

How to Build a Satanic Altar

by Phenex Apocrypha, the Devil's Librarian

Introduction

Altars are perhaps one of the most iconic symbols of any religion, from the strict requirements of the Catholic Church to the artistic color bursts of Hindu shrines. And we've all seen, in some media or another, a portrayal of a fictional Satanic altar. Severed goat heads, inverted crosses painted in dripping blood, candles getting wax in every place possible. But how does a real Satanist build an altar? In a religion with no rules, knowing how to construct and use an altar that will actually support your spiritual development can be tricky, especially for a beginner. Take this guide not as strict laws you must follow, but suggestions to keep in mind.

Understanding What an Altar is For

In mainstream religions, the altar usually has one purpose - worship. In some specific circumstances, it may be used in a particularly important ritual, such as a marriage or a baptism. But for the typical at home-user, an altar is where you come to pray, maybe meditate, maybe make offerings, depending on the religion.

While the Satanist can do all of these things at their altar, for many of us, the altar becomes much more - it becomes a worktable for magick. At our altars, spells can be cast, invocations can be done, and rituals to alter our minds, lives, and very worlds can take place.

It is of course worth emphasizing that none of this is *required*, to be a Satanist. In fact, you aren't required to have an altar at all. But if you determine that you would like to have one, it is up to you what you use it for. Think of it as your spiritual home base, the space you go to for religious work, whatever from that takes for you.

What Does Your Altar Need?

Unlike other esoteric traditions, such as Wicca, there is no set list of altar items a Satanist must have. Instead, it is most advantageous for the Satanist to consider what they will use their altar for, and make a list of needed items for those tasks. Here are some recommendations.

General: A cloth to cover the surface the altar will be placed on, a light source such as candles (electric candles are perfectly acceptable)

Worship: A symbol of the entity being honored (statue, painting, sigil, associated symbolic object), offering plates/bowls, incense

Prayer: Prayer beads, book of prayers

Meditation: A comfortable seat, such as a meditation cushion or bench, or possibly a chair. If you prefer to meditate standing or walking, you will need the space to do so.

Magick: This selection will heavily depend on what sort of magick you do. Again, think of your altar as your magickal work table. What tools do you need for your unique craft? If you do not have a magickal

practice yet, but are interesting in starting, I would recommend studying up on the technique of magick you're interested in (witchcraft, ceremonial magick, chaos magick, etc) and select your first tools based on what is typically needed by that sort of practitioner.

A few common tools would be a wand, a ritual dagger, a goblet, a pentacle, a divination tool such as a tarot deck or black scrying mirror, oils and incense, and a bell or singing bowl. The first four are often used because, in systems descended from Hermetic magick (as most Western magickal traditions are), these items represent the four elements, and have particular magickal uses as a result. The wand is fire, the dagger is air, the goblet is water, and the pentacle is earth. And of course, a necessary disclaimer: the dagger is rarely used to cut anything physical, usually being reserved for cutting and directing magickal energy. The divination tool can be used to look into the future, gain insight about life's biggest questions, and communicate with gods and spirits. Oils and incense carry scents, which can be powerful catalysts for changing one's mindset and energy. Bells and singing bowls both produce sounds that can be used to cleanse the space of unwanted energy and set the mood for your workings.

How to Acquire Altar Items

We live in a time where buying almost anything you could want on your altar is as simple as browsing Amazon and having it delivered to your door within two days. And this guide will not condemn that method. However, I encourage you to explore alternate options, and I will explain why.

In Satanism, your altar is more than just a representation of the collective faith. It is a representation of *you* and of your unique Satanic path. Even if you choose to follow methods laid out by someone else, no one can be a Satanist in exactly the same way you can, and that is a beautiful thing. Because of this, you will find your altar most useful and effective when it has your personality woven into it. Why buy the exact same items and arrange them in the exact same way as someone else, when you can have something wholly your own? Here are some ways you can acquire items that won't just be unique in and of themselves, but will have stories attached that make them truly yours.

