

SPELLCRAFTING

by Margarian Bridger

Wiccan bookshelves probably contain more verbiage on spellwork than on any other topic. Let's cut through the clutter, and get it down to one simple paragraph:

All spellwork consists of visualizing a goal, then focusing magical energy and intention onto that goal. Everything else is stage props and window dressing.

That's not to say that the stage props aren't important. Anything that helps you focus and prepare for magical work, anything that helps you visualize a goal, anything that helps you raise and direct the energy, is a useful magical tool. Any tool that works, is by definition a good tool.

On the other hand, the most carefully planned and precisely executed ritual procedure is worthless, if it's performed without focus and intent. Any spell whose words and symbolism don't work for you is worthless to you -- though for someone else, it may be excellent. There are certain spells, or general ways of creating spells, that are carefully handed down because they've been honed by generations of practitioners and they work well for most of us. Even so, if you try one and it doesn't work for you, try something else. Don't entirely forget about the one that didn't work for you; it might be just the thing for one of your friends or coveners. Or in a few years, under different circumstances, you may find a technique that didn't work for you before is now full of power and usefulness.

There are many possible paths to any magical goal. There are many possible applications for any technique. There are many possible meanings for any ritual activity or symbol. You've always got lots of options.

Any spell that can be done at all, can be done with empty hands, in silence, any place where you can get a few minutes' peace and quiet. However, most of us, most of the time, prefer a little more help than that. The less experienced one is, the more tired or out-of-focus, the more useful the externals and stage props of magic are. The externals are also very helpful -- almost essential -- to get a group focused together on a magical effort. The more you work with groups, the more valuable it is to use the same symbol systems that are known and accepted by others.

Still, don't get carried away by the externals. If you're spending half your grocery money on altar tools, if you panic because you can't find the proper herb or stone, or if trying to remember the words of a spell distracts you from focusing on the intent -- it's time to go back to basics, and remind yourself of what's really important.

With that in mind, let's look at a few of the varieties of spellwork:

Verbal Spells: These work best when they are short, rhythmic, and state clearly the purpose of the working. Repeated over and over, they function as musical chants do, to silence distractions in your mind and to focus on the goal and raise energy. A purposeful bit of doggerel you create for the occasion will work better than some elegantly worded piece of poetry written by a stranger that you've copied out of a book and used by rote. The spells you find in books are suggestions and possibilities, nothing more.

Talismans: Stones, herbs, colours, bits of jewellery -- these things have no inherent magical value; they are symbol systems only. What works for you, works. Any object can be a focus and vehicle of magical intent; if you can't come up with, say, a doubly-terminated amethyst crystal, wrapped in silver wire and tied into an orange cloth with three bay leaves and a copper coin, then use a pebble from your driveway or a twig donated by a nearby bush instead. The symbol systems used in talisman making can be useful ways of visualizing the goal and focusing your efforts -- but don't make the mistake of thinking these symbols have any inherent or absolute magical power. they contain only the power we give to them.

The one exception to this is -- sometimes -- herb magic. Certain herbs do have a medicinal effect when ingested; certain scents do trigger hard-wired responses in the human mind and body. Herbs with such effects should be used only as lore indicates. Herbs and scents whose magical value is purely symbolic, however, may be adapted and customized just like any other magical tool.

You can focus magical energy into a talisman gradually, as you are creating it, or afterwards with a cone of power or some such -- or both.

Knot magic: Knots may be tied with magical intent. Several people may tie their cords together, to combine magical effort. The knotted cord may be burned to release the magic (natural fibres only, please!), or it may be kept like any other talisman, or it may be used as a meditation device, fingering the knots like the beads of a rosary. The later untying of knots may also be part of the spell.

Some Witches keep one magical cord, and use it over and over; others use a new cord for each spell. The traditional "Witch's Ladder" is a nine-foot cord with forty knots; however, if this proves unwieldy, use whatever length works for you. Depending upon the application, anything from thread to finger-thick cord may be suitable.

One powerful group technique is the weaving of a web. A ball of yarn is tossed back and forth across the circle, unwinding as it goes, while participants sing some appropriate web-weaving chant and/or shout out words or phrases appropriate to the goal. Knots may be tied in the web, or small objects fastened into it. The group can raise more energy by dancing the finished web around in a circle, raising it up and down (perhaps with the person who is the target of the magical working lying on top of it... Whee! what a ride!), firing a cone of power into it, or whatever. This can be a wonderful group bonding exercise, too.

