

MEZLIM

Practical Magick for the New Aeon

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DEATH AND TRANSFORMATION
THE SEASON OF CHANGE

MEZLIM

STAFF

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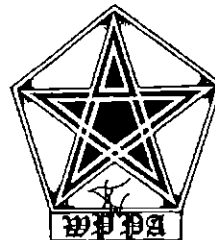
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EDITOR'S FORUM

One of the primary foci of the Western Magickal Tradition is the survival of the consciousness of the Magus after the death of His body. This can be expressed in any number of ways, but essentially it comes down to the desire for a continuity of self awareness after physical death.

This aim is sought after in any number of diverse ways. Strengthening of the etheric body, journeying into the Beyond, consulting with the previously incarnate and astral voyaging are all ways to become more comfortable in that realm we seem to enter immediately after leaving our physical form behind.

The hope is that, by becoming comfortable in this other state of consciousness, that the transition of death will be somewhat less of a traumatic shock, and that we will be able to retain a sense of "who we are" in this life, and merge painlessly into whatever it was that we were before this life.

There are, of course, those who say that it is time for us to evolve beyond the necessity of physical death, and that physical immortality is just around the corner. But even this argument seems to arise from the real fear we have of experiencing the not-so-great adventure of disincorporation.

All ideals aside, it is only natural to fear the unknown, and to try to define it and explain it until it becomes the "known." This is the process by which we confuse the map with the territory. We can know the model which we create to explain the

experience, but we can only Know the experience itself through direct participation. Thus, for all the theories we have about what happens to us after death, we still Know nothing until we experience the thing itself.

Any - or all - of these theories may be proven true by experience. I am certainly open to the idea that we may survive the death of our physical bodies, or even that we may learn to regenerate our bodies at Will. I have traveled into the World Beyond and glimpsed myself in previous lifetimes, but the fear remains. Perhaps it is the fear of loss, of separation; the fear of letting go of the illusion of physicality. But I think that, even in the most practiced of us, there is a bit of the fear that there is nothing lurking beyond the gate of death except for fertile earth and the memories we leave behind in the minds of those who knew us.

And so, in spite of all the ancient lore we've studied, we may also need to learn to live each day by balancing this fear with the lust for this life that may end at any time; and an appreciation for those we love, who may be taken from us forever. Through accepting that there may be nothing beyond this moment, we may even learn to find greater joy in this moment. Then, when the time comes to leave, we will at least know that we have lived to the fullest.

LaChiam!



Prepare to Die

A How-To Guide

by Oz

“Death,” says Alice Bailey, “if we could but realize it, is one of our most practiced activities. We have died many times, and shall die again.”(1) The law of balance in the universe dictates that for every force an equally opposite one must exist. Without death there can be no life. Each life must be preceded by death. Each death is followed by birth. Each waking day is followed by sleep, in which we enter a world of another consciousness, just as we will do at the time of physical death. In this way, we die again and again, just as we die before each new incarnation of our soul. Each rebirth to a new level of consciousness, to a new level of mastery, attainment, or awareness, is preceded by a dying to our old self. Each initiation is a symbolic enactment of death and rebirth. Death is transformation, change, and growth. It is the inevitable process by which life has meaning, for without death all would be still and stagnant. In order to live, we must learn how to die. On the magickal path, we accept and study death as the catalyst for all evolution.

As Pagans, Occultists and Magickians, we have often been guilty of ignoring, as a whole, this all-important transition in our lives. We who specialize in trans-plane experience and inter-dimensional realities have seen in this age everything from inter-species communication to electronic manipulation of consciousness. Yet our focus as a sub-culture remains largely on our own physical lives. Perhaps we are still reacting to the political Christian emphasis on denial of the earthly life in favor of heavenly rewards in the afterlife. Pagans

and Wiccans especially have rightly championed the celebration of the joys and pleasures of the right-here and right-now. Yet, despite the fact that that many of us claim our primary focus is the development of our spiritual being-ness, we have done little to prepare ourselves for that moment when we will actually BECOME spiritual (i.e., disincarnate) entities. Our own physical death may be the very most important moment in our living and waking lives. It deserves at least as much forethought and preparation as any other initiation we undertake.

Death can be a conscious act.

If we begin to explore the approach to death consciously, we find a variety of enlightened attitudes to emulate. Many great spiritual teachers, including Jesus, have suggested we celebrate the coming of death and mourn the physical birth. “For birth establishes the soul in the true prison, and physical death is the only first step towards liberation,” writes Bailey. (2) She states that once a person identifies with the soul rather than the form, that death will become a willing sacrifice, even an act of will and intent. Will. Intent. The key words of the Magickian. Death can be a conscious act.

In one of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross’s books, an essay by Murray L. Trelease, a priest to Alaskan villagers, tells of repeated experiences with Alaskan elders. He would be called in by an apparently healthy elder to perform a religious ceremony for the

family, and within hours the host or hostess would die. One community matriarch, Old Sarah, even bought and prepared the food for her own funeral. (3) Such intention towards death is often found among traditional peoples. Oglala Sioux warriors began each day with the mantra "Ho ha key", translated as "It's a good day to die." This affirmed and acknowledged death as integral to life. In both Hinduism and Buddhism, death is an ever-present and essential transformer which gives meaning to the actions of life. The Self and the Soul are not fixed, but are rather described more as a stream of consciousness which is a series of minute and constant fluctuations between death and life. (4) What we perceive as solid matter is mostly empty space, interspersed with infinitesimal particles of matter. Similarly, life could be understood as a series of psycho-physiological occasions against a background of death. This we "perceive" as "real life". But death is its literal foundation.

death is mostly a journey of the spirit.

Physical death can be a conscious or magickal choice, whether or not we determine the time or the place. It is a matter of both preparation and release, willingness and acceptance of the process. As Magickians, we know that any magickal operation is impeded by attachment. Buddha, Eris and Discordia all say, "make no plans", but the injunction is really against expectations. "The worker in white magic must hold himself free as much as he can from identifying himself with that which he has created or attempted to create."— including his own life. (5) Once we fully internalize that death is inevitable, and

decide to embrace its approach, we are ready to train ourselves for the experience. We are ready to become enabled to birth our own souls into the next existence.

Pain, I read it somewhere recently, is resistance to adapt to change. Death is associated with pain - both physical and emotional. In the past few decades, women have learned how to practice for childbirth in ways that will both alleviate pain and comfort the navigation through unfamiliar territory. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and others have brought great changes in support for the emotional approach to death for both the dying and their loved ones. Such practices are needed to redefine the death experience, but death is mostly a journey of the spirit. Relaxation, focus and therapy can be of great benefit, but for the awakened magickal person, much more is possible. One's own death can be seen as the greatest adventure into the unknown that you can take in this life.

Our own mythologies and practices are already replete with teachings about death. Every shamanic experience is a practice for death. Overcoming the fear of the terrifying vision-quest is probably much like overcoming the fear as one passes through one's own death. Osirus teaches us about death. He has passed through death and returns, bringing us the message of life that is eternal. Inanna and Persephone explore the Underworld. These are themes of all great schools and rites of all the ages, from the Eleusinian mysteries to a modern Wiccan initiation. But the mythologies are more than pretty metaphors. The Otherworld exists, and we have been there. We have stripped ourselves of layers while spiralling into the center of the Earth-Goddess's circle. We have lain in the sarcophagus with our hands crossed across our chests. We have beat the drum all

night, alone except for the stars. We invoke Hekate, the Queen of Death and Magick. We call to Hermes and Anubis, who guide the souls of the dead. We call to the Gods from beyond to guide us. We are, whether we know it or not, preparing ourselves to die.

Dolores Ashcroft-Nowicki, a mystery-school teacher, says that it is both the right and the privilege of an Initiate to cross over in full consciousness. Some Magickians might therefore wish to ride the experience for all it is worth. But what can we expect? Alice Bailey and her contact, the Tibetan Master Djwhal Khul, describe actual death. At a certain point, there comes a vibratory occurrence that stimulates the beginning of the separation of the etheric body from the physical body. The “pull” of the soul, desiring to free itself, creates a response in the central nervous system and its etheric counterpart, called the “nadis”. It is the separation of the “nadis”, like a sheath, from the physical regulator of consciousness, that initiates the process of death. What follows is a series of stages of withdrawal through the levels of awareness which may occur rapidly or by degrees, resulting in a re-coalescence of the life-force in a different plane of reality, beyond the mental, emotional, or astral. (6) Today’s literature is full of accounts of “near-death-experience”, or NDE. In phenomenal synchronicity, vast numbers of people describe a sensation of elation and freedom accompanied by a sense of body-less motion towards a brilliant white light. Dr. Rick Strassman is pioneering research work at the University of New Mexico Hospital in the role of the pineal gland at the time of death. The gland may release hallucinogenic chemicals into the body which catalyze the psychic and visionary experiences that precede human death. What we are able to understand of the time of death therefore is

that the human consciousness is taken through a series of predictable yet potentially disorienting transformations.

In a recent personal communication with Hekate, She spoke of doorways between this world and the next. Some were entry points in which certain souls who had attained a certain degree of “seeing” or realization were able to choose their birth points. These doorways were not accessible to all. Doorways of conscious choice also exist, She says, from our world into the next. “In one way, it could be said that everyone is born with the innate or inherent capacity to ‘know’ how to open this doorway for themselves and thus for others. In another way, it is also true that very few actually discover the fullness of the secret for or by themselves.” The teachings and realizations of the ways through these doorways exist, and it is time for them to be gathered and shared.

“it is both the right and the privilege of an Initiate to cross over in full consciousness.”

Some of the ways to prepare for death are intensely personal, for it is a journey of which it is said “only single tickets are sold.” Other ways enlist the assistance of friends and magickal associates, of spirit helpers, guides, Goddesses and Gods. All are ways to consider when developing one’s own preparation for the transformation. What follows here is a series of suggestions that may be adapted to begin exploring your own death, and perhaps the deaths of your magickal cohorts. These are good workings for covens, lodges, and magickal study groups, as well as for families and loving

partners. A Magickal person develops in a lifetime a range of skills and experiences designed to enhance and activate the process of evolution. These skills work with the personality, the mental and emotional self, the individual spirit, the higher self, and contacts on other planes. Meditation, trance work, the study of symbology, visualization, active imagination, ritual and ceremony, music, drumming, and dancing: all these and more may be employed to explore the individual approach to a conscious death. Certainly, the practices one has been trained in already will be the most useful, and suggestions given here may be adapted to utilize one's personal tools.

Students of the occult are often taught to use a particular meditation before going to sleep each night. Such a regular practice might also be used as part of the preparation for death. The Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram or the Rose Cross Ritual (available in many source books, such as Don Kraig's "Modern Magick") are two such possibilities. Any other relaxation that includes the creation of a safe circle or visualized safe protected space may be used. The LBR specifically sets up a protection and creates a state of mind of calmness and focus, especially with repeated practice. Enact or visualize this rite before sleep, then follow it with a meditation designed to explore the transition of the consciousness from one state to another. This exercise will train the mind to be relaxed and protected and may be used to facilitate the transition of the soul at death with an intentionally "safe" state of mind. The exercise will also provide the opportunity to prepare and train oneself to better cope with the many transitions and states of emotion and consciousness that may accompany the time of death. To use such a protection exercise to begin familiarizing oneself with the death process, one need

only pay attention to the shift in consciousness that occurs as one moves from the visualized safe circle into sleep, being sure to begin the process with an intention that it will be a learning experience. Repeated practice is required, and the memory of the experience is grounded by record-keeping in a journal. One may also use these practices to explore personal issues around death. At different times, fear, loss, loneliness, pain, disorientation, anger, denial and other personal reactions may be addressed - one at a time - as a point of the evening meditation. It is worth mentioning that none of us knows exactly when or how we will die. Death may come suddenly, even in an instant. We may find ourselves unable to be in conscious control for a variety of reasons. In such cases, actual preparations may not be able to be consciously-utilized, but the fact will remain that other levels of your consciousness have been trained and prepared. Some work may key in automatically, or may be stimulated by the assistance of magickal associates who know of your meditative preconditioning.

Another option is to create a ceremony for your own death and perform it now. This can be done privately, or with assistance. Design, prepare and set up a ritual circle in your favorite mode. Include tools and symbols of your most powerful personal magick. Let everything from the candle to the flowers to the God/desses being invoked be those that you would have if you had the presence of mind and foreknowledge to be able to do this for your actual time of death. You may include entreaties for your own soul's ease in passing, directions for your after-life journey, or sections from the Egyptian or Tibetan Books of the Dead. In "The New Book of the Dead", Dolores Ashcroft-Nowicki gives excellent modern versions of

magickal funeral rites. The Golden Dawn book contains a moving requiem ceremony. Create a Death Talisman or Death Shield for yourself. As you perform the ritual with full intent, emblazon it in your memory. When the time of death does come, you may call up this rite in your mind, or have with you a charged talisman or object from your rite, to make your passing a magickally sacred experience.

The pre-living of one's own death may not be a desirable experience for everyone.

The current practice of alchemical hypnosis may also be used to explore death. This is much like a new-age shamanic experience, in which one person guides another on a journey. Recorded or actual drumming may be used to set the proper state of consciousness. The leader talks the journeyer through a relaxation into a mild hypnosis, giving suggestions of both safety and comfort. She is verbally guided gradually to an imagined time in the future when physical death approaches. Specific questions are asked, to describe the physical setting, the emotions, the desires. If the working is recorded on tape it may then be used as a reference to design preparations for actual death. In my first experience with this technique, the man who took the journey described a beautiful scene with a group of friends holding hands around his bed. He was comfortably surrounded by freshpicked wildflowers. He saw and named specific stones placed on each of his chakras, and he explained each stone's purpose. During the experience, he was encouraged to deeply explore his feelings and to communicate what it is that he

wanted or wished he could have. He was encouraged not to proceed imaginistically into the actual death, but to remain in full touch with the state of approach to death. When he came out of the hypnotic state, he expressed such a feeling of contentment and peace with the prospect of his own death that he actually wept with joy. Other eyes in the room were not too dry, either.

New-Age shamanic techniques, specifically those that descend from the Michael Harner school, may also be adapted for preparation for death work. Harner and his students teach a method of using power animals as allies to journey to past lives and re-live the experiences of death. This and other past-life regression techniques may also be used to travel forward in illusory time to one's death in this life. While this may be an incredibly valuable practice for some willing explorers, let me give a strong word of caution here. Any guidance into such potentially emotionally charged states should be undertaken only if you have training in these techniques which includes safety and protection. The psychic states are as real as any other emotional states, and require both trust and skill for effectiveness without harm. The pre-living of one's own death may not be a desirable experience for everyone.

Another superior idea comes from the book "Rituals for Living and Dying". The authors describe an adaptation of a Native American practice of receiving your death chant. Originally, the chant for death was received from an elder, a dream, a meditation or a vision quest, and was used as an instant centering technique - something that could be used even in the speed that it takes to fall from a galloping horse. It provided a sense of serenity and power at the time of approaching death. A personal death chant may be obtained for

yourself by using a method of trance-dance, or a trance-led experience either to a spirit guide or helper, or by using a visualized energy merging. This last technique is given in the book, however many familiar magickal and shamanic practices will work just as well. Once obtained, the death chant should be frequently repeated, ideally as a part of one's meditative death preparations. Making it an intrinsic and responsive part of you psyche will bring it to the fore of the mind the instant death approaches. An example given in the book is simple, yet expresses a deep realization.

