

The Witch's Toolbox:  
**Guiding Trance**

by Gwyneth Cathyl-Harrow and Judy Harrow

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## **Preface**

You are a Priestess (or Priest) of our Religion. The power of the holy Gods was passed to you in love and trust, along with the responsibility to use it well. So you have sought, and will seek throughout your active life, to grow in understanding and in skill, the better to serve the Gods, the people, and the Earth.

Learning neither begins nor ends with Initiation. Our Craft, like our world, is changing constantly, so most of us understand the need for life-long learning. In this book, and in our workshops, we hope to engage your interest and to share some new approaches to time-honored Craft practices. This discussion of trancework will involve some complex psychological and theological issues. Please remember as you work your way through it that all our growing heritage of tools and techniques are just means to an end: conscious contact with the living Gods of Nature. So please take what works for you and yours and leave the rest.

## **Caution to the Reader**

We offer a preliminary caution to you: many Witches have learned, through bitter experience, that trancework can be misused as an easy escape from perplexity, a way to evade or displace responsibility. Please understand this: although trance opens a very important source of information for us, we still need to balance this with information from more ordinary sources, choose our own responses and actions, and live with the outcomes of those choices.

## **How this book came to be**

This book started out as a set of workshop notes for a seminar on masks and trancework, based on theatrical improvisation games. The book then grew into a notebook for a Leadership Institute workshop that we did in 1995 for Covenant of the Goddess. We've given that workshop several times since, and have continued to revise the book for use by Witches of several different Traditions.

This time, we shall view the same processes from a different perspective: that of the person who guides and anchors the trance, rather than that of the trancer.

These notes, and their accompanying workshop exercises, are intended for coven leaders and for people who are in training to become coven leaders in the near future, in all Wiccan Traditions. We have, therefore, striven to avoid revealing Tradition-specific lore. *Nonetheless: information contained herein is subject to the provisions of your Oaths.*

## **Caveats and Disclaimers**

As a Priest/ess, you are responsible for the well-being of the people that you are working with, as well as your own. Please share and use what you learn, from reading this book, with discretion, wisdom and care, for the benefit of the People, the Earth and the Gods. May these words and the manner of their sharing bring good to many and harm to none.

As usual with us, this is a work in progress. We hope to receive advice, corrections, inspirations, great ideas, criticisms and manifestos concerning this book from our brothers and sisters in the Craft. Please let us know what you think should be different in the next version.

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### **What is Trance?**

*"...Our normal waking consciousness ... is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence; but apply the requisite stimulus, and at a touch, they are all there in all their completeness, definite types of mentality which probably somewhere have their field of application and adaptation. No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded. How to regard them is the question – for they are so discontinuous with ordinary consciousness. Yet they may determine attitudes though they cannot furnish formulas, and open a region though they fail to give a map. At any rate, they forbid a premature closing of our accounts with reality. ..."[1]*

William James wrote these words in 1902. Few of us go through life anymore without suspecting the existence of other states of consciousness. Ever since at least 1969, when psychologist Charles Tart

published his anthology, *Altered States of Consciousness*, academics and practitioners have been systematically exploring "the applications and adaptations" of these different types of mentality. Today, a wealth of scholarly information is available to the working Witch, to complement our various Traditions' inheritance (and, perhaps, to fill in the gaps caused by the centuries-long suppression of our ways).

Altered states of consciousness include dreams, daydreams, drug-induced states, and more, basically any form of consciousness that is qualitatively different from the ordinary. The word "trance" has come to refer to a particular cluster of altered states. Trances are waking states that are naturally induced (i.e. drugless). What trance states have in common is a heightening of focus and concentration. "Normal" consciousness, by contrast, is often distracted, diffuse and "noisy." So a person in trance can see more, hear more, feel more, remember more, relax more – and return to ordinary reality with new understanding and motivation to accomplish more.

