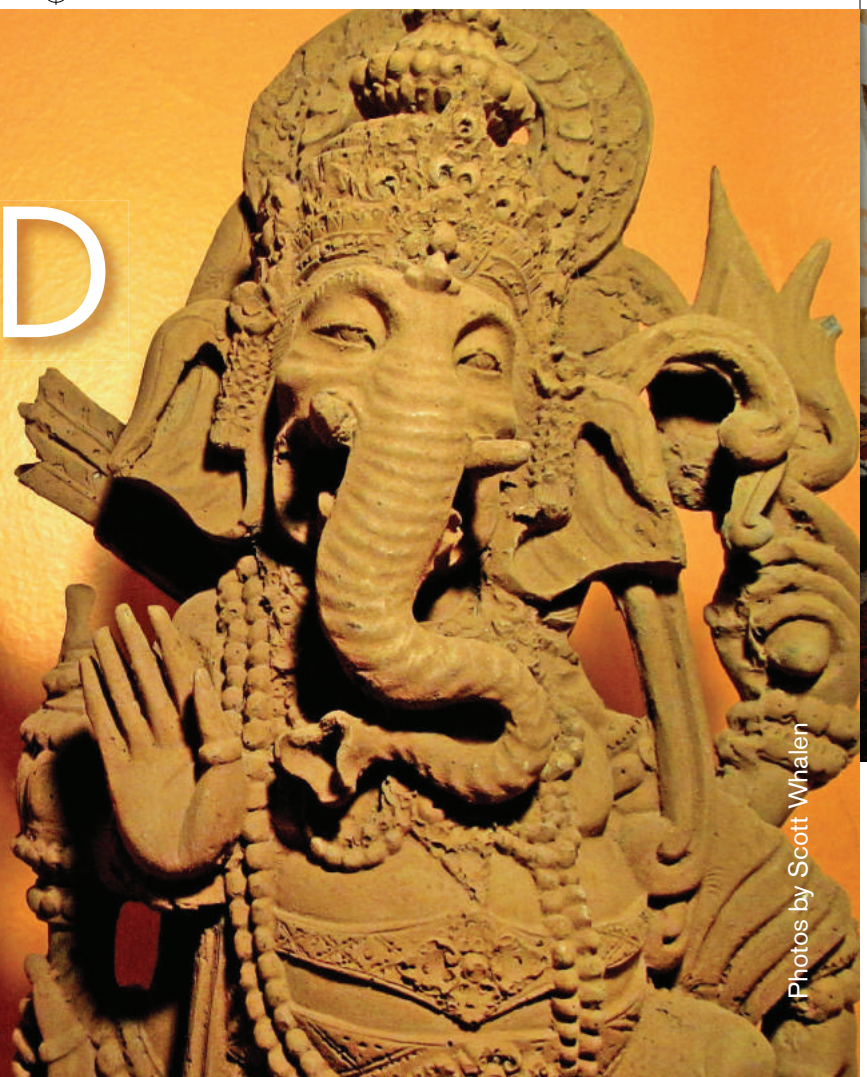


ALTARED STATES

Creating altars in
your home to help
you more easily align
with the Divine

Excerpted and adapted from the
book *Sacred Space* By Jill Angelo



No matter what place we call home, the very word strikes a chord deep inside each of us. Home means sanctuary, the place where we can rest, relax, enjoy time with friends, learn, grow ... and just be. Our homes say a lot about who we are and what we think is important in life.

Think for a moment of your home. If you were to describe it in a word or two, what would it be? Peaceful and calm? Disorganized and chaotic? Open and welcoming? How would you compare the way you describe your home to the life you lead? Your environment is often the exterior reflection of your interior world.

Much of what populates my own home is from thrift shops, garage sales, and scavenger hunts and is reused purposely to respect my commitment to not overusing. My art is either my own creation or hand-selected. I especially cherish those pieces from nature, including my aged hardwood floors, because they come directly from the source.

Each of my decorations has a story: the books (and how I developed a devotion to the study of their guidance and wisdom), the furniture, the stones I have collected most of my life, and even the colors I chose for my office ("chocolate" and "rain"). When I look around my house,

I see my own life history, the growth of my own sense of style, and an awareness of the many lessons that have graced my life.