If you have esoteric shops in your area, explore them. Even the ones that lean hard into Right Hand Path traditions and shun more demonic work can still have useful items, like candles, incense, crystals, and tarot decks. For those that do stock items catering to Satanists, such as Baphomet statues, being able to go in person and hold the item before you purchase it and see if yourself if it's truly what you're after is an irreplaceable experience.

Thrift shops are your best friend. Yes, even your local dingy small town "there's nothing but old people stuff" thrift shop. A plain black pillowcase can be re-worked into an altar cloth. A simple ceramic dish can be used as an offering plate (if you want it to feel more aptly themed, hit up the craft store and paint an appropriate sigil or picture on it). An empty picture frame can turn into a black scrying mirror with some acrylic paint. Antique candle holders, empty journals, sometimes even a goblet can be spotted. And even Christian iconography can be of use, as old Bibles can be torn apart or otherwise defaced, rosaries can be broken down for their beads, crosses can be inverted, and statues of angels can be repainted to become fallen angels. Stretch your dollar and use your imagination.

Using what you have is also an option. This may surprise some readers, as the thrill of taking on a new spiritual journey often feels like it calls for new items. However, if you're short on cash and materials, or you just can't seem to find new items that fit your bill, consider what you already have, and whether it can be repurposed. Does that old scarf have a good pattern for an altar cloth? Do the items from your previous faith have any use, even if it means destroying or altering them in some way? When you're unable to acquire anything more elaborate, items as simple as a plastic butter knife and a red solo cup can serve perfectly well in a pinch.

Foraging and freebies. Sacred power is found in the world around us, and you would be amazed to find out what freely available items you can use for your altar. Objects like acorns, seeds, leaves, stones, and even animal bones can be found with a bit of luck and some time spent looking.

And finally, Do It Yourself! Nothing has as much of your energy in it quite as much as something you've made with your own hands. This is a step that may seem like overkill to some people, but if you have a crafty skill or are willing to learn one, a whole world of possibilities opens up. You can make your own offering bowls and statues with clay, paint your own devotional art, create your own prayer beads and devotional jewelry through beading and metal clay, sew your own altar cloth, mix your own incense, and so much more. If someone else can make it, you can too.

Using Your Altar

So you have enough basic items together to have a functioning altar. But how do you use it, now?

This is a part you truly will have to determine for yourself. While all of these practices I've mentioned - worship, meditation, prayer, magick - are common in Satanism, none of them are required, and none of them have rules set in stone. You're probably noticing a theme around that, by this point.

My advice is to research, and experiment. Read various books, Satanic and otherwise, on how other people practice with their altars, and try out what catches your eye. If you admire the people who set aside time every day to meditate, give it a shot. If you like the sound of making offerings to Satan or another demons, try it out the next time you have a meal or a nice drink*. And if you've begun your magical studies, any decent grimoire should have instructions in it on how to utilize your altar to those ends. When you have no other ideas, try just spending some time with your altar, sitting or standing in front of it, contemplating it and the beings you made it for. Not every church visit is a grand mass - some people just come to sit in the pews and think for a while.

Above all, don't be afraid to allow your altar to grow and evolve. If you add something to it and realize later down the line that you actually don't need it, or that it should be replaced with something else, that is perfectly alright. If you realize you need separate altars for different deities, workings, times of year, or phases of your life, that's perfectly normal. Your altar should not be set in stone, a monolith to rigidity and stagnation. Instead, allow it to reflect you as you move forward in your spiritual journey, changing and growing just as you do.

*Many beginners wonder what to do with consumable offerings after a while, since drink evaporates and food rots. This too is something you can experiment with. Some folks prefer to leave the offers on the altar for a set amount of time (24 hours is common) before disposing of them respectfully, often by

pouring them out onto the earth or burying them. Other folks prefer to consume the physical offering themselves, believing that the demons consume the energy of the offering through them. Try different things out, and do what feels right.

