

Similarly, a world in which magic is real will tend to find little following for religions which fail to offer equal displays of divine power. This explains why such religions often need to associate demonstrable magic with evil deeds and intentions, for how else can they hope to hold the belief and faith of their worshippers? (See *Magical Clerics*, p. 112.)

### *Penance*

Penance is a means of reconciling a sinner and his god. In order to do penance properly there must be true sorrow - and a true resolve never to repeat the sin. Penance is both a form of punishment and an exercise showing repentance.

There are commonly three stages to penance - confession, acceptance of punishment, and absolution. A sinner might be required to make public confession as a part of his penance. Absolution can be a liturgical formula performed by the priest when the penance is done, or a divine pardon, which cleanses the sinner's soul.

Most religions (at least those that acknowledge the existence of sin) have specific rules for punishing misdeeds. Penalties range through the physical, mental and monetary realms. Various sects will require a penitent to spend a certain amount of time in religious service (from a few days to years). Some offenses are more serious than others; this will vary from religion to religion, or even among sects in the same religion. The GM should carefully consider just what will constitute an offense in the eyes of the deity and/or the church. Usually clerics are considered to be examples to other followers, so when they falter, their punishment is often more severe.

### *Divine News*

What happens if a deity changes its mind?

Since religions are collections of beliefs in a divine force or being, changes in the divine will have far-reaching effects.

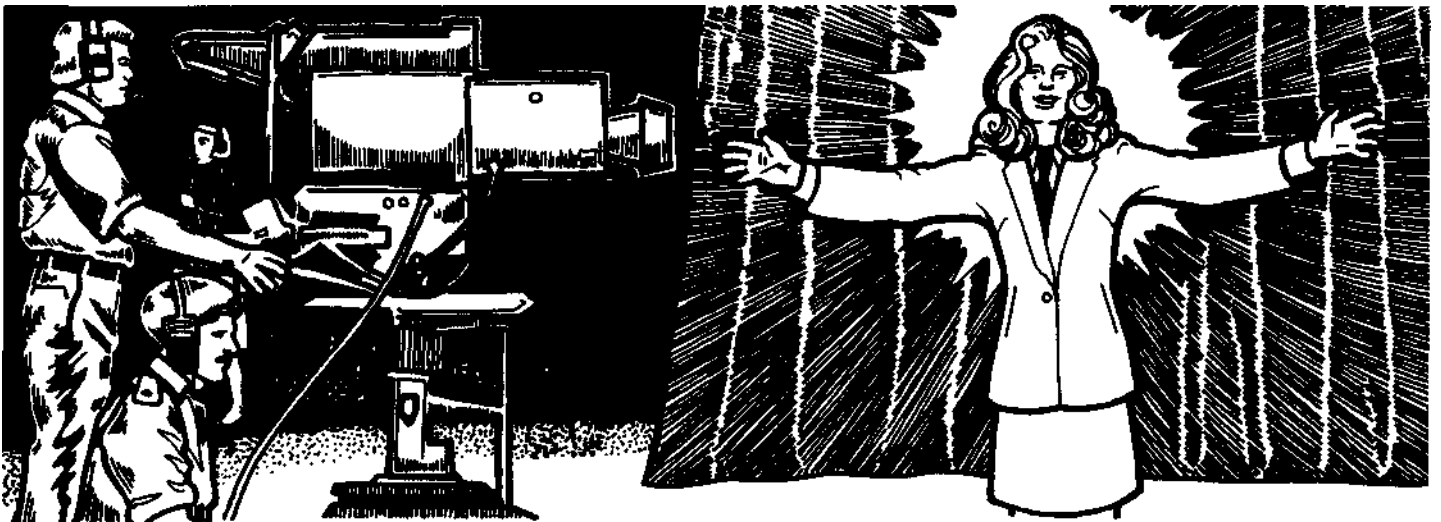
If the deity is indeed powerful, and takes an active interest in its adherents, then it is likely that the religion will change to suit the deity's purposes. This might result in massive cultural effects, especially if a relatively peaceful god decides to launch a crusade.

If the deity does not interact with its followers or grant them direct power, but only speaks to a few clerics, then schisms and arguments will likely result. Some clerics might not believe that the god has changed, and will continue on as they were. Others will insist upon following the "new" tenets of the religion and form new churches or sects.

Even false religions are susceptible. The mortals behind the religious organization may adopt a new agenda, changing the religion to suit a new goal. Divine revelation will, of course, be the excuse used. Or perhaps a deity really *will* come into existence, or decide to "take over" a false religion, making use of an existing power structure.

### *Science*

Technological developments may have great influence upon a religion. They may change the way a religion deals with the world, or shake the very foundations of belief. Before the advent of the printing press, many scriptures and holy writings were available only to clerics and other authorities. With the increase in literacy and the availability of religious material, followers were exposed *directly* to the doctrines of their church. Personal devotion and study became accepted practices. No longer was the cleric the sole dispenser of wisdom - now followers could read religious tracts and draw their own conclusions. Schisms arose as people questioned scriptural interpretation.

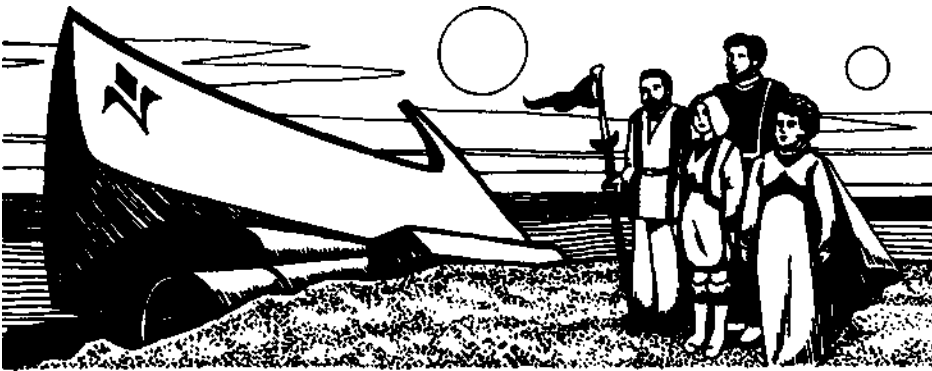


Some technological advances are taken in stride. Many modern religions proselytize through the media, reaching millions of potential converts. Other religions use the conveniences of science to aid in rituals of worship - prayer wheels might be run by electric motors, eternal flames are replaced by gas or electric light, sermons are delivered through amplified systems, electric organs provide music for songs and chants.

Other religions see the development of science and technology as a threat and do everything in their power to suppress new discoveries. The Romans ignored much of the astronomical works of Aristarchus, Hipparchus and Eratosthenes, who suggested a new order for the universe. Copernicus' works, first published in 1543, were prohibited until 1835 because they disagreed with accepted scripture. Galileo, whose works were first published in 1632, was forced to recant his discoveries and was later refused proper burial.

More recent developments, such as birth control, medical improvements and genetic engineering, have caused great argument and consternation among religious organizations who consider such advances to be contrary to divine will.

Many science-fiction stories have portrayed ultra-technological religious dictatorships, such as Robert Heinlein's *Fifth Column* and Frank Herbert's *Dune*.



## Religion in Space

What happens when religions commute?

Just as religious purists fled to the New World to start anew, free from religious persecution, future space travelers may do the same. Entire planets might be colonized by a specific religious sect. Others who could not find their answers on Earth might seek them in the depths of space. Tours of the universe might become grand-scale pilgrimages for those seeking to view all the diverse forms of the divine. Proselytizing religions might send out their clerics to find new converts, even among alien races. And as human culture meets (or perhaps collides) with alien races, some religions may adapt and change while others strike out with xenophobic fervor.

Changing an earth-bound religion to suit a science-fiction campaign will be an interesting exercise for the GM. If, for instance, religious practice requires facing some holy site when praying, what direction do the faithful face when off the planet? Pilgrimage may become a near-impossible hardship. The church may be confronted with creatures not mentioned by their own scripture, or perhaps with the discovery of life created by someone else. Explanations of the unknown often result in shaken - or lost - faith. Some religions might find a way to amalgamate such knowledge, while others will deny its very existence. The church may need to decide whether to accept or seek converts, or even

## Monasticism

Clerics who choose a lifestyle removed from temporal concerns so that they can devote their lives exclusively to religious pursuits are called *monks*. Most religions have some sort of monastic tradition.

Some religions develop traditions of monasticism based upon the wisdom of a holy teacher. Christian monasticism, for example, is based upon the teachings of Jesus that supported celibacy, poverty and total dedication to God. Monks achieve this through isolation, simple labor, meditation, prayer, and the study and recitation of scripture.

Christian monasticism has its roots in the late 3rd century. Celibate ascetics began to move into the desert. Eventually loose-knit communities of hermits formed; the monks lived alone but gathered together for worship and study. In the 4th century, two communities were formed, one by Pachomius in Egypt and one in Asia Minor by Basil of Caesarea. Pachomius monks were very isolated, but Basil's monasteries were famous for their charitable works; they ran hospitals, schools and hostels. Prayer was always a central part of a monk's life, and by the 9th century Benedictine monks were famous for their prayers on behalf of the rest of society. New monastic groups appeared in the 11th and 12th centuries. Some, like the Cistercians, began a revival of the early Benedictine Rule; others such as the Carthusians formed new orders. Later, the Franciscans and Dominicans practiced mendicancy (living by begging).

As monasticism grew more popular, ordered regimens became increasingly important. Discipline not only focuses the mind, but also ensures a harmonious community. After Pachomius and Basil, the idea of a *rule* became a Christian monastic tradition. These rules govern all aspects of monastic life. Monasteries were viewed as large families, and were expected to be independent and self-supporting. Life was plain and simple, but not overly tiresome. The brothers (or sisters) were to elect their Abbot (or Abbess), who thereafter had complete authority. Monasteries were permanent communities; monks who professed to a certain rule were not expected (or usually allowed!) to move to other monasteries.

*Continued on next page...*

## Monasticism (Continued)

Christian monastic rule could be divided into three areas: liturgy (which included the Eucharist and canonical hours); *lectio divina*, or sacred readings to support spiritual growth; and manual labor to help support the community. The rule was extremely detailed (Benedict's Rule consisted of 73 chapters) and described such things as a daily timetable (with seasonal variations), liturgy, diet, moral demands and guidelines for communal living.

### Buddhist Monasticism

Buddhist monasticism is based upon the life of Buddha himself. Traditionally, the Buddha was a member of a royal family who renounced that position and left to seek a more lasting truth. The Buddha chose a middle path focusing on restraint, meditation and study.

After his enlightenment, the Buddha traveled to Magadha (part of northern India), where he attracted many disciples. Wandering truth-seekers took a three-month retreat during monsoon season and often gathered together during this time. Recital of the *Patimokkha*, a form of confessional, developed during this time. Eventually traditions of community life developed and once-temporary communities became more permanent. These monasteries, *Vihara*, became the keystone of Buddhist tradition. The *Patimokkha* developed into an extensive set of rules; 250 in the *Mahayana* tradition, and 227 in the *Theravada* (or *Hinayana*) tradition.

The *Vinaya* is a series of training rules; its most important rule is that the Buddha is the sole monastic authority. These monastic rules are broken into seven sections, according to the offense and its penalties. The first category involves serious offenses (sexual intercourse, stealing, killing) that result in expulsion from the order. Lesser offenses can result in temporary suspension or public confession.

allow clerics, from alien races. Is a soul the same regardless of the body it inhabits - even if it is reincarnated as an alien? Will the spacefarers develop a reasonable dialogue with alien religions, or withdraw, denouncing all but their own belief? Religion may not even be part of a science-fiction setting; belief in science and logic might replace belief in a divine being. Or the wonders of the universe may prove to some that there must be a supreme being.

## Schisms

Virtually every religion suffers from a form of schism at some time during its history. What happens when religions don't adapt - or only parts of them do - may affect how they resolve arguments and change later on. Some schisms are relatively peaceful, consisting of intellectual argument and perhaps a withdrawal of serious adherents. Many religions have sects that developed out of a desire to return to a "truer" form of worship. Other schisms reach into the secular world as well, resulting in political upheaval and wars that last generations.

Schisms are a realistic way for a GM to spice up a religion's history. A GM who may not wish to include numerous religions can still develop interesting political plots by allowing schisms to develop in the sole religion. In a world with many religions, the creation of sects will prevent predictability. Some sects might be friendly to outside religions, while others fiercely oppose them.

## Divine Revelation

If the god hands down a revelation through a priest, some might suspect the cleric of ulterior motives. If there are already arguments within the church, no one would believe it if the opposing side claimed divine support! If the god descends to earth but does so quietly, without fanfare, will those who did not see the deity believe?

What happens when the *gods* argue? If the church supports a group of deities, who supports which side? Clerics might differ in opinion, thus splitting the church. Feuding deities might even manipulate and lie to each other's clerics, trying to gain new followers and cause problems for their competition.

If the divine is not particularly active, what happens when a cleric declares a revelation? What proof can be offered? Will everyone believe? Probably some will, and some will demand proof of the god's will. If an unpopular cleric is chosen for a position of power, others may object and oppose the god's will if they even accept that it *is* the god's will.

