

COMPANIONS OF THE STONE

Instructional Letter
First Degree Series - No. 6

Basic Techniques Of Natural Magic

Along with the specific disciplines of ritual, meditative and visionary work which have become part of the Western esoteric tradition down through the years, there is a body of lore having to do with what was once called "natural magic" -- that is, with the magical effects of physical objects and substances. The focus on personal transformation which has dominated magical thought over the last hundred years has left much of this lore all but unused in Cabalistic and Hermetic circles, although much of it still survives in the various pagan revival movements of the present day.

The sheer volume of this lore makes it impossible to present it in any systematic way here -- a fair-sized book might well be inadequate to the task -- but some basic perspectives and a few useful techniques can be provided for the use of Companions of the First Degree, and further lore will be a part of the training for higher grades of our Order.

Two primary factors come together to shape the traditions of natural magic. On the one hand, there is the role of symbolism -- what older magical philosophy called the Law of Sympathy. This phrase (fortunately!) has nothing to do with "sympathy" in the usual modern sense of the word. The core idea of the Law of Sympathy is that all material things are the manifestations of particular patterns of meaning, which have their origins at the highest level of being and operate all the way along the spectrum separating (and uniting) spirit and matter. Thus frankincense, for example, represents one material form of a meaning which also takes shape as the Sun among planets, gold among metals, and the intelligence Nakhiel among a particular class of spirits. Frankincense thus participates in the energy of these other things, and by burning frankincense in a ritual, some of that sunlike energy can be brought to bear on the work at hand.

These patterns of meaning and energy, and their expressions in matter, form the basis for much of the lore of natural magic, and much can be learned on the subject from old books of herbs, stones and the like. There is another side of natural magic, however, which relies not on these but on the context through which they work -- a context made up of what magicians, borrowing a discarded term from physics, often call ether.

Ether is the basic substance of life, and the matrix of all physical form; subtle and incorporeal, it can nonetheless be felt directly by most people. The standard way to demonstrate this is to rub the hands vigorously together for a minute or two, then

shake them about to loosen as much tension as possible. Once this is done, cup them before you, as though carrying a ball a foot or so in diameter. Move them very slightly toward and away from each other, paying attention to the sensations as you do so. Most people begin to feel the faint resisting pressure of the ether within a few minutes.

In many ways, as this demonstration might suggest, ether acts like a physical substance; it sticks, flows, concentrates, disperses. Doing any of these things affects the way magical forces can manifest themselves in it, sometimes powerfully. In many kinds of magical working, it can be useful to arrange such effects through natural magic, thus freeing up attention for other aspects of the work.

On a less overtly magical level, the ether in a particular area or object tends to take on the emotional tone of people or events that contact it, and can hold onto emotions and energies to a surprising degree. (This is probably the most common source of hauntings and similar events, and explains why most "ghosts" behave like recordings rather than conscious beings.) These effects, which can be highly disruptive at times, can be dealt with by ritual work -- but they can also be dispelled by the use of natural magic, and in many circumstances this latter method is the most convenient.

Some Practical Techniques

a) Frankincense as a solar influence

For most ordinary magical uses, frankincense is the standard incense. As mentioned above, it shares the same meaning and energies as the Sun, and solar forces -- with their life-giving, balancing and purifying qualities -- are of central importance in magical work. It can be useful simply to burn some when troubles oppress, or when one is in need of centering, and it should always be used for the Ritual of the Rose Cross and similar workings.

b) Asafoetida as a banishing incense

Asafoetida is a herb sharing energies with Saturn, the cold, distant planet of limitation and silence. When burnt as an incense, there is no more effective tool in Western natural magic for driving away spirits and energies that are hostile to the magician. On the other hand, it stinks unspeakably, and will strip the energies from consecrated working tools, so its uses in ordinary magical ritual are limited. A sealed glass bottle of asafoetida is a good thing to have in the circle when evoking spirits, performing exorcisms, or doing other relatively high-risk magical operations, and it can also be used as a kind of etheric "bug-bomb" to cleanse a place where the ether has been charged by murder, destructive magical workings, or the like. Just remember to air the room thoroughly afterwards!

c) Iron blades as banishing tools

The use of iron in magic draws on both sides of the natural magic tradition; iron participates in the same energy as the powerful and warlike planet Mars, while at the same time all electrically conductive metals tend to discharge etheric energy on contact, especially if sharpened. Iron (or its carbon alloy, steel) is thus the preferred material for magical swords, daggers, and similar devices. These will, in effect, "short out" patterns of etheric force.

d) Crystals as etheric condensers

Most mineral crystals, by contrast, have the useful ability to hold a charge of ether for an extended period. (This rather simple effect is the basis for all the crystallomania current in "New Age" circles.) It is possible to deliberately charge crystals for various purposes, using ether mobilized by the breath. On a more basic level, though, common salt (which is as good a crystal as any) can be used as an "etheric vacuum cleaner" to soak up unwanted etheric patterns. For example, when moving into a new residence or cleansing a space, scatter salt on the floor, leave it there undisturbed for a few hours, and then sweep it up and flush it down the toilet. (This last point relies on the etheric effects of water, which will be covered below.) Another way to use salt is to keep a small dish of it uncovered in the room where you sleep, or in any place where unpleasant emotions tend to be focused. This should be changed at intervals, and the old salt flushed or poured into running water.

e) A protective amulet

The combination of iron and salt empowers one of the classic protective amulets in Western natural magic: a small red bag, worn around the neck on a red cord, which contains rock salt and a bright bent nail. When worn, it rests above the center of the chest. Any current of etheric force sent against the wearer will discharge against the nail; the salt is there to absorb the energy of the discharge and keep it from passing into the etheric body of the wearer. Such an amulet can usefully be worn any time one must deal with unpleasant spaces or overbearing people, since these experiences very often have an etheric component.

f) Water, sunlight and acids as etheric erasers

Among the virtues of fresh running water and sunlight is that they will erase etheric patterns. (This is, among other things, why ghosts never cross running water or appear in daylight.) An object charged with ether that is left under running water or in sunlight will lose its charge quickly; either of these thus offers an effective way to cleanse and purify items. The colder the water, the more effectively it strips away etheric charges, while the sunlight will lose much of its strength if it passes

through glass. Another set of effective erasers are acids; a bowl of vinegar left on the mantelpiece to evaporate will blank out etheric patterns in the air quite effectively, putting an end to a haunting or to many kinds of magical attack. (Stronger acids will do this more powerfully, but should always be diluted to cut down on the risk of accidents.)

g) Silk and linen as etheric insulators

Traditionally, consecrated working tools, talismans and the like are always wrapped in silk or linen to help keep their etheric charge at full intensity, and to keep outside energies from influencing them. Such wrappers will be required for the working tools of the four elemental Grades and the Second Degree, but not that of the First Degree.