Trance is neither rare nor bizarre. Rather, it's a near-universal experience: "It can be heard in the descriptions of athletes and other artists who describe processes of letting go and getting in the 'flow.' It can be felt by those who become deeply absorbed in the sound of music or the rhythm of a dance. It can be seen in the person so immersed in reading a book, or the child so glued to the television set, that they heed not our calls. It can be observed in the daydreaming student, the deeply depressed client, the reminiscing old person." [2]

### **Types of Trances**

There are several different types of trances; we can simplify our discussion by grouping them into three broad types: internally oriented, externally oriented, and defocused trance states.

Most trance states are internally oriented. Example: As you focus your attention on your breathing – the rise and fall, inhaling and exhaling, the rhythm, the tempo, the depth, the actual location in your chest, or your diaphragm – you may begin to notice that you are more and more aware and more and more connected to your breathing, and more and more connected to being alive.

There are also externally oriented trance-states – pure attention states, in which one can see, hear, feel, smell and/or taste without distraction. When we watch movies, for example, we often become absorbed in the world of the movie – that reality. We feel its emotions, and even seem to be a bit disoriented when the movie ends. The same goes for the novels and stories we read, and certainly the episodes of romance and tragedy in which we are the show. We can learn to bring that same focus to any work at hand.

And there are defocused or oceanic trance states, characterized by a greater openness and availability to any and all experience. These states are sometimes described as "soft-eyed" trances, in contrast to the more focused states. The most familiar forms of meditation - called "awareness meditation" - aim at achieving this state of open receptivity.

Obviously, different types of trance are suitable for different purposes. But most folks don't realize that it's possible to control one's state of consciousness. Without this awareness, there is no real choice or control.

As Witches, we are magic users. One of the classic definitions of magic is "the art of changing consciousness in accordance with will. An integral part of our magic, then, is that we enter trance *by choice*, and use trance to consciously explore our own inner worlds, and, through them, the Otherworld. To this end, we develop fluency in entering trance states, working within them, and returning fully and safely to ordinary waking consciousness. Next, we learn to guide others in trance. As elder Witches, we learn to develop new techniques and to teach these skills to others, so that the knowledge base of our Traditions may both survive and thrive.

### **Hypnosis is not the same thing as trance**

Trance is a goal, a particular series of related states of consciousness; hypnosis is a method, just one of many methods for achieving trance states. Learning the techniques of hypnosis is a way of developing more choice and more trance-control. Hypnosis is a useful tool, particularly for those of us who are just starting out in trancework, but we must remain careful to not confuse the tool with the work being done.

*“Hypnosis is a social interaction in which one person responds to suggestions offered by another person, for alterations in perception, memory and voluntary action...”* [3]

Hypnosis uses the spoken word, and the voice itself, as a means of trance induction. One useful way to understand hypnosis is as a way of transmitting a message in a relatively noise-free environment – free of internal chatter and clatter. It has the major advantages of being very easily teachable, useable and not dependent on any equipment, such as drums, which can be expensive to acquire and difficult to transport.

Clinical hypnosis is also a method for changing trances, altering consciousness from other altered states, and particularly from dysfunctional or symptomatic trances – versions of reality (or maps of the world) that mislead and disempower us. An important part of any growth Path is to awaken from culturally imposed consensus trance, and to discover and use internal resource states. This is, of course, just different terminology for what Witches have known all along: that we must find what we seek within ourselves. It's just that a guide can make it easier, particularly when we are stuck or lost.

Some Witches may feel that hypnosis – particularly the use of post-hypnotic suggestion – is coercive, and so they avoid its use. In our opinion, hypnosis is neither more nor less coercive than any method in which another person facilitates the trance. A post-hypnotic suggestion implanted with prior permission is clearly not coercive – think of all the people who ask secular hypnotists to help them overcome their shyness or stop smoking or change their eating habits. Coercive means imposed without consent; whatever is consensual cannot be coercive.

What it comes down to yet again is the relationship between working Witches, which in Tradition and in reality should be one of love and trust.

## Uses of Trance

Witches Draw the Moon (or Sun), and a great deal of our coven training is directed towards that goal. But that takes a while, typically three or more years. Remember, most of us were formed by a culture that still ignores and discounts insights gained through altered states, and so gives its young no practice with them.

