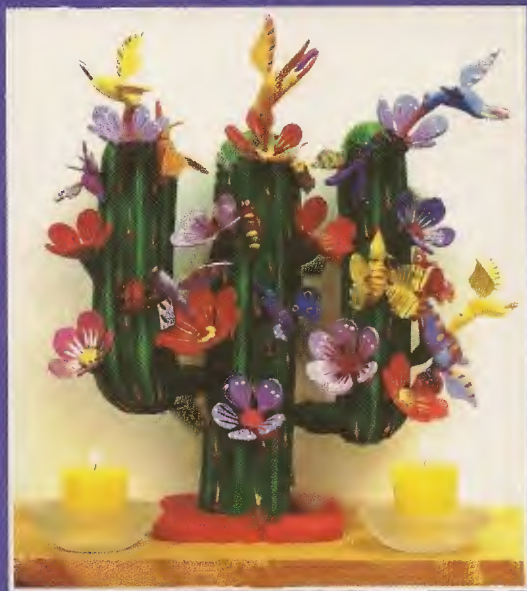
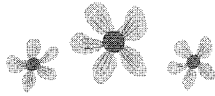


A Little Book of

# ALTAR MAGIC



D. J. Conway



A Little Book of  
**Altar Magic**

D. J. Conway



**THE CROSSING PRESS**  
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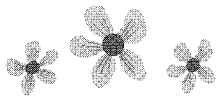
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## CHAPTER 1

# The History of Altars

**A**ltars have been used from almost the beginning of human civilization, as far back as the Paleolithic Age. Yet many people today do not understand exactly what an altar is outside of a religious structure, and do not believe they can set up personal altars in their homes. Nevertheless, on a subconscious level, we set up varieties of altars without giving any conscious thought to the process.

It is common to see groupings of family photos arranged on shelves, tables, or pianos. Many people place clusters of sentimental objects or collections of various kinds in glass-front cabinets or on shelves in various rooms of their homes. It is not uncommon to see displays of collections of beer cans, thimbles, dragons, model cars, or similar objects. These are all done without conscious thought or planning, except that we “want to.” But why do we feel drawn to do this?

Carl G. Jung named the deepest part of our subconscious

mind "the collective unconscious," and said that it connects every person to every single ancestor and provides access to everything that has been known in the past. It seems that the collective unconsciousness within each of us is persuading us to build a personal altar, just as our ancestors did. The problem is, we seldom stop our busy minds long enough to listen to the collective unconscious and learn from it.

The wall of beer cans is a type of informal altar to the gods Dionysus or Bacchus, both deities of the vine, wine, and good times. Model cars may well be a subconscious tribute to the fleet-footed Mercury or to Helios and his sun chariot. Thimbles are symbols of weaving goddesses such as Spider Woman, Ixchel, the Fates, and Athena. Collections of dragons, wizards, and the like are subconscious attempts to tap ancient magic and mystical knowledge. Groupings of family photos can be remembrances of the dead in the hope they will aid us, or sympathetic magic to link the dead with the living. A collection of frog figures may be a subconscious plea to ancient fertility goddesses.

This penchant for informal altars cuts across social and cultural lines. In fact, preparing an altar is a multicultural experience. Unknowingly, humans are constantly building altars around them. Perhaps we should give more thought to the process, thus learning how to enhance our daily lives and spiritual growth.

Archaeologists have discovered the very earliest permanent sacred altars to be deep inside caves, with narrow, treacherous paths leading to them. Their difficult access made the journey a determined, conscious effort. The caves were highly spiritual places, not to be entered lightly, for they symbolized the eternal, everflowing womb of the Goddess and the cauldron of primordial energy. Within them, people used magic for hunting and performed rites of passage including initiation. People and their tribal shamans visited these secret caves whenever their clan migrations brought them back to that area.

However, it is likely that the migrating people of the Paleolithic cultures also carried small Goddess images with them as they traveled from one area to another in search of wild game and other food. These people would create a temporary altar at the hearth they made inside each cave or rocky shelter they entered. The strange little rotund female figures they used to represent the Goddess were shaped with exaggerated belly, breasts, and buttocks to symbolize the Great Mother who gave birth to everything in the world. The faces of these figurines were only vaguely formed. Some figurines had their legs tapered to a point that could be stuck into the ground; others had flat, widespread bottoms, so they could be placed on any fairly level surface. All were quite small, just the size for carrying easily from one place to another.



Later statues became slightly more sophisticated, but most still retained only the suggestion of facial features, like their earlier counterparts. Where the Goddess of Willendorf and those of Grimaldi, Lespugue, and Sireuil are very stylized and exaggerated in body form, the Minoan snake goddesses appear more human in proportion. In addition to being decorated with spirals or meanders (wavy lines), the Minoan figures now hold two recognizable snakes. This evolution of form continues until we find the beautiful, very human, statues of Egypt, China, the Middle East, Greece, and Rome.

The earliest caves were decorated with vivid, life-like paintings of animals, handprints, and other symbols, all representing abstract spiritual and magical ideas concerned with sustaining life and bringing comfort in death. Later, when villages were established and the clans no longer roamed from place to place, human-built shrines became more elaborate. Although the shrine itself is a symbolic cave, the floors of some in the Minoan culture are carefully paved with seashells and roughly carved, colorful stones, with the walls painted just as vividly as those found in the mystical, secret caves. The symbolism's representation becomes more direct.

From the incised decorations on the surviving deity figures, the fabulous paintings on cave walls, and the remains of later shrines, archaeologists have learned that certain symbols held

great meaning for our ancestors. Meanders represent water and the sacred snake of life. Lozenges stand for fertility, while the triangle means the feminine and regeneration, just as the cave itself did. The crescent represents the lunar cycle and energy. A cupmark cut into a stone held water, symbolizing the sacred water that flowed from the Goddess of life. Footprints painted on cave walls refer to the healing force and guidance of the Goddess, while hands are symbols of Her divine powers against evil. Eyes, spirals, and coiled snakes represent the cosmic life force that is an endless source of energy. An X symbolizes death and regeneration, and is similar to both the butterfly and the hourglass.

