

The Circle of Magic

When I was around six years old, I saw my first magic show. It impressed one "Wow!" after another on my sensitive young mind. I couldn't get enough of it! A few years and considerable practice later, my older brother and I began rehearsing. We were preparing for a magic show in our basement. For a dime, we would entertain our friends at our "Spook Time Matinee." We would wow them with such illusions as the Amazing Rising Block, the Incredible Dancing Shoes, and much, much more.

Eventually, I got around to asking my mom something that had been on my mind for some time: Does magic really exist? She paused for a moment and then answered nonchalantly, "No," as if it were a solid fact.

I was crushed. Living in a magical world would be so cool, so right. I didn't give up hope.

Several years later, I met Sharon, my first bona-fide witch. She was in her early 20s with fine black hair and soft voice. Her mother, she explained, was a witch too, as was her grandmother, great-grandmother, and so on. Sharon learned magic at home, but indirectly. "When my mother casts her spells, she doesn't allow me in the room with her," she told me, "but she leaves the door ajar. I put my ear to the opening and from there I can *feel* how she does it."

One day Sharon handed me a dark-purple velvet pouch, fastened at the top with a red silk cord. It fit in the palm of my hand. "What is it?" I asked.

"It contains magic," she said seriously. "It's very strong but easy broken. Don't open it."

This happened when I was undergoing metaphysical studies with a Great Master of the Rosicrucian Order. I showed him the pouch and asked him what he thought. He advised me to go down to the river and throw it in the water, which I did. At this point in my life, my metaphysical training with him was more important than magic. Being curious, though, I wanted to see what was in there. I pulled open the silk cord and poured the contents into my hand. Out tumbled a polished chip of clear quartz crystal, a small dried flower with white petals, and a tiny rose thorn. Without hesitation, I flung them, pouch and all, into the flowing, silver-blue water.

The Wiccans

Over the next couple of decades, I ran into a variety of Wiccans types. Some were benign, while others were downright malignant. Part of their creed says Harm no one and do what you will. However, the Judeo-Christian tradition says Thou shalt not kill, and look what we've got. One told me that I could be a very powerful magician if I applied myself, but I've never been much of a joiner. What is more important, I instinctively knew something about metaphysical powers. Even if your goal was to do only good, if you

became angry, fearful, or greedy, then you could subtly pass to the dark side -- if only for a moment. And the karmic and psychological repercussions of such a trespass can be severe.

Perhaps the most famous and accomplished magician I ever met was Steve. The city paper would plaster his face on the front page of the Local section every Halloween: "The Warlock of Miami." He was pleasant enough socially and looked normal: medium height, thin frame, white hair, and silver wire-rim glasses. His only oddity was the uncertain smile that he would crack now and then, which gave him an air of "something else is happening here."

Once I was having stomach problems, so I went to him for advice because he knew a lot about herbs. He sold me some bloodroot, which I faithfully ingested, only to become violently ill. What I didn't know was that bloodroot contained the nasty toxin, sanguinarine. The "cure" almost killed me. When I told him what happened, he laughed.

A few weeks later I was lying in bed reading when I noticed something in the corner of my room: Steve's face had appeared, hovering in midair, just above the door. His expression wasn't animated; he was staring blankly into the room. I blinked, rubbed my eyes, turned my head this way and that, but he was still there. I wasn't imagining this. Somehow, he could project himself into my room. Although disquieting, his skill impressed me.

The Astral Plane and Its Residents

As I met more and more Wiccans, I began having more astral experiences. At first, the novelty of these experiences mesmerized me. That's part of the seduction of the astral dimension. Magic, often originating on the inner planes, can distort reason and even alter the perception of the physical senses. It's hallucinogenic. It can paint very convincing pictures of reality that have nothing to do with reality. And you believe them.

What is most troubling though is not that the astral plane and magical powers exist. Rather, it's that the entities who reside there can channel through people. This, I believe, is a source of evil in the world. Western religions call these beings "demons" or "Satan's Angels" and cast them as the bad guys in the ongoing battle between Good and Evil. And while it's easy enough to believe that astral entities are "figments of an unenlightened imagination," anyone familiar with channeling knows otherwise. Some New Age groups call these beings the Dark Forces.