It helps to remember that what may seem like mere "precursory" stages are both beneficial and pleasurable on their own terms. A student who never Draws the Moon has still not wasted her time. Here's some of what the progression looks like:

### Basic fluency in trance states

This is the first step. These "warm-up exercises" build the skills of relaxation, imagination and focus. As simple stress-busters, these can be literally life-saving. The ability to focus can be useful for any creative work. It also allows us to enter more fully into any form of sensual pleasure. Here are some exercises that we use with pre-Initiates:

- group stretch and shake out.
- deep breathing - ask people to breath slowly and deeply, gradually slow the pace.
- progressive deep muscle relaxation - ask people to clench major muscle groups, hold for about 10 seconds, then very suddenly relax them. Be sure to include area of shoulders and back of neck and - most important - the face. (These are the "Jacobsen exercises". For a more detailed description, see Appendix A.)
- an abridged and modified version of first part of Masters and Houston's book [4], *Mind Games*, as follows:

*"Are you sitting comfortably? Make yourself very comfortable now, relaxing just as fully as you can, and now listen closely and discover that you can now relax still more.*

*Relax your body a bit at a time, beginning with the toes, and just let them go very limp and relaxed. Then the rest of the foot, and the ankle, feeling the ankle going limp and relaxed, and that relaxation moving up through your body, to the calves, and the knees, and on up to the thighs, and just going very, very limp in your body as I describe the progression of this deep relaxation to you.*

*And now on up into the pelvic area, relaxing, relaxing, more and more relaxed. And the abdomen now, and on up to the chest, going loose and limp all over. The fingers, the wrists, the forearms, the elbows, upper arms, the shoulders going loose and limp all over now. Feel the relaxation, all strain or tension slipping out and away from your whole body. So that the neck feels so loose and limp now, and the jaw, the lips, the cheeks, and the eyes, right on up to the forehead, and over the entire head.*

*Your whole body relaxing now, and relaxing even more and more, so that you are just as limp and relaxed as a beanbag doll appears to be, and you really are that relaxed, as you listen now to what I have to say to you, and you will want to listen extremely closely, very,*

*very closely please, as you are listening just to me, becoming aware just of what is said to you, and of your response to what is being said to you.*

*And for a little while now, with closed eyes, remaining relaxed, breathing slowly and deeply, focus your awareness on that breathing, as you breath in now, and then breathing out ... in and out ... in and out ... (pause)*

*Let yourself feel this state of relaxation and deep comfort, all of your body at ease, and know that you can return to this state, as often as you please, by simply working with your breath and your muscles as you have just done. (pause)*

*In a moment I am going to play some music for you, some very sensuous music, but first you should know that it is possible for you to hear music very differently from any way you probably ever have heard it before.*

*It is possible, and this is what you will do, to hear music over the entire surface of your body, not hearing just with your ears. And over the entire surface of your body, know that there are countless end-organs that can be stimulated by the music, so that your entire body will hear, and that your body also is able to experience this music as touch sensations, music touching you everywhere.*

*Now, when I play this music for you, you are going to make use of this capacity of your skin to hear the music with your whole body, and to be touched by the music, all of your flesh caressed and excited by this music.*

*It will be an extremely pleasurable experience, the music swirling around you, passing in and out of your body, as your sensitivity increases, as you become more and more sensitive, more and more responsive to the music, until you are experiencing the music rapturously, exquisitely with all of your body, your flesh, your skin, your muscles, all of you totally involved in this awareness of the music. And I will play it for you Now!*

*(play music, then pause)*

*And now, I will play some more music for you, and this time all of your senses will participate in the music.*

*You will see the music, taste the music, smell the music, as well as hearing the music and being touched by the music.*

*A total and intense sensory involvement, as I am going to play for you now a different kind of music. And all of your senses will make individual responses, but, then, your senses will make an integrated, orchestrated response, each sense reinforcing every other sense, all of these responses coming together in a many faceted experience of pleasure.*

*And I will play the music for you Now!*

*(play music, then pause)*

*Please know that you can always listen to music in this way, with great, great pleasure. And you can taste food in this way, look at a flower in this way. You can enjoy the intense and many-formed beauty of Mother Earth, at any time, on your own or with a group. You can*

worship Her by the offering of your appreciation. And this act of loving contemplation is also very good for you. You can do it as often as you like.

