

TOUCHED BY FIRE

**TECHNIQUES OF MODERN SHAMANISM
VOL.3**

PHIL HINE

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For Paul, with love & kisses

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Also Published:

Condensed Chaos, New Falcon Publications 1995

Prime Chaos, Chaos International 1993

The Pseudonomicon, Dagon Productions 1997

In Adobe Acrobat Format (Somewhere on the WWW):

Oven-Ready Chaos

PerMutations

Running Magical Workshops: Notes for Facilitators

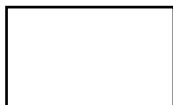
Group Ego-Magick Exercises

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Walking Between The Worlds: Techniques of Modern
Shamanism Vol.1

Two Worlds & Inbetween: The Worlds: Techniques of Modern
Shamanism Vol.2

Chaos Servitors: A User Guide



Introduction

The aim of this book is to go some way towards exploring the evolving perspective of 'Urban Shamanism'. It's not really a training manual like its predecessors, but gives one viewpoint (mine) on tackling the problem of living and acting from a broadly shamanic stance, within a city culture. Starting out with the premise that shamanic work is less of a purely personal trip and more related to the recovery of a functional role that individuals may come to play in their community, I have tried to present a clear picture of my own approach, in the hope that it may point others to explore what remains, largely, unknown territory.

This book does not offer any prescriptive solutions to the problems it highlights - we tend to look for easy solutions to problems almost before we've fully grasped what's going on. I'm more interested in the development of approaches to situations, which ultimately, gives a more flexible approach. Magick, for me, is a way of enhancing survival in our environment, whether it be open countryside or inner city. There is a race of gnomes, so the story goes, who believe that nothing is possible; and there is a sect of magicians who believe that everything is. Shamanism in its original form developed from early human approaches to survival and evolution. We seem to have reached a point in our collective story where we must make a drastic evolutionary leap, in order to continue. Shamanic techniques, and a broad, shamanic outlook can help us here.

Some sections of this book are to be taken as 'atmospheric' text, as some of the sense that I'm trying to put over can only be sidled up to sideways. Also, there isn't space here to describe all the different techniques I'm discussing, so it's up to you to do some follow-up work. It's worth bearing in mind that it's taken me 14 years of magickal training, group work, academic work and

constant activity to get to the point of writing this, and half the time I still feel like a novice in new territory.

Personal Reflections on Urban Shamanism

Back in '87, I wrote a brief article for Moonshine on the subject of 'urban shamanism', tentatively asking the question "Can we be Urban Shamans?" - and if so, how do you go about it? Three years on and I've managed to glean a few personal answers, only to find yet more questions waiting in the wings.

One option is to become involved with the weekend workshop scene - first as a learner, then as a trainer. It seems to help if you train under someone who's a 'name', and then pick up a few credentials such as 'fourth gateway pipe-carrier', then go and get an alternative therapy qualification, add the magic word "shamanic" to your practice, and away you go. It's also worth considering a name-change; anything with the words 'crystal', 'rainbow', or 'Moondancer' in it is a safe bet. Moving to London or Glastonbury is also worth thinking about, since there probably isn't much call for chakra masseurs in Batley!

The current 'glamour' of shamanism has a very ethnic gloss to it. Reading between the lines one can feel the search for a sense of stability, permanence, or connection with the past; whilst around us the rate of social change seems to accelerate every day. No longer psychically bound to our cultural landscape, we can choose from myriad shards of belief, from the wisdom based on historical traditions, to the myths of rehashed/recovered knowledge. Our society is becoming too big for us to handle, as individuals. The total symbolisation of the environment means that we are rapidly approaching information overload, whilst the social control systems of culture are fast becoming truly esoteric. In the midst of all this chaos, it is easy to understand and share the yearning for a simpler existence, where all is, at least, potentially apprehendable.

The other way to developing a shamanic stance is to burrow your way into a community and become a 'useful' person.

‘Useful’ people are those who everyone else tells you to go and see when you’ve a particular problem, be it blocked drains, the DSS, or “there’s something ‘orrible lurking in the cellar - what do you think it is?” It’s surprising how many people have ‘psychic’ or otherwise unexplainable experiences that they don’t let out to just anyone, for fear of incredulity or perhaps, too much credulity from others. Many people tend to view their experiences of the weird as signs of possible aberration - if you can assure them that this isn’t so; that “it happens all the time” (perhaps relating a similar incident that you know about), then you’re well on your way to becoming a ‘useful person’. I recall that one of my first ‘big breaks’ at being classed as ‘useful’ by my peers came up over a well-known haunted house. I heard tales of moving carpets, banging doors & creeping presences on the stairs; and promptly stayed the night there with it’s sole remaining resident. Word must have spread on the grapevine, as people started to seek me out (not in droves, mind you) to come and look at the things in their flats & houses; do Tarot readings, and generally talk about the intrusions of the uncanny into their lives. I won’t pretend it’s a living, ‘cos it isn’t, but it is rewarding in the sense of making connections, learning and occasionally, getting into sticky situations.

Occasionally things do get nasty. One of my friends was subjected to a week of threatening telephone calls, and then received a really nasty curse object through the post. How do you deal with this one? Well the obvious thing to do is some kind of protection for those involved, backed up by what we might call magickal (oh all right then, ‘shamanic’...) counselling; what they can do to protect themselves, how the curse operates and what signs to look out for, and finally, dealing with the curse itself, and, if you can find them, the perpetrators. Again, there’s more of this sort of thing going on than you might expect, and while most of it is done by amateurs, that doesn’t mean to say it isn’t effective.

Psychic Attack is another example. Most psychic attack is self-induced, meaning that someone thinks that the black lodge down the road is sending malign blasts at them (goddess knows why), which eventually becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, even if the

black lodge turn out to out not to exist after all. From my experience, it seems that most psychic attack, like rape and child abuse, is carried out by people who are known to the victim; such as ex-, or even current lovers. It's not enough being able to recognise the signs, you should know the methods of dealing with it as well. It can be life-threatening, especially if someone is becoming suicidal, or so confused that they step out in front of a car one day. Something which occasionally crops up, and may well be on the increase, is pagans being prayed over in relays by groups of born-again fundamentalists. A variant is people who get involved with some form of occultism or paganism (or indeed any lifestyle that parents or 'friends' find threatening) and find themselves being prayed over, exorcised, and generally told that they are possessed by the the devil. Or mad. In my book, this amounts to psychic attack just as much as having a poppet of yourself prodded with pins - having your newly-found belief system or self-image forcefully battered by someone who is 110% sure that they're right and you need saving can lead to severe trauma.

This probably sounds like racy stuff, but its all happening out there. Magick is alive and well and being practised in the suburbs, squats, and housing estates. There's an infinite plurality of approach, which is partly why I don't stick to one system exclusively - having an eclectic approach, and being adaptable to new situations is more useful for me.

