

# As Above So Below

By Barry Albin

From the earliest of times, mankind has believed in a spiritual realm that is separate from, but in some way connected to, this world. They have believed that innumerable spiritual entities live in that world that are more powerful than mankind and are willing to either help or hurt our activities here in the physical plane. The problem was how to get these entities to help us. From this problem arises two classes of knowledge: magic and religion. Both of these branches make use of a principle that was noted by Sir James George Frazer in his famous treatise, *The Golden Bough*. It is that principle called sympathetic magic that we will explore in this paper especially looking at the nature of ritual in relation to sympathetic magic.

Sympathetic magic can be denominated into two basic types: the Law of Similarity which says that like produces like, or that an effect resembles its cause; and the Law of Contagion which says that things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed.<sup>i</sup> From the first of these principles, the faithful believes that he can produce any effect he desires merely by imitating it and from the second he infers that whatever he does to a material object will affect equally the person with whom the object was once in contact, whether it formed part of his body or not.<sup>ii</sup> Although the study of contagious magic is interesting and forms the basis of much that we hold dear and true in the religious realm, it is not the subject of our discussion. It is the Law of Similarity that we are going to explore.

The problem in practical magic is to convince the spiritual world to do something on the physical plain at our behest and not at the natural times that such an act would be done. The most obvious example is making it rain. From the earliest of times, there have been a special class of workers whose duty it was to cause the spiritual world to bend to our will so that we would have things that were needed. These workers were the first specialized workers to appear among society. They were in constant fear that their lives

would be eliminated for failure to achieve the ends of their profession. They believed that if they acted in an imitative way on earth that it would influence the rain god or the rain Archangel or something in the spiritual realm to provide them with rain. This principle is, of course, a religious principle and underlies all attempts at prayer for rain which most of my readership has participated in. The specialized personnel we shall call the priest.

The earliest primitive was no doubt experiencing a drought and prayed to the unseen spirits to provide him with rain. It rained. The tribe noticed that his prayer had been answered and they asked him to pray the next time they had drought. It did not rain. So in order to maintain his exalted place in the tribe, which he gained from previous success in prayer, he decided to do a sacred dance. He took a hide and filled it with water. He brought it to the campfire and had another hold one end of the hide and he the other. He then had a third person beat a drum and the two holding the hide sprinkled the hide on the fire thus putting the fire out. It rained. The tribe attached by similarity the act of shaking the water over the fire with the rain that came. The next time that there was a drought the tribe called on the same man who had previous success with making rain to ask the spirits for rain again. This time he tried to remember what he had done before. He added to it though. He got three people. One to play the drum, two to shake the hide, and a third to act as if he were dancing in the rain. He then prayed to the spirits while this play was going on. It rained again. The tribe believed that there erstwhile priest was capable of getting the spirits to produce rain. The tribe was attacked by another tribe, was defeated and taken into captivity. Drought came. The slaves told their masters that our rainmaker could solve the problem. Rain came again. The principle spread. Thus the ritual of rainmaking is born.

These men were not frauds. They would not have been chosen to their specialized area of work had something not happened and happened regularly enough to make believers out of the tribe. These specialized workers were expected to acquaint themselves with everything that could aid man in his arduous struggle with nature. He was to delve into the properties of drugs and minerals, the causes of rain and drought, of thunder and lightning, the changes of the seasons, the phases of the moon, the daily and

yearly journeys of the sun, the motions of the stars, the mystery of life, and the mystery of death.<sup>iii</sup> In beginning to study nature, these workers became philosophers and scientists of a primitive sort. For them the sacred acts were real, but they began to deduce patterns from their studies and began to see laws that applied to their sacred science.

The Hindus and Buddhists talk of union with G-d. They do it to form a mystical bond with G-d that allows them to find inner perfection. But, the worker in the occult area seeks union with G-d for another reason. He wants to be able to control nature and bend it to his will. He needs union not for personal reasons of inner growth although most practitioners of high magic seek inner growth, but rather he needs that connection for professional reasons of being a public functionary. If he finds union then his ritual will be more likely to be harmonized with the desires of the unseen world and thus he will get what he prays for. As a result of his professional need to find union with the spiritual world, the worker in magic uses certain aids to gain the union quickly and without personal investment. The common methods of obtaining the quick “magical” union is with drugs, with incense and meditation which allows a hypnotic entrance into this altered state, or by actions such as sex or dance or physical pain. What is called union with G-d may or may not be actual union with a divinity, but it is an altered state of consciousness.

The trance is an altered state of consciousness which occurs when a person is hypnotized into extreme concentration that separates him or her from the surroundings he is in and causes him to participate fully in some action of thought or body. When done by a person involved in ritualized actions, this altered state of consciousness may well cause the person to be receptive to communication from the spiritual world or to become a vessel for possession by a spiritual entity. The trance state is often not even noticed for those participating in it. Churches use incense, song, lighting, and setting as methods of inducing a hypnotic trance as a result of long-ingrained suggestions that the person associates with ‘holy’ activities. A trance state makes the participant in a ritual act not only as an observer, but an actor in the ritual. As the usual reason for obtaining this

trance-state is to make a ritual work, becoming part and parcel of the ritual act is normal in ritual events.