Now, feel yourself being extremely relaxed now, as though you were in a hot bathtub, all of your body relaxing, relaxing more and more, and beginning to feel heavier. Your body becoming heavier and heavier, very, very heavy now, so heavy you couldn't possibly move it around, a pleasant, lazy heaviness, just totally relaxed, .

And now that heaviness will begin to leave you, slowly at first, and then more quickly, as your body is becoming lighter, and lighter, until your normal weight has been reached, and then continuing to become even lighter, lighter and lighter, feeling light as thistledown. And all of the weight going out of your body, until you are almost weightless, almost entirely weightless now, so that you could possibly float upon the air. And you may feel yourself to be rising just a little, levitating, floating just a little off the substance beneath you, and then settling gently back down once again.

Slowly, pleurably now, discovering that your normal weight is returning, and it is very pleasant to become aware of your own flesh and the fullness of your body once again. And be very aware of your body now, and observe to your surprise that you are growing smaller.

Smaller and smaller, you just keep growing smaller, down to four feet tall, and three feet, and down to two feet, and one foot, and growing even smaller, very, very tiny, right on down to about six inches, and you're now just six inches tall.

Feel that, experience it, how it is to be just six inches tall. What can you learn from being tiny? What can you fit into? What can you explore? (pause)

And now, you are starting to grow in the opposite direction, getting bigger once again, on up to one foot, two feet, three feet, and four feet, and growing still more quickly, on up to your normal size, and past that, keeping right on growing and growing. On up to seven feet, and eight feet, and feeling at the same time a giant's strength, and energies, feeling very, very big and strong, and enjoying that feeling. What is it like for you to be that large, that powerful? What can you learn? (pause) And then, slowly, easily, returning to your normal size and normal body awarenesses once again.

Now, notice your body again as it becomes very dense, and your substance as it is changing, and you are feeling at first as if you are made of rock, very solid, very strong. You have been here for thousands of years, steady and unperturbed, thinking your long, slow thoughts. What is the wisdom of the rock? (pause)

Now you are metal, ... and now wood, and the wood becoming supple, feeling all of this quickly now, body very supple, like that of a young, energetic tree, full of sap, full of vital juices, able to bend and sway with the breezes, as you now do bend and sway with the breezes, all your leaves rustling. The sun warms you, the rain nurtures you, you dance your intricate dance in every breeze. How does it feel to be a dancing leaf?



*And you perceive your body as more and more porous, so that the wind could just blow right through you, and now the wind is coming, a gentle breeze, and it does just pass right through you, a wonderful feeling of lightness, feeling of openness, of freedom, and now you are the wind, no longer anchored, moving, moving. ...*

*Now you are a wafting breeze, blowing free, skimming freely along, rustling the leaves of the trees, stirring grasses, going through the woods, rising over the hills, blowing in a gentle caress over plains and waters and bodies of animals and people, a hot wind passing over desert regions, a cool wind whispering to dreamers on an island.*

*And you feel yourself now, as wind, whirling, whirling, slow and fast (pause), blowing back to your starting point.*

*And you take a shape again, you settle back into a body, and now you feel that your body is changing, changing into the body of a cat, and you will feel a great contentment, and a sensuousness that is being satisfied as you feel yourself being stroked and rubbed, and feel yourself very completely into that lithe, agile cat's body, feel the purring contentment, the sensuousness, the stretching, and enjoy all of this for a little while. (pause)*

*And now, easily, slowly, feel yourself ceasing to have the body of a cat, ceasing to be a cat, and becoming human once again, coming back into your own body, (pause) becoming yourself once again, your body, and your identity restored.*

*But remember, remember what you have experienced, and know that you can feel all these things, and that your body may feel itself to be of any size, of any shape, any substance, and that when you wish to you will be able to experience your body in just about any way at all and to learn what that form can teach you. (pause)*

### **Self-management and/or self improvement**

This is the second step. People may want to use trance to help mobilize inner resources toward some practical goal, such as stopping smoking, improving their athletic or musical performance, preparing for childbirth, or even stimulating their immune systems.