Healing takes up a large part of my 'work', and is usually the most difficult. There are some things I can do, and some things I can't, and its usually a wise move to say to someone that you don't know the fine details of a subject, but can possibly recommend someone who does. Having a background in allopathic medicine helps here, as in the case of people who want to know more about the drugs they've been prescribed, or the drugs they've acquired in other ways. Healing tends to involve counselling, trance induction, working with body energies, teaching relaxation & centering exercises, getting spirits to take care of specific problems, and occasionally, ritual work. Different clients respond to different approaches - some respond better to full-blown ritual, while others prefer light trance work

with minimal trappings. Of course, much depends on the situation & the problem.

The flipside of shamanic work is dealing out retribution of one kind or another. Historically, and in existing shamanic cultures, it's accepted that the shaman/ka occasionally has to roll up their sleeves and get stuck into a situation that's, shall we say, murky. Turning curses back onto the people who sent them out in the first place is the prime example. The occult is full of people who think they can get away with anything, and do, until someone else puts their foot down. Let's take an example. A friend of mine had his car stolen. It was recovered, but the thieves had taken some items which had great sentimental value. He wanted me to throw a scare into them - not a smoking boot job or anything, but to impress on them that stealing cars was not a nice thing to do. In the end, I set up the situation so that he was the one who gave the thieves a fright by turning up in their dreams. Anyone who's gasping in horror reading this should be aware that this sort of incident is rare - but then again, people in our community tend to stick up for one another. If I'm asked to help out in a situation, I will, and consider it my function in the community. Many situations are unsavoury, but by steadying each other through the bad times, we learn to appreciate the good times even more. All the same, such activities should never be undertaken lightly.

For me, the basics of the urban shamanic approach require an ability to adapt in the face of necessity. When walking into a new situation, like as not armed only with my thunderbolt, tarot, and notepad, I try and find my 'point of power' from which to act - the role I will play in the unfolding of events: upfront support or backstage prompt. Once I have found the point from which to work, I try and stick to it - knowing that that's the best way for me to influence the situation (of course it's rarely that simple). What I can actually do in a given situation is partly defined by my clients. A first step is to look for possible loopholes in what, on the face of it, is a no-win situation. Extreme situations usually require extreme strategies, and people are generally more interested in results than intellectual niceties.

As I have said, I don't use just one approach to shamanic

magick - I use whatever seems necessary to get the job done. This colours my writing, and I'm far more interested in putting across the general understanding of a subject than describing prescriptive solutions. This is because situations will always outstrip existing prescriptions. The complexity of working in a city easily outstrips current magical realities. They may be great for connecting you with a sense of continued tradition, putting you back in contact with inner wisdom, natural cycles, or eternal archetypes, but often, they don't help you deal with the wild cards thrown up at you by the urban jungle. Example: A 23 year old junkie who desperately needs to detox before her heart quits on her asks you to help her "magically". Any good answers?; I'd like to hear them, 'cos exorcising a house is peanuts compared with human problems. Meeting up with other people's horrors is instructive - it stops you dramatising your own inner conflicts into cosmic catastrophes.

Intervention can of itself, become an addiction. Eventually you'll fetch up with a situation that no matter what you do, you can't do anything to help out. Trying only makes it worse. Once you manage to convince yourself that you're a shaman, healer or whatever, and continue to feed that smug little thought, then watch out. You may go rushing in and unwittingly screw things up even more. An acquaintance got addicted to giving hugs. Everyone got big, jolly, reassurance hugs. Now don't get me wrong, I like a good hug myself, but it's not always appropriate, especially when the person's body language is screaming "Don't touch me." Look before you leap in; at the situation, the people, and yourself.

Information-gathering is of prime importance. You can never have too much of it. I'll talk to anyone or anything, from familiar spirits to social workers, if it will give me a clearer picture or throw up a different slant. All data is potentially valuable, even if, on the surface, it's got nothing to do with the matter in hand.

Our cities are myths; constantly rewriting themselves and spawning our demons; incest, rape, child abuse, drugs, poverty. Besides these 'beings', anything you can tempt into a portatriangle is nothing by comparison. Yet we don't seem to have a magical approach to the complexities of city-life. We've hardly

begun to touch the psychic complexities of urban living; how it affects us and generates weird elementals and semi-sentient nexuses of energy. It seems to me that we spend too much time searching for a connection with the past, whilst doing our best to ignore that we are hurtling at breakneck speed into the future.

For me, magick, call it shamanic or whatever you like, is a way of improving our ability to survive - as individuals, and in groups. Shamans help their community to survive and develop, which in turn helps their own progression. I suspect its a vocational calling, where the return comes back as love, support, and mutual trust. Some things, like the need to be warm and hold someone else, are eternal, whether you live in a cave or council house.

Staking out the Territory

To begin with, I'll clear up two questions regarding the Urban Shamanic perspective. These are; a) What roles/functions can the shamanic practitioner aspire to, and b) What is the territory in which they are carried out - i.e. what do I mean by 'community'?

Firstly, let's examine some shamanic roles, examples of which might be: Sorcerer, Mythographer, Therapist, Sacred Fool, Priest, Artist, Musician, Poet. A short list, but there's a hell of a lot involved in those roles; after all, developing the skills and insights of any one of them can take a lifetime. Let's say that the difference would be that a shaman, for example, takes on all of those roles whilst remaining, essentially, a shaman. That's quite different to, for example, an artist who occasionally does 'shamanic' pictures, or a therapist who uses one or two shamanic techniques.

Sorcerer

"Sorcery is the art of capturing spirits and training them to work in harness, of sorting out our powers of mind so we might manipulate them and make them cause changes both within our minds and beyond them."

Stephen Mace, *Stealing the Fire from Heaven*

Sorcerers work with spirits, and use their abilities to cause changes in the world. By 'spirit', I mean any non-organic entity that has some degree of individuality, from the little beings who flit around poorly-insulated power sockets, to the Goddesses & Gods who've been around for thousands of millenia and aren't about to let you forget it. All the different approaches to shamanic techniques have their own rules about spirits; how to contact

them, treat them and get them to do things for you and so forth, but as a general guideline I'd say treat them with respect and, if you're not quite sure where you stand with them, a little bit of caution. Just like other people or unfamiliar animals really. Some spirits are quite wary of humans, while others will seem to us as mischievous or downright malicious. What is generally agreed on is that quite a lot of them like doing things for us. Without getting too metaphysical about it, it seems that spirits don't have the same kind of individuality that we do, and so by working with us highly individualistic beings, they acquire a 'persona' - in terms of a name, appearance, sigil, and something to do, and eventually a 'life history' of their own. By feeding them energy, they grow in power and eventually, can become independent of the person who created them in the first place. Now I realise that that's a very simplified explanation, but I'll deal more fully with spirit work in another volume.