"This is a good day to die
The Sun will rise tomorrow
This is a good day to die
The River flows endlessly
This is a good day to die
I follow my bliss into the Earth."(7)

My favorite preparation for death is well-described by Dolores Ashcroft-Nowicki in her book "Highways of the Mind", and is further explored in "The New Book of the Dead". The pathworking is a guided visualization that sets up a place to which you will automatically travel at the time of your own death, even if death is unexpectedly sudden. It is created by repeated practice in advance. Instructions are given both for those inexperienced in such matters, and also for those already versed in magickal practices. It begins with a journey down an imaginary and distinctive approach. A country lane, a forest path, a stone highway leading to a pyramid, or any other byway may be visualized. The approach must lead to a gate, which is an important symbol of the dividing line between the worlds. In practicing the pathworking, the gate should always be opened with a key, left open during the pathworking, and locked securely after leaving. Only when the gate is passed

through for the last time should it be locked behind you, and in that case magickally sealed with a pentagram or other magickal symbol. The gate should be specific and clear in detail. Beyond the gate, you build, in your imagination, the place of your dreams. It may be a simple cottage, a mansion, a wizard's castle, a cloud behind pearly gates, or any other place that will serve as your resting place when you first depart from this life. It should be a place that you can believe in, that you can love, and in which you find comfort and safety. Journey to this place often enough to build it vividly and firmly in your imagination. You may begin by having someone lead you verbally, or by creating a tape recording which takes you there. Make your journey sometimes a part of the evening meditation. Spend your visits to this place decorating, exploring details, sounds, sensations, smells and colors. You may have loved ones waiting there for you who have already passed over. Dolores says that this is, for you, the place of the 42 Assessors who in Egyptian mythology pass judgement on the souls of the dead, for it is here that you will review and judge your own life before going on. It is here that you will meet those who will assist you in the next phase of the life of your soul. The building of this magickal pathworking is both an exploration and an act of conscious intent towards receiving and travelling your own death journey. "To Initiate and Student alike a working knowledge of the inner worlds is of vital importance. It must be mapped as far as possible and that can only be done on a personal level because it is your world and no one else's." To close each practice working, always exit through the gate, lock it securely, and hang the key in a specific and visible place where you will easily find it again the next time. Then return by the pathway of your approach before returning to your normal consciousness.(8)(9)

Most magickal folk already work with teachers from other planes, whether they be power animals, familiars, Goddesses & Gods, Holy Guardian Angels, or spirit guides. These can be our best resource in preparing to enter that next world. My own personal angel came to me when I was still a teenager, and being young and curious I had a million questions. I used to lie at night in a light trance and ask her to tell me what it was like in her world. I wanted to know everything - what inter-relationships and emotions were like "over there". What about travel and movement and time? Often she stopped in mid-explanation exasperated because there was no way to make me fully understand. Then she would allude vaguely to that time when I would be able to actually come to where she could show me. I began to look forward to my own death as a time when I could join her. (This, it is to be noted, is not a good thing to confide to a traditional psychotherapist). Such a connection with an ally on the other side helps to set up an understanding of your entry into that world. There are, within the pantheons of all races and all ages, spirits and high beings and teachers who have deliberately chosen to maintain a conscious communication link with this world. That link can serve as a valuable resource for magickal people who work on conscious preparation for death.

You can find a spirit ally that will assist you at the time of your actual death. During a deep meditation or a powerful evocatory or divinatory rite, establish a communication link. Call to your own personal guide or an appropriate deity, and ask if you may have the answers to three questions: 1. What is it that I need to learn to prepare myself for death? 2. What is it that I can do to help others around me prepare for death? 3. Who is the guide from the spirit realm whom I should call to me at

the time of my own death? ..

It may take more than one attempt to receive answers to all three of these questions. Persevere. If the first working is not successful, try again when you feel that the energies are with you. Be prepared to receive an answer that may not fit your expectations, and be prepared to accept the answers that you do receive. One of my own shamanic teachers, George Huaco, in referring to such questionings admonishes his students, "You must keep what you get. You must USE what you get." Do not ask lightly, and remember to honor the answers you receive. Once you have received an answer to the last question, include work with this spirit being in your other death preparation exercises. Visualize, invoke, and speak with this being regularly in your meditations and pathworkings. Such beings likely await all of us, but a little foreknowledge will empower our transformative journeys. Many have taken this journey before us, and their wisdom may be ours to share. They will share with us, and we must share with others.

The soul we are told, must return to the one who gave it...

Many of us fancy ourselves to be leaders in the new aeon. We gather everywhere in groups for spiritual growth and healing. In 1971, Alice Bailey saw that groups devoted to healing would be coming in the near future. She wrote: "If I were asked to say, what is the major task of (such groups)...I would say it is to prepare human beings for what we should regard as the restorative aspect of death, and thus give to that hitherto dreaded enemy of mankind a new

and happier significance. ...The result of this will be new attitudes to dying, and the inculcation of a happy expectancy, where that inevitable and most familiar event occurs.... The soul we are told, must return to the one who gave it... During the next cycle, ...death will become a normal and understood process—as normal as the process of birth, through evoking less pain and fear. This comment of mine is in the nature of a prophecy, and should be noted as such.”(10)

Footnotes:

1. PONDER ON THIS, Alice Bailey. Lucis Publishing Co., NY NY. 1971. p. 65.
2. *ibid.* p. 69.
3. DEATH, THE FINAL STAGE OF GROWTH, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross. Prentice Hall, NJ. 1975. pp. 33-35.
4. *ibid.* pp. 65-67.
5. see 1. p. 73.
6. see 1. pp. 70-73.
7. RITUALS FOR LIVING AND DYING, David Feinstein & Peg Elliott Mayo. Harper San Francisco, 1990. pp. 96-99.
8. HIGHWAYS OF THE MIND, Dolores Ashcroft-Nowicki. Aquarian press, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, England., 1987. pp. 45-58
9. THE NEW BOOK OF THE DEAD, Dolores Ashcroft-Nowicki. Aquarian Press, London. 1992. pp. 50-55.
10. see 1. p. 69.

Oz is the co-founder of the La Caldera Foundation, a Magickal organization inspired by the vision of the Goddess Hekate. Its purpose is to design and activate new and resurrected ancient rites and ceremonies for conscious death and dying, and to joyfully assist in the journey through the doorway into the next world. The Foundation's members include Ceremonial Magickians, Neo-Pagans, Doctors, Psychotherapists, Nurses, Witches, Native Americans, Ceremonial Artists, Scientists, Spiritual Healers from many traditions, and some of the people mentioned in this article.

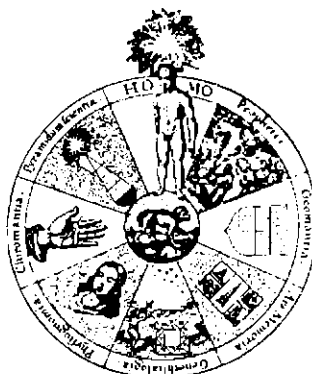
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THROUGH THE PILLARS OF DEATH

by E. E. Rehmus

Once a year, in Celtic Tradition, at Samhain (or Samuin), which means "Summer's End", the gateway to the Fairy World opens and, it is said, if we are fortunate enough to find it, we can pass through into another dimension. Through this same gateway as well, however, pass the goblins and demons of the qliphotic trails through time who visit our world on this night. We call it "Hallowe'en" because when the Galileans attempted to nullify the pagan observance, they had to replace it with something innocuous, and so they renamed it "All Hallows (or All Saints) Eve."

Even the Sun will one day
turn into a Black Hole!

Despite the Christian taming of Samhain, however, people are still divided over whether to bear grim skulls and skeletons on this night or to celebrate with brightly lit jack-o-lanterns and bonfires.

The latter illumination is partially explained by accounts of the Near Death Experience, in which the voyage is invariably described as a terrifying, solitary passage through pitch black night until a light finally appears in the distance and quickly brightens, dispelling the darkness.

The light turns out to be the Astral Plane where we begin to recreate the afterworld of our expectations. Christians here encounter Jesus, Muslims encounter a new Garden of Eden, Spiritualists find themselves in the "Spirit World" and so on. Since the Astral is not material, its form is dredged up from the imagination, filled in as we fill in the missing lines of a sketch. The "substance", however, of this realm is simply that of a way station. The true Afterworld is the vast Mystery lying beyond the Astral.

There obviously can be no such thing as death, so far as any existing thing is concerned. Nothingness, the Ultimate Void, Zero—this is a non-existent abstraction for us. From the standpoint of material reality, it is a will-o'-the-wisp and zero is The Fool's number. Obviously, the Void and the Realm of Manifestation are mutually inaccessible to one another. Therefore, anything that exists has always existed and always will exist. But all things can and must change, for nothing is immutable. And we all resist change, seeking to anticipate and avoid it, because any change is perceived as painful, if not annihilating. What's more, nothing is immune, as the Wheel of Fortune reveals, to changing into its opposite number—the first becoming last, the male becoming female, the good becoming evil, the dispersed becoming coagulated and vice-versa. Even the Sun will one day turn into a Black Hole!

Nevertheless the Void does "exist" (language fails at this point) and it is the goal of the spirit which is seeking always to return to that higher and higher celestial

abstraction that jumps finally off into the freedom of complete non-manifestation, out of which it originally fell into the trap of matter. But only the highest spirit, the most carefully initiated and trained, can make it past the impermeable wall dividing Is from Is-Not, through the vulture-topped pylons of Death and across the Great Abyss.

Porphyry, in a footnote to Evola's Hermetic Tradition says "There are two kinds of death: The one known to all where the body is removed from the soul; and the other, truly of the philosophers', where the soul is removed from the body; nor does the one always follow the other." Even a "philosopher's" consciousness may fail to cross the Abyss, while occasionally an uninitiated spirit may make it through. The sad truth, however, is that very few survive with individuality intact.

But it is a well known axiom amongst the ancients that "The life we call life is really Death." The endless round of Death, Rebirth, Death, etc. is the equivalent (as above, so below) of the sexual act, which on the lowest level results in ordinary reproduction, and which, for the spirit, is a cruel imprisonment to which it has been lured by the siren call of "Knowledge" or "Experience." Once trapped, the only way back lies through greater knowledge, i.e., "Wisdom".

The celestial spirit is drawn into life by the web of Heimarmene, which is the earthification of the heavens, the gateway of destiny, known as the Horoscope. When the spirit "falls" into birth, it drops into one of the cells of Time, reserved for it by the stars: Aries, Taurus, Gemini, etc. and under the prison guards of the planets, called "Archons." Thus, we are delivered and nailed to manifestation via the twelve-fold cross of astrology into an aeon, which is our prison sentence on earth. It is thereafter

the task of the soul to overcome its imposed limitations, to confront the Archons with their true names (i.e., understanding) and thereby, by our own bootstraps, we pull ourselves up into the spirit's reascension.

But first, all things must pass over the Abyss, if they are to be reborn to a higher state. Even Ra in his midnight boat is transformed into a lowly beetle before he can be born again as Light. Similarly, even the great Norse God, Odin, had to submit to death and sacrifice in order to acquire his superior wisdom.

death is not the complete disappearance that it seems to be.

It is important not to gloss too quickly over the symbols attributed to death. The skeleton, skull, hourglass, sickle and coffin, for instance, convey meanings beyond the obvious. The skeleton is the final, "purified" residue, which the alchemists say is the hiding place of the philosopher's stone. The skull is the polar opposite of the living brain, the realm of non-consciousness. The hourglass is the reminder that we are dealing strictly with Time (Saturn) and the fact that the sand can be turned over and run again, shows the circular nature of all aeons. The sickle, or harvesting instrument, is the razor thin edge between body and psyche, so thin that it cannot be determined or measured. This is what the Greeks called *sinapi*, "the mustard seed", the link, as Jung suggests that creates the "psychosomatic" entity, the fusion of Conscious and Unconscious. As for the coffin, it is the artificial outer shell that reflects the outer shell of the physical body itself, to remind us, by its permanence

alongside the body's decomposition, that death is not the complete disappearance that it seems to be.

Death is the 13th trump in the Tarot deck because that is the number that comes after the number of signs of the zodiac, which are, as we've said, the gates of birth leading into existence. The 13th is the "birth" into non-existence. Actually, however, since the Hebrew letter *Nun* is "really" the 14th letter, this reflects the fact that there really ought to be thirteen signs of the zodiac, as the Druids maintained all along. Similarly, it was into thirteen (or sometimes fourteen) parts that—it is said—Osiris's body was cut up and buried. The root of the Hebrew word *Nun* means something like "deterioration" or "wasting away." This is close to the meaning of the Greek word, *thanatos* ("death"), which is akin to Anglo-Saxon *dwinan* (dwindle), "to disappear" and Sanskrit *dhvan*, "to fall to pieces". Death, therefore, is not qabalistically a transformation into something better, but a loss or disappearance. To be sure, what this refers to, naturally, is simply the material body. It is out of the death, burial and breaking up of the seed that a plant is "born." In occult terms, then, the body is the "seed" which must be destroyed in order to release the spirit.

The Egyptians, however, who divided the after-life essence into several portions, were not over-concerned with the spirit. It was assumed that it could fend for itself quite nicely without our help, whereas the soul would inevitably be pulverized and reabsorbed into the life stream to be born anew in another incarnation. The trouble was, certain souls, such as those of kings, were deemed too important to be lost to reincarnation. Since the soul is tied to the body, it was felt that as long as the corpse was mummified and preserved, the soul could be kept back, unable to enter

reincarnation, wherein it would be altered beyond recognition—obviously amounting to the same thing as its death and disappearance.

In the Egyptian pantheon, the God, Anubis, was the psychopomp, or guide to the underworld. Jackal-headed to indicate his supernatural canine-like psychic qualities and fearlessness in the face of death. Dogs are often associated with death: For example, consider Cerberus, the three-headed dog standing guard at the entrance to the Graeco-Roman Hades—the three heads indicating Past, Present and Future. When the Egyptian soul arrived in the judgment chamber, the thing that mattered was the heart, because the heart (not the brain) is the seat of the ego and individualism. The heart was weighed to indicate whether or not it had acquired discernment during life. If it had not gained anything, it was deemed worthless and thrown to the Crocodile to be devoured.

One can't honestly discuss life and death, however, without getting into a discussion of Christianity. Like most occultists, I resist all religions, but particularly this one. I don't disapprove of Christianity because it is repressive or "wrong" or because I simply dislike it. I disapprove of it because it tries to force its beliefs down everyone's throat—just as its rival, Islam, does. (And, incidentally, as Buddhism, Judaism and Hinduism do not do!). Tolerance is a virtue to be sure, but tolerance of intolerance is not acceptable. So, if it is not my place to evaluate Christianity—whose place is it? Nobody's? A Christian's? An extraterrestrial's? Is it only God's place? Then, which God?

