

Quitting the Night

An Article on the Path of the Modern Magician

By FP

Of all the spiritual disciplines open to individuals, that of the Magician appears the most inaccessible and incomprehensible. The very word brings to mind obscure grimoires, magical circles, strange rites and at worst the Dennis Wheatley archetype of the sinister Black Magician. The "occult" is generally frowned upon as having very little to do with the healing of individuals or society, and has been promulgated in the media as some seedy den of iniquity. Nothing could be further from the truth, and nothing can encapsulate the sheer joyful diversity and unrelenting demands of that which is for good reason known as the Magnum Opus; The Great Work. Indeed, the word "magic" is derived from the Greek word μαγειν, magein, which referred to the Priests of Zoroaster in ancient Persia, and probably meant "wise one" or simply, "priest". It is the purpose of this article to provide a more reasonable and balanced perspective, and to focus on the goal and method of the real Magician as opposed to those one encounters purely through the lurid eyes of the tabloids and sensationalist television.

To begin at the beginning, the history of magic is as diverse as could be imagined. It has been said that a history of the world would be a history of secret societies, and for this reason we cannot simply condemn those working this path as harmless cranks or dangerous charlatans. Many monarchs and presidents were influenced by such workers, one obvious example being John Dee, who in the middle 1500's claimed to speak with angels and was a serious student of all occult lore as well as being court advisor to Queen Elizabeth. Sir Christopher Wren was also a prominent freemason and student of hermetic lore, and Roger Bacon (1214-1294), to whom we owe many scientific advances, including early experiments with gunpowder, was an advanced occultist. However, to arrive at a definition of what the path of Magic is composed of is extremely difficult. Occultism has flourished, diminished, been reintegrated, redeveloped, passed down orally, deliberately obscured, deliberately promulgated, in some great labyrinth of information, some great tapestry woven from threads as diverse as Jewish mysticism to basic chemistry.

It is from this diversity that modern magic has developed, and the Magician is expected to concern himself with all forms of enquiry into our fundamental relationship with the Universe, be it through sociology or cosmology, football score figures or the pastoral symphony. One of the works of Magic, signified by alchemical doctrines, is in deciding which observations and events should be fed into the Inner Crucible or Athanor that is the individual awareness for the healing work to take place. One of the systems utilised to accomplish this act is that of Kabbalah, primarily the aspect of Kabbalah known as the Tree of Life. This diagram, most often composed of ten circles and twenty-two lines, or "paths", functions as the Magical Language, or a grand filing system of experience and ideas.

One of the foremost rules of the Magical Path is that of Thelema (Greek for will), first stated by Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430), utilised by Francois Rabelais (1494-1553) in "Gargantua and Pantagruel"¹, and popularised by the notorious occultist Aleister Crowley in the early 1900's. In Crowley's phraseology, this rule states "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law" and "Love is the law, love under will"². On first sight, a licence for anarchy and chaos - do whatever you want, is it? Well, not quite. As Colin Wilson³ has pointed out, the Magician sees the ills of society as stemming from the repression and misunderstanding of will, that is, individual direction. Thelema necessitates the practice of another magical dictum, "man, know thyself" in order to fully explore the potential we each hold, and then direction becomes obvious, and is aligned with the stochastic process of the Universe, be it called Tao, or Ma'at, or the Grand Plan. Crowley noted in his diaries that Thelema demanded unrelenting discipline rather than unmitigated licence and it is of note that the

¹ Rabelais, F., "Gargantua & Pantagruel", Chap.57, Penguin (1978)

² Crowley, A., "Magick In Theory and Practice", RKP (1985)

³ Wilson, C., "Aleister Crowley", Pgs. 165-168, Aquarian (1987)

whole school of Psychosynthesis⁴, founded by Roberto Assagioli, is based on this rediscovery of Will as the active function of the whole psyche.

The techniques that the magician uses are again an eclectic mix of practices and forms of behaviour. Yet these too may be attributed to relevant locations on the Tree of Life to provide a general syllabus of spiritual development. It is difficult to do any internal work in awareness unless one has learnt an appropriate, undistracting relationship with the body, and hence physical exercise or Hatha Yoga are practised in the first grades. Then may follow a critical psychological examination, using techniques as varied as dream control to shamanism, astrology or ceremonial evocations. This phase is known in Alchemy as solution, and is a bitter toil as one's unquestioned and blind notions of oneself (ego identity) are unravelled and forced out by the clearer light of detached awareness. Later grades of the work involve larger shifts of worldview and resultant changes in behaviour, and the higher grades deal with the mystical experience directly, once the rest of the psyche has been both harmonised and stabilised to receive such insight.