So, having made the point that spirits are all around us, let's have a look at some of their uses. Most spirit-work that I tend to do is healing; enhancing a person's capabilities to fight off an illness and speed their recovery, by creating a spirit specifically to deal with that person. Spirits tend to be good at increasing the probability of something happening, given that it's possible in terms of a particular situation. For example, you could make a spirit with the purpose of helping someone get a job, for example. However, if that person had no real motivation towards seeking employment and stayed in the house all day, then the chance of the spirit being able to manifest a positive result would be much less. Thus, in this case, you might reason that the real problem wasn't so much related to 'getting a job', but to apathy, lack of self-confidence or fear of the necessary life-changes employment would entail. It could be that your spirit working would have more success with one of these components of the situation. Hence the necessity to assess a particular situation so that your actions breed the most effective results.

Amulets

Another aspect of spirit-working is the making of amulets objects which have a spirit bound into them so that they enhance

a particular quality such as health, courage, or restful sleep. Amulets are always in much demand, with the predominate trend at the moment being towards using crystals as the material base.

Divination

Using divinatory techniques is probably the most obvious skills connected with shamanism in a modern setting. As soon as word gets around that you can read the runes, cards, or palms, you can guarantee a steady flow of people wanting readings. One-to-one sessions can lead to counselling and problem-solving. For example, I use the four tarot suits to break down a situation as follows: Wands - ideas/motivations; Cups - Overall view or desired result; Swords - can the problem be broken down into manageable steps; Disks - Actions that need to be carried out. Looking at a problem using this procedure may involve goal-setting and teaching the client how to draw energy or advice from appropriate spirits bound up into the cards. Such sessions can also be a useful point to look at any established coping patterns that need to be identified and modified; or to teach methods of relaxation and Centering.

A second use of divination systems is to examine a situation in terms of its different facets, the people involved, what spirits dominate it, and what role you play in it. I mentioned this in the introduction - the necessity of being able to 'place' yourself within a situation so that you know from what point to act - if indeed you should be involved at all. This is part of the assessment procedure. You can appear to others to be a bystander in a series of events, but still be influencing the outcome, or, at the other extreme, you can be rushing about being everyone's crying shoulder and up all hours of the night. Once you find your place of power, you should stick to it, unless a drastic change occurs.

A third role for your divinatory abilities is 'sensing change' in a broad way. Rather than focusing awareness onto a set of symbols, this comes to me in those moments of no-thought as I wander the streets. The clues are fleeting and diverse - a slow build-up of 'something's about to happen' which may be hinted

at by the creaking of a wrought-iron gate and the simultaneous blare of horns; by the suddenly-understood shapes made by the flocks of starlings who fling themselves across the buildings in city square; the sense sneaks in sideways. With time, you can recognise the truth-sense sweeping you up, and be prepared to play and reel in the fragments - a name, a place, how bad it's going to be this time. In its pure form this is known as prescience. Noticing coincidences is one route towards this state; after all 'coincidence' means two events which happen in harmony with each other.

Essentially, there are two approaches to divination; the first is the formalised symbol systems of the Tarot, I Ching, or Runes, and the second is the more free-form approach which uses black mirrors, pendulums and automatic drawing. You can also use spirits to help in seeking knowledge, either as Familiars residing in objects, pictures, or freely mobile, or by seeking contact with them in Innerworld exploration via trance techniques. Rather than concentrate on one method, I'd say it was a good idea to use as many different approaches as possible - that way you have a flexible response to meet differing needs. A very practical example is in the case of losing things. Several times I've gone round to people's houses only to find them frantically turning the living room upside down as they've lost the (any number of things). I've missed out numerous occasions with which to earn undying gratitude and appreciation because I didn't have a pendulum handy, nor have, at the time, a spirit who could reliably find things (I used to have, but he doesn't live with me any more).

Exorcism

Mention exorcism and you'll see people instantly conjuring mental pictures of children vomiting and being able to rotate their heads 360° whilst intoning in a deep voice "I'm the devillll...." ahem. Basically though, there's two situations where exorcism becomes necessary, where spirits are bothering places or objects, or people. Probably the most popular form of disturbance is haunted houses/flats/basements. Disturbance by what? you might ask. Good question. I once worked in a hospital

which had a haunted ward. The regular staff kept a 'ghost book' in which all uncanny happenings were reported - what was seen, heard or felt; at what time did this occur; and in what part of the ward. The general opinion was that the 'ghosts' were the confused shades of ex-patients wandering about. This sounded plausible, as 'things' did wander about, occasionally entering the nurses residence and disturbing people's sleep. On another occasion, I spent several nights in a haunted house which had a heavy, depressing gloom about the place - no one lived there very long and there was rumour of a suicide there years ago. The last night, I was woken from a fitful sleep by the 'echo' of a thick, sluggish, bubbling, and dimly perceived a faintly glowing shape in the far corner of the room. The nearest I can describe it is as a skinned horse's head with a suggestion of a slug-like body. I only glimpsed this apparition for a second (and believe me, that was far too long) but the sense of a malevolent presence was overwhelming. Needless to say, I beat a hasty retreat and haven't visited the place since. Enough anecdotes. I don't have an overall theory for explaining such occurrences, but some tactical approaches are useful.

Assessment

This is a firstly a matter of asking some searching questions, such as; How long has the disturbance been going on?; in what ways does it manifest?; how many people have experienced it?; is it localised to one spot or does it move around?; does it happen at any particular times?; has the place had a past history of such occurrences?; what do the clients think is causing the disturbance?

A case I recall that illustrates the importance of asking the right questions concerned a house where the tenants were experiencing some upsetting disturbances - footsteps in the corridor, being touched by invisible hands, and doors that unlatched themselves. They believed that the source for the disturbances was a previous tenant who had killed herself. On the surface, this sounded plausible enough, but subsequent digging around revealed that one of the present tenants had a history of such phenomena - they seemed to follow her wherever she went, so it was more likely that the source of the

manifestations was from her own Deep Mind. A placebo exorcism was performed to generally calm down the tensions in the house, whereas the core of the case involved investigation of the person whose own errant spirits were the source of the disturbance. This involved referral to another magician who had trained in hypnotherapy.

Once you've built up as much detail from your clients, you can then investigate the situation more deeply. Freeform divination techniques such as using a black mirror might be useful, as might spending time in the place seeing what impressions you can pick up. If the spirit likes to bang things about it might be a good idea to stretch cotton across objects or door-frames; sometimes, a pendulum suspended from a stand of some kind can be used as an indicator of something appearing. In this sort of situation, any trick which you can devise which you think will be helpful is worth trying out.

Assuming that you've established that there is something lurking around, where do you go from there? Assuming that you can't ring the local branch of 'Ghostbusters', the next step is to decide what should be done. Probably the most obvious thing is to go in with wands blazing and try and zap the thing into ectoplasm; but it's a more sensible approach if you try and make contact with the spirit, for example using a technique such as scrying, being 'open' to impressions, or having a third party present to act as an independent observer.

