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Whare Atua

Abracadabra

This is probably the most well known of ancient magical words of power, popularised by stage magicians over the generations.

But it originally had a serious purpose as spell for healing.

THE ABRACADABRA FORMULA was first publicly used, as a spell to reduce fever, by Serenus Sammonicus, physician to the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius [188 to 217 c.e.] He took it from a contemporary Aramaic magical healing formula which is spelled אבדא כדברא, and pronounced "Abda ka-Dabra," which means "May it perish as the word."

The word was then repeated over and over, each time shortening it by one letter:

אבדאכדברא
אבדאכדבר
אבדאכדב
אבדאכד
אבדאכ
אבדא
אבד
אכ
א
א

As the word diminished, so would the fever reduce. This is a classic piece of sympathetic magic. There are about three pages to the original spell and its accompanying ceremonial healing rite.

However, Serenus made the mistake every not very good student of Hebrew makes. He confused the letter Daleth ד with the letter Reysh ר.

Daleth is made with two strokes of the pen; Reysh with one stroke of the pen. Daleth and Reysh were always getting

confused in ancient times and in modern. So Abdakadbra became Abrakadbra.

Qabalistic analysis

The original formula with all its reductions had a measure of 582 which is of the 6th degree, referred to the Central Sefirah, where resides Rafa'el, the mighty Archangel of Healing. The word ABDAKDBRA before reduction has the measure 235, which is of the 17th degree, referred to the letter Cheyth, which is linked in the Sefer Yetsirah, written at about the same time as the ABDAKDBRA formula, with Seychah, which is sometimes translated Speech, but is specifically used for any kind of meditation that uses words. Seychah is the kabbalistic equivalent of Japa or "mantra meditation" in Sanskrit.

Aleister Crowley

Aleister Crowley knew nothing of all this, confused the pronunciation of the word with the spelling of the word, which are two different things in Hebrew, and got the measure 433 which didn't do anything for him, so he altered the spelling to ABRAHADABRA with the measure 418, the measure of the spelling of חיה, pronounced Cheyth, corresponding to "Seychah". So he got there in the end, but only by accident.

The source of the above information is "Amulets and Talismans", by E.A. Wallis Budge, a 1961 reprint of the original edition.