The Ancient Greeks held a different view. They understood demons to be neutral messengers between the gods and man. This makes sense to me. Humans can reach the astral plane (or Fourth Dimension) with relative ease, but touching the heavenly plane

(the Fifth Dimension, which transcends the duality of good and evil) is very difficult. So, having an intermediary between the Earth plane and Heaven makes sense.

Whether they are neutral or not is another story. On a strictly experiential level, when they interact with you and you are aware of it, they certainly appear evil. Viewed transpersonally though, I believe that they somehow play a higher role. Perhaps they are teachers whose job is to test us or to make us stronger. Maybe they are in charge of redirecting the course of our lives if we have taken the wrong path. If a person has become too deeply immersed in the wrong path, a more powerful entity (a "Lieutenant" or some other higher-up) may become involved to redirect that person. It's "evolution, the hard way."

"Magic-lite" -- visualizations and other New Age techniques -- can have karmic repercussions as well. For instance, one technique suggests that you imagine something you want and imagine that you have it. Overall, this is an excellent way to manifest something. However, say you drag others into your vision. "I want to marry Lolita." This could interfere with Lolita's free will and taint the process. At the very least, it could complicate matters. Other practices appear harmless enough, though, like securing a parking place for yourself while you are on the way to a crowded parking lot. The Universe can probably accommodate you without creating karma or having to make major adjustments to the Cosmic Plan.

Some prayers are a form of magic too, like when you ask a deity to grant a selfish wish. It's not necessarily bad to do, but it's based on magical principles nonetheless. On the other hand, thanking God for something is an expression of gratitude. Expressing this positive sentiment shows that we are in harmony with life. I try to give thanks for being alive every day. Life can be hard, but it is beautiful as well.

What is the relationship between the Dark Forces and the spiritual and physical evolution of humanity? I believe three processes may govern our evolution: cosmic, scientific, and humanitarian. Cosmically, evolution could be our destiny. We evolve because we are meant to. This belief is highly speculative of course, as many countries, particularly imperialistic ones, think they are "destined" to save or civilize the world. Their alleged God-given decree usually ends up causing immense suffering, especially to those they are allegedly trying to save or civilize. So, while "manifest destiny" should not be entirely ruled out as a guiding force, we should treat these claims as suspect while we inspect their motives.

Scientifically, Darwin noted that forms evolve. As they do they become more conscious. Humans are an example of that. By extension, as our bodies evolve, we will become more conscious and therefore more spiritual.

From a humanitarian point of view, as a species we are waking up to a higher way of living. We are beginning to realize that the mindset of power-obsessed nation states and greed-based multinational corporations are no longer sustainable. Indeed, the continual pursuit of their goals is an ever-increasing threat to civilization and Earth-life itself. Wake up. The time is now.

Within this context, astral entities could provide wake-up calls, both on a personal and a global level. They could nudge us forward by exposing evil for what it is: causing others to suffer, either intentionally or through apathy. Alternately, they could nudge us over the edge and we could end up extinct -- a failed experiment -- but I try not to dwell on that possibility.

Santeria

Although I mentioned that I'm not a joiner, that's not altogether true. When I was in Florida, I met a man who could "channel the gods." This was new to me. He was sitting on a high-backed chair in our living room when suddenly he started shaking uncontrollably. His brown eyes bulged, he shook some more, and then he slumped forward and sat motionless. After a moment, his body became rigid and he went into a trance. He lifted his head and shot his arm out stiffly, pointing to a bottle of sugar cane rum on the shelf. I twisted off the cap and handed him the bottle. He tilted it straight up and gulped down the entire fifth in one drink. Incredibly, it didn't make him drunk. He wiped his mouth slowly with the back of his hand, and then pulled a fat cigar from his shirt pocket. Picking up a plastic cigarette lighter, he fired up the cigar. What startled me was that he was smoking it backwards, with the flaming part in his mouth. The fiery tobacco wasn't burning the inside of his mouth.

After smoking like that for a minute or two, he dropped the cigar with its glowing red tip into a tall glass. It hit the water with a violent hiss. His expression went flat, and he started talking in another language. As it turned out, he was speaking in Yoruba, the African language used in Santeria. Santeria, or "The Way of the Saints," is an Afro-Caribbean religion derived from traditional beliefs of the Yoruba people of Nigeria, and he was a Santero - a Santeria priest. This was my first experience of overt channeling. It eventually convinced me to join the cult -- not, I must admit, as a true believer but to explore it further.