Priest/ess

Intercession

The main function that a priest of any religion plays is that of intercession between congregation and divinity. Both the high church priest and the Voudoun Houngan are playing the same role - master (or mistress) of ceremonies at a meeting where worshippers may converse (to differing degrees of directness) with their divinities.

For the modern shaman, one of the likely manifestations of this role is being asked to perform pagan marriages (usually

known as hand-fasting); naming ceremonies (of children, or re-naming of adults), house blessings; initiations, and the like. A less than serious example of the latter is that I was privileged to ordain the first Erisian Papess of York. How one 'scripts' such events is purely a matter of taste and experience. Another level of such a role is being the mc at a communal gathering - whether this be a drum-in, solstice celebration or acid-house party. This is closest to the shamanic function of leading ecstatic ceremony, which can range from tribal dance rituals to group psychedelic experiences. In this situation, it is the shaman who leads the dance, or sets the parameters for the hallucinogen-aided innerworld journey, thus acting as a guide between the worlds. The shaman leads others, or opens the doorways into the dream-tracks of the inner landscape and the Mythic World. (I'll come back to this in more detail when looking at the Shaman as Healer). Group ecstasy is a powerful source of energy, so much so that our culture only permits 'acceptable' outlets - take for example the continuing furore over Stonehenge, free festivals, and acid house parties. This is not an age where 'frienziad rites' (such as the Greek Bachannalia for example) are frowned upon. Useful skills to acquire for this kind of situation would be drumming, dancing, learning a few chants, using (and making) musical instruments, and enthusing/inspiring groups of people to get together, drum and chant. It's simple, it's fun, anybody can join in, and such events are wonderful for strengthening bonds, beginning friendships, raising energy, and for having a good time. Time for a word about leadership. Anyone who tries to 'direct' an open festival gathering by 'organising' everyone else into a particular sort of ritual will only generate argument and insults. In many situations, it's not a good idea to try and visibly lead the direction an event takes. A more successful approach is for example, when sitting around a fire, begin a drum beat or chant and let others take it up (or if everyone's too spaced out, let it drop off). Obviously, some events will need more conscious direction than others, and will require more stage-managers - other shamans, or perhaps people acting as spirit-helpers. An obvious parallel to this is the shaman as rock 'n' roller.

Death

Death is one of the greatest taboos from which our culture cringes. There are a vast variety of beliefs about death and what (if anything) happens afterwards. Reincarnation; Eternal Damnation; The survival of the Personality; all act as supports for much of our behaviour and ego-complex whilst currently alive. If, rather than believing that if you sin you'll be eternally cast into the fires of Hell, you believe that what you do at present has no possible effect on your next incarnation; it's quite likely to affect how you go around behaving. As we go through life, our ideas about death change as we go have different experiences and get exposed to different ideas and beliefs. Strangely enough, in times of bereavement, one's parentally (and socially) acquired conditioning about death reasserts itself - usually in terms of taboo and social behaviour concerning how to act around bereaved people - all too often, unfortunately, this can manifest as people

staying away, or not allowing others enough space to mourn. Some psychiatrists for example (helpful as ever) seem to think that if a person mourns for a longer period of time than 'average', then this is an indicator of mental breakdown. For the modern shaman, brushes with death can involve you with anything from appearing at funerals, counselling the still-living, and perhaps even a rite to guide or celebrate the bodiless spirit to its meeting with the guardians of the lands of the dead. To perform this latter task is known as acting as a Psychopomp. In getting to grips with counselling, then some form of course is probably in order, as bereavement counselling is a delicate art. One sort of shamanic priest, in discussing death, may discuss different beliefs about death, while another sort might choose to favour their particular chosen or favourite set of beliefs about the subject. Again, this is a personal matter for each individual.

Invocation

Invocation is a battery of magical techniques which, when used, allow the individual to identify with a particular entity so passionately, that some quality or attribution associated with

that entity manifests in the person - such as enhanced oracular perception or 'hidden lore'. While this ability may be developed by anyone who practises magick, most people don't do it, and thus a shamanic practitioner may be asked to act as the incarnation of a particular entity as part of an event - or to bring about a similar experience in another person - 'invoking upon someone', as it is known. An extreme degree of this type of trance is possession, which, while quite common in shamanic cultures, is rarely found in modern approaches to ritual. It is not uncommon, for example, for a Voudoun Houngan or Mambo to search out 'hidden lore' (i.e. knowledge) by allowing themselves to be 'ridden' by entities (known as Loa) who speak through them, providing the answer. More common, in our culture, is the phenomena of overshadowing, where the individual's awareness is partially submerged in that of the entity. This also happens to actors, who sometimes find that, while playing a particular role, become so identified with that role that they, while on stage, can perform tasks - such as singing or dancing - that are associated with the character, but that they themselves are not usually able to do. This is no different from magical invocation, and the techniques involved are virtually the same - visualisation, speech, gestures, posture, and other senses - particularly smell for example, with regard to incense or essential oils. The shaman, to some extent, is also responsible for instructing people in how the gods behave - in many cultures, spirits (masks wearing human bodies or spirits riding human bodies) are thought to be above the law, or can behave in ways that are unacceptable under normal circumstances.

Healer

The shamanic role of Healer has received a great deal of attention from the pundits of the current vogue in new age shamanism - almost to the extent that other shamanic roles have become obscured. 'Shamanic' therapies abound, as the glamour of the shamanic stance has been taken on board by the new age/human growth schools. The growing dissatisfaction with

allopathic medicine is leading more and more people to seek alternative approaches to dealing with health problems.

Listening

Being able to 'listen' to others is one of the primary skills of any healer. We often get so caught up with what we want to say in a conversation that we miss out on what others are actually saying. A good exercise in this respect is to try listening to what someone else is saying to you, whilst keeping your mind blank of thoughts - thus stopping your replies leaping out of your mouth before you've fully digested what has been said. It takes practice to listen with attention, and then yet more practice to give an appropriate answer. Some people are good at this naturally, while for others some form of formal counselling training might well be appropriate.

A great deal has been written about the shaman as healer by other people, so I'm not going to add much more to the weight of words in other books. Suffice to say that healing is more difficult than you might think, and should always be approached realistically. By this I mean that if you try and take on a problem which deep down, you know you can't do much about, then it is wiser to pass the person concerned to someone more appropriate. If you do take a problem on, then make sure that both you and your client know what the score is as to how you're going to approach the problem, and for how long your relationship with them will last. Healing however, is a multi-levelled process, and you'll find elements of it cropping up in other sections of this book.

Heal the Earth

Heal the Earth was the title of a mass ritual energy-raising, the aim of which was to increase awareness of the global ecological crisis. It was performed in Britain and Europe on the Summer Solstice between 12 - 2pm (1987), and repeated as part of Sheila Broun's Listen to the Earth project on 9th April 1990.