Straightforward post-hypnotic suggestion works for this. Therapeutic metaphor can work even better. Remember that when people become engrossed in a story, a book or a movie, this is a form of trance. Stories told to people who are already in trance, relaxed, attentive and receptive, are even more effective. If the story points out inner resources, or suggests new possibilities, it may effect a deeper transformation than simple suggestion could. So, for example, if you are working with someone who is tense and stressed out, tell them about a day spent beside a mountain stream, in the cool, green woods.[5]

Remember this: the goals must be those of the person in trance, chosen before the trance was induced. To implant any sort of post-hypnotic suggestion without prior consent is coercive and unethical.

### **Self-exploration**

This is the third step. It consists of encounters with power animals, spirit guides, ancestors, guardian angels, etc. These figures, which represent power and wisdom of many kinds, may engage people in dialogue, offer them advice or gifts, take them on adventures within the Otherworld. Leave silent pauses in your facilitation to allow the trancer's active imagination space to work in. The change wrought in the person will be deeper and more pervasive, but less obviously noticeable – insight rather than specific behavioral change. Encourage people to keep journals of their trance experience and whatever else seems related to their inner growth.

### **Cultural or sub-cultural exploration**

This is the fourth step. In pathworking, which is guided meditation within a Pagan religious context, we witness and experience the myths, the great teaching stories that convey the core values and characteristic energies of our religion.[6] We gain a deeper understanding of our shared religious symbols and their interactions. By sharing these inner experiences, we also build and reinforce a deep, strong bond with each other.

Like dream narratives, these stories are always told in the present tense: you see, you hear, you do. Depending on the vividness of the experience, the person may participate in the action or merely witness it, but they never just hear about it.

You could read the same material in a book or even simply discuss these topics without the preliminaries of a hypnotic induction or the indirect approach of metaphor. But then it might well remain a sterile intellectual exercise, and you'd wind up "knowing about" instead of *knowing* in a deep and holistic way. As much as we value the learning of the mind, we know it is incomplete unless the heart learns as well.

The trance induction, and the hyper-attentive state that it creates, transforms the story from words to imaginative experience. Those who listen in trance enter the story, seeing, hearing, feeling the tactile or kinetic sensations – and also sharing the emotional responses. By the vividness of this experience, the message inherent in the story is planted deeply, to root in our deep minds, to connect us to each other and to our Gods.

### **Accessing Sacred Wisdom**

This is the fifth step. A light, receptive trance of the defocused or "oceanic" variety is helpful for many forms of magic, including touch healing and divination. This is very similar to the state reached in awareness meditation. Those who want to practice healing or divination independently would do well to meditate regularly or otherwise learn how to reach this receptive level smoothly on their own.

### **Drawing the Moon or Sun**

This is the sixth step. Some Witches call it "aspecting" or "Deity assumption." In our workshops, we most often use the gender-neutral term "Carrying." When we Carry Deity, we temporarily and consensually set aside our own personalities to allow the Gods to speak and otherwise interact through our bodies.

## Further readings

### Pearce, Stephen S.

1996: *Flash of Insight: Metaphor and Narrative in Therapy*; Allyn and Bacon, Boston.

### Tart, C.T., ed.

1990: *Altered States of Consciousness* 3rd edition; Harper Collins, New York

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[1] James, William, 1961: *The Varieties of Religious Experience*; NY: Macmillan 1961, page 305; a reprint of the 1902 edition.

[2] Gilligan, Stephen G., 1987: *Therapeutic Trances: The Cooperation Principle in Ericksonian Hypnotherapy*; NY: Brunner/Mazel; page 42.

