

Candle Lore and Magic

By Rosemary Ellen Guiley

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Candles have a long and interesting history in religious worship, magic and folklore. They light the way to the sacred; they dispel the forces of darkness; they are associated with ghosts and the dead; they can find buried treasure; and they play a role in incubated dreaming.

The origin of candles is not known, but there is evidence that beeswax candles were used in Egypt and Crete as early as 3000 BCE. Other early candles consisted of tapers made of a fibrous material, such as rushes, saturated with tallow.

Ancient peoples observed that candle flames revealed mysterious things. By staring into a flame, one could enter an altered state of consciousness and see gods and spirits, or see the future. The late Egyptians of about the 3rd century used lamps, and possibly candles, in a magic ritual for "dreaming true," or obtaining answers from dreams. The individual retired to a dark cave facing south, and sat and stared into a flame until he saw a god. He then lay down and went to sleep, anticipating that the god would appear in his dreams with the answers he sought.

Ancient Pagans used candles and lamps in religious observances, a practice which the Roman Christian theologian Tertullian vehemently protested as "the useless lighting of lamps at noonday." By the 4th century, both candles and lamps were part of Christian rituals, but it was not until the latter part of the Middle Ages, from the 12th century on, that candles were placed on church altars. The Catholic Church established the use of consecrated holy candles in rituals of blessings and absolving sins, and in exorcizing demons.

Witch-hunt lore

During the witch-hunts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, inquisitors' handbooks such as the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486) prescribed holy candles as among those consecrated objects "for preserving oneself from the injury of witches." Farmers used holy candles to protect their livestock from danger and bewitchment.

According to the prevailing lore during the witch-hunts, witches were said to light candles at their sabbats as offerings of fealty to the Devil, who was often portrayed as wearing a lighted candle between his horns. The witches lit their candles from the Devil's candle; sometimes he lit the candles and handed them to his followers. Witches also put lighted candles in the faggots of their brooms, which they rode through the air to their sabbats.

It was believed that witches made perverse use of holy candles in putting curses on individuals. According to an English work, *Dives and Pauper* (1536), "it hath oft been known that witches, with saying of the Paternoster and dropping of the holy candle in a man's steps that they hated, hath done his feet rotten of."

Black magic

Candles made of human fat were believed to contain life energy, and supposedly were used in the Black Mass in the 17th century, and in other black magic rituals. The *Petit Albert*, an 18th-century grimoire, claims that a "Magic Candle" made of human tallow would disclose buried treasure. The treasure-seeker took the candle into a cave or other subterranean location. When the candle began to sparkle brightly and hiss noisily, treasure was at hand. The nearer the treasure, the more intensely burned the candle, until it went out at the exact spot. Treasure-hunters were advised to carry along lanterns with consecrated candles, not only for light, but to conjure the spirits of dead men who were said to guard buried treasure. The spirits were to be summoned in the name of God and promised

anything in order to help them find "a place of untroubled rest."

At the turn of the 19th century, Francis Barrett, author of *The Magus* (1801), wrote that candles made of "some saturnine things, such as a man's fat and marrow, the fat of a black cat, with the brains of a crow or raven, which being extinguished in the mouth of a man lately dead, will afterwards, as often as it shines alone, bring great horror and fear upon the spectators about it."

Candles and the dead

In folklore, candles have a strong association with the dead, perhaps dating back to old Jewish customs, later adopted by Christians, of lighting candles for the dying and dead. A lit candle placed by the bedside of a dying person is believed to frighten away demons. One Jewish custom calls for keeping a lit candle for a week in the room where a person died, perhaps to purify the air. In American folklore, however, a candle burning in an empty room will cause the death of a relative. Superstitions about candles hold that a guttering candle means someone in the house is about to die, and a candle that burns blue means a ghost is nearby.

Wicca and practical magic

In some Wiccan rituals, consecrated white candles are placed on altars and at the four quarters of a magic circle. If a ritual calls for it, candles are placed at the points of a pentagram. Colored candles are used in many magical spells; each color has its own vibration, attribute, symbolism and influences.

As part of the preparation for casting a spell, rub a candle with anointing oil while concentrating on the purpose of the spell. The formula of the oil will be determined by the purpose of the spell. Or, write a spell on a candle and then burn it.

The following are some of the energy vibrations and influences evoked by colors. Burning colored candles in magical work enhances the vibration of the colors.

White: Spiritual truth and strength; purity and purification; meditation; attract benevolent spiritual forces; break curses; feminine principle (in alchemy).

Pink: Love and friendship; harmony; entertaining; morality; domestic tranquility; the sign of Cancer.

Red: Sexuality; strength; physical health and vigor; passion; protection; the signs of Scorpio and Aries; masculine principle (in alchemy).

Orange: Courage; communication; solving of legal problems; concentration; encouragement; the sign of Taurus.

Yellow: Persuasion; confidence and charm; aid to memory and studying; the signs of Virgo and Gemini.

Green: Healing; money and prosperity; luck; fertility; the sign of Sagittarius.

Blue: Psychic and spiritual awareness; peace; prophetic dreams; protection during sleep; the signs of Aquarius and Virgo.

Purple: Ambition; ruling authority; reversing a curse; speeding healing in illness; extra power; the sign of Pisces; lavender for the sign of Libra.

Gold: Protection; enlightenment; masculine principle; the Sun; the sign of Leo.

Silver: Intuition; subconscious; feminine principle; the Moon.

Brown: Protecting pets; solving household problems; attracting help in financial crises; the sign of Capricorn.

Gray: Stalemate; neutrality; cancellation.

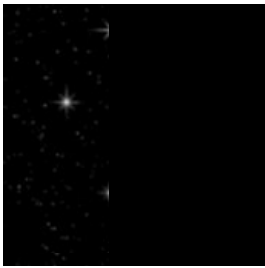
Black: Loss; sadness; discord; releasement; negativity.

In angel magic, use colored candles in work with these principal angels:

Haniel ♦ red and pink

Michael ♦ gold and yellow

Gabriel ♦ white and silver



Raphael ✦ green and orange

Uriel ✦ ice white and ice blue

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Adapted from *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft*, 2nd. ed., by Rosemary Ellen Guiley, published by Facts On File, 1999.