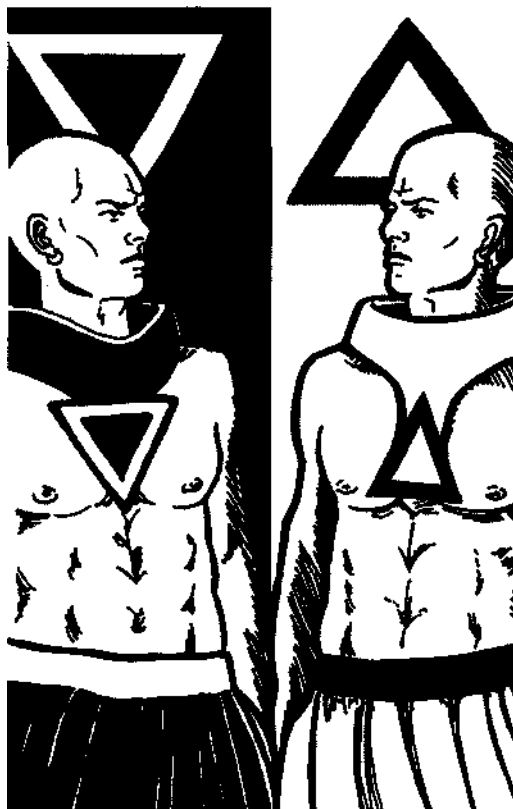
## Interpretation and Politics

Few things cause more argument than religion. Differing opinions about

the practices of the religious elite often result in rebellious groups. Some clergy might object to trends and practices within their church for political or ethical reasons, or might favor the welfare of the common folk over the excesses of the nobility. Intellectuals within the clergy might question the reasoning of their teachers, challenging their authority. Others might favor a return to simpler times.



Schisms often begin as reform movements started by disagreements in scriptural interpretation. In the 8th century a Jewish sect called the Karaites denied the validity of rabbinic oral traditions, preferring instead to develop their practices based solely upon written scripture. The Rabbinites (those who opposed the Karaites) believed that this sect threatened the unity of Jewish thought, so they opposed them in polemical writing. Attempts to disprove the Karaite position resulted in a number of new studies of the Torah throughout the Middle Ages. This is a good example of how a religious schism can cause people to re-examine their own beliefs, if only to prove someone else wrong.



Many reform-based schisms, however, cause great disruption, which overflows into the secular world. When those involved in a religious argument hold temporal power, the entire society can become involved. This is especially prevalent in societies where religion is an integral part of the culture. If there is little or no separation between church and state, then religious schisms become political schisms as well. A classic example of this is the Protestant Reformation (see sidebar, p. 51).

Some schisms begin gradually, as the result of expansion and external influences. If a religion spreads over a great geographical distance, it can be difficult to maintain contact. These new "outposts" of a church are often subjected to local pressures that the mother-church cannot understand. The new church makes decisions on its own, since consultation with superiors is difficult at best. Over time, attitudes and even doctrine can change.

Sometimes a single schism will lead to the establishment of many other sects. The first blow to Islamic unity began 25 years after Mohammed's death and was the result of a political, not religious, argument. This schism resulted in the establishment of the Sunni and Shiite sects. Over 70 splinter sects then sprang from the Shiites, most of which justified themselves on religious grounds.

## Reunification

Not all movements are toward separation. Sometimes movements within a religion may wish to heal old theological wounds, seeking reunification of existing splinter groups. These factions feel that dissension with the church weakens it. Some might wish to present a unified front to the competition; oth-

## Sikhism

Sikhism is a faith which combines teachings of the Muslim *Sufis* with those of *Bhakti* Hinduism. All ten of the *Gurus* that Sikhism venerates were Hindu. Muslim influences came later - the caste system and idol worship were rejected and monotheism was emphasized.

The Bhakti cult dates back to the *Nayanar* and *Alvar* saints of south India during the 8th century, and the monism teachings of *Samkara*. The impact of Islam came with the advent of Sufi mystics; both Bhakti and Sufi traditions stressed the importance of ascetic discipline and the chanting of litanies under the guidance of a teacher.

In the early 16th century, Guru Nanak began to preach after a divine revelation. He built the first *dharmshala*, a "temple of righteousness." His following consisted of both Muslims and Hindus, many of whom called themselves *Nanakprasthas*, "followers of Nanak's path." Before he died, he appointed a disciple, Angad, to continue his work. A series of Gurus followed. The fifth Guru, Arjun, supported trade with Afghanistan and Turkey, becoming important commercially. His involvement in Muslim politics caused his arrest and eventual martyrdom. This caused a schism between Muslims and Sikhs, ending Sikh pacifism. Later Gurus raised armies and became active in the Himalayan foothills between involvements with the Mogul courts.

In the late 17th century Gobind Rai built fortresses and founded the *Khalsa*, a military fraternity with specific rules of conduct. All members of the Khalsa took a new common family name, *Singh*, meaning lion. Sikhs who did not join the Khalsa were called *Sahajdhari*, "those who take time to adopt." Those who later renounced the Khalsa were *patits*, or renegades. Gobind Rai lost all his sons fighting the Moguls; he himself was assassinated. According to tradition, he proclaimed the end of the line of Gurus just before his death. The Khalsa had been a strong political and military power and many Hindu peasants converted. During British rule the Khalsa were given special privileges in both the army and civil services.

In more recent times, the Khalsa tradition appears to be losing ground. Many members have cut their long hair and beards and have lapsed into Hinduism. Many Sikhs living outside of India are clean-shaven; Westernized Sikhs in India are following that trend as well.

## Ancient Egypt

All of ancient Egyptian culture had religious origins. Astronomy arose from the need to time rituals; the oldest maps involved the geography of spiritual realms; most doctors and physicians were also priests. Religious commandments defined practices of hygiene. State administration was tied irrevocably to the concept of divine kingship; to serve the Pharaoh was to serve god. Judicial officials were titled "priest of Maat."

Egyptians monarchs were central to both political and religious life. A new era began with each new monarch; earthly and cosmic realms were linked through the royal personage. In its earliest stages, the Egyptian state unified neighboring tribes into *names*, each of which had religious autonomy. Originally there were 38 nomes; that number was later raised to 42, representing Osiris' 42 judges of the dead. During the Archaic period there were two separate groups of gods. Those of the first group were each linked to a particular place - these included the old nomes gods and were usually worshiped in animal form. The other group of gods represented various cosmic or natural forces. Scholars believe that the theriomorphic (animal-shaped) gods originated with North African Hamitic cultures, while the anthropomorphic gods were connected with Western Semitic belief.

Early in the Old Kingdom, the monarch was seen as an incarnation of Horus. After the Fifth Dynasty, Horus was replaced by Ra, the sun god. During the Twelfth Dynasty, Amon became the state god. A period of monotheism resulted when Akhenaten declared Aten (another sun god, perhaps another version of Amon) to be the sole state deity. During the late period, animal cults became very popular, while during Ptolemaic and Roman times, Isis reigned supreme.

Throughout Egypt's long history, the religious state controlled much (if not all) of the country's commerce and trade. Agricultural product belonged to the gods; it was dedicated to them and stored in huge temple granaries, and later re-distributed to the various nomes according to guidelines developed from census information. Many revolts occurred when this distribution fell short of demand. Nome administrators were also priests; only they could release goods held in the temple granaries.

ers might wish to pool resources to deal with outside threats. Some might feel that they cannot help others while their own church is in such disarray. Many might feel that division within the church is a deterrent to converts. And others still may simply feel that the deity wants it that way.

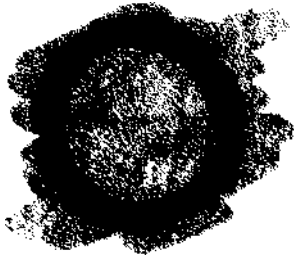
Present-day ecumenical union in the Christian church, for instance, appears to have developed out of a feeling that the church's influence was waning. Many of the Protestant denominations have established councils of churches on both the national and world level. GMs wishing to run present-day or futuristic campaigns might wish to consider this sort of world-wide religious organization.

On the other hand, when the leaders of two churches agree to merge, there will usually be some followers of each who reject the merger. This leads to the existence of three churches - the new unified church, and the remnants of the two original churches!



# SYMBOLS





### ***Round Motifs***

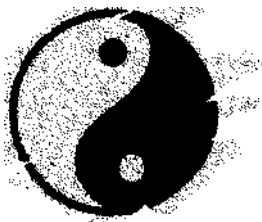
The *circle* is usually a feminine symbol, associated with protected or consecrated areas. The cosmos is often seen as an unbroken circle. Circle symbolism is often used to convey a sense of equality of rank, such as with the Arthurian Round Table.



The *double wheel* is a symbol of eternity which represents the life cycles of the earth within an outer cycle of the cosmos. It often symbolizes a universal deity or elemental spirits.



The *spiral* is a symbol connected with the cycle of birth and rebirth. Sacred dances often follow spiral or circular patterns.



The *yang and yin* form a classic Chinese symbol representing opposing yet complementary and completing powers - male and female, light and dark, winter and summer, good and evil, and so on. Each half of the symbol contains a small spot of the opposite color, symbolizing the small portion of its opposite that each half of a dualistic pair contains.

Symbols are physical representations of faith and worship. Ceremonies are symbolic acts. Both focus belief, and provide a familiar element which binds those of similar faiths together.

## **Symbolism**

Symbols are of utmost importance in most religions. The essence of a symbol is the meaning it conveys. Symbols may be acts, sounds and objects, and will always have strong cultural significance. By granting the invisible or intangible a visible or tangible representation, immaterial ideals and concepts are more easily understood and recognized. Venerating a symbol shows respect for the beliefs it represents. Similarly, contempt or enmity for a belief or those who hold it can be shown by attacking or defaming its symbols.

Some symbols and labels are randomly adopted. These symbols are often variations on ancient motifs (see sidebars, pp. 66-69). If the same symbol is found in many wide-ranging cultures, it is called a universal symbol. Universal symbols may represent entirely different ideals or concepts, depending upon their cultural associations. For example, the color white represents purity in Western society, but deep mourning in Oriental cultures.

### **Symbolic Connections**

The ideals represented by symbols range from everyday matters to ideas of cosmic importance. In simpler cultures, symbols often represent concepts of sex, fertility, creation, natural and supernatural powers. Associated objects and rituals are designed to induce good luck or ward off evil. In more sophisticated cultures, the symbolism may become more abstract, and often deals with personal characteristics such as greed, jealousy, hatred, love and envy.

Over time, symbols may gain new associations that are contrary to their original meanings. In most modern Buddhist cultures, the swastika remains a positive symbol of life and the sun, while most modern Western cultures vilify it as a symbol of Nazi Germany. Sometimes the presence of a universal symbol can indicate an old cultural influence, but tracing this can be difficult. The horned crown of the Assyrian kings, a symbol of power and divinity, began as a crescent crown worn by Suin, an ancient Babylonian moon-god. But since the crescent resembles horns, over time it came to be depicted as a horned crown, its celestial origins lost.

### **Graphic Symbols**

Many universal symbols are geometric shapes. The wheel-of-life, the yin and yang, the various forms of the cross and interlacement of stars are all examples of common motifs (see sidebars, pp. 66-69). Some associations, like the sun and the circle, are virtually universal. The triangle is commonly associated with any triune deity or concept of a threefold (such as body, mind and spirit) cosmology. Squares, spirals, crosses, meanders (wavy lines), chevrons and scrolls are other common symbols.

### **Symbolic Acts**

Gesture, posture and position often hold symbolic meaning, especially in a religious context. The posture of religious statuary may represent the mood or temperament of the deity. Gestures of benediction or blessing are often conveyed by the uplifting of hands or certain positions of the fingers. Worshipers

often kneel in supplication; the god in a position of authority is often seated as a Judge. A finger placed to the lips to indicate silence, the "V" for Victory sign, a thumb down for death - all of these are symbolic gestures. Washing is a universal symbol of purification; breaking bread often indicates charity, or community.

## Appearance and Dress

Color, fabric, style of dress and hair, scarification, tattooing - all of these may have specific meaning to a particular religion. Indeed, many religions have codes of dress and appearance. This places the individual within a group of worshipers, making him easily identifiable. Male Sikhs adhere to the wearing of the "five Ks." These are the *kesh* (uncut hair), the *kangha* (a comb securing the hair), the *kara* (a steel bracelet), the *kirpan* (a dagger) and the *kachh* (breeches which end above the knee).

In some religions, certain parts of the body must be concealed (or uncovered) at all times. Veils or headcoverings are often required (or removed, in some cases) within temples and churches. Malaysian Buddhists remove their footwear before entering their temples to pray.

Clergy must often adhere to stricter codes than secular worshipers, especially during religious services. Zoroastrian priests wear white robes, turbans and masks over their mouths during certain ceremonies. (See also *Clerical Garb*, p. 85.)

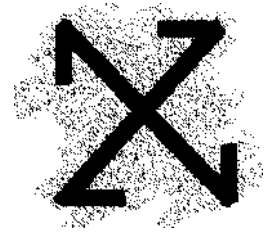
Particular colors are often sacred, or are worn at a particular ceremony or time of year. In the Catholic church white is used during Christmas and Easter, black on Good Friday, and blue or violet during Advent and the first four weeks of Lent.

## Food

Plants, flowers, trees and fruits often hold particular significance to a religion. Rice is thrown at a wedding for luck, prosperity and progeny. The lily represents purity or death; corn symbolizes fertility. In China, long strands of vermicelli (representing wishes for long life) are eaten at birthdays. Bitter herbs and particular wines might be consumed at specific religious festivals, such as the Jewish Passover, in symbolic remembrance. Other foods, especially those of animal origin, may be considered unclean and therefore forbidden. Sometimes a particular plant or animal is actually considered to be a manifestation of the deity. The *haoma* plant is seen by Zoroastrians as the god Haoma on earth; in ritual the plant is pounded and the juice drunk, a bloodless offering representing the sacrifice at the end of the world which will grant immortality to all humans.

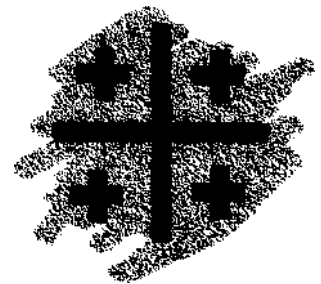
## Animals

Often deities are associated with particular animals or natural motifs. Mithras, worshiped across the Roman Empire and beyond during the 1st to 4th centuries, was nearly always depicted slaying a bull. The cat was connected with the goddesses Bast and Freya, the cow with Hathor and Io, the ram with Amon and Aries, the sow with Astarte, Cerridwen and Demeter. All important animals either have some association with the supernatural, are adopted as

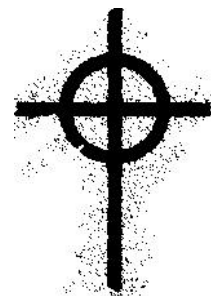


### Cross Motifs

The *wolf cross* is an ancient Nordic symbol representing the first month of the year. A variation of the swastika (which was originally a symbol of life, light and the sun), the wolf cross also symbolized the turning of the year and annual sun cycles.