As I've said elsewhere, most people, if pressed, would say that we are here to learn. The Theosophists might say we are here to fulfill a task. The Buddhists would say that

existence is an illusion and its purpose merely to distract you from your Original Identity. The Egyptians would have said we are born in order to stabilize the spirit in material form, to keep it from moving further and further away from manifestation into the Void (thus the roaring lions at the two gates: Birth & Death). Radical biologists point out that the goal of life is evolution in the direction of greater freedom for the gene at the expense of the individual and his cortex. The cortex, or instrument of human intellectual striving, however, has goals of its own—which may or may not coincide with those of the gene. Rupert Sheldrake, no doubt, would say that manifestation as existence is just a habit, like the hard-to-break “habits” of physics, which we call scientific “Laws.” The Gnostics insist that life is a cesspool from which we can extricate ourselves only with the greatest difficulty and with special knowledge.

But then comes Salvation, drearily, telling us that the purpose of life is nothing more than to acquire endless life—thus postponing both question and answer forever. This is foolishness. We are already immortal. What we need to know is how and why.


The average person, however, finds the hook of relying on a Savior to do his work for him to be nearly irresistible. It relieves him of the necessity of doing such a difficult job himself. In a society that values childhood above adulthood it is asking a lot to expect anyone to be mature enough to assume such a heavy responsibility. As for “accepting ourselves as we are” that would mean we’d have to settle for the life we already have. But since in our culture we are carefully taught to despise what we have and to long for what we have not, we are ready to rely on the hope of something or someone, someday, offering us a better world

at a price cheap enough in our spiritual poverty that we can afford. Such offerings, like the spurious claims of advertisements, we must realize, can only be illusions.

Outside of Salvation, it is easy to accept death in the midst of tragedy or physical pain or after a long and productive life. But acceptance of this kind is not the key to transcendence. Transcendence is achieved only by overcoming desire, fear, ego, despair and all our other weaknesses.

And Death does not automatically confer “transformation” any more than all transformation means the death of what came before. Death is simply the end of a particular time-cycle. When we dwell in eternity, or when we visit the plenum standing outside the circles of time, there is neither beginning nor ending, and hence no death. In the zodiac, the sign of Scorpio is conventionally described as the sign of “Death, Sex and Metamorphosis” and the animals symbolizing these changes are the scorpion, the serpent and the eagle representing the three most important stages in the biomorphic evolution of the species. First, the birth of life at its most elemental level of self survival. Second, the expansion of physical life in all its wondrous variety and planetary ecology.

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DEATH, THE FINAL TABOO

“On the Making of a Requiem”

by Antero Alli

“I have my dead, and I have let them go, and was amazed to see them so contented, so soon at home in being dead, so cheerful, so unlike their reputation...”

—RAINER MARIA RILKE

Death, the last taboo. A death-ignorant culture does not grow; it refuses to grow past its infantile dreams of living forever. How can it? Without an awareness of death, there is no way to respond to the inevitable, no way to really live your own life. A death-ignorant culture glamorizes its youth while sweeping its elders beneath the carpet. A death-ignorant culture suffers from its deficiency of transformative rituals for giving expression and form to its own human responses to death. Such a culture disables, disempowers and disembowels those who must find ways to express their responses to death—their own, their loved ones—and can find none. Death is sad enough as it is. Robbed of our birthrights to respond, far sadder still...

“Only you return; brush past me, loiter, try to knock against something, so that the sound reveals your presence...”

—RAINER MARIA RILKE

As a performing artist, I see the need to make up rituals for expressing my responses to the inevitability of death; I don't see how else it can be done. This process hit home in June of 1990 when my father suddenly died a few weeks after I had begun structuring a performance ritual based on Stephen Mitchell's lucid translations of

Rainer Maria Rilke's epic lament, Requiem for a Friend (written as a tribute to Rilke's good friend, the artist Paula Modersohn-Becker, who died from complications stemming from the birth of her first child).

As artists know well enough, life and art do this dance together and this time life took the lead. I hadn't seen my father in over thirty years; he also lived in Finland where I, too, was born. Yet we had found ourselves corresponding over the last ten years of his life, by letters and the occasional long-distance phone call. News of his death came by telephone from my grandmother, who also lives in Finland. The feeling, in me, when I heard the news has never completely left. A distant yet very real mourning matched our distant yet very real knowledge of the other. Yet, in this very distance, an indistinct understanding grows of unspeakable connections no matter how faint, no matter how far apart.

“Do not return. If you can bear to, stay dead with the dead. The dead have their own tasks. But help me, if you can without distraction, as what is farthest sometimes helps in me.”

—RAINER MARIA RILKE

My roles in the performance ritual were to be director and narrator. Three women would portray three aspects of Paula—mother, artist and the soul torn between—involved in their separate routines unaware that Paula had died. I would read the poem as an invocation: to the spirit realm, or “afterlife”, that Paula—the three women—now inhabited. While rehearsing the vocal recitation, I found myself spontaneously addressing my

father or his spirit; I wasn't sure what it was except that speaking Rilke's words invoked a presence.

I rehearsed alone, often times in a tiny closet at night lit by a single candle. The poem takes at least thirty minutes to read and I read it out loud—always out loud—and I read it at least three times through with each sitting. About halfway through the third time, the walls of this small closet seemed to disappear while an infinite blackness opened up around me. I addressed this abyss, each and every time, as if speaking to a presence there. Sometimes I thought it was my father, other times it felt like a part of my own soul which had already crossed over to “the other side.”

“Oh don't take from me what I am slowly learning. I'm sure you have gone astray if you are moved to homesickness for anything in this dimension. We transform these Things: they aren't real, they are only the reflections upon the polished surface of our being.”

—RAINER MARIA RILKE

I left this a question; the answer was not as important to me as the execution of an honest reading. It was here that I learned the meaning, my meaning, to this poem and where I cultivated enough confidence to bring back with me some of this “presence in the abyss” to the live performance ritual itself. Requiem for a Friend premiered at The Bell Gallery, a Seattle art gallery which provided an ideal setting for our installation: An eight foot high, jet black wall with three large gold-gilded frames allowing the audience to view the simultaneous unfolding of the three women's routines; one inside each “window.” My partner, Camille was seven months pregnant when she portrayed the “mother” aspect of Paula in this performance. After Requiem finished its run, we withdrew from the world until Zoe

was born January 4, 1991, and then, we “withdrew some more...”

In March, ideas for revisioning Requiem for video surfaced and by May we were well into rehearsals, again. By the end of summer, a new Requiem was born: A hybrid between docudrama and video art, something I chose to call a “VideoPoem.” In it, I wished to provide the viewer a kind of ritual lament, some awareness which set apart a time and a space for mourning whatever had not been given time and space to mourn. In a death-ignorant culture, there is little time allotted for death and painfully less for the grieving of losses.

“Once ritual lament would have been chanted; women would have been paid to beat their breasts and howl for you all night, when all is silent. Where can we find such customs now? So many have long since disappeared or been disowned. That's what you had to come for: to retrieve the lament that we omitted. Can you hear me?”

—RAINER MARIA RILKE

Postscript: I thank Stephen Mitchell for his kind and generous permission for allowing me the use of his excellent translations of Rilke's Requiem throughout this process (the quoted stanzas of poetry in this article are excerpts from “Requiem For A Friend” from THE SELECTED POETRY OF RAINER MARIA RILKE, edited and translated by Stephen Mitchell; Vintage International, 1989.)

Antero Alli is director of ParaTheatrical ReSearch of Seattle. Forthcoming 1992 video works include “Archaic Community” (ritual without dogma) and another VideoPoem using Pablo Neruda's “Book of Questions” as narrative. For information on the ParaTheatrical process and/or how to obtain a VHS copy of “Requiem”, write PO BOX 45758, Seattle, WA 98145 USA.

XXX

“Carpe Noctem”; Seize the Night!

by Jaq D. Hawkins

Occult and mystical literature have many recurrent themes which transgress culture and time periods. One of these is the common myth of death and resurrection. This can take many forms. The common thread in many mythologies is a tearing down of old ways in order that new possibilities can exist. This is sometimes represented by the death of a god who then reincarnates. This process of death and reincarnation often causes some form of transformation of the god into a higher spiritual realm.

The tarot card, “The Tower” is symbolical of this “tearing down the old in order to make room for the new” mythology as is the symbol of the Phoenix, dying in the flames only to arise anew from the ashes.

Even reincarnation itself, accepted as fact in many cultures, could be seen as a symbol of this renewal process. There are a variety of theories regarding reincarnation. The most commonly known among today’s Western New Age culture is simply a matter of working out an individual’s Karma, a concept borrowed from Eastern sources, by living a series of individual lifetimes in succession to learn a variety of spiritual lessons from different life experiences.

A variation on this theme which has become somewhat popular with some New Agers is the concept of parallel lives. This is the idea that the soul of the individual can split into different bodies, increasing the variety of experience within a shorter time period, then eventually fuse into the eternal godhead (another Eastern acquisition) after collecting the required experiences to cause the soul to be truly free of the need for further incarnations. This also is one explanation for the common questions about where all the new “souls” are coming from for the steadily increasing population

of the Earth, although there are other theories with at least as much possibility.

There are other variations on the beliefs within reincarnation theory, including the concept of the soul progressing through a variety of life forms, moving up the evolutionary scale or down if the life was lived badly. Some even believe that the soul incarnates on different planets in the solar system in whatever form is necessary to survive.

One very important example of the death and regeneration cycle, is commonly known as the “dark night of the soul.” This is often misinterpreted by young or inexperienced magicians as a literal evening spent re-evaluating one’s life and the programming that parents and society have infused into one’s mind. I have heard young magicians speaking of their “dark night of the soul” as if it were their mid-life crisis. One almost expects to come across a flyer for Mr. Erhardt’s new “dark night of the soul” seminars.

It is natural to question one’s programming to some extent at various stages of maturation. This “little death,” as one may refer to the sloughing off of bits and pieces of parental projection onto our personalities, is also a valid representation of the rebirth of the personality in a more mature form out of the death of one’s youth; this is the reason behind many rites of passage or coming of age ceremonies in various cultures.

A true “dark night,” however, is a total and sudden transformation of the individual’s world, perhaps in a physical sense, such as in the case of a devastating experience; or in a philosophical revelation, the tearing down of all one’s ideas and all that the person previously accepted as given reality. Quite often it is both.

The word "night" in this context is symbolical of a short period of time, not necessarily a particular night following an otherwise ordinary day. The key ingredient here is the darkness, for it is the darker side of our nature which we face in this struggle.

Darkness does not necessarily mean evil. The word "occult" means "that which is hidden," and it is the darkness which hides most efficiently.

People begin to study the occult for various reasons. Two of the most common are either that they were exposed to some of the New Age spirituality that had a resurgence in the 1960's and curiosity led to further study; or they had a need to understand unusual or psychic experiences in their own lives, and this need to understand led to the study of those topics which are related to psychic phenomena. In many cases, this has been against the religious teachings of the individual's family which can lead to many a "little death" as the person learns to shed the religious training of childhood, replacing it with the knowledge gained from independent study. In some cases, rejecting the religion of one's family is a step on the road toward a true "dark night," as the individual may find him/herself bereft of family support or the security of religious illusions in the progression of the transformative journey.

It is individual transformation which leads to an overall effect on society. Each individual person is changing all the time. Each new experience in our lives has an effect on us; every word we read, every new person we meet helps to shape the person that we become. Still, the lessons we grow up learning from our parents and teachers give us a basis for interpreting all of the new experiences within a framework of a perceived reality. This may include religious training, family and societal values that shape how we believe people should

behave, academic lessons which teach us how the world works and much more. As we grow older, we observe the world we have been taught, but also learn to think for ourselves in deciding which of these lessons are valid to us as individuals, and which of them have alternatives that we may learn from other sources.

The person who will someday become a magician may be one who questions the validity of all of these lessons throughout childhood. S/He may also be one who suddenly discovers that there are alternatives at a later stage in life. Either way, this person will come to an understanding at some time in life of the illusions of religion and mythology, of society and the artificial rules that it tries to teach us all to believe in, and of the natural chaos that shapes physical reality despite the assertions of many scientists who believe they understand the parameters of reality.

It is difficult to believe that science has all the answers when one experiences strange phenomena, only to have outrageously bizarre explanations handed forth from those who simply refuse to believe certain things despite any amount of evidence. For example, on August 17, 1992, CNN showed videotape of a creature swimming in Loch Ness, the ridges of its back clearly undulating above the water, and then a camera pan of the area to show the location clearly. The variety of explanations was almost comical, even including "an effect of lapping waves." Yes, I saw the waves lapping...against the ridges of the creature's back!

When those who claim to have all the answers fail us, whether it is science, religion or our elders, it sets the stage for disillusionment. When this disillusionment encompasses everything we have ever believed in at once, a transformation is sure to occur. For some people the pressure of

this extreme is too much. No doubt that many suicide statistics, as well as mass murder cases where a person goes berserk on a large group of innocent people, are the result of this total disillusionment. In these cases a particular event in the person's life will be blamed by the media, but further investigation will find that the person had been following a pattern of difficulty for some time.

For those who survive the pressure, there is transformation. The personality may not entirely "die," but the change will be significant enough to term it so. The new, reborn personality will learn strength from enduring the tearing down process which has led to the "dark night." This too, can take many forms. Survival can turn an innocent child into a street thug, an emotional teenage girl into a cold, calculating gold-digger, or even a hopeless air-head into a competent member of society.

When a magician faces total breakdown of perceived reality, there is danger of obsession. Many a religious fanatic would feel vindicated at discovering a magician who had failed to tame his/her own demons and gone off the deep end. Fortunately, this is not a common occurrence as those who are not well suited for conjuring the demons of their own psyche are most likely to fall back on their earlier lessons of reality and rest secure in the apparently solid foundations of scientific fact.

Those who go on to face the darkness experience a psychological transformation that is unique to each individual, but results in the common attribute of a permanent change of outlook toward all things and their relationship to reality. Reality itself becomes less defined, and each life experience is looked upon with new perspective for fluctuating validity.

Austin Osman Spare wrote about the

opportunity of a disappointing experience, such as the loss of a friend, in one's life as an emptiness which must be filled. He tells us that ritual work at such a time makes use of the void and fills the magician with the ritual's purpose. The "dark night" is a similar emptiness demanding to be filled, but on a much larger scale. Faced with the prospect of one's entire being becoming stripped bare and filled with new data, it seems appropriate that one embarking on the magical path should give some thought to what will fill the void. Although a "dark night" cannot be predicted or entirely prepared for, some serious thought of how to handle such a situation could prove valuable, and could lead to good insights.

A "dark night" is often brought on by a specific event, as stated earlier. A magician must learn to face his/her fears and hidden anxieties in order to remain in control of the course of magical workings, and such an experience should be looked on as an opportunity to build strength and character. This is what is often meant when one speaks of "looking into the Abyss." One who survives looking into the darkest recesses of the mind and the fragility of the fabric of reality itself experiences alchemical transformation of the purest form, that of spiritual transformation and a new understanding of magical reality.

I would not recommend that any magician seek out this experience, but only to recognize it when it comes and hopefully be better prepared for it than the Mundanes who will make tomorrow's newspaper headlines. It is a shaking experience, but need not always be a miserable one. In some cases, it occurs as a "blossoming" of realization. The consequent changes in outlook can be a liberating experience.

As a good friend of mine often says, "Carpe Noctem"; Seize the Night!