Ritual then develops as more than just words. It is the set of words, settings, music, and smells that are associated together to put a participant into an altered state necessary for some act to occur. The magician does not doubt that the same causes, the ritual, will always produce the same effect, the desired end. But to accomplish the task, the causes must be exactly done as before. The magician is strictly limited by the laws of nature and of magic and to neglect these rules is to incur failure. The ritual insures success for the ritual remains constant and produces a constant effect.<sup>iv</sup>

The delicate line between what is called religion, magic, and science is then so insubstantial as to be impossible to define. But religion resorts to philosophy and logic to define the spiritual laws that the magician encounters. Religion mythologizes those laws and gives them moral content. What was once just a reflection on cause and effect, now becomes a commentary on the nature of man's relationship with the unseen world. That commentary was seen by the Hermeticists as a law that is the subject of this paper: as above, so below. Simply stated that law says that actions on the spiritual plane can and do have an effect on the physical plane; likewise, actions on a physical plane can and do have an effect on the spiritual plane. Science on the other hand refuses to believe in anything that it cannot replicate on demand. As the conditions for magic to work are so delicate that any one of a number of minor changes can cause the ritual not to work, magic is not easily replicable. It really is governed by a principle in science called the indeterminacy principle, because our very looking at a magical ritual changes it and can taint it.

The Zohar is a great attempt by religion to explain the laws of magic. It proposes explanations for events described in Torah that can be explained by principles of magic. A good example is found in the following passage:

“For it is a dictum of our teachers that corresponding to the impulses of man

here are the influences which he attracts to himself from above. Should his impulse be towards holiness, he attracts to himself holiness from on high and so he becomes holy; but if his tendency is towards the side of impurity, he draws down towards himself the unclean spirit and so becomes polluted. For this reason, in order to draw towards himself the unclean spirit from that supernal serpent, the wicked Balaam besmirched himself nightly by bestial intercourse with his ass, and he would then proceed to his divinations and sorceries.”<sup>v</sup>

In this passage, we see that the actions on earth, the intercourse with the ass, caused actions in heaven. While the Zohar certainly covers a vast array of numerology, legend and commentary on scripture, its explanations often make recourse to the principle of “as above, so below.”

Masonic ritual is in many ways based upon the principles of “as above, so below” and the dictum cited above. First, we are told in this passage of Zohar following directly after the cited passage:

“To begin with he would take one of the familiar serpents, tie it up, break its head, and extract its tongue. Then he would take certain herbs, and burn them as incense. He would then take the head of the serpent, split it into four sections, and offer it up as a second offering. Finally, he traced a circle round himself, mumbled some words, and made some gestures, until he became possessed of the unclean spirits...”<sup>vi</sup>

In Masonic ritual, we begin the meeting with a walk around the work lines of the lodge. This creates a protected inner space in which to work our spiritual acts. We have the junior deacon declare to the outer world that our lodge is at work and tiled so that no evil thing can enter. We go through a process of making sure that evil things are excluded by demanding a password from all present. Then we establish the earthly and heavenly authorities in the lodge.

The first acts of the Junior and Senior Deacon occur to build a magic circle, the circle of the passage above quoted. Building wards is the oldest know form of religious and magical act and its purpose is protection. By walking the boundaries of our working

area, we say on earth and declare in heaven that no spiritual being not called for can enter. It is an act of protection. Call it what you will, it is magic.

“Like most of the fundamentals of lodge technique, opening and closing rituals are handled in much the same way in different lodge systems, magical or not. The formula or basic framework, the order of events, and even many of the details are all part of the standard toolkit of lodge technique. The variations that do occur are mostly a matter of the particular symbolism being used by a given lodge, or – especially in the case of modern fraternal lodges – sheer lack of understanding of what it is that the rituals are supposed to do in the first place.”

“A fraternal lodge opening is meant to create constructive but relatively ordinary states such as feelings of fellowship and an orientation toward the lodge’s ideals.”<sup>vii</sup> By creating in a Masonic lodge this protected consciousness of fraternity and fellowship, we open ourselves to the sweet and comforting influences of the day set aside for a higher work, the work of growing in love for each other and the Grand Architect. In short, our lodge meetings when conducted in the correct state of consciousness is a method of contacting the Divine. Thus like the description in the Zohar our lodge meetings are meant to be a method to draw down the holiness of heaven upon us for after all, we are a religious brotherhood.