Heal The Earth began as an idea - appearing in the midst of a group of Leeds magicians who were discussing the possibilities

afforded by politicised magick. If, as we are told, the clans gathered together in the New Forest to work magick against the threat of the Nazi invasion wasn't it about time, we thought, that we did something along the same lines? The original idea was for a mass-ritual, co-ordinated through a group symbol or image, and carried out by individuals and groups at the summer solstice.

Having grasped the original idea, we then took it around other local pagans and asked for general feedback - and everyone we talked to was very enthusiastic about the project taking off and being a success. this helped gather impetus and energy toward making it so.

Having begun to raise energy towards realising the project, the next step was to consider the targetting of the ritual. We discussed the idea of focusing on very specific political issues, but eventually decided to go for a general raising of awareness - a ripple across the human planetary mind.

Next, we designed the leaflet - magical artist Sheila Broun very kindly allowed us to use her tarot design for the Ace of Cups as the central image - through which the participants in the rite could link up their efforts. The leaflet was worded to try and get

the idea across in as succinct a way as possible, since we wanted as many people as possible to join in. A description of the qualities of the Ace of Cups was included, and a quote from the Tao te Ching expressed perfectly what we were trying to do:

“Under Heaven nothing is more soft and yielding than water, Yet for attacking the solid and strong, nothing is better - It has no equal.”

Lao Tzu.

Once the leaflet had been designed, we then utilised our network contacts to reach as diverse a number of people as possible, and leaflets were taken abroad by friends, displayed in shops and windows as A4 and A3 posters, handed out at the Glastonbury festival, and distributed at various gigs up and down the country. Together, the Leeds group alone distributed over 7000 leaflets (later information revealed that over 2000 leaflets

were distributed in total).

During the weeks running up to the Solstice, there was a feeling of energy being raised in preparation for the event. I spent the solstice period with other project members, drumming for the two hours on Ilkley Moor, in a ritual dedicated to Arwen, Goddess of inspiration. At various points, we all 'saw' and felt the great current of energy pouring forth into the chalice which was the focus for the energies.

Of course, this idea isn't unique, and many different groups have been organising mass 'rituals' for some time, and they are becoming more popular.

Raising people's awareness about an issue is probably more effective than trying to influence such a global situation directly, since to be able to act upon a problem requires conscious awareness that there is a problem in the first place. Such acts are empowering because we are conditioned into believing that we are basically powerless to try and change such huge issues individually. Participating in mass-workings reminds us that we can be individually effective, and can contribute support in many different ways. It's all too easy to feel overwhelmed and powerless about major problems.

Mythographer

Probably one of the most important shamanic roles is that of Mythographer - the person who remembers, interprets, and extends the mythic pool of their community. Myths may well have an eternal quality about them, but they are constantly being rewritten, destroyed, and recovered. Joseph Campbell said recently that our society desperately needed some new myths. Not that there is a lack; just that modern myths have become fragmented. Examples of how myths grow are not difficult to find. While modern 'shamanic' writers dissect and repackage the mythic structures of the Australian Aborigines, for example, they are busy having dreams about cars and jet aircraft - such things have always existed in the Dreamtime, they say - it is just that they have only just begun to visit those particular parts of the Dreaming. Shamans in surviving tribal

cultures are beginning to translate the icons and activities of us 'civilised' westerners into the mythic pools of their cultures, so that their communities can accumulate all the better to the reality shock of contact with technology. The sense of connection to myths is important for our sense of continuance and stability, which is increasingly important in a world where the pace of social change is getting faster and faster. In our cultures, the role of mythographer is often expressed through the medium of literature and film - the old myths are constantly being retold through different channels and guises. We tend to spent a great deal of time digging up the myths of crumbling or dead cultures and, as often as not, projecting dreams and fantasies about how we would like the world we live in to be, onto them. Both the past and the far-flung future are infinitely malleable, but what about the now - the future that's just around the corner?

Social Wounds

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of using a shamanic approach in a modern setting is getting to grips with the complexities of living and working in the urban environment. We've hardly begun to understand how living in cities affects us from a psychic point of view, although the experience of 'anomie' or rootlessness is well-documented. Our cities are spawning-grounds for spirits of many different natures, from the very real demons such as poverty, despair, and frustration to the elementals arising from the tangles of electrical cables and heavy industrial areas. It is probably easier to get a grip on cities if we regard them as living entities; immensely complex systems in which we are just one indwelling organism. An initial problem with getting to the feel of such a place is that it takes time to do this; time to put down roots and feelers so that you can extend your perception into the streets and roads and learn to sense the cities' pulse - how it changes according to the seasons, and how it responds to the subtle mood changes in its resident populations. The city grows from generations upon generations of experience - which don't fade away, but become embedded in its collective psyche. A building is torn down, and another grows in its place, leaving the ghost of the old to linger in memories and archive photographs.

The city nurtures us and crushes us at the same time. We can seek escape routes by taking our magic into the hills, or by creating inner-world spaces in the safety of our own homes, but the cityscape returns us to paramount reality, with the routines of everyday life and the dependence on others for the services which allow us to live in varying degrees of security. Many of us live in cities with an attitude of necessary sufferance, dreaming of escape. Nature invades and adapts itself to the cityscape - weeds push up through cracks in the concrete; dog-

packs collect on the estates. Loose ‘communities’ and cliques arise and fall as the different social strata constantly shift across time. The psyche of a city can be terrifying - vast, constantly changing; slow, yet its moods are perceptible. It’s difficult enough to establish empathy with our fellow humans - how do we come to terms with these vast beings through which we move each day?

In non-industrial cultures, the ‘power’ of the shamanic practitioner may sometimes be inherently bound up with an individual’s ‘territory’ - be it a village or sacred ground. After living in Leeds for three years, I’m starting to feel this sort of affection for the city. Sometimes I can’t wait to escape from its embrace - it’s nice to wander around, but I’m beginning to feel affinity with the entity which is Leeds itself, even though I’ve only come to know a small part of it with any sense of familiarity. Much of this awareness grows over time - getting to know a place, but I sometimes find it useful to let my awareness wander through the streets in the form of a cat or bird, exploring the innerworld map of the city in my head, and then to wander through the different areas, trying to sense the dominant moods and histories that settle like sediment in the under-levels.

Perhaps one of the key tasks for would-be shamans living in cities is to try and make sense of we live in them. A mammoth task, certainly, but worthwhile if we can develop a magical methodology which is able to come to grips with the complexities of city life, and look at the magical properties of that environment. For me, this is a very slow process of feeling my way through territory which is familiar surroundings, yet there are few guidelines to work from. One of the first questions that I tried to get to grips with was, is it possible to magically affect the collective psyche of a city, or a particular region? Since areas can be ‘scarred’, for example by disasters such as occurred at Hillsborough in Sheffield, or by economic decline, is it possible to try and heal the scars, if only fractionally? Such scars of course have far-reaching effects for the people involved, but the wounding seems also to permeate the whole area. Another example of this is estates which have been built upon sites where a large battle has taken place - I visited one such estate in the

Midlands where there was a seemingly high proportion of psychic turbulence - people reporting all kinds of psychic phenomena, from UFO sightings to ghosts and houses which could not be tenanted because of the disturbing atmosphere. Areas which have fallen into disuse are often closely associated with the appearance of strange beings, and John Keele, in his book *Strange Creatures from Time and Space* gives some intriguing accounts which seem to confirm this observation.