XXX

Death and Transformation

by Keter Elan

Death has many faces; some known and some yet to be discovered. Before I became better acquainted with Death, I feared it—its permanence; the pain associated with its process; the darkness with which it cloaked the world beyond its portal. My fear was reinforced by early training in the judeo-christian mythos, where Death is associated with judgment and probable condemnation to the depths of hell (not an enviable fate).

Yet, in this “civilized” country in the middle class within whose confines I was raised, Death is a rare visitor. Medical breakthroughs which extend life (and thereby allow us to think we can cheat Death) are heralded with great fanfare and are greatly sought after. Death is reduced to a macabre form of entertainment, “the evening news,” where it usually manifests in a “larger than life” sense with lots of gore, and where it always seems to happen to the “other guy.” Our lives have become so insulated that many of us never even gaze upon the most basic face of Death, that of a loved one, until well into adulthood; and even then, somehow, we deny its relevance to our own lives.

I was one of those very insulated god fearing, middle american types whose only (relatively inconsequential) brush with Death had come in my early teens when a friend's brother had died. Then, as an adult, I found myself working in the Third World for several years during a period of overt warfare and covert guerrilla activities. Violent death was a frequent and often

unannounced visitor, greeted casually by the living. Life was truly “cheap.” I will never forget the feeling of knowing how easy it is to kill someone. I saw it happening; it took so little effort. The cloak of invincibility that we all seem to don at birth was no longer a protection against reality.

My world became brighter, more in focus, more intense. Everything was important. A detail could determine my survival; a passing flower vendor might be my last chance to view those particular blossoms. I clung to Now because Future was totally unobtainable; I knew I wouldn't live that long.

Living with Death as a daily companion changes your perceptions, your choices, your world. It is a life at the very edge of existence, constantly touching the periphery of that transitional space between worlds. Some who inhabit this space grow to love Death and court Hlr, risking all manner of “heroic” acts in hopes of attracting Hlr; some chose to withdraw and inhabit internal worlds where Death is excluded, living life “as usual”; some see Death, but are so filled with fear that they vehemently deny the presence of Death, refusing to see or even acknowledge the tangible evidence laying sprawled in the street; and, some see and hear and fear, but reach out to use the power and clarity created by living in this transitional space. They use it to survive and to transcend and sometimes even to cross thresholds into other worlds—a type of death for the living—transformation.

Transformation always involves Death—death to our previous state of being; death to our previous conception of

the world; death to our particular version of the multiverse. The Self that enters into the transformational experience is not the Self who emerges. Reality has altered; such is the nature of magick.

Transformation occurs spontaneously—like the girl who becomes a woman as she prepares for her first date, or the boy who becomes a man as he shoulders the responsibility for his first real job. Such transformations occur as the individual, faced with a change of status in life, prepares to meet the challenge presented by their specific circumstances. Life itself initiates—without the assistance of magickal orders. However, assistance is useful if the full impact of such transformational experience is to be realized and internalized in such a manner so as to provide building blocks for future growth and development.

“Planned” transformation is generally no more predictable in its outcome than its spontaneous counterpart. The difference lies mainly in the intent of the individual—who chooses to enter willingly into the transformational experience, proactively managing the process of growth within their lives—and in the world view generated by the experience. Spontaneous transformation is often accompanied by reactive response to circumstances; and, this, in turn, instills a sense of powerlessness in the individual—“the world happens to me” rather than “I happen to (or control) my world.”

In a reactive mode, Death/Transformation is to be feared because one is always at its mercy—never prepared, always filled with uncertainty. In a proactive mode, Death/Transformation can be used to enhance life by furthering one’s pursuit of self actualization and personal growth. Transcendence of the Abyss (and

the fear associated therewith) is necessary to attain one’s Star/Potential.

One of my “reactive mode” transformational experiences occurred when I was a freshman in college. I had stayed late at the computer lab and was walking home alone when I was attacked. I was psychologically unprepared to take any sort of proactive action to avoid or mitigate the consequences of this attack; and, therefore, incapable of responding to this physical violence in any other way than physically. My reactions (training and strength) were inadequate for the circumstances; I was “overpowered” by the sheer physics of the situation. I recall clearly the intense rage and fear I felt at being rendered so completely powerless in the situation.

The Self who emerged from this experience was a very different Self than the one who had gone to the computer lab earlier that evening. Besides the obvious physical consequences (which healed over time), a great many internal changes took place. Much of my trust “died,” along with my sense of invulnerability. I no longer looked at physically risky activities as “invigorating challenges.” Much of my outward expression of my inner Self was greatly curtailed. And...I learned that I was emotionally capable of killing someone—willingly, even gladly, and with no remorse.

The levels of rage and fear that I had reached during that experience opened doorways to places within my Self that I had never known existed before. The capacity to kill was one of the discoveries that I made in those places. That particular discovery, so closely related to Death (i.e., my willingness to assume the Aspect of Death for another human being), raised an even greater fear—fear of this “new” Self.

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Photo by Dan MacDonald © 1992

INITIATION BY DEATH: Practical Work for the Third Degree

by J. C. R. Geber

When I first began doing the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram (LBR) some years ago, I was told that the daily practice of this ritual would "hasten my personal evolution...speed up my 'karma' or 'dharma,'...make me more than human!" My initial experience didn't seem to go against this, but more and more what I experienced didn't feel empowering, but disintegrating. Gradually it began to dawn on me that what I had been doing all along was a form of magickal suicide.

From the first performance of the LBR, I had been gradually banishing the elements of my personality and Will without quite realizing what was happening. Since Nature (and Spirit) abhors a vacuum, I found quite a bit of chaos created as new and unexpected emotions and thoughts flooded in. I became afraid to do my daily practice because of the confusion that was created. I entered the Chapel Perilous for my own funeral as I attempted to press on. But pressing on seemed increasingly to be the only true choice. Gradually, as I realized my own responsibility and opportunity in ritual, my perception of life and death began to change.

With the LBR we have an opportunity to gradually stretch out and touch both extremes of our lives, our births and our deaths. As we begin to realize that we are, in fact, dying as we enter into our daily banishing, we begin to understand that we are also reborn as we come out the other side. Whatever other rituals the budding adept chooses to perform with the

banishing would then be for the purpose of structuring the new energy bound to rush into the void of the new birth. In this way each initiate chips away at the facade we have all been taught to believe is our only possible reality.

Slowly, as we follow our daily practice, each ritual death and rebirth brings with it a more complete and lasting transformation. As each symbolic death becomes deeper so does the process of transformation which carries us far beyond our human expectation.

Birth and death have been the primary symbols in initiatory cults since man's own initiation into the mysteries millennia ago. The Tibetan Book of the Dead tells us that the forty-nine day period after death was considered to be when the soul detached from the previous life and made its preparations for the next life. To the Tibetans, death and birth were seen as two sides of the same experience: Death, the In door; rebirth, the Out door into another life. What lay between was the process of transformation.

The concept behind all initiation is that transformation is achieved through the death-rebirth experience. All forms of initiatory ritual become types of the death/rebirth phenomena, using associative technique to attempt the creation in the candidate of the actual transformations desired. Death has been at the root of Magickal Initiation from its inception.

In Carlos Castaneda's record of his apprenticeship to the sorcerer Don Juan Matus, he is told that death is the constant companion of every man, waiting at his left

shoulder. Don Juan goes on to say that for a man of knowledge, death should be his greatest and most influential ally in life's decisions. He then proceeds to scare young Carlos nine-tenths of the way there repeatedly for the next several years, or so we would be led to believe.

In Dr. Melvin Morse's ground breaking book Closer To The Light, on near-death experience (NDE) in children, the initiatory practices of the cult of Osiris are briefly mentioned. In these rites, the candidate was taken into the hall of initiation and then sealed into a stone sarcophagus for a period of time just sufficient to cause the candidate's death by suffocation. The lid of the sarcophagus was then popped open, the cool air reviving the aspirant to new life. In this way, the priests of Osiris induced a near-death experience in the aspiring magus, literally forcing the initiate through the void of death into a new life of service to both the gods and man.

Dr. Kenneth Ring, in his book The Omega Project, unequivocally states that "students of shamanism—the ancient and virtually universal cultural tradition whose initiations and techniques are said to provide access to a non-sensory world beyond death, find the basic elements of the near-death experience to be inherent in the shaman's journey and in principle available to anyone who finds himself in the kind of altered state that shamanic practice seeks to induce."

Dr. Ring goes on to detail the long term changes which seem to occur in the lives and personalities of those who experience the usually involuntary initiation of a near-death experience. His findings lend significant evidence of the role near-death experience plays in deep personality change including a more compassionate nature, a

broader appreciation of life and a stronger link with Spirit. In initiatory magickal technique, the aim is very similar to the apparent spiritual, mental and emotional changes that accompany NDE in a majority of cases. That is a gradual rebirth at an ever broader level of awareness of both the Self and the world around us.

Initiation is the Great, all-consuming Work which never ends. It comes to us by degrees, little by little, as we strive thru magickal practice to reach out and touch our new lives thru the door of our own deaths. We begin to tap into the most potent source of change known to man as we begin to be able to experience what lies on the other side of that dark door. We find our own humanity and our true immortality when we return reborn. As we repeatedly venture beyond the veil, what had been imagined has become real. The Magus has achieved the Third Degree.

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HAS DEATH GOT A BUM RAP?

by Cynthia Entzel

In the mid 14th century, a strange public celebration, the Danse Macabre, sprang up in Europe.

It was the time of the Black Death. Whole families, even whole communities died. One out of every three humans was gone, overnight. The great forest quietly moved in and reclaimed the fields and towns. With no hope from the church, which piously informed the people that the disease was punishment for their sins, the already pessimistic common folk took a dark glee in the fact that death was the great final equalizer.

Dressed in ragged robes, wearing fake crowns and the trappings of the powerful, groups danced and capered in the streets. Led by one of their group dressed as Death himself, they celebrated a revelation; a realization that all of us reach this gate with the very same baggage, and we own nothing but our soul.

Many years have passed since that time in history, and that message seems to have been forgotten.

In the modern western world, the desire for security and material possessions has become an obsession. People make choices based on this obsession, leaving happiness and experiential living to take a cursory part in the design of their life plan. Death is seen as the enemy, an aberration, a loss of everything we view as important.

We Neo-Pagans pride ourselves on our pragmatic, non-dogmatic approach to our spiritual life. What, then, should we make of this riddle?

Fear of the unexplainable is possibly the greatest hindrance to understanding death. During the instant that your life flashes in front of your eyes while encountering a near-miss on a dark, wet highway, fear is what infiltrates every fiber in your body. Fear of death, of the mysterious unknown.

However, when living a magickal life, recondite occurrences transpire regularly and are willingly accepted. One does not wince at the obscure. Why then fear death?

Arguably, the most important difference between religions is their approach to death. Some religious beliefs are rather distressing.

Christian belief lends itself to the "one shot" theory. Each person gets one chance at life, and then you die. If lived correctly, a soul can spend the rest of His life basking in glory at the right hand of a god. For the soul who has not lived appropriately, eternal torment at the hand of the devil is what She has to look forward to. It's not a wonder that modern man is frightened of death. A rare few people lead the kind of life required to exist at the right hand of a god, leaving the less desirable choice as an inevitability for most.

The stunning achievements of the technical world and the emergence of psychology have mastered the prolonging of life and created a belief system which assumes physical life to be the only life. But is it?

According to those who have had a near-death experience (NDE), it is not. Raymond Moody, a physician and author of The Light Beyond, believes there is something in each person that survives after death, a spirit or soul that continues to exist and have experiences.

Reports have been made from hospital patients whom, despite apparent technical death, have been "brought back" through means of medical technology. Experiences such as: Being in a tunnel, strong feelings of warmth and love, "panoramic memory", a moving recollection of one's entire life, and remarkable clarity of thought have been recounted. Some of these patients were angry to have been brought back to physical life because their experiences were extremely pleasant.

Does this prove that death is simply a passage to an extension of our physical life on earth? Or are these NDEs, as some scientists believe, manifestations of our brain's neurons coping with imminent death?

Some religions believe it to be a passage. They assert that death is not so ominous as the western people have come to believe. In fact, it is a time that is discussed and prepared for. As stated in The Tibetan Book of the Dead, "the art of dying is quite as important as the art of living."

In ancient times, people believed that the dead were drawn up to the sky by the moon only to become stars. The earth and the skies were filled with humankind. Sometimes the deceased were buried with horses, chariots, weapons, even wives and children in an attempt to make the new realm as familiar as possible.

The Buddhists believe that we all live

many lives and die many deaths. Through reincarnation, one has the opportunity to overcome self-imposed demons and get on with the process of enlightenment. They believe it is only the unenlightened who do not remember their deaths and rebirths.

Eastern thought accepts the inevitability of death. Fear does not accompany death. Preparation for the parting is as natural as preparation for a successful life. The belief that the thoughts with which one leaves this world are the very thoughts with which one will be reborn is widespread.

As a result, liberation from sorrow over separation and death is pervasive. Realizing that there is no estrangement from the real substance eliminates the mourning process invoked in western civilization.

It is widely accepted that we live in at least two worlds. The shell we roam in while in this world, the skin, bones, muscles, blood, is only a prop. The physical self is merely a manifestation of the inner spirit; a necessary tool with which to participate in the game of life. At death, the useless and burdensome shell is discarded and the spirit self continues on.

Often a dying person has uttered the phrase, "I have lived a full life," as though their imminent death means the definite end. For those who don't understand and believe in the circle we all live, death can be the ultimate cessation rather than a journey.

A fatalistic view of death is what causes people to spend millions of dollars in, what one psychologist coins, "avoidance therapy." Technology, pharmaceuticals, and many other techniques prolong the commencement of the great journey and have, in essence, relinquished the dignity in

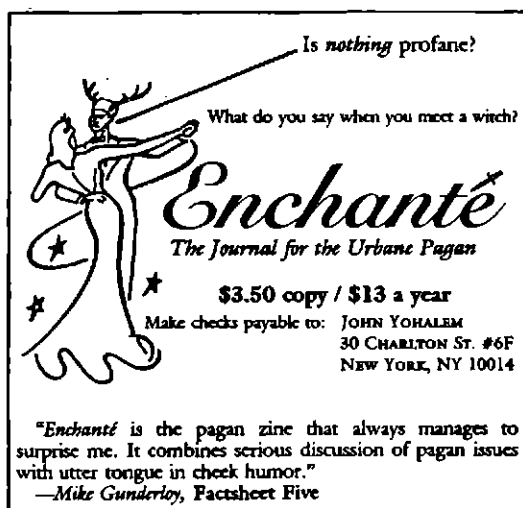
death. No longer is the process of dying viewed as a positive ritual. Does that loss of dignity diminish what can ultimately be the most empowering element in the circle of life? Conceivably so.

The ability to move on to another plane, a higher plane is a quest many people attempt while on this physical earth. Why then would the opportunity to explore that same venture in another realm be so readily avoided and totally unprepared for?

Passing on to another sphere could possibly be the ultimate adventure. Undeniably, we have all felt, if even for a fleeting moment, the sheer power of our spirit or soul. This energy cannot exist indefinitely in the physical world. It's too big, too awesome. There must be a reprieve. Perhaps it is death that provides the liberation.