Archaeologists have found evidence of two types of shrine through every age: the permanent and the mobile. Two things become clear from the study of the religious practices of ancient cultures. The first type was originally a natural site, such as a special cave, grove of trees, hilltop, or power spot. What we would call the altar was usually a naturally formed rock that happened to be within the sacred place. Except for engravings on rocks or paintings on cave walls, the sacred place was not transformed in any way.

The second type of shrine indicates that these early people understood that any place could be made sacred by erecting a temporary altar. This simple portable altar, consisting of a

Goddess statue, was of great value since Paleolithic clans seldom stayed in one place for very long. They needed a place to worship and to perform their sympathetic magic while they followed the migrating herds of wild game.

These two types of shrine persist even after people began to settle permanently in villages. It seems that although people gathered together in one place for special ceremonies, they liked the idea of having their own personal altars at home.

The elements of Earth, Water, and Fire were very important to the early migrating peoples. Their lives depended upon fire for protection, warmth, and light; they considered that the earth provided their source of food; and they knew their existence depended upon a ready source of water. Much later, our ancestors added the element of Air to the list when they realized that this invisible substance was needed for breathing and that wind brought storms and rain. Spirit, the traditional fifth element, had always been important, for the elusive power of Spirit tied the living to the dead and held the promise of rebirth.

Today, we find the same symbolism in our modern places of worship. Some religions have a definite altar, while in others the altar has become only a raised platform for the minister and choir. Non-Christian religions often have special cabinets for their holy books. Sacred spaces are decorated with flowers,

candles, and often pictures or statues of deities, saints, or gurus. Sometimes, holy water is kept by the door, and grape juice or wine is offered to the participants. Singing or chanting and prayer are usually part of the service.

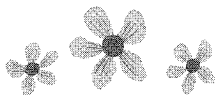
But what do we do at home, in our private places? Statues of saints are common in Catholic households. A cross is a familiar symbol in other Christian homes. Non-Christian homes have statues or symbols of their deities, often surrounded by flowers, candles, and other symbolic offerings. These are consciously made altars, places we make sacred for our spiritual growth and comfort.

Those who do not attend any organized church or temple or do not profess any belief in any deities are still influenced by the collective unconscious mind to build altars. Subconsciously, they are drawn to build little informal altars of collections of items that appeal to them. With some thought and attention, these altars can add positive energy to our lives.

We need to realize that conscious intent in building an altar can create a positive, spiritual atmosphere that will improve our everyday lives. Altar building crosses all cultural lines and is not necessarily connected to any religion. Taking this action merely says that you wish to connect with the unlimited pool of cosmic energy that sustains the entire universe. This connection may be made to manifest certain desires in your life or

simply to say "thank you" to a higher power for what you already have. An altar can be permanent, changeable, or temporary, according to your needs. The bottom line is that you should be building your altars with conscious intent and understanding of what you are doing.

Intentionally building an altar helps you to step outside yourself and whatever everyday troubles you may have. Using an altar helps you to elevate yourself in order to see your surroundings and conditions more clearly. It helps you to clarify what you want and why you want it. Although you may choose objects for your altar subconsciously, not completely understanding why you made the choice, the very act of creating an altar teaches you to listen to your subconscious mind and its messages. You become more centered and at peace with yourself. When you are centered, positive energy and happiness flow into your life. Isn't that what we all truly desire?



## CHAPTER 2

# How to Erect and Prepare an Altar

Joseph Campbell said that sacred space is a place where wonder can be glimpsed. Building an altar (or altars) in your home can fill your life with wonder, for the presence of an altar makes any place sacred. Creating an altar opens you to the spiritual dimension, whatever path you choose to take. It allows you to express your personal glimpse of the divine in whatever way you imagine it. It helps you to integrate the sacred into your personal life, for altars are places of centering and rebalancing. It draws on subconscious thoughts, making you receptive to the sacred in life.

Building an altar requires four stages of preparation: thinking out and clarifying your reasons for doing so, planning the project, acknowledging the emotions behind this decision, and actually building the altar. These steps are no different from what we should be doing when we make every major decision in our lives. The whole experience is a process of discovering

more about yourself, how you perceive things, and what symbols and objects mean to you.

What do you need to create an altar and make a sacred place? Really, not much. There is no need to run out and spend lots of money. Begin with what you have on hand. Most people are pack rats of a sort and tend to accumulate items they like. Look closely at your possessions. You will be surprised at what you find.

The first thing you will need is something on which to arrange the symbols and objects you choose for your altar. An altar space can be anything: a small shelf, a table, a covered box set in a corner, the top of a dresser, or one corner of the coffee table. The important thing is simply a flat surface, which does not need to be large or elaborate.

If you wish your altar to be private, arrange it in a place not readily visible to everyone, perhaps in your bedroom. If you wish to energize certain rooms of your home and do not care about your altars being seen, you can place them wherever you wish.

It is not unusual to find tiny altars in kitchens today. These may contain shiny copper molds, pictures of the family and pets, or perhaps a small statue of the Virgin Mary or the goddess Kuan Yin. At one time, the hearth and cooking area was the most important part of every house, for it was here that the

precious fire was kept burning and the food for survival cooked. And it was here that one could find a small statue of the Goddess and perhaps a kitchen deity. The symbolism is the same as eight thousand years ago, when people placed Goddess statues in the grain bins so that the food supply would never run out and so that occupants of the house would prosper.

According to the Chinese art of placement, called *feng shui*, situating an altar so that it faces the main door will permit the *chi*, or energy, to freely enter the house. This may go back to the centuries-old thought that the threshold of a house should be protected, and that sacred objects set near the entrance build a demarcation between the outer public world and the inner private one.

*Feng shui* is thousands of years old and still used, with remarkable results. The energy forces said to be promoted by this art are believed to determine or change the outcome of health, prosperity, and luck. If you wish to place your altars according to *feng shui*, consider these suggestions. The Chinese say that rectangular and square shapes are *yang*, or masculine, in nature and spin off energy, while circular shapes are *yin*, or feminine, and hold energy in balance. Both *yin* and *yang* objects should be used in the art of placement; wind chimes, mobiles, or small fountains will increase energy within the home.