Community

The term 'community' is difficult to pin down, as it gets used in so many different contexts, often by those who wish to project the message that a particular group of people have shared concerns, regardless of how they might themselves perceive the situation. One tends to be cynical about hearing 'authorities' talking about 'community spirit', but much more accepting of one's contemporaries. For me, community arises from a sense of being in a particular network of relations, where people have a consensus of shared concerns and viewpoints, and collude with each other to maintain them. This can range from everyday survival concerns, to evolving a distinct, but often very subtle, set of mores about how individuals interact with each other. You can see this happening when you enter a new community for the first time - it's very easy to make social gaffs, before you are accepted and treated like anyone else in the area. Often, 'community' can be used to imply that everyone in a particular group shares common values, and it's easy to forget that that within the network of social relations, individuals don't usually share all the same views on all issues. This can be seen very clearly when people who are perceived as being a part of a distinct community gather together, and, surprise surprise, arguments break out over particular issues. Usually, communities are much more complex than we like to think.

In the previous section of this book I looked at some of the roles that a shamanic practitioner might fulfil in an urban community, the emphasis being on working with individuals. Another approach that I have admittedly only begun to look at is workings for particular communities as a whole, in a similar

way that a tribal shaman can work for her or his tribal group.

Furies

Last year (summer '89) brought a heat-wave to the community in which I live, and as the temperature climbed there was a rising spiral of violent or potentially-violent incidences against women in the area, plus a surge of homophobia. Several of us discussed a possible magical approach to counteracting this trend, which resulted in a ritual to unleash 'the Furies' - a group of female spirits whose action is to constrain oppressive males (originally from the Greek mythos). Essentially, the ritual was a highly concentrated vortex of energy which allowed the Furies into the collective consciousness of women across Leeds. The rite served to enabled the women involved to articulate and direct their anger about oppressive male behaviour, so that the energy was channeled into the rite, rather than being held within and repressed (which is highly stressful). Liberating anger in this way can be healing in itself. In the weeks that followed the working, we heard of several cases of women turning upon men who were oppressing them, and the spate of local incidents dropped also.

The Scream

This is an anger-channeling exercise which was worked out as part of the Furies working, which should give you some idea of the approach to this kind of magickal work.

"Imagine yourself to be all-woman, from every culture, in every country, throughout all the ages, down throughout the centuries, all faces, all ages, all races, gathering your anger at oppression, and shouting that you have had enough and are not taking ANY MORE SHIT!"

As the energy is not directed at specific individuals, it becomes 'free energy' (or pure Will) which can be magically directed, causing a ripple across the collective psyche of the group concerned. As noted above, this redirection of anger can, for those concerned, be beneficial, since it releases energy which is otherwise contained within the BodyMind as stress and

frustration. It also serves to demonstrate the power of the focused will to bring about change. On a personal level, the Furies rite damn near wasted all of us, and took months to get over - but we feel it was worth it.

'Traditional' approaches to magick tend to focus on bringing about change to one individual, or one particular aspect of a situation. At the moment I'm trying to work with situations - which requires looking dispassionately at the different elements in an evolving situation; divining probable outcomes, and deciding at what point, and most importantly, how to intervene magically - if indeed such is required at all. I'm often asked to become involved with developing situations, and occasionally, find myself 'hanging back' for no apparent reason. I find following my intuition on such occasions usually leads to me finding out why it isn't a good idea to become involved, at least in the manner initially indicated. Sometimes its better to wait (for more information to turn up) than go rushing in - you can easily end up making the situation worse than it already is.

MAGI-PROP

A witch is a rebel in physics and a rebel is a witch in politics.

Thomas Vaughan, Anthroosophia Theomagica, 1650.

In the 1930's, Wilhelm Reich, observing the battle between communist Left and fascist Right, observed that the problem the Left had in gaining mass appeal was that it gave an Intellectual answer to life's problems. Unable to move beyond the level of material changes (jobs, housing, wages), it lacked a sense of Cosmogeny (a total reality) as a backdrop. In contrast, Reich saw that the fascists understood the necessity for a mythological dimension to their political gatherings. For it is by appealing to the mythic world of experience that social reality may be manipulated. The Nazi party made constant and efficient use of symbolism, myth, and powerful emotive ideals to project their visions into the mass mind of German culture. Of course, it is not wholly responsible for the fascist's rise to power, but its importance is often neglected when one approaches the modern political arena.

The British Nationalist Party for example, are a good example of a political group well aware of magick (if only unconsciously). They are mimetic, sending tendrils into any kind of situation which will feed them - Green Politics, Paganism, The Campaign to save Leeds Markets - all issues which have a direct, emotional appeal. They are further reinforced by the Meme (viral idea) of Xenophobia, and it's mutation of anti-intellectualism - the virtue of stupidity. These viral ideas are as unpleasant as head colds, and about as difficult to shift. The xenophobe is an old meme, old to the extent that it is embedded within the minds of a great many people, to the extent that it's natural to hold these beliefs - to act this way, as both history and culture justify it. Images are reflected and reinforced through our everyday experience, until

the BNP member feels that he has God, Nature, and “His Country” on his side. Which to some extent, he has. History is not only the passage of time and the unfolding of events - it is also the breeding ground for mythic images too. And we should know by now that history lies, depending upon through who’s mouth it is being spoken. Symbols retain their power over time, especially when set against a mythological backdrop.

Word Viruses

The purpose of any virus is to survive by replication of itself throughout the cells of its host organism. The Word Virus is a very small unit of word or image that entraps the energy of its human host into recycling an instruction or behaviour pattern. Ever walked around, unable to get a popular tune out of your head? Advertising, slogans, jingles, words and images are all carriers for the parasitic virus. Likewise harmful gossip, and of course political ideas (and behaviours) which perpetuate a particular set of power relationships. As Ghandi pointed out, the problem is not people, but the attitudes that they maintain, which can be understood, from a magical perspective, as viral entities. ...Getting even, being Right, holding onto to power...viruses which infect and corrupt the collective psyche of human beings, and are difficult to counter by intellectual or emotional argument alone. A developing magical approach is to explore ways of countering these viruses directly, as an alternative (or support) to other counteractive strategies. Some people tend to shy away from political magick, but since the Seventeenth century, magick has had a close association with the political struggle for freedom.

Political magick, for me, is a matter of ground zero politics - that is, survival against oppressive institutions and viruses. The first *Heal the Earth* working drew its inspiration from Starhawk’s *Dreaming the Dark*, which draws together political issues and a magical approach to regaining power, and opposing oppressive structures without falling back into the power-games through which they are maintained. Again, individual empowerment is the key issue - finding within ourselves the power to act effectively and thereby make a difference, and to pool energies collectively

without the need to spawn new political viruses which can, over time, become structures that are just as repressive to the spirit as those that they claim to be fighting.

