

AN ANIMIST'S GUIDE TO WORKING WITH THE SPIRITS OF YOUR HOME



By Ivy Senna

Introduction

The Open Encyclopedia of Anthropology describes animism to be “a particular sensibility and way of relating to various beings in the world. It involves attributing sentience to other beings that may include persons, animals, plants, spirits, the environment, or even items of technology, such as cars, robots, or computers.” It is a worldview that we, as witches and practitioners of magic, may choose to uphold as we interact with the world. In essence, everything is alive: from the rock sitting at the side of the road to the gushing brook and the rushing river, to even the fire which cooks your food.

The gist of this booklet is that everything has a spirit within it, and working with them is as simple as just talking to them and giving offerings. This little booklet aims to provide beginner-friendly advice on how to start engaging with your home— spirits who may, with time and devotion, become allies or friends with you. It is, however, just a guide. It is not meant to be exhaustive or set in stone. Moreover, although I am writing from the perspective of a Thai woman who has lived both in the urban center of Bangkok and is living abroad in the UK, I hope that my advice will be applicable to all readers regardless of where you are from, no matter if in a conventional house or a flat in an apartment complex. Please feel free to adapt the text in whatever ways you see fit, to make it tailored to your spiritual practice and living situation.

The follow-up installment of the booklet, titled *"An Animist's Guide to Working with Spirits of Your Neighborhood,"* is planned for release in the future.

The First Step

A traditional Thai house is often elevated—a stilt house, raised to avoid the floods during monsoon season. In Lanna (Northern Thai) beliefs, the spirit of the first step (or first few steps) of the stairs leading up to the house (known as the *ผีท้าวขึ้นใจ*) is said to be the protector of the house, keeping unwanted influences away and preventing danger from entering the house. Back when I lived in an elevated house with a modern reconstruction of such steps, I liked to simply say hello to the spirit to respectfully acknowledge its existence whenever I am passing by. Likewise, perhaps once a week, or every so often, I would leave a splash of alcohol on the step as an offering to the spirit, whilst thanking the spirit for guarding the house.

Nowadays, I live in a flat. Nevertheless, the same concept still applies. Is there a walkway which leads up to the entrance of your accommodation, for example? I would recommend that you do what I did, leaving some discreet offerings to the spirit as thanks, a splash of alcohol or coffee here and there (think of it as giving your security guard a boost of energy!). Moreover, to aid the spirit in its role as a guardian, you may anoint the step/walkway/whatever with protection oils¹, or leave some iron tools to the spirit which the spirit could use as a shield or weapon, perhaps discreetly positioned behind a flower pot or something similar. Additionally, the entranceway can be worked with to draw in luck and prosperity. You can wash the step and/or the entranceway with prosperity washes², or leave some coins there (again, place it somewhere safe and discreet) to draw in more wealth.

The Door and Windows

In Roman times, doorways were regarded as sacred, not only in a metaphorical sense—symbolizing thresholds and boundaries between worlds or places—but also in a more spiritual and literal one. The Romans revered a goddess named Cardea, whose name translates to “door pivot”. As the goddess of door hinges and handles, Cardea was believed to protect thresholds, preventing evil spirits from crossing into sacred or secure spaces.

Thus, the door too is a guardian and, like everything else from an animistic worldview, it possesses a spirit. Offerings should be given to the spirit of the door every once in a while— fresh water or alcohol or coffee will work just fine. Since both the door and the windows act as an opening to let things in and keep things out, the same concept as aforementioned still applies: you can anoint the door and windows with protection oils and clean it with prosperity washes. In addition to that, I also

¹ I'll explain examples later on of how to make such oils in a simple way

² Same here, I'll give examples later in the booklet

recommend hanging protective charms from the door and windows, whether it be some hagstone and key (tied together with a red thread), an iron horseshoe, a nazar, a SATOR square, or whatever other amulets you may have. Certain protective herbs and plants could also be used.

According to *The Green Mysteries: An Occult Herbarium*, mugwort hung above the door of a house will protect the domicile from evil magic. Similarly, boughs of gorse or wreaths of holly can also be used. Likewise, pots of iris and mullein planted by the front door of the home can serve ‘a house-ward, repelling malign spirits and visits by unwelcome persons’. I recommend not just randomly hanging the herbs or placing some potted plants there, but to communicate your intentions to the spirits of the door and windows too. Tell them why you are doing so, and invite them to work with the herb/plant/charm to better reinforce the boundaries of the home.