The Chinese also carefully consider directions when placing altars. The south is connected with professional success, fortune, and fame, with the color red and images of birds also useful there. The west is for creativity, joy, and children; the color white and an image of a tiger will increase energy in these aspects. East is associated with health and growth; use green and a dragon here. The north is connected with money, career, and business, as well as the color black.

For information on the use of colors, the elements, objects, symbols, and the directions, see Chapter 3, which goes into detail on their historical uses and meanings.

Now that you have decided what you will use for your altar and where you will set it, you need to consciously choose what you will place on it. You may wish to have all goddess statues, or you may choose to have both god and goddess images. Perhaps you will have saints instead, or no images at all. Every altar will reflect the personality and spirituality of the person who erects it.

Using the four elements on an altar will bring the energies associated with these elements to your sacred space. Fire can be a candle; Air, incense; Earth, a stone or flowers; Water, a fountain or water in a vase. Or each of these elements might be portrayed in a picture that speaks to you. By placing the elements on your altar, you are subconsciously asking that balance come to your space and life.

Certain flowers and the wood of trees have traditional meanings and can be used to symbolize specific energies. So can objects, such as a pyramid, box, animal figurine, or stone. Or you may decide to incorporate images and objects that remind you of a person you wish to remember or an event or action you desire to accomplish. Listen with your heart, and choose what feels right to you.

If you burn candles on your altar, be certain that the candle is firmly set in a metal holder and is well away from anything flammable. The last thing you want is a devastating fire ruining your home. Incense is also a potential problem if not handled with care. Stick incense should be placed in a can of sand or a holder large enough not to tip over. Cone incense should be placed in an unbreakable, heat-resistant holder or on a bed of sand. If you burn paper requests at your altar, use a metal bowl or cauldron.

Chapter 4 gives several examples of altars erected for a specific purpose and the objects placed on them. These altars are eclectic and not especially based on any religion or lack thereof. Feel free to change them to incorporate your own ideas and desires.

It is a good idea to cleanse your altar periodically. Dust does accumulate, as does pet hair. Some people feel the need to cleanse their altar weekly by smudging or burning incense and

sprinkling holy water. Others only clean when their instincts say it is necessary, or after negative people have been in the house and have touched the altar.

Try to cleanse your altar separately from your ordinary housecleaning, so you can concentrate on the action and not shatter the vibrations built up around the altar. Remove any dead flowers, clean up incense ashes, and trim candle drips. Rearrange or replace any items you wish.

If children are visitors or permanent residents, they will probably rearrange things on the altar. Take this in stride and be patient. As long as the children are not destructive, arranging an altar can be an enthralling pastime for them.

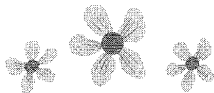
Altars can be erected in celebration, commemoration, to mark life's turning points, or to heal grief. They are also valuable in helping you to focus energy on a specific part of your life that you would like to improve or change. Grief altars are helpful in working through emotional pain, whether that pain arises from the loss of a loved one to death, divorce, or some other end of a relationship. Event altars keep you focused on a goal, such as paying off a mortgage or saving money for a long-desired trip. Altars are reminders of where we need to focus our attention, and that the spiritual is intertwined with the mundane and is never separate from it.

It does not matter how you view the word "spiritual" in

relationship to altars. Spiritual simply means acknowledging that there is a Power or Force greater than you. You may call it Goddess, God, or the Big Bang. Building an altar is a way of consciously reminding yourself that a powerful force of energy runs through the universe that anyone can tap into with a little effort. Whether you do positive or negative things with that force is up to you. However, remember that the type of energy you give out is what you get back, so it is safer and more productive to do only positive things.

Perhaps one of the most important things to remember about building an altar is that it should be done with joy, anticipation, and a sense of wonder. By your actions you are drawing spiritual energy into your everyday life. This cannot help but make changes for the better.

So build your altar as it pleases you, and be prepared for your life to open and expand in a way you never thought possible.



## CHAPTER 3

# Symbols and Sacred Objects

**T**hrough the centuries, humans have used many different symbols and objects as part of their individual and collective spiritual worship. Since the collective unconscious mind of every human, as described by Carl Jung, is connected to the symbols used by our ancestors through genetic memory, these objects and symbols still have deep meaning for us.

The subconscious mind does not speak in words, but only in nonverbal symbols. By using symbolic objects on your altars, you are communicating with your subconscious mind, the conduit through which flow psychic messages, spiritual communications, and extrasensory perception, all the little nudges and gut feelings that help us deal with life's difficulties. To open the door to the collective unconscious, one must enter through the subconscious mind. Until you establish a dialogue using symbols, the subconscious mind will not allow you to reach that deeper source of information.

Today, many people are attracted to ancient deities from around the world. This attraction may be to the deities of their ancestors, or it may come from a past life to which they still have strong ties. Renewing a relationship with the powers represented by these old goddesses and gods by placing representations of them on altars may help these people improve their lives.

For those who have no attraction to ancient deities, I have provided lists of angels, archangels, and saints. Petitions to these spiritual beings have brought about success and guidance in many people's lives.

By using any of the following images and objects on your altars, you are strengthening the spiritual energies that collect about your sacred places. By intensifying the energies, you deepen your spiritual experiences and hasten the creation of your desires.

## SACRED ANIMALS

All around the world, various creatures have always represented certain deities and/or magical qualities. Using statues, photos, or drawings of animals on your altar can help you to invoke a specific energy you wish to manifest in yourself or in your life. These animals can be actual creatures, or they can be what are known as fabulous beasts, such as the unicorn.

Following is a list of creatures, both physical and fabulous, whose magical–spiritual qualities have been known and used by many cultures. Sometimes called shamanic or totem animals, their astral (nonphysical) equivalents frequently appear in meditations, shamanic journeys, and dreams. They act as guides and portents of things to come.

*Adder, snake*—Wisdom, cunning, defense, psychic energy, creative power, pure divine energy, beginning and ending, and understanding.

*Badger*—Tenacity and unyielding courage.

