

THE MAGIC OF NEED

by Phil Hine

There is a difference, albeit a subtle one, between 'doing magic' as part of a development programme or to test an idea, a ritual, and the magic which arises out of need—that which wells forth from circumstance. Over the years, I have seen a vast difference in terms of both the event, and the effects. This is not to say that the one is somehow 'better' than the other. Constructed rites based on a raw idea can spin the celebrants off in surprising directions. However, for the moment, I want to concentrate on the magic of need.

Need may be your own inner drive, or it may arise from circumstances around you. What is important, I feel, is that the need 'fires you up'—it engages you both emotionally and intellectually, so that you 'have' to do something about it. Magic is often the final recourse to action when all other roads are closed off or have proved to be dead ends. When crisis beckons, one often doesn't have time to sit down and plan thoroughly a nice, neat ritual. Acting quickly, while the moment is hot, is more important.

The Sausage Curse

Some years ago, I learnt a powerful lesson in the sorcery of *need* by watching an adept of the art at work. I was visiting the High Priestess of a local witch coven. Whilst idly glancing through the evening paper, she came across a report of a rapist prowling in the district. She shot up out of the chair, shut up everyone else in the room with an icy glance, and, on reaching the dining table, cleared a space on it by simply sweeping everything onto the floor with a mighty crash. She placed an indenti-kit picture of the rapist from the paper in the centre of the table, grabbed a sausage from the fridge, and, after furiously rummaging in her sewing box, proceeded to methodically drive needles into the sausage, muttering furiously under her breath. The atmosphere in the room was electric. After some minutes, she stalked out of the room and took the sausage into the back garden. On her return, she smiled brightly at the cowering men in the room, and announced "I think a cup of

tea would be nice, don't you?" She offered no explanation or justification for her actions, and never alluded to it afterwards. A week later, the rapist was caught, sentenced and incarcerated.

It was only years later that I began to appreciate the power of this woman. She didn't dither around, nor did she worry about the ethics, morality, or whether or not she had the 'right' to act in this way. Nor did she bother with any of the elaborate procedures of ritual magic. By her glance, and her violent clearing of the table, she created a charged atmosphere that rivalled anything I had experienced in more formal magical surroundings.

This is the sort of thing that I am attempting to discuss. It's difficult, I find, to do this in the abstract, so this discourse will, of necessity, be punctuated by anecdotes.

Not only is the magic which arises from need practically useful (in terms of resolution), it is a highly valuable experience for many other reasons. Firstly, *doing* the magic of need shows you just what you are capable of when necessity looms before you. Necessity is also very useful in forcing back your personal boundaries—both in terms of what you think you know, what you can do, and, perhaps equally important—what magic can do.

A Night Visitation

My early years of magical practice were much influenced by a psychological understanding of what magic was all about. Studying for a psychology degree and exploring the symbolism of the qabalah in a very intellectual way was my starting point. One of my first 'real' magical experiences did a lot to blow away—in one instant—some of the boundaries I had built up in my head concerning magical work. I had been meditating on the Tattvic square of Earth. One night I awoke to a sense of overwhelming oppression. The room was filled with a red mist. It felt like someone had dumped a suitcase full of rocks on the bed. I couldn't move. I was terrified. Didn't know what was happening or what to do. Nothing 'ordinary' seemed to work. Eventually, I visualized the

banishing pentagram of earth, pushing it forcefully into the space above me. It wasn't hard to visualize with eyes closed, 'cos I certainly didn't want to open my eyes! But the banishing pentagram worked. All the sensations—pressure, oppression, etc., lifted, and I sank into a grateful sleep.

This experience left me in a state of shock for a couple of days. What I feel is important here, is not so much that it happened, but it showed me all too clearly that magic has a habit of surprising you, just when you think you've got it 'sorted'. I'd been thinking about magic only in terms of psychology. Suddenly I had an experience which I couldn't fit into my categories of 'explanation'—it 'moved the goalposts' of what I thought magic was about.

In consequence, this and other experiences have led me to consider how the workings of magic are put across in books. Unless one is fortunate enough to make the acquaintance of other magicians (it took me five years to meet other 'experienced' magicians) at an early stage in one's development, most of us have to learn from books. Therein hangs the problem. There is only so much you can put across in a book. Many of the magical 'beginner's' books are little more than 'cookbooks' of spells, or texts heavily influenced by modern psychology. Some authors seem to be keen to give the impression that magic is easy, and that if you follow their prescriptions 'correctly' you shouldn't have any untoward experiences. I have found, however, that 'untoward experiences' are an essential feature of magical development. I have certainly learnt more about magic (& life in general) during those periods when things have become seriously weird!

This is surely no news to the experienced magician—what I am trying to do here is get at that 'hidden face' of magic, some of the weird shit that goes down, which doesn't tend to get written up for books and articles.

