

IN THEIR RITUALS and celebrations, many modern Pagans call upon and refer to four elements: fire, air, earth and water. These four elements are invoked by the use of special prayers, the use of coloured banners or cloths; decorations symbolising those elements; and by the use of tools or objects to signify those elements.

The *athame*, or black handled knife, is one of these items. It corresponds with either the element of fire, or the element of air and as such symbolises energy, intent, the intellect and the will. For this reason, it is considered by many Pagans to be the most important, and most personal of their tools.

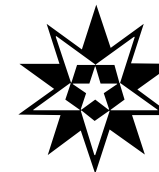
It must be understood that due to the diversity of belief (*for more information please see PAN Inc's "Pagan Paths: An Overview" pamphlet*) many Pagans do not use an athame or sacred knife at all, nor refer to four elements. Neither is acquiring a sacred knife a requirement to become a Pagan. Regardless, all Pagans understand the usage of ritual or sacred knives.

For those Pagans who do use an athame, it is a piece of equipment of supreme significance and importance which can be felt to represent the will or energy of its owner.

It is kept carefully, and other people are not encouraged to handle the athame of another person. Most Pagans would find little need to carry their athame away from their residence or ritual site, but if the two places are separate, then the athame may be transported between them, carefully packed. It has no commonplace use and is not used to cut objects, being a symbolic and ritual item. The athame does not bear an edge and is usually forged in such a way that it will not take an edge. As the athame does not need to be sharp, it can be made of almost any material, including metals, but also wood, bone, semi-precious stones and ceramic or glass.

Some Pagans use a second ritual knife called the *boline*, or white handled knife. This knife is used to cut items for ritual or ceremonial use, like herbs or candles, and so it bears an edge. The *boline* is thus made of hard metals, and may or may not have a curved, sickle like blade. If for some reason it must be transported, great care is taken to prevent it damaging any other items.

Neither the athame or *boline* are used to harm any person or living thing.



THE ATHAME IS USED TO:

- Direct energy
- Symbolise its owner
- Symbolise intent or will
- Delineate sacred space
- Bless food and drink
- Indicate objects

IT IS NEVER USED TO:

- Hurt or threaten another person
- Harm or butcher animals
- Cut any object at all

THE BOLINE IS USED TO:

- Prepare items used in ceremony
- Cut ribbons or threads
- Cut herbs

IT IS NEVER USED TO:

- Hurt or threaten another person
- Harm or butcher animals
- Cut everyday items



The Black Handled Knife

Athame

ATH-a-may



The White Handled Knife

Boline

BOLL-een



To join PAN Inc or for more information

Email: ***info@paganawareness.net.au***

Write to: ***PO Box 1062
North Sydney NSW 2060***

An annual membership of \$40 Single (GST Inc) or \$30 Concession. brings many benefits, including discounts at participating retailers, our regular 'Small Tapestry' publication listing Pagan events and gatherings across Australia, and regular updates on the legal and media work happening on behalf of the Pagan community. For more information, please post or email your details as follows:

Name: _____

Address: _____

State _____ Postcode: _____

Phone: _____

(Do not send money with this. A formal membership application will be sent to you via the post along with further information about PAN Inc)

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Paganism and Sacred Knives

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