*Bat*—Gaining direction in difficult circumstances; avoiding obstacles, barriers, and troublesome people. In China, the bat is a symbol of good fortune and happiness; in Europe, a companion creature of the goddess Hel.

*Bear*—Stamina, harmony, protecting the self and the family, dreams, intuition, transformation, and astral travel. The bear was sacred to the Greek goddesses Callisto and Artemis.

*Bee*—Responsibility, cooperation, prosperity, and planning for the future. In the Indo-Aryan and Greek Orphic teachings, bees were thought of as souls. They were called the Little Servants of the Goddess by early matriarchies. Bee was also the title of Aphrodite's high priestess on Mount Eryx. The Greek goddess Demeter was sometimes called "the mother bee."

*Blackbird*—This bird denotes joy.

*Boar, sow, pig*—Cunning, intelligence, revenge, defense, knowledge of past lives, magic, protection of family, cooperation, prosperity, and health, death, and rebirth. The sow, in particular, represents magic, the Underworld, and deep knowledge of the Crone aspect of the Goddess. The sow was sacred to Astarte, Cerridwen, Demeter, Freyja, and the Buddhist aspect of the Goddess called Marici.

*Bull, cow*—The bull is a symbol of strength, potency, alertness, protection of the family, and knowing when to be aggressive. The cow represents gentleness and balance, but also fierce mother love and the life-giving and sustaining power of creation. In the beginning of human religious symbology, the bull was a lunar symbol of the Great Mother, with the horns emblematic of the crescent moon. Later, the bull became a



symbol of sun gods such as Attis and Mithra, both associated with Cybele. The cow was associated with the Egyptian goddesses Hathor and Neith, and the Norse goddess Audhumla.

*Butterfly*—Reincarnation, beauty, love, transformation, joy, and freedom. To the ancient Greeks, the butterfly represented the soul. In Ireland, Cornwall, Mexico, and Siberia, white butterflies are still believed to be the spirits of the dead.

*Cat* (domestic)—Independence, discrimination, stealth, resourcefulness, healing, love, self-assurance, seeking hidden information, seeing spirits, and receiving protection when faced with a confrontational situation. In ancient Egypt, the cat was considered to be a lunar creature and was sacred to Bast and Isis. In other cultures, it was sacred to Artemis, Diana, and Freyja.

*Cheetah*—Swift, speed, and developing self-esteem; making events happen quicker.

*Cobra*—To the ancient Egyptians, the cobra symbolized spiritual and divine wisdom and protection. The Hindus saw the cobra as a representation of the kundalini force that rose through the seven chakras of the astral body.

*Cock*—Self-confidence.

*Coyote*—Cunning, shapeshifting, stealth, opportunity, creativity, and new life.

*Crane*—From China to the Mediterranean, the crane represented justice, longevity, dignity, wisdom, discipline, vigilance, and reaching deeper mysteries and truths.

*Crocodile*—To ancient Egyptians, this creature represented mindless fury and evil. However, they also said the crocodile could provide knowledge.

*Crow*—Trickery, boldness, skill, cunning, alertness, prophecy, and shapeshifting. A companion of the Celtic goddess Morrigan, the crow symbolized the creative power and spiritual strength found through the Crone aspect of the Goddess. The raven is similar.

*Deer, hind, doe*—A messenger from the Otherworld, the appearance of the deer traditionally signaled a guide for adventures of mystical value. This creature also represented contact with spirit guides and the gods; abundance, dreams, intuition, and psychic powers.

*Dog, hound*—Devotion, companionship, loyalty, willingness to follow through, alertness, and discovering hidden knowledge and the truth. Sacred to Underworld goddesses, dogs also represent our own subconscious judgment. Myth says that the Celtic god Nodens, a healer, could shapeshift into a dog. The Norse god Odin rode on his Wild Hunt with a pack of hounds, carrying out the wishes of the goddess Hel.

*Dolphin, porpoise*—Intelligence, communication, friendships, eloquence, freedom, speed, prudence, change, balance, and harmony. Sacred to the Greek goddess Themis, this creature also symbolized active seedforms within the sea-womb of creation.

*Dove, pigeon*—Often the symbol of a spiritual messenger between worlds, in the past this bird also represented peace and love, a meaning it still holds today. It was sacred to Aphrodite, Astarte, and Venus.

*Dragon*—This fabulous creature is a universal symbolic figure found in most cultures around the world, and has several, sometimes contradictory, meanings. The dragon represents cunning, knowledge, riches, protection, the ability to rise above and conquer obstacles, and instruction in spiritual matters.

*Dragonfly*—Dreams, breaking down illusions, mystic messages of enlightenment, and seeing the truth in any situation.

*Eagle*—Wisdom, long life, taking advantage of opportunities, keen insight, strength, courage, seeing the overall pattern of life, connecting with powerful spiritual beings, and the ability to reach spiritual heights.

*Eel*—Avoiding trouble.

*Elephant*—A sacred creature to the Hindus, the elephant represents the power of the libido, removal of obstacles and barriers, confidence, patience, tackling a new situation, strength, wisdom, and eternity.

*Falcon*—Astral travel and healing.

*Fish*—To many Mediterranean and Asian cultures, fish in general symbolized sexuality and fertility. They also represent the subconscious mind and divination.

*Fox*—The Greek god Dionysus was said to shapeshift into a fox on occasion; his Lydian priestesses wore fox skins and were called Bassarids. The fox denotes intelligence, cunning, wisdom, remaining unobserved, and avoiding trouble.

*Frog*—Moving quickly, keeping a low profile, fertility, a new cycle of life, and initiation and transformation. The Egyptian frog goddess Hekat was connected with birth.

*Goose*—New beginnings, inspiration, happiness in general, happy marriage, children, creativeness, and spiritual guidance in one's destiny.

*Griffin*—Great magic, power, facing the inner self, spiritual enlightenment, and understanding the relationship between psychic energy and cosmic force.

*Hare, rabbit*—Transformation, receiving hidden teachings and intuitive messages, quick thinking, divination, fertility, swiftness, and avoiding traps or dangerous situations. Hares and rabbits were sacred to lunar goddesses.