Travel Altars

Travel altars are a hot topic in the online occult sphere these days, in part because they are easy to put together and sell as a product. The truth is that you are not required to have a travel altar, just as you are not required to have a main altar. Just because you need to leave the house for a week doesn't mean you have to bring any of your religious materials with you. But for those of you who do feel it is necessary, here are some ideas.

First, choose a vessel to house your altar in. Altoid tins are a popular choice, but you could use any small box, bag, or container. Next, consider what you normally use your regular altar for, and how much you're likely to do that work on your trip. Select what you're bringing based on that knowledge. You probably can't get on the plane with that ritual knife, and you probably won't have time to do a full-fledged ritual, but maybe you'll have some time to pray each day, and will therefore need your prayer beads. A necklace with your deity's symbol on it can serve in place of your usual statue, electric tea lights can replace your normal candles, and so on. If you like, decorate the inside of the box or container with paint, stickers, or other items to include symbols, sigils, and other visual elements that relate to your practice.

Hidden Altars

Many Satanists must live with their horns tucked, hiding their faith from their families and friends. If this is your situation, know that you are not alone, and that you need not delay your spiritual practice until you are able to move elsewhere. There are ways of maintaining an altar without being found out.

The riskiest option is to maintain a minimalist altar that you can pass off as mere decoration. I say this is risky because if your family is particularly sharp-eyed, they may catch on to what you are doing despite your efforts. But if you think you can get away with it, there truly is nothing suspicious about having a table in your room with a few personal items that just so happen to have spiritual significance. Not many families would balk at the sight of a table with a candle, a vase of flowers, and a deck of playing cards, for example. They don't need to know you chose a coffee scented candle because coffee reminds you of Satan, that you picked that red rose in his honor, or that you can use playing cards to do divination just as readily as you can use a regular tarot deck. A few other low-profile swaps might be a pocket knife as a ritual dagger, a worry stone as a prayer tool, a water glass as a chalice, and a jar of paper stars instead of a pentacle. As for representations of deities, many deities have associations with common animals or symbols that are perfectly normal to have around the house - a star for Lucifer or a butterfly for Beelzebub, for example. You could even use images of other religious figures as sneaky stand-ins for your actual deities. I heard of a Satanist once who used Catholic devotional candles with images of Mary and a guardian angel on them to represent Lilith and Lucifer!

It may feel as though you are doing Satanism “wrong” by using these items, but just because your tools aren’t all painted black, or don’t look particularly religious, does not mean they can’t have significance to them. Remember that Satan is the father of lies - use his gifts to us well.

Another option is to keep your altar items tucked away when you are not using them. Like the last option, this can be quite risky, if your family is known for coming into your room and going through your things. However, if you can be reasonably sure it won’t be discovered, and you won’t be interrupted in the middle of any of your religious practices, there is nothing wrong with simply packing your altar away and bringing it out again as needed.

If keeping any kind of normal altar is too great a risk, you still have options. Digital altars are quite common these days, and can be maintained in a number of ways. If it’s safe to keep sensitive files stored locally on your computer, you can keep a whole folder of images and writings that correspond to your religious work, and can even create collages with them. If your family is likely to go through your device, you can instead maintain something like a blog or Pinterest page, which can be logged out of without fear if a snooping family member seeing it. I’ve even seen people built altars inside of video games, such as Minecraft. Get creative!

Finally, one other option is to make your altar as a form of art. This may be as simple as opening a sketchbook and drawing the altar you want, or as elaborate as turning the entire book into an altar, covering each page with pictures and symbols of your deities and faith. To use the altar, simply leave the book open in front of you on a table and proceed as normal. To hide it away again, close the book, and put it somewhere safe. You could even disguise the book as something else by using a common novel as a base, or if you’re really cheeky and willing to take a risk, you could always use the Bible!

