

Altars

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Stony Brook, NY, October 2012

Rev. Margie Allen and Rev. Dr. Linda Anderson

Opening Words In the Spirit the Fall Equinox and of Halloween
(adapted from Marna 2010 from *We'Moon 2011: Groundswell*)

Magic builds bridges across time and space. When we enter the sacred circle, we generate a trans-temporal vortex, so that we circle not only with friends here in our own time-space, but also connect with all the men and women, wise ones and healers, all who come together at this time all over the planet to be still, to focus, to listen and speak. As we gather, we have access to more than our own wisdom, insight, and guidance. We become in gathering, becoming still and focusing, consciously part of a greater whole.

In this time of balance, at the portal of our greater being, we can also hear the voices and stories of our great (great) grandmothers and great (great) grandfathers who have blessed us with their lasting acts of courage, fortitude, faith and hope. We hear the laughter of our children's (children's) children, greeting us, coaching us, encouraging us, warning us, helping us navigate towards the good and around disaster, down the path of choices, encounters, discoveries and choices.

In this moment, as we gather on the leading edge of autumn, let us breathe in together in the silence the greetings and blessings of the unseen generations behind us and before us.

Chalice Lighting and Silence

[Covenant Review]

Check-in (*Suggested focus: Where do you go to center yourself, to find your balance, to remember how you are held in the web of the world*)

Topic Introduction

Whether or not we have up to this moment viewed it as an altar, most of us have created, naturally and instinctively, groupings of personally significant elements on one or more surfaces in our homes. What distinguishes these areas from other decorated spaces is the conscious intention in the selection and placement of the objects and the feelings they regularly evoke when we focus on the arrangements we have made. The objects placed on an altar become visual reminders of what is most beautiful, true and precious in our lives and of our highest values and aspirations. The altar becomes a sensory cue that can, if we are open to it, transform the way we are holding ourselves, viewing our lives, encountering our hopes and fears. As we look at the altar we have made, we engage with a larger perspective on what our lives are all about. (adapted from Maggie Oman Shannon, *The Way We Pray*)

Where are your altars? On the windowsill over the kitchen sink, on the dashboard of the car, at the end of the row of books on the bookshelf, around the edges of a mirror or window, on the fridge door, on top of the fridge or television, on the mantelpiece above

the fireplace, a little shelf or table near the front door, on a shelf inside the closet, on a special rock or tree outside, in a hanging basket?

What is on your altar? Framed pictures of places and beings you love and of people and animals who have died, flowers, beautiful shells or stones, a bird's nest, a pine cone, an acorn, something that belonged to an ancestor, sea glass, a cup, candles, a statue, a wind chime, a poem, a book of readings or prayers, a written reminder...

Activity (*Facilitators*: your group members will bring objects from home for the altar that you will build together. Create some kind of central surface in the room where you gather and some fabric or other kind of covering to make a colorful or meditative or seasonal setting upon which participants can place their objects)

Instructions for participants: As you are moved, please place the object or objects you brought for our altar in the prepared place. Tell us about your object: how you came to choose it, where it resides in your own home, what it means to you.

Questions for Group Reflection

1. Can you remember a time as a child or youth or at some time in the past when you had a significant encounter with or relationship to an altar or activities taking place around one? What feelings come up for you when you remember that time?
2. Do you now maintain an altar or an altar-like space in your life or have you at some point in the past? What objects do you (or did you) place there? How do you (or did you) relate to your altar in the course of your daily life?
3. When you look at the altar the group created earlier, what can you say about the relationship of the object you brought to others on the altar? Would you like to change the arrangement of all the objects in any way?
4. What do you think the altar you have created says about this group as an entity, an expression of who you all are together?

Likes and Wishes

Closing Words and Chalice Extinguishing

Through an altar, including the objects placed on it and the acts performed around it, a person invokes and has a relationship with the transcendent. It's a place to invite, to talk to, to know the Whole, the Holy, the One that some call "God." It's a place of aspiration and dedication to ideals. It's a place to bring and grow your soul.

~ (UU) Rev. Ed Serle