This process is termed "initiation", and can be modelled in many ways, from the ten stages of Kabbalah to the fifteen stages of Alchemy. It is a tradition rooted in antiquity, and common to most mystical societies. In ancient Egypt, the "Book of the Dead", more properly translated as the "book of coming forth by day", detailed the stages that the soul undergoes in its purification and return to the source, in Tibet, the Bardo Thodol bears similar responsibilities. The Mithraic mystery religion had a series of seven initiations and grades through which a candidate passed as he progressed in understanding and devotion. Each group agreed that the process was generally similar for all who passed through it, albeit that the symptoms, lessons and barriers would be unique to each individual's psyche and background. The Mystery religions, such as the Eleusian and Orphic traditions followed similar systems and provide many of the sources for modern occultism, be it through Freemasonry or pagan revivals. The very word, "mystery", derives from the Greek, μυσεν, muein, meaning "to shut the mouth", and μυστησ, mustes, "an initiate". It is impossible to speak of initiation precisely because it takes place at the level of awareness prior to thought and feeling, and the other layers of the ego process that compose the personality.

The three levels of work that a Magician performs may be viewed as transformation, transubstantiation, and transcendence. All forms of work, whether exoteric or esoteric, basically examine our relationship with the Universe. For example, Science examines the principles constraining events around us, Psychology the principles within us. Philosophy examines our relationship with the world of concepts, and Art with the world of perception. Esoteric work such as religion and magic, on the other hand, focuses on what might be beneath or beyond all these realms.

The work of transformation rearranges the form of life around us, and thus includes all actions. However, the "substance" of form can be changed, transubstantiated, within the awareness of the participant, and this is the act of Magic, causing that change to occur in conformity with will. As an example, automatically making tea because one is thirsty is an act of transformation. Making the tea with the awareness that it is an act required to sustain the body as the body is required to fulfil one's chosen goals is an act of Magic. The difference is not perceptible to those watching the event, as it takes place in the consciousness of the individual, and this is what initiation alters. The work of transcendence takes this a step further by seeking to recognise the state of awareness with the relationship itself, rather than the event at any level.

Most modern magic falls into a number of camps, which range across a large diversity of theory and practice. A large number of occultists are independent researchers, and are probably unique as a group as encapsulating so many otherwise varied backgrounds, ages, gender, social status and so forth. Recent surveys have demonstrated that no one cultural background generates magicians, although many work in areas of teaching, social work and new technology⁵. Other societies define broad bands of approach, but again, members of the same group may vary considerably in belief and behaviour. The Ordo Templi Orientis (of which there are a number of versions) promulgates the work of

⁴ Assagioli, R. "Psychosynthesis", Turnstone (1975)

⁵ Adler, M., "Drawing Down the Moon", Beacon Press (1979)

Thelema, and groups like the Society of Inner Light follow a mixed tradition involving Kabbalah and Inner Work such as visualisation ("pathworking" when performed with the Tree of Life as a guide). Specialised groups exist, such as the International Order of Kabbalists, the Pagan Network, Fellowship of Isis, and so forth, each focusing on a particular area of occult reality.

The majority of Magicians also bear a social responsibility, in that as identity becomes more comprehensive, the meaning of the biblical injunction to "Love thy neighbour as thyself" (Lev.19.18) becomes clearer. Many occult groups have been instigated with social reform in mind. The infamous Bavarian Illuminati were dedicated to the "enlightenment of humanity", and groups such as the Theosophical Society founded by Blavatsky and Olcott in 1875 had similar ideals. Modern Magicians see the trend of consciousness developing from our current individual awareness to that of a planetary awareness, an idea prevalent in the works of the Christian author Teilhard de Chardin⁶, and recent scientific authors such as James Lovelock and Gregory Stock, author of "MetaMan". In Magic, a system similar to that of the Zodiacal ages is utilised, but mapped in terms of the Egyptian Gods. It is seen that we are currently in an aeon of Horus, symbolising self-individuation and strife, but running parallel to this is the aeon of Ma'at, signifying Truth, Balance and Justice (and global awareness). One of the works of the magician is to synthesise these "currents" of evolution within himself, to achieve a transpersonal perspective of himself and the Universe of which he is part.

To the Magician, the goal of initiation, and all other systems purporting to better the lot of humanity, is the grade of Ipsissimus, "his very own self". That is, a complete, constant, consistent and comprehensive recognition of identity as the ground of being, or God. This is of course the goal of most spiritual paths, and the mystical traditions within religion, which is merely the outside husk. The process is a constant loss of attachments and beliefs, and therefore it often proves to be a path prone to error and wild goosechases, as at some points the path is so abstract as to have no form, or so empty as to have no signpost. In these bleak periods, the Magician must hold to the oath he first states - in whatever way - when he embarks on this path; "I desire to quit the Night and Seek the Day".

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⁶ de Chardin, T. "Man's Place in Nature", Fontana (1971)