Another point about the magic of need is that it forces you to think on your feet. In such moments, I find, you really get to grips between what you think you know, and what you actually do know. Again, this is something that the 'how to' books can't really prepare you for. Also, a great many magical books are 'dated' when it comes to the needs of this latter end of the twentieth century. In the Lesser Key of Solomon, for instance, there are demons who specialize in divining the fate of kings, which is all very well, but you won't find

any demons whose provenance relates to debugging a COBOL program or finding lost contact lenses. The myriad books on healing through crystals are unlikely to be of much help when your partner starts to recover buried memories of sexual abuse by a relative.

It's all too easy to get into a mindset where one (unconsciously perhaps) makes a division between one's magical activity, and one's day-to-day life. We might think nothing of invoking a god for 'magical inspiration', but might never consider invoking a god for help in sorting out the bank overdraft. Equally, it's all too common for people to turn to their tarot cards or runes to help sort out a dilemma, when the 'real world answers' are staring them in the face. Related to this latter is the issue of how seriously we are prepared to take the results of divinations. It's very common for people to ignore a divination message that they don't want to hear, in the same way that we might ignore 'good advice' from a well-meaning friend.

One of the problems of working from necessity is that it can become addictive—particularly if you take a great deal of interest in the problems of those around you. Some alternative healers I have met seem to be 'addicted' to healing in a similar fashion. Placing too much emphasis on working on behalf of other people can leave you ignoring your own problems. Moreover, the ego-identification of 'being able to sort other people out' can result in a blindness to the subtleties of a situation. As I remarked in *Condensed Chaos* (New Falcon Publications, 1995), over-confidence in a situation can be as problematic as lack of confidence. A case in point is that of a person I knew slightly once approached me to help him with a 'magical battle' against a 'black magician' who had lured his girlfriend away from him using 'dark forces'. Oh how some occultists do love the melodramatic! Now, had I taken him at his word, I would have simply fired up a search-and-destroy servitor and sent it off. Being somewhat more prudent by this time, I looked into the matter for myself and discovered another angle on the story that the lady in question had grown sick of this 'White Magician's' pompous posturing, and quit him for another, who was more charming, & less concerned with saving the universe and crossing the abyss before breakfast. Naturally though, the White Magician's ego couldn't accept anything so 'normal' and commonplace, so the whole thing became

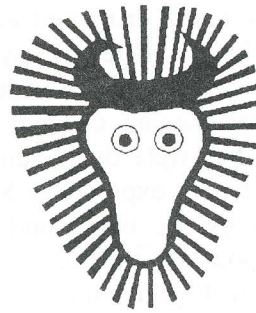
a magical battle between Good and Evil.

If you are going to intervene in someone else's situation, I cannot stress too highly the prudent approach and the importance of (a) gathering information—through tarot, familiars to the social grapevine, and (b), checking out your own motivation for getting involved in the first place. What's important here—is it helping out a close friend, boosting your image as the local mage (nothing wrong with this, providing you're aware of it), testing out a new magical technique, or what? Situational analysis techniques (again discussed in the New Falcon edn of *Condensed Chaos*) can be helpful here.

One of the most subtle issues relating to interventions on the behalf of others is that of ethics. In the early days of Chaos Magic's arrival on the UK magical scene, there was much worrying done in print by magicians of other persuasions about the perceived 'lack of ethics' implied in the statement "Nothing is true, Everything is permitted." The implied criticism was that 'chaos magicians' would become immoral monsters capable of just about *anything*, without some stated code of magical ethics to follow. For me, a cornerstone of magical work is that one's sense of ethics *grows from within*. Questions of ethics are always going to be more complex than the often trite 'codes of practice' that the various pagan and magical denominations trot out from time to time. Especially insidious is the way that magicians can 'bend their ethics' to cover behaviour which otherwise would not be acceptable. A rather ludicrous example is a qabalist of my acquaintance who has apparently convinced his wife that due to his 'religion', he cannot refuse any woman who makes a pass at him. Thus he cannot avoid sleeping with any woman who shows more than a passing interest in him. On a 'darker' note, cursing is pretty definitely seen as 'Black Magick', except of course when you can justify your reasons for doing it like the Wiccans who once attempted to magically attack me because I was plugging 'the Left?Hand Way' in *Pagan News* magazine. I'm not being melodramatic here. I (or rather my partner) detected the attack as it was occurring and we countered it successfully (itself a good example of doing magic out of necessity—responding to a 'live' situation), and some weeks later, I heard through the grapevine that a Wiccan in Bradford (I was in Leeds at the time) had been bragging about

'sending a Manitou' to deal with me. Yeah, right.

