



Beyond The Book of Shadows



Lynden Clarke

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by
Lynden Clarke

**GREEN
MAGIC**

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GREEN MAGIC

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INTRODUCTION

This book has been written as a guide to some of the advanced techniques of ritual circle building within the overall tradition of modern Wicca. It is intended for anyone who is currently practising Witchcraft, of any form, who wishes to explore advanced techniques beyond his or her current style of ritual practice.

This book has been entitled; 'Beyond the Book of Shadows' because it is a sincere attempt to explain and develop Wiccan ritual practice beyond where the 'Book of Shadows' left off; especially regarding the awareness of the energetic side of ritual. It is primarily focused on just two practices; the setting up of a magical circle and the invoking of Divine force into it. Together these form the two fundamentals of Wiccan magic ritual. The idea is that if these two practices are learnt correctly and done to the best of our ability, then everything else will fall into place and evolve quite naturally.

What really goes on in a Wiccan circle (or indeed, in any ritual circle), on a magical level, is rarely written about. This book is an attempt to remedy this gap, by being a guide to conducting the fundamentals of ritual and an inspiration to the mystery of ritual. For when any ritual truly comes alive it enters into the other world and takes us with it. Wicca, for all its idiosyncrasies and

differences has, at its heart, a pure diamond of divine mysteries. It is one of the very few mystery religions we still have with us today.

The Book of Shadows

The Book of Shadows is a symbol of Wicca's roots and one of the main sources of its current mythology. At the time of its creation, the Book of Shadows was no doubt what was needed in order to capture people's imagination and kick-start the movement of modern day Wicca. However, Wicca has matured considerably since it was written in the middle of the last century. Much of the material contained within the Book of Shadows as created by Gerald Gardner, while being a tremendous spring board to the growth of Wicca initially, has now long outlived its usefulness and is at best interesting as a curiosity and at worst, simply embarrassing. While Wicca has a magical heart, it is surrounded by a forest of mythology, of old style religious beliefs and personal idiosyncrasies. This book is an attempt to carry out some pruning and show some more of that magical heart.

Religion v Spirituality

Wicca is unusual in that it is both a religion *and* a method of magical development. Because Wicca is a religion as well as an esoteric path, it suffers from the same problems all religions do. Its structure and mythology solidify and become taken to be true in themselves. It is for this reason that ritual lodges mostly escape this problem entirely, although the Crowley inspired Thelemic movement may find itself sharing some of these issues.

Human beings love to create religions and the path of magic is actually for the relatively few only. Many people have become attracted to Wicca because it seems to offer a new identity, an

exciting lifestyle (at least in their eyes) or image, new friends or social activities and so on. On this level, it offers the same as any religion; a new set of world beliefs and viewpoints, another dream-world fantasy and another set of distractions for the mind.

Every path of spiritual development worthy of its name requires us to take repeated hard looks at our own personal beliefs and mythology in order to help us become aware of our own hidden assumptions about the world and ourselves. As part of this process we need to look also at the structure of our chosen path; the myths and prejudices, the inner unspoken paradigms, all those elements which make up the outer shell of a religion or a world view. Whatever that path may be, it is nothing if not a reflection of our own inner state. We chose it because something about the structure of our religious or spiritual path resonated with something similar within ourselves. When we shed light on the meaning of this outer form, we shed light on its inner or outer counterpart within ourselves. When it comes to comparing the framework of a religion and the flame of spirit, the structure and shell of any religion, Wicca included, usually has one overwhelming effect; that is to trap the spirit and put it to sleep. To walk the path of initiation also has only one purpose; that is to free the spirit and awaken it.

I say usually because a religion represents two different end results. One of these is the crystallisation of original spiritual insight into a more or less rigid form. The other is the condensing of spiritual insight into a guiding wisdom relevant for our time. The first of these prevents the spirit from evolving. The other inspires its growth to new levels. This is a very thin line to walk and it is a very human trait to take the form of a religion for the light of spirit and so fall asleep. While the path of magic may be for the few, it may be that the true path of religion is for the even fewer.

Wicca is unusual in that it is to all extents and purposes, a modern, 'made-up' religion. Unlike other religions, it does not

have a semi-mythical prophet as its founder. Its founder was a man, Gerald Gardner. Gerald Gardner did not set himself up as a prophet. He did not claim any divine inspiration or message from 'on high'. He stated that he was simply continuing an ongoing current of tradition. Whether he was or whether he mostly reinvented something makes no difference, either way Wicca stands alone as being a religion which has grown upwards from this world, rather than one which has descended from some 'higher world'. Because of this, it has a greater degree of freedom with which to define itself than do most religions. Because of this, it constantly runs the risk of losing its inspiration to mundane differentiation.

Wicca makes up and creates its own myths and cosmology as it is evolving. Which is why it is so much more important for Wiccans to be conscious of what myths we are taking on board and operating by. Such religious mythologies and beliefs have a strong habit of feeding back upon their creators; ourselves, perpetuating themselves and in the end defining and limiting (if we let them by not being conscious of them), our own world view and our ability to see clearly the matters of spirit, which is beyond all world views.

This book then is about the esoteric side of Wicca, not the religious side. It is about the inner, energetic side of Wicca, not the side of appearances and lifestyle. It is about the divine mystery at the heart of Wiccan practice which is its soul and spirit, not the Wicca of herbal remedies, fortune telling and love spells. This is a book for those who would awaken their souls to the divine presence at the heart of Wiccan practice and who are not afraid to grow beyond its mythological shell.

PART ONE: SETTING THE SCENE

1. MAGIC, RITUAL & SYMBOLISM

Magic is an incredibly difficult subject to write about, when we want to describe its heart. It is by its very nature experiential and 'beyond words'. Which is why it is known as 'the mysteries'.

To begin with, why practice magic or ritual, of any kind, at all? What is its purpose? Ultimately (or even, most importantly) the purpose of magic and ritual and of every spiritual path of awakening, of which Wicca is one, is to help us to contact and 'converse with' Divinity. In other words, Ritual supports our own spiritual growth and evolution.

Traditionally, much of Wicca might play down or even deride this aspect. Instead, Wicca would concentrate on its earthly, empirical side. Ritual, or magic, so this attitude goes, is done to heal, gain a job or a lover, or some other practical benefit. All of which is a valid use of magic of course, but this is a little like owning a top of the range sports car and using it only for trips to the supermarket on a Saturday morning. Such a way of approaching magic also imposes something of a limited perspective on ourselves. If that is all we concentrate on in our ritual practice, we perpetuate Wicca's own mythology (and by extension, ours too), of being a religion for and of the 'common folk', the peasants, the 'rural country folk'. This mythology defines and limits us if we let it. This is particularly evident in the practice in Wicca of referring to the God and the Goddess as

the 'Lord & Lady'. Quaintly folksy as it is, what is it symbolising about our own standing, how we see ourselves and how we view our relationship with Divinity? If we want to pretend that we are a kind of modern day rural peasant whose reflex action is a quick doffing of the cap, then that is what you will become. If you wish to become all that a human being truly can, then perhaps such an attitude is best left behind. I prefer to believe that the Gods are there to grow along with us, not to rule over us.

If magic is ultimately about contacting Divinity, why use ritual as a means to do this? Partly, it appears that we do not have much of a choice. Ritual seems to be something which is hard-wired into the architecture of the human brain and psyche. It arises naturally in children and is present in every single human culture on the planet and, as far as we can tell, always has been. It is an expression of a deeply inherent human intuition that performing actions in a certain way can have an influence on the world around us. We spontaneously create rituals and intuitively respond to them. So, in other words; it's natural.

I am differentiating here between 'ritual' and 'habit'. Any repeated action or series of actions could be either. When a series of actions are done consciously, then it is ritual. When it is done unconsciously, then it is habit. In this context, the rituals we are dealing with are those performed explicitly for religious or spiritual reasons, however this is defined.

Ritual can be and do many things. ● On one level, whereas mysticism carries one person to the Divine, ritual can carry many. Following the Qabalistic and alchemical axiom; 'as above, so below', a ritual can mirror a divine process on earth and so help in its manifestation. A ritual can be a way of gathering together and focusing psychic energy (however you may define it), towards a specific end; be this the invoking of a God, the evocation of a spirit, the consecration of an item or the gaining of knowledge or experience of a specific type of spiritual energy. A ritual can be a way to symbolically and importantly mark a special event, such as an initiation and a ritual can also be purely

devotional; dedicated to giving energy or thanks to a particular deity purely out of love.

At the basis of all of this is the simple but powerful reason why people the world over perform ritual. No matter how deeply and unconsciously buried it might be, people have a sense of the Divine and at some level, in some way, wish to communicate with it. In a nutshell, that is why we all do ritual (yes, even chaos magicians; though they would never admit it!). So ritual is how we give structure to the phenomenon we call magic.

You may ask, how (for example), is a spell for more money related to contacting the Divine? Well, the question also has to be asked, if we did not believe in anything outside of or greater than ourselves, we could not or would not, be performing such a spell. That sense of 'something else' I would say, is the spiritual urge of any human being, however faintly it might be felt.

From this point of view then, let us look at what we are doing, on an inner level, when we perform a magical ritual. We might begin by trying to define what magic is. There have been numerous attempts and definitions which respective commentators have come up with over the years. They all capture some aspect of the truth but none is really all-encompassing. Personally, I am not so sure it is possible to define magic in an overall sense. Magic is too shifting and ephemeral and too 'beyond words' to really capture. A way of looking at magic which I find useful is simply that Magic, in its truest and most profound sense, is the action of our divine self in participation with the rest of the universe and ultimate Divinity. Perhaps that doesn't mean anything to you, perhaps it resonates strongly with you. For me it works because it seems to express what happens on a most fundamental level when we truly 'Work Magic', rather than being an empirical type of answer which I am not sure is even possible.

Instead of trying to define magic itself, it might be more helpful to try and make sense of what magic is by describing what magic feels like when it happens. That way, we are following our own intuition of where our practice is taking us and can learn to

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recognise magic when it happens.

If we do this, Magic, as I experience it, is Awe. It is that spine tingling feeling of wonder. Magic is the most joyous type of communication with the whole of reality. It is, in essence, the language of ecstasy. Even if only because that is the state a ritual can lift one too and in which it is carried out. We may not get there all of the time but it is always there I believe, none-the-less, just waiting for us to grasp it.

There is much in this for meditation on. To say that magic is the action of our divine nature is important. We could also easily say that magic is the effect of our participation with our divine nature. We are truly divine at heart but most of the time we don't know this because we live in our personalities only and perceive the world not as a unity but as a million different dualities. It can easily seem that we contact our divine nature in ritual but it is more accurate to say that we lose some contact with our false sense of self and who we are and become a little more of our true selves. From the point of view of the ego 'we' do not do magic because the limited self of the ego or personality is quite unable to do such a thing. It is our Divine self who does the magic and who we truly are. Magic helps us to realise this more and more.

Ritual, defined, is a structured action performed with conscious intent to mark something, say something or achieve something. It is similar to habit except that habit is simply ritual without the conscious attention. There are many, many rituals which are not magical. What makes a ritual magical is the intent (again, however faintly felt or perceived), of the human soul to contact the Divine soul. Ritual can be as simple as a cross of the fingers or the lighting of a candle or as involved and complex as a full Golden Dawn ceremony. The opposite to ritual; the Divine contacting the human, is Grace, which uses no ritual but just 'happens', naturally, 'as if by magic'.

All magic and ritual works by use of symbols. Generally speaking we tend not to wield the fundamental forces of nature

directly with our bare brains (not outside of fantasy novels anyway). Instead, we deal with all of reality both magical and mundane (if we must differentiate), via the use of symbols. Everything we do in magic we do by the use of symbols. Everything we do in everyday life, we do through and because of, symbols. Understanding the nature of symbols is the key to almost everything in magic (and much else).

Symbols are the words of our Divine language. Symbols are how we communicate with Divinity and with other beings and also with each other, across dimensions of existence which rule out any other way of communicating. Symbols and the energy behind them, form the truest universal language. It is hard for us, in these most literal of times, to appreciate just how true this is. Let's look at some examples:

Religious paintings are full of symbolism; it virtually falls off the canvas at you. They are this way because they were intended to portray and illustrate religious or spiritual principles and parables to a populace who mostly did not read and also to preserve esoteric truths for time (and conversely, to hide esoteric truths from those who could not 'read' the language). So if on a painting you saw a cat and a dove sitting together by a fireplace, for example, you would know this to be a symbol that an unusual degree of peace and grace was being depicted here. A similar communication of spiritual principles has been incorporated into the architecture of the great European cathedrals. For those who have the eyes to see, they are like huge great books of spiritual truths. At the most profound level, the whole world is also taken to be an interplay of symbols, depicting deep spiritual truths. The Tarot cards are another prime example of transmitting spiritual principles via images or symbols, rather than words. The great Alchemist, Nicholas Flammel, allegedly achieved his knowledge by gazing at the pages of an old Jewish alchemy book. This book contained sacred images, the contemplation of which eventually excited and enlivened Flammel's mind until the sacred knowledge each picture was symbolising, crystallised into his knowledge of

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how to complete the operations of Alchemy.

To get to the root of symbols, let's take a quick excursion into biology. Let's look at how we interact on a very basic level, just in this world. We see with our eyes and hear with our ears. Obvious, yes? Yet we do not do this without a great deal of learning; learning how to see and how to hear. Our culture, at the same time, also teaches us what to see and what to hear. After only a few years or even months of life, we do not actually 'see' or 'hear' what comes into our eyes or ears anymore. Instead, we see the representations our brain has built up internally, to symbolise the patterns of light entering our eyes and the vibrations of sound entering our ears. After a while, we increasingly tend to see and hear what we expect to see and hear. The brain tends to operate on the probability of what we encounter in the outside world. Almost all of the time this works just fine. It's quick and easy and evolution has obviously preferred it. But it is not reality. It is symbolic and we exist right in the very thick of it. It seems that there is absolutely no escape from symbolism. It is inherent in our very biology and reality is a most elusive thing.

Think for a moment how we communicate with each other. Do we speak with each other directly, mind to mind, spilling whole concepts of understanding into each other's consciousness? As a rule, no. We can't (usually) do that. So instead we make scratches on paper or sounds in the air, both of which in themselves mean absolutely nothing, but to which we have attached a shared meaning. We agree, between ourselves, to use the same sounds and the same shaped scratches on paper to mean, or symbolise, the same fixed things in the outside world. Like magic and ritual, symbolism too arises naturally out of the architecture of the human mind and herein lies the root of language and writing.

We can be surprisingly accurate and specific most of the time with this. By making agreed sounds in the air (with otherwise would be meaningless babble), or agreed shapes on paper (which otherwise are simply doodles), I can tell you that I would like a chocolate and cashew nut cookie placed on my bedside table

at 10.34pm on Wednesday next week. That is a high degree of information to be able to convey by translating my thoughts into sounds or scribbles which you then translate back into your own thoughts (and then bring me my cookie). No wonder mistakes in communication occur yet most of the time it works just fine. But it is not 100% accurate. Its great for fixed 'things' like the example used above but if I say 'I love you' or even 'I don't love you', or if someone asks 'do you love me?', things get a little trickier. We can't look into each other's minds or hearts and know exactly what each of us are feeling or thinking and it sometimes takes an awful lot of words to convey our feelings and they can still seem inadequate. But it's all still symbols. Symbolism then, is how we communicate all of the time and how we interact with the world.

Now in magic, we are communicating with forces or even beings who inhabit different worlds entirely. Just think of how much a Wall Street trader might have in common with a Mongolian Yak herder. Not much, but at least they are both human and can still smile and laugh and both, for all their different worlds, share basic human cares and concerns. Now imagine a being such as a spirit of the Air element. How many people can conceive of what it is like to be such a being and to live in such a totally different world? How would we communicate with such a being? Well, as an initiate you might very well need to know this.

How do we communicate with an intelligence which lives in a world where it has no physical body, no physical senses such as eyes or touch, knows nothing of our constant need to eat, does not need to sleep, has no territorial demands or notion of personal status? Virtually all of the things which define our world as human do not exist for a spiritual being. If ever there was an alien intelligence then this is it. How on earth can we ever communicate with such a being?

Just as the Wall Street trader and Yak Herder from Mongolia are both humans, they, along with the spirit of the Air element are also all creations of Divinity. If we are acting with Divinity in

mind or with a divine purpose or aim then we have a common ground and can communicate. And we do this through symbols.

In hermetic magic and the Qabalah there is the axiom or saying; 'as above, so below'. It simply means that the same fundamental principles operate throughout the universe on all its many levels. It's all built on the same architecture. Things in 'heaven' have their reflections here on earth and vice versa. Because of this, we can use symbols to communicate across barriers, across different dimensions, worlds, languages, species and beings.

Symbolism is at the root of our very existence and forms the basis of all magic. Part of the path of the initiate, of spiritual awakening, is to use symbols consciously to increase our awareness of their influence on the world around us and on ourselves. Ultimately, symbols might be left behind entirely in those glimpses where we seem to contact Divinity and true Reality directly, beyond all dualism and illusion. This is a long process but it begins with becoming conscious here and now of how we use symbolism, of how we are defined by it in many ways and of learning how to consciously use symbols and their energy. In this way we learn to begin to see the mythology by which we lead our lives and with which our religions shape and colour spiritual truths.

In magic, symbolism is the language of the divine, whatever form it takes. It forms the common tongue of all beings everywhere. Truly, learning magic can be viewed as learning to speak in another language. In actual fact, it is the energy and intent behind the symbol which is 'read' by both parties, the symbol itself being more of a shorthand for us, a symbol of the energy being carried. The symbol is not the thing it is symbolising, but it may be a material expression of it as it manifests into this world.

In summary, we are talking about a very special language. A Divine language of nature based on love and unity. Symbols are its words. Ritual is its speech and magic is its sound. And its sound is ecstasy.

2. THREE THINGS WE NEED FOR MAGIC

You perform a ritual. You stand in the middle of your room and draw shapes in the air and call out strange names. Is it working for you? Or perhaps you watch someone else perform a ritual, maybe even on TV. Does it grab you and involve you and move you to another level entirely? Or does it seem empty or simply theatrical? It could be either, depending perhaps on suspension of disbelief. Call to mind the extent to which television and non-magical theatre have the power to so move us and play with our emotional states. Magical ritual can do all of this and more, but just like a television program or play, it has to be done well and it's easy to do it ineffectually.

What makes a ritual actually 'work' and become magical? It has been written about many, many times but always bears repeating. Imagination. Focus. Passion.

The not so secret *secret* to ritual and magic, is that the most important stuff happens internally and this then supports and gives life to that which is happening externally and physically. This is why the external form of a ritual can be so varied and still be effective. What happens internally is the same each time.

On the outside, it might seem like a person in a ritual simply wanders serenely across the room and places something on the altar. If they are doing it right, beneath the surface they will be concentrating intensely, imagining, focusing on their role and conjuring up emotional energy. Just like in a play, to make a ritual come alive, it has to be real for the participants, whether they be actors, witches or magicians.

How is that brought about? Let's look at the three ingredients listed above. Imagination. Focus. Passion. Exactly like performers, we use our imagination to *act*. We use our focus to concentrate and our passion to make it feel real and to come alive. We make believe in other words, just like children playing. The difference is that in ritual we are not playing cops and robbers we are 'playing' with symbols.

What happens in practice is that, though at first *we* create the images and ritual around us, sooner or later (depending on how vividly we have created these symbols around us), there comes a point at which the symbols connect with the energies which they represent. At this point, suddenly, the ritual, the images, the symbols, everything we are using, begin to speak back to us, with an inventiveness and vividness that is way beyond both our capability and, more tellingly, our style. Be prepared; the first time this happens it can be quite a shock. Suddenly you realise all this is for real.

When children play, their game and the drama being played out is absolutely real for them. They know it's a game of course, but they don't play it while constantly thinking in their heads; "oh, this isn't really real, I'm not really a cowboy or a shopkeeper". Instead, they play and throw themselves into the game and for the time they are playing it, forget about the 'outside' world. Just as we, when watching a play or television programme forget about the rest of our life, our cares and concerns and concentrate on the play and become absorbed in the drama and story being

played out in front of us. We become involved in the story and events of the characters and, 'believing it to be real', within that space, become moved to tears, elation, frustration or laughter, according to their story. Magical ritual is based on exactly the same principles and attitude; it just takes it a little bit further. That 'little bit further' is what causes a ritual to eventually contact and cause a response from the inner worlds. It is at that point, that a magical ritual really takes off and lifts us to another realm entirely. But we usually have to put some effort in first just like actors rehearsing.

The three pre-requisites mentioned above are the foundations of success in ritual and magic. The usual theory is that if we picture something strongly enough and embody enough psychic energy into it via our emotions and then concentrate on it until it becomes more stable, then it becomes increasingly 'real' and will eventually manifest on this material plane.

Imagination is usually taken to mean visualisation, perhaps because we are predominantly a very visual culture and this is reflected in our language. It sounds odd to ask someone to visualise a smell or sound when one means to imagine a smell or a sound. Even the words imagine, image and imagination suggest images and visual happenings. We do not have an equivalent terminology for creating and perceiving sounds or smells or emotional states within us. Yet some people will hear sounds or experience smells or emotional states as easily and vividly as others see pictures. No matter. For now, let's use the word imagine to mean an internal creation, whichever sense we are using to perceive it.

In circle building, we use our 'imaginative senses' at every single step, bringing the ritual to life in a very real way. What this means is that when performing an activity within a ritual, as well as visualising as acutely as possible, we also add the energy of our other senses as well. So, when invoking the elements at

the quarters for example, we do not just visualise a pentagram and a being behind it. We add to our visual sense all of our other senses. We add to our imagined picture, sounds, smells, an emotional nuance or energy and a sense of reality or substance, an 'as if we could touch it' quality. All of which is genuinely difficult work to do at first, as it demands that we use senses and ways of perceiving that we normally skip over or neglect. However, when this ability is applied within ritual, it will develop magical ability and ritual success more quickly than pretty much anything else.

To do this takes a great deal of focus, which only comes with practice. No matter how much natural ability for magic we have or no matter how little natural ability we think we have, we can never progress much beyond that level unless or until we learn to focus and concentrate our 'monkey minds' and then to silence our minds. These two abilities are the absolute foundation for all spiritual progress. Exactly like exercising our biceps, no matter how weak or strong we are to start with, practice makes us stronger and enables us to do more. This is as true magically and spiritually as it is physically.

There are many ways to learn to concentrate and silence our minds. But history and the experience of participants in all paths has shown that the one way that is more effective than any other is simply to sit down and learn to meditate. There is no glamour in this; it is a struggle to sit for 10 minutes or 30 concentrating on nothing but our breath. It is even harder to sit for the same concentrating on nothing; simply silent minded. Yet it is this practice which will open all the doors of the mysteries to each seeker, and whatever we can do naturally, we will be able to do much more, the greater we master these two practices.

Just as great actors and actresses do not just simply appear, fully talented and able but instead develop and hone their craft through years of training and discipline, so to do spiritual seekers

wishing to perform magic need to do the same. It takes time to develop the imagination, time to strengthen the concentration and time to learn to evoke emotional states and energies at will. It also takes a great deal of motivation. Of course, we don't have to do any of this; we can take it very gently. By analogy, anyone can do amateur dramatics and derive great pleasure from it for many years. But think of the difference between a play by a local village AD society and the RSC. What makes that difference? Natural talent yes, but mostly years of disciplined training. So the qualities needed to be good at magic are at root no different to those needed to progress at any activity. The difference is that magic demands more qualities to be developed and honed than any other discipline and, much more importantly, requires that all of our qualities be as much in balance as possible. Spiritual development is not for specialists. It is ultimately about the fullest ripening of everything that each and every human being is and can be. Which is a very tall order indeed.

We have looked at the role of imagination and focus, what about that of Love, Emotion, Passion or Feeling, the third component? Benjamin Rowe describes one aspect of this very well in his article; 'The Essential Skills of Magick' when he describes the emotional component as; *"Passion in the sense of an intense desire to be connected to that which you are seeking to invoke, a desire that places no restrictions or limits on the connection, but which is so one pointed that nothing save that which is sought is included in its focus"*. There is much in this sentence, very succinctly captured.

The other aspect to this is, like the children playing games described above, when performing ritual one of the best attitudes to adopt is to simply play and to happily enjoy the ritual and, at first, to perform it 'without lust of results' and to simply see what happens. Trying too hard or taking it too seriously, especially when first beginning such a strange activity as ritual or witchcraft, can all too easily strangle our own inner soul. Speaking from

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experience, if we concentrate on getting the structure right, so that we can perform the ritual 'correctly' without thinking about it, then we will have overcome the biggest obstacle to success, because then our conscious mind can take a rest, as we do not now need to be thinking about 'what comes next'. From learning a blind habit, grows the vision of magical ability.

The short answer then to how to do magic and ritual is this. Play with it. Absorb yourself in it. Love it.

3. CIRCLE BUILDING

Having looked at the underlying foundations and motivations behind practising magic and ritual and before we look in depth at the different aspects of circle building, it is useful to take an overview of the whole process of how we go about opening up a magical circle for ritual. The basic circle ritual forms the backbone of magical practice and certainly is the main practice at Wiccan Esbats and as preparation for the seasonal Sabbats. It is the way in which we prepare a space and ourselves for any further ritual or magical work. The ritual of circle building, at its best, takes us from the mundane world of duality and gradually raises us up, until we are aware of increasingly subtle realities, ultimately up to awareness of our own Divine Selves.

Without exaggeration it is true to say that this is the most important part of any ritual. If the circle building is not carried out effectively, then the remainder of the ritual is unlikely to have much of an impact either. Indeed, for much of our training, the building of a magical circle is an important enough work in itself, worth doing for the benefits it alone brings regardless of any other work.

The actual form the circle building takes is less important

than the energy and intent behind it and the ability of the ritual participants. The form presented in this book is based on the 'traditional' format found in mainstream Gardnerian Wicca, though with several changes and influences from other sources. The general structure of any ritual can be broken down into the following characteristic activities:

1. Preparation

Clearing and Preparation of the Room and Altar
Sweeping In / Sweeping Out
Opening Invocation
Blessing the Altar Elements
Consecration of the Room with the Elements

2. Creation

Casting the Circle
Invoking the Elements
Drawing down the Light
Raising Energy
Declaration that the Circle is open

3. Operation

Middle 'Working' bit, where the Main Ritual Activity is Performed

4. Cessation

Closing of the Quarters
Releasing of the Circle
Closing Declaration
Closing and Grounding.

In the following chapters we are going to tease apart this

structure and look in depth at these different stages and in so doing, learn how to go about constructing our own ritual circles. We begin this by taking a bird's eye view of the whole process to illustrate an essential aspect of good circle building ritual; namely how a gradual raising of the energetic level is achieved throughout the ritual, via both the symbolism and ritual actions employed.