Non-Physical Altars, also known as the Astral Temple

The topic of deep trance, astral projection, out of body experiences are beyond the scope of this guide, and possibly more difficult than you’re ready to grapple with, depending on where you are in your journey. Regardless, it is worth knowing that no matter who you are or what circumstances you are in, you can have an altar using nothing but the power of your own mind. This skill is worth having even if you have the space, time, and money to afford an entire building to put your altar in, because the fact is, we cannot always be at our altars physically. People travel, people get sick and are unable to leave their beds, tragedies happen that cause altars to be destroyed or lost. Therefore it is beneficial for anyone who is interested in having an altar learning to construct an astral temple.

At the most basic level, the art of building an astral temple is an act of imagination. This may make it feel, at least in the beginning, that you’re playing pretend, or doing something “fake,” but in truth, a flexible and active imagination is key to effective magick.

Start someplace quiet, where you will not be disturbed. If you can, sit up in a comfortable chair or cushion. If you have no other options, you can attempt this practice when you’d laid down to sleep at night. Even if you share a bedroom with someone else, nothing about this practice is visible from the outside, so no one will know what you’re doing. Begin by closing your eyes and taking a few deep, steady breaths.

Imagine yourself reached out into the darkness and grasping a door handle. It fits well in your hand, and turns easily when you twist it. When you push open the door and step through, you find yourself in the ideal room to hold your altar. What that room looks like is up to you - Does it have high church ceilings, echoing with faint singing? Is it a dark cave, soft sand beneath your bare feet? Is it your own bedroom, slightly rearranged to hold what you need it to? Is it well-lit, or dim and mysterious? Is there the scent of incense on the air, or the ocean breeze, or your favorite food? Is it warm, as if a fireplace is blazing nearby, or cold enough to put a chill down your spine? Pick whatever makes you feel truly immersed in spiritual energy, and build the full sensory experience. If you can't visualize anything, that's alright, you can focus on whatever sensory elements you are able to imagine. If you can visualize, I would encourage you to do more than *just* visualize. Don't just ask yourself what it looks like, ask yourself what it feels like, smells like, and sounds like.

Central to this room, in a place of honor, is your altar. Again, what elements are included on that altar is up to you, but unlike the physical world, you can truly go wild with your choices here. You want a ritual sword cast of meteorite metal? A leaping cauldron full of eternally burning purple flame? A massive statue of Satan that not only portrays him exactly as you imagine him, but moves and speaks to you when you pray? Go for it! Just keep in mind the earlier prompts - include what will be useful to you, even if that use is just to add to the mood.

In this space you can do the same work you would do at a physical altar. Imagine yourself going through the same motions you would go through with your physical body. If you are here to pray, will you kneel, or stand? How will that feel? If you're making an offering, are you sharing in that offering, or just setting it in place for the demons to claim? Can you imagine its taste, if you are sharing it? If you're performing magick, do you have all the tools you need?

When your work is done for the time being, turn from your altar to face the door you came through, and step back out. Take a few more deep breaths, and open your eyes. Shake your body out a little if you can, ground yourself. Maybe get up and get a glass of water, or a snack.

You can return to your astral temple, and the altar inside it, whenever you please. You need no permission, no tools, and no unique physical space to do it. You could go there on public transit, sitting on a bench in the park, you could even slip off to the bathroom for a while if you're in public and need to retreat for a moment to be at your altar. No one can take it from you, and no one needs to know about it unless you want to tell them. It's your precious secret.

The Question of Respect and Concerns About Doing Things “Right”

The most common altar question I see from folks starting out in Satanism is “How do I know I'm doing it right?” usually with the added fear that doing building or using their altar “wrong” will disrespect Satan, and possibly even lead to punishment.

This fear is understandable, given the controlling nature of most mainstream religions, and the reputation Satan has culturally as a cruel tormentor. However, it is a misguided question. Satan is not the sort of god who demands strict obedience and subservience on pain of punishment. In fact he is quite the opposite! As the god of freedom, he urges all of us to pursue the spiritual techniques and traditions that are most advantageous to our own goals. This is why practices like prayer, offerings, or

maintaining an altar at all are optional pursuits in Satanism. A Satanist should pursue them if they seem beneficial or enjoyable to the Satanist, not simply for the sake of pleasing Satan.