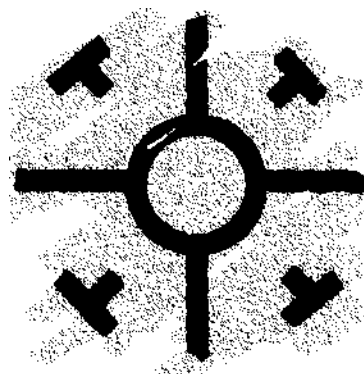
The *Jerusalem cross* was once a pre-Christian symbol called an "earth-center" cross. The subordinate crosses represented either the seasons, directions or four elements, depending upon the tradition. When Jerusalem grew to be the center of the medieval Christian world, this ancient cross symbol remained.



The cross became a well-known symbol as Christianity spread; this version is called the *Celtic cross*. Particularly common in Scotland and Ireland, it often serves as a grave marker. The Hindu *kiakra* is almost identical in shape.

The *Coptic cross* began as a sun-oriented symbol; the circle represented the sun, supported by four heavenly pillars. It was later adopted by Coptic Christians, who added the four "nails" to represent the crucified Christ.

Cultures of aliens with more than four limbs may have "cross" motifs with varying numbers and lengths of "arms," depending on their anatomy.

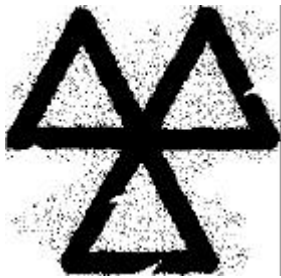






## Triple Motifs

The *triangle* is the most common triple motif. Triangle designs often represent the feminine principle.



Fate is often seen as not one, but three, linked entities and is often represented by a *triple triangle* motif. Single and triple triads (motifs containing 3s and 9s) are significant in many earth religions.

The *trefoil*, or three-leaf shamrock, is



one of the oldest emblems of triune divinity, dating back to Indus Valley civilizations. This is a virtually universal symbol, but is particularly common in Celtic and Near Eastern religions.

The *world triad* is an emblem of cos -



mic creativity, symbolizing both the threefold nature of fate and the eternal cycles of life.

guardian spirits of some sort, or are identified with some cultural trait. In China the bat signifies good fortune, while in Europe it is associated with demons and vampires. The snake is a popular symbol, often seen as a wise feminine force. In other religions, the snake is diabolized, and seen as a corrupting beast. The European fox and Native American coyote are trickster figures. Various mythological creatures may also have religious significance, such as the well-known link between unicorns and purity.

## Buildings

Temples and places of worship are often constructed to remind followers of aspects of the divine. The basic design, orientation, location and decoration may all have symbolic meaning within the religion. Christian churches often take the form of a cross, tall steeples pointing to heaven. A temple might have four towers, representing the four directions or elements; columns and pillars may specifically depict the deity or they may merely exist in numbers sacred to the religion. Buddhist *stupas* are often built in the form of a mandala, with three open, circular terraces within five closed square galleries. Doors and altars may be aligned in particular directions. A sanctuary to a solar deity might be constructed so that the light of the dawn pours in through the front door. Shinto shrines usually face south, or sometimes east; north and west are considered to be unlucky.



Sometimes religious buildings are only temporary structures, such as the *sukkahs* or booths built during the Jewish *Sukkot* pilgrimage festival. Other structures might be continually rebuilt. The most sacred Shinto site in Japan is the shrine to the supreme sun-goddess at Ise; it has been rebuilt on the same site, according to the same plan, every 20 years since the 4th century.

Some cultures grant special protective powers to religious buildings. Someone who takes shelter in such a holy place is immune to arrest for committing a crime, for holding divergent political views, and so on. This custom is called *sanctuary*, or sometimes *refuge*.

## Tools

Objects may have symbolic as well as practical value. In addition, many items might represent the same ideal. A book, scroll or floppy disk may be used to represent learning. Scales and balances might represent justice. A chalice or flask might depict healing. In other cultures, one symbol may hold many meanings. Flame might represent knowledge, or torment, or destruction, or the warmth of the home.

## Ceremonies

The terms "rituals" and "ceremonies" may generally be interchanged. They are formal symbolic acts which are defined by protocol, tradition and convention. Sometime these actions are mere routine and habit, and hold no deep significance to the participants. Indeed, over time, the actual meaning of a habitual action might be lost. But frequently they involve elaborate preparations and are performed with a great deal of pomp and formality.

### What Is a Ritual?

Ritual is perhaps the most complex form of symbolic activity in any religion. These activities express religious belief in a physical way, and invite reflection and thought by their participants. Rituals can rarely be understood out of the context of religion and culture, and often puzzle - or even offend - outsiders. Rituals affirm the social position of the participant, and help define social boundaries, confirming one's place in the community. This sense of identity and community is vitally important to a religion.

#### *The Done, the Said, and the Seen*

Ritual is highly symbolic, and expresses concepts on many different levels. Language, gesture and physical objects involve all the senses. The taste of ritual foods, the smell of incense, the touch of anointing oil, the sounds of bells and chants - all these draw the participant's attention and strengthen the symbolism. The best way to understand a ritual is to consider it in terms of what is done, what is said and what is seen.

Ceremonies and rituals consist of a sequence of performed actions. Often a ritual re-enacts past events in the history of the religion, celebrating triumphs and remembering times of sorrow and misfortune. At times, rituals can be an emotional outlet and a means to deal with problems, by invoking religious laws and judgements, or offering sacrifices and penances. Rituals are small dramas, in which the congregations are the actors, the clergy are the directors, and the deity is the audience.

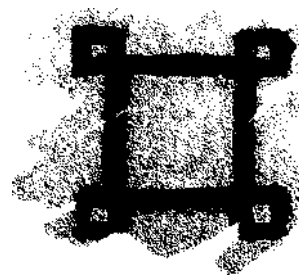
The vocal components of rituals are also important. They may be confirmations of faith, confessions, songs of praise and prayer, or the recitation of religious history and myth. What is said and heard enhances the meaning of the ritual.

Paraphernalia also reinforces the symbolism of ritual. Visual symbols are very common in rituals, and involve colors, numbers, shapes, vessels, vestments, animals and foodstuffs in complex combinations. A symbol can represent more than one thing, depending upon the ritual it is used in. Rituals grow, adapt and change according to the needs and traditions of the adherents.

### Community Rituals

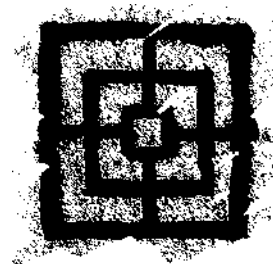
Ritual plays an important role in maintaining a sense of loyalty and community among members of a certain society. Rituals are generally performed publicly, according to oral traditions or scriptures. Special holy sites or consecrated buildings are the usual locations. Leaders of such rituals act as the liaison between the worshipers and the divine. These leaders are usually specially trained and consecrated.

Community rituals can also be performed by the laity. Jain temples do not hold images of gods, only depictions of their *Tirthankaras*. Images of these enlightened mortal teachers are bathed, sung to and purified during various rites

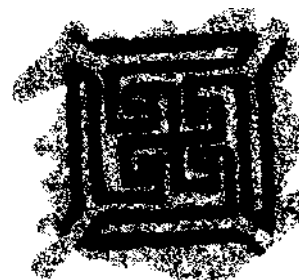


#### *Four-Way Motifs*

The *earth square* represents the nearly universal concept that the earth has four corners and four directions. It is thought to be inherently protective, for it also represents the four spirits, or earth-guardians, that stand at the corners of the world hold up the sky.



The *Morris square* (also called the Mill, or Triple Enclosure) is common to Celtic and earth religions. It represents the four elements, winds, directions, rivers and so on, all of which proceed from the holy center.



The *Nandyavarta* is a Hindu labyrinth design used in both mysticism and meditation. It symbolizes contemplation and revelation of inner mysteries.



The *world symbol* represents the four elements joined together by a central unifying force.

## ***Defining Symbols for a New Religion***

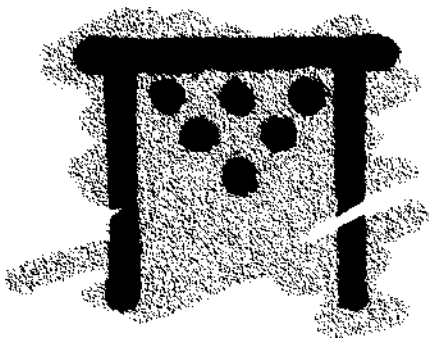
Symbols are important because of the associations they bring with them. When choosing symbols the GM must consider exactly what he is trying to convey. The GM should determine the key beliefs of the culture and pick a symbol for each. Using symbols that have common meaning can be a shortcut to help players understand the world. For example, to many people a sword will symbolize strength, knightly orders and chivalry.

If the GM wishes to create a new "feel," it is a good idea to choose symbols that do not already have strong connotations, or use older symbols whose meanings have been forgotten or changed. Reclaiming the older meaning of a symbol can be difficult, however. The swastika's present meaning (to Western cultures, at least) is far different from its ancient connotations of creativity and light.

If the GM wishes to create a totally alien "feel," then designing completely new symbols is an option. Such symbols should echo the structure of the alien society in some way.

Whatever symbols he chooses will play a strong role in any ceremonies associated with the religion. Symbols are inscribed upon altars and holy items, worn on priestly vestments and flown on standards at the heads of armies. Ritual gestures echoing the shape of the symbol will develop. Ritual responses might be repeated a holy number of times. (See *Numbers*, p. 12.)

Symbols do not have to be religiously significant - even atheistic societies will have symbols. A corporate logo might inspire loyal workers just as a religious one might inspire a true believer.



celebrating auspicious occasions. Communal meals, ranging from the temple gatherings of the Zoroastrians to modern Christian "potlucks," all help maintain community ties and strengthen religious fellowship.

Religious parades are another form of community ritual. Examples include the Corpus Christi parades in Peru, the Islamic Ashura festivals in Kashmir, the Hindu marches devoted to Ganesh, and the well-known "dragons" paraded in Chinese New Year celebrations.

## **Clerical Rituals**

Some rituals may only be performed by a sanctified or anointed member of the religion. These rites, sometimes called sacraments, are either so formal or so "holy" that only an invested cleric may perform them. Often clerical rituals are restricted by ranks. For example, a high priest invests a priest, while a priest invests a minister. Religions often require that their leaders undergo training, or that they be approved by the deity. Rites of passage are commonly considered clerical rituals, as are rites of initiation or ordination. Sometimes this investiture is only temporary and the individual serves for only a specific length of time, much as do the Elders found in some Christian churches. Young Buddhist boys in Burma usually become monks for a short period of time when they are about four years old. This particular ceremony is considered to be more important than a marriage or funeral and is intended to encourage the child toward the monastic life which is a Buddhist ideal.

## **Domestic Rituals**

The home becomes a sacred place, and the parent (or elder) acts as the leader. A specially prepared place within the home is the usual locale for such rites. Domestic rituals are usually designed to involve the children in religious traditions. Religions involving ancestor veneration often hold their most important rituals in the home.

## **Personal Rituals**

These rituals answer individual spiritual or emotional needs and link religion to everyday life. Solitude and privacy are often required for personal rituals. Techniques such as meditation, prayer, dreams and self-induced trances are often used. Such rituals do not require another individual to act as a liaison between the worshiper and the divine. The doctrine of Zen depends entirely upon years of disciplined meditation. For the Zen Buddhist, gardening, archery, tea-drinking and the enjoyment of nature are all personal rituals that contain the mystery of life and as such have the greatest religious significance.

Personal rituals are often repeated on a daily basis; the devout Jew begins and ends his day with the same prayer, "*Shema Yiswel Adonoi Eloheni, Adonoi Echod* (Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One)."

## **Rituals of Healing and Exorcism**

These rituals are designed to ensure the wholeness of the body and spirit. Often they act to restore health and purity, or to exorcise negative influences from the body, spirit or a particular location. The healer or exorcist uses symbolic systems, formulae and other skills to invoke the aid of the sacred; these are an important part of such rituals. He also uses techniques involving the "laying on of hands," praying, burning incense, and anointing with holy oils. Such rituals are thought to benefit both the individual and the world at large.



## Festivals

Festivals are a popular and colorful form of ritual and are celebrated in all cultures in one form or another. Many festivals celebrate duality - the welcoming of the new, the ushering out of the old, mourning and rejoicing, fasting and feasting, and so on. There are two basic types of festivals: ecofests and theofests.

An ecofest is a festival which celebrates a seasonal or astronomical event. These are often rituals of remembrance, renewal and initiation. Spring and harvest festivals are classic examples of ecofests, as are celebrations marking the waxing and waning of the moon. Sometimes both seasonal and astronomical events are used. Ancient Chinese festivals were based on the old lunar calendar and the agricultural year, while the solar calendar was used for bureaucratic matters. Some religions, such as Judaism and Islam, still use lunar calendars.

## Birthdays

Among peoples who have developed a sense of time, birthdays are important and often marked with special rites. Birthdays are times of transition and change, so many people believe that both good and evil spirits will try to influence the person at this time.

Ceremonies and games carried out at birthday celebrations are often seen as a symbolic wiping of the past. Trials of strength and skill often are performed as demonstrations of growth and progress.

The exchange of presents and communal feasting is a common custom. This strengthens communal bonds and ingratiates an individual both with the spirits and with his relatives.

The hour, date and place of birth are often very important, as they may be clues to the fortune and fate of the child. (See *Divination and Prophecy*, p. 16.)