The Four Stages of Ritual Circle Building

One way of looking at how we set up a circle is to look at any ritual as a whole and to then divide it up into four parts, based on the main focus of intent behind each section. The first part is that of preparation, in which we prepare ourselves, the space and anything to be used in the ritual. The second part is that of creation. This means the creation of the actual magical circle; the energetic space within which the main body of the ritual takes place. The third part is that of operation, where the main ritual purpose is performed and the final part is that of cessation or closing, where all of the energies of the ritual are finally concluded, banished, grounded and closed. The first two parts are perhaps the most important and are the most relevant to the process of circle building. They form the foundation of our circle and the ritual to take place within it.

In the preparation part, we in turn cleanse, bless and consecrate our area. Each of these involves the use of an increasingly focused and dynamic energy. In the next part; that of creation, we utilise the forces of creation, invocation and invitation to bring the magical circle into existence. These actions progressively invoke the energies of the Human, Elemental and Divine.

In this way, when constructing a circle, with each type of

action we aim to gradually and inexorably raise the level of the energies we are working with and invoking. At the same time, we raise the level of our own consciousness and awareness, up to Divine level. By this point, the circle is complete.

Any magical work is then performed within this sacred space. When all is completed, the circle is closed in reverse order, gradually releasing the energy previously gathered and focused, until a complete 'grounding' is reached. Let's now expand this simplification and take a look at how we go about performing each of these operations. You may wish to refer to the complete ritual, as set out in Chapter 14 to see how all these stages operate when fully expressed within a ritual.

1. Preparation

Clearing & Preparing

Before all else, we begin with physically clearing the room or area we are intending to use for the ritual. The altar is then set up as appropriate and the candles are lit. In Wicca, this stage is often further marked with a ritualised sweeping of the room with the Witch's broom. All of these actions have cleansed the energy of the room.

Opening Invocation and Elemental Blessing

Next, an opening invocation may be given to state the purpose and focus of the ritual. The four elements in the form of salt, water, fire and incense are prepared on the altar for use in the next stage of the ritual. This has the effect of blessing the physical space and the ritual about to take place within it.

Consecration of the room with the Elements

The energy of the room is then further purified or consecrated

using the power of the physical elements which have been blessed on the altar. Sometimes everyone participating in the ritual is also included in this procedure. This marks the completion of the preparation stage of the ritual.

2. Creation

Casting the Circle

The energy is then contained and sealed by the creation of a circle of energy around the entire room. This prevents our cleansed area from becoming contaminated by other types of influences and focuses and contains any energy we invoke into it. Most importantly perhaps, the creation of the circle marks the separation of our working space from the world 'out there'. It now begins to be a 'place between the worlds' which partakes of the nature of both but is wholly neither.

In effect, we have now created the magical circle. A sphere of energy, charged with our intent is surrounding us and keeping out stray influences. To a certain extent, this is enough. Perhaps if we just wanted to meditate or simply to have some quiet space, this would suffice. The reason we continue from this point is that we now change the energy in the circle to a level higher than that which we could achieve on our own, by invoking the help and assistance of other forces and beings.

Invoking the Elemental forces

We take the first step of raising the level of energy by invoking the four elements around the circle in their highest aspects. This adds the energies and powers of the four elements into the circle we have just drawn. It also adds a type of energy which is not of the human realm. Depending on exactly how we invoke at this point, it may be purely elemental

but may also be Archangelic in nature. What we get depends on where we focus our intentions when we invoke.

Drawing Down the Light

The final stage involves the inviting in of the Divine Light, which is the light of Spirit, of Divinity as you conceive it or of the fifth element of Akasha. This raises the level of the circle as high as possible. It adds a sense of timelessness and spaciousness or infinity to the circle and by its nature keeps any energies present in a balanced state.

Raising of Energy

Traditionally known in Wicca as the 'cone of power'. This raises the energy of everyone in the circle and in effect, 'throws the switch' of the circle, switching it on and lighting it up. Depending on exactly what energy raising method is used, it can set the tone for the rest of the ritual. It can give a light and ethereal feel to the ritual or it can give a very vital and energetic feel.

Declaration of Opening

At this point, a kind of 'marking' statement is often given to ritually define the point at which the circle opening is considered achieved and complete. This is usually very simple and along the lines of; 'We now declare this circle open' or 'Let there be peace within the circle' or something similar. This marks the completion of the circle building stage and the start of the main activity of the ritual.

3. Operation

Main Ritual

We have now created a sacred temple into which, in Wicca at least, we now invoke the Divine energies of a God and Goddess. This defines the highest level of energy that we usually work at or can work at. At the same time, within our prepared space, any personal ritual or magical work can be performed.

4. Cessation

Closing of the Quarters and the release of the Circle

After the ritual is completed, the circle is then closed, in a roughly reversed order. The four elements are released with thanks and blessings are given to the beings of those realms. The circle is either released or the energy drawn back in to the person who created it. The Light of Spirit is simply left as one would not ordinarily wish to banish Divine Light.

Closing Declaration and Grounding

A closing invocation is given to seal and ground the energies remaining and to declare the ritual properly over. Finally, participants usually perform an 'earthing' activity such as eating, dancing or perhaps love making to ensure the energy of the ritual is earthed and dispersed in a healthy and balanced manner.

Looked at as a whole in this way, the entire process should convey the inexorable build up of the level of energy within a circle, its peaking at a Divine level (even if only symbolic), a plateau at which our ritual work is done and then a descent back to where we began.

In the following chapters we will look at each of these stages in more depth, examining the symbolism of what is

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done, how it might be done differently and what we are trying to achieve on the inner, energetic levels. It is in this way that we develop our ability to evolve our own magical and ritual styles and our own path to Divine truth and Self Realisation.

**PART TWO:
BREAKING IT DOWN;
BUILDING IT UP**

4. THE TEMPLE

According to tradition, the simplest definition of a Temple is: 'a house of God' and this a pretty accurate description. A Temple is a specially prepared space in which to invoke Divinity to come and dwell for a greater or lesser time. A space in which the Gods and Goddesses can be called to appear and feel at home. It is somewhere special, sacred, half in this world and half in the next, which reflects in its structure the entire universe both hidden and visible, according to our beliefs. It is like a magical circle made permanent and real.

For our purposes, there are perhaps three ways of building a temple.

1. The Permanent Temple

I imagine that, if given the choice, most people would like to have their own permanent temple; a separate room set apart wholly and solely for the purpose of performing magic and ritual. Certainly, if we have the means, there is a definite attraction to having a room set aside solely as our own temple, for that is what it becomes. On a material level, we can decorate this space to fully reflect the symbolism of our own cosmology. We can leave

an altar fully set up and the temple can be graced with whatever symbols of an 'indwelling spirit' we wish. It makes for powerful symbolism and energy.

On an energetic level, just as any room or physical space eventually gathers its own unique atmosphere according to the activities regularly performed there, a permanently set up temple will take on a life of its own. The atmosphere of a Buddhist monastery, a Russian Orthodox church or a traditional Iranian Mosque will all have their distinctive, different but powerful 'personalities', derived from the style of their respective traditions. Any temple set up and used exclusively for a sacred activity such as magic, meditation or ritual, will, over time, tend to concentrate and 'hold' those particular styles of energies invoked into it. Whether this is because some of the energy of ritual is held by the physical material of the room or perhaps because we don't manage to banish every last bit of energy after a ritual and these little 'left-overs' gradually accumulate, or a mixture of both, a permanent temple will, eventually, be continually 'humming' with a low level ritual or magical energy. At the very least, this makes it much easier to perform any ritual within its space. It also often makes rituals held there seem very much more powerful; more bang for buck, as it were.

The flip-side to this, which is not to be under-estimated, is that this can be very addictive and also limiting. It is addictive in the sense that we can easily grow used to having all of this accumulated energy hanging around at our disposal. It can make one lazy. If you find yourself performing a similar ritual elsewhere, you might find that you really miss the helping hand and familiar feel of your own 'special room'.

The other slight limitation is the inertia of the energy of one's own style. This may not be much of an issue, but it is well to be aware of it. If you regularly perform Wiccan rituals (of whatever style) in your temple, your temple will build up an energy which

is particularly specialised in responding to your own style of rituals. If, for some reason, you suddenly wanted to perform say, a Qabalistic ritual, it might feel a bit strange. You could still do it of course but imagine if you were invited to a Qabalistic ritual in your friend's temple where he or she only ever did Qabalistic rituals. Imagine how different the energy would feel. Imagine performing a Wiccan ritual there. Of course, you could do it. But the two rooms would have a very different energy built up in them.

This really hit home to me once when attempting to perform a ritual in a room which had been habitually used for Quaker meetings. The energy in that room was, for its usual purpose, wonderfully still and quiet. And very inert. Great for silent contemplation. To try and get magical energy moving in it was a lesson in swimming upstream. And it wasn't as if the energy was antithetical in any way to what we were doing; it was simply different and inappropriate.

Many if not most of us however, do not have the luxury of being able to set aside a whole room for this rather specialised purpose. We live in shared houses, bedsits and small flats or simply have families who take up every available inch of space. That's ok. A temple is rather like owning a very expensive car; very nice if you can afford one with all of its extra features but, luckily, there are many other ways of getting around.

2. The 'not-so-permanent' Temple

The most common practice is to perform our rituals in a room ordinarily used for more mundane purposes; let's say it's our living room. One effect we will never get is the build up of residual energy found with a specialised temple. The room is used for different purposes, is filled with people in all sorts of different emotional states and, most probably, no particular

energetic imprint will be dominant at all. Apart from one. Like our whole house, flat or bedsit, it will carry the energetic imprint and style of ourselves. Of us, of our family, of our personality and nature. Just as what we put into our homes physically reflects our own personality and style, this will all be reflected energetically. Which is a plus point right away; it means that we are immediately playing a home game.

In this sense, we are in our own temple immediately. Think of the symbolic meaning of a temple outlined above. It is a symbol of the universe. Of our universe. Magic begins in the here and now, with who we are right here and now. So in this very real sense, our everyday living room is the perfect temple for any of us to perform our ritual and magical practice in.

Another advantage to performing rituals in a room used for other purposes is that we have to do something to prepare it for its ensuing, sacred use. This act of preparation is an act of magic in itself. It is the magic of transformation. It gives us the chance to begin magically affecting the room and, just as importantly, to begin preparing ourselves. The act of clearing away furniture (and possibly, of family), of physically cleaning the room and preparing it by placing decorations or setting up the altar, is the time to begin to forget about the rest of our life and the outside world. It is the time to begin focussing on the sacred activity we are about to perform. Such an opportunity is worth its weight in gold.

3. The 'Inner Temple'

It's also a noticeable effect that the energy of a regularly performed ritual does eventually become concretised and stable, even if there is not a permanent physical temple to ground and 'hold it'. Especially if we have the intent that this be so. After a time, the energy of our repeated rituals can continue to exist

‘away’ from our living room when not needed but can be called back into near physical manifestation when we have prepared the room and ‘call it back in’. It is uncannily like storing our temple on the inner planes, calling it from there as and when needed and then saving it back on the inner planes when the ritual is over and we need a living room again which is not going to make visitors feel all ‘weird’.

This kind of inner temple requires two things; a clear intent from all participants that this is what is going to happen to the energy you all put into constructing the circle and a fair bit of focus and regularity of practice. Put the two together and your inner temple will grow, evolve and strengthen along with your own growth and practice.

The further advantage to this of course, is that a circle so constructed eventually becomes what is effectively, a ‘portable permanent’ temple. Which means that, no matter where we find ourselves, no matter if we move house, no matter what, we are able to call upon the accumulated effect of our past ritual efforts and practice. It bears repeating though, that this does require much regularity and repetition of practice and a strong focus of intent that this be so.

In essence, our temple, of whatever kind, is what we make of what is around us when we perform magic. Ultimately, every single thing in this world is sacred and Divine. In the beginning, we naturally may find it easier to practice magic or to contact our Divine nature in calm, beautiful, specialised surroundings. There is nothing wrong or limiting in that. When we begin anything we are embryonic and everything new and young grows best in special, supportive environments. As we grow and develop into our spiritual adulthood and beyond however, it is often the case that we can begin to make wherever we are a Temple, in a very real sense. This is a force which comes out of us to the degree that we are in touch with and a conduit for, our own and the

Universe's Divine energy and nature.

Building an Inner Temple

To build such an inner temple involves the making into a separate exercise part of the process we go through when building up a circle in ritual. Put simply, it is a way in which we decide beforehand just what our circle will look like, how we will picture the elemental doorways and how the fully set up circle will 'look' on the inner planes or at least, in our mind's eye. We are taking this particular part of the circle ritual and giving it a pre-formed structure. We are essentially planning and playing with the images we will use in ritual in advance.

The advantage of this is that when we come to perform the ritual for real, we will not only be very well practised at what is to be visualised but the images themselves will have a familiarity, solidity and realness to them which would otherwise take a long time to achieve, if it came at all.

A coven can do this exercise together, making up a temple unique to their group. This has the advantage of having the energy of many people creating it and it also helps to build the cohesiveness of the group mind much more quickly. In setting it up for a coven, members should agree to visit it at pre-arranged times to visualise and reinforce its structure, in a fairly tightly defined way. Once set up, the temple will exist in a genuinely real and stable manner.

Coven members who cannot make a circle can still participate in the ritual by visiting the inner temple and not even at the same physical time that the ritual is taking place; such is the strange nature of the inner planes. Covens can also arrange to 'meet' in the inner temple and perform rituals purely there. This is a more advanced way of working however and does take a fair bit of stamina in the visualising department.

The Temple

When working on our own, we can use this temple to perform purely astral magic or simply as a safe retreat space when such a need is felt. When we perform an actual ritual, we call upon our created inner temple to manifest into the physical setting of our rite. In doing this we aim to 'see' it around us as vividly as possible as we cast and build up the circle. When we call upon the elements, see the doorways of our temple around us with the beings of the elements standing within them and the scenes of their worlds behind them. In this way, the circle is made that much more real and powerful, so much more quickly.

It should go without saying that, if working with others not of our group, then it would be most inappropriate to invoke our temple onto the circle. Partly it would energetically clash with or at least disturb, those people not familiar with it. It might even be antithetical to the style of working you are intending. It could also disrupt and dilute our temple to be exposed to the energies of those not originally intended to be working in it. It is a valuable, precious thing; it is best to keep it close to 'you and yours'. It is with such practices as these that genuine magical secrets are truly, and wisely, made.

Exercise 1 : Creating your inner temple

To begin the exercise, choose a time and place where you can be relaxed and undisturbed. You can settle into meditation, listen to some suitable music or simply lie relaxed, in a day-dream like state. This is important because we are going to be utilising our creative imagination, so it is best if we are in a happy, relaxed state before we begin. The aim here is to conjure up a special, magical location, a magical temple which is exactly how you think a magical temple should look. Make it inspiring. Make it magical. Make it real.

With the intent of creating your own inner temple, first of all just think of the room in which you intend to perform your rituals. Picture it as clearly as you can and be aware of its meanings and associations to you, especially in this context if it is a room used for different purposes. Now imagine what it would look like, on the inner planes, with a fully opened ritual circle in it. Your room has fallen away. What do you see? The four walls of your room have disappeared, to be replaced by...what? What would your ideal magical circle look like? Are you outdoors? What kind of landscape or setting are you in? If indoors, are you in a large space, or a small one? Are the walls made of stone, wood or something else? Just imagine the most perfect, magical space you could ever possibly wish to perform your rituals in. This is the general setting for your temple. Spend as much time as you wish to or need to getting this just right, from the general tenor to individual specific details. This almost certainly wont be completed in a single setting, so try and arrange a time to work on it regularly until you are satisfied with it.

Visualise yourself casting a circle around or within this

space. Actually do the basic circle ritual within your imagined temple. Picture it as vividly as you can. See its colour, see its aliveness. Feel its energy and power. Sense how it seals off and protects your area. See it melt into the space of your temple so that though it fades from view, you can sense it is there.

Within this space, now picture four doorways. These are the elemental gateways; one each into the realms of the four elements. At the moment, these doorways are closed, for we are not invoking the elements into our temple at this point. How do these doorways or gates look? Are they large or small? Are they 'door-shaped' or arched? Are they marked out in some special way? Are these gateways filled with actual doors or do they have curtains across them? What do the doors look like and of what are they made? How do they open? What colours are they, if any? If you are picturing an outdoor setting, how are these gateways marked? With standing stones, trees, simple archways? If outside, how are you defining your circle? Make these doorways evocative and mysterious; they are symbolising gateways to other worlds.

Sit in this space, in your mind's eye. Picture everything in it. Really get into the detail and solidify it. Add sounds, smells and emotional nuances. Make it as real as it can possibly be. In doing all of this, you are creating a unique place to which you can go whenever you wish to perform magic.

The elemental doorways can also be expanded to include the elemental guardians you habitually invoke and scenes of the elemental realm behind them. Following the same process as above, open up a circle purely in your inner temple. Picture the beings you call. Sense their energies. Now look behind them to the worlds they inhabit. Make

the scenes you picture as detailed, rich, real and just as vivid as you dare. Then, when performing a physical ritual, you will know exactly what you are calling forth.

When doing this exercise, complete it by closing your inner temple down in a systematic way just as you would a physical temple. Visualise the elemental doorways closing and disappearing into the background. Let the form of the temple become vague and misty until it disappears. If you have cast a circle there then close the circle down just as you would in a physical ritual. Make sure that the temple feels closed and 'gone', before you come back to this world. Leaving it hanging around can be a drain on your own energetic resources and also makes you temple more open to unwanted energetic influences which you wont be aware of until too late.

While it is good practice to initially build up and close down your inner temple very explicitly, when it has become more stable, you can introduce a small shorthand ritual of opening and closing. Choose a word, a phrase, a gesture or a symbol (though not anything which has strong associations with something else). Link this to the opening and closing of your temple so that just the phrase or gesture will eventually evoke and banish your temple.

5. THE ALTAR

The altar is the symbolic and energetic centre of the temple and, in effect, is a microcosm of many of its functions. It is the focus of the temple itself because it is the focus of the Divine presence; of the Gods and Goddesses we work with and worship. It is a place primarily of energetic transformation; between this world and the realm of the Gods. It is a focus for our own offerings and a place where the Divine presence manifests.

A good example of this in practice is found in India. Go into almost any Indian home, cafe, building or even car and you will find a small altar complete with an image of a deity, a living flame in the form of a candle (or nowadays a flickering coloured light bulb) and an offering in the form of incense and perhaps flowers.

In magical ritual and Wicca our altars are simply more specialised versions of these 'popular' altars. They function as the focus of our intentions and energy within a ritual. In this role, an altar is of the Earth element and feminine. Film makers or story tellers who portray black magicians having a naked virgin laid out as the altar have got their symbolism correct. The altar can be taken as representing the Earth itself, the recipient of all heavenly energies and here playing a passive role, supporting the tools of the 'art'. Most people don't have naked virgins on hand

to use as altars but fortunately, it is the symbolism that counts, not the actual form.

The film makers also picked up on the right symbolism in having the black magicians sacrifice their virgin during the ritual. The altar is the place where sacrifice takes place and this could be said to be its most important function. Sacrifice is the translation of energy from one plane to another. Be it of virgins, cockerels or bad habits, it's all the same and the altar serves as the focus for this shifting of energy. The alternative way of viewing this is as offerings, which is just a gentler way of describing the same translation of energy.

I have said that the altar is of the Earth element and, Qabalistically, it is the earth (or 'Malkuth'), where the most important spiritual transformation takes place. In Alchemy it is lead (symbol of the densest of substances) which is transformed and in Wicca it is the Earth wherein our own worship and transformation takes place.

So the altar to us is feminine, passive, earthy and the place of sacrifice. To the inner world the altar looks quite different. The reverse of this last aspect means that it is also the place of manifestation on the inner planes. Just as the sacrifice or offering sends energy from this plane of existence to another (where exactly depends on our intentions), so too does the altar serve as the focus when we are bringing through Divine energy into this world. Talismans, objects being charged, symbols etc, are all placed on the altar in ritual, to symbolise or indeed, actually receive the manifestation of the intended Divine energy.

What this means then is that the altar has a dual polarity. It is passive on this plane when serving as the focus for translation of energy from this dimension to another (sacrifice). It is active when acting as the place of manifestation from other dimensions into this one. And of course, whichever role it is playing, its polarity is reversed across the planes; passive here and active 'there', and vice versa. The altar is possibly the most important

of magical tools, though not always looked upon as such.

The altar is a doorway then, to other-worlds and to the Divine, which is why we place our symbols of the Divine on it and why we traditionally 'kneel at the altar'. Ultimately, the only symbol we *really* need on our altars (if we wish to be minimalist about it), is a single flame, symbolising the Divine light or force of creation. From here on, how we decorate our altars, to symbolise our own conception of Divinity, is entirely up to us and depends on our own beliefs and the rituals we are performing.

Many people will have two candles, perhaps a black and a white one, to symbolise the active and passive forces, either side of the central, sacred lamp. This may just as well be shown by statues of the main Goddess and God in our tradition. Flowers are always great because they symbolise spirit, beauty and love and seem to instinctively lift our hearts and tell us that 'this place is special'. They are a gift of the Gods to us and a gift from us, back to Divinity.

The altar usually serves as the placeholder for the ritual tools, if only for reasons of practicality. In a large coven the altar can get pretty crowded with people's Athames and ritual accessories.

In Wicca, traditionally the altar is placed in the North, linking it with the Earth element in that quarter. I often prefer to put the altar between quarters, as this seems more neutral, as for me the altar has a powerful enough symbolism of its own, which is over and above that of the elements *per se*. Perhaps, theoretically, the most appropriate place for the altar is in the exact centre of the circle. It is then the divine and earthly centre and focus of the whole ritual. It is balanced and centred and good symbolism. Unfortunately, unless we have a huge temple or are outdoors, it is not the most practical place to site it. It can get in the way and also we may want something else to be the main focus of the ritual.

It is a useful exercise to look at where we can find altars in the 'mundane' world around us. I say mundane to mean outside of a

ritual or overtly religious setting. Objects in ritual often have their mundane counterpart in everyday life, because the symbolism behind them still manifests in our ordinary activities or perhaps, is actually derived or inspired by them originally. In this sense, any table is an altar, be it an operating table or a work desk. Other altars are a plate, a bread board, a pentacle and a writing pad – anything which serves as the material location where a focus of energies is brought to bear to achieve some aim or where a translation of energies is effected. This might seem a fairly open definition and it is. The point is that on a very basic level, there is a functional link between all of these objects. An altar in magic is simply a more explicit one, where one is conscious of the Divine element, but the same principle is at work in altars such as mantle-pieces with ornaments above the fireplace, an office worker's collection of personal items and photos on his/her desk, a ticket booth where money is transformed into tickets or a teenager's collection of pop star photo's above the bed.

The purpose of seeing these esoteric links and symbolism between seemingly mundane and unrelated objects or actions is that it makes us more conscious and aware of what we are doing when in a circle and doing ritual. Instead of simply following someone else's instructions we can see the reasons behind the structure and we are then able to create our own structures which still work. A further benefit to having this awareness, is that we are also then much better placed to properly train others and so pass on the benefits of our own training.

6. CLEARING, SWEEPING AND OPENING

After the earlier overview of the entire circle casting procedure, we took a slight detour to look at the context any ritual takes place in; namely the temple, and one of its central elements; the altar. We begin now to look at the process of building up a magical circle, examining the different elements of the circle building ritual, what the different focus is in each stage, how we use symbols and how each stage builds on the effect of the previous one, to achieve the overall aim of constructing and calling into being our magical ritual circle.

1. Cleaning

The first act we perform in any ritual, be it a full mid-summer celebration or a private solo circle is to begin by clearing and cleaning the room (or area if outside), that we are intending to use. This clears a physical space for the circle to exist in and also has the immediate effect of clearing our minds prior to magical work. It is in perfect harmony with the old adage, 'cleanliness is next to godliness'. Go into any church, mosque, temple or any holy place. Above all else, it will be kept clean, as a mark of its

special and sacred nature.

This stage also includes the setting up of the altar and any other alterations or adjustments we need to make to the room before we begin. It is important to realise that this stage is not prior to the ritual. On the inner levels the ritual begins the moment we decide to perform it or write it. On the physical level, the ritual begins the moment we begin changing the chosen location from its normal usage and clearing it. For this reason, all of these preparations should be carried out in a manner or emotional state which reflects the reason why we are doing all of this. Literally, we are about to create a temple. Into this temple we are going to invoke the divine presence of a God and a Goddess. So the cleaning and preparation of the room in this context, are literally sacred actions and should be undertaken in a mental and emotional state which reflects this. This means simply being calm and happy whilst performing a pleasurable activity, with the firm belief or intent, that the room is being made into a place fit for its intended purpose. It should need no comment that setting up your room and altar in a state of stress, anger, sadness or whilst in a state of any strong negative emotion will leave a similar vibrational imprint on the room, not to mention yourself. This part of the ritual is an opportunity to begin to forget your worldly worries and cares and to begin to turn our mind inwards and towards Spirit.

2. Sweeping

In Wicca, this stage is further elaborated and ritualised by the use of a birch broom to sweep the embryonic temple, either in a clockwise spiral beginning at the centre and moving out to and then around the circumference or simply around the edge of the room. Sometimes this is done before lighting the altar candles, sometimes after. Its purpose is to provide a period of time coupled with a repeated, ritualised action, in which the mind

is quietened and settled and the room is energetically swept clean of all stagnant and unwanted energies. This will be visualised in whatever way seems most fitting and may be done silently or be accompanied by a chant which either one person leads with or else all those present join in with.

The sweeping, is usually undertaken in a clockwise or Deosil direction. Akin to using the powers of life and the Sun to help us cleanse an area. Symbolically, performing the initial clearing stage by moving anti-clockwise around the room, would be akin to using an already dirty rag to clean something with.

This sweeping is usually the first action of a ritual in which all the coven members present will participate. As such, it not only provides an opportunity for all present to begin to quieten their minds and prepare themselves, but it also provides the first opportunity in the ritual for the coven members to begin to merge their energies together into a whole, as they begin to work as one energetic entity or group mind, to perform the ritual of opening the circle. It is thus a very important action. Sometimes the first sweeping will be followed by a clockwise sweeping 'in', from the circumference to the centre, visualising clean energy flowing in. Once again, this will be accompanied by visualisations of the desired intent and perhaps a simple rhyme or chant as well. In effect, this is the performance of a simple spell right at the start of every ritual.

Example of a sweeping chant:

"In the name of Unity we now banish all impurities and imbalances. With this broom we do cleanse, purify and prepare the space. So mote it be."

The purpose of the actions so far is one of cleansing. Stagnant energy has been cleared and 'thrown out' and the energy of the room prepared for a focussed activity. If not already done, we would now light the candles on the altar and elsewhere. The next action is the opening invocation.

3. Opening Invocation

With the energy cleared and the room prepared, we now state the purpose for performing the whole ritual. This might be fairly general and similar every time or it might be highly specific to this one ritual. It might be a simple announcement to the 'universe', or a highly specific piece addressed to a particular deity. Either way, it sets a kind of seal upon the 'blank' energy of the temple area. It has a defining and limiting effect and thus gives a vitally important focus and purpose to all of the ritual participants and to the energy of the ensuing ritual as a whole. In other words, everyone and everything knows why they are present and why this ritual is being performed.