[3] Kihlstrom, 1985: *Hypnosis*, page 385.

[4] Masters, Robert and Jean Houston, 1993: *Mind Games: The Guide to Inner Space*; NY: Barnes & Noble, pp. 8-18 (excerpted and modified). Note: the original publication date of *Mind Games* was 1972.

[5] see Pearce, Stephen S., 1996: *Flash of Insight: Metaphor and Narrative in Therapy*; Boston: Allyn & Bacon; for a collection of stories to help with various problems.

[6] Ashcroft-Nowicki, 1987: *Highways of the mind: the art and history of pathworking*.

## CHAPTER 1- GENERAL GUIDELINES

### Set and setting

Think about Christian Pentecostals, members of a religious movement growing even faster than our own, who most certainly experience ecstasy in their worship.

They also raise considerable amounts of power and use that power effectively for healings and the like.[1]

From these experiences, quite similar to our own, they receive messages as different from ours as can be. They believe that

Deity directs them to personal lifestyles of xenophobic austerity, and that all who hear different messages are dealing with demons, not Deity, and are therefore damned.

How come we hear such different things from the Spirit? Perhaps part of the answer lies in the concept of "Set and Setting." Set means whatever mental attitudes or expectations you bring with you as you enter an altered state, for example, an attitude of reverent attention to what the Goddess may say when the Priestess Draws the Moon. Setting refers to environmental cues, which you may have created for yourself in advance: incense, candlelight, drumbeats. Set is internal, setting external, but both influence which particular Gods, if any, will come to us. You might think of them as filters that we place on the message

As members of a reconstructing religion, we have choices about those filters, about Set and Setting, that may not be as available to indigenous Pagans. We also have access to a far greater range of choices, information from Pagan cultures throughout history and all around the world, that could never have been available to tribal and village people before this century. This freedom of choice makes us responsible for the choices we make, for how these choices effect our religious experience.

We share with our Pentecostal neighbors the general expectation – the Set – that worship should be ecstatic, that the Sacred does still communicate with humans, that what we do in our rituals can affect the material world. We have far, far more in common with each other than either of us do with atheists. Beyond that, based on their very different mythos and theology, our Pentecostal neighbors hear what the Deity says through a very different set of filters than ours. It's as though we were all using the same telephone system, but we ordered out Chinese food while our neighbor ordered pizza.

The sacred stories we tell ourselves, the images that we look at, the state-altering techniques that we use are all part of Set and Setting. The word religion derives from the Latin word *religio*, meaning "re-connection," a bringing together of our most deeply held values and our daily lives. It works best when the stories, the symbols, the practices we use are all consistent with each other and with core values. We are responsible for the mental Set we bring to the Circle, the Setting we create there – and those things profoundly influence the experience we will have.

So here are some questions to ask yourself in preparing for a ritual:

- Are there Wiccan core values, and what are they?
- What are my own core values?
- What are the core values of the other people who will be in the Circle?
- Is the specific purpose of this ritual consistent with our core values?
- Are the various stories, symbols, practices I intend to use in this ritual consistent with both the ritual's specific purpose and our core values?

For Pagan polytheists, another question arises. Some Covens invoke specific Deities, sometimes different ones in different seasons. Others call upon the Goddess without specification and let Her decide in which form She will come to us. Both methods seem to work just fine. Are there circumstances under which one or the other would be better? How would you prepare differently for each type of ritual?

### **When is Trancework appropriate?**

Here are a few considerations:

#### **Physical safety**

It is unwise to allow or perform trance work near open fires, cliffs, or fast-moving bodies of water. Similarly, trance work outdoors under extreme weather conditions which might put the people at risk of hypothermia or sunstroke is unwise. We do not normally yield control to the Gods when we need to concentrate on clock-world skills, such as driving a car.

#### **Security and privacy**

This work should not ordinarily be done in places where hostile outsiders might interfere: either high-crime districts or areas where people are intolerant of the unconventional. Beyond a doubt,

people feel better able to concentrate where there is relative privacy and freedom from interruptions.