## Twins

In many parts of the world, the birth of twins is seen as an ominous or special event. Sometimes one of the twins is thought to be fathered by a deity, and one by a human parent. At other times, twins are thought to be evidence of adultery, with one man the father of each.

Often twin births bring great status to the father, as proving his virility. But among many tribal people, twins are destroyed, and the mother rigorously purified.

Twins are sometimes considered to be lucky, or to possess second sight. Often the fate of twins was thought to be interconnected - what happened to one was fated to occur to the other. In some cultures, twins were considered to be part of the same person, and were given the same name and referred to as though they were really a single person.

Ancient Aztec custom required the death of the elder twin at birth, in order to prevent the death of a parent. The surviving twin was considered to have great potential for evil, and was carefully watched.

Many cultures have twin motifs in their mythologies. Twin heroes are very common, especially among Aboriginal, South American and Native American tribes.

## ***Knots***

The *knot* is an important part of many ceremonies, and rituals using knots can signify both joining and separation.

The knot is one of the eight sacred symbols in Buddhism, for it represents life, having no beginning and no end. Throughout India, knots are tied in the clothes of the bride and bridegroom in marriage ceremonies - in some places their clothing is actually knotted together. Roman marriages consisted of a series of knot-tyings and untyings. In Russia a net is thrown over the couple during the marriage ceremony, for no evil spirit can get at the couple without first untying all the knots in the net. In medieval Europe, it was commonly believed that if anyone tied a knot during a wedding ceremony, the couple would never have children.

Zoroastrian initiations consisted of the tying of a sacred girdle in symbolic knots. The sacred thread of a high-caste Brahman is tied in a special Brahma-knot at his initiation. In some Roman ceremonies it was vitally important that the priest have no knots or tangles in his clothing or hair.

Funeral rites often involve knot-tying, or rather untying. It is a common belief in many parts of Europe that knots would prevent a soul from leaving the body.

It is a common practice worldwide to undo all possible knots to facilitate childbirth. Knots have long been used in the causing and curing of disease. Multiples of sevens are especially potent, while nine-knot spells are considered to be most evil. Old Teutonic law severely fined anyone found guilty of tying nine knots. It is also a common custom to tie knots in the fringe of a shawl or scarf when friends and lovers must part.

Fishermen are particularly concerned with knots, and have many traditions about them. Fishers often "tie up the wind" in a knot, and then untie it to raise enough wind to fill the sails. Fishermen often buy a wind-charm from an old man or woman versed in wind-lore. Aeolus gave Odysseus the winds tied up in a bag before he set sail.

A theofest is a festival of theological significance, designed to celebrate some important event in the life of the deity or some other date important in the history of the religion. Many Catholics celebrate various "saint's days" and some still keep to the practice of abstaining from meat each Friday. The Jewish festival of *Purim*, celebrating their salvation from the persecution of Haman, is set on the 14th of Adar, the 12th lunar month.

Many festivals are a mixture of these two types, celebrating both a physical and spiritual event, often combining elements and traditions from older festivals. Sometimes the dates of these festivals vary from year to year, as they do not necessarily follow the modern calendar. The Christian celebration of Easter is such an example. Commemorating the resurrection of Christ, it is a lunar festival, occurring on the first Sunday after the first full moon after March 21st. As such, it falls sometime between March 22nd and April 25th. This formula was chosen in the 3rd century and is used today by most Christian denominations. However, the Eastern Orthodox church celebrates it according to the Julian calendar.

Easter is also a spring celebration; the name itself is thought to be derived from the ancient Teutonic goddess of dawn or spring, Eostre or Ostra. The association of eggs with Easter may well support this, as the egg was a holy symbol of that goddess.

## **Rites of Passage**

Rites of passage are used to ensure spiritual safety at various times during an individual's life. Such rites also honor the participant. Common to all rites of passage are the concepts of separation, transition and entrance. These rituals include acts and symbols which illustrate the separation of the individual from a previous stage of life, the transition of passage, and the entrance into a new state of social and spiritual being. While some societies have literally dozens of such celebrations, there are five basic types of passage rites: prenatal, childhood, initiation into adulthood, marriage and death.

### ***Prenatal Rites***

These rituals confirm and celebrate the pregnancy, or even determine the sex of the child. Such rites are usually very personal, and are accompanied by prayers of both thanksgiving and supplication for protection. Often a woman will travel to a shrine or other holy site to ensure fertility and a trouble-free pregnancy. Some cultures require that a woman undergo some form of ritual purification after birth. Other cultures require rites to liberate and protect the woman from the special dangers inherent in childbirth.

### ***Childhood Rites***

Childhood rites include prayers for protection and blessing, rituals of naming and affirmation of lineage. Names have mystic and magical significance in many cultures. Infants may be given *milk* names that are used until the child reaches puberty. Families that have lost one child may give a new child an unattractive name so that evil spirits will not consider the child worth bothering. Children may be named after famous ancestors in the hope that they will grow up to be equally successful. Often naming rites are combined with other celebratory rituals, such as the child's first haircut.

While the child's parents or godparents may perform some rites, a cleric is usually involved. Many religions have rites which signify the deity's claim upon the child. Such rites usually involve some form of anointing or blessing.

## ***Rites of Initiation***

Rites of passage involving initiation into adulthood are the best known. In most cultures these rituals involve tests, solitary vigils, purifications and anointments. Usually these occur at puberty, but in some societies an individual is not considered "adult" until marriage or the birth of a child. There are numerous other types of initiation rites which an adult may undergo during a lifetime: ordination in clerical orders, graduations, coronations and investitures of noble rank, knightings, hazings by secret societies and so on.

Many initiation rites involve symbols of death and rebirth. An individual may be required to "die," renouncing all previous connections and ties, to be reborn as a "new" person. Naming rituals are often included in such rites.

## ***Rites of Marriage***

The concept of marriage is a complicated one which varies greatly. Some cultures do not hold a marriage to be legal unless the union is sanctified and witnessed by a cleric. Other cultures do not even have words to describe the concept. In societies where marriage has religious significance, it is usually considered to be an honorable state instituted and blessed by the deity to ensure continuance of the race. The spiritual well-being of the couple is ensured when they celebrate their union with some sort of marriage rite.

Symbolic marriages between the cleric and the deity are common in cultures that consider marriage a holy institution. Such "marriages" may involve vows of celibacy and chastity on the part of the cleric. In some cultures, sexual congress between a cleric and a worshiper might be required, most notably for agricultural fertility rites. In other cases, proxy marriages might be required to protect the reputation of a pregnant woman. In India, temple prostitutes were married to a dagger. In classical Greece, it was common for a man to prefer to adopt a child born of a temple woman even over his own issue, for such children were considered both holy and blessed.

## ***Funeral Rites***

These rituals serve many purposes. They mark the passing of an individual from this life, appease his spirit so that it will not wander, and ensure protection from spirits. The idea that it is necessary to defend and protect the surviving friends and family prevails in many cultures. Funeral customs, beliefs and practices are greatly influenced by this.

The custom of wearing black, and other specific colors, developed from the belief that this would make the mourners less obvious and thus protect them from whatever spirits threatened the living. Similarly, throwing some object into the grave is often considered to "lay the ghost." If such a gift was omitted, people feared that the angry spirit would return to haunt the living. Many cultures believe that the dead envy the living, and so the living must do nothing that might inflame their wrath.

It is also important that nothing interfere with the orderly disposition of the body. Any interruption or delay might allow a lingering spirit the opportunity for mischief against the living. Thus funeral processions must not be interrupted or blocked in any manner. Even in modern society, a funeral procession has the right of way over other traffic.

It is the place of the cleric to ensure that all the proper rituals are performed correctly so that the living are not left in peril. He usually speaks the eulogy, although sometimes a good friend of the deceased is granted the honor. In many cultures this is the last opportunity to appease the lingering spirit of the dead.

## ***Feng-Shui***

Meaning "wind and water," feng-shui is the traditional Chinese technique used to select auspicious sites for graves, buildings and cities. The feng-shui practitioner sees the earth as a living being through which energy flows. Different locales have different concentrations of vital sky and earth energies. The patterns of hills, streams and plants show the presence of this energy.

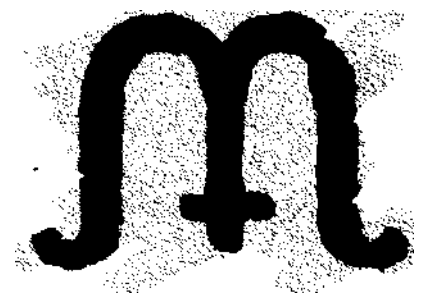
Feng-shui theory is similar to traditional Chinese cosmology. The land exhibits *Yin* or *Yang* forms of energy. This energy can be classified as one of the *Five Agents*: wood, fire, earth, metal and water. In an ideal spot these agents are balanced, with perhaps slightly more Yang energy. The value of the earthly elements, however, also depends upon the influence of the stars and planets, so astrology is an important part of feng-shui.

If a grave is located at such a balance point, then the cosmic energy present will cause the bones of the dead to radiate this energy on behalf of their descendants. If a home or building is built on the spot, then all who dwell within will benefit.

A good gravesite is typically located halfway down a mountain slope, facing south and overlooking a body of water. Vegetation should be abundant and beautiful - it is important that the site be comforting to those who come to visit. A deficient site can be strengthened by building artificial mounds, pools and walls.

Feng-shui is not a religious technique per se, but it is necessary to ask the local deities for permission before proceeding with any construction.

Feng-shui was first developed in the Han dynasty (206 B.C. to 220 A.D.).

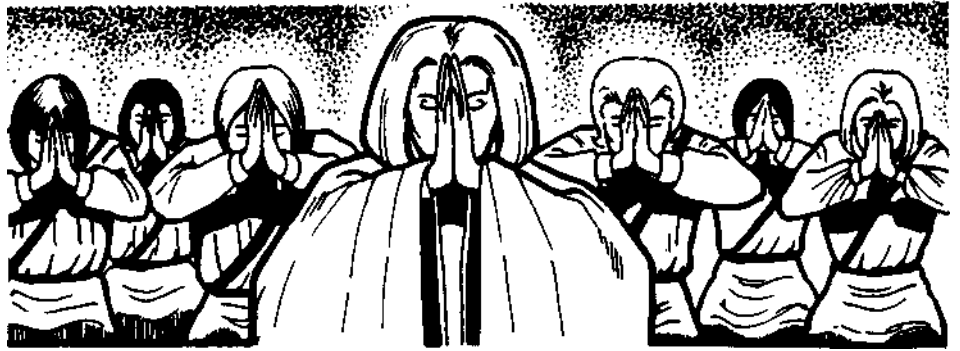


## Scarification

Rites of passage and other ritual ceremonies often include some form of mutilation or scarification, such as circumcision, tattooing or piercing. This proves that the candidate is able to withstand stress and pain, and thus is old and strong enough to fulfill adult tasks. Sometimes the pain and blood involved in such rites is considered a sacrificial offering. In modern culture, many of these ceremonies have been reduced to functions such as the hazings and "hell weeks" suffered by college freshmen.

In other cultures, ceremonial wounds are prevented from healing, either by continual irritation, or by rubbing the wound with ashes or dyes. Other cultures bound the feet of young girls, or wrapped infants' heads in such a way as to ensure they would develop sloping foreheads. Such mutilations often appealed to both secular and religious sensibilities.

Many people regard such mutilations and scars as marks of distinction. In some cultures such scars provide visible proof that the individual is part of the community. This is not so different from the European students who boasted of their saber-duelling scars.



## Prayer

Prayer is often a primary element of worship. Any address to a higher power is usually considered to be a prayer. Prayer serves many purposes: praise, adoration, confession, petition, intercession and thanksgiving. It can be a highly personal ritual between the supplicant and the divine, or a communal rite led by a cleric. In some cases the priest intervenes directly, praying on a worshiper's behalf.

Prayer can be spontaneous or ritualized. Ritual prayer can be as elaborate as a series of cadenced phrases and antiphonal response. (An antiphon is a responsive song or prayer.) Other prayers might be silent. Often prayers are not addressed directly to the deity, but rather to some figure who is asked to intercede, such as a saint or local spirit.

Prayers frequently consist of set forms recited at particular times of day, according to the traditions and demands of the religion. Prayer often also involves symbolic gestures such as genuflection, bowing and prostration. Islamic ritual prayer, performed five times a day (at dawn, noon, late afternoon, sunset and after sunset), begins with *wadu*, a purificatory washing. During the course of this silent prayer, the worshiper bows from the waist (*ruku*) several times and prostrates himself such that his forehead touches the ground (*sujud*).

The supplicant may beg, make demands or even reproach the deity. But many religions believe the more pitiful the speaker, the more effective the prayer. Such prayers often begin with a long list of self-effacing comments. Prayer is often accompanied by offerings and sacrifices.

Sometimes a prayer is neither spoken, nor silent, but is written down. Some Buddhist temples have huge guardian statues that are covered with bits of paper. Worshipers write their prayers down, and after chewing the paper, throw it at the statues. If the paper sticks, that is thought to be a sign that the prayer will be answered.

## Sacrifice

A sacrifice is an offering of some value which establishes a relationship between the supplicant and divine beings, spirits, ancestors or other sacred powers. Such offerings may be gifts of thanksgiving, bribes or penances.

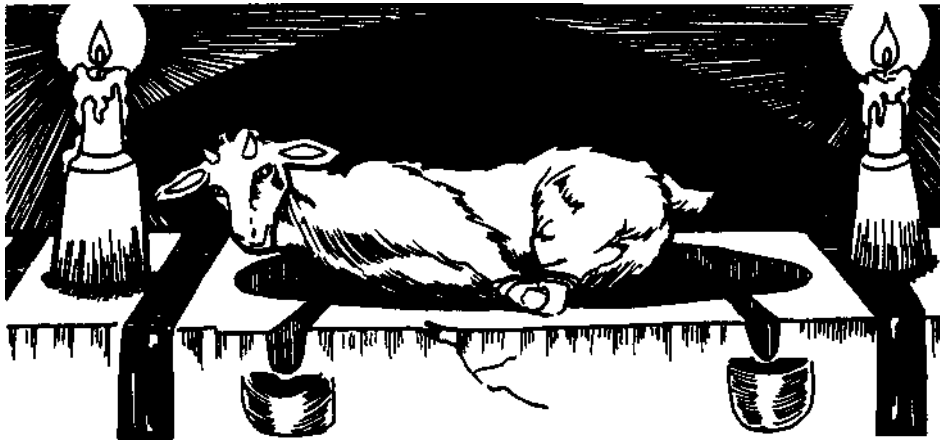
Sacrifice often involves the destruction of the offering - even the killing of animals or people, depending upon the seriousness of the ritual. Offerings might also be in the form of incense, food, flowers, drink, money or models of larger objects such as houses and ships.