If that is so, then Captain Hook in Peter Pan was correct when he said, "Death is the only Adventure."

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THE FINAL GARMENT OF ISHTAR

by Mishlen

It happened on the night following a solar eclipse. The day which preceded it stood out only as exemplary of an ordinary day. I was peacefully sleeping, when I was suddenly hurled out of my body into the Stars. It felt like this:

Floating in space, I looked up. Above me the Stars glistened with such beauty that I desired to travel among them. To do so, I made myself lighter, and as I became lighter, I floated up. The heaviest things were my ego's implementa—feelings, thoughts, desires—and there were lighter things, things for which I have no name.

Finally amongst the Stars I floated. A wild zinging extended through me, and I could see in all directions at once. The Stars danced; taking on gigantuan forms and moving in a slow pavane, they would exchange pieces of themselves with each other. All of this I beheld, and within it I was but a speck of a speck on the wall.

Perhaps the most unusual thing was that I felt completely at home—completely myself, my truest self. And I decided I would never leave. But even that fleeting thought was too heavy to sustain in this heavenly sphere. Downward I plunged, and I experienced a sense of division, for part of myself remained in that land of lights. As the heavier parts of me fell earthward, I began taking on the aspects of my former self. First came those finer traits, then came the ego's atrocities. As I fell, I became focused, and as I focused, I lost that awareness of my higher, starry being.

Returned to my body of earth, I was filled with wonder, and for the days that followed, I was touched by bliss. What had happened to me? Some have referred to it as the "Comity of Stars". Some call them the Secret Chiefs. Crowley's saying "Every man and woman is a star" is not merely symbolic, but literal fact.

The Sphere of the Zodiac, Chokmah, is the realm of these beings. Astrology provides a human pattern with which we can understand, read and determine their workings.

What was I while I danced amidst the Stars? What was that core that was left to me, as I watched their stately joys? I believe it was the Word.

The Word is the magickal tool of Chokmah, and is essential to its experience. Without the Word, one would simply dissolve, jarred apart by the vibrations of this Starry Realm. The Word can exist on this high plane, but little else can.

It is the Word which gives us our strength. When we take up an Aspect and an Attribute, that is our Word made manifest. When we align our Will with a particular Current, our Word is created. Our Word is the particular viewpoint (Viewpoint—point of view upon the wheel of incarnation, upon the Tree of Life) within this Current, unique to us yet absolutely conforming to the greater Current through which it runs.

Those who have created their Word in the past, became great personalities, drawing people into their glow, finding converts to their religions. Nowadays, these

religions, or viewpoints, are often completely unique, and so one sees the proliferation of many Currents, with a central person as its source, spreading the awareness they have, as Word-holders, to give.

Tantra is one way in which the Word is spread. The sexual tension between the two people becomes a channel like water, through which the Seed (Current) flows, resulting in enlightened force. Practiced by one who has not yet realized his Word, there is no seed—i.e., the union is sterile, resulting in a temporary sexual high, but no inner transformation, which is the fruit of all truly tantric practices. The transmutation is brought about by the melding of the inner person to the new current.


Such a Working should only be done by those freed from the bonds of desire. During and after such a rite, the spirit of the recipient lies open wide, and any agenda you have, may accidentally or not, be impressed upon the soul. Slaves can be created. Even those with pure intent may accidentally impress their own desires upon the other. There is no difference, however, in having all you desire, and desiring nothing. Desireless, the transmission is free to flow purely and cleanly.

Yet, even the Word must, in the end, be given up. This is the Final Garment of Ishtar. When one has simplified Hlrsel into a single focus, giving that focus up will be the most difficult thing they have ever done. But it must be done, for unless it is, the Word becomes dogma; the people become followers; the power is broken. The Word-holder becomes static, parroting over and over the words which once lived, and now lie like dust upon the desert of death. There is no more growth, for growth is a by-product of Life, and that fair follower has fled.

It may be that the giving up of the Word is tantamount to letting go of your child—the Word continues to exist on its own. When a great magickian dies, his soul continues its evolution onward, but the personality and astral form continue to survive. This astral form feeds off of the magickian's created Word, and creates a vessel of power for others to communicate with.

And so we give up our most precious Vessel. We straddle the path of the Fool, between Chokmah and Kether. In the emptiness which comes upon us, a new Word may be born, a new child of Will grows, the process of Creation continues unabated, and we begin our journey back down the Tree of Life.

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Perspectives on Dis-Ease

by Raven Greywalker

Israel Regardie once noted that magickal achievement and an integrated psyche were not necessarily co-dependent functions. Magickal initiation is an inner moment of illumination, an a-ha about oneself and the multiverse that is one's apparent outward manifestation. After initiation, however, if one does not have the basic skills to digest and apply one's realizations, the fall out of depression and confusion (energy that becomes blocked and stagnant due to an inability to manifest effectively) can have long term effects similar to those found in people who chronically seek to repress the initiatory experience entirely. These effects may commonly be called dis-ease.

The growing concern about dis-ease in this culture should perhaps lead us to not only quest after solutions to its physical symptoms, but also to inquire into the nature of dis-ease as a concept.

Much of dis-ease theory presented by the medical institution in this country seems based on the assumption that that which is foreign to the system is inherently dangerous. There is perhaps a genetic predisposition in humans to fear the alien, often interpreted as an invader due to the philosophy of finite supply. The mammalian politics of "this is us, and this is ours" that gives rise to neophobia have also created the competitive urge that allowed us to succeed as a species.

Having progressed to a high rank in the food chain, it is now time to re-evaluate this strategy. In a world approaching terminal overpopulation (also due to tribal competition) un-enlightened self-interest

begets many problems.

A recent medical study suggests that people should not go outside between the hours of 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. without the maximum sun block possible as the holes in the ozone layer are greatly accelerating the number of instances of skin cancer.

Fresh water may become a priceless commodity in the foreseeable future and currently in the U.S. and other technologically advanced countries drinking water is being treated with a variety of chemicals that have unknown long term effects on humans (chlorination which is often a skin irritant that may contribute to developing other allergies and chemical sensitizations, flourides which seem to quicken the aging process, etc.).

The depletion of our soils' minerals and vitamins, the use of toxic pesticides, and the artificial stimulation of nearly sterile land render our produce not only less beneficial, but indeed harmful to our health.

Incredible amounts of growth hormones and antibiotics are used on our livestock to help adept them to poor living conditions.

The landfills keep filling up, the air continues to thicken, and the water and soil accumulate poisons. We all know about this, but the effects of the environmental stress are just now beginning to show themselves.

For instance, let's focus on what has been called the plague of the 20th century - A.I.D.S.

What is now being called AIDS was first recognized by doctors who were treating homosexual men in New York City in the

early 80's. Cases of Kaposi's sarcoma (a rare skin cancer usually found in elderly men of Italian or Jewish descent), *Candida albicans* (a throat and vaginal fungus), and *Pneumocystis carinii* (a protozoan) infection were suddenly being noted in some men. The virulence of the cases was far more extreme than was usual and this led to research.

A correlation was found between intravenous drug users, those who frequented gay baths and the sickness. The first speculations were that AIDS was a syndrome (a varying set of problems, not necessarily viral or contagious in nature, related to lifestyle and environment).

How then was the retrovirus H.I.V. isolated as the sole cause of AIDS?

A surprising number of factors have little to do with medical research.

While in office, President Nixon proposed a massive push to fund cancer research. Retrovirologists jumped on the band wagon and gained support for research into viral causes for cancer. In nearly 20 years of study their results were inconclusive, at best. Money and time for their research was running out. Nature, they proved, was rife with retroviruses. However, retroviruses seemed to be nonantagonistic to their host. Unlike other viruses they reproduce by changing a cell's D.N.A. so that it creates more of the retrovirus without killing the cell or inhabiting its ability to reproduce more healthy cells. Even if the H.I.V. virus did kill cells, tests of AIDS patients find it present in such minute amounts that the natural rate of T cell regeneration would more than compensate. (In fact, the low levels of H.I.V. make testing for it difficult. What's generally tested for H.I.V. is antibodies. Finding these antibodies in a person whose immune system is breaking down seems almost a contradiction.) Add to

that the fact that H.I.V. is a dormant virus in patients (it never makes D.N.A., R.N.A., protein, or toxin nor does it invade a significant percentage of target cells), and dormant viruses are not pathogenic.

H.I.V. isn't even present in all AIDS patients.

H.I.V. may only be another of the many viruses, bacteria, and life forms that co-inhabit the healthy human body. (When testing for AIDS related infections most people in the control [non-infected] groups were found to have similar viral and bacterial agents as the AIDS group.) We are, each one of us, an ecology. The immune system regulates that ecology and when it dis-functions life goes out of balance.

Quite simply, H.I.V. was given to a public hungry for simple answers to the AIDS crisis; without being thoroughly researched.

The government is now trying to list vitamin supplements as drugs so they can control them.

The researchers getting funding aren't likely to reevaluate their premises now. The pharmaceutical companies that manufacture test kits (easy to make, expensive to buy) and A.Z.T. (the drug used by AIDS patients that, by killing more healthy than diseased cells, causes more death than AIDS itself and which is also expensive) also don't want contradicting information. The government is now trying to list vitamin supplements as drugs so they can control them. These supplements may be useful in combatting environmental

disorders. A doctor in California reports success in curing AIDS using massive quantities of vitamin C. Obviously, the pharmaceutical companies have a vested interest in limiting access to supplements.

And what about the growth and the spread of the plague? It was supposed to decimate the hetro community by now, but women still rarely have AIDS (vaginal tissue being more durable and less prone to infection than anal tissue) and the statistics that there may be 10 million carriers is based on the African, not American population.

If the H.I.V. originally spread from Africa, why are there so few instances in Europe and the Far East (In Thailand where there is a flourishing prostitution trade there had been 11 AIDS cases by 1987, four of them westerners; in a study of German prostitutes, none were found to be infected with H.I.V. or to have AIDS) where cross currents with Africa are much stronger?

We again come to the sociobiological and political issues. AIDS is a wonderful weapon in the drug war and the unspoken war on sex. Intravenous drugs, cocaine based drugs, and regular use of amyl nitrate (common in the gay scenes) along with frequent infections stress the immune system, as well as the use of antibiotics to treat infections (by replacing the function of the immune system it weakens the system and kills off bodies' natural symbiotic flora and fauna leaving it prone to re-infection). The answer is not to make addiction illegal. Our government imprisons the sick and discourages non-harmful drugs by adding Sulfur Dioxide to Nitrous Oxide, selling Butyl Nitrate over the counter instead of the less harmful Amyl, and using Methodone to treat heroin addicts, which mimics all the bad side effects of heroin, instead of its euphoric high.

Much of the sex phobia in this culture may come from enmeshed and co-dependent family structures. When a child exists to fulfill the emotional needs of the parent and not to discover Hlr own with the support of the parent, SHE is not allowed boundaries, not allowed to say no or yes to touch, not allowed to have and express Hlr own feelings. Intimacy comes to mean pleasing another at the expense of the self. Such a child will grow up fearing and resenting both intimacy and its lack. Caught in this confusion, it's easy to see sex (which can be the most intimate and frightening experience of all) as dangerous or to accept childhood training that sex is immoral on deep unspoken levels and to find rationales to prove this.

Sex is indeed powerful and dangerous in a sense. The kalas are entheogens. By allowing another's D.N.A. into one's body, the other person becomes part of you on a cellular level and this prompts change and evolution. Sex is a magickal alchemical act that is best done in Love and Will.

Perhaps one of the reasons that AIDS is effecting the ex-hippie generation is that in reaction to the repressed sexuality of their elders they mandated promiscuity and those with already poor boundaries took on lovers they didn't want, building even more inner turmoil.

From the age of competition to an age of cooperation, not as slaves of the hive or of our own programming, but as beings free to Will ourselves into Being. Each of us is an ecology of ideas and life forms. Embrace the alien within and we embrace the world without, that which we fear or reject is beautiful when we discover it is us.

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NEOPHYTE'S NICHE

The Purpose of Ritual

by Donna Stanford-Blake

"Ritual" - the word sets off myriad reactions within me - mysterious, powerful yet primitive and superstitious. The use of ritual is a cornerstone in most religious and spiritual disciplines - including Magick. Yet, only a few short months ago, I questioned the validity of its use in spiritual growth. I viewed it as a "crutch" used by people with little confidence in their own ability or as a device used by those in charge to impress the ignorant. Since I accept my own power and I certainly am not ignorant, I continued to shun all suggestion of ritual in my own growth process.

I can trace my confusion about ritual to my youth. I remember watching my mother take communion - soberly drinking grape juice and v-e-r-y slowly chewing stale bread. It was fascinating. Obviously, this was serious business. But upon questioning her about this performance, the answers were disappointing, to say the least. If my own mother couldn't explain the purpose of this strange procedure, then why do it? As I grew, my disillusionment with ritual hardened into disdain. Primitive, superstitious mumbo-jumbo with no pertinent meaning or power - that is what I vehemently believed. Of course, I couldn't have been more mistaken.

Now I find myself at the other end of the spectrum - actually writing an article in support of ritual! Why the drastic shift in perception? Good question! As with most changes in belief, it has been a gradual process. One realization building on another until I noticed that I don't internally cringe every time someone

mentions the dreaded "R" word. In fact, I have actually - gasp! - performed some small rituals of my own.

Since Magick is so filled with it, I asked three practitioners from varied paths to share their views regarding the purpose of ritual. Their words might help me explain my own change in belief. I asked all three the same question: "What does ritual mean to you personally and what is its purpose in your life?"

Nikki Bado: "What does 'ritual' mean to me? I thought that was a very strange question at first, like those essay questions your English teacher used to give you. Certainly, I've pondered the meaning of specific rituals. Initiation is, for many of us an extraordinarily powerful and meaningful ritual experience. However, I don't believe I've ever stopped to consider what 'ritual' in general means to me.

"Actually, this is really a pretty good question, mostly because it makes us think about the nature of ritual itself. The dictionary says 'ritual' is a 'customary procedure' and that 'rite' is 'the prescribed form for conducting a religious or other solemn ceremony.' Here you can see the way in which ritual is typically viewed in our culture: 'Ritual' is something to be endured; a solemn, dry, boring, routine thing that we do out of custom, habit, by way of procedure - because we have to.

"Well, toss that idea. It's time to rethink what we mean by ritual. Folks of all sorts are redefining it in the most exciting ways. You can see evidence of a creative and dynamic ritual process at gatherings, in small circles, in solo celebrations, and here

in the pages of this magazine.

“To me, ritual is a dynamic and creative expression of my experience of the sacred. It’s a way to connect deeply with the most profound insights of my religion, a way to connect with Nature, and with other people. Ritual is not a ‘prescribed form,’ but a creative act through which traditions are given new meaning. I see it as new and ever-changing, yet as constant and familiar as the changing of the seasons. Autumn comes every year; yet I see Fall’s brilliant colors and smell the heady perfume of leaves and crisp ripe apples as if for the first time. Each Samhain is the same; yet each circle reveals something different - there is a new lesson, a new insight, a new dynamic.