Some will immediately ask about the origin of the words of our rituals. There is no question that the words of the ritual have varied over the years, and yet, a reflection on the words used from the earliest times indicate a uniformity of purpose. The words of opening and closing of a lodge center on setting boundaries that exclude those who are not members of the particular brotherhood and lodge to meeting at that place and time. In so doing, we often think that the words are directed at cowans and eavesdroppers and yet we have a tyler posted at the door to guard against these imposters. We may think that the words are directed against persons seeking to improperly attend our meetings, because they are profane and yet due diligence is made before the meeting to ascertain whether a visitor is a member of the brotherhood or not. Obviously, the words said at the opening

and closing do not have the desired effect if they are aimed only at the physical visitors to our lodge. We are told from the beginning of our membership in the Lodge that we can not walk between the altar and the Master when the Lesser Lights are on. We are told that the reason is that the Light Descending from Heaven to the Great Lights is then communicated to the Master so that he can properly govern the Lodge. Thus we admit that we seek to admit beings from another realm into our lodge and those not properly clad with the raiment of brotherhood are excluded. The words used in the opening exclude those from another realm who are not properly present and we can assure ourselves that the Grand Senior and Junior Deacon of the Grand Lodge Above are tiling our lodges to keep those out from their realm who are not properly present.

The words of initiation are a formula to bring a candidate along a spiritual path toward the goal of beginning his change into a spiritual man. In the past, we let that initiatory period extend for years and the man was truly changed. Now it is merely a sham of the past, but again and again the results occur with those truly prepared in their hearts to accept the message. The words of initiation may vary some in each lodge and jurisdiction, but their import does not change and the effect is the same.

The words of installation are even more clearly directed toward an acceptance of the reality of spiritual presence and the participation of a Grand Lodge Above. When the Grand Installing Senior Deacon makes the declaration to the four winds, he does it not for the sake of the gathered guests, but for the sake of the spiritual world that will now accept this Master or Grand Master as the vessel consecrated by his brethren to have contact with the spiritual realm. He is the anointed priest or High Priest of this spiritual path.

The rituals of the Masonic funeral service clearly refer to the accepting of this brother into the spiritual realm. It presupposes that the spiritual world is listening and the brother is clad as a Master Mason so that his acceptance into that Grand Lodge Above will be guaranteed.

The words then are formulae that not only are used to put us into the trance necessary to cause the spiritual event, that is, the brotherhood flowing and the Light Descending, but also to guard us during that trance from other entities which would like to influence us during our spiritual work. These are the signs and symbols of our Craft that influence our minds. They are the incense we offer up. They are the acts of our play.

From the earliest of times, some were gifted with the ability to speak to the spiritual realm effectively. There was no moral value to that ability. A person could use it for any purpose he chose, either good or bad. In the Lodge, some were recognized as having the gift and they were chosen to call upon the GAOTU as lodge officers. The ancient lodges could accomplish much in this way. But as time went by, the membership lost the concept of the gifted who led them as their secular priests and anyone might be invited or allowed to join our brotherhood. The ritual still works. It works less often than we might wish, but some lodges develop reservoir of the lodges good works, aspirations and history which can be used to invoke the spiritual presence in times of solemnity. The key to any working therefore is intention and the solemnity and awe that should accompany the Great Work in a tyled lodge. It does not matter what words are use so long as the purpose of those words evokes in the minds of those present the same thing in each lodge that works.

One of the things that is of much concern to the longtime practitioner of the Masonic art or any ritual craft is the changing of the words of ritual. They worry that things will not be right. What is it that they fear? Some will say it is change, but I would suggest that it is not the change per se that they fear. Some place within each of us there is a trigger that certain ritual acts in lodge fire. They cause us to feel that trance state, that attentive state, that causes us to experience the brotherhood and the holiness of our endeavor. When we change the words, the trigger is not fired. In order to get the trigger to fire again for the less spiritually attuned, one must cause the new ritual to be experienced again by those brothers. Once they can find the experience necessary to reset the trigger, they will have no problem with the new words. I believe that visitation in foreign jurisdictions is the best way to reset the trigger and in fact to make it a hair-

trigger so that any equivalent wording will fire the trigger and the trance will put the brother in the state to receive the spiritual blessing that should occur in a lodge meeting.

In conclusion, our lodges ethos is dependent upon the sympathetic magical law of “as above so below”. When we pay homage to that law, great things happen. The brethren go into a trance state that allows the spiritual benefits of feelings of brotherhood and well being to permeate the lodge meeting. The new initiates get something very important out of their initiation and are changed people. The brothers are dispatched to the Grand Lodge Above with full fraternal honors and are guaranteed acceptance before the Grand Master’s Chair. The Masters and Grand Masters can function in their fraternal role of priestly intercessors and receive the divine communications of the Light Descending. Everything that we do in the lodge is dependent upon our acceptance of the principle. Just the mentioning of the principle – as above so below – changes our perspective on the world around us and we are more caring, loving, and believing people.

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<sup>i</sup> The Golden Bough, Frazer, Sir James George, Macmillan Paperbacks, New York, 1963, pg. 12.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid, pg. 12.

<sup>iii</sup> The Golden Bough, pg. 71

<sup>iv</sup> The Golden Bough, pg. 56.

<sup>v</sup> Haye Sarah, 125 b-126a, The Zohar, translated by Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon, The Soncino Press, 1984.

<sup>vi</sup> Ibid, 126a.

<sup>vii</sup> Inside a Magical Lodge, John Michael Greer, Llewellyn Publications, 1998, pg. 159-60.