Paradoxically, the permissive "live and let live" mores of high-density urban neighborhoods can often allow us to hide in plain sight better than we can in small towns. However, it still pays to consider what's appropriate behavior in any given situation.

### **Trancer's current status**

A person preparing to enter trance should be emotionally and physically comfortable enough (that is no acute cough or bellyache or other immediately inconveniencing condition) that she can relax and yield control. She should also be well rested, lightly fed, not in any immediate emotional crisis.

### **Medical contraindications**

When doing trancework, particularly when exploring states of possession, the major difference between what we are doing and a diagnosable psychiatric condition such as dissociative trance disorder is that we consider this particular dissociative state to be appropriate within our own cultural context.[2] Our neighbors, who may be living within a quite different culture, may not agree with us.

Carrying Deity, and highly-focused trance-work in general, are not for everyone. People who have a fragile sense of their own identity (ego-boundary issues), are suffering from psychoses (particularly paranoia), are in a suicidal or other potentially self-destructive frame of mind, or who are suffering from a disruptive dissociative condition such as dissociative amnesia, dissociative fugue, dissociative identity disorder or depersonalization disorder [3] (which may be exacerbated by the use of mood-altering substances) should not attempt to Carry, because they run the risk of severe emotional damage. See Table 1 for comparisons between psychological and mythic models of dissociative states.

Physical conditions such as epilepsy are also contraindications to Drawing Down because of the potentiality and consequences of triggering seizures. Flickering lights, such candle flames, as trance foci or as general sources of Circle illumination, are also dangerous to people with epilepsy. Some neurophysiologists consider that the very existence of a sensed Divine presence is due to temporal lobe epilepsy, a form of electrical micro-seizures in the brain; this possibility bears further study. [4]

### **Guiding and Anchoring Trance**

If trance is so intrinsic to our work as Witches, the role of facilitator, guide and anchor must be critical. However, up to now, few of us have received formal training in how to guide and facilitate trance for each other. We have learned by watching and imitating alone, without a chance to understand how our techniques work so we can keep improving on them. It seems like plain common sense to add trance facilitation skills to the priest/ess' toolbox.

Practice without theory is limiting, but theory without practice is completely useless. Just reading these notes won't do it. Find whatever opportunities you can for experiential learning. If that's unavailable to you, talk things over with trusted friends. The best feedback of all, of course, is your own thoughtful attention to your experiences working with trance. Here are some pointers to get started with:

1. You probably have one or more friends who are well-practiced meditators. Ask them to let you watch while they meditate. Take careful note of the visible, physical changes that take place. Observe their breath rate, skin coloring, postural and facial changes from reduced muscle tension, etc. These are the same changes to watch for when you are guiding someone into trance.
2. Start with the body. Trance work can involve sitting still for a relatively long period. People can do this more comfortably if they release as much overt muscular tension as possible before they begin. So, at minimum, ask them to stretch and shake out before settling down.
3. If they are beginners, or if they seem particularly tense, you can do progressive deep muscle relaxation. This is a sort of self massage, involving clenching and then suddenly relaxing various muscle groups. You'll find a full set of instructions in Appendix A.

Work through the whole body. Be particularly sure to include the face. A whole lot of tension rides there, particularly for people who have to suppress their emotions or display emotions they don't particularly feel (as most of us do at work).

Whether or not you have done the deep muscle relaxation, have people just review their bodies, feel into each area in turn, and release any remaining tension.

Keep your own breath slow and deep, your own muscles relaxed. Speak quietly, in a calm and soothing tone. You can't fake or "technique" this. Projective empathy is a big part of priest/esscraft, and the basis of that is your own ability to shift your mood or state of consciousness at will. Before you can calm others, you need to be calm yourself.

Remember that the person (or group) you are guiding is entering a hyper-receptive state

of consciousness. They will pick up on any residual tension, or any other incongruity, in you.