“Ritual provides a way for me to celebrate the cycles and seasons of my life as well as the seasons of Nature. Through its use, I may mark times of personal growth or transformation, celebrating both life with its new beginnings and death with its necessary endings. Rituals can certainly be solemn; providing space for me to cry, to release pain and hurt, to heal. Rituals can also be fun; a space where I can literally dance with a light heart around the circle and laugh with the sheer joy of being alive! In addition to celebratory occasions, they provide avenues through which I and the people in our coven can focus our energies, weaving our will and thoughts together as one to accomplish a particular goal.

“I see ‘ritual’ as similar to the practice of art forms. When you learn an art - sculpting, metal smithing, weaving - whatever - you acquire tools and learn basic skills. For example, how to use your muscles or how to move energy, how to make patterns or designs. To these basic skills, you add your own creativity, shaping incoherent ‘stuff’ into something of beauty and value. So, too, with ritual. It can be a

tool, certainly. But it can also be the means through which we assign meaning. The place where the traditions of our culture and the very essence of our lives find creative voice.”

Sheva: “Broadly defined, a ritual is taking place when we fire up the computer, rustle our papers, and settle down for a day’s work at the office. Or when an athlete is breathing and focusing before each jump; an Aikido practitioner is tapping into vital core energy before a fight; or when a Traveller in the Underworld touches tools, listens to drums or purifies the space to ready body and mind for the Inner Journey. Hence, ‘ritual’ can be more specifically defined as a sequence of acts, spiritual and/or physical, used for the purpose of focusing. This focus can either be secular or sacred in nature. Ceremony, in turn, can be defined as ritual in a group, say a handfasting or wedding. There are additional definitions but these will do. With this said, what else is there to say? Before offering my own subjective view, as I’ve been asked to do, I thought I’d check on other people’s attitudes on the subject.

“Boy, Pandora’s box - by comparison - was nothing! I received two earfuls! This is some of what I heard:

a) At one extreme:

‘Ritual? Ceremony?...

AUTHORITY?!?!’ (Insert here appropriately rude sounds - from middle class sniffing to loud, graphic gutter vocalizations.)

b) At the other extreme:

‘NO ritual and/or ceremonies?!

Beware Of The Consequences!!’

(Insert here the appropriate sounds of threatening, lugubrious laughter. Otherworldly, of course. This is from the Terrible Entities from OVER THERE which will come to gobble you up!!!! Or so say Those Who Know.)

“Both groups are basically comprised of people raised with European Judeo-Christian traditions. The first group has lots of ceremonial religious pageantry in their upbringing to run from. The second group wishes to best the mainstream religious competition by coming up with more beautiful or potent ceremonies of their own. The more mellow, by far the larger group, ranges somewhere in the middle. But all agree that when working with the Otherworlds neglecting ritual or ceremony entirely can cause, at the very least, the spiritual equivalent of stubbing one's toe. Where the extremes differ is in how judgmental they are of those they disagree with; how harshly they judge each other for their practices (or lack thereof) and how serious, consequently, they expect the spiritual misfires to be. (Individuals at the extremes favor a sort of Pagan Sheol.)

“As to my own view, well, it really is simple. After all, I am one of the *Am HaAretz* (the People of the Land, i.e., the hicks, as the rabbis say), which is an Israeli Pagan Path of Earth and Warrior Spirituality. We use shamanic techniques and by definition almost 90% is solo work. As a result of who I am and the practices I choose, I have a pragmatic, empirical approach in this Reality, as in any other. (The same approach has been found to be helpful in other types of Neo Pagan practice.) In other words, I have found that what works on this plane, works over there. When linking with or journeying in the Otherworlds, I think it only wise to do so with at least the same precautions I would use on this plane.

“Say, I am getting ready to do some serious trekking in the desert wilderness. Using what I have learned in my wilderness experience (in this Reality), I know that it is unwise to load myself down with equipment. Instead of concentrating on the

trek, I find myself more concerned with organizing and carrying the extra baggage. Because my focus has shifted from my original purpose, I lose sight of my objective and never reach it.

“Yet, I would never venture out into Nowherelands with so little equipment that the first sandstorm, or dry well, or bitterly cold night, finds me unprepared and impacts me so severely that I count myself lucky if I can even make it back.

“Usually, when I use this simile, I get these questions: ‘But how do you know what equipment you will need? And how much is too much? Or too little?’

“My answer is: ‘If you don't know don't do it! Learn first.’

“In ALL Realities, it all boils down to having sense.”

ΔDamien: “Not so long ago, a friend sent me a card. On it was a picture of a very small dragon with wings folded, fitting just-so into an antique pipe rack. The dragon wore a smile, enclosed as he was by pipes on either side. The caption under the picture simply said, ‘My Place.’ I kept the card, not really knowing why it appealed to me. I know somewhat better now. Ritual is ‘my place.’

“Among other meanings, ritual fits me. It is a constant in a changing world, a thing I can look toward and predict. It is mine because I control it. It is a world I create of my will, of entities I will; a space that is mine with no necessary relationship to others in place and time. I am there and the ritual delimits and defines that place by my will. I love it.

“The ritual, then, defines a set of boundaries. And I do love it. I can create things in that place - my place - that exist

and depend on nothing else. It allows and supports my power and I finally feel free to exercise my power within it. That is really wonderful! However, like any structure that supports power, it has (at least) two possible drawbacks. On the one hand, I can easily become slavish in my attendance to ritual, mirroring my psychological need to isolate, protect and aggrandize my Self - to make 'green smoke' in the manner of stage magicians. The other hand? That of 'creating' my own ritual, having no real idea what the hell I'm doing and meeting invoked entities on some imperious, uncontrolled basis. Each of these is dangerous and lessens me. I constantly remind myself that ritual is something I do, not something I am. That it must exist at all only as a manifestation of my Right Will.

"Ritual, in circumscribing a space and time, also allows a situation. Just as a stage encloses a play and a ring a prize fight, so ritual forms a venue for thoughts, feelings and perceptions that are not part of my mundane life. It encourages and suggests this greater variety of perceptions, while at the same time bonding them. Further, much as a beach scene sometimes 'keys' (produces or 'conditions') a relaxation response, so ritual keys a progressive relaxation and regression, a dropping of conventional models, a letting-go of defenses and a much more uncritical acceptance of both the different environment and the different Self that is thereby produced. This different Self can act effectively on the world in ways I would not have even considered before. I can practice these true alternatives, and rejoice in them, and develop others. Finally, since ritual does not alter my cognitive capacities, I can evaluate the alternatives clearly with respect to the outside world and choose among them."

It is obvious that the mere word "ritual"

illicits a strong response from people. A response conditioned by our upbringing and societal influences but ultimately shaped by our own experiences with this potent tool. And that's what it ultimately is - a creative tool. We give our power to the words, acts and gestures that comprise any ritual. No matter if it's an invocation or a work day routine. Without that personal involvement it becomes empty, meaningless, and without power.

Of course, there should be moderation in all things. Dependence on ritual to validate one's self or impress others negates all the potential for spiritual progress. Instead of a tool it becomes a meaningless burden - or worse - a destructive weapon.

Whether simple or complex,
ritual is a part of our lives.

How does this answer the question of my dramatic change in belief regarding "ritual?" Basically, I have come to see its true purpose and its value in earnest spiritual growth as well as in every day life. Earliest man knew its intrinsic value, it just took a little more time for me to recognize it. Whether used extensively or only for select purposes, ritual is a potent ingredient in the quest for self knowledge. Even if you don't consciously construct and use rituals in every day life, pay attention to your daily routines. Is there anything you do the same every time you do it? Even the simple task of making morning coffee and reading the paper can be a focus to awaken your energy for the day ahead. It's a ritual.

Whether simple or complex, ritual is a part of our lives. When we open ourselves to its purpose, we can begin to access the power of our Will.

XXX

DEATH: THE ENDLESS DANCE OF CHANGE

by Frater Omnis Amare

Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law.

Most people look upon death and see it as an end to a life or a cessation of something, that which is no more. True, the physical body ceases to function, and in essence “dies,” but death is not an “end”—it’s an interchange. It’s a transformation between different modes of existence. We can’t be sure what occurs after our physical death, but we can catch glimpses of it through certain states of consciousness.

The formula of death is not exclusive to the physical deaths which we witness everyday and the various incarnations we undergo. The words “As above, so below” come to mind. Within our present life, if we but look around, we’ll see death and transformation all around us. It is change—and change is the key to evolution. By definition, as a living organism, we are constantly changing and evolving—mutating even! It is an inherent part of existence, on all levels, and we must come to understand it and work with it.

I’d like to relate an experience I underwent which deals with the formula of death as it occurs throughout our present life. It basically focuses around the time in my life when my involvement in Magick and Thelema became increasingly more active. When I first began dabbling and

researching in these areas, I was merely drawn out of what was (to phrase it simply) pure curiosity. I was living my own normal (?!?) life, pursuing my own mundane goals, and dwelt amongst my own happy circle of friends and companions. As I gradually got more interested in Magick and Thelema, I began to understand and realize the beauty of the philosophy of the system. Intuitively, I was pulled or drawn in that direction, and as a consequence I began to devote more and more of my time to it. Gradually, I came into contact with people who shared my beliefs and ideas, and I began associating with them frequently. I eventually got to the point where I was caught in the midst of a struggle between my mundane life (with its separate circle of friends and relationships), and my Magickal life (which, in turn, had its own unique circle of companions).

For months I was caught in this struggle, and the war waged on mercilessly in my head. Part of me wanted to hang on to the life I had with my mundane friends and interests—to continue throughout life in the same patterns and habits which I’d grown accustomed to. The other part of me wanted to spend all my time in pursuit of the Great Work. I was stuck in the middle of it all, and desperately sought a means of escape. Should I force my mundane life to wave the white flag and surrender to change? Or should I hang on to my memories and resist the force that put this baneful dagger to my throat? It was an impossible task trying to balance the two “lives” out, and eventually a victor was declared.

I slowly cut my ties to my "former" life, though I never completely dissociated from my mundane friends (friendships can cross over many paths, and sometimes overcome the most overwhelming obstacles). I focused my Will and went on my way in my own unique path, confident that I was expressing my true nature which had lain within me for so long—trapped inside a mere shell—an imposter with more faces than Choronzon himself. In a very symbolic sense, I "died" and proceeded to embark upon a new "life." Not in the sense of dying and being reborn as in the Old Aeon formulae, but in the sense of a change—a new beginning—a new phase in my development and in the realization of my True Will.

It was a transformation, and one which is obviously very common, especially in the Aeon of Horus. People are finally realizing the inherent godhead within them and standing up to walk on their own feet. One can't say whether one is better off now as opposed to then, for it's all relative. It's a change—the constant interplay between Hadit and Nuit. I've heard many stories that all follow the same lines. One casts away his or her "old self"—the husk of outdated ideas and concepts—and partakes in a new mystery. Everyone has their own path to walk, but we all go through these transformations. It is change at its essence—a constant striving for the unknown—the new and unique. The undiscovered territories within and without.


It brings to mind the dance of death—endless change—a serpent swallowing its own tail. The serpent is one of the three primary interpretations of Atu XIII. In its method of movement is symbolized the eternal exchange between two phases of existence—life and death. It also represents Kundalini, the "serpent

power," the coiled snake at the base of the spine ready to rise up and awaken within the Magickian. This Kundalini is the life force in man. We find parallels between these symbols and DNA, the double helical structure which contains within it the history of the evolution of our race—and perhaps more. They all represent an endless dance of transformation—a process of change, and a phenomenon of existence.

"I am the flame that burns in every heart of man, and in the core of every star. I am Life, and the giver of Life, yet therefore is the knowledge of me the knowledge of death." - AL.II, 6.

Love is the law, love under will.

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The Hebrew Earth Festivals

Autumn

by Sabra

(This is the first of a four part series on the Hebrew Earth Festivals as celebrated by the Am HaAretz.)

The term *Am HaAretz* (People of the Land) was used by the learned rabbis of ancient Israel to refer to the “simple” country folk as opposed to the city/temple people, the sophisticated scribes and doctors of Hebrew/Jewish law. It also means: Unlearned, unschooled – in a word – a *hick*.

We use this term now to denote the followers of the path of Hebrew Nature & Warrior Spirituality. (You may notice a certain similarity with the anglo-saxon term *pagan*.)

Normally, we *Am HaAretz* share festivals, if not intent, with the mainstream Jews. But we reconnect mostly to old Hebrew Earth spirituality. Hence to us, the two “high holidays” of mainstream Judaism (*Rosh Hashana* and *Yom Kippur*) are neither relevant nor major festivals.

This is because, unlike most other festivals of the Hebrew lunar calendar, *Rosh Hashana* is not related to nature at all. Nor to the lore of the People of the Land. Nor to the Land itself. So as a Nature Religion it doesn't do much for us. While it does fall on the New Moon; all New Moons are celebrated monthly. This one is just somewhat bigger, because it occurs in the seventh month—a sacred number since antiquity. Anyway, what is called *Rosh Hashana* is to us merely—as it was in antiquity—*Rosh chodesh tishri*, “the new moon of Tishri” and hence a minor holiday at best.

There are other reasons, but they are too long and technical to go into here. I will give you only one more. The fall “New Year” (there are several in the Hebrew calendar, including one in spring) is mentioned only once in the entire Bible, and that in a very late text, in Ezechiel 1:10, but it is on the tenth of the month, not on the first as now. To my knowledge, it became an important festival fairly late, during the days of the second Temple, after the first Babylonian Exile.

Which brings us to the other “high holiday” *Yom Kippur*. I call it the holiday that wasn't. Before the Monarchy and the ensuing Babylonian Exile there were nature festivals with open revelry, but no *Yom Kippur*. And so, the *Am HaAretz* do not celebrate it either.

After all, it is not an Earth celebration. It's one of the rare sad and grim holidays in an agricultural and nature moon calendar that is otherwise replete with celebrations of life.

As People of the Land, and former soldiers, one thing we do of course, is to commemorate the soldiers who died in the modern Kippur War. But that's a personal, private choice; and has nothing to do with Hebrew Nature Festivals which are the topic here.

Instead, we *Am HaAretz* celebrate a truly authentic older Holiday. And no, we did not have to make it up. The name we prefer is *Hag HaOssif* (The Feast of Ingathering of Grape).

Not surprisingly, this was a wine harvest festival. The Hebrew Warrior Shepherds

were, in the days of the Book of Judges, already shedding the stark ways of the desert nomad and learning to make merry. Picking up habits from their Canaanite neighbours, of course, who knew a thing or two about that. Gradually, the Hebrews took up the hoe and bone sickle of the land laborer. They planted grape. They harvested it, and made wine.

And so the greatest holiday of them all came in Fall.

This was due to the local climate and season over there. The Hebrews, who were peasants by then, had to keep on working during the other, earlier harvest of the Hebrew agricultural year; but this harvest was the last one. Once it was gathered, these farmers were free to clean up, put on festive garb and take off for the closest High Place or sanctuary. We know the country side was dotted with them, before the Temple gradually monopolized all worship. The roads filled with travelers on their way to the High Places, there to rejoice with wine and song and partying.

The *Am HaAretz* were and are a merry making people, but at no season of the year did they drink and sing as much as during the autumn festival.

The records say that they chanted and danced while circling the altars of the local High Place. Wine and water were poured as a libation. The altar, and presumably the Asherah planted next to it, were inundated.