Example of an Opening Invocation:

'Behold!

In the name of the God and the Goddess

And the Power of the Elements,

We gather together

In perfect love and perfect trust,

To open this circle.

So mote it be."

This is an example of a very generic opening invocation. It still serves to declare that the ritual has officially begun and, in an open manner, has stated why the ritual is being performed. It is called an invocation, rather than a declaration, because it contains a gentle and general call to those natural powers and sources of inspiration. It calls our minds to those energies which may be the underlying reason behind our ritual.

A specific ritual may focus on a particular deity or group of deities and ask that they be present for quite specific reasons, according to the purpose of the ritual being performed. It is still serving exactly the same role as the general example given above.

These simple actions have now set the scene. They have changed the room we are using from a mundane place into something else. Perhaps not quite a full blown temple yet, but there is something special about the space around us now.

The next stage in the ritual builds on the cleansing we have done and adds blessing and consecration. The difference between the three bears some elucidation.

Cleansing refers to the clearing away of energetic 'dirt'. Any old, stagnant or unwanted energy hanging around an area or implement is cleared away. This leaves what was cleansed in a new, fresh, 'blank' state of energetic being.

Blessing is the 'putting in' of a divine energy. It is something we ask for from a higher level. It thus raises the level of energy from that of the mundane to the sacred.

Consecration, in this context, is the dedication of an area or implement which has been cleansed and possibly blessed as well, to a particular purpose or with a particular energy or intent. Technically, we could consecrate something to a destructive purpose but usually the term is applied to more benign and sacred uses.

In the opening stages of a circle ritual in Wicca, we first cleanse with the broom. We then bless the elements on the altar and then we consecrate the room with the power of the, now purified and empowered, physical elements.

4. Preparation of the Elements

The blessing stage traditionally involves the cleansing of water, the blessing of salt and the mixing of the two upon the altar before using them to further purify the temple through consecration. Gerald Gardner seems to have derived this practice from the books of Eliphas Levi, though it may have been a common medieval practice too. In any case, whatever the literary source, the symbolism is quite appropriate.

The use of salt and water to cleanse a place of negative energy seems to go back centuries and perhaps originates in the Middle East, where the Arabic name for the natural salt deposits; Natron, gave its name to the chemical symbol for sodium; Na. Water has been used for cleaning, both materially and energetically perhaps for as long as we have been around as a species. In many practices, salt water is seen as one of the most effective of psychic cleansers. On the material level, it has a powerful anti-bacterial action and on a symbolic level can substitute for blood. It mirrors the salty waters of the ocean, as does our own blood. The ocean and blood are both symbols of life and purity. In Chinese medicine, the kidneys are considered to store the root of our health and constitution. They are ascribed to the water element and are considered to be salty.

The usual procedure is to bless the salt and then both cleanse and bless the water. The reason for the difference is that salt is held to be always pure and incorruptible whilst water, by its very nature, will easily take up and hold the energetic imprint of any influence around it. So we need to clear this back to a pure state, before we can use it.

From the latest research surrounding the properties of water, this would appear to be literally true. (See the work of, among others Masaru Emoto, in his book 'The Hidden Messages in Water',). In Wicca, this process is traditionally performed by placing our Athame into the bowl of salt and then into the bowl of water. However, it may well be that the contact of metal has the effect of collapsing whatever etheric charge and structure we may otherwise have built up'.

The impact of using a metal Athame to prepare the water is

1 Dr Robert Miller, a research chemist, conducted experiments designed to test the stability of healer-energised water. While time itself would gradually lead to a dissipation of the 'charge' of the water (demonstrated, by Dr Bernard Grad in previous experiments as being a change in the angle of hydrogen bonding in the water molecule, leading to a

that the charge given to the water will still exist on an astral level, according to the strength of the intention but it won't exist on the etheric level because of the metal discharging the energy. The difference in effect is of the levels one is then working on. At this stage in the ritual we are still clearing and preparing the space and so are very definitely working on a physical to etheric level. We might therefore be much better served by simply using our hands instead and forgetting about the Athame at this point. If doing it this way, we would simply either hold the container of the salt or water directly, or just hold our hands above them. With intent, visualisation and energy, we transform the salt and water into sacred materials fit to be used for ritual purposes. It is good to make up a short verse or spell or prayer to say over each of these actions, as is shown in the ritual in Chapter 14. ● Once prepared, the salt and water are mixed together.

Visualise light or energy going into each of these substances as you are performing the actions and generally try to have an emotional ambience of well being. Just as in healing a person, if we are enjoying what we are doing, the energy transfer will be much more effective than if we are tense or worried or simply trying too hard. In fact, all of the ritual should be conducted in a similar frame of mind. We get results much more quickly if we simply 'play' whilst conducting ritual, remaining relaxed and open, than if we are trying hard and 'lusting for results'. Which is one of the biggest reasons why Wiccan rituals succeed as much as they do. The attitude of 'mix reverence and mirth' seems to keep our minds and bodies relaxed and open so our more subtle sides can more easily come to the surface. Whatever the explanation, it is certainly effective and more enjoyable.

decrease in the surface tension of the water), it was also discovered that touching the water with metal or pouring the water into a metal container, would cause a sudden collapse of and discharge of the energetic field and changes which the healer had previously introduced to the water. See *Vibrational Medicine* by Richard Gerber, MD, 2001.

Oddly, in the Book of Shadows, Air and Fire elements are not included in this process, but it is good practice and nicely balanced to include them at this stage. As the salt and water are combined to represent the passive elements of Water and Earth, so the charcoal and incense are combined in the censer to represent the active elements of Fire and Air. We can bless these in a similar way to that for the salt and water. In this case I would personally say that Fire is the equivalent of salt in that it always remains pure and so only requires a blessing whereas Air, like Water, can hold within itself other influences and so benefits from a cleansing act prior to blessing. We now have a container of salty water for the passive elements and a censer containing the active elements. These are all very physical examples of the four elements.

Examples of preparing the elements:

Place your hands around the bowl of water and say the following:

"We cleanse thee O Creature of Water, in the name of truth and life, that you return to your most perfect state of purity."

Let healing energy and good intentions flow into the water.

Place your hands over the bowl of salt and say the following:

"We bless thee O Creature of Salt, in the name of strength and solidity, that you return to your most perfect state of purity."

Let healing energy and good intentions flow into the salt.

Pour the salt into the water saying:

"Salt water of the mother's womb and the great sea from whence we came. Blessed Be."

Place your hands around the charcoal and say the following:

"We bless thee, O creature of Fire, in the name of passion and

transformation, that you return to your most perfect state of purity."

Let healing energy and good intentions flow into the fire within the charcoal.

Place your hands around the incense and say the following:

"We bless thee, O Creature of Air, in the name of inspiration and vision, that you return to your most perfect state of purity."

Let healing energy and good intentions flow into the incense.

As you light the charcoal and pour onto it the incense, say the following:

"Air of inspiration and Flame of Spirit. Blessed Be. "

5. Consecration of the Temple

In a standard Wiccan circle these physical elemental preparations are used to conduct a purification and consecration of the room or temple. Beginning with the passive elements, the mixed salt and water is carried around the room in a clockwise direction and sprinkled around the circumference. This is followed by carrying the censer around the room's circumference, allowing the smoke to act as a carrier for the elemental energies of Air and Fire.

Example:

Firstly with salt water, walk around the room clockwise, sprinkling the water around the circumference as you go. Visualise waves of salt water sweeping any and all negativity or dirtiness away and leaving the room physically and psychically in a state of fresh purity.

"I consecrate this temple with the salt water of birth and rebirth. Blessed Be."

Next do the same with the incense. Visualise flames of purifying

fire swept within a cleansing breeze raising the vibration of the room and building a strong impression of purity and holiness, leaving no room for anything not fitting with these qualities.

"I consecrate this temple with the Fire of transformation and the Air of Vision. Blessed Be."

Again, all of this is accompanied with vivid visualisation, a strong intent (in this case to cleanse the room or temple with the power of the said elements and to surround the room with this ring of consecrated energy), and often a chant or rhyme. As each element from Earth to Fire has an increasingly dynamic and faster energy, this, coupled with one's intent, is already building up and increasing the level of energy within the growing temple. Indeed, when carried out effectively, this procedure seems to create a kind of proto-circle around the area which joins in with and assists in the creation of the actual circle we draw in the next stage.

This has now taken the room out of its normal energetic state. With just the cleansing, we could be cleaning the room for any purpose, mundane or magical. Now we have cleansed and consecrated directly with the energy of each of the elements. This will have made quite a change to the 'feel' of the room but we have not yet drawn a definite circle, so the energy is not strictly confined or intensified. It is the creation of a circle around ourselves within the temple which truly focuses and defines the energies of our growing ritual.

7. THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME: CIRCLES, PENTAGRAMS AND HEXAGRAMS

1. Circles

Circles, more than any other geometrical figure, symbolise the concepts of wholeness and balance. They symbolise the cosmos and infinity; as a circle has neither beginning nor end. Circles, and their corollary; spheres, thus convey the notions of timelessness and perfection and an infinite inclusivity; that is, they symbolise the entire universe. What is outside the circle or sphere (for in many ways they are inter-changeable), does not really exist for the purposes of the universe within the sphere.

Our magical circles create mini universes, within which alternative realities can manifest and co-exist with the bigger universal sphere we normally live within. On the opposite scale, our universe too may exist as a smaller sphere within another other-dimensional reality we cannot yet sense or understand but which magic is a possible means of exploring.

Whilst many of the symbolic meaning around circles and

spheres seem to be universal, the source of the ideas of Western culture may well derive from early Babylonians. They saw in the circle the qualities of time and timelessness and, mathematicians that they were, divided the circle into 360° . Such a circle represented the entire cosmos. This concept subsequently made its way into Greek culture as the image of the Ouroboros; the eternal serpent perpetually devouring its own tail.

In the casting of a magical circle then, the essence of what we are doing is the isolation of an area of space from its surrounding environment and the filling of this space with the energies of a non-material or Sacred nature.

It may be asked, why do we need to mark out a circle? Why not just do magic and ritual right here and now, where-ever we find ourselves? Well, sometimes we do and sometimes that is all we need. Mostly however, the practice of circle building is far and away the most common method of performing all types of magic and ritual. There are numerous reasons why this is so.

Partly, we cast a circle because we are learning to interact with sometimes very subtle energies and attempting to communicate across different dimensions. This is a specialised activity which in turn requires a specialised environment in which to manifest. We thus mark out and construct a space where this activity can take place successfully and with no disturbance. We don't do open heart surgery in our kitchen, runs the usual analogy.

Partly, we cast circles to assist our own spiritual growth. This is often a very precarious process. As with anything embryonic, this ability and process grows and develops best in a special, safe and protected environment.

Partly, we construct a circle to contain and focus the energies we are dealing with in a structured manner. Like many activities in life, we need to contain energy or matter in order for us to use and interact with it. Whether it be hot tea in a mug, plasma within a magnetic field or magical energy within a circle, the

principle is the same.

Finally, it seems that we conduct magic within circles because it is hard-wired into our very nature to want to do things in this way. All of the magic we do is a uniquely human magic because its very form is an outward expression of our own internal structure and our own conceptions of Divinity, deriving from the very nature of who and what we are. Circles, for us as human beings, symbolise an outward expression of our conception of Divinity, of wholeness and balance and infinity. All perfect concepts for reaching outward from our earthly selves.

Casting the Circle

As most books or people will tell you, a magic circle is visualised as a white or blue or gold ring around the temple, running along the edge of the area beyond it, depending upon circumstances. In actual fact though, the circle is the two dimensional edge of a three dimensional sphere, which is what we are really drawing around ourselves in ritual. Take a moment to visualise both and note the difference in how they feel. It is only convention that we speak of casting a circle rather than casting a sphere.

Casting a circle is usually done in a clockwise or Deosil direction. This is to follow the apparent direction of the Sun (and all of the other planets), across the sky and, by analogy, the direction of flow of subtle energies. This is of course, only true in the Northern Hemisphere. In the Southern Hemisphere anticlockwise will be the Deosil or 'sunward' direction and rituals should be conducted accordingly. Whichever hemisphere you find yourself living in, it is very good to experiment with this and feel the differences between casting Deosil and Widdershins.

When drawing the circle we accompany the action with an actual invocation or chant, a circular dance or other gesture, all to help us focus and raise our energy, commanding the circle into existence. This is the first major act of creation we perform in the circle building ritual. Needless to say, we also join this intent

with as vivid a visualisation of the circle or sphere as we can imagine.

The phrase ‘casting a circle’ is an uncannily accurate and appropriate description of the actual process of the creation of an energetic sphere around us. In energetic terms, the drawing of a circle in ritual is a true act of magical creation. It is also an act of Human creation. We do it all ourselves. We do not, generally speaking, call on any other forces or beings to assist us or to give their energy to it. It is a demonstration of our own power.

To do it well, requires us to literally ‘throw out’ or cast, our energy, our aura, our whole sense of self, as far and as wide as we can as we ‘cast the circle’. When doing so we should genuinely feel much bigger than normal, larger than life, as our energetic body encompasses the whole area of our working space. Try casting a circle without ‘casting’ – whilst imagining and feeling that you are small and withdrawn. Forget it. Instead, when casting a circle, we do so by literally taking centre stage, taking command and having presence. We may not be able to do this every single time, but this is how we do it well.

There is a mystery within this. To cast a circle is truly an act of creation on our part. We consciously and deliberately create something on the inner planes and sometimes even to the etheric and almost physical level. The reason I have described it in such grandiose terms above is that to do it successfully requires that we expand ourselves to be a little bit more than we usually are. The ability of *creation* is the mark of Divinity par excellence. We too have this ability given to us and in the creation of our own mini-worlds which are our circles, we mirror the Divine act of the creation of this universe. It is not coincidental that circles are traditionally cast with swords or wands. These are two symbols of authority and are ultimately symbolising a Divine authority, which we are emulating and learning to develop. So, every time we cast our circle we are as a little god. Truly have magic and witchcraft long been considered dangerous and heretical arts!

Exercise 2: Expanding the Aura

When learning something like a martial art or Tai Chi, we often begin by learning a small movement over and over again so that, when we come to do the 'whole thing', we can accomplish it much more easily because we have already practised the most essential part separately. We also learn action by performing it in an exaggerated fashion, gradually performing it in an increasingly subtle way as we learn and internalise the process. We are going to do exactly the same thing here with the circle casting.

Sit quietly somewhere and relax. When ready, feel for where the boundary of your aura is. If you don't know how; that's fine. Simply imagine where you think the boundary of your aura would lie if you could sense it. You will be right on the spot. The important aspect here is simply to imagine and feel for what you sense. It is not necessary or relevant to be literally, 'seeing auras'; that is not the point of this exercise. This is to do with becoming energetically sentient, not clairvoyant.

Take your time with this and do not try and force it. Whether you can do this instantly or quickly or incrementally in small steps is not important. The important thing is the actual energetic 'stretching'. When you get there, sense how your aura feels to you. How far out is its boundary? Is it wider at the top or at the bottom? Wider in front or behind? How dense do you sense it as being? Does it have any shape?

Now expand your aura to twice the size. Does it feel a bit different? Does it feel less dense or lighter? Go through the same questions as above and sense any differences. Then

bring it back to how it was when you began. Repeat the exercise but expand your aura to the size of the room you are in. Note not only the differences in your own aura but in how it makes you feel. Then bring it back once more to its resting state. In what way does it feel slightly different? Looser? Lighter? More energised?

Now shrink your aura. Feel it shrink to your skin so it exactly matches your physical form. Now bring it inside your skin. How does that feel? Finally, shrink it down, smaller and smaller until it is nothing but a spot in the centre of your body. Hold it there for a moment feeling how dense it seems and then shrink it just a little bit more until it disappears entirely. Hold it like that just for a second and sense how it feels then let it explode or bounced back to where it wants to be. Pay attention to how it feels now.

The aim is to get used to throwing out your energetic body. Practice with this until you can achieve a similar level of 'density feeling' when your aura is expanded as when it is at 'rest'. Experiment with casting your aura more strongly behind you or to one side. Play games with it. Make an exercise of seeing how fast you can throw your aura out and pull it in, in one movement, perhaps keeping its density the same. Practicing expanding and shrinking your aura like this builds up very strong energetic muscles which come in very useful in all kinds of ritual practice (not to mention its uses in daily life!). If you can, make this exercise a regular one.

2. Pentagrams.

Pentagrams are the occult symbol bar none. The earliest representation of a pentagram seems to date from around 4000 years ago to Mesopotamia, where many have been found on clay seals seemingly used as the identifying symbol of the city of Jemdet Nasr. It has been said that such a use represents a symbol of stately or regal power. This would fit well with its evolution into a symbol of spiritual and magical power today and its use as a symbol of the complete (and therefore 'god-like') human being.

Its use as a magical symbol may already have been prevalent in Mesopotamian times, which is why the rulers adopted it as their symbol, to partake of or to co-opt its power. Certainly it was used as a symbol of protection even in Babylonian times, from which many of our mystical ideas have their roots. The pentagram subsequently finds its way into Greek geometrical thought; being the simplest star one can draw with a single, unbroken line (known as a unicursal figure). It finds its way onto ancient British coins and into Church iconography in a purely Christian setting. The five points symbolised the five wounds of Christ. Leonardo Da Vinci used it as a symbol of the ideal human proportions in his work; 'The Vitruvian Man'. The linkage of the pentagram with the human form comes about partly as a result of the symbolism of the number five; both we and the pentagram have five 'limbs', as is vividly expressed in Da Vinci's painting.

The link with the number five was further strengthened with the rise of hermetic thought, linking the pentagram with the five elements. By the 13C grimoires were liberally sprinkled with the symbol and by the late 19C Eliphas Levi sealed its modern fate by not only linking it to the elements quite explicitly but also by inverting it as a symbol of evil. This was the first time this link had been made, but it seemed to stick.

In all, the pentagram has sustained a symbolism concerned with perfection, with the number five, with the complete human

person and with magic itself. Today it is most commonly used as a symbol of the four elements with the upper single point symbolising the crown of Spirit. Most commonly it is on this basis that it is used in magical groups of all kinds.

The main use of pentagrams in ritual then is to invoke and banish elemental beings or energies by drawing the particular elemental pentagram in the quarter of that element and calling on the powers of the beings from that element. In Wicca, this is done as the next stage after the actual circle has been cast. It is often called 'Invoking the Watchtowers', though this is actually a term borrowed from Enochian magic.

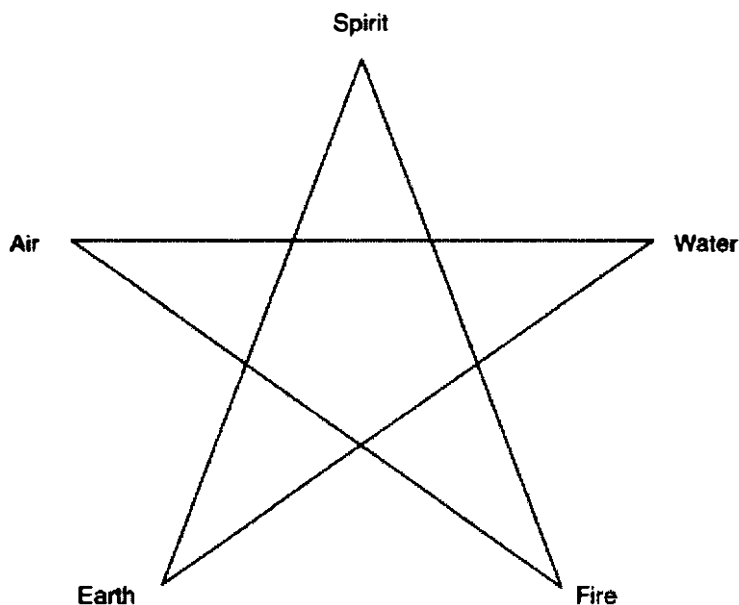


Figure 1. Diagram of the Elements on the Pentagram as depicted by the Golden Dawn system.

Each one of the points of a pentagram has an element attributed to it. The 'standard' configuration of the elements on the pentagram (as found in many books and as used in many covens

and magical groups), and the means of invoking/banishing the elements is derived from the method used by the Golden Dawn. It is illustrated in *Figure 1*. As might be expected of anything derived from the Golden Dawn, this method is rather complicated and I have always found it quite counter intuitive. Within this system, the placement of the elements around the pentagram seems to be derived by the Golden Dawn from John Dee's Enochian system of the 'Watchtowers'.

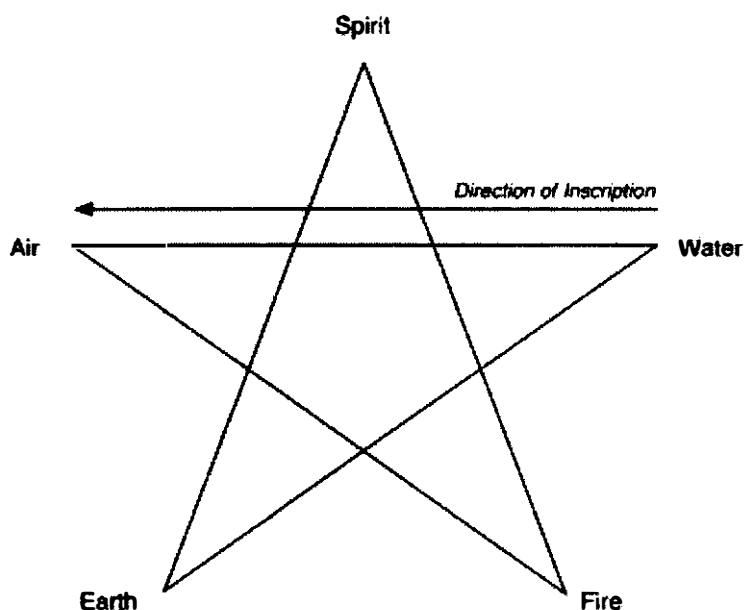


Figure 2: Invoking Pentagram of Air? / Banishing Pentagram of Water?, as per Golden Dawn.

To invoke an element using this method, we would begin by drawing the elemental pentagram from another point entirely and then moving towards the element we are interested in. To banish, we begin at the element we are interested in and move clockwise towards another element. Using this method, the only difference between an invoking pentagram of Air and a banish-

ing pentagram of Water, for example, seems to be one's intent; see *Figure 2*. As invoking any element is definitely not the equivalent of banishing another, this system has always seemed to me to be less than ideal.

Invoking the Spirit or Akasha element is even more complicated, involving no less than four pentagrams; two each for 'Spirit Passive' and 'Spirit Active', the use of which depends on which other elements one is working with. I have seen more people stumble over this procedure of pentagram inscribing and take longer to learn it and get it wrong more often, than any other aspect of ritual. Luckily, there is an alternative way.

If we place the element of Spirit at the top-most point of the pentagram, which seems natural enough, we can derive a workable placement of the elements by simply following the order of the evolution of the elements according to hermetic, alchemical and Qabalistic philosophy.

In this, the element of Spirit or Akasha exists before all else. We can think of it as the primal, pre-existing unity out of which all creation arose. The first element to appear from this unity was Fire (or light or energy). The second was Water (or darkness or matter). These two elements represent the absolute primal duality behind all of manifest creation.

According to Hermetic philosophy, the action of these two primal elements is to engender a third element or 'child'. This we name Air. The function of Air (on this rarefied level), is to mediate between and balance the actions of, the two primal elements.

Finally, the action or effect of all three elements together results in the creation of Earth; tangible matter, which when manifested, contains all the previous elements within it, to make a fourth energetic state.

Following this model then, we draw our pentagram in a clockwise direction beginning with Spirit at the top most point. Next we place Fire at the bottom right point, Water at the top left point, Air at the top right point and Earth at the bottom left

point, before returning to Spirit at the top most point, where we began. See *Figure 3*.

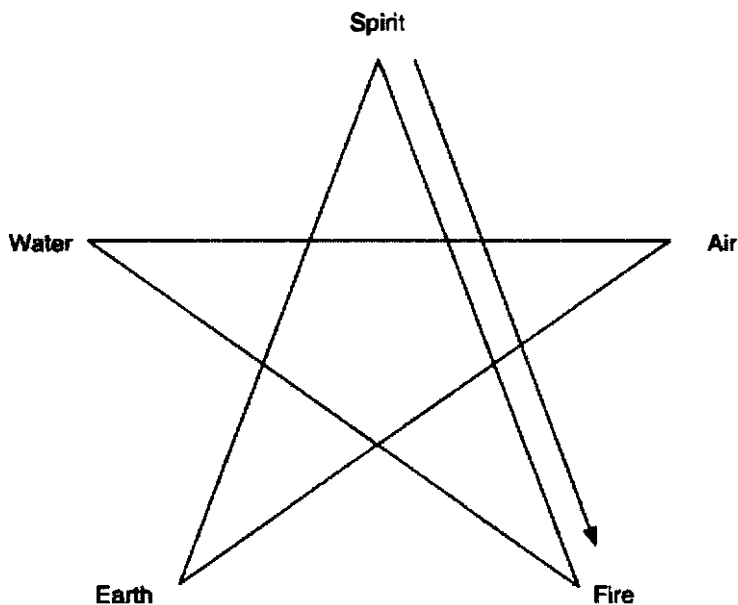


Figure 3. Pentagram with Elements placed in order of their evolution.

This gives an interesting balance of two active elements on one side and two 'passive' elements on the opposite side. As a pentagram is often said to represent a human being with arms and legs outstretched, if one imagines a human figure within the pentagram, then this placement gives an appropriate symbolic representation of our own, physical polarity. What we are actually drawing upon here, or aspiring to, is the energy of the 'perfected' state of the human spirit; before the 'fall' in Qabalistic terms. We can see this illustrated in *Figure 4*. In this, Malkuth or 'this world' has been restored to the place of Da-ath. The most lowly and 'earthy' Sephiroth has now taken the place of what currently perceive as Spirit.

