

## SOME STEPS TOWARDS MAGICAL DISCIPLINE

Think of some activities which you perform every day of your life, with no particular effort. You shower and brush your teeth? Of course. Make coffee and eat a meal? Chat on the telephone to family or friends? Switch on the TV? Write e-mails or surf the Net? Naturally, you say, who could get through the day without doing one or all of these things? They're part of life, built into the daily routine. Here's another question then: what about your magical work? Do you do that every day too? *Every day?* ..... "Oh – er – well, I've been busy lately, just haven't had much time. You know, work, friends, family commitments. Well, I was about to start yesterday, but then the phone rang and I just didn't get round to it. But I'm definitely going to do something tomorrow."

Have you heard something along these lines before? Does it have an uncomfortable ring of familiarity? The member in our imaginary scenario is sincere in his motivation and has a genuine love for magical work, so why the excuses? Why does he find it such a struggle to keep up a regular discipline of daily rituals, and is there a way through this problem? I've been through similar phases myself. I've used every excuse in the book and I could take a degree in displacement activities. I am also, by nature, the laziest person on this side of the Abyss. However, gradually, through painful trial and error and some hard lessons, I have learned a few secrets about building and, most importantly, *maintaining* a firm pattern of consistent daily discipline, which I will gladly share.

I originally trained as a music teacher, and I can perceive certain similarities between magical and musical work. Both are concerned with the manipulation of energy, vibration and emotion, and both require huge amounts of personal effort and steady application. I was fortunate in being able to bring the discipline into my magical work which I'd learnt over the years as a musician, and it could be that some of the insights which I gained will be useful to those who are struggling to keep up their daily rituals.

There is no doubt that firm discipline, preferably formed during the earliest stages of the work, will pay incalculable dividends later on. The establishment of this discipline demands will-power, determination, self-mastery and self-knowledge, all of which are essential attributes for the aspiring magician. The habit of daily practice must become so embedded into the routine that it becomes virtually impossible to neglect

it. The magician, whether beginning or advanced, should make contact with the Light/the Divine force every single day of his or her life.

This is the ideal, and it all sounds very fine. But what about the reality? The reality is that we are human beings, with mood-swings, problems, jobs and families, and we don't always feel spiritual, focused and disciplined. What happens when we just don't feel like doing our daily rituals, when suddenly we realise with a guilty shock that it's actually a week since we performed the LBRP, and we have started avoiding our mentor in the street? Why do many people have such difficulty in keeping up their daily ritual work and, most importantly, what can be done to help them?

The first step towards a well-grounded discipline is to have a thorough awareness of the aims and purposes of the work. Most people find it difficult to be motivated if they have no clear objective, so it is vital for the student to meditate seriously on what s/he personally hopes to achieve through the ritual work. Our goal-oriented society creates particular problems for students on the occult path, who have been educated in the world to expect tangible results for their efforts. The disciplined occult student will surely obtain results if s/he sincerely perseveres – but the main stumbling-block is that the results may not be immediately obvious. This lack of a tangible result can lead frequently to disappointment and loss of motivation in the early stages, if it is not properly understood. Sadly, many beginning students arrive at the following apparently logical conclusion: 1) if I do the daily rituals, I don't seem to get any results 2) if I *don't* do the daily rituals I still get no results but, on the other hand, at least I don't have to make any effort.

At this stage, it is vital to have faith in the process and to trust that, if you persevere diligently, there will be results, although maybe not in an immediately recognisable form. After all, if you plant a seed and water it regularly, you can't see anything happening for some time. So do you just stop watering it? No, of course not; this would be somewhat counter-productive. Instead, you must simply continue to nurture the seed, while trusting that the creative process is unfolding beneath the surface. Magical work is similar in this respect, and it is certainly not only the neophyte who spends prolonged periods groping through apparent darkness. It's during these frustrating, confusingly dry periods that a mentor can be especially valuable: someone who has been through similar problems, and who can help to maintain the student's faith in the work, support them and boost their motivation. The mentor, like the Kerux, can lead and light the way through the darkness until the student can see the path ahead for himself. (I feel, incidentally, that the Swedish

word "handledare", one who leads by the hand, expresses this concept much more satisfactorily than the English word "mentor").