The earliest record of this holiday can be found in the Book of Judges. King Samuel's father, Elkanah, made a point of making that journey every year.

One of the most popular sites for celebration was in Shiloh, a major High Place then. In Temple days the water used

to pour libation on the altar during that holiday was still brought by the Yahweh Priest from Shiloh. That sanctuary, by the way, is in beautiful hill country, in the mountains of Ephriam.

And what a holiday it was. Women were very important in it. Already in the Book Of Judges, we are told how the women went in dancing processions in the Vineyards, to celebrate.

There was dancing in the fields, and drinking of the new wine. And eating. Lambs were slaughtered for sacrifice and feasting. At *Beth El*, another High Place, they caroused too. Kind of an ancient Hebrew Oktoberfest.

Of course, they threw one hell of a party at the base of the Golden Calf too, didn't they? After all, don't let's mix up Yahwist wishfull thinking with the reality of the People of the Land.

This merrymaking People Festival was so ingrained that later, when the Temple was built, the Yahweh Priests had no choice. They invited elders of the clans to the grand opening—and guess what Festival was the first to ever be celebrated there?

The festival of Ingathering. In the Highest Place of them all—The Temple, instead of back home on the farm. After all, if you cannot beat them, join them.

So, while modern scholars agree that *Hag HaOssif*, not *Rosh Hashanah* or *Yom Kippur*, was the greatest Holiday of the Year in early Israelite days, mainstream Judaism still reflects the wishes of the Yahwists.

In fact, a Yahwist fundamentalist Seer - the Prophet Amos, records that at the sanctuary at *Beth El* there was considerable

merry making. He raised his eyebrow and launched into vitriolic invective and even attempted to forbid the celebration of the Ingathering altogether – to no avail.

Meanwhile in the southern kingdom, Judah, much the same went on. Isaiah witnessed the Festival of Ingathering and didn't like what he saw. So he ranted and raved and complained bitterly that even the Seers and the priests got drunk and had a merry old time in—horrors!—their local sanctuary. The people didn't listen there either.

Merely ONE of the reasons they called us a stiff necked people, don't you know? Our forefathers and mothers did not like to be told what to do. Which is exactly what the Prophets of Yahweh, which was then a stark and fundamentalist cult, were often so angry about. Perhaps the ancient Hebrews didn't bother paying any attention because they were too busy partying.

All of this changed with the Babylonian Exile. First the Northern Kingdom, then the Southern were attacked and the people taken into captivity and sent to distant places. Thus, the people were brutally disconnected from their land; its seasons, their harvests, and the cycles of its nature.

In a different climate, with different seasons, different harvest times, old holidays lost much of their meaning, and hence also lost their hold on the people.

People did not live long in those days. No more than around thirty years on the average. Within close to two generations of captivity the leaders of the people had a problem. To somehow keep the community together. A folk identity based on Earth Religion alone was threatened as the earth connections disappeared. Perhaps also

because they did not want to be left with nothing to lead, the leaders had to come up with something. We do not know what solutions were considered, except for the ones the Yahwists found.

They needed some kind of common denominator to keep the community together. The best they knew was to inject new Wine into the old jars. They engaged in some creative mythopoeetry. Returning from Exile, the first thing they did was to proclaim a new holiday. It is today called *Chag Has Succoth*, the Holiday of the Booths.

This festival was probably celebrated with merry making. That is, pretty much like the Harvest Holiday it superseded. This is why the *Am HaAretz* still celebrate *Succoth*. We just add it to the Ingathering Festival. Both were great big nature related parties. Palm fronds and olive branches and sweet smelling citron were hung everywhere on the streets and from the houses. People built entire cabins out of them, and walked about during the day in festive garb, waving fronds about, even binding them with golden ribbons if they were rich.

(There is also a possible connection with the palm fronds in the hands of the Queen of the Beasts. Those who revere Her, would, I think, agree.)

We do know that at Shiloh, after the Exile, The High Place was surrounded by merry makers who walked around and around it, singing and dancing and waving the fragrant fronds, and beating the ground with them.

This new festival did not make a return to the Ingathering of the wine harvest, probably because it can take up to seven or eight years for some types of vines to yield a

harvest of grapes once they are planted, and the returnees needed something to cement their community more immediately—so this new festival of *Succoth* was created, along with its mythopoetic rationale.

They said that booths of fronds had been built by the Hebrews in the desert on their way from Egypt; and that this was what the Old/New Feast was now commemorating.

Even the sages admitted that this was false. Were this tradition related to the Exodus, then it would have been at Passover, not in Fall. Besides, go look for yourself. Try finding fronds in the Sinai desert at anytime at the year. Let alone enough for an entire wandering people to make booths from. This also shows just how divorced the people already were from their roots in the earth.

Coming as it did on top of the Ingathering Feast, it was bound to be a successful graft. So great a Festival was this new Post Exile composite that it was sometimes merely called *Ha Hag* (The Holiday).

The *Am HaAretz* celebrate *Succoth* in the same spirit the Ancients did. Minus the Yahwist slant. We deliberately celebrate the Ingathering of Grapes and the Frond Booths at the same time. We party. Back home, in the kibbutz, some decorated their houses with fragrant fronds. Why not? Yahwist incorporation or not, this is an earth connected tradition. We built frond shelters to have meals in with friends and even to live in for a week. Others went camping—living in a tent for a duration of seven days, to somewhere pretty, in nature. And then of course, whenever possible, there just has to be a bonfire and drums and chants. Can't miss that, now, can we?

Those who revere the Queen of the Beasts might even clear a path for her, by beating and sweeping the ground with fronds, if they like to practice a religion-like ceremony. If you look at it that way, it's no wonder the Yahwists of old got nervous. They did try to ignore this tradition of beating the ground with fronds, to look down their noses at this part of it; and called it a "habit of the common people, unworthy of sages," or words to that effect. So some of us back home started doing that too. For fun. Around the bonfire, if possible.

From the days of the *Hag HaOssif*, when the women went dancing into the vineyards, to the day of *Succoth*, the Frond Booth holiday, this was still a special Feast to women. Their role was too ingrained a tradition for the Yahwists to break. So women played a key part and celebrated it and danced in the Temple Court of the Jerusalem Temple as well.

There was a major Women's ritual. Four branched menorahs were lit, in the Court of Women. Dancers followed. Burning torches were hurled in the air over and over to the sound of music and the stamping of dancing feet. And—believe it or not—the Yahwist Priests and Levites stood on one side and sang, and played harp and cymbal to it.

The celebrations of the *Am HaAretz* are similar today. Those who are good with that sort of thing throw torches and catch them. But not women only; both women and men. It's fun. As long as one doesn't catch the torch from the wrong end, which can happen when one gets carried away...

XXX

VOICE OF THE SHEYA

NEW BEGINNINGS

by Tath Zal

I prepare once again for a formal descent into the Underworld—another candidate seeks initiation into this path of Sheya. Each has worked with us prior to this point—on Stillness (of body and mind) and on the Creation of Sacred Space. But, it really all begins here, with dying—dying to Self and dying to Ego who masquerades as Self.

We are full of definitions of Self provided by our parents, our teachers, our friends, our co-workers, the world in general. There is no room in our psyche for Potential; the space is all used up by the here and now, defined/structured by past experience.

This initiation must create a space within the candidate within which Potential is given an opportunity to flourish. The old must be swept out to accommodate the new. Lots of theory, but in practice, it works.

The Temple must be prepared—cleansed, sanctified, brought to the proper level of vibratory awareness. The initiatory current must be invoked and then all is ready, waiting only upon the candidate.

The candidate is brought forth from seclusion, seeking entrance. Why? An adequate answer is rewarded with admission to the Temple. The initiation proceeds. The “death” of the candidate is arranged. Does S/He truly desire this thing? No light task to die for one’s desires—to willingly forego the Known for the Unknown; to reject Security for Potential.

They are brave, these candidates—though warned, they choose to embrace Death for New Life. The initiation continues, the “death” of the candidate is accomplished, the “remains” consumed in fire. All is darkness.

The nameless and formless one who remains is then guided through this dark void, the Abyss, in order to bring Hlr to a new Awakening. Life is a cycle, after all, and Birth follows Death as surely as Death follows Birth.

The journey begins with a descent (doesn’t it always?) into the womb of the Earth. Do the candidates understand the correlation of this womb to their own subconscious? Not that it matters; the macrocosm overlaps the microcosm—as above, so below—so that the effect is the same, regardless.

There, at the very center of this place, each candidate encounters Hlr new form and is given a new name, a new identity which accompanies this form. Re-embodied and re-named, this new creature is ready to Awaken; to embark upon the path S/He has chosen; to join the Community of Others who are also traveling this way.

They are always so beautiful when they emerge, like the butterfly emerging from the cocoon—transformed from ordinary, plain, earth-bound creatures into spirits of light, now decorated with beautiful colors woven in intricate patterns on wings of sheerest gossamer. Also, like the newly emerged butterfly, the Initiate trembles slightly and moves somewhat hesitantly within this, the newest of worlds. And yet, S/He is radiant, shining forth with the glory of new found power and love.

We stay to ground this experience within Hlr and S/He grows steadily calmer and more centered. It is a new calm, a new center, from which much growth will come. That lies in the future. Who knows or even wishes to know tomorrow? Not I; not now. It is enough to have facilitated here, and to share in the joy of new beginnings.

EHYA/IAM!

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If you are interested in further information concerning Draconis Temple and/or any of our focuses as outlined above, please address all inquiries to:

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Letters

28 July 1992
Moon in Cancer

Dear Mezzlim,

I find the bantering between Donald Michael Kraig and Antero Alli very disconcerting: first it was funny, but now it's not. It's evident that these men are getting a charge out of trying to hurt one another—and, as a magician, I am embarrassed by their conduct! Donald is defensive because he doesn't trust himself. Antero is pompous, because he is overly self-involved, and infatuated with the Game. Neither of them seem willing to take responsibility for their own emotional condition. And I would like them to know that they are hurting people. Yes! Their correspondence is not constructive in any way; it is only offensive and shoddy reading.

I am belittled by the whole thought that these men profess to be spiritual leaders, and appoint themselves as “teachers”—while neglecting to demonstrate any credible emotional maturity here whatsoever. My experience has been that Antero, especially, is easily threatened by the presence of a Woman of Power. In the past, he once personally threatened me with the possibility of “becoming violent”! How admirable! Maybe it's time to divulge—for, it is no wonder—how his following becomes so pretentious, so elite! Yet any person with any innate integrity or maturity can witness: Antero is distasteful, he is rude, and worst of all, he is inconsiderate. Antero is the Master of the Mental Mind-Fuck: he hurts people.

When, I wonder, will magicians like you get your asses out of the patriarchy and back into compassion? This lack of trust, this lack of love—it is all a lie. You are feeding into the patriarchy if you are not able to cultivate and

mature those virtues in your life. You feed the patriarchy when you do not make a place for those virtues within yourselves. You call yourselves on the “leading edge”, Donald and Antero? The two of you are doing battle on an emotional war field that belongs in the Dark Ages.

Mezzlim, I ask your weary readers to hear the call of the Goddess of Death and Rebirth: do not resist me with your Egos!

Some Egos will resist Her supple, receptive calling; other Egos simply become rough, tough and rotten...

Antero does not care if you watch him or Oprah; here is your public invitation to learn! Antero has an Ego that is akin to a burned-out steak: go ahead and chew on it all you want to, Donald! You'll never be satiated. As for Antero, it will be the very thing he chokes to death on.

(P.M.S.'ing,)

(Ms.) Orandan La Marie
Seattle, WA

Dear Editor,

I pick up a copy of your magazine whenever I get the chance, and I was pleased to find out that our local “Borders” bookstore has just begun to carry “Mezzlim.”

One aspect I enjoy very much about “Mezzlim” is that this magazine has not become a battleground of the Anal Retentive Magicians (ARMs) who are, of course, always right and who are the only ones that are right. This is why I was most unpleasantly surprised to see the gawd-awful Alli-Kraig bitching match drag on for two whole issues. It aggravates me to no end when authors have such fragile egos that they have to respond to every piece of criticism—no

matter how stupid it may be.

So Antero Alli disagreed with Kraig. So, perhaps, he went further than merely criticizing Kraig's article and escalated to unwarranted personal attack. SO WHAT! Is not the magician's goal to "become more than human?" Well, if the correspondence of these two individuals is any indication of "more than human" behavior, I'm not too sure that that's a worthwhile goal. Perhaps we should strive to become more human, before we set higher goals for ourselves.

Love and Blessings,

Jeva Singh-Anand
Pittsburgh, PA

Mezlim,

Frater Annuit Coeptis' article evoked some intense reactions in me that I would like to share with the readers.

I couldn't help noticing his use of the word "girl" not once but twice. Why doesn't he refer to himself then as a boy?

Toward the end of the article he also uses the word "wife", yet "man" is still "man". Why not "husband"? Is he implying that the "wife" must be faithful to her "man" while the reverse does not always apply? What about, "the word of Sin is Restriction...there is no bond that can unite the divided but love." (Al. I 41) And by the way, I don't think Atwass made a mistake and meant to say "lust", these two emotions are both dealt with clearly. (And why, Fr. A. C., are they separate as you seem to say?)

I also thought it amusing that he describes falling "in lust with Thelema" because of a woman who wore high heels and lipstick. He admits to "scoffing" at women who he calls

"hags", I suppose that is all those who wear flat shoes? Get real! Maybe all we female Thelemites should begin judging our male counterparts against the Hollywood images we are told are sexy by the media? Or is Fr. A. C. trying to evoke The Scarlet Woman by way of Frederick's?

On a purely spiritual level I found the article shallow, and his definition of The Great Work misleading. I will not even comment on the remark that "women have no souls". Perhaps this is an example of "old boy" humor.

Throughout the entire piece I sense a teenage mentality behind the magical formulas.

Again I say, get real.

Soror Persephone

Dear Mezlim,

*Do it till it wilts shall be
the whole of the law.*

A brief note in response to the letter from Fra. Annuit Coeptis:

I must admit, I suspect the man of attempting to stir up trouble. Firstly, after verifying with Dog (a current, not an ex-ELF) that he was under no delusions as to having sworn an oath to Bill Siebert (he wasn't and he didn't) I can say without reservation that while many have sworn oaths at Bill Siebert, few or none have sworn oaths to him. The very idea would fill him with contemptuous glee. Initiation is an inspired and spontaneous event in the Chthonic-Auranian O.T.O. having, in general nothing to do with oaths or arduous trials. We encourage members to do their Will and belong to whatever associations, magical or otherwise, they wish.

Dog is no Tito Puente. As with everyone

he is himself. The oldest school or tradition of drumming is the inspired do-it-till-you-drop-then-get-up-and-do-it-again school. Dog is hard-core. That's about the best compliment I can give anyone.

The all night drumming is the shamanic technique that feeds gatherings some of that good energy we take home when it's over. Those who don't enjoy it and would rather sleep (!) might wish to camp far away. I suggest ear plugs.

Also, a comment on Fra. Annuit's article; as a magickian inhabiting a female body I find it difficult to do my Art on a pedestal—it's confining and there's a long way down. Nor could I respect a man who would permanently place himself in an unequal position to me. Anyone foolish enough to give another complete and unreserved control of their genitalia gets what they deserve (pickled in a mason jar?).