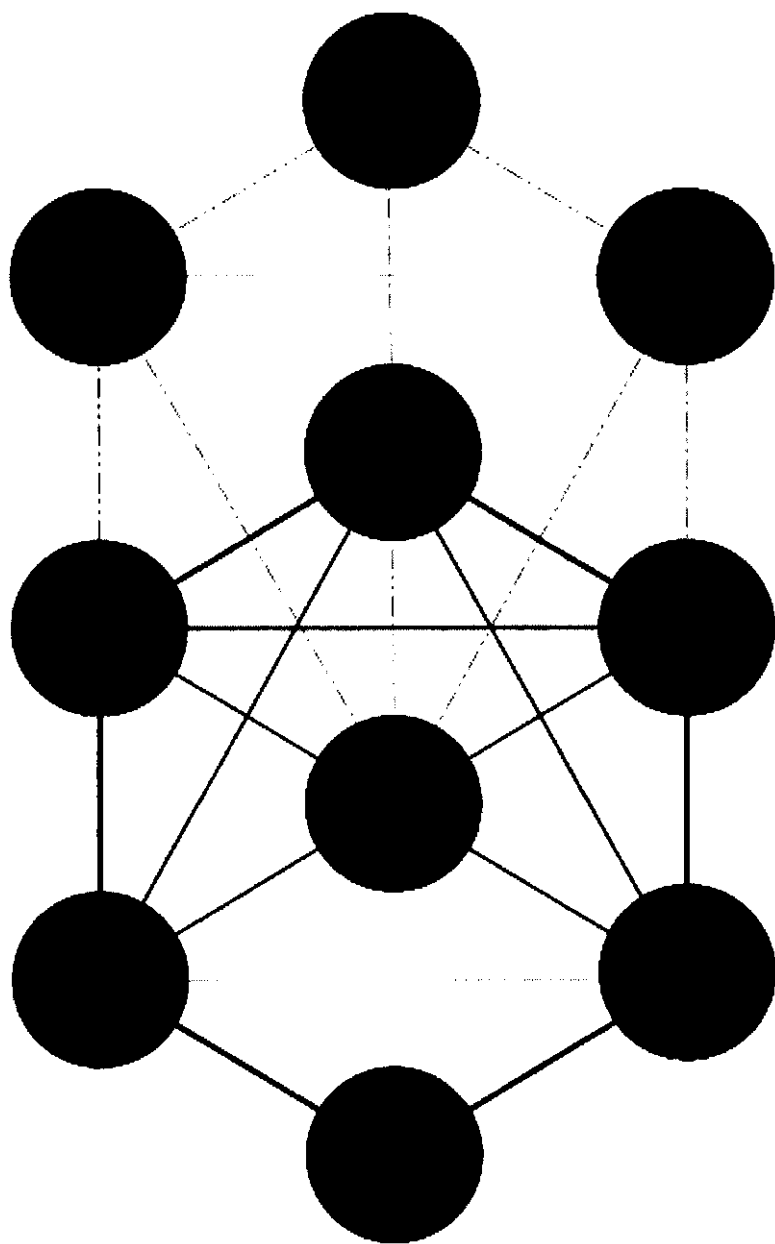


Figure 4. The Perfected Tree of Life

Instead of using the complicated methodology of the Golden Dawn, to invoke or banish, we simply begin at the point of the element we are interested in and draw the pentagram clockwise from that element to invoke and anti-clockwise from it to banish. Simple.

A point here needs to be made about the use of pentagrams in Wiccan and magical ritual. A very common method of opening a circle is to use only one type of pentagram at each of the quarters. The pentagram used is the Earth pentagram. In western magic rituals this is derived from the Golden Dawn way of doing things. In Wicca, it is no doubt derived from the same source as well but it also fits in well with the mythology of Wicca being earth based. The reason behind its appearance is interesting though.

According to Ben Rowe the Earth pentagram is used at all four quarters because the Earth element is believed (and this is based on Qabalistic thought), to contain all of the other elements. I mention the Qabalah because this view is equating the Element of Earth with the Qabalistic Sephiroth of Malkuth, and if you had to link an element with this Sephiroth, then it indeed would be earth. Malkuth is the receptacle and manifestation of all the other Sephiroth. There are definite similarities here with the element of Earth; its nature in hermetic thought is said to be a result of the actions of all of the other, and prior, elements. However, a Sephiroth is not an element. It is something much more. Never-the-less, the Golden Dawn went with this line of reasoning and it does have an internal logic and from this has derived the use of the Earth pentagram to substitute for all of the other elements.

There is however another way of looking at all of this. Spirit also contains all of the other elements, and can be used in exactly the same manner as the 'default' pentagram to represent everything else. The advantage here is that there is no 'residual' elemental association of energy. Spirit contains all of the elements

equally and in perfect balance. From Spirit comes everything and anything. From Spirit can anything be derived.

There is no right or wrong answer to this; it is simply a matter of preference and style. But it is useful to know that there is a choice and a different way of working with things. For my practice, I feel much happier leaving the earth pentagram for invoking and balancing the Earth element only. If I want a 'generic' pentagram for protection or sealing of an area, when I am not really needing particular elemental associations, then using the 'Spirit' pentagram as a general pentagram I have found to be very appropriate. One invokes clockwise from the top-most point and banishes or closes by tracing the pentagram anti-clockwise from the top-most point. I have found this to work very well.

Why are we doing this and re-arranging the elements from the 'normal' way? Partly because the Golden Dawn derived method is relatively difficult to use but mostly because it is not enough to blindly copy something just because that is the way everyone else does it. If we do not know the reasons why, for example, which elements are linked to which point on the pentagram then it is good to go and find out. If we then agree with the reasoning or methodology then great; we have a system and we know its internal rationale. If we don't agree however, then there is nothing to stop us from re-arranging the structure into a form which seems intuitive and consistent and which makes sense to ourselves. This will become very apparent in the chapter on invoking the elements from the four Quarters. There are other ways of arranging the elements on the pentagram than described here. If you prefer another way then by all means explore it and use it. Just be sure of why you are doing it and once decided; be consistent.

3. Hexagrams.

While not strictly used in a circle building ritual, for the sake of completeness and by way of comparison, it is worth mentioning here the use and symbolism of the other major geometrical figure used in rituals; the Hexagram.

While pentagrams are used in ritual for dealing with elemental energies, hexagrams are used for planetary energies. Traditionally the hexagram has a mixed collection of associations. As another ancient symbol its original meanings can only be guessed at. One of the oldest meanings we know of is that it represents the union of the above and the below, of heaven and earth, of Divinity and Humankind, into a unified balance. This is symbolised by looking at the hexagram as two interlocking triangles, otherwise known as the Star of David.

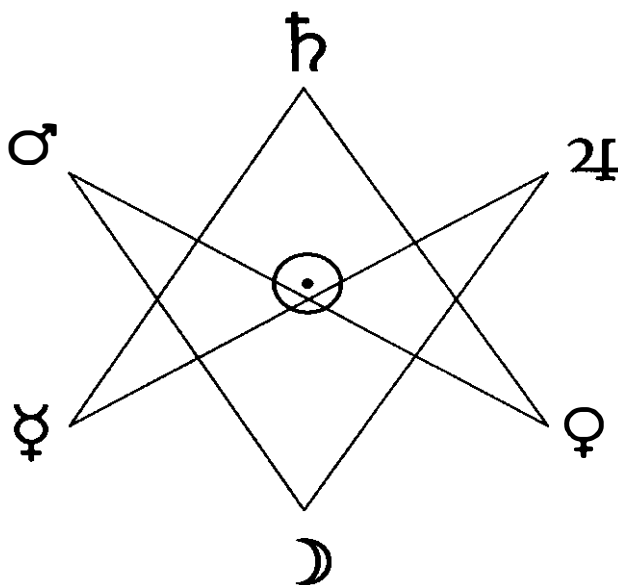


Fig 5: diagram of a unicursal hexagram with the seven planetary symbols around the points.

As with the pentagrams, the original Golden Dawn method of using the hexagrams to invoke planetary energies is somewhat over complicated. So much so that a much simpler and quite inspired method was evolved by Aleister Crowley. He came up with the 'unicursal' hexagram. This is the hexagram used in *Figure 5*. This can be drawn freely and easily to invoke or banish specific energies in the same manner as we used the pentagram; i.e. to invoke begin at the point of the hexagram representing the planet one is working with and move clockwise. To banish, begin at the same point and move anti-clockwise.

Qabalistically, if placed upon the tree of life the points touch (mostly), the planetary Sephiroth (Binah, symbolising Saturn is moved slightly to be placed where Daath normally is), so in this context the hexagram is taken as representing the balance of all the planetary energies, with Tiphareth or the Sun, at the centre. It is with this in mind that we use it in ritual.

This method is tricky, firstly because planets don't really have elemental attributes, except in the most tenuous of ways. They are really another order of energy altogether. Secondly, to locate a planet in the heavens at the time of your ritual we really need to do our homework and know our planetary astronomy (not a bad thing in itself), but what if it is not above the horizon? Can we still invoke it?

The answer to this would seem to be that if we are working with the energy on a Divine level, then it does not matter too much if the planet is not actually showing at the time of our ritual. If on the other hand, we are working with the energy on a more etheric level, perhaps making planetary elixirs or talismans or performing alchemical work, then the position of the planet will be much more important and will affect the energies available.

Instead of the above complexity, it is much simpler and generally just as effective, to invoke a planet's energy at the four quarters beginning at the same quarter we usually do, or at

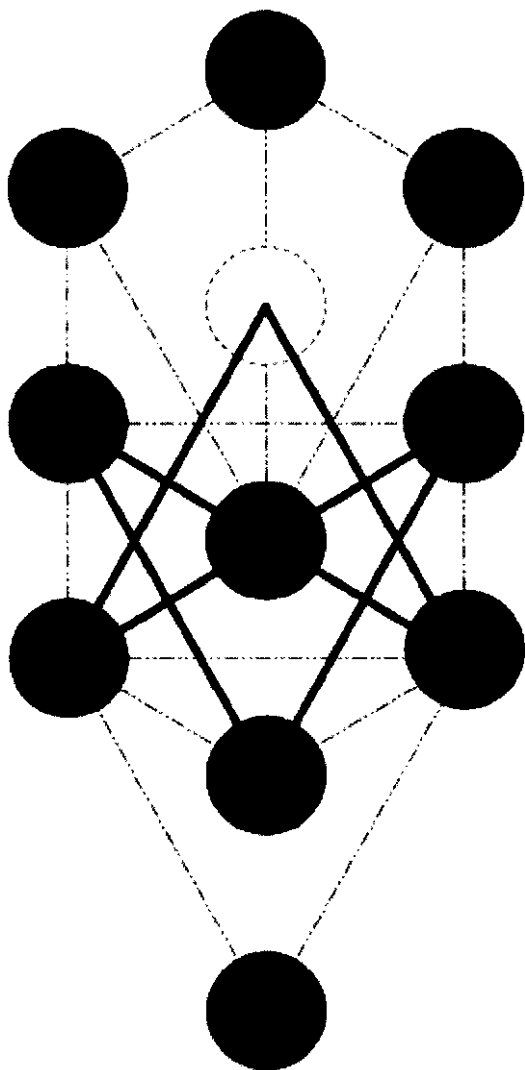


Figure 6: Qabalistic Tree of Life showing the Unicursal Hexagram around the central Sephirah.

one which we consider the most appropriate. We are not really intending any elemental symbolism on the quarters here, it is simply to keep an energetic balance and to 'surround' our own

Beyond the Book of Shadows

‘cosmos’ (the circle), with the planetary energy. In this too, there are no hard and fast rules and it is finding an approach with which we feel is consistent and comfortable and works for us that is most important.

8. THE ELEMENTS

The Elements play an important part in Wicca. We call on them at the quarters and worship them in nature around us. We may even make use of them in spells and rituals. The elements of Earth, Air, Fire and Water are one of the most written about subjects within the Wiccan and Pagan tradition. Each of the elements is a whole world in itself, larger than any of us could ever explore fully in a single lifetime. The elemental beings who inhabit these worlds are an endless source of beauty, knowledge and inspiration. The elements are without doubt the backbone of all magical and spiritual development. In fact, it may be true to say, that without working with the elements in some way, there can be no magical progress at all; so fundamental are they to the whole practice and cosmology of magic and Wicca and indeed, our own constitution.

Traditionally in Wicca, we tend to mostly work with the elements in their more manifested forms; that is, on the etheric level of the world around us (as in the elemental properties of objects), or the closer astral levels where many nature spirits reside. Of course, the elements are deep pools of experience and there are no limits to how we work or what levels we contact and as Wicca itself evolves, so too does our practice. In view of this, it may be useful to consider a wider and possibly 'deeper' view

of the whole nature of the elements, which still derives from Western traditions, in order to give us more of a context for our own evolving Wiccan cosmology.

The four elements of mythology and magic are known as the 'Elements of the Wise', to emphasise that they are considered to be something distinct from the 'mundane' elements such as the fire of a candle flame or the 'everyday' water in our taps.

According to this view, the elements we see around us, such as that of a fire in a candle-flame, are considered to be the outer aspects of a larger, inner reality. This is based on a view that the world itself is a living symbol and an outward expression of another level of reality and structure. These outer symbols, such as a candle-flame, show us, by analogy, some of the qualities of the true energetic nature of that element; not all of which are expressed directly in the manifested state which we encounter on this plane.

If a candle flame is not the whole element of Fire, it is natural to ask what actually is the element then? What are any of the elements? Western tradition states that the four elements are considered to be the four *fundamental styles* of existence. They can be thought of as states in which energy can exist, ways in which things can relate to each other and the fundamental material out of which everything is composed. They therefore exist on many levels; from that of ultimate creation down to the manifested world we see around us. These states relate to how the universe is conceived to have evolved and describe abstract notions of how energy can behave. It is often illuminating to consider the elements as 'functions' rather than as fixed 'things' called elements. It emphasises a more dynamic view of their nature and action.

According to this theory, there are only two 'pure' elements: Fire and Water. These are taken to be the first two elements to appear out of the 'Great Unmanifest', albeit on a very rarefied level, as simply 'first energy' and 'first matter'. This is

elemental energy on its most abstract level but it does indicate the profundity to which these symbols reach. Fire and Water thus embody the ultimate duality behind existence and in that sense, everything else does evolve out of their interaction. Being the cosmic 'Yin & Yang' of the West, Fire and Water are the elemental symbols for any and every duality. In Qabalistic terms they are the Chokmah and Binah of the tree of Life.

Compared to Fire and Water, Air isn't really an element at all. The element of Air is a description of an extremely dynamic state of being. Air is considered to be the result of the interaction between Fire and Water. Any state of dynamic balance between two opposites is an aspect of the Air function. Air describes another state in which energy or matter can exist, albeit a very dynamic and shifting one. Astrologic descriptions of Air signs give a good idea of the nature of this universal 'function'. Because it is such an important and ever present function however, we conceive it as an element in its own right.

Earth is considered to be what happens when all three of the above states or elements are mixed together. Anything which collapses into a state of solidity, of tangibility, of fixedness and of manifestation, we see as an aspect of the Earth element or function, of the universe. In other words, Earth describes the result of the inner processes behind manifestation and evolution. In this sense, it also includes Time as one of its qualities, with the other three elements describing the co-ordinates of three dimensional space.

There are two ways of considering all of this. We can look at the elements and the universe from a one-world or a four-world viewpoint. In each of these the universe is divided up into four distinct levels: the Physical, the Astral or Emotional, the Mental and the Causal or Spirit world. Each 'world' describes the dominant mode of expression on each level. The difference between the two views is one of how the elements are seen to manifest on each of these levels.

The world in which we live is the Physical world and in the four-world view, it is composed of just one single element; Earth. The Astral or Emotional world is composed of the Water Element, the Mental world of the Air Element and the Causal world of the Fire Element. These represent the 'four worlds'. This is saying that each one of the elements has an analogous nature to one of the four Worlds and there it finds its natural habitat, or, each of the four worlds has an analogous nature to one of the four elements. One can be used to pretty much symbolise the other.

In the four-world view each level is taken to be represented by a single element. Hence, there are four worlds. Everything we see in the world around us is an aspect of the Earth element only. So a candle-flame is not the Fire Element itself (which exists only on the Causal level), but is simply the *Fire aspect of the Earth Element*. It shows us something of the nature of 'true' Fire, but by analogy only.

By contrast, in the one-world view, the world we see around us is composed of all four elements instead of just one and this holds true on each of the four levels of physical, astral, mental and spiritual. This model looks at the universe in a more detailed way. It is called the one-world view because the Elements are taken to operate on all four levels simultaneously, hence, 'one-world'. This means that a candle-flame in this world is the *Earth aspect (or manifestation) of the Fire Element*. Note the distinction.

The difference is that in the four-world view, each element is unique to its level and manifests all four aspects of itself on that level. In the one-world view, each element operates on all levels, but manifests just one aspect of itself, on each of those levels.

These two models elucidate different information about the workings of the universe and the elements and are not quite as mutually exclusive as might appear at first glance. They simply emphasise different aspects of the world we live in.

As with everything, all of this is simply playing with models

against the background of a cosmology and universe which is of infinitely greater profundity than any of our simple models can explain. The model of the elements here is the traditional Western and Hermetic based model and is one which I like to use. I find it detailed and self-consistent and in harmony with other Western traditions. However, there are many other elemental cosmologies, each of which are equally self-consistent and believable. It is a matter of personal choice which model one adheres to. Consider the differences and similarities in the following systems;

With the Element of Air, I have described the Hermetic view of its function; that of the dynamic balance between any two opposites. In the Hermetic system, Fire is considered the element 'closest' to Spirit. However, in many cultures, Air is considered to be essentially Spirit itself; the 'breath of life'. In this view, things are *alive* only because they have this breath of Spirit within them. When it departs, the physical frame disintegrates. It is the Air which holds or binds them together (which sounds suspiciously close to the Hermetic balancing function). In Eastern views, Air is the element which carries 'Prana', which is the vital energy of life. In the Hermetic view, life is created only by the interplay (Air) of the two fundamental of Fire and Water. Air flows wherever it is needed and it seeks to find, like water, a balance. The difference in the view of Air is one of emphasis; its balancing nature seems to be conserved in different mythologies whilst its hierarchical place in the evolution of the elements seems to be viewed differently according to the time and place of the culture.

In Masonic traditions, an initiate progresses in development from Earth which represents the body, to Air which is the mind, to Water which is the Soul and finally to Fire, which is the Spirit. This is Western but note the displacement of Air and Water to the Hermetic order, which goes Earth, Water, Air, Fire; an order of decreasing density. There is also a large tradition of symbolising the Soul with Water and the Spirit with Fire. Air, as

a balancing medium, sits in between.

In the Sufi tradition, an initiate begins with the element of Air, as this physical world is held to be illusory and insubstantial. Once this illusion is penetrated, the next stage is one of purification by Fire. After this a person can perceive ultimate reality in its most changing form, via the element of Water. Finally, the individual perceives the ultimate Godhead, symbolised by Earth; as earth, like the Godhead, is the only true and solid substance. All of which is rather opposite to the Western view yet still sheds light on the nature of the elements.

Carl Jung attributed different psychological functions to the elements consistent to those used within occult circles. Physical sensation is attributed to Earth. The thinking function corresponds to Air. Intuition corresponds to Fire and feeling corresponds to Water.

In ancient Greek culture, the elements were ascribed certain physical qualities. Fire is considered to be hot and dry. Its energy has the nature of expansiveness. Water is cold and wet. Its energy has the nature of contractiveness. Air is warm and wet, partaking as it does from the nature of Fire and Water. Its energy has the nature of lightness. Earth is cold and dry, taking the remaining qualities of Fire and Water. Its energy has the nature of heaviness and density.

The elements also function as four ways of approaching and knowing Divinity. On this level, the elements embody those aspects of Divinity known as Omnipotence (power/fire), Omniscience (knowledge/air), Compassion (love/water), and Eternity (immortality/Earth). This is the elements on their highest level of expression and such a view lends insight into the subtle nature of their role and functions. In some way, the physical elements we encounter around us, will embody and be an expression of, their nature and function on this Divine level.

None of these models are right or wrong, they are simply our attempts to rationalise an intuition about the universe. We

must make of them what we can. Incredibly though, whatever model we chose to use, we can still, with just these four symbols, describe and have an understanding into the nature of, any type of energy or process on any level or dimension of the entire universe. That in itself says much about the fundamental reality of the elemental model.

The manifestation of this can be seen in how we ascribe the elements to our ritual tools. The wand is an embodiment of our will or power and so is an instrument of the Fire element. The Chalice is an embodiment of our love and so is an instrument of the Water element. The Knife is an embodiment of our knowledge and so comes under the Air element. The pentacle symbolises the manifesting of our skills and so pertains to the Earth element.

This deluge of information can be organised quite simply by looking at and working with, the elements on three different aspects. Firstly there is the External aspect to each element. This is how we interact with the element as found around us in nature and in every aspect of the external, material world. Secondly, there is the Internal aspect to each element. This relates to the energy of the element and how we experience the action of the elements within our bodies and minds. This means simple sensations such as heat or cold and the emotions such as anger or sadness. Also, personal qualities such as patience or having a 'quick' mind. Thirdly, there is the Esoteric nature of the elements. This relates to the elemental beings themselves and what they have to teach. It also includes the Divine qualities of the elements; such as immortality and omniscience.

The three aspects to each of the elements help us to differentiate the type of energy we may be dealing with and also to focus our intent more precisely when we wish to interact with an elemental energy.

To conclude, it remains to mention just briefly about the 'fifth' element of Akasha. This has always occupied a somewhat

awkward place as it is not really an element in the same way as the other elements are. Akasha symbolises more the context or matrix within which all of the other elements exist. It symbolises Spirit and that 'unity' which contains all the elements within itself.

These then are the qualities and energies we call upon when invoking the elements as part of our rituals. When we do so, we are calling these energies both from the wider universe and from within our own selves. Regular contact with these energies within ritual builds a greater familiarity with and understanding of the role these elemental forces play, both within our own personalities and as they are expressed in our own lifestyles.

We can deepen this process by deliberately working with the elemental energies and beings directly. The following exercises can be carried out solo or by a working coven within a standard circle ritual. They are open ended and there is no limit to how much one may deepen them or what one may discover.

Exercise 3: Elemental Balancing Exercise

In the first of these exercises we learn to feel the qualities of an element within us. We isolate and increase each element's unique energy firstly within our astral or emotional body and then within our physical body. In deliberately singling out each element in this way, we are able to sense the distinct nature of its energy. We thus learn about and contact, in a very direct manner, the reality of that element. We are thus able to begin balancing its influence within our own psyche and soul.

Within an opened circle, sit in meditation or perhaps perform a short path-working to a calm space. When you are settled, proceed to the exercise itself. This consists of feeling the qualities of the chosen element (See Table 1, below), within your own body. Begin by surrounding yourself with a ball of light of the appropriate colour as a symbol of the elemental energy you are working with.

When beginning, this may be enough for quite some time. It is important to take your time with this so as to be able to begin to feel the energetic quality of the light as strongly as you can. When you feel ready, allow the light to begin to penetrate your physical body, carrying with it the qualities of that element. Using Earth as an example, begin with perhaps a green, russet or even black light around you. Embody the qualities of heaviness and density into this light and gradually let these qualities enter your physical body so that you really do feel them within yourself. This is the energetic nature of the Earth element. Explore what these qualities feel like within yourself. From this, you are gaining a real insight into the real nature of this element. When you feel you wish to stop, let the energy dissipate and disperse and consciously push out any remaining traces of the element, to bring yourself back into a neutral balance.

The lessons learnt through doing this exercise can take quite some time to integrate fully and the lessons learnt can be many. Pay close attention to your dreams and look out for how the element of Earth (in this example), manifests or is found, in your everyday life around you. Doing this exercise will awaken this energy to some extent and you may find it being reflected back at you from the most unlikely (to our conscious minds) places. Pay attention to this, for here are likely to lie some of the most useful insights for yourself.

Begin this exercise with Earth, and move on through Water, Air and Fire. Spend at least a month with each element before moving on to the next. In doing this, we thus progress from the least dynamic to the most dynamic type of energy. This is the safest way and is the way, according to Hermetic lore, of the soul's evolution back to Spirit. For more information on similar exercises, see 'Initiation into Hermetics' by Franz Bardon.

The Tattwas

If the previous exercise is too meditational for your tastes and especially if you are more visual in your orientation, then you may wish to explore the elements by using the Tattwas as elemental doorways. These are simple shapes from Hindu mythology, each of which is a symbol for one of the elements plus Akasha or Spirit. These were made popular in Western Magic by their use within the Golden Dawn. Though not usually considered to be part of Wiccan practice, there is no reason why they should not be used as they are a marvellous and relatively easy way of accessing the elemental worlds.



Figure 7: the four elemental Tattwas

The Tattwas are elemental symbols from the Vedic system of India. They depict the fundamental types of matter in the universe. As with much of Indian culture, the Tattwas have made their way to the West and have evolved into a system of elemental exploration. It is certainly worth one's while to research the original Vedic philosophy behind them; much of it is surprisingly similar to Western esoteric doctrine, perhaps indicating a similar source?

Exercise 4: Tattwa Exploration

To use the Tattwas paint each symbol onto a separate piece of white card. Earth is a yellow square. Air is a blue sphere. Water is a silver crescent. Fire is a red triangle. Spirit can also be depicted, as a purple ovoid or egg shape,

widest at the base. About A3 size is ideal and bright paints are definitely called for; in fact, the brighter the better. To begin, take up one of the cards, lets again begin with the yellow square of Earth as our example, and stare at the symbol for a few minutes in a bright light. Just steadily gaze at the image you have made. Then quickly shift your gaze to a blank piece of white card. You will then see an image of the original Tattvic shape, but in its complementary colour, caused by the continuing activity of one's retinal cells. It is this image which you now visualise in your mind's eye to use as a doorway into the elemental realm.

Staying with Earth again as an example, you would now be seeing, with your mind's eye, a mauve square; mauve being the complementary colour to yellow. Once you are proficient in holding this image in your mind's eye, then picture it as a doorway into the realm of the Earth element.

How this is done is largely a question of personal preference. Some people will get by with simply picturing the square itself. Others prefer to visualise it on a doorway of some kind. The important aspect is the vividness of the imagination and the continued concentration upon the symbol. It is this which seems to evoke it into life and which perhaps evokes a response from the Earth element itself.

When satisfied that the image seems real and alive in some way such that it has become a true doorway, you then approach the image or let it grow larger, as you prefer, and step through the mauve square (in this example), and into the element of Earth (or the element of that symbol you are using).

One can reinforce the procedure by calling on relevant

Gods or Goddesses, by invoking a sole element into your circle beforehand, by performing a path working to an appropriate place, by ritually decorating our temple in the colour of that element or by performing the activity in a location close to that element; say by the ocean for a Water exploration.

What you next experience depends on a great many things; your own expertise in scrying, the time of day you are performing this exercise (for the Tattwas have their own 'tides' throughout the day; certain hours when each one is at its most pronounced), your own personality and what elements you have a natural affinity with and so on.

It is usual to meet elemental beings, so have a reason for visiting so you can ask them questions about their world and so come back having learnt something. Pay attention to how the world feels, to the energy of the beings, things that you see them doing and to the style of the landscape. All that you see will be symbolising something about the nature of the element. It is like being within a huge book where if you have the skill, everything can be read as telling you something about that world.

To return, either retrace your steps back to where you entered the world or visualise your Tattwas symbol and step back through it with the intention of leaving that world and returning to this one. Once back, visualise the symbol shrinking to nothing and firmly closing down. Know that you are back in this world.

The same comments as given to the previous elemental exercise regarding paying attention to one's dreams and elemental symbols appearing in one's life also apply here.

Working with Tattwas: Keeping safe and secure

In ritual magic the practitioner is instructed to pass through the symbol and once on the other side, to vibrate various 'God Names' and to 'test' any guides who appear with these names or with the drawing of certain signs in the air. Whilst this is still a valid form of magic and from personal experience, certainly is effective, it has always struck me as cumbersome and stilted and has it has never really felt right or even necessary to behave in such a way. Whilst this is only my experience, I believe that if you step into an elemental world with a genuine intention in your heart, it is unlikely that you are going to come to any harm.