*Hawk*—Keen insight into situations, being observant, omens and dreams, and recalling past lives. In Egypt, the hawk was thought to represent the soul. Sacred to the god Horus, the hawk symbolized the inner vehicle for transformation. The hawk was also an animal of Apollo.

*Hedgehog*—Self-defense.

*Heron*—Dignity, watching for opportunities, patience, and the generation of life.

*Hippopotamus*—Birth of new ideas, pregnancy, life, and strength. The Egyptian hippopotamus goddess Ta-Urt also represented righteous fury.

*Horse*—Associated in several cultures with death and the Underworld, the horse was frequently sacred to ocean deities. It was considered to be a vehicle for journeying to the Underworld, where one could contact spirits of the dead. It also symbolized freedom, friendships, stamina, faithfulness, and a journey.

*Hummingbird*—Love and happiness.

*Ibis*—A bird of the Egyptian god Thoth, the ibis was symbolic of magic, spells, writing, and recordkeeping.

*Leopard, panther*—Swift, cunning, strength, aggressiveness, and perseverance. These animals were sacred to the Greek god Dionysus.

*Lion, lioness*—The male lion represents relaxation, strengthening family ties, power, majesty, courage, energy, releasing tension and stress. The lioness symbolizes strong, protective mother love, the ability to care for one's self and family, and the strength to defeat aggressors. The lioness was sacred to such goddesses as Hathor, Sekhmet, and Cybele, while the lion belonged to such male deities as Apollo, Chrysocomes, the Arabic Shams-On, and Mithra.

*Lizard*—Escape from danger, dreams, mental creations, keeping a low profile, and asking for guidance in difficult situations.

*Lynx*—Intelligence and long journeys.

*Magpie*—Boldness.

*Monkey*—Ingenuity when dealing with problems.

*Mouse*—Being inconspicuous.

*Octopus*—Symbolizes the unfolding of the creative–destructive process.

*Otter*—Magic, friendship, joy of life, finding inner treasures or talents, gaining wisdom, and recovering from a crisis.

*Owl*—To the ancient Egyptians, the owl symbolized death, night, and cold. However, to the Greeks, it represented wisdom, the moon, lunar mysteries, and initiations. This bird also symbolizes alertness, wisdom, magic, keen insight into obscure events, unmasking deceivers, dreams, shapeshifting, clairvoyance, and a messenger of hidden secrets. The owl was sacred to such goddesses as the Eye Goddess of the Mediterranean, Athena, Lilith, Minerva, Blodeuwedd, Anath, and Mari.

*Peacock*—Dignity, self-confidence, watchfulness, and divine justice. It was sacred to the goddesses Hera and Sarasvati.

*Pegasus*—Poetic inspiration, astral travel, and changing evil into good. It was sacred to the Greek goddess Medusa and to the Muses.

*Phoenix*—Renewal, rebirth, and spiritual growth.

*Quail*—Good luck and victory.

*Raccoon*—Creativeness when faced with a new problem.

*Ram, sheep*—Keeping your balance in upsetting situations, fertility, and new beginnings.

*Rat*—Slyness and being able to move inconspicuously.

*Raven*—This bird has long been considered a messenger from the spirit world and a guide to oracles and teachers of magic. Sacred to such Celtic goddesses as Rhiannon and Morrigan, the raven represents great magic, divination, eloquence, spiritual wisdom, prophecy, a change in consciousness, intelligence, and communicating with the Otherworld.

*Salmon*—Great magic, journeys, endurance, and spiritual wisdom.

*Scarab beetle*—Vitality, new life, and learning about past lives.

*Seagull*—Taking advantage of opportunities.

*Seal*—Guidance when facing a separation or divorce; protection from gossip.

*Snail*—This creature, with its spiral-shaped shell, represents the action of the primordial spiral of energy upon matter.

*Sphinx*—Initiation and the end of a cycle.

*Spider*—Creativity, new life, beginning a new project, and becoming pregnant. As a weaver, the spider symbolizes the spiraling energy of primordial matter and the Divine Center in the web of illusion.

*Squirrel*—Harmony with life, patience, endurance, changing with the times, preparing for the future, and moving to a higher level of consciousness.

*Stag*—This horned creature represents the animal passions within each human.

*Stork*—Sacred to the goddess Juno, the stork represents a messenger of new ideas and birth.

*Swan*—Dream interpretation, mystical knowledge, developing intuitive abilities, dignity, and following instincts. Sacred to such goddesses as Aphrodite, Venus, Sarasvati, and the Norse Valkyries, the swan also symbolizes a messenger from the Goddess and the satisfaction of a desire.

*Tiger*—Power, energy; facing an unpleasant situation and doing something about it.

*Turtle, tortoise*—Keeping alert for danger; patience, perseverance, long life. In the Far East, the turtle symbolized the cosmos and seeds of unformed matter that would subsequently manifest.

*Unicorn*—Purity of spirit, a link between the physical and spiritual realms, fame, prosperity, strength of mind, and developing personal power.

*Vulture*—Cycle of death and rebirth, spiritual counsel, destruction followed by rebirth, and prophecy. Sacred to the Egyptian goddesses Nekhbet and Mut.



*Whale*—Music, long life, family, friends, developing psychic and telepathic abilities, initiation and rebirth, and embracing the opposites of existence.

*Wolf*—This animal represents cunning, intelligence, independence, avoiding trouble and escaping pursuers, the ability to pass by danger invisibly, outwitting those who wish you harm, strength to fight when necessary, wisdom, dreams, intuition, transformation, strong protection, strength, and spiritual guidance. To the Egyptians and Romans, the wolf represented valor; the wolf-god Wepwawet was a companion of Isis and Osiris. Among the Norse, it symbolized the destructive powers of chaos; Odin had two great wolves by his side at all times. The wolf was sacred to the Roman Lupa or Feronia and was a symbolic animal of the Vestal Virgins.

*Wren*—Divination, joy, and finding your niche in life.

## RITUAL OBJECTS

Throughout human history, certain symbols and physical objects have been used in ritual and art to represent spiritual ideas. Many of these physical and artistic metaphors are still being used in modern religions and are powerful symbols for spiritual development. They often appear spontaneously in dreams and visions.