The Kitchen

In Northern Thailand, there is a belief in the ผีก้อนสำ which, when translated literally, refers to the spirits of the three rocks or stones which are placed beneath a pot to boil water to support the pot. These three supports were often given names referring to precious metals/gems, with the first one being named แก้ว (glass/crystal), the second being named เงิน (silver), and the third being named ทอง (gold). The naming would be performed whilst offerings of flowers and prayers to the spirits. After the naming ceremony, the fire was lit using auspicious wood, such as gooseberry or other sacred woods. Once the firewood had burned down completely, a pot or rice container was placed on the stove as a symbol of good fortune. It remained there until the next morning when the first actual meal would be cooked, marking the start of the household’s culinary activities.

During the initial cooking session, a small offering of cooked rice, about the size of a thumb, was placed on each of the three stove supports to honor the spirits of the hearth. These spirits were believed to reside in the stove and protect the kitchen. If the homeowner needed to leave the house, especially with children, they would leave an offering of cooked rice on the stove, asking the spirits to protect the family on their journey. For children, adults would smudge soot from the pot onto the child’s forehead, symbolizing the spirits’ protection and serving as a mark identifying the child’s origin if the child somehow became lost.

When asked why the stove was believed to house spirits, village elders explained that the kitchen stove was like a “forest of the dead.” Animals killed for food, sometimes even brought alive to the kitchen, were cooked or prepared there. Over time, the spirits of these creatures were believed to accumulate in the kitchen. In homes that had been occupied for decades, the stove was thought to harbor countless

So, what does this mean for the modern day practitioner? It means that there are spirits dwelling in the hearth of your kitchen, that even the pots and pans may be alive and should be treated with the respect they deserve. In practice, an easy way to give offerings to the hearth spirits is to portion away a small part of your meal and offer that bit of the meal to the spirits after you've finished cooking. Occasionally, wiping down the stove and cleaning the cookware with rose water may help in bringing a restfulness and comfort to the dead of the kitchen.

With regards to the bedroom, the same protective charms like the hagstone and key, the iron horseshoe, the nazar, SATOR square et cetera can also be hung above the bed so they can protect you whilst you sleep. The spirit of the bed is one you can petition to ask them to protect you from nightmares and relieve you from any night anxieties so you can fall asleep easier. Furthermore, in the *Greek Magical Papyri* there is a spell *PGM CXXIIIa 51-52* that can aid you in your sleep.

If you have trouble sleeping or if you wish for a more restful sleep, I recommend writing those symbols and characters on a bay leaf, and placing it either beneath your pillow whilst you sleep or beneath your bed (if there is space beneath your bed). And, do tell the spirit of your bed how you plan to use the bay leaf charm to help you sleep. This is so that the spirit can interact with the bay leaf charm and make it more effective.

Although the bathroom is often thought to be a place of dirtiness (where you urinate and defecate etc), I believe it is more productive to think of the bathroom as a place of cleansing and purification. Even in

Roman times, Venus Cloacina was venerated as a patron of the sewers. There is an indication that the Romans regarded the water flowing through their sewers with the same respect as they did a fresh, above-ground river. Consider this: running water is a privilege, even in today's modern world. Without it, our concept of hygiene would crumble. And without the understanding and practice of hygiene, humanity could never have achieved the progress and advancements we enjoy today. Therefore, we should be respectful to the spirits that dwell within the lavatory, within the bath, within the shower, within the washbasin, within the pipes, within the drains.

I recommend leaving offerings of water—fresh water, spring water, perhaps even sea water or water and sea salt (please divine on your spirits' preferences)—somewhere suitable in your bathroom as an offering to the spirits there. I also like to decorate the bathroom with sprigs of lavender (a herb the *Viridarium Umbris* calls the “Herb of Cleansing”) or other herbs of purification (hyssop, rosemary, juniper etc) and offer these herbs to the spirits of the bathroom. When you wash or clean the bathroom, also use a little bit of lavender water (or, if you practice Hoodoo or Conjure, you can also use a bit of cologne like Florida water) to do so as well.

The Garden

Not every house or accommodation has a backyard or garden in them, but gardens—or whatever green space exists within the bounds of the accommodation—are important and should not be neglected. Before you begin to introduce new plants into the garden, it is important to befriend what already dwells there. Is there a pond or any other water source in your backyard, man-made or natural? Is there an old tree in the garden or some other plant with specific local folklore attached to it?