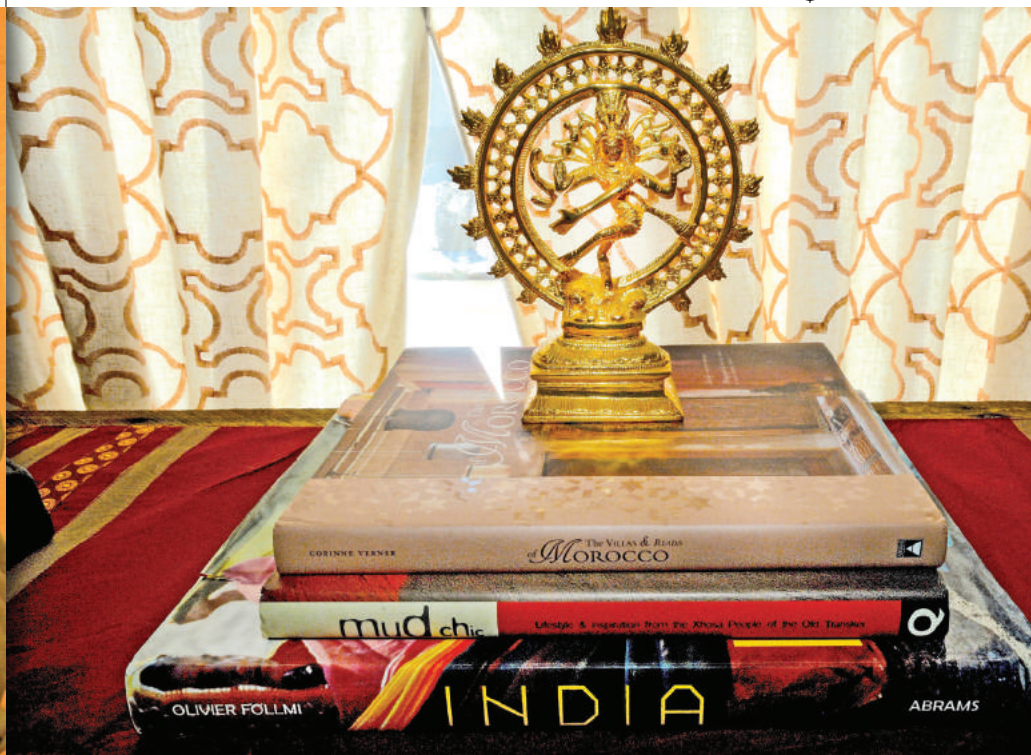
This, I believe, is what makes a home sacred.

Anatomy of an Altar

Creating altars is one particularly beautiful and inspiring way to heighten your home's sacred atmosphere and to help you to align simply and seamlessly with the Divine.

There is no certain size, shape, or specific location for an altar, but before you select a place, take some time to focus and be guided by your own spirit. Furnish your altar with flowers you especially love, icons of deities or sacred teachers you feel especially close to, and found objects, family photos, candles, crystals, prayer beads, or affirmations written on small pieces of paper as prayers. Arrange these objects in relationships that speak vibrantly to you. You might place them on your favorite cloth. To keep the sacred energy of your altar alive, consider using blessed holy water, fire (with a candle), or the occasional stick of incense.

As you walk through your home, notice the many structures and surfaces that are already altars: sink areas, dressers, desks, buffets, nightstands, and fireplace



mantles, for example, where you perform rituals—both sacred and ordinary—every day.

In my home, I have a hand-whittled dilapidated barn buffet from 1890 that holds a vibrantly colored, jeweled cloth with three favorite books from India, Africa, and Morocco stacked together as a foundation for a glowing gold statue of the dancing Shiva. Also on this altar is a railroad key lock housed in rich, hard teak from an ancient railroad line in South Africa along with an equally aged form of a rubber stamp of stars from India. For symmetry and balance, both sides are anchored with dimly lit lamps. This altar consistently reminds me of my passion for the colors of India and for the white lions of South Africa. And Shiva inspires and protects me each

time I walk past with devotion.

My bedroom is one large altar. I love to see sacred symbols when I wake up and to go to bed surrounded by holy images. These provide me with a profound sense of joy and protection.

In my bathroom I have another altar. Buddha shares space on the sink with a white elephant (the divine self), a small offering bowl with tiny pinecones and pebbled rocks I have found or been given by dear friends as well as a Tibetan box that holds pure essential oils and my prized possession—a coaster that says “Leap and the net will appear.” It is in this grounded, warm sacred space that I prepare for my day or night. Everything that I do in this room becomes peaceful and holy.



Practical Altars

One of the most important things we do is choose what our habits are. Rituals are prayers for order. They sum up who we are as human beings. They define us. They are crucial, because without them we would be distracted and disassociated.

Think you're different? Remind yourself of the last time you were in the shower and the shampoo was empty and you had to improvise, or you ran into construction driving to work and you had to quickly find a new route.

Our homes say a lot about who we are and what we think is important in life.

That exhale of frustration is your nerves adjusting to the need for immediate change. Life's just like that.

Daily stresses probably don't stay in our memories for more than a few minutes but they add up. All those routines we move in and out of leave most of us longing for down time. And we seek that down time in a special place devoid of distractions and interruptions.

All of us have such practical altars. Examples might include a well-stocked, well-organized kitchen (the site of those who love to cook and entertain), the garage (well-lit and organized, with a workbench or two, the handyman's holy place), a man cave (a shrine to masculinity with an emphasis on comfort that often includes the best audio and video equipment in the house), and a dressing room (a shrine to the divine feminine where women adorn themselves with the makeup and jewelry that are part of their regular inner and outer transformations).