Having said that, simple elemental creatures which you may encounter, can be mischievous, capricious and sometimes harmful in that way that any natural force can be harmful if one is stuck on the receiving end of it. However, I have never found any actual maliciousness in any elemental creatures I have encountered.

Never-the-less, one should take precautions in the same way one would if trekking across the Australian outback or walking across any unfamiliar city late at night. One prepares for the territory but without indulging in overkill paranoia, which is more likely to attract bad attention than would simply acting normally and blending in.

There are four ways in which we prepare ourselves for journeying into any elemental world or indeed, for having any dealings with such specialised realms, all of which will either prevent any harm approaching us or, should we be very unlucky, get us out of trouble very quickly. All of these should be performed before venturing into any elemental realm.

1. Have a clear idea of the intent, purpose and focus of exactly why we are going to visit this elemental world. This helps us to know when something is not right or helpful and to recognise

when we have gone off-track. There are times for just wandering around, but that is a much more advanced way of working and until we are ready, we will get much more from having more focused explorations.

2. Become as conscious as we can of our own Divine nature, our crown chakra, our silent mind, before entering the elemental world. The more we are conscious of this energy within ourselves, the more we will be recognised by the elemental beings as an example of and, essentially, an emissary of, this Divine principle. We will be treated with much greater respect and helpfulness. As Humans we have all four elements within us plus Divine energy. It is this latter which ultimately makes us superior to the elementals, as we embody an aspect of the ultimate Godhead which they do not. This is obviously part of our own general spiritual progress but it is useful to concentrate on its relevance in this instance.

3. Embody the energetic qualities of the element within our self before stepping into the elemental world. Almost like a diver undergoing slow pressurisation for a deep dive, we acclimatise our astral and mental bodies for a trip into a more specialised realm. This has the effect of making us appear to the elemental beings as 'one of their own', and not as some strange creature from another planet! It's like going to a foreign country and at least having a smattering of the language to deal with the essentials. By increasing the energy of that element within ourselves, we not only make it easier for us to 'pass through', we make it easier to perceive that element, to learn about it, to move around within it and for the beings there to communicate with us. Remember; elemental beings generally have comprehension of just one element only; we have access to all of them. It is therefore incumbent on ourselves as travellers to that realm, as well as good manners, to emphasise the element we are visiting,

before approaching the locals.

4. Invoke the highest form of that element before-hand. In doing so, we visit as if 'on royal command', with a letter from the King to prove it. It opens many doors and smoothes the way. This is perhaps the most important practice. Prior to any elemental working, perform some kind of invocation to the highest aspect of that element or to an appropriate God or Goddess. In this way, we then venture to that world 'in the name of', who-ever we called upon. We can then call upon that figure for assistance or help should the need arise.

Beyond these, the most important thing is to trust in our intuition, to treat anyone or anything we meet with respect and if things do begin to feel out of sorts, to simply leave. One of the quickest ways of doing this is to visualise the symbol you entered with and to step back through it. Close the symbol, banish the element and close the circle. Go and do something normal and physical like eat, dance or make love.

Exploring the Elemental Worlds.

The Tattwas have their own quality and type of inhabitants which reflects their long history of use. We may find them quite different to other elemental methods of exploration, which illustrates just how wide and varied each of the elemental worlds really are. To explore each one is similar to exploring a foreign continent but one to which we do have some connection (as the elements are within us, which is why we can travel to them). We may feel at home there and go there every chance we get and may even make friends there, getting to know some parts very intimately. Even with all of this however, most of the realm we will never see (and will never get to see), at least in this life. There will always be huge unexplored regions of which we hear only

rumours and tales. Each of the elements is like this and each makes a continent seem easy to explore in comparison. Luckily, the point is not to explore every part but to understand the role each element plays, both within our own psyches and in the unfolding dynamic of the larger universe.

In Wicca, the elements we call to the quarters within a circle are predominantly the more evolved aspects, personified as elemental 'Guardians'. The Guardian can be understood as wise 'representative' of that element, who has agreed to work with humans in order that both parties may benefit. Because we tend to get what we ask for from this 'ever-willing-to-oblige' universe, when we call the elements in ritual or in path working, we should always aim to call upon the highest aspect of the element we can conceive of. The idea being that such an 'intelligence' will be wiser than a simple nature spirit for example. Whether such hierarchies exist as simply as this is very much debatable and though there are very simple elemental beings and very wise elemental beings, the exact relationship between the two is perhaps beyond our current understanding.

The elements in nature are perhaps not so simply differentiated as in our theories. It almost seems that, when out in nature, there exists a jungle rife with life all around us; as every aspect of the landscape will potentially have its own intelligence, which can be personified and communicated with. This means that every flower, every plant, every fly, every stone, worm, tree, pond etc will have an awareness. What we contact depends on what level we focus on. Once again, depending on whether we use the one-world or the four-world model, such nature spirits may be considered as all Earth elemental spirits or differentiated into beings of the four elements; if you feel up to the job!

If this seems confusing, and it has to me until I learnt to simply accept and work with it, think of it as a country. A country on one level has definite geographic boundaries, imposed by us as lines drawn on a map (equivalent to our elemental

models). Wander overland across the border and does the land immediately change? No, of course not. It may be more helpful to think of the elements as ecosystems or bioregions. We still model them but there is no distinct boundary between them; they blend into one another gradually and gently. If we wish to explore a particular type of ecosystem or bioregion we generally do not go to a boundary area; we go to a 'type' region, where that type of system is evidenced most strongly. The most important point to keep in mind is that the universe is more strange and multifaceted than we can possibly imagine and that all of our ideas about the world are simply working models to help us to orientate ourselves within a world which is utterly more beautiful and mysterious than we can ever know whilst remaining our normal human selves. It is only on that basis that we can proceed to grow and learn at

The four elements inform and influence almost every aspect of our Wiccan practice and certainly provide much of the structure of circle building. To explore them is to enter into those beautiful realms which underlie the world in which we live. Such exploration is, like many aspects of Wicca, a lifetime's work; undertaken not to reach any particular end, for there is none, but simply for the joy of exploration and the pleasure of interacting with and communicating with the many unique beings and intelligences who inhabit this universe with us.

Table 1: Elemental Properties:

Attribute	Element				
	Earth	Air	Fire	Water	Akasha
Colour	Green Yellow Green Black	Blue Green Turquoise	Yellow Blue White	Red	Purple White Black
Energetic Nature	Heaviness and density	Coldness and contraction	Lightness and movement	Expansiveness and heat	Timelessness and Infinity
Platonic Solid	Square	Icosahedron (20 equilateral triangles)	Octahedron (8 equilateral triangles)	Tetrahedron (4 equilateral triangles)	Dodecahedron (12 equilateral triangles)
Aristolian Quality	Dry and cold	Cold and wet	Warm and wet	Hot and dry	
Elemental Creatures	Gnomes	Undines	Sylphs	Salamanders	
Elemental King	Ghob	Nischa	Paralda	Djin	
Greek Wind	Zephyrus is the Western Wind	Boreus is the Northern Wind	Eurus is the Eastern Wind	Notus is the Southern Wind	
World	Physical	Emotional	Mental	Causal	Spirit
Tattwa Symbol	Yellow Square	Silver Crescent	Blue Circle	Red Triangle	Purple Ovoid
Tattwa Name	Prithivi	Apas	Tejas	Vayu	Akasha
Archangel	Uriel	Gabriel	Raphael	Michael	Sandalphon
Elemental Weapon	Pentacle Cauldron	Chalice	Blade	Wand	Lamp Cauldron
Body Region	Legs	Abdomen and genitals	Thorax or chest	Head	Not incarnated in the body; above the crown
Hebrew God-name	AGLA	EL	EHEIH	ELOHIM	
Enochian Elemental Name	NANTA	HCOMA	EXARP	BITOM	
Tibetan Mantra	Kham La Zhi Kye Le Du	Mam Dang Ra Mam Ting Du	Yam Yam Ni Li Thun Du	Ram Tsang Tang Ne Ram Du	A Mu Ye A Kar A Ni A

9. INVOKING THE ELEMENTS & ELEMENTAL GUARDIANS

1. The Quarters and the Elements.

Most magical circles the world over are divided or orientated towards the four elements in the four quarters and Wicca is no exception. In Wicca, the usual orientation is to place the Earth element in the Northern quarter of the circle, the Fire element in the South, Air in the East and Water in the West (*fig. 5*). With the Altar traditionally placed in the Northern quarter, the circle tends to be orientated around this element, in accordance with Wicca's own mythology.

Before we progress any further, there is one fact which needs to be fully taken on board. Despite anything you may have heard to the contrary, though there are four elements and four quarters, the elements don't actually *go* in any of them. It's simply a way of ordering them for our own convenience.

There are many ways of placing the elements around the four quarters (24 to be precise), but none of them are any more correct than any of the others. We can call any element from any quarter we like. We can even call all four from a single direction if

so wished. It depends on our own beliefs, traditions, mythology, location and taste. That's not to say that each configuration doesn't feel different and lend its own flavour of energy to a circle and have a slightly different effect. With that in mind, let's look at some different methods of orientation within our magical circle.

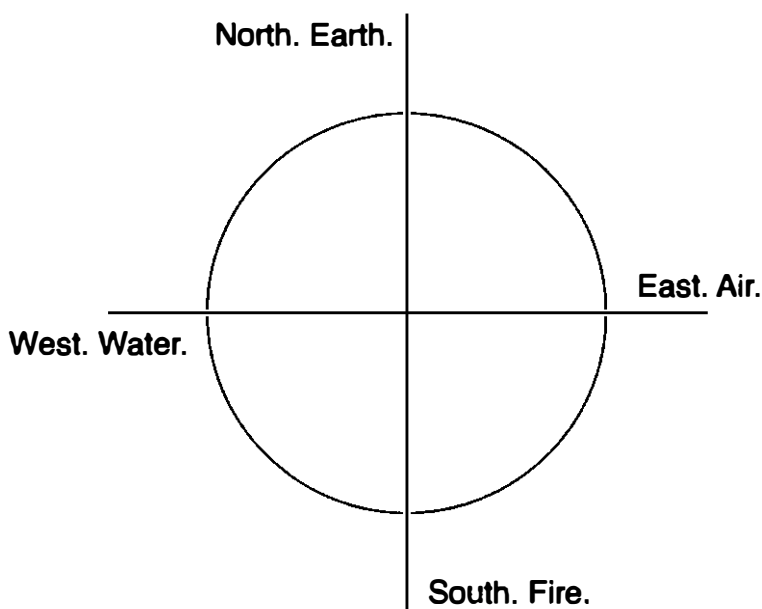


Figure 8: The traditional placement of the elements around the quarters.

There are two ways of approaching the placement of the elements around the circle; we can chop and change our placements according to where our rituals are taking place or we can have a theoretical framework of which elements go where and stick to that through thick and thin. Both have their uses.

If using the first method, we call the elemental energies from wherever they are strongest in our immediate locality. For example, if we live on an East coast, it makes perfect sense to place the Water element in the East. In fact, it's a bit nonsensical

to be turning our back on the ocean and calling in Water from the West. But people do. If we have the sea to our East and mountains to our West, then Earth probably sits quite appropriately in the West. Though having said *that*, mountains (or rather, high places in general), are also used to symbolise Air or Spirit. Fire usually ends up in the South, at least in the Northern hemisphere, as that is where the Sun is at its strongest and most powerful. In the Southern hemisphere of course the opposite is true and the North would 'hold' the Fire element. The placement of Air is as adaptable as its element and can easily be placed according to local conditions and personal viewpoints.

Acting in this way Wicca is at its most natural and shamanistic; intuitively responding to local conditions and energies. If we are intent on working closely with natural forces this seems the most appropriate approach to take, yet many Wiccan circles are quite rigidly fixed in their associations and orientation. Of course, such an approach simplifies matters if we have several groups coming together to work and everyone always does the same kind of circle. Yet Wicca is an initiate's path. The point is to awaken not to fall asleep. Lazy assumptions are not very conducive to developing awareness and if groups are coming together to perform ritual work in relation to local energies then everyone needs to be aware of where they are in relation to the landscape around them and decide together from where to call in each of the elemental energies.

The other way of orientating our circle is completely opposite yet just as valid. This is to use a theoretical framework which we adhere to, regardless of local conditions. This is usually the case in ritual lodges (which saves antipodean magicians much headaches), but is also quite appropriate if we are intending to work more with 'higher' elemental energies which are not really tied to the local landscape. Again, there are innumerable ways of placing the elements around the circle depending on personal choice. I will describe my personal one by way of example. This

arose after many years of working with the traditional way of placement as described and becoming increasingly dissatisfied with it. It just did not make very much sense to me. Eventually, the following orientation seemed to evolve itself.

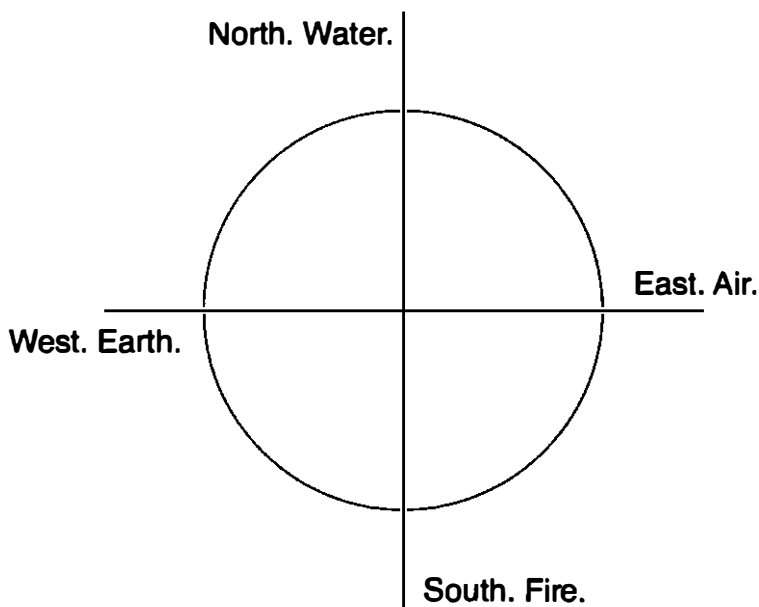


Figure 9: My own way of ordering the elements around the circle.

With Fire safely and seemingly immovable in the South (for the Northern hemisphere at least), I place Water in the North. This gives a pole of energetic opposites and polarity running through the circle. Every single duality can be placed upon this orientation. Remember, the Circle is a microcosmic universe, so it makes sense to construct it according to a chosen internal logic. The South is Fire, consciousness, active, hot, masculine, solar and daytime and opposite is the North, Water, the subconscious, passive, cold, feminine, lunar, night. This gives a dynamism to the circle which I have not felt with any other elemental placement.

Air I place in the East. For me, the Air element and its Spirits the Sylphs, have a freshness, a spaciousness and a freedom that

I find mirrored in the dawn sky and in the early morning part of the day. Both contain an expectation and potential of unknown possibilities. A hint that anything could happen. It seems natural for me to call upon the Sylphs from the East.

Earth also sits easily in the West for me. The Earth is the source of all of our sustenance, our food, water, air and all our resources. It sustains and supports us with its never-ending harvest of fertility and abundance. Around the circle, if the South is high summer and the North is winter, then the West to me is late summer and autumn, the time of Earth's harvest, autumn fairs and nature's bounty. If the circle is taken to be life stages, with Air as youth, Fire adulthood and Water death and the afterlife, then Earth in the West represents the wisdom of maturity and old age. This placement balances well with Air in the East. Heavy Earth giving the Air a fixed quality and the Air adding a lightness and dynamism to the dense Earth.

Overall, I like the dynamic and balanced energetic feel which this placement gives to a circle. If you do use this then there is one further aspect to it. If we open the circle in the Western quarter with the Earth element and move clockwise around the circle then we are invoking the elements in the reverse order of formation, going from Earth, to Water to Air and to Fire. This is the order (in Hermetic teachings), of the return journey of Spirit, so the symbolism is quite fitting. Furthermore, in keeping with the effect of constantly raising the energy level in the stages of circle building, here we are invoking the elements in a progressively more energetic order. This makes for good symbolism and a better energetic feeling in the circle. In my own practice now I do not pay attention at all to the quarters – I simply open the elements in the above order, from Earth to Fire and begin from wherever. I cannot say I have felt any difference from ignoring the compass points.

The only way to decide is to try out different placements for ourselves, for many circles each, so that we really get a feel for

the different energies they all bestow and can see which we are happiest working with.

It is also very good to drop all theory sometimes and to work directly with the local energies of the landscape around us. Abandon the traditional 'elements' as such and instead, invoke the energy of rocks, woods, lakes, mountains, bogs, fields etc. In this way, we can incorporate, both symbolically and energetically, the actual placement and layout of the energies of our immediate environment, within our circle, as if in a miniature reflection. This can be very instructive and a very intimate way of getting to know the land energetically. To the extent that we have successfully invoked the different elements, we will be able to feel the energetic nature of the landscape itself around us.

This is a more advanced type of working and has a very different feel and effect from working with the elements in 'abstract'; it is more working directly with the nature 'Devas'. If we are serious about getting to know our environment and working with its energies, it is a truly wondrous way of working which has a whole new world of intimate mysteries to explore.

2. Invoking the Elemental Guardians.

i. How we call.

So, we have our pentagrams and we know how to draw them and we have decided on which element is going where around our circle. The next step is the actual invoking of the elemental energies themselves. This has two aspects; the method of invocation and the focus of our method. In other words, how we call and who we actually call upon.

When invoking an element, as we draw the particular pentagram, we call upon the powers of the element in the form appropriate to our tradition, using the associated sounds or names by which the elemental powers are known. Such names are as many and

various as there are traditions. There are Enochian elemental names, Qabalistic names, the four Winds of classical mythology, Tibetan Buddhism has elemental mantras, goddesses and letter symbols, we can use astrological symbols, or we can simply use random sounds or specific vowel sounds to help symbolise and invoke the energies of each particular element. (See table 1 for a full list of elemental correspondences). In a later chapter we will explore a method of creating elemental guardians unique to your own tastes and beliefs. For most of ritual practice, it is enough to pick a 'cosmology' and stick to it. Consistency and regularity of practice are the most important points.

In contrast to the casting of the circle, where *we ourselves* provided the energy, in calling upon the four elements we are in actuality performing four *invocations* to powerful beings from other realms to come and be present at our circle and to *add their energy to ours*.

How do we do this? In one sense, it is a mystery, just as is the Divine Invocation. Traditionally, it is said that the elemental beings benefit and learn from interacting with Humans and so help their own evolution. It does seem to be that Humans and Elemental spirits have strengths and weaknesses in complementary areas and so can, if willing and able, mutually assist each other. It is partly for this reason that we do not usually 'command' the higher elemental spirits, nor 'beseech' them as one would a Divine figure. Instead, we call upon them, as we might call upon a colleague who has a specialist skill we have need of.

In practice, we conjure up a feeling of each element within us as we draw the elemental or spirit pentagram in the air in the appropriate quarter. We then visualise this pentagram as vividly as possible, very large, in the chosen elemental colour. As we are drawing the pentagram, we can intone the invocation or 'call'. Perhaps something along the lines of:

"Nischa, King of the Element of Water and Guardian of the Watchtower of the North Quarter, We do call thee and invoke thee from thy realm, to guard and balance our circle and add thy Wisdom to our rite"

That is a simple and fairly typical style of Wiccan elemental calling. Obviously we substitute whatever being, title (such as King, Guardian, Queen, Lady etc) and Quarter is appropriate. The beauty of these elemental invocations is that we can make them as short or as lengthy as we wish. It is really good practice to play around with them and try out different types of calls until we evolve ones that we are happy with. I began using short prayers outlining the elemental qualities which were important to me, such as this one for the Fire element:

*"Hail to you Guardians of the Watchtowers of the South
and the element of Fire,
All ye Salamanders and spirits of Divine Power
In the name of the Archangel Michael
Do we call thee and invoke thee
To guard and balance this circle*

*By the beating of our heart
and our red blood coursing
do we invoke thee*

*By the light that illumines
by the heat which gives life
do we invoke thee*

*by the power of the will
by the flames of passion
by the courage and faith of the flame
do we call thee and invoke thee from thy realms
King of Fire, come forth from thy realm and grace this circle
with thy element's presence."*

Now I have gone back to simpler ones and reserve the longer calls for single element workings. It is very much a matter of what works for us as individuals or for our own group. Approach the elemental beings in the way you think is best. The response should tell you whether you are being appropriate or not!

Of course, it is not as simple as simply saying the words. We are attempting to call and establish contact with, another being from a different realm. It requires a certain application of technique. As mentioned above, before drawing the pentagram, we should feel, within ourselves, the qualities of the element we are calling on. Ultimately, it is this energy which 'makes' the invocation work and to which the elemental being responds too. If working in a coven, every other person present should also be conjuring up this elemental quality within themselves and projecting it at the person leading the invocation, to help them perform this act most successfully.

For Earth, we feel the qualities of heaviness and density within ourselves. A solidness and a wisdom. For Water, feel the qualities of Love, of cold water, of contraction and fluidity. For Air, feel a lightness and a freedom from restrictions and a love of space. For Fire, feel heat and an expansiveness to our energy. These are the basic physical feelings the elements convey. I have found it helpful to really take my time in conjuring each set of qualities within myself before drawing the pentagram in the air before each quarter. It helps me in building up a strong connection with the nature and energy of that element. When ready, the pentagram is inscribed in the air using either the Athame or simply our outstretched arm. The energy we have conjured up within ourselves goes primarily into the call or invocation.

The next stage is to visualise an elemental scene behind the pentagram and within this the elemental being we have just called upon. In effect, what we are doing is preparing an astral 'body' appropriate for this being to come and inhabit. And, even if not at once, eventually, it will. And the scene and the being

will come alive in a way we have perhaps not thought possible. As always, to assist this process, the landscape and being behind each pentagram is visualised as vividly as possible, including vivid colours, clear sounds, smells and feelings.

The way to succeed in this is simply to take our time. Don't rush around the quarters trying to get them done. Take each quarter as a whole world in itself to call upon and we should take as much time as we feel we need in order to enable ourselves to do it correctly. Yes, we do get quicker with practice but, like tai chi, it is something best learnt slowly. In this way do we build up sensitivity in sensing the elemental qualities, plus skill in balancing and strengthening our inner senses. It means that we are also gaining skill in invocation and in communicating with intelligences from other realms. It is for reasons such as this that opening a circle is a ritual worth doing at every opportunity, including privately for our own practice. It helps us to develop a great many magical skills and abilities which is part of an initiate's role as a Priest or Priestess of Wicca.

This whole process lends itself to invention and creativity. Ritual magicians 'open the portal' by stretching their arms out and making a gesture as if parting a pair of curtains, actually quite an effective way of opening each quarter. We might also wish to intone elemental 'words of power', according to the focus of our coven's cosmology. This can be anything; Hebrew or Enochian words, chants, vowel sounds or Eastern elemental mantras. We can invoke with physical movements and actions particular to each element. We can use music or sound in the same way. It is interesting to experiment and to learn to experience what all the different techniques feel like and how they all evoke the elemental energy in a slightly different way. As always though, remember the essence of what we are trying to do; open a contact with a specific type of energy. This will lead us through any self made confusion!

ii. Who do we call?

In the tradition of the Bon Buddhism of Tibet, to invoke the elements around the circle, the initiate calls upon the four elemental Goddesses. Each Goddess is visualised in her appropriate colour and holding a particular weapon or implement. Each Goddess has her own mantra and, enlightened beings that they are, they are invoked in the name of compassion for all beings of the world and they respond with equal compassion. With this cosmology, the Bon Shamans, monks and nuns, reach out to an impressively rarefied and elevated aspect of the elemental energies.

While perhaps not suitable for use in a Wiccan ritual, this practice illustrates perfectly all the principles of 'best practice' in elemental invocation. It is an example of a complete and harmonious cosmology. The images used are all of the highest nature of being the practitioner can conceive of. They are invoked by sight, sound and emotions. Their form and nature are fully known and they are called to the circle in the name of compassion for all beings. What do we have that is a comparable cosmology?

The nearest (perhaps exact), equivalent in the West to the Tibetan practice is to use the four Archangels as symbols of the four elemental energies at their most pure. Admittedly, in the world of Wicca, not everyone would be comfortable using such imagery in a Wiccan circle due to Christian connotations. This may be throwing the baby out with the bathwater though because Archangels have been part of Western religious experiences for thousands of years before Christianity was even thought of. Archangels are traditionally conceived of as Divine messengers whose sole purpose is to assist human evolution. They thus go far beyond the narrow limits of Christianity in their scope. Their images are Briatic (to borrow from the Qabalah) and archetypal in nature. They are thus literally, the highest manifestation of the elements (among other things) we can imagine or conversely, the first and most pure manifestation of the elemental forces

out of the original Divine Unity. In many ways they are the ideal cosmological images to use. They are beyond gender, their purpose is to help us, they operate from a place of compassion and divine love and, within the limits of Western religious imagery, are quite adaptable in how they can be pictured.

Around a circle, we can picture the Archangels all as male, all as female or as a mixture, according to the polarity of the element they are representing. The usual placement is for Raphael to represent Air, Michael to represent Fire, Gabriel to represent Water and Uriel to represent Earth.

If one really cannot work with Angelic figures, what alternative cosmologies are there? Bear in mind that whatever images are used, ultimately we are still aiming to contact the archetypal level of that element. Once we do, we are working with an Archangel, however they are defined or pictured. Still, people use all sorts of imagery in their practice according to personal tastes. We will need to delve into our chosen mythology to try and find some appropriate beings to call on, from figures who have an elemental association. Remember though that Gods and Goddesses, like planets, are a different order of being and energy altogether from that of the elements and do not really have a true elemental association. We are also invoking the elements here, not the Gods, so try to avoid this. It is also worth mentioning that the Tibetan Elemental 'Goddesses' are not Goddesses as we would define the term. They are enlightened beings who have essentially renounced Nirvana in order to assist our own evolution. In other words, they are humans who have volunteered for this specific job.

The default in Wicca is to call upon the Guardian of the Element (perhaps not named), as the highest aspect and to visualise an appropriate looking image. Many covens use the names of the four winds from Greek mythology. Though there are four of these, blowing from the four compass points, they are not particularly 'elevated' spirits and, when it comes down

to it, they are embodiments of winds and so really, are spirits of the Air element only. For these reasons they are less than ideal images.

As mentioned, the most important aspect of calling on the elements in ritual which needs to be kept in mind, is that we call upon the highest, most divine aspect of that element first. This way, we not only access the element in its purest, most divine form, we access it in its most intelligent form; all of which gives our circle a much better energy.

Another reason is that we avoid trouble. If we invoke only 'lower' or lesser elemental energies or spirits in the absence of any higher 'authority', then we will have nothing to call on if things go wrong, and when working with elemental spirits especially, there is always the possibility of events going otherwise than planned!