Back when I was living in Bangkok in my childhood home, there was a pomegranate tree in my garden that looked frail, its branches thin and fruits tiny. Yet, when other flowers or vegetation are planted near its trunk, they tend to all die whilst the pomegranate tree ends up surviving year after year. There may be a scientific reason behind this, perhaps something to do with the intensity of the sun or the quality of the soil, but I believe there is something special about this tree too. The tree was planted for a specific reason: my parents believed (perhaps inspired by Thai-Chinese folklore) that a house with a daughter in it should have a pomegranate nearby, for luck and protection. Thus, the tree knows its duty and purpose: it was planted because *I*, my parents' first and only daughter, was born. With a duty and purpose entrusted to it, the tree is compelled to survive. It is also here, at this tree, where I would pour libations meant for the dead, due to both western and Chinese folklore linking the pomegranate to ghosts and the underworld.

If you want to befriend spirits of the garden, I would recommend you to introduce yourself to plants that grow in the garden— preferably starting with the oldest or largest tree first (who may act as a patron or guardian of the garden), then working your way to the flowers and then any water source that may be there. Tell them who you are, what you do, and acknowledge that you are a peer who shares their domain. If it was your grandparents who seeded the tree and your parents who watered it and now you are the one approaching it, then let it know that too. The trees and flowers and soil remember who took care of them.

Then, as before, you should give offerings.

It was either my mother or grandmother who taught me to feed the rose apple trees in my garden a mixture of water and sugar, and to sing and talk to them, believing that sugar makes the fruits sweeter while song and conversation helps the tree grow. After learning some science behind plants and trees, I do not often water trees with sugar nowadays. Yet, that does not negate how trees may appreciate offerings in the forms of voice and water.

Give constant offerings. In my opinion, it is better to be constant in your gifts and show of gratitude than to do a big ritual every once in a blue moon. My routine is as simple as giving libations of water to the big trees in my garden once a week, and also a general libation dedicated to the land and all who dwell there. Eventually, you'll eventually sense what the land and the plants prefer. Warm water or ice cold? Tap or something else? Perhaps a dash of honey? Ask, and they will let you know. And, if you ever wish to add new flowers or herbs to the garden, or massively redecorate your backyard, I think it is also important to ask the existing spirits on their opinions, if such changes will be welcomed or not, and, if not, then you may ask if there may be things you can do to compromise or mitigate whatever concerns the spirits may have.

Ever fallen asleep on the grass before? Or under a tree, with your head resting on top of its gigantic roots like a hard pillow? Some trees like the blackboard tree - nicknamed the Devil's tree in certain countries - are said to be unlucky and that if you fall asleep beneath them, you may be visited by the spirit of the tree. Spirits of the land and the fauna can talk to you through feelings, through flashes of intuition, or in dreams. There are some trees in Thailand where people would give offerings to and in turn, the spirit of the tree will visit them in dreams and give them prophecies that will bring them prosperity, such as information about where to find treasure or what lottery number to purchase. Dream incubation can be also used to communicate with nature spirits, if it is your intention to learn further magic from them.

Basic Recipes

As promised above, here is a list of herbs you can use, either boiling in water to make washes or infused in oil to make oils. The recipes here are collated from *Hoodoo Herbal: Folk Recipes for Conjure & Spellwork With Herbs, Houseplants, Roots, & Oils* whilst the corresponding psalms to consecrate the oil are taken from *The Charmers' Psalter*.

To make a herbal wash, simply add your roots and herbs to a pot of boiling water. Let them boil for a few minutes, then turn off the heat, cover the pot, and allow the mixture to steep until it cools. Once cooled, strain the liquid, and your wash is ready to use. Still, I recommend praying some psalms whilst you are using the washes to clean your house.

For oils, it is important to remember that herbs, roots, and oils are just raw ingredients until infused with intention through prayer. Prayer transforms them into a functional and powerful tool. Instead of hastily throwing something together, you can use a candle setup to enhance their potency. Dedicate at least five days to praying over your oil for optimal results. To empower your recipes, you can use a basic cross setup with tealights. Place one candle at the top, one at the bottom, one to the right, and one to the left, forming a cross. Put your oil in the center, then light the candles in the order you placed them. Say your prayer over the oil, infused with the herbs and roots, and repeat this process daily for at least five days to imbue it with energy and intention.

Money Oil

- Bayberry
- Magnetic sand
- Calamus root

Use psalm 85 or 72

Protection Oil

- Dragon's blood
- Devil's claw
- White mustard seed

Use psalm 25, 91, 7, or 57

Money Drawing Wash

- Shredded money
- Cinnamon
- Blue flag

Use psalm 85 or 72

Peaceful Home Wash

- Bloodroot
- Bay leaf
- Pinch of salt

Use psalm 144, 96 or 98

Blessing Wash

- Rosemary
- Sandalwood
- Marjoram

Use psalm 92 verses 12-15 or 122 8-9 or 128 1-2

Uncrossing Wash

- Frankincense
- Myrrh
- Angelica root

Use psalm 91

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