Any object becomes sacred when it is used consciously for the proper reasons on an altar. The following list suggests items you might wish to use. However, any object that has meaning for you is just as appropriate.

*Ankh*—A life symbol of a cross with a loop on top, the ankh was used by the ancient Egyptians to represent eternal life and resurrection. The crook or crozier, also known as the Shepherd's Cross, is a similar symbol. The Egyptian god Osiris, in his role as Shepherd of Souls, carried a crook, as did the Greek Hermes. Use it to represent divine guidance and spiritual seeking.

*Arrows*—This emblem signifies divine intervention of both healing and killing power. To the Balkan god Perun, the arrow denoted lightning, long a symbol of illumination. A symbol of

the god Apollo, the arrow also represents supreme power and the sun's fertile rays. Mars, Tyr, and Mithra were also associated with the arrow. Use the arrow to symbolize the direct path you plan to take.

*Basket*—A sign of fertility, passion, and birth, a basket of ivy in ancient Greece symbolized the Bacchanalian mysteries of Dionysus. In ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, it represented the wholeness of divinity. Ceremonies to the Egyptian goddess Isis and the Greek Artemis featured sacred baskets. Place a basket on your altar to symbolize gathering what you need in life.

*Bowl*—A symbol of the universal womb, the bowl represents both nurturing and giving. Use it to hold special stones or paper requests.

*Box*—With a lid, this is a female symbol connected with the subconscious mind and the unknown. A box without a lid represents life or gifts coming to you; it represents the universal womb. As with the basket and bowl, you can place in the box requests written on pieces of paper or jewelry that you wish to empower.

*Breasts*—Breasts symbolize the source of life power and life-giving fluids from the Great Mother. Some of the earliest sacred images were little models of two breasts with a stem that could be pushed into the ground, thus holding the image on an altar or personal hearth. Breasts represent everyday material needs being met.

*Bridge*—Traditionally, the bridge is a link between heaven and earth, or between the subconscious and conscious minds. Bifrost was the astral bridge that spanned the heavens between Asgard and Midgard in Norse myth, while for the Israelites the bridge symbolized the Covenant between God and His people. An image of a bridge can represent the bridging of differences, making a transition from one cycle of life to another, or moving to a higher plane of consciousness.

*Bridle*—This is a symbol of control over the physical body and the emotional things that would motivate a person to react without clear thinking.

*Caduceus*—Most people are familiar with the wand with two entwined serpents as the emblem of the Greek god Hermes and healing. However, this emblem existed long before the Greeks used it. The Sumerian goddess Inanna is shown holding the caduceus as she stands under the Tree of Life. The double-headed snake was one of the emblems of Ningishzide, a healer god who was one of Ishtar's lovers. The caduceus is also found on stone tablets in India, in paintings by Native Americans, and in Aztec art. To the Romans, it was a symbol of moral equilibrium, while to Buddhists it represents the axis of the world with the kundalini of the chakras entwined about it.

*Candles*—Lighted candles symbolize personal spiritual enlightenment. When choosing a color, check the list on Colors and Elements for the meaning.

*Cauldron*—Long a holy object, the cauldron represents the belly-vessel of rebirth and transformation. It was associated with many goddesses, one of whom was the Celtic Cerridwen. Use a small cauldron to symbolize the churning, primordial matter from which you can draw energy to manifest your desires.

*Cave*—A womb symbol of the Goddess, the cave represents that which is concealed, something incubating, or the entrance to the subconscious mind.

*Chalice, cup*—Similar to the cauldron, the chalice has several meanings. Its primary meaning is rebirth and illumination. However, a filled chalice represents the bounty of life coming to you from a higher power, while an empty chalice is the receptacle for offerings. To rid yourself of negative emotions and feelings, gently blow into an empty cup, mentally emptying yourself of your problems. Then, turn the cup upside down on the altar. This symbolizes your turning your problems over to a higher power to be solved and transformed.

*Child*—The image of a child symbolizes the future with its potential as yet unrealized, the deeply hidden treasure in the mystic center of each human, or the beginning of a new cycle.

*Circle*—An ancient symbol, the circle represents the return from multiples to unity, from time to timelessness, from body-obsessed consciousness to the spiritually centered subconscious.

Jung calls the circle the ultimate state of Oneness, for it has no beginning and no end. Engravings of circles and cups can be seen in Paleolithic caves and Neolithic graves. The Gnostics used a drawing of a snake with its tail in its mouth to represent the circle; this symbol was called the ouroboros and it represented the cycles of time, life, the universe, death, and rebirth.

The Native Americans made and still make circular medicine wheels. Permanent circles often marked holy places and sacred sites, such as Stonehenge and the Chinese Temple of Heaven.

To several ancient cultures, the black circle represented the sun god during his nightly passage through the Underworld. Sometimes, instead of the sun god, it symbolized his dark twin brother, a secret, very wise god who held knowledge about all worlds.

Modern Wiccans and magicians draw a circle about their ritual area to symbolize protection from negative astral forces and to represent moving beyond the material world's vibrations.

*Clover or trefoil*—Long before Christianity arose, the clover, or any three-leafed plant, was an emblem of the Triple Goddess; among Christians, it became the symbol of the Trinity. All trinity symbols date back to the time of the Goddess religions when they represented the Maiden, Mother, and Crone

aspects of the Goddess. As far back as the civilization in the Indus Valley (c. 2500–1700 B.C.E.), the trefoil emblem signified a triple deity.

*Cobweb*—Associated with the Fate goddesses and weaving, the cobweb is the spiral shape of the creative matrix that leads inward to the center where matter is destroyed before being reformed. Minerva, Athena, and Spider Woman are associated with spiders and cobwebs.

*Column, tree, ladder, obelisk*—Symbolic of the connection between heaven and earth, or gods and mortals, this emblem has been pictured as a ladder, column, World Tree, sacred mountain, obelisk of the sun god, or tent pole of the shamans. It is much the same symbol as the bridge. When in pairs, the columns signify the balancing of opposing forces.

*Cornucopia*—This horn of plenty, usually filled with fruits and vegetables, symbolizes strength, abundance, and prosperity.