One of the first experiences I had of the unpredictable nature of elemental spirits I still remember clearly today. I had just opened a circle, having called on each of the elements and was sitting in meditation before beginning a path-working. Suddenly, from out of the Fire Quarter popped a Fire elemental (or spirit). This was not some 'higher' being, just a simple Fire sprite. But it was like coming around a corner and suddenly being faced with a potentially very dangerous wild animal.

Sat in the middle of the circle it looked for all the world like a red and constantly glowing large, bright spark. I had the impression that it was as bewildered at being in the middle of the circle as I was at it being there and that it was not at all sure what to make of things. For a few moments we both seemed to look at each other; both a bit wary of what the 'other' was and might do. Slowly, I called on the highest aspect of the Fire element I could think of and asked that this little creature be returned to its home with blessings. A large figure appeared behind the pentagram and instantly the red spark of the fire elemental leapt right back into the Quarter and was gone!

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Now I mention this for one very good reason. Tiny little simple and innocent fire elemental that it was, this thing simply blazed with energy. It seemed to literally crackle with compacted fiery energy and it wasn't even a particularly powerful Fire spirit. I learnt more about the energetic nature of the fire element in those few seconds from that little creature than I would have done from a year's worth of reading and meditating about it. I also realised that, had I panicked this creature, it was quite capable of causing untold trouble just by 'doing its own thing' and being in a panic. Luckily, I had something else to call on, which 'handled things'. I would never practice now without that safeguard.

10. CREATING YOUR OWN ELEMENTAL GUARDIANS

In building a Coven, one of the things which makes it work and hold together is the Group Mind. This is when our coven takes on a life of its own, when it becomes more than the sum of its parts and it develops a stability, momentum and cohesiveness which can pull along coven members with it to their benefit and which can survive the changing of individual members without losing its distinctive identity.

One of the ways we can help a group mind to form is by having 'coven secrets' which become our group's own way of doing things. One of the most powerful aspects of this is to form our own elemental guardians on whom we call when casting a circle. Their very creation will help to form a group mind and their continued use will help to cement it. We will then have created a set of guardians which are unique to our coven (or to us personally), and in harmony with our own or our group's own cosmology.

The essence of this practice is the creation of an astral image of a Divine being of a particular element. This will be imbued both with our own energy and actual Divine energy. Stabilised

through repeated use, the being will act as a mediator of all energies of that element. Make it well enough and use it often enough and genuine archetypal Divine energy will come through it by force of attraction and analogy. In effect, our being will come alive. We begin to create this image by essentially asking ourselves what such a being would look like. Through detailed questioning, in a state of light trance, we gradually build up a very realistic image of such a being which will embody the very qualities we seek.

The creation of each of our elemental guardians is as follows. Open a circle specific to the element we wish to work with (lets imagine it is Earth to begin with). Importantly, we open this circle in the name of our coven deities. We then state our intention of creating an elemental guardian to mediate the Divine energies of 'X' element and to guard and guide our circle. State that the guardian is being created specifically to help and assist our group and will exist only for as long as the group exists. Whatever we actually state, the overall notion is to keep our intentions high and our motives pure.

The next stage is getting ourselves into a suitable state in which we can form the image of our elemental guardian. Begin the process by conducting a short path-working to a general location where the detailed visualisation and creation is to take place. This needs only to be quite short and will be the same every time. It is only intended to put people into a light trance as they will later on be required to speak, whilst still remaining in an 'imaginal' state.

When everyone has 'arrived' at the chosen location, begin to deepen the experience in a way specific to the element being worked with by evoking the nature of the element and filling ourselves with its qualities. This is best done by a guided meditation, with one person leading the rest of the group with a

short narration on the elemental qualities and guiding people into feeling these qualities within themselves. Begin with external and physical symbols of the elements, leading to physical sensations, emotional resonances and finally the meaning and energy of the element in its highest aspect, however this is conceived.

We have now arrived at our 'creation space' and have tuned-in to the energy of the element. Within this space, we now state our intention once again of why we are doing this exercise. This is: to create an image of a divine elemental guardian, specific to our group, to provide guidance and protection for all group rituals.

The scene now set as it were, one person (picked beforehand) must now take over and begin asking questions (also previously decided), of the rest of the group and noting these down. This is the reason why the path working is kept short; people need to be able to respond to questions and to speak aloud. If you are doing this solo, you will have to ask the questions yourself and keep aware of the effect of your answers. It is perfectly possible, if doing this alone, to be able to pose questions and write down the answers whilst still remaining in a trance state; but it does require some skill and practice. It may be easier, if you have such equipment, to record your answers instead of writing them down.

The questions now asked have the purpose of actively creating the image of our guardian-to-be from the group mind of everyone present. Begin with an open, 'what-if' general style of question and gradually begin asking more and more detailed questions. Thus, firstly, ask something along the lines of: if a Guardian/Guide from the element of Earth were here now, what might they look like?

What kind of body build would they have? Give suggestions

if necessary; slight? heavy? stocky? rotund? skinny?

What sex would they be? Let's assume female for now.

Is she old or young or something else?

What is her hair like? Long, short, light or dark,

What are her clothes like? What colour are they?

Does she have any weapons or implements?

What colour is her skin? What texture?

What are her eyes like?

What is her temperament like? What is her personality like?

What kind of things are of concern to her?

If people cannot answer, ask a 'what if' question; 'what do you think an Earth elemental Guardian's clothes would be like, if such a being existed?'

Continue like this until you have built up a very detailed picture of this being from your group's collective consciousness. Do not worry if people give contradictory answers. Include them all if people insist – this being is a creation of your group after all. At the end, with people still in their imaginative state, read back to them everything they have said. This enables everyone to picture the being again, this time being told how they have imagined it. Finally, ask for a name. Take the first name anyone speaks. If two are close together, then perhaps your guide will have a double name, perhaps a public and a private name; you decide.

Next, with everyone picturing the being as visualised, tell the being why it has been created and when it will cease to be and dissolve back into unity (usually upon any formal ending of the group and someone has to take responsibility for doing this). State in whose name it has been created (the Deities specific to our group or ourselves), and clearly define its purpose once more (e.g., to embody the highest aspect of the Earth element, to be a guardian and a guide to that element for all who are a

part of this group), and then formally give the being its name, as chosen by everyone present.

Finally, we ask the deities in whose name we opened the circle, to bless and consecrate this image so that – and here repeat your intention. We can then dismiss our newly created elemental guardian with blessings and begin the process of bringing everyone back from the location and out of the path-working, dissolving any elemental energies within ourselves firmly closing the circle.

Repeat this procedure for all four elements and then call upon these beings at the quarters from each circle. They will grow with you and can lead you to profound experiences.

The reason for performing this ritual under the name of a God and/or Goddess and of keeping our intentions and motives ‘pure and holy’ is two-fold. Firstly, this is potentially powerful magic. Visualised and empowered images are called (somewhat confusingly), Elementals (though they have nothing to do with actual spirits of the four elements), or thought forms. If not created with exacting care, they can easily take on a life of their own and grow out of their creator’s control. By creating this image with high intentions, in the name of an already existing deity and with a very specific focus and job to do, we are trying to make this event highly unlikely.

Secondly, the intent here is to create a being or image that is a fit vessel for the invocation of the archetypal force of that element. For this to happen, our image must mirror, in form and energy, the archetype’s nature. If the being is created with correct purity of intent and this is reinforced by the way in which it is used, a response from the Briatic or Archetypal realm will eventually find its natural expression in the created image.

It also helps, with beings of this nature, to keep them busy and occupied. It is when such created living thought-forms are neglected that they tend to grow more wayward and troublesome.

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By creating a set of beings who are invoked every week at a circle, their main purpose of existence is continually reinforced.

11. RAISING & USING ENERGY

All of the magical work we have looked at so far requires one thing above all else in order to be effective; energy. Without some kind of energy to empower our actions, we are only posturing. Useful sometimes for learning, but not the real article. One of the advantages of working with an already established coven is that even if we don't know how to raise energy, others will and we will be swept along in it, until we simply learn by osmosis and begin contributing energy of our own perhaps without truly knowing 'how'. If we are learning on our own, or are part of a group in which everyone is relatively new, then this often seems to be a real stumbling block. The good news is that raising energy is easy; we do it naturally all of the time. The trick is doing it consciously and on demand. Once that ability is gained, it is the learning of focusing and directing it which takes the ability and practice.

It might be useful to begin this chapter with a clarification of what we actually mean by 'energy'. On one level, energy is such an elusive concept that I don't think the answer is really known by anyone as to what any energy is, let alone magical energy. Instead, just as with defining magic, it is easier to describe what it feels like. When raised, magical energy feels like a change in

our normal state of being. It can feel like goose-bumps on our skin. It can feel like an excitement and exhilaration. It can feel like being drunk, intoxicated and disorientated. It can feel 'other-worldly'. It can feel highly sexual. It can feel as if we are filled with vitality and on every level, it involves an expansion of our usual self. It is because of this 'expansion' effect of raising energy that the most difficult aspect of magical work is not the raising of energy itself but instead, that of keeping ourselves focussed with this energy inside ourselves and being able to direct it according to our intent.

In the most general of senses, magical energy is usually thought of as 'life-energy'. That might be the simplest way to think of it, at least initially. When people talk about 'raising energy' and 'energetic' experiences they have had, it is very often this type of 'etheric energy' that they are referring to. It feels different from the everyday physical energy we are familiar with but it also feels quite different to the rather subtle and ethereal astral level energy. It is somewhere in-between.

It is very useful to understand this distinction because we must be capable of working on many different levels and the more specific we can be about our intent, then the more successful we will be in our efforts of achieving our aims.

Physical energy we know about. It comes from our food and the oxygen we breathe in. We can raise our levels of physical energy by eating well, resting, not being overly stressed or even by using artificial stimulants. We can lower our physical energy by not eating, by feeling stressed, by not having enough sleep or by hard physical exercise. Physical energy is pretty much a matter of mechanics; it can be measured, after all. But it is not 'life energy'. Eating food does not, in itself, actually make or keep us alive. It is at this point that physical energy blends into etheric energy and between the two types a great deal of interaction takes place.

Without getting into complex metaphysical models of

'energetic planes', etheric energy is the first non-physical type of energy we encounter and can use, though it is very closely tied to the physical plane. It seems to interpenetrate with the physical and can affect and influence it. We raise our etheric energy by conscious breathing, moderate exercise, by eating fresh and raw food and, most importantly, by changing or raising our emotional state or level. Feel excited and it rises. Etheric energy can be directly felt in a physical way as 'Qi' for example, in martial arts or acupuncture. In the right conditions it can even be seen, as a type of misty or ghostly white outline around our bodies or sometimes in nature especially at dusk, around plants and trees. It can come in a probably infinite range of 'flavours' and styles, according to the particular way it is operating and manifesting.

Etheric energy lies just behind the physical plane and to some degree controls it and to some degree is controlled by it. It is the level on which much 'folk magic' takes place. Ideas and acts relating to the 'charging' of objects, the 'atmospheres' of locations and much of our circle building, are all operating predominantly with etheric level energy.

Again keeping this model simple, the next level of energy might be termed 'astral' energy or 'Akashic' energy. This type of energy feels much more subtle than etheric energy and is usually 'sensed' rather than 'felt'. Whereas etheric energy stirs our emotions and our bodies, astral energy moves our minds and intuition. It is no less strong for being so very much more subtle but working with astral energy requires a highly honed intuition and 'feel' for it. Invocation operates on this level (as well as others), as can healing (which can also be quite etheric) and in the circle building, the casting of the circle is the beginning of the shift from working on an etheric level to a more astral level.

I always feel slightly wary when using models such as this. Just as the elemental models mentioned earlier are our own attempts to make sense of the universe by imposing an artificial but to us,

understandable, structure on something which is not really quite so strictly differentiated, trying to model different energetic 'planes' is equally as helpful and artificial. Take these ideas as useful frameworks to help orientate ourselves, but always keeping in mind that the universe is not nearly so obligingly simple!

It might seem that it follows from this that people who are overflowing with a natural animal magnetism and in glowing good health will be quite good at magic and people who are weak and sickly will be quite poor. Well, magic is odd like that. Sometimes that is true. But often it is not. What seems to matter most in the raising of energy is a particular ability to increase our own reservoir of vital (i.e. etheric), energy by literally pulling it out of the universe. Or, to operate directly on an astral level and translating this down to an etheric and physical manifestation. This is a knack which is sometimes natural and sometimes learnt but if we have a huge store of our own vital etheric energy, then there is not much motivation to learn how to increase it whereas if we have little, there is a lot of motivation and such people often seem to come 'alive' within a circle and become very different entities. Such is magical practice.

In circle building we use energy at every stage of the process. However, to use our own energy would not be a good idea, as we would quickly begin to exhaust our self and anyway; why bother? The universe is filled with abundant energy for us to tap into. Any uniquely personal power we might have is insignificant compared to the immense sea of energy we are constantly living in. It would be silly not to take advantage of it. In fact, it is probably best to not think of this whole process as being about actually 'raising' energy, as this in itself implies some effort on the part of the practitioner and easily instils anxiety about ability. Instead, it may be more helpful to think of it as simply 'channelling' energy. Energy which is all around us and available simply by requesting that it be so. There is no effort as such in

channelling energy, it is more a question of relaxing enough to allow energy to flow through one's person. The main job of the practitioner is to maintain the focus of intention necessary to direct the energy appropriately.

In an informal way, we use magical energy in sweeping the circle, in blessing the elements on the altar, in consecrating the room, in casting the circle and in invoking the elements. In none of these do we formally raise energy before doing them. Yet an experienced practitioner will not be using his or her own personal energy for these basic tasks of circle building. How do we do it? How do we enliven ourselves, how do we enlarge ourselves, how do we make ourselves larger than life, so that our rituals become something alive and genuine?

We do it by doing it. It is one thing which can't really be taught except by practice. One of the best ways to learn how to raise and feel energy is to go off and do something altogether different. Go and learn Tai Chi, Qi-Gong, Reiki, Shiatsu or any other energetic or healing discipline. The reason is that these practices are focussed explicitly on raising and learning to feel an etheric level of energy. These disciplines are masters at teaching us how to direct our minds and emotions along certain paths in order to allow energy to flow. You will often learn the art more quickly through these methods than through struggling along in a circle, wondering if you are doing it right. Wicca is great like this; it demands so many different skills that it can take a person into so many different areas of life, in order to learn and gain the skills and qualities which circle magic requires to do well.

However, there is one practice which is common to most Wiccan circles and that is the Witches Rune. The Witches Rune is a longish chant performed to a circular dance which every group member participates in, finishing with a repeated verse continued until the energy raised is judged to have risen to a peak. At this moment, everyone comes together to instantly

release the energy and send it into the circle. It has the effect of livening everyone up; it being a physical method of raising energy and it seems to actively switch the circle to 'ON'. After such a physical chant and dance, both people and the circle, are 'humming' and the circle is declared open.

If we examine the structure of the Witches Rune, we can see how it incorporates many different mechanisms for raising energy. Its core effect is that of ~~trance~~ trance induction and the blending of the separate identities of coven members into an effective group mind, able to direct energy together as one unit. Taking a close look at this central and well known energy raising practice will help to shed light on the general principles of raising energy in a circle so that they can be applied elsewhere. I think this is more helpful than simply listing different ways of raising energy because in essence, absolutely anything, including nothing at all, can be used to raise energy because doing so is a change of one's internal state and not a property of some external practice, tool, object or 'thing'.

The Witches Rune is performed with one person leading it. This is important because it is the job of this person to sense how the energy is developing and direct the exercise for maximum efficiency.

The Rune begins with coven members linking hands to form a circle. This simple act immediately increases the emotional and etheric connections between the individuals present. What were, moments before, a group of separate persons, has now formed into a single unit. This is the physical representation of what is intended on an energetic level.

Movement and chanting begin, slowly and gradually at first, building in tempo as the Rune progresses and rising to a pitch at its climax. This is a common trance inducing activity as spinning or dancing in a small circle has the effect of disorientating us and getting us out of our left-brain state. It is also a physical

activity which raises our own etheric energy. This disorientation or 'forgetting where we are' helps us to focus on entering into another state and to become aware of what is happening on a collective and energetic level.

The Witches Rune progresses with a chanted series of verses. With a little practice these become memorised so that performing it does not need the use of that intellectual part of our brain. Instead, we can truly 'perform' it; really stepping into the words, placing our energy and emotions into them, bestowing the process with that much greater energy.

The words themselves are important. They act as an invocation of sorts. They guide us through the Wiccan mythology and invoke the powers of the elements, the sacred weapons and the archetypal God and Goddess energies. Again emphasising the building up of a group mind, this ensures that all participants are inhabiting the same inner world and that their intentions and energies are entrained; or brought together on the same wavelength.

The Rune culminates with a short, repeated chant, which is iterated faster and perhaps louder, until an energetic climax is reached. It is up to the person directing the Rune to judge the most appropriate moment of 'peak focus' at which to end the Rune. At this stage, members are physically awake, their energies have been focussed together and the tempo of the chanting and dancing will have risen to a faster and more disorientating speed. At this point, two different outcomes could take place.

In theory, the Rune could now reverse its progress; slowing down and releasing the focus until the participants eventually come to a halt and release hands. This would have raised energy and taken people somewhat 'out of themselves' and then gradually allowed the energy to dissipate as people were led back to their 'normal' state. Nothing much would have been done with the energy.

Instead, what is usually done is that the 'director' of the Rune ends the process suddenly and unexpectedly, perhaps by throwing up his or her hands and shouting a conclusion, such as "So mote it Be!", or perhaps by suddenly falling to the floor (usually to a sitting position), bringing everyone else down with them. This brings the exercise to a very definite conclusion.

What is going on here is that the person leading the dance or rune has judged that the energy has reached a peak. This stage is very dynamic and will only last a short time. Continue performing the Rune and people will begin to lose focus. They will become bored, tired or distracted and will begin to *think*, thereby coming out of that 'altered state'. The energy will then immediately begin to dissipate. Catching the process at the most opportune moment is a knack only learnt by practice.

Instead of letting this energy dissipate then, the person leading stops the process abruptly and suddenly. As soon as this is done, every person taking part 'throws' their energy into a shared focus. A standard one might be to formally open the circle. It works because everyone, without any time for thinking or pausing, acts in a unified way from an altered and shared state. Unlike in the winding down version, people are left in a 'peak state'. They have left the mind state they were in when they began the Rune and have not returned to it, even though they have just used the energy they have just raised. A threshold has been crossed in the journey from beginning the ritual to completing the circle opening. Everyone is now in a prime state to work magic.

12. INVOKING THE GODS

Invoking the Gods is truly the divine jewel at the heart of Wicca. To have a divine force invoked upon one's self and to have this energy flood into one's consciousness (or even just trickle), induces such changes to one's own spiritual development like nothing else. To be the person who performs the invocation is to be in a position of responsibility and rare intimacy, with both the 'invokee' and the divine force itself. To be present in a circle when the divine force attends is to witness the change in gear of the magical space you are in and to truly take part in those mysteries, which are as old as humankind ourselves.

The word invoke means to 'call in', whereas to evoke means to 'call forth'. In religious practice, invocation refers to a calling down of a Divine force or being. In Wicca, invocation refers specifically to the practice of calling upon a specific God or Goddess to manifest energetically by inhabiting the body and mind of a Priest or Priestess. In other words, it is the practice of creating a controlled possession by a Divine force; a practice no doubt as old as humankind.

In Wiccan rituals, we invoke the Gods and Goddesses for a wide range of reasons, ranging from a desire to worship and adore the Gods/esses to a desire to increase our own spiritual

development. We also invoke because it's fun and enjoyable. One of the best aspects of Wicca is a recognition of the sacred nature of laughter. Invoking the Gods and Goddesses is fun in the sense that communion with one's Divinity should be a joyful experience. Yes, there are many sober and serious moments and sober and serious Gods/esses but, in the main, invocation should be a joyous, uplifting and inspiring spiritual practice.

Invocation enables one to gain direct experience of the energy of a God or a Goddess. As far as one's own spiritual growth goes, this is fertiliser for the soul. It is said, though I cannot verify this personally, that the Gods/esses benefit from continued contact with humanity because they evolve and change as we do. Such a view certainly makes a lot of sense to me and feels like it should be true. One only needs a cursory study of mythology to see how the roles of various Gods and Goddesses have changed over the millennia. Which is worth bearing in mind when you do invoke; many ancient Gods and Goddesses have some very dubious backgrounds.

Finally, for the purposes of ritual, while it's true that we, as humans, could certainly celebrate the yearly festivals and perform magic pretty much under our own steam; to invite the Gods/esses to take part and join in gives any ritual a significant boost and does take the proceedings onto another level entirely.

Few, if any, Wiccan books have really described how to invoke these Divine energies. Magical books on the other hand do describe it, but to me it has often seemed in too mechanical a way, which never conveyed the mystery or the joy which the process involves. Perhaps this is all because the practice of invocation is something which is much easier to teach and learn by doing rather than reading. Partly, it is also because (in Wicca, though seemingly not in ritual magic), invocation is part of the secret, initiated mysteries. Unfortunately, if you are running your own coven and you are not practising invocation, then it is much like

driving around in only first or second gear all the time and never really knowing what your vehicle (be it spiritual or otherwise) is actually capable of.

The Mechanics of Invocation.

When a magical circle has been made, the next stage is the ritual 'proper'. If, as part of this, a Divine force is to be invoked, then two people are chosen (usually prior to the circle; when the ritual is being planned); one to perform the invocation and one who is to have the God or Goddess invoked onto them. The practical side of how it is done is fairly easy to describe. The person being invoked will stand, kneel or sit, with eyes closed and mind as silent as possible or alternatively, concentrating on an image of the God or Goddess they are to embody. It is helpful for this person to conjure up a feeling of devotion towards the deity about to be invoked or that one is already in possession of the deity's qualities and energy. This is one event where the donning of specific clothing or the wearing of masks, relevant to the deity, can be extremely effective in helping us to call and embody the Divine force.

Either way, the 'invokee' must open up energetically and be as receptive as possible to the incoming energy. This is often, at first, a subtle thing, as both the invoker must learn how to 'do it' and the invokee must learn what to feel for. It takes time and don't be disappointed if at first and for quite a while, the effects are quite subtle. The advantage of a coven of course, is that experienced invokers can pull the force down onto a beginner, so that you are left in no doubt as to whether it has 'worked' or not, and, conversely, if it is not subtle, you have a group of experienced people around you to help you deal with it and come back down to earth afterwards.

The invoker too must open themselves up energetically and raise as much energy within themselves as they can. They then call

upon the God or Goddess being invoked to manifest through the invokee. Just like that. It sounds simple but what really happens is a mystery. Either by using a memorised invocation or, if one is able and experienced enough, a spontaneous one, the invoker recites this with as much energy and passion as they can muster; visualising the image and feeling the energy of the Deity who is being invoked. One throws one's 'being' up to the God or Goddess concerned and calls it down. Somewhere in the process of invoking, you change from addressing a God or Goddess 'out there', to focussing on the person and addressing the Deity 'as if' it is already within the person *and the person and the deity are one and the same*. One projects one's own focussed energy into the other person, filling them with a mixture of your energy and the God's/esses'. One lifts oneself up in inspiration, devotion and ecstasy to contact the God/ess force. The invoker in effect, almost invokes themselves in order to contact the Divine force and then in effect 'lead it down' onto this plane and then into the other person.

And sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes it's just a mild feeling and sometimes it's so strong that it blows everyone away and the invokee cannot remember a thing they said or did. How and why it varies no one knows (or at least they are not telling). That is why it is a mystery. We don't control the Gods; we invoke them. What seems to be paramount, is simply one's intent to call in a Divine energy and one's ability to lift oneself out of one's-self, if that makes sense.

For the invokee, the experience is an expansion to another level of reality and understanding altogether. To have a God or a Goddess come into one leaves its mark forever and accelerates one's development like nothing else. It can also make one go seriously off one's rocker if not careful, which is why it's best practised within stable and trusting groups, be they Wiccan or magical. To have an archetype look through your eyes is an

incredibly strange experience.

Well, you have called it in. Now, what do you do with it?

Using the Invocation.

The essence of the practice of invocation is that we are invoked for the benefit of the many, not simply for our own stimulation. The 'many' in this case means the rest of the coven who will be standing around waiting for their bit in the ritual. The other reason for giving the energy out to others is that it is actually quite a strain on the psyche to hold this energy within one's self for any considerable period of time. Sharing this energy really is the healthiest option.

One common way of doing this is by the recital of a memorised piece known as a 'Charge'. An example of a Charge is the 'Goddess Charge', now published in many sources and attributed to Doreen Valiente.

The Charge of the Goddess:

'Whenever ye have need of anything, once in the month, and better it be when the moon is full, then shall ye assemble in some secret place and adore the spirit of She, who is Queen of all witches. There shall ye assemble, ye who are fain to learn all sorcery, yet have not won its deepest secrets; to these will She teach things that are yet unknown. And ye shall be free from slavery; and as a sign that ye be really free, ye shall be naked in your rites; and ye shall dance, sing, feast, make music and love, all in Her praise. For Hers is the ecstasy of the spirit, and Hers also is joy on earth; for Her law is love unto all beings. Keep pure your highest ideal; strive ever towards it; let naught stop you or turn you aside. For Hers is the secret door which opens upon the land of youth and Hers is the cup of wine of life, and the cauldron of Cerridwen, which is the Holy Grail of immortality. She is the gracious goddess, who gives the gift of

joy unto the heart of man. Upon earth, She gave the knowledge of the spirit eternal; and beyond death, She gives peace and freedom, and reunion with those who have gone before. Nor does She demand sacrifice, for behold, She is the mother of all living, and Her love is poured out upon the earth.

She who is the beauty of the green earth, and the white moon among the stars, and the mystery of the waters, and the desire of the heart of man, calls unto thy soul. Arise, and come unto Her. For She is the soul of nature, who gives life to the universe. from Her all things proceed, and unto Her all things must return; and before Her face, beloved of gods and men, let thine innermost divine self be enfolded in the rapture of the infinite. Let Her worship be within the heart that rejoiceth; for behold, all acts of love and pleasure are Her rituals. And therefore let there be beauty and strength, power and compassion, honour and humility, mirth and reverence within you. And thou who thinkest to seek Her, know thy seeking and yearning shall avail thee not unless thou knowest the mystery; that if that which thou seekest thou findest not within thee, then thou wilt never find it without thee. For behold, She has been with thee from the beginning; and She is that which is attained at the end of desire."

It's one thing to hear this recited by a person (no matter how talented an orator they may be). It is quite another to listen to this spoken by one who has been invoked with a Goddess energy; literally, it is a Goddess speaking, not a person.

There are Charges now written for a variety of deities and if we cannot find one, or one to our liking, then we can simply write our own. Such a piece is almost always more effective anyway because it comes from our own inspiration and comprehension. The aspect of a God or Goddess revealed to one person may not actually mean very much to ourselves and we can only successfully invoke that which we can have some comprehension

of.