It needs at least seven people; if you've got more than twenty you might want more than one ball of yarn going at once. Start with a solidly wound sphere of yarn; soft machine-wound yarn balls have lousy aerodynamic properties.

Burning something written on a piece of paper: This can be done for many different purposes. Burn the name of something you want to banish, and let the flames destroy it. Burn a prayer or a thank-you message or a promise, with or without a pinch of incense, as a way of sending it to the gods. Burn a goal or commitment, as a way of making it irrevocable (it can no longer be erased or changed) and of adding the fire's energy to it. Burn a message to ash, then add the ash to a talisman.

Candle magic: The good thing about candle spells is that magical energy is being released the entire time the candle is burning. The bad thing about candle spells is that a candle is a fire hazard for the entire time that it's lit. A long-burning candle should be contained in a sturdy, untipable jar; a taper left burning unattended should be in a sink or a similarly sturdy, fireproof basin out of the reach of pets and children. Watch out, too, for overhanging hazards such as cupboard doors that could swing out over the flame.

Occult supply shops are full of special-purpose candles at exorbitant prices. Don't waste your money on them; a candle you prepare for yourself is far better than an assembly-line product created by strangers.

Take a candle -- any plain candle will do -- charge it with magical intent and a strong visualization of your intended goal, and then burn it. If you wish, you can meditate further upon the goal while the candle burns in front of you. Don't spend too long staring at a candle flame at close range; you may damage your eyes.

If you want to get more elaborate, do some or all of the following: Choose a candle whose colour corresponds to the magical purpose at hand. Rub the candle with appropriate scented oil, or warm it enough that the wax is slightly soft, and roll it in appropriate incense or powdered herbs. Carve or write suitable words or symbols on it.

If you're into making your own candles (and stubs of old candles, provided they're not magically charged, can be recycled in this way), you can combine the colours you want, add herbs or scented oils to the melted wax, mold or carve the candle in a particular shape, or build a candle in layers that will burn in the appropriate sequence. As with any other magical work, the more focused effort and intent you put into creating a ritual tool, the more effective it will be when you use it. We can't all forge our own athames, but most of us can melt a little wax in a double boiler and pour or dip a candle.

Physical spells: Any physical action that effectively models the magical intent can be used as a part of spellwork. This can include flushing down the toilet a symbol of something you want to get rid of (be careful not to clog the drain!), tying two people (or dolls representing them) together at a handfasting, or sprinkling water on a map of an area where rain is needed. Spellbooks will give you some ideas, but if a book doesn't have what you want, use your imagination. Work with the available materials and practical constraints. Be creative -- but you don't have to be elaborate. Read Wiccan texts to learn some of the symbols, and systems of symbols, that are available -- and then apply them in a way that works for you.

Cone of power: This is simply a way for a group to simultaneously raise magical energy and direct it to a goal. There are many possible external procedures used to raise and shape and direct the energy. It may be fired off in a slow trickle or in a sudden climactic burst. It may be used to charge an object that's physically present, or sent off to some distant target. Usually the cone of power is directed by one person -- but not necessarily. The only external characteristic that all cones of power have in common is that the participants stand (or sit) in a circle, facing inward.

No matter what the external process or the accompanying visualization, all good cones of power feel much the same internally.

If a cone of power is fired off in a single burst, the release feels a bit like a good orgasm. This is no coincidence. Magical energy and sexual energy are made of the

same stuff and are often interchangeable; this is the "secret" behind all sex magic techniques, and is also the reason why most Witches choose a day or two of sexual abstinence before a major magical working.

An orgasm is also, incidentally, a failproof and pleasant way to ground leftover magical energy when you get home after a ritual.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS: The ethics of magic is a subject important enough to demand repeated discussion. In summary, though, the rule is this: examine every spell you do for its ethical implications before you begin. Are there any ways in which the intended result could cause harm to anyone or anything? (Remember, a gain for one person can mean an undeserved loss for another, and rain in your parched garden could translate to flash floods or drought fifty miles away.) Are there any loopholes in the wording or intent? (Remember the cautionary tale of *The Monkey's Paw*.) Are you willing to pay the necessary price, and to follow up the spellwork with effort of the more mundane sort? Are you resorting to magic too soon, before other alternatives have been adequately tried? Do you have the consent of the intended recipient of the magical gift? Is what you're asking for what you really want? Is there any potential for harm in this spell? Always remember the Rede.

Only if the answers to all these questions are satisfactory should you proceed. If in doubt, wrap the spell in an "an it harm none", or refrain entirely.