Out Demon Out

The idea of ‘cursing’ is generally regarded as dubious ground on which to tread. If you believe in individual free will (surely a fundamental pagan belief?) then any attempt to gain ‘power over’ another individual is not only contradictory, but also devalues yourself. Most cases of cursing that I have come across are related to petty arguments and desires to maintain control over a situation which has changed in a way that the people involved are emotionally unequipped to deal with. However, it should be pointed out that in some cultures, cursing is seen as a valid approach to resolving problems. Techniques of cursing seem to be most highly developed in cultures which have suffered from repression from a more powerful group, and are otherwise unable to articulate and recover their power. This is one of the shamanic roles which has received scant attention, apart from some Feminist writers who have looked at ways of constraining and binding rapists. Modern approaches to this kind of magic have generated the tactic of cursing institutions rather than individuals, an example of this being Pagans against the Poll Tax.

Pagans Against the Poll Tax

This is an anonymously-circulated document which sets out guidelines for magically countering the Poll Tax. The basic idea is that the exchange of money is a form of energy transfer which has very powerful associations - being one of the basic roots of our society. An old wart-charmer’s trick is to ‘buy’ warts off a sufferer and transfer them somewhere else. The Poll Tax curse is a blank cheque where the user signs using a magical persona, writes in appropriate sigils instead of money, and ‘pays’ the targeted authority a ‘problem’ which will disrupt the implementation of Poll Tax collection, such as ‘six months of computer trouble’. Computers are particularly sensitive to magically-generated interference, and one group of magicians

claimed to have momentarily disrupted television transmissions. Posting off the cheque activates the curse.

The arguments against such acts revolve around the question of ‘do you have the right to do that?’ and also the view that such politically-active acts will reinforce the view that occultists and pagans are evil. Essentially, this is a matter for each individual to consider, but consider this; being on the receiving end of repression and not being able to do anything about it can grind you down awfully quickly. Likewise, Starhawk’s magicopolitical writing came out of the Seventies, before eco-action was seen as acceptable. Moreover, you can’t expect freedom and acceptance from a power structure that survives by perpetuating limitations and intolerance. I wouldn’t be surprised to hear of third-world shamans who are engaged in magical action against forest-burners, land developers and low-flying military aircraft which threaten their way of life. *The Emerald Forest* explored such a stance, with its final scene of a dam being destroyed by tribal earth magick. Peasants in the Middle Ages often resorted to poppets and pins to strike back at oppressive landowners.

The Furies working I mentioned in the previous section can also be considered as a ‘curse’ - against violence and oppression by one section of society against others. It was perhaps, an extreme situation which demanded, so we felt, extreme action. But if we must curse at all, surely it is better to try and change oppressive structures and ideas; to attempt to destroy the demons bred of fear, ignorance, hatred and repression than leave them to wander across the world unchecked? For something to grow, whether it be an individual, an institution, or a culture, sometimes it is necessary to destroy the psychic structures by which the entity maintains itself in a limited space - a fortress, if you will, of fixed beliefs, dogmas, and entrenched attitudes. Sometimes these fortresses cannot be unbricked by rational argument and gentle persuasion - especially when whatever is lurking inside them is trying to crush you (whether with boots, bureaucracy or by removing your freedom to act). Sometimes a psychic assault is necessary - like suddenly finding a back entrance into the fortress which allows you to show the occupant(s) the demons

of their minds which they have rejected and shied away from. Confronting your inner demons is never pleasant, whether willingly or unwillingly, but is a part of growth.

Looking to the Future?

Shamanism is the oldest form of magical practice - and the recent upsurge of interest in its various forms has led to many developments as Westerners attempt to 'borrow' various concepts and techniques, and utilise them, with various degrees of success, in the modern world. It should also be stressed that these techniques are continually being updated and developed, as individuals are attracted to the shamanic perspective from different backgrounds and interests. We have seen the resurgence of shamanism in all forms, from the 'historical' traditions such as Celtic, Amerind, Nordic, Finnish and Aboriginal Shamanic approaches, to the New Age formulations 'channelled' from spirit guides or dolphins. Shamanism contains both an effective psycho-technology and an positive life ethic, and is malleable enough to be adapted to differing situations and requirements.

Shamanic techniques and concepts can also be found lurking in many modern institutions, from sports psychology to management training; alternative therapies to drama training. Sometimes, I have the impression that shamanic techniques are in danger of becoming 'sanitised' - that the magical essentials of shamanic practice are being edged out as the 'shamanic' self-improvement manuals stream out of the publishing houses. So too, I am becoming increasingly wary of those who rush to label themselves as shamans. As I hope I've demonstrated in this book, it's by no means an easy label to live up to, and personally, I would say that though I spend a great deal of time using 'shamanic techniques', I don't see myself as a shaman - that, for me, is a glamour to be avoided.

As far as future developments in shamanic practice go, I would like to see more exploration of what the implications of using shamanic techniques in the big cities might be. In a future volume I will be looking at the various forms of 'Technological

Shamanism' - experiments with computers, video, electronic music, light effects and also the 'fringe cultures' of tattooing and body modification. I'd like to think that the future is open enough so that developments in all approaches to shamanic practice can grow - and possibly grow together. The essentials of magical experience and praxis are similar, no matter what symbols and words we wrap them up in, and once you've got to grips with one particular approach or technique, it's easier to learn another. Of course, deciding what next to incorporate in your approach to practice is a matter of personal taste and judgement. Increasingly, I find that virtually any life skill can be useful, whether it is information-based, a practical creative skill, or a set of magical techniques from a particular system. Personally, I hold the view that the idea of separate traditions and systems belongs to another age. Whilst training as an Occupational Therapist, I was taught to approach situations and deploy a battery of techniques and approaches that were most effective in that situation, and I approach shamanic practice in a similar fashion, drawing from my past experience and knowledge, and selecting what seems to me the best approach given the circumstances. I would find this difficult to do if I only worked within a single 'tradition' - since the world generally offers up a wider variety of problems that any one approach can deal with. And we live in an increasingly complex world where perhaps, no single individual can cope with taking on the many different roles that the shamanic perspective encompasses. Knowing other people who are working from different perspectives, concentrating on different areas of work is increasingly important. We need more dialogue between different practitioners; a dialogue which transcends personal differences and the wariness which comes from not understanding (or appreciating) the validity of another person's approach. Growth comes from the cross-fertilisation of ideas, and the healthy exchange of views. We need to be able to assess ourselves, both as developing individuals and in terms of the techniques and approaches that we are wielding. From this will grow new forms of shamanic practice to take us into the next century.