The other common way of incorporating this practice is by celebrating the seasonal rituals. Those who are to play the parts of the God and Goddess are invoked as precisely those God/ess images specific to that festival. The ritual is then performed with, in a very real sense, the God and the Goddess actually present within the circle. The participants are then solidly grounded at the end of the ritual (though before the circle is closed). This can be a very powerful experience for those playing the main roles. For the rest of the Coven it can bestow an intimacy and knowledge of that God/ess and of the deeper meaning behind the processes being played out in each particular seasonal ritual. Just this in itself, is a lifetime's worth of exploration.

Performing a charge can expel most of the energy of an invocation directly into the temple and the other coven members, if so desired. Within a ritual though, there are many ways of making use of this energy. One can charge up talismans, bless tools or food, bless coven members, heal, make prophecies, perform divination, make spontaneous speeches or even just remain absolutely silent (blown away). Bear in mind though, and be prepared for, that we are dealing with Divine energy here. It is definitely possible that, despite your well laid ritual plans, the God or Goddess invoked may have quite different ideas about how to make use of its presence. A different charge may 'come through' or the invokee may act in unplanned-for unpredictable but 'in-character' ways. This is always a possibility when dealing with invocation. If you feel you can 'go with it' and incorporate it into the ritual then the ritual may well be the richer for it. Always have one person though stationed as a 'watcher' so if the person seems to be acting out of character or dangerously, this person can step in and completely ground the invokee, expel the energy and, close the ritual.

Barring events like that, when a ritual goes as planned, one can

stay 'in part' for quite some time. Eventually however, what goes up must come down and it will be time for you to be earthed.

Earth calling...

Grounding should best be carried out by the person who performed the invocation. Invoking a person creates an energetic bond between the two individuals; a relationship, for invoking and being invoked is a very intimate process; we ideally need to have much trust in both the Divine force and in the person invoking us (not to mention ourselves). How do we bring to an end an act of invocation then? Well, firstly, by the end of a ritual, much of the energy of the invocation will have been exteriorised anyway; either into the ritual performance itself or by the willing of the energy into coven members or talismans or such like. So the natural process is that when we have been invoked, to an extent we progressively earth ourselves anyway throughout the ritual and gradually return to our prior state. The purpose of the more formal act of grounding is to sink any residual Divine Energy which is left in the person out and into the Earth; but to do this in a ritually defined way; so that all parties involved (that is: the invoker, the invoked, the rest of the coven and the Divine force itself), are made unequivocally aware that the invocation has now ended. This is very important.

There are any number of ways this can be done. In Wicca, the traditional method is that the invokee is 'adored' by the invoker, who begins by kissing the feet of the person and gradually working his/her way up the other person's body until a final kiss is given on the lips. A hug is then given, (if the invoker also stands –gently – on the invokee's toes it helps to really 'earth' the person), and the process concludes with the invoker sliding his/her arms down the invokee's arms and fingers, with the intent of flinging out any residual energy and completely bringing back down to earth that person's psyche. This method is respectful of

the intimacy between the two parties, is physical and, performed with the correct intent by both parties, is very effective. Especially when followed by an even more physical act such as eating at the end of a ritual.

One does not have to kiss; one can anoint with salt instead. Pressing a few grains of salt along the joints of the body, or against the chakras has a very earthing effect. The main object is to give some kind of definite and strong physical touch to bring the person back into definite contact with their physical senses and for both parties to have the intent that the energy is being fully earthed and grounded.

Other methods involve a ritual thanking of the God/ess and a bidding goodbye to their presence with thanks and blessings and a 'please come again next time' type of phrase. Note that one does not usually directly banish a Divine force; one thanks it and then bids it depart. It is a banishing; it's just a more polite banishing.

Once again, it is necessary that we evolve our own method according to our own tastes and those with whom we are working. The most important aspect of any grounding exercise is to ensure that the person who has been invoked is returned to as much a state of normality as is possible. Of course, one may be quite affected by the ritual, which is understandable. What one doesn't want is for someone to still be 'off with the fairies' as it were, when everyone around is falling asleep or going home.

Practising Invocation.

One aspect of invocation which should be mentioned is the actions of the rest of the coven. What do they do whilst an invocation is taking place? Well, work really hard is what. When any invocation is commencing, the job of the rest of the coven is to send as much energy as possible to the person doing the invoking. As with every part of the ritual process, there are no

'innocent bystanders' in Wicca. Everyone focusing in with the same intent like this adds significantly to the synergistic effect of an invocation. Not only is the actual calling down of the God/ess stronger and more effective but, because everybody has (even if only indirectly), participated in the invocation, everybody actively benefits from the energy invoked, that much more.

The mechanics of invocation are fairly easy to describe but what actually happens is not. It is best done in a group, at least at first, and it is best to stick to familiar and somewhat stable God and Goddess images for quite some time until experience is acquired. It is best to limit the times that one is invoked to once a month at first, as the effect of containing a God/ess force within your body and psyche can be immense and can continue to ripple out into one's life and self for many months afterwards. Much more benefit will accrue if we allow the effects (often very subtle and surprising), to fully dissipate and be integrated, before having to deal and incorporate a new type of energy of a different God or Goddess.

It is also good practice to build up a deep familiarity with the God and Goddess we are going to have invoked on us or which we will be invoking, prior to the act itself. This means studying their mythology, their 'history', their likes and dislikes, their personality and temperaments, their habits, their adventures and their context. Not only does this make the invocation more likely to succeed, it enables us to gain much more from the experience in terms of knowledge and depth. It is also a good idea to have symbols and offerings for the God/ess being invoked, around the temple or on the altar. These can even be presented to the invoked, for them to bless with the energy of that deity. Scatter them about, adorn the invoked, dress the altar, attire the coven accordingly.

In invocation practice, there are no firm rules and exceptions occur to everything. If we are invoking our coven's particular

God and Goddess each week then a familiarity will build up and we will need less preparation and paraphernalia. It is with such regularity of practice that we will also notice how the presence of a God/ess waxes and wanes, as does the power of an invocation – for probably innumerable and unknowable reasons. It is with this momentum though, that we can build up a unique familiarity and intimacy with your own coven deities, which, again, takes our practice onto a different level.

Gender qualities and invocation.

It remains to mention that, traditionally in modern Wicca, invocations are performed by men on women and women on men and that men have Gods invoked onto them and women Goddesses. We should not let tradition limit our practice however. There is no reason why each sex should not invoke onto their own sex and why Gods and Goddesses should not be invoked onto individuals of the same gender as the deities. Indeed, there are good reasons why we should invoke in such ways. The energy between individuals is a matter of individual polarity which, as initiates, we need to be able to switch around as desired. The practice of same-sex invocation also generates a much greater web of links between the members of a coven, than the traditional splitting of a coven along gender lines. We also cannot grow fully, if we only know one half of divinity, which is why we all need to be invoked as both Gods and Goddess, as required.

The best way to begin with this practice is to start gently and slowly. Read lots and pick a God and Goddess to invoke regularly as your coven deities. Experiment with different ways of invocation; from simple to elaborate and see which begins to give the best results. From there, expand into the seasonal deities and after a year's round, take stock of what you have learnt and the experiences you have had. You may wish to invoke planetary

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deities for specific rituals or figures from mythology. It is not impossible to invoke fictional characters, in so far as they link up to an archetypal energy, or if they have acquired enough energetic stability on other planes. The spiritual lessons from such activities are no doubt less and such figures may be coming more from one's own subconscious, but maybe not. Invocation can span the whole range from possession by something 'less than human' to being touched by the grace of divinity itself. It is up to you where you focus your sights and you will get what you ask for. Either way, it is invocation which is one of the prime keys to the understanding of our own spiritual development.

13. CLOSING AND GROUNDING

Closing a circle is a much quicker process than that of creating one. It takes more time and effort for us to reach and maintain altered states of consciousness than it does for us to return to our usual level of awareness. Closing is an essential stage however of the whole process of ritual. It is good practice to formally and ritually close a magical ritual in a way which leaves us in no doubt that we have left that sacred and altered space and have returned to this world and this level.

We perform an identical process all of the time in mundane ways. When going to work we may put on special clothing, even if it is just a tie, which we do not wear out of work. Donning these 'work clothes' puts us in a particular state of mind which might be more difficult to engender if we just wore our jeans and t-shirt. In the same way, the first activity of many upon arriving home, is to change out of our work clothes, 'so we can relax'. It is a ritual action which sends a sign to our minds that one way of being is over and another has begun. Magic is no different.

When conducting ritual we are in a very different state of mind to that of our everyday activities. A powerful ritual can take us to a very different state indeed. It is very important that we 'come back' from there to our 'default' state. Partly this is simply pragmatic; we would find it very difficult, impossible or even

dangerous to try and carry on our normal life activities whilst in this state. Driving is an obvious example but trying to carry out most activities whilst still in a 'ritual mind state' would be akin to being inebriated on drink or drugs and trying to do the same. Simply not an appropriate or useful state to be in.

The other reason is our psychic health. Just as we don't walk around in our work clothes all the time or go to work in our informal clothes, we close the circle to step out of a specialised mental state. To not do so would begin to unbalance our personalities and leave our senses too open to energetic influences without the benefits of being in a circle to help us to deal with them. One of the effects of continued spiritual development is to continually open up our more subtle senses but this happens in a gradual way; in balance with our ability to close them down when we need to. We deal with life by filtering out most of what is 'around us' (on lots of levels). We can learn to deal with more 'input' as our overall awareness increases but this is generally a slow and gradual process. To walk out of a circle without a formal closing can leave us dangerously open. It can leave us feeling sick and 'out of sorts' to completely unable to deal with things at all.

Closing Declaration

When the main business of the ritual has been completed and participants are ready, the process of closing the circle begins. Often it is useful to gather people together and to announce that the closing is about to begin. This in itself immediately helps people to focus on what is happening, draws their attention away from the events of the ritual and turns their minds towards 'winding down' as it were.

Symbolically, closing is generally a mirror image of the building up stage. Firstly the elemental doorways are closed. In setting up the circle we performed four invocations to the elemental spirits. People differ in how the effect of this is reversed. Some people banish the elements, some dismiss them, some command them

to depart. How you go about it physically is up to you but it is well to look at what we are trying to achieve on an inner level in this stage.

Closing the Elemental Quarters

We have surrounded our circle with four elemental beings, asked them to watch and guard our circle and perhaps requested that they add their particular energies to the proceedings. So it is not simply an energy we are dealing with but an elemental intelligence as well. We need to break contact with the intelligence firstly and then to close down the doorway we have created to that particular type of energy.

If we were dealing with simple elemental spirits or, perhaps, unwelcome spirits, a banishing would be the most appropriate means of breaking contact. However, banishing is banishing. It's a pretty strong response. Banish really means; 'go and don't come back!'. It's not really the meaning we are trying to convey. In any case, it is likely that we have called upon fairly elevated elemental spirits or guides in our initial invocations. Such beings are considered to have a fairly high degree of awareness and intelligence. It is unlikely that we would wish them to be banished never to return.

What we want to do instead is to convey to these beings that the ritual is now over. That we do not require their presence at the circle any longer. If we had been called to watch a street performance in which the actors had requested our participation, I doubt we would be very pleased to be simply dismissed when the show had ended. But we wouldn't want to be left hanging around wondering if the show had finished or not either. I approach dealing with the elemental spirits in the same way.

For closing the elemental quarters we can begin by standing in front of each quarter and declaring that the ritual is now over and that the elemental doorway will be closing. It speaks to our own minds clearly and the intention on the inner planes is straightforward and simple. Then address the being earlier

invoked or called upon, directly. Express thanks and gratitude for their attendance and part in the rite. Finally, to leave no ambiguity, bid the being depart to their own realms until next time they are called.

Have the same person or people do this as invoked the elements, as they are the ones 'responsible' if you like for the opening and closing of these gates. Visualise the entities fading away and see the pentagrams very strongly.

*"We now declare this ritual over and this doorway is now closing.
We thank thee(insert name of the being called upon),
guide of the element of
for thy help in this working.
(pause to actually give energy back in thanks)
We now bid thee depart for thy fair and lovely realms
with thanks and blessing
Blessed Be!"*
(have the rest of the group repeat this loudly).

With our street performance analogy, this acknowledges the input of the people called to watch and take part. It simply says 'thank you. It wouldn't have been the same without you'. Those who were called to watch the show have been thanked and told the show is over. Until next time. When they will be very welcome to come again.

Expressing this thanks, when genuinely felt, gives something back, energetically, to the beings behind that quarter. They have given of their energy now you are giving of yours. It seems fair and equal. It is a good idea for every person in the group to do this together.

After dealing with the elemental beings, we complete the process by closing down the energetic doorway we initially created and through which the elemental beings made their presence felt. This is best done by inscribing the pentagrams once again, but this time in an anticlockwise direction, to close

and banish the energy (not the spirit) we earlier invoked.

This process is repeated at each of the quarters. This completes the closing of the quarters and essentially, we are left with a closed circle of energy with no open links to 'anywhere else'.

Closing the Circle

The next stage of closing is to 'take down' this circular sphere of energy we created. In essence, this means 'undrawing' the circle. If we are reversing our earlier actions then this means moving anti-clockwise around the circle, otherwise known as 'Widdershins'.

Widdershins is a word derived from old German and describes movement opposite to that of the apparent direction of the sun. In usage, this came to mean opposite anything the Sun stood for, so therefore opposite good luck, life and, perhaps, 'God'. Of course, such only holds true in the northern hemisphere. Antipodean Witches will, presumably, cast their circles in an anti-clockwise direction and dissolve them Deosil or sun-wise. For me, closing a circle in the opposite direction to the one in which it was opened seems the most appropriate way of closing the energy; a real 'winding down'. Experiment with both ways and find which works for you the best. The energy forming our circle was created with our own energy and it is up to us what we do with it. We could just release it into the universe. We could ask for it to be used wherever it might be needed most. Or we could 'save' it, for use later. It is best to decide beforehand how we wish to close our circles energetically. We would not really want to just leave a whole pile of energy lying around for anyone to use. That could (and eventually probably would), attract very low level astral entities to our temple area. In the same way we don't leave uneaten food just lying around because if the animal life it attracts, we need to do something with the energy we have created.

One idea is to intend that, as the circle is closed, that the energy flows back into either yourself, the tool used during the casting

of the circle or into an actual object (perhaps a deity statue) to be stored until needed.

After this is done, the circle has been dissolved and to most extents, the temple is almost closed. However, note that we have only reversed the stages of the invocation of the elements and the drawing of the circle. If the ritual has been performed in a dedicated temple used for no other purpose, then we do not reverse the consecration of the area itself by 'de-consecrating' the temple in a formal way, but this might be done by making a last dedication to the coven deities or by clearing the altar of implements specific to that ritual. In a space also used for other activities, this 'de-consecration' is carried out in-effect by the clearing away of all of the ritual tools and set-up and returning the room to a normal appearance. This is just as much a part of the ritual as was the clearing of the space at the beginning of the ritual.

When this part has been completed, then it is good for all participants to gather together and for a final, closing declaration to be announced. Mirroring the opening declaration, this can be a simple *'We declare this circle is now closed. Blessed Be all who are here'*, or it can be a more lengthy and formal statement of the groups beliefs and short prayer of thanks to the guiding deities. Either way, it carries out a mirror function of the opening declaration.

The remaining activity is a more physical one. While we have energetically closed our temple and brought ourselves back down to this plane, it is always good practice to do something more physical after taking part in a ritual. This is especially true if we have to travel or drive somewhere afterwards. Activities such as eating or making love are perhaps the most common ways of connecting back with this level of reality. Exercise such as a short run would also be equally good, though perhaps one less likely to be carried out in reality!

In the next chapter we can see the entire ritual and how each part builds on the activity of the previous one.

14. COMPLETE CIRCLE OPENING RITUAL

We have now taken a close and detailed look at each stage of the circle opening process. Putting it all together, this is an example of what a complete circle ritual might look like.

The words used here are purely by way of example only. I have specifically tried to avoid giving verses or words which might seem specific to any particular tradition, Instead I have tried to use words which I hope convey the intention behind each particular section of the ritual. As you adapt this to your own tradition, of course you will change the words to suit your own cosmology and working practices. What is set out here is, by design, as general as possible.

It is assumed that the room is set out as desired, and the altar and any room candles have been lit and everyone is present and ready to begin.

1. Sweep

*"In the name of Unity we now banish all impurities and imbalances.
With this broom we do cleanse, purify and prepare the space. So mote
it be."*

2. Opening Invocation

One person can say this, standing in front of the altar and directing it to the lamp of Spirit or to your own particular deity. Even though just one person might be saying it, all participate in its intention.

“Behold!

In the name of the God and the Goddess

And the Power of the Elements,

We gather together

In perfect love and perfect trust,

To open this circle.

So mote it be.”

3. Elemental Blessing

Either one person can do all of this section or it can be shared, as you see fit. The purpose is to prepare the physical elements, so they are blessed before being used to consecrate the room and possibly, if desired, all the people in the ritual.

Place your hands around the bowl of water and say the following:

“We cleanse thee, O Creature of Water, in the name of truth and life, that you return to your most perfect state of purity.”

Let healing energy and good intentions flow into the water.

Place your hands over the bowl of salt and say the following:

“We bless thee, O Creature of Salt, in the name of strength and solidity that you return to your most perfect state of purity.”

Let healing energy and good intentions flow into the salt.

Pour the salt into the water saying:

"Salt water of the mother's womb and the great sea from whence we came. Blessed Be."

Place your hands around the charcoal and say the following:

"We bless thee, O creature of Fire, in the name of passion and transformation, that you return to your most perfect state of purity."

Let healing energy and good intentions flow into the fire within the charcoal.

Place your hands around the incense and say the following:

"We bless thee, O Creature of Air, in the name of inspiration and vision, that you return to your most perfect state of purity."

Let healing energy and good intentions flow into the incense.

As you light the charcoal and pour onto it the incense, say the following:

"Air of inspiration and Flame of Spirit. Blessed Be."

This ends the preparation of the elements.

4. Consecration of the Temple

Again, a single person can perform this section or two, as you wish. The purpose is to cleanse and consecrate the room in preparation for the circle casting.

Firstly with salt water, walk around the room clockwise, sprinkling the water around the circumference as you go. Visualise huge waves of salt water sweeping any and all negativity or dirtiness away and leaving the room physically and psychically in a state of fresh purity.

"I consecrate this temple with the salt water of birth and rebirth. Blessed Be."

Next do the same with the incense. Visualise huge flames of purifying fire and clouds of cleansing incense smoke raising the vibration of the room and building a strong impression of purity and holiness, leaving no room for anything not fitting with these qualities.

"I consecrate this temple with the Fire of transformation and the Air of Vision. Blessed Be."

5. Cast the Circle

Take up whatever ritual tool you use and take centre stage. Whilst only one person performs this act, all other ritual participants should be sending their power and energy into this person to help them to cast the circle as effectively as possible. In this way, everyone has a part in its creation and it is thus cast by the whole coven.

"We conjure thee O Circle of Power, that thou beist a sacred place between the worlds. A Guardian and Protection that shall preserve and contain all power we raise within thee. Keep pure and holy this temple of the mysteries, that it be a place of perfect love and perfect trust. Wherefore do we bless thee and consecrate thee in the names of.....and....."

At the end you may state the names of your coven's personal deities.

6. Invocation of the Elements

One person can do all of these or you may wish to designate a different person for each quarter.

At each quarter, draw the pentagram and visualise it strongly, whilst saying the following words. If only reciting the first paragraph, then put the power of the invocation into the visualising of the pentagram. Then visualise and sense for, the appearance of an elemental guardian behind the pentagram, as it fades away. You can recite the final paragraph at this point, to invoke the elemental guardian. If you are intending on doing the full invocation, then gradually let the pentagram fade away as you continue with the invocation. Let yourself feel the qualities of the element within your body and mind and visualise and sense for, the appearance of the elemental guardian.

Note that the placement of the elements around the quarters is not the traditional one in this ritual.

West

*'Hail to thee, Guardians of the Watchtower of the West and the
Element of Earth.*

All ye Gnomes and Spirits of Divine Immortality

In the Name of the Archangel Uriel

We do call thee and invoke thee

To guard and balance this Circle.

By the bones in our bodies

And our sense of touch

Do we invoke thee

By the circles of stone

And the seven sacred metals

Do we invoke thee

By the silence and stillness which you love

By the herbs and gems which you nurture

By the solid Oak and the wide green earth

Do we invoke thee and call thee from thy realms

.....King of Earth

Come forth from thy realm and guard this circle”

North

*“Hail to you Guardians of the Watchtowers of the North and the
Element of Water.*

All ye Undines and Spirits of Divine Ecstasy

In the name of the Archangel Gabriel

Do we call thee and invoke thee

To guard and balance this Circle.

By the flowing in our veins

and the tides of our emotions

Do we invoke thee

By the magic of the sacred springs

and the mystery of the ocean depths

Do we invoke thee

By the force which

by the love that heals and nurtures

by the unity which bonds us all

do we invoke thee and call thee from thy realms

.....King of Earth

Come forth from thy realm and guard this circle”

East

*“Hail to you Guardians of the Watchtowers of the East and the
Element of Air*

All ye Sylphs and Spirits of Divine Knowledge

In the name of the Archangel Raphael

*Do we call thee and invoke thee
To guard and balance this Circle*

*By the breath in our lungs
and the air around us
Do we invoke thee*

*By the whirling sword of Air
And the power of the four winds
do we invoke thee*

*By the beauty of the new dawn
By the greatness of the wide open skies
By the love of freedom and new horizons
do we call thee and invoke thee from thy realms*

.....King of Air, come forth from thy realm and guard this circle"

South

*'Hail to you Guardians of the Watchtowers of the South and the
Element of Fire*

*All ye Salamanders and spirits of Divine Power
In the name of the Archangel Michael
Do we call thee and invoke thee
To guard and balance this circle*

*By the beating of our heart
and our red blood coursing
do we invoke thee*

*By the light that illumines
by the heat which gives life
do we invoke thee*

*by the power of the will
by the flames of passion
by the courage and faith of the flame
do we call thee and invoke thee from thy realms*

.....King of Fire, come forth from thy realm and guard this circle”

7. Invitation to the Light

Here a person walks silently around the circle visualising a ball of light appearing at the top of the temple and gradually expanding to fill the entire circle. Take a candle from the altar and carry it around the room, returning it when ready. The person performing this ritual should begin by visualising their crown chakra as a sphere of white light above their head. They then call in a similar energy to the circle itself. Keep this energy in mind whilst circumambulating the circle. Everyone else should also be tuning into the same level of energy in the same way. It is performed silently.

8. Rune

The circle has been constructed, it now remains to bring it to life and switch it on. Perform the traditional witches rune and end it in whatever way you see fit; either by falling to the ground or coming together with arms raised before all letting go.

It is usual for one person to be ‘leading’ or directing this process. This person will begin the chant, lead it, direct its speed and decide when the chant has ‘peaked’ and is ready to end. When this person falls to the ground or raises their arms in the air and steps in, so does everyone else.

Of course, any suitable chant can be used. The words are

not important. It is more relevant that it is simple and everyone knows it 'by heart' so they can really let themselves go whilst reciting it. It is very effective if it ends with a short simple rhyme which is repeated faster and faster to build up to a peak which finishes suddenly.

Purely because it is well known, by way of example, the traditional Witches Rune is used here.

Darksome Night and Shining Moon

'East then South then West then North

Harken to the Witches Rune

Here we come to call thee forth,

Earth and Water, Air and Fire

Wand and Pentacle and Sword

Work ye unto our desire

Hearken ye unto our word

Cords and censer, scourge and knife

Powers of the Witches Blade

Waken all ye unto life, and

Come ye as the charm is made.

Queen of Heaven, Queen of Hell,

Horned Hunter of the Night,

Lend your powers unto the spell and

Work our will by magic right.

By all the powers of land and sea

By all the might of Moon and Sun,

As we do will so mote it be

Chant the spell and be it done..

Eko Eko Azarak
Eko Eko Zomilak
Eko Eko Cernunos
Eko Eko Aradia!"

Repeat the last chant until the energy 'peaks' and then let it out into the circle. Let go of the energy and chant. Release and forget about it.

9. Opening declaration

When the above has just finished, the person who has led the chant, states and announces that the circle is formally and fully open. Something along the lines of:

"In the name of we declare this circle...Open!"

This may seem very short but it is to the point. It follows a section in which we can let our hair down, go wild and raise lots of energy. This formally marks the effect of that energy and ritually seals the circle and sets out the beginning of the main ritual space. It is the formal ending of the building of the circle.

10. Main part of ritual

Here you perform the main focus of or reason for the ritual. It is now that any invocations can be carried out.

11. Release of the elements

Have the same person or people do this as invoked the elements, as they are the ones 'responsible' for the opening and closing of these gates. Visualise the entities fading away and see the pentagrams very strongly.

*‘We now declare this ritual over and this doorway is now closing.
We thank thee (insert name of the being called upon),
guide of the element of
for thy help in this working.
(pause to actually give energy back in thanks)
We now bid thee depart for thy fair and lovely realms
with thanks and blessing
Blessed Be!’*
(have the rest of the group repeat this loudly).

12. Release of the circle

State your intention of closing the circle and what will happen to the energy. If flowing into a ritual tool, visualise it doing so as strongly as you can.

‘We now close this circle and release the energy within. Let the circle reside in..... So mote it be.’

13. Closing declaration

The main ritual activities for closing the circle have now been completed. Let everyone gather together as they did for the opening declaration. One person speaks.

*‘In the name of and (your coven deities)
We declare this rite now over.
May all receive this blessing,
To the creatures of the elements, may they be well
To our ancestors and those yet born, may they be well,
May all who are gathered here now, may they be well,
In the name ofand..... may this time, this place and all
who are present,*

Beyond the Book of Shadows

Take blessings.

Blessed Be!”

14. Extinguish the lights

The ritual is over. Tidy up. Eat. Drink. Sleep well.

PART THREE: GOING BEYOND

15. RITUAL TOOLS

Wiccan practice typically comes with a fairly extensive set of tools, not all of which are used very much and none of which are actually essential. The main tools are the Athame, the Wand, the Chalice and the Pentacle. These 'big four' are similar if not the same in their use and symbolism as those found in most Western occult groups. This makes sense as they share the same derivation. As well as these, Wicca also lists as its tools the Scourge, The Censer, The Sword, the White Handled Knife, Cords and sometimes other implements such as the Cauldron and the Broom, depending on individual perceptions. It is interesting to examine the mythological assumptions inherent in these choices of 'tools'.

None of the traditional tools are essential to practicing Wicca (or, more precisely, to practicing magic), or to performing ritual. What is essential is that which comes from within. It depends on how much of a minimalist v ritualist we are. On the 'Zen-style' side of things, we can get along perfectly well with simply a sacred lamp and little else. On the opposite side of the scale, we can fill our temples and altar to the gills with ritual paraphernalia. Personally I think that less is more. A simpler use of tools helps one to focus on what is essential.