Repelling a magical attack is in itself a very good example of the kind of magic I am discussing. Now people saying they've been 'cursed' is common on the magical scene. In some circles it's almost a qualification of 'status' that, at one time of another, that one has been magically attacked (usually by anonymous 'black magicians'). It's much rarer to meet people who can say, "Well someone tried to have a go at me, but I caught them at it and stopped them". Most techniques of



magical defence are simply 'passive' in that they help you feel better, but they don't actually do much to help you 'confirm' the reality of the situation. I once made the mistake of lending a friend Dion Fortune's classic *Psychic Self-Defence*, with the result that he began to interpret every event possible (flickering lights, a poster falling off his wall) as evidence of 'attack'. The next anecdote I'm going to trot out is not only a good example of 'hands-on' response to 'magical intrusion' but is also an example of serious weirdness!

In 1984 I moved to York, in order to train as an Occupational Therapist. I thought of this as a time to have a 'rest' from magic and get into serious study. Famous last words! It didn't take me long to meet a woman on the same course who professed to have an interest in 'witchcraft'. At this time, I was in a Wiccan coven based in the North-West of England. One morning, I woke up to find myself really depressed—that "nothing's-worth-bothering-with-anymore" sort of depression. The thing was, I couldn't work out *why*—i.e. I didn't really have anything to be depressed about—but I felt literally 'drained' of energy. That evening, I was lying down generally ignoring everything, when the phone rang. It was the High Priestess of the coven. "I've been trying to reach you all day," she said, "don't you know you're under magical attack?" When I admitted that no, I didn't know, she said

“Well you are, and here’s what you will do about it.” She advised me to cast a circle around the bed, and, instead of going to sleep, to ‘hover’ in a light trance on the edge of sleep, and to look out for any ‘things’ appearing. So, somewhat bemused, I followed this advice. Lo and behold, I saw this ‘thing’ like a cross between a bat and a cat, materialize on the edge of my bed. Following the priestesses’ advice, I attempted to focus on the creature, and get a sense of ‘who’ was behind it. What I got from this was a hazy picture of the ‘witchcraft’ woman on my course. Now Kathy (the HPs) had pretty much drummed into me the sage advice that you have to take any psychic experience which involves other people with a pinch of salt—unless, that is, you can get a confirmation from them that they were doing something that can account for your own experience. So the next day, I took the bull by the horns and confronted the witch-woman about my experience. “I spotted your familiar last night. If you send it again, I’ll ‘kill’ it, which’ll hurt you, so I’d advise you not to do it again.”

“Oh,” said witch-woman, smiling, “I didn’t think you were advanced enough to spot it.” Now all that was weird enough, but what I really found freaky was that Kathy somehow knew what was going on, even at a distance of well over a hundred miles!

The final aspect of ‘the magic of need’ that I want to deal with is the personal crisis. A couple of years ago (1995) I had reached a ‘turning point’ in my magical direction, as it were. I didn’t know quite what was happening, but I knew I wasn’t happy in my current situation. The stress of trying to resolve the issue was winding me up something rotten. The situation was complicated by feelings of both personal, organizational and business-related loyalties which I felt would make it difficult to make ‘a clean break.’ This all peaked up one evening at a Seminar. Feeling sick and twisted up inside, I walked across the venue’s grounds and found a tree well away from the main building, where a riotous party was going on. Sitting down, I began an impromptu puja and invoked ‘Pasupati’, the tantric deity who is the herdsman, one of whose functions is to remove ‘that which binds’. I’d never worked with this god before, but emotional intensity (born out of overwhelming need) enabled me to achieve the appropriate state of bhakti, and I was stunned by a vision of Pasupati, blazing with white light, staring back at me. In retrospect, it was

the white-hot intensity of this moment which allowed me to ‘let go’ of the bindings that I felt entangled in. The effect wasn’t immediate, of course, but that, for me, marked the change-point.

This sort of experience is akin to the initiatory cycle—the ‘zero point’ where you cannot sink any lower, and so achieve a measure of calm resolve. A comment made by Lionel Snell comes to mind, that the darkest moments of depression often presage the heights of future magical flight. We tend to learn the wisdom of this through hard experience, but again, it’s something which tends to be omitted from magical textbooks.



You cannot set prescriptions for how to deal with this sort of thing. After all, it’s going to be different for each person, but I do find that reassurance from another magician is highly valuable—the ever-present spectre of madness dogs most of us from time to time, so a measure of understanding from a colleague is often very helpful. This sort of situation is one of the strongest arguments for having some kind of social contact with other magicians, if only to talk through feelings & situations which one finds difficult. There is magic enough in reaching out to another person, and feeling their warmth and support for you flowing back.

This essay is taken from the on-line collection “Permutations” (in Acrobat format) which can be found on the IOT Americas Website - <http://www.execpc.com/discord/iot/iot.htm>

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