Personal sacrifices are often seen to hold the greatest value. Monks might sacrifice their sexuality or speech by taking life-long vows. Other worshipers sacrifice part of themselves, undergoing mutilations or painful scarring. These are common during rituals of penance or mourning. Sacrifices in the form of self-torture and mutilation are sometimes required for initiation rites.

Blood and live offerings are common. Blood is often considered to be the "seat of life" and so is considered to be particularly valuable, as are other body parts. Australian tribesmen regularly make individual blood offerings, North American Indians offered their fingers, the Hindu goddess Kali was worshiped with self-decapitations. Even deities have been known to practice sacrifice Tyr lost his hand in order to bind the wolf Fenris, and Odin exchanged his eye for knowledge.

Sacrificial offerings may also be symbolic, and substitutes and surrogates are commonly used. Animals might be sacrificed rather than humans; bread or vegetable carvings of animals are burned in place of the real thing.

In some cases a token sacrifice is acceptable. Ancient Greek libation was a few drops of wine. Practicality has led many Chinese to use paper models for most sacrifices, or food which is later eaten in a great feast. Sometimes there is no physical component to the sacrifice at all. Among poor Hindus, it is literally the thought that counts: a visualization of the offering during prayer is enough.



### *Performers and Recipients*

Sacrificial rituals may be performed either by a worshiper in a private ritual, or by an intermediary on another's behalf. Such mediators are usually clerics or other sanctified individuals (such as an Elder or King). Sacred rulers (as in ancient Egypt, China, Japan and India) are especially holy intermediaries. Sacrificial rituals performed at a sacred time and place may require consecrated performers.

Fire, smoke, air or water conveyed offerings to the divine. Sometimes the deity requires sacrifices on a regular basis. Ancestors worshiped in mortuary religions require constant sacrifices. Cooked food is commonly given in such cases, often in the form of a special meal in which a portion is set aside and burned in a domestic ritual.

### *Human Sacrifice*

Surrendering one's life is often considered the ultimate sacrifice. In many cultures such an offering was the ultimate gift a worshiper might make. This might not actually involve physical death, but rather a withdrawal from the world, with the worshiper devoting the rest of his life to the deity. In other cultures, the victim was actually slain.

The reasons behind human sacrifice are myriad. The victim might be considered a messenger to the gods, a hostage or securer of fertility, or a hedge against natural disasters such as flood, famine or drought. Captives or prisoners

### *Blood*

Blood is seen as being of vital spiritual and magical importance. It is thought to be the seat of life itself, or the dwelling place of the soul. As a result, a great number of practices and customs involve blood.

Blood is often drunk to enrich oneself with the soul or essence of the donor. In battle, warriors will sometimes drink the blood of their fallen foes. Often the blood of fierce animals, such as lions and tigers, is used for the same purpose.

Many people also use blood for curative purposes. Leprosy was traditionally treated by bathing the afflicted person in blood. Bathing in blood is also thought to raise the dead or reanimate people who have been turned to stone. Sigurd became invulnerable after he bathed in a dragon's blood.

Some traditions hold that blood can act as an instrument of vengeance. It is thought by some that a body will bleed in the presence of its murderer. Often murderers bemoan that they cannot wash the blood of their victims from their hands or clothing.

Many offerings to the gods involve blood, not flesh, sacrifices. This may be real blood, or symbolic, such as that of the Christian communion ritual.

Blood is a powerful, binding agent. Thus blood covenants are considered to be among the most serious of oaths.







## Ashes

The residue left after burning has important religious significance in many cultures.

Often ashes are thought to have purifying qualities, due to their close association with the mysterious nature of fire.

Brahmans rub their bodies with ash in preparation for certain religious ceremonies.

The lamas of Tibet mix the ashes of a holy man with clay and form images with them. They then place these in shrines and other places of devotion.

Ashes might also be scattered in the air, in the hope of bringing rain in time of drought. In Peru, they are used to disperse mist. In parts of Mexico ashes are thrown upon the water to bring fair weather. Often ashes are used as talismans against thunder and lightning.

The ashes of a sacrificed creature are often scattered over fields to ensure the fecundity of flocks and plenty of milk.

Ashes are often used in curative rites, or given to cattle to fatten them or to protect them from plague.

Mourning rites make frequent use of ashes. Many people strew themselves with ashes during funerals. Other cultures mix ashes with wine or milk and consume them in remembrance of the dead.

Ashes might also be used in divination or as protection against ghosts and other spirits.

might be slain in rituals of thanksgiving for victory in war. Other sacrifices are scapegoats, offered to appease a deity's wrath. Sometimes servants and spouses are slain as part of funeral rites. The bodies of sacrificial victims might be buried beneath the foundations of important buildings, or their bones and blood mixed into the bricks and mortar.

Human sacrifice is often closely tied to fertility, birth, resurrection and reincarnation. In such sacrifices the victim is usually intoxicated or drugged before the ritual. During the rituals the victim is actually deified, becoming the holiest of sacrifices. The Aztec priests of Xipe Totec wore the flayed skins of their victims as a symbol of reincarnation. Religions in which the cyclical nature of creation and life have great import often count human sacrifice among their most holy rites.

In voodoo (voodoo) and some earth-religion traditions, a worshiper opens his body to the gods so that they might walk the earth among their followers for awhile. The worshiper's soul may spend this time "sleeping," wandering or waiting between the worlds where the deities exist between visits to Earth.

Ritual cannibalism is often tied to human sacrifice, the participants believing that by consuming the victim they gain special divine benefits and blessings.

## Dance

Dance seems universal to all cultures. Patterned, rhythmic movements of the body are used to express a number of emotions, most notably joy. Dance is often an important part of religious ritual, especially in tribal religions. In more complex cultures, dance is often either a performance art or a folk activity. Sacred dances are vital to many religious traditions such as Hinduism. Shinto and Confucianism.

### *Ecstatic Dances*

Ecstatic or trance dances allow communication with divine forces and are used in rites of healing and exorcism. Often these dances are part of a shamanistic rite, accompanied by drumming, whirling and chanting. These activities are thought to induce a mystic trance which enables the shaman to aid the subject. Narcotics or intoxicants are often used. The shaman's spirit might leave his body during such a dance, to be temporarily replaced by an animal or ancestral spirit. The dancer is inspired to perform superhuman acrobatic feats, writhing, climbing, leaping and falling. Often the dancer becomes immune to pain; he might indulge in self-mutilation by fire or blade.

Some Hindu and Islamic sects practice ecstatic dancing as a form of moving meditation. Their repetitive movements induce trances which aid enlightenment.

### *Funeral Dances*

Dancing is often an important part of funeral rites in which merrymaking is thought to please or appease a spirit. Specific dances might also be used to dispatch a lingering ghost. In cultures with shamanistic traditions, funeral dances become ecstatic rituals which aid the shaman in escorting the dead spirit to its proper realm. In some cultures these have been reduced to folk dances, although it is still considered to be extremely bad luck to dance certain Scottish reels and Irish jigs except at wakes.

## Mocking Dances

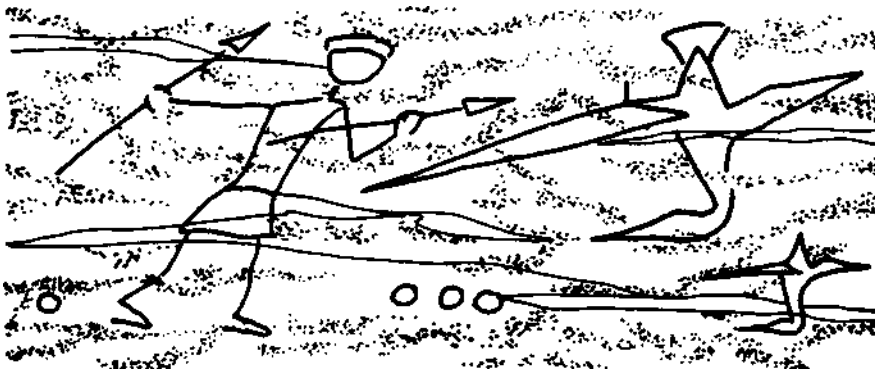
These dances, also called *clown* dances, may re-enact battles or make travesties of history. The dancers portray supernatural beings or spirits of the dead. Speech is often distorted during such rituals (either reversed or falsetto) and combined with obscene gestures and actions. Demon or animal masks, usually made of wood or leather with long noses, beards, hair and horns, are used. The dancers wear shaggy or torn clothing and carry whips, bells, rattles and mock weapons. Medieval carnival clowns and fools arose from these traditions. Some North American Indian tribes use clown dancers to point out people's foolishness or pretension.

## Astronomical Dances

Many agricultural and nomadic societies worship astronomical objects such as the sun, moon and stars. Astronomical dances are common at solstice and equinox festivals, and also might invoke benevolent forces to aid crops and hunting. Mummer's plays, the Maypole dances, the Eclipse dance of the Denne Indians and famous Sun Dances of the Plains Indians are all astronomical dances. Often these types of dances have multiple purposes - the Sun Dance also has curative and heroic aspects.

## Battle Dances

Specific dances are performed in preparation for war or in celebration of victory. These dances strengthen communal bonds and boast of prowess and virility. Battle dances, most specifically sword dances, are often closely tied with agricultural rites. Such dances symbolize the cyclical death and resurrection themes associated with vegetation deities - crops are harvested (the god sacrificed) in the fall, but grow again (the god reborn) in the spring. Sword dances are often performed by men's secret societies, echoing sacrificial fertility rites.



## Holy Sites

Location can enhance rituals. Certain sites take on special meaning and importance. These may be holy cities, wells, rivers or simply consecrated buildings. Symbolic shapes, such as circles, crosses, triangles and spirals, can often be seen in the site - the circle of trees about a well, the triangular island within the joining of two rivers, the winding concentric path that leads up to a mountain peak. Buildings erected on such sites often echo the shapes revered by the religion.

Unusual natural formations are often seen as holy. Ayers Rock, in Australia, is one example. Monumental structures from lost cultures will usually be *assumed* to be holy, even if their true purpose is long forgotten!



## Mistletoe

Mistletoe has been regarded as a mysterious and sacred plant from the earliest times. It is reputed to bestow life and fertility, and to serve as a protection against poison. The oak mistletoe was considered to be particularly effective, and has many medicinal and magical attributes.

The famous *Golden Bough* that Aeneas took to guard him on his way into the underworld was the mistletoe.

Mistletoe is especially sacred to the Celtic druids. Both Pliny and Caesar describe the rite of harvesting the plant: on the sixth night of the moon, white-robed druids cut it down with a golden sickle. It was not allowed to fall to the ground; instead it was caught in a white cloth. Mistletoe is still picked at midsummer in many Celtic and Scandinavian countries. (See *From Beginning to End*, p. 14, for its Norse associations.)

As a medicine, mistletoe is still called *allheal*, and is believed to cure sterility and epilepsy.

Mistletoe is often hung over house and stable doors as a protective charm.

## Cake Customs

Many acts of sacrifice, worship and divination are associated with annual cycles. Cakes are used in many aspects of the life cycle, and are especially associated with baptisms, weddings and rituals for the dead. Cakes are often molded into the shapes of humans or animals, and offered as a substitute for the actual being.

In ancient Greece, dough cakes were thrown into chasms and crevices as offerings to Demeter and Persephone. In Egypt, dough cakes representing pigs and other animals were offered to Osiris and to the moon. Cakes were often left in tombs, as food for the dead. Millet cakes were sacrificed to Ceres and Mater Matuta by Roman matrons. Hindus feed the dead upon cakes covered with boiled rice, sugar and melted butter.

Cakes of various shapes were particularly popular in Greece. Cakes in the shape of girls or arrows were given to Helios at Delphi and Delos; Artemis was offered honey-cakes. In Athens, a twelve-knobbed cake was offered to Cronus every spring. At each full or new moon, circular cakes topped with candles were placed at crossroads in offering to Hecate.

Cakes are also often given away as charms, or used to drive away evil. In Scotland, children go from house to house upon New Year's Eve, singing carols and receiving oat cakes.

The Lenten season was ushered in by great feasting. Shrove Tuesday (or *Mardi Gras*) is celebrated throughout the Christian world by eating pancakes. On Good Friday, hot cross buns are a favorite treat said to bring good luck.

## Hiding Ancient Symbols and Names

As religions diminish in power, their influence wanes as well. But sometimes ancient symbols and divine names live on in the practices and languages of later societies. GMs might wish to disguise such things in the societies they create as hints or clues to lost civilizations or faded gods. Often the names of lost or forgotten gods are seen in the names of days, months, or even humble everyday items. For instance, "Wednesday" derives from the phrase *Wodnes daeg*, meaning "the day of Odin (or Wotan)"; the term *cereal* is derived from the harvest goddess Ceres. Sometimes well-known religious terms become common idioms. Below are a few other historical examples of this subtle adaptation.

*Continued on next page...*

Holy sites have mythic or historic significance. Someone of importance to the religion, perhaps even the deity, is believed to have visited that site, or performed a significant deed there. Many holy sites are also educational centers.