This does not mean you will never receive signs or indications that Satan wants you to change something about your altar setup or usage. But it does mean that those signs are never expressions of petty like or dislike. Satan is a spiritual guide and mentor, urging you towards the path of growth and power. Sometimes, that may mean he tells you that you need a different color of candle, or a new type of tool. These requests are for your benefit, not to appease him. He is a master craftsman advising his apprentice on how to improve their work, not a dictator giving pointless orders to keep followers in line.

If you have a reoccurring fear that Satan is constantly watching you, waiting to enact punishment upon you on the slightest offense, it is possible you are suffering from a misunderstanding, or possibly even trauma. In mainstream religions, and especially Christianity, there is a belief that one's god is a higher power, an unreachable ideal to which we all must bow and admit our inferiority to. This is not so in Satanism. While there are absolutely Satanists who prefer a more traditional god/worshiper relationship, it is almost universally agreed upon among Satanic sects that Satan does not expect blind groveling and obedience, but seeks to empower and uplift us. To that end, it is always beneficial to ask two questions - Why should I do that? And do I want to? I will explain how these two questions can apply to altars and their usage, using an example.

Let us say that you read in a book somewhere that a Satanist must use only black candles for their altar. Ask *why* that might be. It is possible the book explains itself - perhaps it claims that black is Satan's most sacred color, and so it is the best choice to call in his energy. Perhaps the book does not explain itself, and you will have to use your own knowledge and intellect to make an educated guess. You've read somewhere that black candles are associated with protection and baneful work in other magick systems, perhaps they are used here because to a Satanist, Satan is both a protector and an avenger.

Now that you have your reason why you might do something, ask yourself if you want to. Does it feel right to *you*, using all black candles? Maybe the reasons for their usage that you've read in the book or determined for yourself satisfy you, and you want to go ahead and follow those instructions. Maybe you just like black candles, so you're happy for an excuse to include them. Or, maybe it doesn't feel right after all. Maybe you have a background in more mainstream magick traditions, and thus have a familiarity with candle magick already, and you'd prefer to use whatever color best suits your current working. Perhaps you actually associate a different color with Satan, such as red, or gold. Perhaps all you have on hand is white tealights and you need to make do with what you've got! Carving a sigil or word into the surface of a candle with a needle or other small sharp object can imbue it with the needed energy, regardless of its color.

There is no wrong answer, only your own answer. Whether you choose to follow the book's instructions or not is entirely up to you. But whatever your choice is, make sure you know why you're making it, and that it's a choice you actually want to make. If you keep those things in mind, you will build an effective and useful altar, in a style all your own.

Social Media

In recent years the internet has had a huge impact of spirituality of all kinds, and Satanism is no different. It is entirely possible that the person reading this right now originally looked into Satanism because they saw a picture or video of someone's altar online and felt intrigued.

I will tell you not to post pictures of your altar online. What you do with your altar is your business. However, I urge you to not think about social media at all when you are building and using your altar. Don't arrange things a certain way purely because it will look better on camera. Don't feel as if you have to copy someone else's altar you saw online. Your altar is about you, the work you do, and the entities you work with, no one else. Your spirituality will not blossom if it is simply a performance for the approval of people online. Some magicians feel strongly enough about this issue that they actually never take pictures of their altars, or even keep their altars from being seen by anyone but those they trust deeply. I encourage you to think on why this might be.

Parting Thoughts

If an altar seems like the right move for you, don't be daunted. Altars are accessible, flexible, and malleable. You need not fear infernal punishment for building your altar "wrong," because the altar exists to further your work, not to simply please an outside entity. Make use of what you have, even if all you have is your own mind. Research the methods of others, but question those who would seek to impose their own practices and beliefs onto you. Cultivate your altar the way a craftsman cultivates his tool set. In time, you will find yourself with an altar that is unique to you and your path, which I guarantee is more fulfilling than following anyone else's instructions to the letter.