Having sincerely meditated on his/her personal aims and motivation, it is vital for the student magician to form a *clear will and intention* to do the regular work. This may sound obvious, but all too often there is a lack of firmness at the outset which can undermine the work later on. There must be no vagueness here and no room for excuses, unless in the case of severe illness or a family emergency. It can be an excellent plan to make the intention into a formal, personal magical vow, as this will help to guard against weakness during the difficult periods which will inevitably come. It is never too late to do this. An experienced magical colleague, after fighting a battle with inertia for over 10 years, performed a ritual of solemn intent, wrote and signed a vow to his H.G.A. and fixed the document over his altar as a perpetual reminder: today he claims that this one act revolutionised his approach to his daily magical work. Such a vow, perhaps together with a reading of the Neophyte Obligation, could be renewed on the anniversary of one's initiation, in the form of a ritual of rededication.

However, even with firm intentions and a magical vow in place, the way of discipline is never going to be easy, and there are certain techniques which can assist in forming good working habits. If work and family allow, it is advantageous to establish a routine of doing rituals at the *same time* in the *same place* each day. This is the single most effective factor which I have discovered so far. The human body and psyche adapt favourably to an established routine (this can be seen even in very young children), and this natural tendency can be usefully harnessed when attempting a regular discipline of any kind.

If possible, try to select a time which fits the natural cycle of your own personal body-clock. If you are, as I am, a zombie in the mornings, then there is little value in rising for dawn rituals at this stage. It's best to choose a time when you are feeling alert and refreshed, and preferably not immediately before or after a meal (both hunger and repletion can be equally distracting). For the first week or so, try setting an alarm-clock for the chosen time, and stick to it faithfully. If your body or mind object and rebel (and they will), simply ignore their protests and carry on calmly with the work, always remembering the firmness of your original intention. After a week of working regularly in this way, the alarm-clock is rarely necessary – something goes "click" in the brain at the appointed time, and this is a very good sign that the routine is becoming firmly established and internalised.

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As I mentioned earlier: in addition to selecting a regular time, it is helpful to do the work in the same place each day. Of course, not everyone has the luxury of a separate temple room; however, one area, even if it is only a desk or small table, should be set aside as a permanent place for ritual practice, as this will be a powerful aid towards triggering an appropriate state of mind for the work. Wearing robes, using a favourite incense or wearing a particular item of magical jewellery set aside for ritual use will all serve to enhance this "trigger" effect. Later on, it will be quite easy to achieve the correct mood and focus without any "props", but until that happy stage is reached, it makes sense to use whatever works best.

It is better not to be too ambitious regarding the duration of the ritual practice, particularly if discipline has already been a problem. Over-fatigue will act as a serious disincentive to further practice. Quality and regularity are much more important than length: it is more valuable to do a modest, short session on a regular daily basis than to indulge in lengthy ritual extravaganzas at erratic intervals.

As the student advances through the grades, the quantity of required ritual work increases. My own experience is that, if work and family commitments permit, it can be enormously helpful to divide the work into two (or even three) shorter sessions. Again, it is best if regular times can be firmly established. Experience will be the guide as to which kinds of rituals work best at particular times of day. If certain invocations need to be performed at astrologically elected hours, this will of course be a governing factor. Equally, if the student chooses to perform regular solar adorations, such as those in Crowley's *Liber Resh vel Helios*, the times for these will obviously be set astronomically and can be usefully combined with other ritual work.

The keeping of a daily magical diary is an essential tool for the disciplined magician. It should be as ruthlessly honest and objective as is humanly possible, giving precise dates, times and content of ritual practice, together with details such as the phase of the moon and the student's own state of mind. This objective record can be a powerful incentive to regular daily work. Excuses about phone-calls and social visits make no impression on a magical diary: a day without ritual is an uncompromising blank page, and the mere knowledge of this can be sufficient to spur one on to daily activity.

Many people find it quite difficult to work on their own over long periods: therefore another valuable source of inspiration and motivation can be to team up with a fellow-member for regular rituals, preferably one of the same grade who is going through a similar process. This can provide valuable support and feedback, and can

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do much to restore enthusiasm if the work has become a little stale. It is, however, unwise to draw comparisons between one's own progress and that of another member, as each person's magical path is unique and each member develops at his or her own individual pace.

Although the need for constant vigilance and discipline will never disappear completely, the student should find, after steady long-term effort, that the daily practice eventually takes on a momentum of its own, as the heart and soul become increasingly focused on the Higher. The realization that this is happening is one of the greatest rewards of steady and faithful application to the work, and makes sense of the struggle which has gone before. At this stage, it is truly both a duty, a joy and a privilege to perform the daily rituals, and the period set aside for the work becomes the high point and the focus of the entire day. It is then, if we are fortunate, that we may be granted a vision of the true purpose and nature of our work:

*"If we are willing to persevere, to be patient, and to work at self-discipline, to aspire and to invoke often, the Angel will allow us to do all of this. For every step we make in His direction, he will take two"*

(Israel Regardie, The One Year Manual)

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