Postscript

I find it difficult to cut what I do into easily-assimilated chunks for other people. This book has thus been a reflection on the uses to which I've put shamanic techniques so far, and the areas which I feel are worthy of further exploration. Again I would stress that this is a personal account of my own experiences which have grown from particular events and situations. I'm not trying to create a definite 'system' of shamanic practice, and though I welcome feedback & discussion on anything I have written in this and the previous two books, I don't regard myself as a 'teacher' of shamanic techniques and any such correspondence should take this into account.

Appendices

The two essays following were written around the same time as this series of booklet.

“ACTIVATE THE BEAR IT’S A TEENAGE RAMPAGE”

“In a labyrinth of metaphor and words, intuition is lost, therefore without their effort must be learned the truth about one’s self from him who alone knows the truth.....yourself.”

Austin Osman Spare

Power is hard to find. And when you do find it, it’s hard to hold onto. It creates tensions. But well, that sort of comes with the job. Power only comes at great cost. It makes its own demands on you, so that you can make demands back. Balance comes in making sure there’s a more or less equal trade-off.

Power lights you up like a candle. And any candle in the darkness attracts moths. People will either do their damnedness to try and take your power away from you (then spit on your carcass afterwards) or they will try and surrender their power to you. Neither is particularly pleasant, and both can be very insidious. Some are addicted to power. Some are addicted to giving their power away. Many want the gains without any pain, or don’t want to leave the safety of bright light and barriers. But power growls to itself in the darkness, dangerous as a wounded tax inspector.

You’ll need to chase power, to prove to it you’re on the level. Doesn’t really matter how. You can hang nine days on the world-tree. You can lie watching galaxies drift as a near-O.D of homemade speed bores holes in your neocortex. Doesn’t really matter. Bucky Fuller found his whilst poised to throw himself off the Golden Gate bridge. Lucky Bucky - he made it. Most don’t.

Power corrupts. An old adage that. But who does it corrupt? Not only them who has it, but them who’s jealous of them who has it. Them who’s too lazy or fearful to chase it for themselves.

You may have met one, you may even have been one. The Spiritual people. The “I-have-conquered-my-ego” people. Who don’t drink, smoke, fight, fuck or talk dirty. Psychic fascism is on the move within this not-so green and pleasant land of Albion. I can’t cut all this impeccable warrior stuff you know. Recall I saw Apocalypse Now in Israel, where you can’t walk very far down the road without seeing some kind of military hardware. A friend I made there,(one of Mr.Begin’s charioteers) offered me a game of Russian Roulette. The added frisson he said, was that the bullets in his ageing revolver didn’t always go off. He wasn’t a warrior anymore and I certainly wasn’t looking to be impeccable. Two days later he bled to death when a buried AP-mine took his leg off. After which I could never take serious any kind of “.....warrior” trip. Call yourself a warrior and one day you will end up on the business end of something sharp and unyielding. End of Story.

But I digress. Contrary to popular opinion there are very few fixed rules where power is concerned. The wanting of it can be an ache in the gut which sends you scrambling for books, mindfucks, teachers, talismans and cosmic crystals. We are hooked into believing in secret knowledge. Get a foot in the door and start chasing dreams. There are no easy routes into power. You can’t hitch a lift down highway 666.

The usage of it is even worse. Someone will always brand you a “Black Magician”, ‘specially if you start asking too many awkward questions. Take the other week, this guy I hardly know rings up to ask (politely) if I’d been cursing him! But why bother cursing people when you can have their arms broken instead? (I know this impeccable warrior, see....) He almost sounded disappointed after I’d finished laughing down the phone.

I spent Beltane with Vishvanath. With a cheap bottle of plonk for libations we invoked Pan in the Leeds green belt. The dawn was very fine indeed, the university towers veiled in mist. Leeds crouched beneath our feet like some great grey leviathan about to flex its muscles. We live in a magical universe. Where nothing is true, and everything is possible. Or so they say.

Once power finds you, you'll try to duck it, like as not. Once it finds you, then you have to admit you've got it. Hedge around and you only diminish yourself. Worse, you can really burn others without realising it. Power brings its own responsibilities. And sadnesses. But what is it some will ask. To define it is to lessen it. And lose it in the process. Either you'll know soon enough, or you'll never need to.

*"It is not in my mind to ask questions which cannot be answered.
That is the soul standing upon the crossroad of vacillation. You search
for wisdom, but achieve only a stasis of will."*

Adeptus Astartes Proverb

TimeWind

I wrote this peice late one night, whilst a storm howled about the house. Sitting in silence, I caught a fleeting glimpse of a storm-spirit, and named it Azg. I 'rode' Azg into shaman-time, and upon leaving, these words began to flow of themselves.

Shamanic magick relies heavily upon personal Gnosis, the 'sense' of it cannot be transmitted by the written word. It wells up from the Deep Mind, or it crashes down from the skies as streaks of white lightning. A casual gesture by my teacher-lover hurls me down a corridor of dilated irises, to a plain where dreams are flayed and laid out in fields of blue ice. I am word-heavy and cannot dance, until the storm comes and whirls them away.

Gnosis - knowledge of the heart - can only be felt or halfglimpsed. Words reflect only secondhand daylight. I = (; Azg =): () rides the storm. () are space. You cannot take words into space.

Shamanism predates words, being born first in gesture and the twistings of the body. Feeble in birth and death; sinuous in sex. This physical language speaks directly to the Deep Mind. Hands, eyes, feet are most eloquent when words have been banished.

Next came poetry, the structure of rhythm and cadence; poetry of motion, image, sound and form. Poetry as dance and music. Words are not nimble enough. Then came the pictorial image, glyphs and symbols; picture-writing.

Nowadays we live amongst words to the extent that the physical language has become mysterious to us. Azg tears the words from my throat and ... I read the patterns of wordless knowledge; in the rattling of an iron gate; the spray of rain across my window; the dull ache of a tooth. Words imprison the body, obscuring the dance. The shaman dances, free of words.

Words bind us into Time. Traditions can only be passed down when words can be formed. The shaman does not write “committing” thoughts into words; my thoughts scream like caged jackdaws when I order them. Visions are notoriously unruly. Shaman has few words but many dances. Join me in the dance and it becomes yours.

Tradition = time progression; transmission of words. Shaman-time is cyclic, not linear. There is no past to hide the future from the present. In shaman-time there are no Gods, no well-mapped paths, no systems, no tattered beliefs hoarded by scribbling devotees. You have your body, and the world full of fellow-dancers. Such guides as there are, are nameless; formless, to be half-glimpsed or sensed as fleeting images. They may have names, but you will not find them in any book, indeed they are but titles or honours that you must find the wit to offer them, and risk their wild laughter. There is only one book; the world, but only you can discover how to read it.

Shaman always plays to the audience, be it clan, community or allies. The pupil always knows she is ready when she can out-dance the teacher. We live within Time; the dance may carry us outside its spirals. Do this by breaking the addiction cycle of words. You cannot take words into space and the shaman needs space to dance.