My Santera (godmother) initiated me into the religion and put me under the guidance and protection of a saint (remotely akin to a guardian angel). She chose the saint Obatala for me, and I was happy with her choice. In Santeria, Obatala is the creator of the world and enforces justice everywhere. He is the source of all that is pure. He is wise, peaceful, ethical, moral, and compassionate. His color is white, because he contains all colors; however, he transcends them all. Of all the saints, Obatala was the only one I considered to have a fifth-dimensional personality.

The initiation ceremony took place in her chapel located in the back of her home. Life-size statues of the saints lined the white walls, each with impressive offerings laid at their feet - - heaps of tropical fruits, black cauldrons with metal arrows or pointy iron objects protruding, or lush bouquets of fresh-cut flowers. The air was thick with burnt herbs and incense. At one point, one of the Santera's helpers threw a handful of tiny seashells onto a round wooded plate. He was divining the fate of the two white doves that looked on nervously from their small wicker cage. Fortunately, the gods decreed that she did not have to sacrifice the birds. Animal sacrifice is an unsavory aspect of that religion.

The ceremony lasted all night and ended with her placing a long strand of small, white beads around my neck. They were blessed of course. The helper took the white pigeons outside and set them free. The sun had just risen, and we drove down to the seashore and buried some fruits and old clothes in the sand. For the next month, I wore only white.

As it turned out, the religion was fear-based. I discovered that everyone was worried about somebody putting a curse on them. One morning, I opened my front door and found a thin, neat line of white powder sprinkled across the doorstep. Naturally, I consulted my Santera and she dutifully performed a counter spell. I paid her for her services and went home. After considering the implications of this religion on my lifestyle, I realized that I didn't want to live like this. So, I quit.

The Mind and Magic

I've lived in a psychic environment for 30 years; my companions have all been psychically tuned. This made me very aware of my thoughts, because they'd pick up on them one way or another. Some knew specifically what I was thinking; others picked up on the general feeling tone of my thoughts. To materialists, this sounds as if I'm neurotic at best; maybe all this *is* just a head-trip. My experience has confirmed the reality of this so many times, though, that I'm a true believer. Yes, a true believer. We live in a psychic world.

These experiences encouraged me to be more in control of my thoughts: being imperfect, some thoughts should stay private. Further, thoughts and intent are a basis for magic. When you casually or even unintentionally (out of habit) send out bad thoughts or "vibes" to someone, you are using a crude and unrefined form of magic. Ritual magic is much more focused and therefore more effective, for either good or evil.

In any event, I've always strived to be a good person. If I become angry, I don't want to add to the bad-vibe pool of the world. Because of this, I developed a technique to transmute that negative energy. If I think negatively about someone, before it has a chance to escape into the vibe pool I try to put a positive "wrapper" around it. I take that negative thought/energy and surround it with the intent "We evolve." Roughly speaking, it's like

"turn the other cheek." At its best, it makes the transmission a win-win-win situation. I evolve, the "target" evolves, and by extension, humanity evolves a little too.

However, after I used this for a while, one of the "targets" psychically responded that she didn't want to evolve. The old woman was full of hatred, and she had no intention of letting it go. That is what I imagined I received from her anyway. In any case, people don't evolve while holding onto their anger. Was my practice infringing on her free will? No, I wasn't demanding that she evolve. I suggested it. But she resisted, so I dropped it. I left it as "I evolve."

These days I'm no longer attracted to astral phenomena, and I don't use magic anymore. I never used it much anyway -- hardly ever. On the dark end of the spectrum, the astral plane -- the source of magic -- is seductive and dangerous to deal with. I realize that dedicated Wiccans may disagree with me; or maybe they agree but have mastered its challenges. While I respect the magical path, I believe that I'm not cut out for it.

Now, I pray for the health of my loved ones; to ease the suffering in the world; for world peace; for the evolution of the species; and for whatever else catches my attention and strikes me as good. Of course, there's always the temptation to "fight evil. . . ." In addition, I'm devoted to following the direction of my spirit as best I can. If I can do that consistently -- not an easy task -- then I'll do the right thing in every moment. Spirit is love based, and embodying love is perhaps the highest goal to which a person can aspire.

I realize now that my childhood dream of living in a world of magic was for me, well, immature. The ideas that I held, combined with my sensitivity to life, was (in some ways) not consistent with a magical universe, but with a miraculous one. But that's another story.