reverence to the Creator, one's ancestors, one's family and community and the unborn. Through prayer, songs and affirmations our attention is called to 'center down' during this time of meditation.

In addition to the individual benefits that are to be derived from this practice, you, your family, friends and community of faith will be strengthened as a collective body through the spiritual energy that will be unleashed through this communal practice of being on one accord. Once this is accomplished, the group can move forward with a keen sense of purpose and motivation to complete any goal it has set for itself. Even when this has to be fulfilled in stages, like the ancient Hebrews, we will not lose sight of our main objective, to "build beyond our years."

## **PREPARING FOR THE SHABBAT MEDITATION**

### **GATHER FOR THE MEDITATION**

#### **Materials:**

1. The family/individual will need candles, one per person. The candles represent the unborn and the ancestors.
2. A live plant and water for pouring libation. Libations should be poured outdoors when the weather permits.
3. A sacred space/altar where the family/group will gather for the meditation. If possible to acknowledge the role of feminine energy in this coming age, the Mother or eldest female identifies and organizes a sacred space/altar where the family will gather for the meditation.

Note: An altar can consist of a white towel/mat on which is placed a rock representing earth, a feather representing air, a bowl or cup of water, and a candle. (Other sacred items may be placed on the altar, Kinara, books, libation cup, pictures of family, etc.)

### **CANDLE LIGHTING CEREMONY**

Place the candles in the center of the gathering space. (Note: single men can also do this part of the ceremony themselves).

2. The Mother or eldest female initiates (see note in # 1 above) lighting of the candles, by lighting her candle first. Then the Father or eldest male lights his candle. The children light their candle from the eldest to the youngest. As the candles are being lit, one member of the family should read – a bible verse, poem or lyrics of an appropriate song.
3. The youngest family member lights the candles that represent the ancestors and the unborn.
4. After all the candles are lit the family sings – a song the family has chosen.

## **LIBATION CEREMONY**

A pitcher of water and plant are needed. Water is poured into the plant in honor of a worthy ancestor or a family member give thanks to the Creator. Remember that ancestors are those people in our families who served their own families as well as the broader community with love, dignity, and power. "Ashe" is said after each statement of thanksgiving to the Creator or after an Ancestor is lifted up.

1. To the Supreme Being -(pour the water)- "Ashe!"
2. To Mother Afrika
3. To Ancestral spirits in Afrika
4. To Ancestral spirits who endured the MAAFA (i.e. the Holocaust of the Middle Passage)
5. To Ancestral spirits who survived enslavement (name some of those you know aloud)
6. To Ancestral spirits who fought for freedom (name some freedom fighters you know aloud)
7. To Ancestral spirits who form our present as the cloud of witnesses (those who have transitioned)
8. To the unborn who will someday remember us as Ancestral spirits

## **MEDITATION HYMN, REFLECTION AND [FAMILY] DISCUSSION**

The family is now prepared for the singing of the Meditation Hymn OR listening to an appropriate music accompaniment selected by the person, family, or group. (CD, music service, Youtube, etc.)

Using the suggestions above "How to Study the Bible", read the bible verse and then reflect on what was read and then engage in a meaningful [family] discussion



# HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

Pastor Mark A. Ogunwalè Lomax

1. Choose a good study bible. I recommend either *The New Interpreters Study Bible* (NRSV), or *The Harper Collins Study Bible* (NIV).
2. Choose a good bible dictionary. I recommend the Interpreter's Bible Dictionary, the Harper Collins Bible Dictionary, or on-line resources like Biblegateway.com or Biblehub.com.
3. Choose a good bible commentary. There are a lot on the market but I recommend either the Anchor Bible Commentary.
4. Read the entire biblical book (ex. Genesis, Matthew, Revelation, etc.) in one sitting. The purpose of reading the entire book in one sitting is to enable the reader to discern the purpose of the book being studied, as well as to acquaint the reader with the setting, characters, plot, and purpose of the book.
  - a. while reading, jot down any thoughts, insights, questions, or comments that come to mind while reading
    - i. do not try to look up definitions or do deep research in this stage of study.
5. Now read verse-by-verse, chapter-by-chapter. In this second (close) reading, read margin notes, footnotes, and cross check biblical references that often appear in the notes. The goal here is to discover the meaning of the biblical passage.
6. Look up and get the definitions of the words you don't know.
7. Using your bible dictionary, look up place names, names of deities mentioned in the text (especially in the Old Testament), and the names of biblical characters (sometimes the names of the characters are keys to understanding the biblical text.
8. Note recurring words and phrases. Recurring words and phrases are normally indications of the writer's true intent and message.
9. Using a good concordance, (bible gateway, bible hub) check to see how often a word, phrase, or character actually appears in the author's book (for instance, how many times does the word "brother" show up in Matthew's gospel? About whom is Matthew speaking when he uses the word "brother?")
10. Now, re-read the chapter you've just studied. Think and jot down what you think it is saying.