WILL/LOVE

Raven Greywalker

Dear Readers;

Some of you may be amused, others disconcerted by the letters printed in this column. Our purpose is not necessarily either to amuse or to disconcert, but rather to print what feedback we receive, as space allows. So, if you have an opinion - either positive or negative - about something you've read in Mezlim, let us know. Who knows. You may end up amusing and /or disconcerting everyone else.

Have at it,
Kenneth Deigh

Continued from page 15

And finally, the enlightenment of

consciousness that transcends the Ego and embraces the oneness of the world soul. As in the stages of initiation leading to yogic mastery and eventual immortality, each step forward in biological mutation requires an extra effort of the will on the part of the species. Without this effort or adaptation, all species tend either to retrograde or to stand still and finally to become extinct. Just so, the human soul that refuses to seek development, must regress and die. And similarly, tragically, the human race, standing in as it has chosen to do for all terrestrial existence, in failing to transmute itself, will bring down along with itself the destruction of all higher forms of terrestrial life as well. So transcendence is the real meaning of karma—"our spiritual work"—which must be accomplished during a single lifetime or else the individual is swallowed up and reincarnated as something even less endowed, less able to transcend its limits.

Instead of passing through the Abyss beyond the portals of Death, the portals of Death become the portals of Birth. And reincarnation, it must be understood, unless deliberately chosen by a bodhisattva or magician, is always a step downward.

Such retrogression, perhaps, may even extend as far down as the mineral level, where transmutation and transcendence are almost impossible to achieve. Thus, the Philosopher's Stone is the residence of the highest power and the key to everything, because the mineral kingdom is the most difficult to overcome—in contrast to the relatively much easier freedom of man and all his advantages. Paradoxically, then, it is in the lowest that the highest is finally re-encountered, just as the white point of Yang is found in the darkest center of Yin.

In this way it is Death, after all, that is the way to Life.

Reviews

Sister Moon Lodge

by Kisma K. Stepanich

\$14.95

From Llewellyn Publishing
St. Paul, MN 55164-0383

Reviewed by Donna Stanford-Blake

This is a woman's book. Men may read it - many should read it - but the subject matter is thoroughly feminine. As the subtitle explains, this is a book about "The Power & Mystery of Menstruation." Taboo, even in this age of enlightenment, Ms. Stepanich handles the subject with candor, knowledge and insight. She addresses the fear, shame and disgust women have been taught to feel about this most feminine of bodily functions in a frank, caring manner. Her views helped me to begin to value the physical manifestation of my "femaleness". Quite liberating!

Divided in three sections - In the Beginning; Full Flower; After the Flow - this book covers everything from "Ovulation Awareness" to "The Grandmother Revolution". A separate table of contents lists meditations and rituals for easy reference. A lunation calendar journal is also included so you can keep track of your own personal cycle. The three appendixes and the bibliography offer a wealth of resources from natural feminine products to information on forming your own moon lodge circle.

The unique flavor of this book is achieved by the blending of practical advice on coping with the physical aspects of being female with meditations and rituals

celebrating the spiritual side of each stage of womanhood. Though I found the information on P.M.S. enlightening, I especially enjoyed reading about the crowning ritual.

Ms. Stepanich borrows from Native American traditions mixed with Wiccan and adds a dash of herself to create her meditations and rituals. She encourages the reader to experiment in creating the rituals that work best for each individual. Some are best done alone but many lend themselves to group work. Women coming together to honor their womanhood. Beautiful!

A single reading doesn't do justice to this book. It contains so much valuable information it definitely has earned reference book status. A wonderful gift for a young woman - or a woman of any age for that matter!

The Secrets Of Masonic Mind Control: Alchemical Psychodrama And The Processing Of Humanity

by Michael A. Hoffman II

From Riswell/Ruffin House
Temecula, CA

Reviewed by Thomas Lytle

Michael Anthony Hoffman II is a notorious conspiracy researcher, occult investigator and journalist. Hoffman is well known for his extremely original and startling alchemical theories and, on the underside, for his extremely racist doctrines and activist stances relating to the occult, human evolution and para-politics. This racism, called "white separatism", extends

into the premise of this otherwise brilliant occult book, which includes his ideas of attempts to “deculturalize the masses, making them into rootless herds of wandering consumers without history or heritage.” What springs from heritage—morality, ethics, family and religious tradition—among other things—is under a final attack in a precise way. This attack has been growing for centuries, according to the author, by way of what Hoffman terms “the gnostic/Kabbalistic/Masonic/Hermetic Academy.”

An interesting premise to Masonic Mind Control is that yes, indeed, we did once live in a perfect world—a natural God-created Paradise. Then magicians deliberately set about to “improve” on this, constructing and attempting the “better mousetraps” built of rationality and technology.

Swimming into the same deep channels as the alchemists he accuses, the author describes man’s original fall from grace:

“Man began his peregrination away from Eden through his conceit that he would ‘become as God’. Yet, as soon as he left the divine plan for the occult process, his stated objective became the Kabbalistic call for the *Tikkum Olam* or ‘repair of the world’ via the imposition and intervention of human brain power—the very egomaniacal device that caused the separation from God in the first place.

“...The heirs to the magic(k)al current were saluted by the Illuminists and master alchemist Comenius in his 1668 book The Way Of Light, dedicated to the first scientific organization in human history.

“...a key Rosicrucian description of the *City Of Utopia* is shown to be dominated by

science and mechanics—and more ominously—the dissection of cadavers...the hyperanalytical obsession with rationalism...” Hoffman, pp. 5.

The basic premise of Hoffman’s amazing book—or perhaps I might say his “counter-grimoire”, posits modern techno-revelations like nuclear fission, television, space flight and even recent marvels like Virtual Reality equipment to be part of a more sinister plan to further separate man from Nature’s calls and his own God given instincts.

The Virtual Reality experiments have the focus of a plethora of New Age or Hip or counter-culture publications, accepted like sliced bread without a second glance. Hoffman goes toe-to-toe with the New-Age darling, quoting especially from his favorite prophetic film “Videodrome”.

“Videodrome” has to do with the occult application of television to transmit a “current” which “initiates” the victim into a bizarre world of hallucination and genetic mutation:

“We are entering savage, new times... The battle for the mind of North America will be fought in the video arena—the Videodrome!

“... Your reality is already half hallucination. If you are not careful it will become total hallucination. Massive amounts of Videodrome signal will ultimately create a new outgrowth of the human brain which will produce and control hallucination to the point that it will change human destiny...”

Hoffman continues:

“... If we consider the hours of the day that most Americans spend in front of the TV, and add to that the hours that most

children spend immersed in the digital world of video games, and add to that...computer simulated worlds of 'supposed history and travel'... We see the gradual creation of a population of 'dwellers in perpetual illusion.'

"Couple this with the very rapid destruction of our own wild nature and environment and/or our ability to access this and modern humanity emerges as the enslaved drone bee—worker ant helmeted and wired, processed and programmed that has been the object of secret societies since the inception of Adam Weishaupt's *Beenan Order* [Order Of The Bees or Illuminati—TL]." Hoffman, pp. 38.

Hoffman also accuses one of the major occult academies—the *Ordo Templi Orientis* of being purely Satanic and acting as some sort of "counter-Church." He accuses O.T.O. Lodge-master John Whiteside Parsons—the famous rocket scientist—of being a "descendent of the Satanic Hell Fire Club of Britain." He even accuses the O.T.O. of setting up and performing Earth magic(k) rituals to perversely control the Earth's (or Gaian) electromagnetic system through ritual. He believes that the Earth, like the human body, is made up of meridians and chakra's and that "manipulations" can be done to affect weather, climate and other terrestrial

phenomena—just like some sort of Geo-acupuncture.

He also makes claims that Hillside Strangler Kenneth Bianchi somehow was involved with the O.T.O., and part of his killing had to do with rituals surrounding such O.T.O. "chakra" sites. ...And that Mt. Palomar and the giant telescope there became a ceremonial focus for the group of magicians led by Parsons, and that the giant telescopic "eye" channeled in light from Saturn/Sirius for initiatic radiations.

The importance of Hoffman's book lies in his ability to gather what seems to be initiatic insights—probably from prior days in the occult—and use them to blast the Illuminati to its' core!

Hoffman is dangerous and so is this book, especially so for those who mystify Illuminism or Hermeticism. He truly believes that the original Aryans were a peaceful, nomadic tribe very similar to American Indians pre-conquest. Then the Illuminati and their lap dogs moved in, and the Aryans were pillaged. And their heritage scattered.

They are back with a vengeance, and Michael Anthony Hoffman is carrying the teeth of the Hydra...!

Writer's Guidelines

Are you interested in writing for Mezlim? We are always happy to review submissions of articles, artwork and photography in a Magickal vein.

Articles may range in length from 500 to 4500 words. All submissions should be typed, black ink on white paper. Please enclose S.A.S.E and the name under which you wish to be published.

Address all submissions to the Editor..

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Continued from page 22

What kind of person had I become that I could contemplate such a thing, and even Will it? Not knowing how to resolve such a question, I chose to hide from this Aspect of my Self for many years.

As I continued on my particular path, I became acquainted with magick. Herein I discovered the guidelines for undertaking self-transformation "with intent." I began to specifically address my fears in ritual. I worked to reclaim my sense of trust and of power over my world (a success, I might add). I am currently working at tearing down the barriers I have built around my inner Self. Another fear, that of "Exposure/Rejection/Death" of Self, is slowly passing into oblivion. Magick is powerful stuff; that stuff of which transformation is made—of Self and of our World.

Death/Transformation is a vehicle which carries us into new territory, previously unexplored. It is unique in that, in the process of transporting us, it also transforms us. The old Self has died and the new Self does not yet recognize this new internal landscape. Maps for this new territory must be developed; Self slowly comes to know Self. And, the process continues.

All growth occurs in cycles and includes Death. It is an integral part of the process. Without a clearing away of the old, there is no space for the new to come forth and develop itself. Death heralds the beginning of Life. As we come to accept this and begin to set aside our fear of this important step in the evolutionary process, our progress along our respective paths will become steadier and may even accelerate—a very worthy goal for so serious an undertaking.

The "cultivation" of Death is not without pain and sorrow. The old is known, comfortable, sometimes even loved. The very human tendency is to remain where we feel safe and secure...but therein lies stagnation—and a different sort of Death: Death of Self, Death of Process, Death of Potential. To transform one's Self and one's world is to leave behind the familiar; and, even when that familiar world is itself full of pain, to abandon it in search of the unknown can hurt a great deal. Such is a part of the price we pay to attain the greater Self, the more perfect Union, the Star in Sight.

Ferryman, my coin...

XXX

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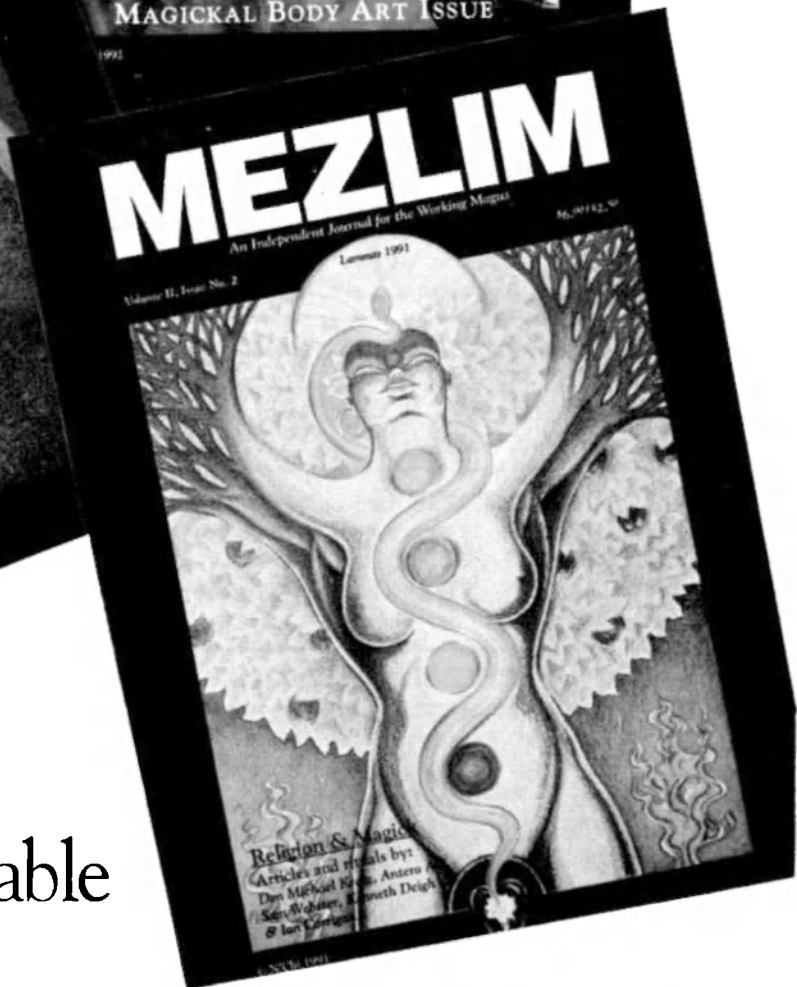
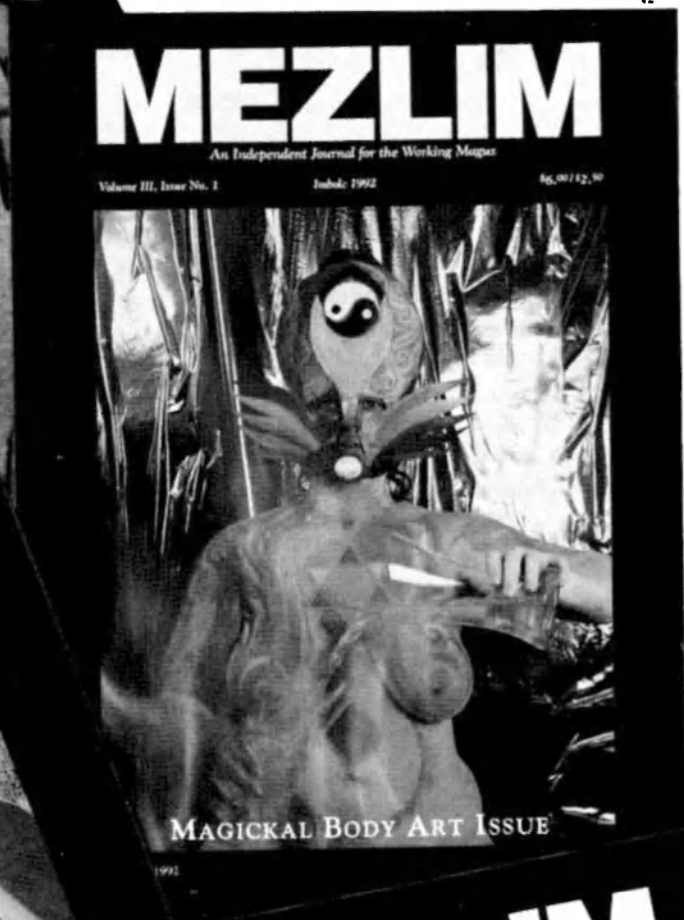
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