## Pilgrimage

A pilgrimage is a religious journey to a sacred center or holy site. Such a journey is often considered to be a new beginning or turning point in the individual's spiritual life. Sometimes this pilgrimage is required duty. Every adult Muslim who possesses the means is expected at least once in his life to undertake the *hajj*, the pilgrimage to the *Kaaba* in Mecca. The actual ceremony he performs once there is complex and takes several days to complete. It includes both extensive prayer and sacrifice.



Pilgrimage may also be part of a healing or exorcism ritual. Pilgrims travel to holy sites that have reputations for miracles in the hope that they, too, will receive divine aid. From ancient to modern times people of various religions have traveled to sites like Bath, England, in the hopes of finding a cure for their affliction.

Other pilgrimages are made to petition the deity for a specific blessing. In southern India, many women travel long distances to ask *Naga* (a snake deity of fertility) to grant them a child. Frequently a second pilgrimage is promised should the blessing be granted.

Pilgrimages might also be journeys of hardship undertaken to redress some past misdeed. A pilgrim may travel to a holy site intending to make a special offering. During medieval times, many people sought Jerusalem for this reason. It was considered a "good work" by which they could acquire merit in the eyes of God. Christians, Jews and Muslims still travel to that city today for much the same reason.

Pilgrimages may also be undertaken for recreational or social reasons. Often great fairs and cultural centers develop around holy sites. Pilgrims may travel alone or in groups. Traveling together strengthens regional as well as religious identity. It might be particularly significant to visit a holy site or shrine at a specific time of year. It is not only important *where* something happened, but *when* as well. In Shinto belief, it is best to visit the Great Shrine of the Izumo Province (sometimes called the "land of the *kami*") during October when the *kami* from all over the country flock there for a grand meeting.

Some religions have festivals associated with ancient pilgrimages. Jews celebrate three such pilgrimage festivals: *Pesach*, *Shavot* and *Sukkot*. During these times Jews were commanded to go to Jerusalem to worship in the temple.

## Holy Times

Particular days and times of the year may be considered special or holy. These times allow the adherent to make a connection between real, measured time and cosmic time. The solar year, with its solstices and equinoxes, and the lunar year, especially at the new and full moons, are nearly universal in their importance, especially in rural and agricultural societies.

Sometimes a specific day of the week is set aside as a holy day. Each day may also have junctures of ritual importance: dawn, noon, dusk, midnight. Orders of worship often contain series of rituals and prayers which are repeated at timed intervals. Astronomical and astrological measurements, such as the movement of moons, stars and constellations, often have ritualistic importance.

## Solar Year

Solar festivals celebrate changes in the sun's course, especially its return at midwinter (about December 22nd). Themes concerning the birth or rebirth of solar deities are commonly celebrated at the winter solstice. New sacred fires are often lit.

The summer solstice (about June 22nd) is also called Midsummer's Eve or Night, and is celebrated almost universally with fertility and agricultural rites. Dancing, fire leaping, singing and other celebratory rituals play an important part in solstice rituals. Sun-deities that are born at the winter solstice frequently die or are sacrificed at this time, to be reborn again at the winter solstice. Restrictive laws and customs are often lifted for this single night.

Solstices occur in opposite seasons in the northern and southern hemispheres.

Equinoxes occur twice a year when the sun crosses the equator and day and night are of equal length everywhere. Usually this occurs around March 21st and September 23rd.

## Lunar Year

The repeating phases of the moon have long been used to count the passing of time. Many calendars, such as the Mohammedan and Hebrew, are based upon the lunar month.

## Hiding Ancient Symbols and Names (Continued)

*Hurricane* - Hurakan was a Mayan god of thunder and lightning. The Tainos of the West Indies and Bahamas spoke of an evil spirit who brought tropical storms; they named him *hurrican*. And the Galbi and Carib Indians used the word *hyorocan* when speaking of the devil. The Spanish borrowed from these terms when they coined the word *huracan* to describe the fierce storms they encountered in the New World.

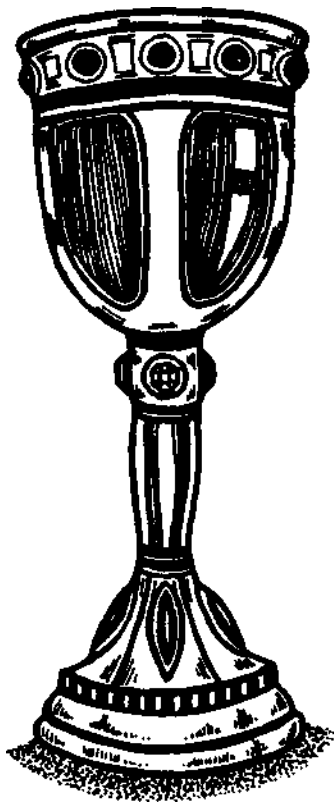
*Juggernaut* - This word is an Anglicization of the Hindustani *Jagannath*, which means "lord of the world." The Jagannath is a large wooden statue of Vishnu that is treated with great respect and is clothed and bathed by worshipful servants. Each summer the statue is paraded through the streets: in the 14th century Europeans reportedly saw worshipers throw themselves beneath its wheels. Believing that this practice was part of the Hindu religion, the god was seen as barbaric and destructive and its name became equated with a force of blind destruction.

*"In seventh heaven"* - originally a reference to the Islamic multiple heavens; paradise is located in the seventh heaven or the realms above it.

*Mumbo jumbo* - derived from the name of an African god, *Mama Dyambo*; during religious ceremonies, someone would wear a frightening mask and rave about, making horrible nonsense noises to scare away evil spirits.

*"Dressed to the nines"* - a reference to the nine Muses, who were the epitome of creativity and beauty.

*Typhoon* - Typhon was an ancient Greek monster well known for his fierce battles against Zeus. The word was adopted into Arabic as *tufan*, meaning a violent storm. In southeast Asia it became *tai-fung*, which was adapted by the Portuguese as *tufao* and then by the English who made it *typhoon*.



## ***Symbols and Common Meanings***

Every culture will have symbols to represent or define abstract concepts. Below are some traditional meanings; this list is by no means complete, nor should it be taken as absolute.

*Acorn* - Life, fertility, immortality.

*Anchor* - Hope, steadfastness, stability, good luck.

*Ankh* - Egyptian symbol of life and knowledge.

*Axe* - Solar symbol of sky gods, power, thunder, sacrifice.

*Bell* - Consecration, protection against destructive powers.

*Candle* - Light in the darkness, uncertainty, prayer.

*Cauldron* - Nourishment, abundance, fertility, renewal, transformation, rebirth, feminine power.

*Cave* - The womb of Mother Earth; the heart, the union of self and ego, rebirth, initiation.

*Chalice* - Inexhaustible sustenance, healing, salvation, faith, feminine power.

*Clouds* - Sky, air, rain, fertility, life-force.

*Continued on next page . . .*

Festivals and prayers celebrating the new moon and the reappearance of its light in the sky are virtually universal. Similarly, the full moon is viewed as a climactic period. The dates of many religious festivals are calculated as falling upon a specific day after the first full moon after the vernal equinox. The full moon nearest to the autumn equinox is often called the hunter or harvest moon.

Eclipses of the moon occur only when the earth is between the full moon and the sun. The shadow that results often has a reddish tint, which either dims the moon's light or totally eclipses it. These *bloody moons* are often considered dire omens. Other customs and superstitions relating to the moon are often agricultural in nature. It is considered best to plant above-ground crop under the light of the full moon, while root crops should be planted in the dark of the moon.

## **Sacred Items**

Almost any object can be dedicated and sanctified to service or worship. Sacred items are objects which symbolize some aspect of the religion. These items are often specially created and consecrated to allow their use in religious services and rites. A sacred item does not necessarily have to be a Sacred Vessel (see p. 105) or Holy Object (see p. 106), although many will be. Sacred items are usually not worshiped in and of themselves, but rather are venerated as symbols.

## **Altars**

An altar is a raised structure or platform which serves as a place of ritual or worship. Offerings and sacrifices are often placed upon an altar, in full view of the deity and worshipers. Altars are frequently either rectangular slabs or tall tripods. Some altars are also tombs, where offerings are made to deified ancestors. Altars used in personal rituals can be quite small or even portable. Sometimes relics and other sacred items are placed within or upon the altar.

## **Animals**

Animals play an important role in many religions. The animal may be used as a offering. This offering is not always a sacrifice - sometimes the animal is dedicated to the god and lives out the rest of its life on holy ground. Many Hindu temples in India have preserves of elephants, deer or snakes and some Shinto shrines have ponds of sacred goldfish.

Some deities are associated with a specific animal; depictions of this animal will be frequent in religious art. The image of a lamb, representing Christ as the Lamb of God, is commonly seen in Christian churches.

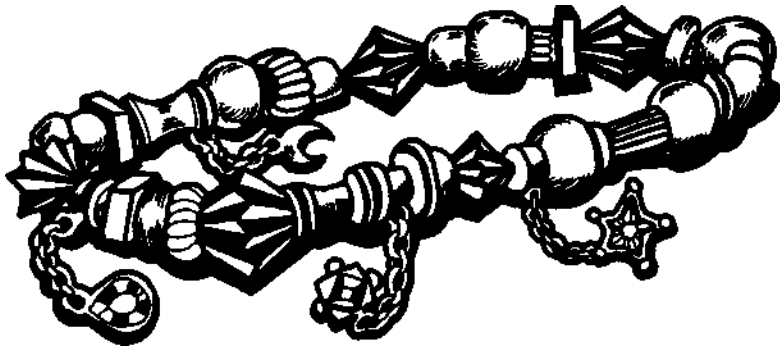
## **Arks**

An ark is a box or chest in which sacred items are concealed and carried. The ark might resemble a coffin, a flat-roofed building, or a boat. Often arks are transported by multiple bearers who carry it by means of poles passed through rings. In Hebrew tradition, the ark is considered so holy that it is hidden behind curtains or screens, and it is considered sacrilege for any but the highest clerics to look upon it.

## **Banners**

Banners, decorated with religious symbols and themes, often hang in religious buildings. Sometimes, while the banners may be dedicated to the glory of

the divine, they are looked upon as mere decoration. In other cases they are venerated as being inherently sacred. They are often carried in religious processions.



### ***Beads***

Strings of beads are often used as a memory aid when reciting long series of prayers, chants or devotions. Many religions have liturgies of repeated prayers. The Catholic rosary is a well-known example of this. Small carvings and other symbols held sacred to the deity are sometimes strung with the beads. They are often important worship aids for the laity as well, sometimes becoming an accepted part of secular dress. Throughout much of China's bureaucratic period, court officials wore heavy necklaces of 108 beads, a number sacred in Buddhist belief.

### ***Bells***

Hollow vessels that are sounded by striking them with a stick or hammer are called bells. Some bells are sounded by being struck by an internally-hung clapper. Bells are usually made of metal; they can vary greatly in size.

Smaller bells are sometimes worn upon garments to protect the wearer from evil spirits and other harm. Bells may also be rung to call for rain or a good harvest. Ceremonial and temple bells are often inscribed with holy symbols and rung as part of the worship service. Bells were publicly baptized, named and dedicated throughout both medieval Europe and Japan.

Bells are also used to warn and to summon, and to call out the hours of the day. Often long rituals, involving both prayer and sacrifice, are used in the creation of bells.

### ***Chalices***

Bowls, cups and chalices are commonly used in rituals. Sacred bowls catch the blood of sacrifices, or are used in divination rites. Cups are associated with symbols of resurrection and rebirth, and were raised to salute the divine and assure the worshipers that the god had received the proper homage and portion. Oaths are often made binding by the act of drinking from a common cup. Sometimes the cup is shattered to show that the oath can never be changed, for the vessel that witnessed it is no more. Cups are also associated with rites of purification and healing.

### ***Drums***

The drum is the most widespread and ritually significant musical instrument. Drums are often used in religious ceremonies, particularly in communal rituals involving divination, exorcism, healing, fertility, prayer, singing, dancing and marching. Drums are common in shamanistic and tribal traditions.

## ***Symbols and Common Meanings (Continued)***

*Crescent* - Symbol of the Mother-goddess; feminine or lunar principles.

*Crescent and Star* - Divinity, sovereignty.

*Crook/Crozier* - Authority, faith, mercy, jurisdiction, guidance.

*Crown* - Sovereignty, victory, honor, dignity.

*Crystal* - Purity, perfection, knowledge.

*Cup* - Immortality, plenty; when overturned, emptiness and futility.

*Date* - Fertility, abundance.

*Dawn* - Resurrection, hope, illumination.

*Desert* - Abandonment, isolation, desolation, contemplation, revelation.

*Dew* - Spiritual refreshment, blessing.

*Dice* - Fate, chance.

*Distaff/Spindle* - Spinning, time, creation, fate.

*Door* - Hope, passage, initiation, revelation, opportunity.

*East* - Dawn, spring, hope, youth or childhood.

*Egg* - The life principle; potential greatness, hidden knowledge, cosmic time, resurrection, hope, creation.

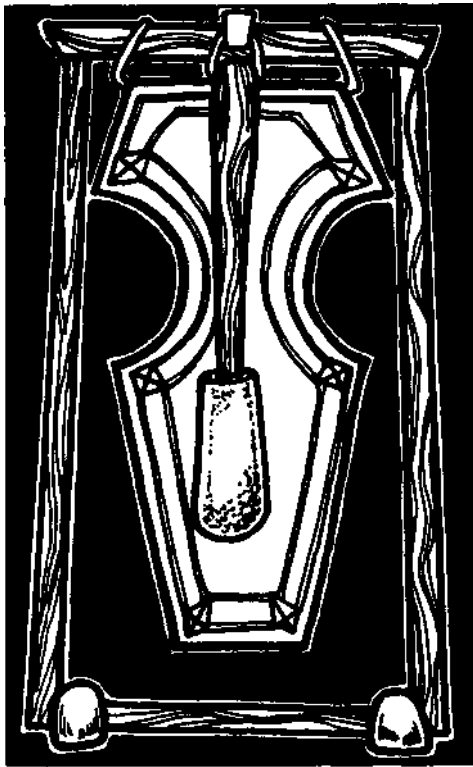
*Ewer* - Purity, innocence.