11. Note whether chapters begin with conjunctions (and, therefore, since). If so, to what idea or action is the chapter connected? It is important to note the *context* of a particular chapter or verse – what comes before and after the chapter under consideration? If they are linked in some way, then true understanding cannot be attained without considering that to which they are connected.

12. There will often be times when you will want to know more than what the Bible says about a place, a person, or a people. Both bible dictionaries and biblical encyclopedias are helpful in garnering more information. ***Do not consult a commentary until you have done this work.*** The commentary simply affirms your own work with primary source materials.

13. Pay particular attention to the setting of the biblical text. What is transpiring on the stage of human history at the time of the writing? Who was in power? Was there oppression? Who (what people) does the text seem to privilege? Is the setting one of wealth or poverty? Etc.

14. Pay close attention to the *spirituality* of the text. Is God mentioned? If so, in what way is God speaking and acting? On whose behalf is God acting?

15. Having done your best to discover what a biblical passage meant, now ask yourself what it means. Since the passage spoke a particular way back then, how does it speak today?

## SHABBAT WEEK #1 JAN. 3 – JAN. 9, 2021

GATHER FOR THE MEDITATION

CANDLE LIGHTING CEREMONY

LIBATION CEREMONY

MEDITATION HYMN

**Sunday, January 3, 2021**

**Biblical Text: Mark 12:29-31**

*<sup>29</sup> Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; <sup>30</sup> you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' <sup>31</sup> The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."*

**Matthew 6:33**

*<sup>33</sup> But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

**Matthew 22:37**

*<sup>37</sup> He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.'*

**REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

**CLOSING PRAYER** (In case of gatherings, a different person should say the closing prayer each evening).

## SHABBAT WEEK #2 JAN. 10 – 16, 2021

GATHER FOR THE MEDITATION

CANDLE LIGHTING CEREMONY

LIBATION CEREMONY

MEDITATION HYMN

**Sunday, January 10, 2021**

**Biblical Text: Proverbs 3:1-6**

*<sup>3</sup> My child, do not forget my teaching,  
but let your heart keep my commandments;  
<sup>2</sup> for length of days and years of life  
and abundant welfare they will give you.  
<sup>3</sup> Do not let loyalty and faithfulness forsake you;  
bind them around your neck,  
write them on the tablet of your heart.  
<sup>4</sup> So you will find favor and good repute  
in the sight of God and of people.  
<sup>5</sup> Trust in the Lord with all your heart,  
and do not rely on your own insight.  
<sup>6</sup> In all your ways acknowledge him,  
and he will make straight your paths.*

**Romans 12: 9-13**

*<sup>9</sup> Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; <sup>10</sup> love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. <sup>11</sup> Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.*

**REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

**CLOSING PRAYER**

## SHABBAT WEEK #3 JAN. 17 – JAN. 23, 2021

GATHER FOR THE MEDITATION

CANDLE LIGHTING CEREMONY

LIBATION CEREMONY

MEDITATION HYMN

**Sunday, January 17, 2021**

**Marin Luther King, Jr. Birthday**

**Biblical Text: Deuteronomy 10:17-20**

*<sup>17</sup> For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, <sup>18</sup> who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. <sup>19</sup> You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. <sup>20</sup> You shall fear the Lord your God; him alone you shall worship; to him you shall hold fast, and by his name you shall swear. <sup>21</sup> He is your praise; he is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things that your own eyes have seen.*

**Proverbs 19:20-21**

*<sup>20</sup> Listen to advice and accept instruction,  
that you may gain wisdom for the future.*

*<sup>21</sup> The human mind may devise many plans,  
but it is the purpose of the LORD that will be established.*

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

CLOSING PRAYER

## SHABBAT WEEK #4 JAN. 24 – JAN. 31, 2021

GATHER FOR THE MEDITATION

CANDLE LIGHTING CEREMONY

LIBATION CEREMONY

MEDITATION HYMN

**Sunday, January 24, 2021**

**Biblical Text: Psalm 46:10**

*<sup>10</sup> "Be still, and know that I am God!*

*I am exalted among the nations,*

*I am exalted in the earth."*

**Sunday, January 31, 2021**

**Biblical Text: Jeremiah 29:11-14**

*<sup>11</sup> For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. <sup>12</sup> Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. <sup>13</sup> When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, <sup>14</sup> I will let you find me, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.*

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

CLOSING PRAYER

**At the end of this Shabbat we enter into the Liturgical Season of BIRTH/INITIATION**

**Symbol: The Ankh**



**Color: Red**

We believe in the living Creator, who fashioned the Universe, The one who gave life to this galaxy, solar system and planet, more specifically life here on mother Earth, and the most ancient presence of humanity that originated within our Mother, Africa. We were formed in the image of our Creator, male and female. And this is very good.