*Crescent*—The crescent is a lunar and Goddess symbol. It represents the world of changing forms that goes through a cycle to repeat itself endlessly.

*Cromlech*—Whether part of a circle of monolithic stones or standing alone, the cromlech stands for fertility, health, and spiritual enlightenment. A cromlech is an arrangement of stones, consisting of a cap stone on top of surrounding stones.

*Cross*—Now a Christian symbol, the cross is actually a very

ancient symbol, meaning much the same as the column. However, the crosspiece of this emblem signifies the balance of the four elements. The cross was associated with the Phoenician goddess Astarte, the Greek deities Artemis and Aphrodite, and the Aztec goddess of rain.

*Crown*—In cultures as far apart as India and northern Europe, the crown symbolized the sacred marriage between the Goddess and Her consort. This emblem signifies light, achievement, success, and spiritual enlightenment.

*Cube*—The three-dimensional equivalent of the square, this symbol represents the material world of the four elements. It is also associated with stability. A box with a lid can be a cube into which you place your requests on slips of paper.

*Curl, loop, rope*—As with the knot, this emblem means binding and unbinding, especially in a magical or spiritual sense.

*Curtain, veil*—The veil represents the ethereal door between the worlds of matter and spirit. Seven veils were associated with the goddesses Ishtar and Isis.

*Dice*—These represent gambling with the Fates; taking chances.

*Disk*—A sun emblem, the disk symbolizes matter in a state of transformation. Associated with the sun, the disk also signifies celestial perfection.

*Door, gate, portal*—Any door signifies the entrance to the path



leading to spirit, an initiation, or the opening of a new talent or way of life. In addition, the door represents the ability to pass from the earth to the astral plane, from one cycle of life to another, or to another level of spiritual knowledge. Similar to circles, doors also symbolize a separation of the physical and the sacred, signaling to the subconscious mind that a mindset transition must be made. The two-faced Roman god Janus, deity of the past and the future, ruled over doorways of all kinds. Altars were frequently placed near doors in ancient Greece, Rome, Assyria, and Mexico.

*Drum*—This instrument symbolizes divine ecstasy in ritual. In Africa, the drum is associated with the heart, while other cultures that practice any form of shamanism believe it is a mediator between earth and heaven.

*Dwarf*—The personification of forces that remain outside the realm of consciousness, this figure represents the guardian of the threshold between the conscious and subconscious minds, and the guardian who protects us from being exposed to more than we can understand or assimilate.

*Ear of corn*—Associated with many harvest deities, including Ceres and Demeter, an ear of corn represents the disintegration of life followed by rebirth. It also symbolizes the germination and growth of ideas. Maize or grains of corn represent prosperity and fertility.

*Egg*—Eggs dyed red were an important part of early Goddess worship and ritual, especially in spring. In ancient Egypt, the hieroglyph of an egg represented the potential seed of rebirth. Several creation myths tell the story of the World Egg. This symbol signifies immortality and the potential for life renewal.

*Eye*—Thousands of statues of the Eye Goddess have been excavated from third-millennium Sumer, where this aspect of the Goddess was very sacred. In Egypt, the eye was associated primarily with the god Horus. The eye is associated with intelligence, spiritual light, intuition, and truth that cannot be hidden. It also represents judgment by the Goddess.

*Fan*—Femininity, intuition, and change. The fan is an emblem of the Chinese deity Chung-Li Chuan, one of the Eight Chinese Immortals.

*Feather, plume*—In Egypt, the feather of truth was associated with the goddess Maat. It represents faith, contemplation, and reincarnating souls. Many goddesses, including Juno, were associated with feathers, which represent change.

*Flower*—Flowers are usually connected with spring and rebirth or renewal. For a more complete explanation of flowers, read the Flowers chart.

*Fountain*—The main portion of the fountain is associated in a minor way with the World Tree, while the flowing water

represents the life force within all things. The fountain symbolizes blessings, wisdom, purification, renewal, and comfort arising from the Divine Center.

*Geode*—A womb symbol similar to the cave.

*Globe, sphere*—Representing the world soul and the human soul, the globe or sphere symbolizes wholeness. If it is depicted with wings, it represents spiritual evolution.

*Goblet*—The same as the chalice and cauldron.

*Grain, wheat, corn*—This emblem represents life and the sustaining of it, and the harvest.

*Grapes*—Associated with such gods as Dionysus, grapes represent fertility and sacrifice.

*Hand*—Handprints are among the first symbols found in ancient, sacred Paleolithic caves. There, red marks of individual hands are found among wavy lines for water and crescent-shaped horns of fertility. In the shrines of matriarchal Catal Huyuk in seventh-millennium Anatolia, handprints, along with butterflies, bees, and the heads of bulls, decorate the walls. In Catal Huyuk, the hand probably represented the hand of the Goddess and action or manifestation, while in ancient Egypt, when combined with an eye, it signified clairvoyant action. In present Islamic cultures, the hand is still sacred and symbolizes protection, power, and strength.

*Harp*—Similar to the World Tree or mystic ladder, the harp is another symbol of the bridge between heaven and earth.

*Heart*—The ancient Egyptians believed that thoughts and morals arose from the heart, the center of physical life and a symbol of eternity. Thus, this symbol represents moral judgment, and pure, true love.

*Hexagram or six-pointed star*—The six-pointed star is composed of two overlapping triangles oriented in opposite directions, and is found around the world. It is also known as the Seal of Solomon, David's Shield, or the Star of David (in Judaism). The hexagram represents the combination of male and female.

*Honey*—To the Greek Orphists, honey was a symbol of wisdom. In India, it symbolizes the higher self.

*Horns*—Originally a fertility and lunar symbol, to early cultures horns also represented strength, power, and prosperity. The Egyptian hieroglyph of the horn signified elevation, prestige, and glory. The word horned may be derived from the Assyro-Babylonian *gamu* or the Phoenician words *geren*, *qarnuim*, or *kerenos*. The horned Apollo Karnaios resembles the horned Celtic god Cernunnos.

*Horseshoe*—Originally a symbol of the Goddess, the horseshoe represents the ending of one cycle and the beginning of another.