*Eye* - Omniscience, divinity, light, knowledge, vigilance, protection, enlightenment.

*Feather* - Truth, speed, space, flight, the soul.

*Continued on next page . . .*





### ***Symbols and Common Meanings (Continued)***

**Fire** - Purification, renewal, power, strength, transformation, protection, passion, illumination, destruction, truth, knowledge, emotions, fervor, revelation.

**Girdle** - Sovereignty, wisdom, strength, virginity, purity, binding, dedication, protection, fidelity.

**Gold** - Incorruptibility, wisdom, illumination, the sun, nobility, honor, wealth, prosperity, light, immortality, masculine power.

**Hammer** - Symbol of thunder gods; masculine principle, vengeance, justice, sovereign power, divine creation.

**Heart** - Physical and spiritual center; love, compassion, understanding; pierced, it represents penance; flaming, it symbolizes religious zeal.

**Hearth** - Feminine principle, warmth, bounty, food.

**Helmet** - Protection, preservation, hidden thought.

**Horns** - Divinity, supernatural power, royalty, victory, protection, virility, abundance.

**Hourglass** ~ Time, death, fate, temperance.

**Ice** - Brittleness, impermanence, frigidity, rigidity, hardness of heart, absence of love.

**Iron** - Strength, firmness, durability, inflexibility.

**Jade** - Purity, benevolence, justice, music, loyalty, good fortune, prosperity.

*Continued on next page . . .*

The construction of ceremonial drums is particularly complex and ritualized. Drums are highly decorated with carvings and painted holy symbols. Often charms and other holy objects are attached to the frame of the drum to increase its effectiveness.

Drums were also used in some places as a means of secret communication and as instruments of execution and expulsion. Criminals are often drummed to their hangings, and disgraced individuals might be drummed from their homes into exile.

In some cultures, drums are considered to be so holy that taking refuge in a drumyard (the outdoor compound where drums are kept) is similar to taking refuge in a church or temple (see *Buildings*, p. 68).

### ***Fetishes, Charms and Amulets***

These objects are believed to hold magical properties to protect and aid the wearer. Fetishes are not truly sacred objects, as they do not usually represent the divine. Rather, they are magical in nature. They are commonly found in religions that combine magical and spiritual traditions. Amulets and charms are predominantly magical items also, although these small ornaments might be inscribed with prayers or holy symbols rather than magical protections. Often amulets are made of a particular substance thought to have inherent protective abilities.

### ***Font***

A font is a receptacle for holy water, usually of a size which is not easily moved. Often a font is dedicated in the same way an altar might be, and is used as a focal point for religious ceremonies, most notably baptisms and investitures.

### ***Gongs***

Gongs are convex metal plates, sometimes with a central boss. Unlike clapperless bells, gongs are struck in the center, not upon the rim. Gongs are used in many religious ceremonies to drive out evil spirits or to control the winds. Drinking from a gong after taking an oath is a binding and sacred rite in many cultures.

### ***Holy Water***

Water which has been ritually purified or blessed is often referred to as *holy water*. Water is commonly seen as a purifying substance in and of itself - water that is blessed is thought to be even more effective when used in purification or healing rituals.

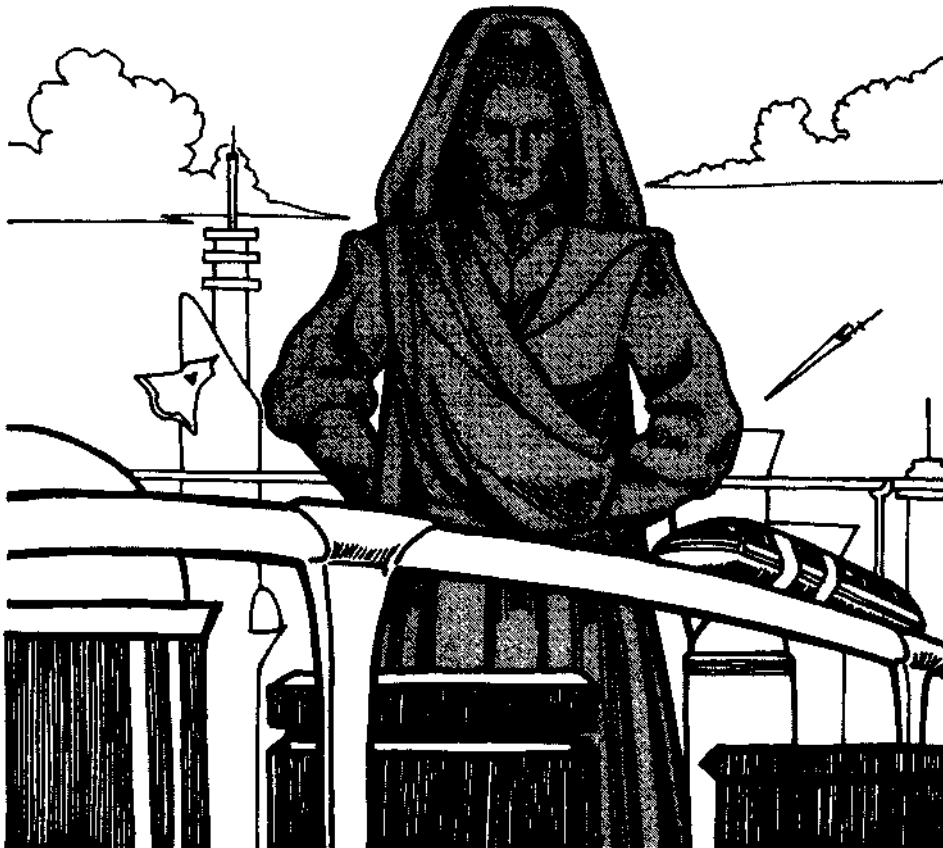
### ***Icons***

Icons are religious images painted or drawn upon flat panels of canvas, parchment, wood or some other substance. These images are drawn in a particular style determined by the traditions of the religion. Icons usually depict the deity or events in the history of the religion in a way that aids both public worship and private devotion. Some religious sects, such as the Eastern Orthodox Church, venerate icons and even worship them directly.

### ***Idols***

An idol is an object that is made to either imitate the shape of the deity, or to house the deity's spirit. Effigies of dead ancestors are often thought to hold the ancestor's spirit, so by addressing the effigy the supplicant addresses the

ancestor directly. Statues and idols are often highly decorated and draped with precious offerings and other rich items. In Ireland, many roadside and other isolated shrines have statues of saints that are bedecked with such offerings.



### ***Lamps and Candles***

Lamps are typically symbols of enlightenment, and are often kept burning perpetually within a shrine or temple. Many religions venerate an "eternal flame" as a representation of the deity's presence. Candles are also commonly associated with ritual. A Jewish mother blesses Sabbath candles at the beginning of that holy day. The lighting of a candle is often linked with the preservation of the soul, seen as a small bit of light within the darkness of death. Candles are often lit in great numbers, and vary greatly in both color and size. Sometimes candles are placed in multi-limbed candelabra; during the Jewish festival of Hannukkah the eight candles of the *menorah* are lit on successive nights. The lighting of candles is sometimes offered as a sacrifice, in gratitude or supplication.



### ***Symbols and Common Meanings (Continued)***

*Kiss* - Peace, good will, faith, sealing a pact, reconciliation, fellowship.

*Knife* - Vengeance, death, severance, freedom, sacrifice.

*Lamp* - Divine light, revelation, immortality, wisdom, guidance, intellect.

*Lance* - Strength, victory over evil, divine wisdom, masculine power.

*Loom* - Weaving of destiny, fate, time.

*Mace* - Absolute power and authority.

*Mill/Millstone* - Fate, heavy burdens, martyrdom.

*Mirror* - Truth, wisdom, the soul, self-knowledge, purity.

*North* - Obscurity, darkness, night, coldness.

*Pen* - Learning, intellect.

*Rain* - Divine blessing, revelation, purification, fertility.

*Rainbow* - Heavenly glory, transfiguration, bridge between worlds, reconciliation with the divine.

*Ring* - Power, sovereignty, protection, delegated power, strength, commitment, fulfillment, union, royalty, eternity.

*Rock* - Permanence, stability, strength, refuge.

*Rod/Scepter* - Divine or royal power, justice, authority, dignity.

*Salt* - Life, incorruptibility, permanence, wisdom, the soul, knowledge, purification.

*Sand* - Instability.

*Scroll* - Learning, knowledge, law, destiny, the passage of time.

*Scythe/Sickle* - Death, time, mortality, harvest, rebirth.

*Shield* - Preservation, protection, strength, chastity, feminine power.

*Shoe* - Liberty, freedom, control.

*Silver* - The moon, divinity, virginity, purity, brightness, eloquence, feminine power.

*Skull* - The passing of life, futility, death, time.

*South* - Fire, warmth, youth.

*Spear* - Fertility, prowess, the masculine principle.

*Staff* - Authority, dignity, judgement, magical power, travel, pilgrimage.

*Star* - Eternity, divinity, constancy, immortality.

*Sun* - Cosmic power, all-seeing divinity, justice, glory, splendor, royalty, illumination, radiance, destruction.

*Sword* - Power, protection, royalty, leadership, justice, law, courage, strength, victory, destruction, martyrdom, vigilance, the masculine principle.

*Tower* - Ascent, vigilance, the inaccessible.

*Continued on next page . . .*





### ***Symbols and Common Meanings (Continued)***

*Twilight* - Threshold, uncertainty, ambivalence.

*Veil* - Darkness giving way to light, inscrutability, hidden knowledge, secrecy, ignorance, mourning, protection, submission to authority, modesty, chastity, renunciation, separation.

*Water* - Fertility, refreshment, purification, life, rebirth.

*Well* - Healing, wish fulfillment, salvation, purification, feminine principle.

*West* - Autumn, middle age, the dying sun.

*Wheel* - Solar power, cycles of life, rebirth, renewal, time, fate, karma.

*Whip/Lash* - Authority, government, domination, punishment, fertility, lightning, strength that drives away evil.

*Wine* - Revelation, truth, vitality, sacrifice, fertility.

*Wings* - Divinity, spiritual enlightenment, air, flight, freedom, victory, speed, communication.

*Yoke* - Balance, control, union, humiliation, slavery, toil, patience, obedience, law, sacrifice, agriculture, fertility.

### ***Mandala***

A mandala is an art form based upon symmetrically arranged geometric forms, usually circles, within larger concentric forms. Typically a mandala represents a central figure surrounded by a pantheon of subordinate deities. A mandala might be called a "spiritual blueprint of the universe" and is used in both public rituals (as an icon) and private meditation.

### ***Masks***

Masks can be made of all kinds of materials. They may be painted, carved, or both; they vary in size and complexity. Masks can be highly symbolic in design, or disturbingly realistic. They may be either worn or carried, and are often used in conjunction with holy dances. Masks are used in rituals for many reasons - to arouse specific emotions, such as bravery or fear; to frighten and exorcism harmful spirits; to teach; to entertain. Those who wear masks are considered to be representatives of the divine. Masks are used in sacred drama and rites which recall the activities of the gods in past times.

In the traditional societies of West Africa, masks are especially associated with agrarian and funerary rituals, as well as in ceremonies that recall the mythical origins of the tribe. Among the Dogon, each adult male becomes a member of the *awa* - the village's society of masks. When not in use, the masks are hung together in a holy cave. In addition to their ritual use, they are often venerated themselves, receiving regular sacrificial libations.

### ***Mirrors***

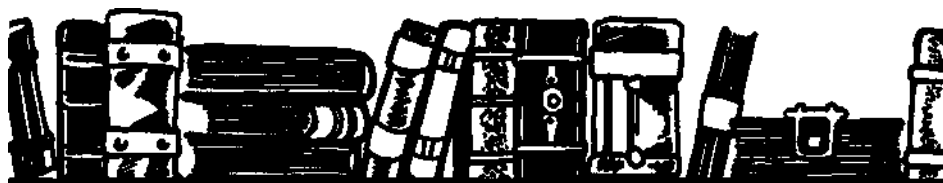
Cultures which believe that one's reflection is a vital part of the soul often see mirrors and other reflective surfaces as either "soul catchers" or doorways into other worlds. Mirrors can be used in divination rituals, and are particularly holy in lunar goddess traditions. The moon is often described as a mirror which reflects all that happens in the world. Copper mirrors are thought by some to be especially effective in healing rituals.

### ***Phylacteries***

Phylacteries are small amulets, pouches or boxes which contain fragments of holy writings or small relics. In Hebrew tradition, phylacteries called *tephillin* are worn upon the body, tied or bound to the arms, forehead, or over the heart. Other traditions, such as Orthodox Christian, use small reliquaries in a similar fashion.

### ***Prayer Books***

Prayer books are collections of prayers, readings, songs, scriptures and other holy writings. These books are used for private devotions, on a schedule defined by the traditions of the religion. Hebrew tradition calls for two prayer books: the *siddur*, used for Sabbath and during the week, and the *machzor*, used for festivals. Books used in clerical or community rituals are often more elaborate and richly decorated. The *Book of Kells* was made for such rituals. Often these books must be made following strict guidelines; the Jewish Torah must be



handwritten without error on a flawless parchment and is considered to be inherently sacred. Other books, such as modern-day hymnals, the medieval "Books of Hours," and orders of service, are considered simply aids to worship.

### ***Prayer Wheels***

The most common form of prayer wheel is that of a prayer-inscribed cylinder upon a shaft, with a weighted cord to act as a flywheel. The worshiper rotates the cylinder as prayers are offered. Hand-operated versions vary in size from a few inches to several feet. Some great prayer wheels may be 20 feet in height. Such large wheels, which are found at shrines and temples, may be powered by wind, water or physical effort. Long stands of multiple prayer wheels are turned by a continuing series of worshipers - as one tires another takes his place.

Fragments of sacred texts are written upon each prayer wheel; sometimes entire collections of sacred writings are inscribed upon the largest wheels. As the wheels turn, each rotation is a separate prayer offered on behalf of the worshiper.