Practical altar intention

Whether we think of them as practical, useful spaces or not, these parts of our homes refresh and calm us. It's easy to lose sight of their sacred aspects. It's important that we set them up mindfully as sacred spaces so we can benefit from the time we spend in them.

Set your intention: *My intention is for this space to be a productive oasis where my creativity thrives.*

Spiritual Altars

Traditional altars are any structures where offerings are made for religious or spiritual purposes. While they are frequently located in places of worship, altars don't belong only in churches. They can be simple and beautiful additions to your home too.

When deciding where to put an altar, think of its intended purpose. Perhaps it will be used to offer the grace of healing prayer, to manifest something (such as abundance), or simply to acknowledge and celebrate life.

The nail bar in my neighborhood has a small altar dedicated to welcoming customers and celebrating the day. It is discreetly placed near the entrance and is neatly arranged: a statue of Buddha, some flowers, and a stick of burning incense are balanced by teacups and a small box of donuts, fruit, or nuts for customers. It's a simple, sweet altar and I always appreciate seeing it. Its offerings keep the intention alive and the welcoming energy flowing.

Spiritual altar intention

Forgiveness is one of the hardest things we ever do and is a perfect reason to create an altar. Fashion one that utilizes deities and symbols and creates a safe and open environment to forgive. Write notes to the people who have hurt you. Visit this altar daily and work on letting go of the pain you feel that others have caused you. Include a green plant or flowers to keep the energy alive and soothing.

Set your intention: *My intention for this spiritual altar is to let my heart release the pain and allow me to forgive those who have hurt me.*



Outdoor Altars

The exterior parts of our homes have altars too. We align our landscaping with mulch, stones, solar lights, and garden statues. We plant specific flowers in precise ways to achieve certain themes and patterns, much like a harmonic symphony.

We look forward to spring when we can be with the earth and touch its “skin” again. We nurture the earth with our love and compassion as the things that we tend grow before us. We host parties outside to spend as much time as we can in this life force energy.

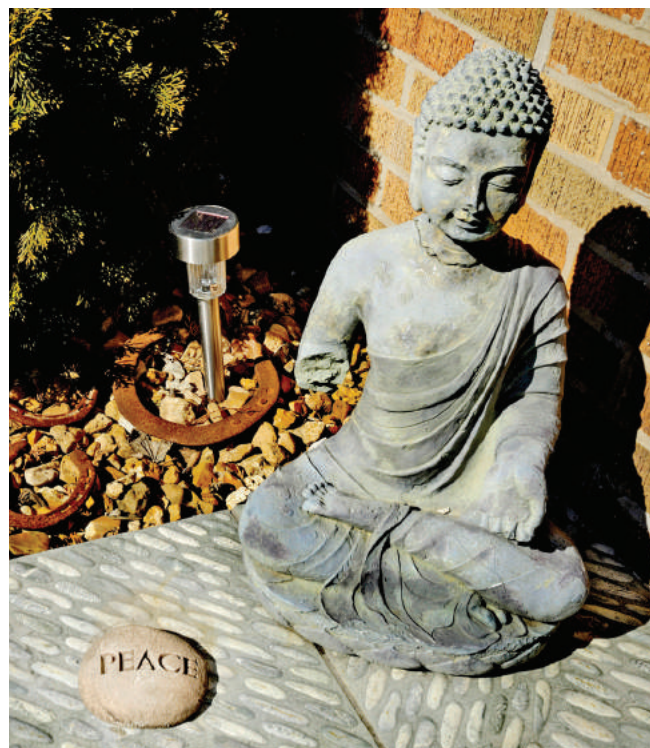
Outdoor altar intention

When you purchase landscaping, carefully consider your selections as they have their own energetic life force. Give thanks as you plant them. Thank the soil for the nurturing container it will provide for the new plant's roots to grow. Give gratitude to each living species for being part of your sacred space. Have extra gratitude for the seeds or seedlings you choose, because like babies, they need additional love and nurturing.

Set your intention: *My intention for this garden altar is to give thanks to the earth and offer it as sanctuary for her plants and creatures.*

As architect Anthony Lawlor once said, “You enter the temple of home by discovering a new way of seeing, one that reconnects the needs of your soul with the buildings and landscapes that shelter you.”

My wish is that you use *Sacred Space* to rediscover your home's environment and create a sacred space that not only inspires you, but also serves as a creative gateway for your spirit.



These simple yet exquisite altars are all from the author's own home.

Jill Angelo, the author of *Sacred Space: Turning Your Home Into a Sanctuary*, is a certified Interior Staging and Redesign Professional and Interior Decorating Design Professional. She is also the founder of Your Space of Grace Decorating and Staging Services. For more information about Angelo, including how to sign up for her online program, “Sacred Space: The Course,” visit her website, www.jillangelo.com. Her book, *Sacred Space*, is available on Amazon.com.