*Hourglass*—This emblem symbolizes the cycle and connection between the upper (spiritual) and lower (physical) worlds; creation and destruction.

*Jar, urn*—Long a sacred object in many cultures, a pot or jar

represents the universal womb of the Goddess and the Oneness that proceeds from the Great Mother. It symbolizes the potential for transforming anything placed inside it. In China, the jar represents good luck. Isis was frequently portrayed with a jar about her neck, just as the Hindu goddess Kali was shown with pots and jars.

Many sacred ceremonies involved the use of water jars to signify the presence of the deities. These ceremonies included the Osirian Mysteries of Egypt, the Babylonian rites of the god Nabu, the Cabirian Mysteries for Demeter and Cabirius, and the Greek festival of Anthesteria for Dionysus.

*Keys*—This symbol is associated with many deities from a variety of cultures. Hecate and Persephone held the keys to the Underworld and the universe. Athena was said to control the key to the city of Athens. The Babylonian god Marduk is said to have made the keys to heaven and hell that only Ishtar could use. In Rome, women in labor were given keys to hold for an easy childbirth. The Egyptian god Serapis was believed to have the keys to both the earth and the sea. Ancient spiritual mysteries speak of keys as the symbol of knowledge, a task to be performed, or a successful quest or spiritual journey. Keys are still used as a symbol of warding off evil spirits, and represent the means of solving a mystery or performing a task. They are also symbolic of locking and unlocking, or binding and loosening.

*Knife*—While the sword symbolizes spiritual heights, the knife represents vengeance, death, and sacrifice; it also alludes to the means to end a cycle.

*Knot*—The knot has two meanings: unity, stopping progress, or binding up energies when it is tied, but also releasing energy when untied. It is closely associated with weaving and the woven web of life. This symbol, with its weaving connotations, was connected with the Greek Fate goddesses and the Norse Norns.

In ancient Egypt, Isis was said to loosen or bind the knot of life, while Hathor wore a *menat*, the knotted headband or necklace. All the Egyptian holy mysteries were called "she-knots." The knot can be found in the Egyptian circle of eternity, the loop of the ankh, and the cartouche that circles the name of a pharaoh. Priestesses of the Goddess in Crete wore a knot of hair at the back of their heads and hung a knot of cloth at the entrance to the shrines.

In Rome, it was forbidden for anyone to wear anything knotted or tied within the precinct of Juno, who was the goddess of childbirth; knots were thought to cause a difficult birth. Muslims will not wear knots when they take their pilgrimage to Mecca. According to rabbinical law, Jews are not to tie knots on the Sabbath. One of the Chinese emblems of good luck is the Buddhist "endless knot" of longevity. Among the

Celts, the knot was a protective device to trap negative or evil energies.

Tie knots in string or yarn to bind up negative energy. Or use intricate drawings of knotwork to release energy when it is needed.

*Labyrinth*—The labyrinth takes its name from the ancient Minoan labrys, or double ax. However, the idea and use of the labyrinth in drawings goes back much further than Crete. Such designs are found on the walls of Paleolithic caves, where the ritual participants had to crawl through narrow openings and traverse narrow passageways to reach the sacred center of the cave itself. This symbol represents the spiritual path leading back to the Divine Center, and regeneration through the Goddess by the process of initiative rebirth. Focus on a drawing of a labyrinth while tracing the path with your finger. This will draw you toward the spiritual center of your being.

*Labrys, double ax*—A Goddess and moon symbol widely used in Minoan Crete, the labrys was sacred as a ritual tool. It was also a sacred image of the Amazons, who used it both in battle and as a ritual tool. It symbolizes the renewing of the life cycle and the soul through sacrifice, or death and regeneration.

*Lamp*—This emblem symbolizes spiritual intelligence and enlightenment. The Hermit of the tarot cards is shown holding a lamp or lantern, denoting his offering of guidance and

higher instruction. Deities associated with the lamp were Juno Lucina and Diana Lucifera.

*Leaf*—To the Chinese, the leaf means happiness.

*Mask*—In ancient times, the mask was worn during Mystery rituals to signify the spiritual metamorphosis conferred by the rite itself. This emblem represents secrecy, hidden meanings, and shapeshifting.

*Mirror*—A Goddess and moon symbol whose meanings include revealing the truth, intuition and the psychic realm, and the imagination. Mirrors were also known as soul-catchers or soul-carriers; Celtic women were buried with their mirrors that they believed carried their souls.

*Moon*—Originally a symbol of many goddesses and a few gods, the moon later came to symbolize the rhythm of life and the universe, the passage of time, and the power of rebirth. The moon represents creation, ripeness, cycles of life, spiritual disciplines, and initiations.

*Necklace*—At one time a sexual symbol of the completeness of the Goddess, the threaded, beaded necklace later came to mean the unity of diversity, or the continuity of the past lives of a human. The goddesses Freyja and Ishtar wore special necklaces.

*Nest*—This symbol represents the foundation or beginning of a life, event, or path.



*Oar*—This mundane object represents action, controlling the direction life is taking, and stability within an unstable situation.

*Obelisk*—Primarily a symbol of ancient Egypt, the obelisk was an emblem of the sun god and considered to be a solidified ray of the sun. Physically, it was a slender, four-sided, tapering column that could be hundreds of feet high. Obelisks frequently stood beside the doors of temples. The door to the temple of the goddess Astarte at Byblos was flanked by a pair of obelisks.

*Palace, castle*—This emblem represents the sacred place within, or the Divine Center.

*Papyrus, book*—Whether a rolled scroll or a bound book, this symbol means knowledge and an unfolding of the Akashic Records. These Records are a spiritual compilation of all the lives of every person.

*Peach*—To the Asians, the peach symbolizes immortality.

*Pearl*—Considered one of the eight Chinese emblems, the pearl signifies the sacred center. To Muslims, it represents heaven or paradise.

*Pentacle, pentagram*—A pentacle is a five-pointed star, once the symbol of all things feminine and the great Earth Mother. In Egyptian hieroglyphs, it means to "rise up" or "cause to arise," and it was associated with both Isis and Nephthys. The pentacle