### ***Rattles***

A musical instrument that makes percussive sounds when objects enclosed in it are shaken is called a rattle. Rattles may be created from a great variety of substances, and may be attached to a dancer's body or clothing, to a staff, or may simply be held in the hand and shaken. They are common in tribal and shamanistic traditions and are often constructed of materials holy to that tradition, such as bone from a particular animal. The sound of the rattle is believed to be the voice of the spirits, and is used to curb or entreat supernatural forces. Often a specific type of rattle is used for a specific ritual. South American Indian shamans use *maracas* (rattles made of gourds) for healing and fertility rituals, while narrow stick rattles are used for visionary and divination rites.

### ***Relics***

A relic is an object which is venerated because of its past association with an esteemed or holy individual. Relics are usually physical remains, such as bones or teeth, but might also be remnants of clothing, skin or hair.

Relics play an important role in many worship services, and are housed in specially made and sanctified containers called reliquaries. These reliquaries vary greatly in both size, shape and the amount of decoration. The reliquary which houses the arm bone of an ancient martyr might be constructed of gold in the shape of an arm raised in blessing, and carried before religious processions.

Relics are often associated with miraculous healing.

### ***Clerical Garb***

Most religions have traditions (or even laws) which define the clothing their clerics wear. Classic examples are the Eucharistic vestments of the Catholic Church.

The *chasuble* is a sleeveless, often full-circle cape-like garment worn draped over the shoulders.

The *stole* is a long, relatively narrow band of fabric of varying lengths worn about the neck; Eucharistic stoles hang down nearly to the ground.

The *dalmatic* and *tunicle* are simple sleeved tunics; the dalmatic has wider sleeves than the tunicle.

The *humeral veil* is worn about the priest's shoulders during certain parts of a Mass or Benediction.

The *cope* is a floor-length, full-circle garment worn over the shoulders and falling straight at the front without overlapping. It may or may not include some form of hood.

*Mitres* are shaped, usually heavily embroidered hats that are worn by bishops and archbishops.

*Continued on next page . . .*



## Clerical Garb (Continued)

The *High Mass* set of vestments includes the chasuble, dalmatic, tunicle, double stoles and humeral veils. Copes are optional. A *Low Mass* set consists of the stole and chasuble. A *Benediction* set includes a cope, stole and humeral veil. There are numerous sets of these garments and drapings, one in each liturgical color.

When vesting (dressing for a ritual), a priest first puts on the *amice*, a neck cloth that fills up the space left by the neckline of the chasuble. The *alb* follows; this is a long linen tunic, usually with decorations at the wrists and lower hem. The *girdle* gathers in the alb at the waist; it is usually a white linen rope with tassels. The stole is worn in various ways; priests cross the ends and use the girdle to hold it in place, bishops wear it with the ends hanging straight down, deacons wear it over the left shoulder and tie it under the right arm. Last comes the chasuble; a bishop will also wear a dalmatic over a tunicle beneath the chasuble, along with gloves, cope and mitre. Deacons wear the dalmatic; subdeacons the tunicle. Both wear the



## Thrones

Thrones are ritual seats, typically very elaborately carved and decorated, which are reserved for selected people. While they exist primarily in secular buildings, thrones are also found in the holiest of temples, reserved either for the deity itself, or for the deity's highest cleric. West African tribes often have a *smith's throne* within a sacred cave. The smith is both craftsman and priest, playing both social and religious roles.

## Totems

A *totem* is an emblem or revered symbol, usually of an animal, which is associated with a particular family or group. This animal is considered to be either a mythical ancestor of the family, or a friend and protector. The term refers to both the physical object (such as a small carving) and the subject it represents. Totems are especially common in cultures which practice ancestor veneration (see *Totemism*, p. 127).

## Unguents

Unguents are holy ointments, salves and oils. These sanctified substances, which might be stored in special jars and containers, are used in rites of passage, purification, anointment and healing.

## Vestments

Ceremonial clothing and insignia worn by clerics are called vestments. These articles of apparel - tunics, stoles, pendants, hats, scarves, crowns, copes, capes and robes - are worn to indicate both clerical rank and religious affiliation. Vestments may be simple or richly decorated. Style and color varies greatly, depending upon the religion and the rituals involved. Sometimes secular worshipers are required to wear particular articles of clothing. The Amish and Mennonites wear simplistic garb of antique cut; observant male Jews must wear a *yarmulke* covering their hair and a *tallit* (prayer shawl) during morning prayers; Muslim women traditionally wear the *purdah* veils.

## Weapons

Some religious traditions forbid the presence of weapons in a place of worship. Others venerate them as symbols of divine power, especially if a particular weapon is associated with a particular god. Some weapons might become symbols of a religious sect because of their similarity with another holy symbol; the Crusader Knights often used their swords as a symbol of their faith because the sword resembles the Christian cross in shape. Holy symbols and invocations might be inscribed on weapons in the hope of obtaining divine favor.

## Putting It All Together

When designing a religion, the GM can mix and match many elements, but each should be considered in relation with the others. After determining the nature of divine power, the GM should consider how that power interacts with the world. Symbols are often the means by which divinity is expressed.

Symbols are a vital part of most religions and a GM should choose them carefully, considering that symbol's impact on the culture he is designing. Is the symbol so common that everyone knows what it represents? Or is it used as a secret sign to identify the faithful? If religion is an integral part of everyday

life, then religious symbology will likely be overwhelmingly present in that culture. If a religion is persecuted, a subtly carved symbol might indicate a sympathizer, or a place of refuge. Is the symbol seen as inherently holy? If so, anyone who defames it might face religious wrath. Is it merely the symbol of belief, and not of divine power? If so, adherents might wear it proudly, declaring their religious allegiance to all. The young might wear it brazenly, to defy their elders.

A GM might choose symbols whose meanings the players will easily understand, thereby easily conveying a great deal of information. Or a GM might choose more obscure symbols in order to create a more exotic "feel" to the religion. Religions often have many symbols associated with them, some of which they might share with other beliefs. How did this come about? Was it mere coincidence? Or does it indicate an older, common belief that split generations ago, developing into separate religions?

Next, the GM must decide how the symbols are used. They may be venerated in and of themselves, regarded as mere decoration, or used as aids to worship and meditation. They may play a role in the various rituals and ceremonies of that religion - and also play a role in everyday life.

All religions have ceremonies or rituals of some sort. Even a lack of ritual can in itself be a ritual; forbidden actions can carry as much weight as prescribed ones.

Some sects or denominations might support pomp and ceremony while others reject it. Even among individuals, such activity can vary. A priest will probably be involved in more rituals than a lay member. The GM should consider how big a part religion plays in everyday life. Rituals may be relegated to a specific day of the week, or to special festival days. Or adherents may be required to perform certain rituals each day, or each hour. Such rites could be so much a part of daily living that they are performed almost without thinking. An outsider might not even recognize them as religious rites. Or their religious significance may be forgotten, and the ritual is performed by rote - out of habit.

A GM should also remember that symbols play a vital part in religious ceremonies, especially communal services. These worship services begin with an invocation - a formal prayer, a song or chant, or some other action that calls for the attention of the divine. Often a holy symbol is displayed to the worshipers to focus their attention. There may be some indication that the deity (or its divine servant) is present - a chime or gong may ring, a sacred fire might leap higher, candles may flare or go out. Or there might be no sign at all, and the celebrants must take it on faith that the god is present, or at least listening.

After the invocation, a communal service often concerns itself with praising, thanking or petitioning the divine. Celebrants may sing or dance, the priest may lead prayers, sacrifices might be made. Again, symbols often play a key role. An animal holy to the god might be sacrificed, the altar might be decorated with holy objects, special garb might be worn by priest and worshiper alike.

At the end of the service, the priest may announce the god's will, grant boons or pronounce a blessing upon the celebrants. Often a service will end as it began - a reverse procession, or prayers or songs which echo the opening.

Symbols are vital throughout a worship service, evoking common feelings and beliefs. Ceremonies remind believers that they are a community of faithful. Together, symbols and ceremonies both define a religion and strengthen its adherents.

## *Symbolism of Color*

Depending upon the culture, colors will have different associated meanings. This symbolism can be useful when choosing clerical heraldry and garb, adding color to a campaign in every sense of the word. This list includes only the most common associations; it is by no means absolute or complete. (Keep in mind that availability may alter these meanings. If peasants can afford purple cloth, but not orange, for example, the associations of each may be very different!)

*Black* - Death, primordial darkness, the void, shame, destruction, grief, sadness, time, sinister aits, mourning, humiliation, spiritual darkness.

*Blue* - Truth, revelation, wisdom, loyalty, fidelity, peace, contemplation, the divine feminine principle, the heavens, mercy.

*Brown* - The earth, spiritual death, renunciation, degradation, penance.

*Gold* - Divine power, immortality, glory, endurance, light, durability, emotional warmth, truth, enlightenment, the masculine principle.

*Green* - Life, youth, hope, change, jealousy, abundance, peace, prosperity, immortality, victory.

*Gray* - Depression, ashes, humility, mourning, penance, wisdom, tribulation.

*Orange* - Love, happiness, splendor, fire, luxury.

*Purple* - Royalty, pomp, pride, imperial authority, temperance, truth, justice, penance.

*Red* - Royalty, truth, love, joy, passion, ferocity, arousal, blood, anger, vengeance, martyrdom, the divine masculine principle, faith, strength, calamity, evil, fertility, fire, creativity.

*Silver* - Light, purity, the feminine principle, divine power, the moon, virginity

*Violet* - Spiritual or religious devotion, humility, intellect, knowledge, sorrow, temperance, grief, mourning, temperance, old age, authority, truth, fasting, penance.

*White* - Light, sun, perfection, purity, innocence, redemption, salvation, spiritual authority, chastity, mourning, life, love, transformation, virginity, the purified soul, peace, enlightenment, surrender.

*Yellow* - Intellect, faith, goodness, faithlessness, betrayal, cowardice, treachery, treason, quarantine, secrecy, greed, renunciation, humility, divinity, revealed truth, beauty, life, immortality.

# CLERICS



**P**riest, monk, priestess, mullah, shaman - a cleric is one who has dedicated his life to the service of his religion. It is through the efforts and duties of these devoted servants that a religion is sustained, the myths and legends properly told and remembered, the dogmas enforced, the rituals correctly performed. Their duties and responsibilities may vary widely, but in the end their task is the same: to seek the divine and ensure the preservation of their faith, whatever that may be. Beyond these goals, however, clerics differ as widely as the religions in which they serve. From the wildly tattooed shaman in his bearskin loincloth, to the stately priestess in white robes, to the armor-clad knight of some warrior sect, clerical characters have endless possibility and variation.



## CLERICAL CHARACTER TYPES

Clerics are as varied as the religions they follow, but there are certain accepted stereotypes within history and mythic legend. Most cleric types are likely to have the following:

*Advantages:* Clerical Investment, Patron: Church.

*Disadvantages:* Duty, Vows.

*Skills:* Theology with specialization; Performance/Ritual.

These, of course, are suggestions, not requirements.

### ***Bardic Priest***

These clerics who spread tales of the world and the divine through story and song are most commonly found in cultures with strong oral traditions. There is always a vocal ingredient to their spells - usually poetry or song.

*Advantages:* Appearance, Charisma, Language Talent, Legal Immunity, Musical Ability, Voice.

*Disadvantages:* Overconfidence, Reputation, Truthfulness.

*Skills:* Acting, Area Knowledge, Bard, Breath Control, Carousing, Dancing, Detect Lies, Diplomacy, Fast-Talk, Gambling, Heraldry, History, Holdout, Law, Musical Instrument, Performance, Poetry, Riding, Savoir-Faire, Sex Appeal, Scrounging, Singing, Stealth, Survival, Teaching, Theology, any combat/weapon skill, any language.

### ***Healer Priest***

These are pacifistic clerics who believe that the divine word is best spread by aiding those in need. They may be associated with proselytizing religions as missionaries, traveling in search of the needy. Or they may work within the bounds of a church which throws its doors open to the general public. They tend to abhor violence, and believe that the divine is benevolent.

*Advantages:* Blessed, Empathy, Immunity to Disease, Reputation.

*Disadvantages:* Dependents, Honesty, Pacifism, Sense of Duty.

*Skills:* Cooking, Diagnosis, Diplomacy, First Aid, Naturalist, Physician, Physiology, Poisons, Surgery, any craft.

### ***Sage Priest***

Wise man, crone, sage, hermit - these elder clerics are thought to have a clearer sight of the divine. They may travel in near poverty, isolate themselves from others, or live in comfort, serving as councillors or advisors. They are often sought by students who seek to learn their wisdom.

*Advantages:* Alertness, Blessed, Eidetic Memory, Intuition, Language Talent, Strong Will.

*Disadvantages:* Age, Pacifism, Truthfulness, any physical disadvantage.

*Skills:* Bard, Detect Lies, Diplomacy, Heraldry, History, Holdout, Law, Leadership, Meditation, Poetry, Research, Scrounging, Singing, Stealth, Survival, Teaching, Theology, any craft, any language.

### ***Warrior Priest***

Religious warriors may serve as protectors of their religion, or as crusading warriors who make converts by force.

*Advantages:* Alertness, Ambidexterity, Combat Reflexes, Danger Sense, Peripheral Vision, Strong Will, Toughness.

*Disadvantages:* Bad Temper, Bloodlust, Code of Honor, Fanaticism, Honesty, Intolerance (Religious), Overconfidence.

*Skills:* Armory, Carousing, Heraldry, Leadership, Leatherworking, Riding, Strategy, Tactics, any combat/weapon skill.

### ***Resident Clerics***

These are clerics who remain in a particular area. Their religious calling might require them to devote themselves to the welfare of a particular group of followers, or they might choose a simple, reclusive lifestyle in which to explore the realities of the divine.

### ***Ascetic Monk***

Those who seek the divine through rituals of self-deprivation and physical exertion have rejected the luxuries of society, though they may still feel a duty toward it.