

On Offerings

Staying Onside With The Gods

By Keith Hackwood

Clerics, priests and shaman (and perhaps monks, paladins and any devout others) are generally required, as part of their practice, to make offerings to their gods. These may be simple, daily offerings (some flour or water, a specific prayer, a drop of their own blood etc) or part of an elaborate ritual (a seasonal festival or community event such as a wedding). They may be for a specific purpose (the healing of another, for a safe journey, pre-battle blessings) or be of a more general nature (as he is passing through a hamlet, the local villagers implore Yendras the Good to bless them all, along with their livestock and children). There may well also be consequences for failing to make offerings – illness and elemental or divine disfavour can certainly result. The following is a possible way to include thinking about offerings within game play.

The Purpose

Roll d6 to establish the basic intention of the offering in question:

- 1 to appease
- 2 to praise
- 3 to invoke
- 4 to pacify
- 5 to gratify
- 6 to thank

The Offerings

Offerings may be literal and substantial or visualised and symbolic, depending upon the context, nature and object of the offering (so a demon may well insist upon literal blood sacrifice, a chaotic deity may enjoy random improvisation in the offerings made, or a benign deity may be satisfied with the pure-mind visualised offerings of a follower). Offerings may take a certain form (hand or body gestures, or *mudras*; or a specific way of presenting to an altar; offering bowls may be needed, or perhaps all offerings are placed into a holy fire to be consumed) and certain places may also require offerings (making offerings to the spirits of a place may be considered polite, not doing so may raise the ire of said

incorporeal denizens – etiquette is all important!). Here is a selection of ideas for offering substances, to be used literally or in visualised form as the CK determines.

Roll d30

1. Music (could be specific, eg drumming, flute music, stringed instruments)
2. Voice (solo or in union)
3. Water for bathing/water for drinking
4. Urine
5. Alcohol
6. Flesh or fresh meat
7. Flowers
8. Perfume
9. Incense or scented smoke
10. Oils for the skin
11. Blood (could be highly specific depending upon the deity)
12. An object the worshipper has very strong desire for
13. Silk or other rich fabric
14. Pain and the sensation of physical suffering
15. Terror or abject despair
16. Grain (oats, barley, rye, corn, rice etc)
17. Flour (can be thrown aloft in handfuls, or formed into shaped representations or *tormas*)
18. Chocolate
19. The mind itself (once purified of distortions)
20. Semen
21. Faeces (perhaps of a specific animal or person)
22. Hair

23. Iron
24. Tobacco
25. Salt
26. Coloured sands or paints
27. Gold and/or gems (specific amounts may be required for specific purposes)
28. Exotic fruits or other foods
29. Milk and/or Honey (may be a specific kind of honey, to be requested for in certain manner)
30. Certain seeds and powders (mustard, sesame, saffron, resin etc)

Afterword

For some traditions the substance is all important, for others it can be imagined and offered. In some, the offering is meant as a means to pleasure the deity's senses, in others the substances are base materials to be transformed by the deity's power. Fit the offerings to the cultures of the places or the characters as required (so if barley is a staple in one area, it is likely that it will be used in offerings; as will very rare substances). As well as the cultural needs for offerings at certain times (seasonal, communal events, at birth and death, at harvest time etc) in a more general sense, the following phenomena in nature may also 'require' offerings (i.e. it may benefit characters to do so, or damage them not to):

A river or spring, estuary or confluence of waters

A mountain or mountain pass

A forest, or a particular tree within such a forest

The sun and moon(s)

The sea or ocean

The first flowers of spring

A lake or loch or fjord

A specific large rock outcropping in a field or meadow

Weather events (first blizzard of winter, a summer thunderstorm, extreme winds, desert dust storms etc)

Make your own connections as to what might represent an appropriate offering to such phenomena (e.g. rivers like chocolate as an offering substance, or plants tend to appreciate seeds and grains etc).

Finally, give some thought to the consequences of improper offerings (motivated 'wrongly' in the eyes of the elemental or deity) or of neglecting to make offerings at all. It is likely that such consequences will be more severe depending upon the person responsible (so worse for a formerly devout high priest than for a novice, worse for a novice than an ordinary layman etc) or the consequences may affect a whole community. The consequences may be specific (failure to mark the harvest may lead to poor crops; a river crossed but not propitiated may later 'cause' an accident in which the guilty monk loses all his books; illness may result from breaking vows and so on) but it should always be possible for characters to repair the damage (to take the hint!) – usually through some more elaborate and perhaps difficult to achieve offering ritual (which may require a type of quest to gather a specific ingredient or substance and prove worthiness).

Have fun!

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