We use tools in ritual for two reasons primarily. The first and

main reason is symbolic. Each tool symbolises a specific type of energy. With the first four tools mentioned above, they represent the archetypal division of four; usually described in elemental terms. The standard symbolism for the main ritual tools is thus: Wand for Fire, Blade for Air, Chalice for Water and Pentacle for Earth.

The second reason is that energy can be accumulated in ritual tools until they become actual magical objects. They begin as symbols of specific energies but, with time, energy and effort, they gradually grow to become actual living objects imbued with the real energies they are symbolising – sometimes to quite a surprising degree of intelligence.

We don't really need to have any ritual tools for opening a circle and invoking Divine force into it. Our fingers and hands can serve the purpose admirably. However, we may wish to have the four 'elemental tools' either for more elaborate rituals or as essential tools when circle opening. After time of course, such tools can act as 'batteries', supplying energy in addition to our own, because of our prior investment in charging them with such energy.

On Making Our Ritual Tools

There really is no substitute for making our own tools and neither is there any excuse for not doing so. Buying tools, even though it is very easy today, is not the best way in which to gain objects which, over time, become deeply personal and intimate spiritual tools. Spending months making our own leads to us owning magical implements which are real, empowered, living symbols of energy, carrying depth and meaning to their user. Walking into a 'mystic-magic' shop and buying the whole lot in five minutes flat really doesn't bestow the same effect. This certainly holds true for our first set of tools. After several years of using these there is a place for buying tools perhaps for specific

rituals or for use as 'public' tools. Our primary set however, should always be forged from our own hands and efforts.

Before making the elemental tools, it is essential to spend time considering the symbolism behind their natures. Ask why each tool is symbolising a particular element. Find out what the element means to us personally. Completing the exercises of exploring the different elements as detailed in Chapter 8 enables us to have an understanding of the differences in their natures and energies. Making the magical tools should really be something which comes later in our magical or Wiccan career, after a fair degree of exploration, rather than being one of the first steps of our magical training. Our magical tools are an outward expression of our inner abilities and knowledge. They are, or become, close companions on our journey, helping us to explore the specialised realms they each represent. This is not beginner level work but is the ongoing work of our own spiritual growth and exploration. Gaining the tools as a first step does not bestow this ability or knowledge and, as stated above, such tools are far from essential in any case. In essence, tools are an external symbol of an inward ability. Acquiring the external symbol does not itself create the inward state.

Charging our Tools

I mentioned earlier that our tools become, over time, real living objects, imbued with the energy they represent. This is not mere metaphor. Properly made and charged tools should really be regarded as spiritual beings with a life and power of their own. They are literally sacred objects and should be treated as such.

To really go through this process, every step of making a tool should be treated as a sacred ritual and a special event. Prepare yourself thoroughly before the act of making the tool and prepare any materials used in the construction of it. Gathering together a set of magical tools is far from a mundane act; it is

rather an act of sacred creation. Approach it accordingly.

Many books will go through a brief ritual to charge one's tools. Say a few words and put some energy into the object. On a certain level such a description is correct though it omits a great deal. While we could have a tool which simply contains our own energy, sacred tools are something altogether different.

In the first instance it is perhaps more helpful and descriptive to call this stage '*birthing*' the tools, rather than '*charging*' them. These sacred tools we are making are destined to become actual intelligences. We are either creating specific thought-forms to inhabit our tools (as we did for the elemental guardians) or we are calling out to link our tools with a suitable intelligence or archetype of that elemental energy. Either way, we are giving birth, like mid-wives, to a new energy to inhabit our magical tool.

Such a 'consecration' of an object is best carried out after a good deal of time and effort spent preparing ourselves and the object and in a sacred space such as a magical circle, as we have learnt to do. The appropriate energy is invoked into the tool and sealed with the intention we have for that object.

After giving birth to a new ritual tool in this way it is good practice to communicate with it for at least a month afterwards on a daily basis. In doing this we build up a connection with the energy or intelligence inhabiting the object, reinforce its intent and strengthen its own existence. It is important that other people do not handle our own tools. It is rarely detrimental on the odd occasion but habitually allowing other people's energies to interact with one's own tools confuses the energy, can drain it, can make it lose focus, decreases the intimacy between it and yourself and can even sometimes be harmful to the other people. It is possible to seal an intention into a tool during its birth so that other people will not see it or touch it or go near it and also, for the energy to only be present for yourself. Other people will not be able to sense anything special about it and so cannot misuse the energy or spirit within.

It should be obvious that this approach is very different from buying tools from an occult supplier or even making a whole set of tools ready for initiation, as some schools require. Making just the basic set of four elemental tools will usually take the best part of a year. This is fine; there is no rush. None at all. Such objects will reside with yourself for the rest of your life and become trusted companions and helpers. A year is a small time to invest in something so important. As stated earlier, tools are not essential. All ritual can be carried out perfectly well without them and indeed, *should be done so* initially, so that we can gain experience in and become more proficient at raising our own energies and sensing the changes in the energies around us. Such sensitivity pays dividends later on and it helps us to not become dependent on any tools which we might make later in our spiritual progression.

Below is a summary of the main elemental tools and how we might go about making them when we are ready and the time is right.

The Wand

The Wand is, traditionally, a symbol of the Fire element. Because the element of Fire represents power and expansion, the Wand is also a symbol of our Will. In this case, principally our magical Will. Our Sacred Will. Fire represents the force of creativity, of the spark or fire of life. The wand is representing this creative force within ourselves. It is, of all of the elemental tools, the most masculine in its symbolism. Fire is also a means of transformation. What burns with the sacred flame is transformed and the wand is also a symbol of this transformative process in our own spiritual development.

Fire has always been regarded as a primal and Divine force. Wood is a symbol of fire probably because it was seen to be a 'carrier' of fire or because fire seemed to come 'from' wood,

or to reside within it. So wood can be thought of as 'stored' or 'embodied' fire. This idea was formalised in physics in the 19th century in the theory of phlogiston. While we now know that there is no such substance, on the level of symbolic logic, the theory remains true.

In making a wand we are seeking to forge a symbol of our own creative energy and will power. Luckily, a wand is also probably the easiest of the elemental tools to make. In essence, a wand is simply a stick of wood. Just a stick and it can be any kind of stick. It is not of huge importance what wood this kind of wand is made from or whether it has crystals stuck to it or more bands of copper wire wrapped around it than a generator. Go and walk in the woods until you find a stick to your liking (or of course, until one finds you). Why on earth would anyone ever buy what is essentially, a stick of wood? (you really can sell anything to some people). What is important is that you are making a symbol of your will. Your Magical Will. What kind of symbolism are you giving to your Self if you have to have someone else make a wand for you and you have to buy it from them? What is that symbolising about your own personal power? No, far better to invest the necessary time and effort required to make your own.

The Chalice

Contrary to the Wand, the Chalice (or Cup) is the most feminine of the tools. It is taken to represent the element of Water and all which that element symbolises. As an element, Water is receptive, cool, reflecting, also dark and hidden. It is the apparent source of life in same sense as a womb is. While the spark of life which is fire is less obviously visible, a womb or the great sea is a tangible source of growth and life. It is in many ways opposite to the nature of Fire yet appropriately complementary. Where Fire transforms, Water digests and reflects. Being the two primary elements, the Wand and the Chalice are the two primary

tools.

An ancient symbol of Water itself is actually clear crystal. While most people might initially think of crystals symbolising the Earth element, clear crystals were originally thought to be solid water. While a Chalice is a holder of water, a crystal can be used very well as an alternative tool to represent the element of water itself.

If using a Chalice, bear in mind that it really doesn't have to be an expensive silver chalice carved with pentagrams and naked Goddesses with long flowing hair. Wood or clay are perfect mediums from which to fashion our own chalices. Go on a green wood-working course, build a pole-lathe and make a cup from some local wood. Alternatively, find some local clay, dig it up, play with it, make a cup, build a fire and fire it. Have fun doing it, have fun making it. Sit and play with an open and happy heart. There, you have your very own chalice.

The Pentacle

Bearing in mind the chapter on the nature of the elements, the Pentacle represents the Earth element and earth is all that is tangible, manifested and fixed. The pentacle as a magical tool takes the powers of the Earth element and represents our own powers of manifestation and ability to make stable and real our own spiritual insights and developments. It is the solid base to which we return after ritual work. Just as the Wand is a symbol of our magical Will, the Pentacle is a symbol of how we earth and manifest our spiritual knowledge and skills. It is a symbol of our being in the world, of how we affect it, influence it and deal with it. The power of the Earth element and the Pentacle comes from the density of the Earth element and the power of gravitation; to draw all things inexorably to itself. It then grants a stability to all things within its sphere of influence.

Pentacles are also easy to make. A round bit of wood, stone or

metal can be used to form our pentacle. While a circular shape is traditional in Wicca and other traditions, a square shape is also highly appropriate. A square represents stability itself, and symbolises the cube in three dimensions. Saw through a fallen log. At worst, buy a bread board. Invest in some carving tools and begin to work on it. Again, what symbolism are we expressing if we cannot find it within ourselves to bring into manifestation even a simple piece of wood?

While the Book of Shadows contains symbols to be painted or inscribed upon the pentacle, these relate to that specific tradition. For one's personal pentacle, the symbols should really be those which speak most powerfully to yourself about the nature of the pentacle and the function of the earth element.

The Athame

The principle Wiccan tool is the Athame, which traditionally in Wicca is used to symbolise the Witch's will (a function which usually is taken to be an aspect of the Fire element). As a blade traditionally symbolises the Air element, the way it is used in **modern** Wicca is quite unusual. A knife or, more usually, a sword is sometimes used as a symbol of power and authority, but this is more of a mundane symbolism. The true symbol of divine power and spiritual power is the Orb. Or a Crown. It is not a weapon. It is unfortunate and inappropriate that Gardner introduced a knife into Wicca as the main tool – but then, he seemed to have a bit of a 'thing' about ritual knives. However, it is unlikely that the use of the Athame will ever change. It is too ingrained now as *the* witch's tool. Which means it may be best to say that it symbolises Spirit, as the Athame is used for absolutely everything and to keep single-element tools for specific elemental tasks.

However, there is also a deeper vein of underlying symbolism behind the Athame which may be useful to follow. Blades

of any kind (be they swords, knives, scissors or shears), have traditionally been used as symbols of the Air element because they are implements of cutting, moreover, of Separation. They reduce something integral and whole to pieces, just like thought, just like words. This links the Athame to the Air element along with thoughts and the intellect, as both are instruments of discrimination, of telling apart and of separation. Thoughts are what separate us from full consciousness of the One mind, which is why the practice of meditation ultimately leads to the stopping of thoughts to enable a unified comprehension.

Separation however, is also a stage in Alchemy and in historical times, 'swordsmanship was considered to be a hermetic discipline', because of the underlying links and symbolism. For a much wider and deeper discussion of this, see 'The Emerald Tablet' by Dennis William Hauck.

In Alchemy, Separation is the power of extracting what is valuable from an alchemical solution by a process of sifting, heating, filtration etc. Spiritually, it is the process by which we become able to distinguish between those aspects of ourselves which belong to the personality (both conscious and unconscious), and those which are of our true Self or Spirit. In other words, it is the process by which we cut away the fantasies and illusions of our own mythologies with which we have surrounded ourselves, to reveal the Divine Self at our heart.

By an odd coincidence then, the main tool of Wicca, which has almost come to symbolise Wiccan practice itself, is a tool which symbolises the process of Separation; of the cutting away of falsehood to reveal ultimate truth. So Wicca has, as its main tool, the very thing to cut away the mythology with which Wicca has surrounded itself. For the wielder of such a tool, it seems to suggest that a witch, by extension, is one who continually cuts away at falsehood, fantasy and ego, to reveal the Divine Presence

both within oneself and one one's practice. So Wicca contains within itself, as its main tool and symbol, the very means to bring

about its own destruction and liberation.

Metal knives are perhaps less easy to make but there are ways to do so. If there is one in your area, enrol on a local blacksmithing course. You will make one fantastic blade, whatever it actually looks like. Even a welding course will do, to cut some sheet steel and bang it into shape. You can make your own Athame. Even today, people living in more tribal and traditional or just poverty stricken ways know how to fashion some kind of cutting tool from any old bit of metal or glass. You are taking part in the long tradition of 'mankind the tool maker', harking back to the first knapped flint.

If this really is too much, then visualise for a knife – a magical knife. Eventually, one will turn up. You will have to spend a lot of time cleaning it and charging it and making it your own. But at the end it will be. If you do end up buying a knife, then take a file and reshape the blade. Take off the handle and make a new one yourself. Stain it, dye it, charge it up. Alternatively, consider making one that is not metal. There are quite possibly many energetic advantages of a non-metal Athame to the usual steel blade. Flint, glass, stone, wood, bone and antler are all materials from which one can fashion a cutting tool. Use your imagination.

The Book of Shadows

While not an actual magical tool as such, a diary of our rituals and magical work is essential to keep because we forget so much. It is very illuminating to look back on one after a few years – usually to see how far one hasn't come! It is highly useful for seeing recurring patterns within ourselves which we miss on a day to day basis. However, the name is more usually applied to a book of rituals and it is handy to keep a record of your favourite rituals and spells. It is also good magical practice to have this as a hand written document. Printing out pages typed on a computer is definitely NOT the same. Books, for anyone

who loves them, are intensely personal items and do soak up an awful lot of personal energy from their owners. You can have some very powerful psychometric impressions from handling old books.

In these modern times one can now buy black clad 'books of shadows', sometimes with big silver pentagrams on the covers (how terribly 'witchy'). Perhaps it would be better to enrol on a book making course and make our own. It's not at all difficult. It is easy enough to just use loose paper and cannibalise an old book or use wood for the covers and literally 'build' our own. Such items are sturdy to the point of indestructibility, are uniquely ours and can be adapted to whatever are our own personal uses and proclivities.

Why bother?

Why all this trouble? Why not just order that 'witch-kit' from the magic shop? Well, partly because the path of magic is one of personal development. If we have to take six evening classes, learn a host of new skills, travel about our local area looking for materials and develop our visualisation and manifestation skills, just to get our four basic tools together, then fantastic. Lucky us. I mean it. We will have come a long way, will have truly earned our tools and will be much the richer and more capable for it.

Partly it is magical. If we spend a few weeks carving out a cup from a block of wood we have spent time searching for, the finished product will have more of us in it, even without any conscious charging, than any shop bought item ever will have.

Finally, it is not good for a Witch to simply be a passive consumer or to be taken in by shinning trinkets. If nothing else, it's a bad mythology to live by. As stated in the introduction, the structure of religion, any religion, often solidifies and then serves only to put the spirit to sleep instead of serving to wake it up. Shiny trinkets lull us into the dream myth of witchcraft;

Beyond the Book of Shadows

“you need these to be a witch and if you have these you will pretty much be a witch.” Not true, fortunately. If we want to be a witch, then be confident and awake, able to form the tools of our art from our own hands and head. When it comes down to it, if, in years to come, we ever find ourselves in a dark place with no way out, it will be the tools we first made; those clumsy, misshaped efforts, which we will find ourselves turning to and finding power in, rather than the shiny, beautiful shop-bought artefacts we might have picked up later. That is why.

16. INITIATION

Gardnerian-derived Wicca began as an initiatory tradition and for the most part continues to adhere to that style. From what is known about Traditional witchcraft it too practices or practiced its own kind of initiation rituals. It is only in fairly recent times that books have appeared on how to form a 'self-initiated' covens or how to simply initiate one's own self. So is initiation still necessary?

Personally I would strongly say yes, it is so now and it will always be that way. I would go further and state that, almost always, for almost everyone, it is simply not possible to truly initiate oneself. On a practical level, initiation is itself a skilled and advanced magical operation and true self-initiation a relatively rare occurrence. It is not something which beginners, by definition, are likely to either achieve or experience. Linguistically, the phrase 'self-initiation' is something of an oxymoron in that how can one's everyday self initiate itself into something bigger than itself? It just doesn't work. Most attempts to do so are really self dedications, rather than initiations. Absolutely valid but very different from initiation.

Reasons For Initiation

To look at the reasons for this viewpoint, it is useful to examine the real purpose of initiation and why it has evolved.

Physical Security

Magic has always been a bit of a suspect thing to practice and it is best if your members are not a collection of barely known all and sundry who could easily spill the beans. Not usually life threatening today but certainly so in the past.

Emotional Security

Magical groups require two components in order to work well; the building up of a group mind from its members and the creation of an atmosphere of trust and commitment to help members deal with the occasional storms of spiritual growth. Without initiation, it is very difficult to impossible, to achieve these conditions.

Working magic and undergoing spiritual growth can create powerful group dynamics. There will be times when relationships become strained during times of growth and change. People need support from other members, they need to know they can trust other members and the group needs to have enough commitment from people that they do not leave at the first hint of anything difficult. In an open group it is difficult to build the strong bonds of trust and support which are required.

Psychology

Initiation helps to create the right framework for magical work due to its impact on our basic psychology. Human beings do not value what they receive easily. Making a magical group easy to access generates little commitment and people will just as easily wander out again. It is difficult to build a genuine group mind in a group which is more akin to a class than an initiated magical coven. The simple existence of a 'joining' type initiation ritual,

as a portal between being in the group and not, has a powerful psychological impact once it has been passed through.

Without initiation there is, by definition, no clear boundary between being in the group and not being so. Initiation creates a clear and distinct boundary line. Not just between being in the group and not, but also between life before and life after. It can be thought of as a boundary and a transition both spatially and temporally. Without initiation, joining a coven (or any other group), would be just another seamless and continuous event of life, each one running together without distinction. That is the opposite of what initiation stands for and achieves. It makes and marks a break. It brings this period of life to the full stop of before and after. Before we were that. Now we are this. There is a distinction and there is a difference. Without initiation there is nothing.

Magical Change

This is the real kernel at the heart of initiation. True initiations are a practice of high magic, akin to invocations of the Gods. This is what differentiates them from any other joining rituals, even if they share the same name. A true magical initiation effects an energetic change upon the individual it is focussed upon. It is much more than a simple 'join-the-group' type initiation ritual.

The Source of Power

This magical change is intimately connected to the concepts of magical connection and energetic momentum. Earlier I said that it is not possible to initiate oneself. But every religion and magical current has had to begin somewhere. Mainstream religions usually get around this by placing a divine being as the source of their path. Even normally dry Hermetic magic declares that it was founded by Hermes Trismegistus – a semi mythical semi divine figure of thousands of years ago. And there is some truth in these claims.

Wicca (modern Wicca at least), is clearly founded by one man

– Mr Gardner. So did he self initiate? Well, even if we indulge his unproven assertions of his new forest coven, eventually we would still be asking – who initiated the first witch?

Unless we believe literally that a divine being descended to this plane and actually carried out an initiation on an individual, the answer is the same as it is when asking how did any new field or enquiry or practice begin; with a ‘genius’. It continually happens in human history that there appear from time to time in each generation, exceptional individuals who excel in a certain field of enquiry or practice. In magical terms such individuals, through the power of their quest, their enquiries, their natural abilities or force of their practice, succeed in contacting their own ‘higher self’ or inspiration or divinity, call it what you will. They succeed in accessing a new way of perception or understanding and when they do this what happens is that Divinity meets them halfway. It is the Divine forces themselves which perform the initiation. Whether this can be considered to be ‘self’ initiation is a moot point. The ‘self’ doing the initiating is not the personality or everyday-self we normally encounter or inhabit.

Individuals such as this are rare and necessarily so. Only a handful of people in any generation are equipped for this role and perhaps only one or two will actually fulfil it. And when they do, they give to the world a whole new style of practice or religion.

So, without an earthly initiator, one’s own practice, if pursued with enough vigour, with sufficient intensity, persistence and self ability, can sometimes lead to true initiation when the divine forces themselves reach down and perform the initiation. This is the concept of magical connection. This is why it was stated at the beginning of this chapter that true self-initiation is not only a very advanced magical operation, but also a very unusual occurrence, requiring years of focussed dedication and ability to achieve. It is not a change which can be accessed with no experience after simply reading a ‘how-to’ book on the subject.

One qualifier to this is that it does sometimes happen that

individuals are, for a variety of reasons, 'opened up' prematurely to these divine forces. The effect of this is that the person effectively experiences a genuine initiatory force but without the background and foundation of long experience and preparation. Such an experience can throw a person seriously 'off the rails' for a long time. The result of this is that the individual then has to spend years learning how to integrate and come to terms with the effects of this energetic impact on their unprepared personality. The time spent reintegrating, healing and learning to come to terms with this energy means that such premature initiations are often traumatic and by no means a short-cut.

When such individuals contact this new (or perhaps an ancient and forgotten aspect) of divinity they are able to maintain this contact. They are able to bring it into this world and pass it on to others whom they initiate. A successful and genuine initiation confers the same connection and the same ability to also pass it on in turn. This is the concept of magical momentum and it is this which is the real secret of applied initiation. It is the reason which lies behind why some initiations blow people away whilst others leave the person feeling relatively unscathed. It will depend on the ability of the initiator and how strongly that person can connect with and transmit, the force of energy of their particular tradition. As stated above, carrying out a powerful and effective initiation is not beginner level work.

This is also why some traditions die out. Eventually, such a force begins to decline and weaken. In some religions or practices it happens in only a few generations whilst in others the momentum and force can last for hundreds of years still genuinely in contact with the energy behind the original inspiration.

If the last person as a lineage carrier dies, that is the end of the line for that tradition. But, it can happen that a person, hundreds of years later, picks up those rituals, with such dedication and such understanding, that the inner forces respond. In such a case, when a person performs a so called self initiation or dedication, what makes it different is that it is the spiritual forces themselves

who perform the initiation of that person.

So in the end there really is never such thing as self initiation. One is initiated either by Divinity itself or by another initiate effectively standing as a proxy to Divinity.

In looking at the inner meaning and roots of initiation, we can see that what happens in an initiation is that something is added to us. We are given an open connection to a particular style of practice, with all its associated knowledge, quirks and slants. The better the initiation, the closer we will have been brought to the original insight of that path's founder.

When this seed is planted in us, it changes us. It grants us understanding and a way of perception that we did not have before. It can open doors of ability which we did not have or which were dormant before our initiation. Exposure to a current of spiritual energy can accelerate our growth beyond what we could have achieved on our own without the usual time and effort. In many ways, it is a free ride. It gives us something. A spiritual nourishment for our embryonic self. It is then up to us to make best use of this.

However it affects us, this is the reason why initiation is absolutely necessary. If you are seeking to join an existing esoteric tradition then you need to be initiated to connect its energies with yours. One may learn the rituals and copy the practices but without initiation you will not be connected to it on an inner level. Whether an existing initiate performs this for you or, by virtue of the degree of vigour, intensity and persistence of your own efforts (not to mention the high degree of self ability required), Divinity itself performs the act, initiation is essential to gain access to a particular school of spiritual practice.

On the other hand, initiation and the joining to a particular tradition is not essential to spiritual growth. Spiritual insight is the birthright of every person and is independent of any and every tradition.

17. THE PATH OF A WITCH

This is a tricky issue to write about, because I cannot really speak for anyone else about what it means to be a witch. All I can do is write about what it has meant for me. You may agree and disagree with some or all of it but at the very least, it may help to illustrate where I am coming from in writing this book.

Wicca has always seemed to have two very different faces. On the one hand is the public side, which is very community based, even if only with the community of the coven, conducting shared rituals and mutually training each member in that coven's style of Wicca. This side of Wicca is a religion like any other. It has its gods and goddesses, its rituals of worship and the usual mythology describing its world view.

On the other hand, the heart of being a Witch seems to involve a much more solitary existence, more akin to that of the shamanic path than anything else. This side of being a Witch is about becoming more and more awake to one's own ultimate nature and to the forces of the universe, through direct contact and communication with these energies. It is usually solitary, if only because it is difficult to communicate the experiences one has on this path and, what would one say? Another person would either intuitively understand, in which case there is no need for words or they would not, in which case no amount of words

will change anything. I must admit, that it is this side which has always drawn me more easily and naturally.

As well as the emphasis on increasing self-awareness, for me being a witch is about doing everything as well as one is able, about not dodging or shirking anything which comes one's way, about taking full responsibility for everything one does, about teaching others who may ask for it, about having the courage to explore wherever you are led. It is also about giving love back to the universe, to the elements. Giving thanks for the absolute majesty and mystery of the universe we live in. If the world around you doesn't fill you with wonder and awe, then magic and witchcraft are really not for you at this time.

The fundamental obstacle with Wicca as a spiritual path is that Wicca is also a religious path. As stated in the introduction of this book, there is a vast gulf between these two styles. Spirituality owes little or nothing to structure whilst religions depend on it. There is an inevitable conflict here and one which, ultimately, religion loses, should a person progress far enough. The danger however, is that a person never manages to see through the structure of a religion and instead, takes the structure to be the truth and sees the world through that structure.

Wicca is no less subject to this solidification of original insight into structure and then into dogma than is any other religion. This collection of largely unspoken but defining rules influence how followers of Wicca perceive themselves which in turn, feeds back into the mythology of Wicca itself.

Whether this is an issue for a person or whether one is even aware of it at all, depends on many things; one's motivation not the least. If following Wicca as a path of the spirit then it is always good to be as aware as possible. It is an ongoing process to gradually become more and more conscious of these mythologies and eventually to either leave them behind or to keep them but to do so consciously. Spiritual progress demands that we grow beyond any religious structure.

Wiccan mythology is more noticeable for it being such a young religion and for it being predominantly the invention of one man. Even though Wicca has changed and moved on, much of its structure still derives from the proclivities and predilections of its founder, Gerald Gardner. Such intrinsic beliefs are often called axioms; unspoken assumptions which are simply assumed to be true. One cannot question them without the whole system falling apart because they are what the system is based upon and what it defines itself by. Change the axioms and the system will have to change and that's a lot of work. Scary stuff indeed. In Wicca however, some of these unspoken assumptions are not only over-ripe for a change but doing so is a necessary stage of our own spiritual growth.

It is up to each person individually to then discover, after going beyond the structure of witchcraft, what makes them still a witch? It may be that, if the main interest in Witchcraft is the religious and community side, and that disappears then there is nothing left which makes that person a witch in their own right. It may be that the structure is just something which that person steps into but when it falls away there is a level of perception which still remains, marking that person out as different and colouring their future progress. Witches are truly born and not made.

Wicca/Spirituality

Lynden focuses on just two practices; the setting up of a magical circle and the invoking of Divine force into it. Together these form the two fundamentals of Wiccan magic ritual. The idea is that if these two practices are learnt correctly and done to the best of our ability, then everything else will fall into place and evolve quite naturally.

This book has been written as a guide to some of the advanced techniques of ritual circle building within the overall tradition of modern Wicca. It is intended for anyone who is currently practising Witchcraft, of any form, who wishes to explore advanced techniques beyond his or her current style of ritual practice.

When any ritual truly comes alive it enters into the other world and takes us with it. Wicca, for all its idiosyncrasies and differences has, at its heart, a pure diamond of divine mysteries. It is one of the very few mystery religions we still have with us today.

