

## So what the *bleep* is Magic anyway?

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There's probably no other term in the languages of the world that so many understand and so few can define. Everyone, or just about, knows what *magic* feels like, what an example looks like, yet defining it is another matter. Even the OED doesn't help. Partially that is due to the word's use in multiple, and often conflicting ways.

We have magic is illusion; magic is superstition; magic is "primitive" thought; magic is mystery; magic is evil projection; magic is good projection; magic is religion; magic is proto-science; magic is delusion; magic is practical; magic is spiritual; magic is silly; magic is serious; magic is real and of course, we have magic spelt with a "k" (*magick*). *Oy vey!*

Curiously though, we still seem to know, to sense really, precisely what it is. The late, great British magus Aleister Crowley gave a well-known though equally obscuring definition: "Magick is the Science and Art of Causing Change to Occur in Conformity with Will". By "Will", he did not mean volition.

Crowley (Uncle Aleister) introduced Magic as a world view, a discipline with clearly defined philosophical and spiritual components. For him it was a lifestyle, not an occupation or hobby. Above all else he presented magick as a discipline of knowledge acquisition. He spelt it with the "k" to honor (he said) the word's original spelling in English: *magik*. I use the "k" to honor the central role of knowledge in magick, not to parrot Crowley's positions.

Still, that does not define the gut level comprehension most people have for the term magic(k). Permit me to throw in my two cents; *magick* is inarguably the oldest field of knowledge. It *combines the Art of graceful alignment with the Science of attentive integration*. Magick is also the first discipline to recognize the most tragic of all human flaws: being smart enough to be self-aware, yet dense enough to imagine self-awareness makes us separate, special, or even superior.

In the magickal world view all things are interconnected, there is no separation of spirit from matter, and the magickal universe is, to borrow the anthropologist's term, animistic. That means Magick recognizes both the sacred and the profane as interwoven components of existence (*Nature*). Its goal is simple: to navigate those components in balance so that we can learn something of what it means to be alive - not to mention appreciate that we are.

Now that differs from becoming a perpetual scholar or monastery dweller because magick requires us to use what we learn. Going back to its roots, *shamanism*, we can see what the ethics of that use entail: bringing benefit to our communities. It's not about whose wand is fancier, bigger or more expensive. It's about learning to use that wand to connect the spiritual and profane forces in a way that will assist the welfare of the community. (Yes, I'm speaking partially metaphorically)

Magick fosters the recognition of connection between sacred and profane components which permits their rebalancing. Once that connection is made, communication can proceed (between sacred and profane) to allow adjustment, and thus benefit the overall community. Because we're in an

animistic universe, no special go-betweens are needed. Likewise, the health of our hypothetical community cannot be placed above or aside from that of Nature (everything else). Devastating a natural resource for personal or even communal gain makes no sense in the magickal paradigm.

To readjust such vast components demands nimbleness. Thus, you'll see practitioners acting a bit entertainer, a bit scholar, a bit therapist, and a bit spiritual advisor basically from the Agricultural Revolution to the present day. Doing all that naturally requires extensive study and the theoretical treatises for such study (enter the value of Alchemy, Tarot and magickal (thus, heretical) Kabbalah). When practitioners lost their social significance, such studies turned inward where they largely remain to this day. That's why magick appears so secretive, hidden, unknowable and downright arcane to modern societies.

Over the millennia, for multiple reasons, the social functions derived from shamanism declined in Magick. But, the core precepts of balancing sacred and profane did not. The focus just shifted from the larger community to the individual. Magick went from a tool of social healing, to a tool for doctoring the individual practitioner. It also went underground, in a major way. That is beginning to turn around in this century, and I hope it does.

So what about spell casting, the trademark activity of magick? Well, I suppose we can thank the Inquisition, but even nowadays in shamanic societies spells and spell casting are referred to as *prayers*, unless their intent is malicious. Allow me to cut through the nonsense. Prayers and spells are the same thing and always have been. Both do the same thing: they connect you with the sacred in order to rebalance the profane. Your intent is your own responsibility, and has nothing to do with the structure employed to accomplish it. The structure is identical. Though, that's not the point.

Here's the point. Magick can be divided into two camps: those who believe we can command the forces of nature, and those who believe we can dance with them. Personally, I'm of the latter school. Magick is about connection, it's about shape-shifting into balance with Nature – going with the flow and miraculously discovering one day that the flow is going with you. That's magick, and that's real spell-casting.

According to that school of magickal thought, magick is not a tool to control the forces of Nature. Magick is a tool to seduce them, and it works. It works both ways; when was the last time a sunset seduced you? That's Magick too; the sunset was the practitioner. Have fun!