If you're working with a single person, you can track the rate of their breathing. A good way to do this is to slightly raise and lower your own hand as their belly raises and lowers with each breath. At first, match the cadence of your speech to their breath rate. After a while, very gradually, slow your speech. Their breath will slow down to match your phrasing.

With a group, exaggerate your own breath, and gradually slow it along with your speech. They will probably follow along.

4. It's both more effective and more consistent with our beliefs to use the language of permission and invitation rather than the language of command. You might do this by saying something like "I invite you to get as relaxed and comfortable as you want to, as relaxed and comfortable as you feel is best for you, while still staying in touch with the sound of my voice."
5. Remind the person or group that the depth of their trance is entirely under their own control and that they can return to ordinary consciousness any time they want to or need to. This is an important safety precaution for any trancer. Some will not be able to shift their consciousness at all without this explicit assurance that they have the right and power to leave trance at their own will.
6. The person entering trance will begin to show the same physical changes that you saw in the meditator. Describe these changes as you see them. This will reinforce them and help deepen the trance.

It's good to mix these descriptions with statements about the immediate environment: sounds, light conditions, temperature or whatever. Since these statements are obviously true, they lend credibility to your descriptions of the signs of deepening trance. If there are unpleasant noises or other potential irritants in your environment, be sure to acknowledge them, to weave them into the trance. Otherwise, they might become distractions.

Also weave in statements about how the person is becoming increasingly relaxed and comfortable, and can become still more relaxed, just as relaxed as s/he chooses, while remaining focused and receptive.



7. In later sessions, as trust develops and people become more fluent with trance, you can shorten some of the preliminaries. Perhaps a long staircase can turn into a funhouse slide. Eventually, with practice, you can just take a long, deep breath, say something like "remember what it feels like to be in trance," breathe deeply again, and people will enter trance.
8. Use the language of direct experience as much as possible. Avoid directions like "imagine" or "remember" once you are into the journey (although these can be useful for induction). Use present tense, and generally simple language and grammar. Avoid passive constructions, conditional forms and the like. In trance, we work with Younger Self, who is grammatically unsophisticated.
9. Use specific details if the symbolism is intrinsic to your work: particular colors, trees, animals, etc may relate to particular deities or energies. Other than that, leave as much scope as possible for your listeners' imaginations. More experienced travelers will need less guidance.
10. If you're going to specify, do so at once. Don't move from the general to the specific. If you say "you are standing by the water's edge," and only later go on to describe a quiet lake, you will disorient participants who have created inner seashores or babbling mountain brooks.
11. You may place your listeners as participants or as observers, based on how intense an experience you feel they can handle. Take into account both how experienced, strong and adventurous they are and what kind of experience you are planning to present. People who can happily join the Maiden in a May Dance might still do better to simply watch the Wild Hunt go by rather than riding with it.
12. The relaxation techniques that we use are stress busters, useful in all areas of life. Our shared imagery is also useful in private meditation. Furthermore, repeated practice builds up the images in our minds, making subsequent group exercises more vivid and more effective. So be sure to suggest and frequently reinforce that people can use these techniques, visit these "places" as often as they need to or want to, and that doing so is a good thing. Always reinforce this suggestion before concluding a trance session.
13. Talking about the trance experiences shortly after return, usually while still in Circle, helps fix them in memory and promotes group bonding. Encourage sharing, but do not force it. People should also pay particular attention to both day and night dreams for a few days after any trancework session. Encourage people to keep journals which include their trance and dream experiences.

14. If you have guided someone into trance, you are responsible for their safety until they have returned to normal consciousness. Never leave a tranced person alone.

### **Drawing the Moon: the Anchor/Carrier relationship**

Carrying involves the deepest kind of trance. In full possession, the Carrier has no awareness or memory of what takes place. During this time a Carrier is particularly vulnerable physically, emotionally and psychically. The active participation of a committed, loved and trusted working partner makes it much easier for the Carrier to let go in so complete a way. In Traditional Wiccan practice, working partners alternate roles, each Anchoring while the other Carries. The Anchor's role includes:

- 1) Invoking – the partner knows the series of pre-arranged cues that help the Carrier move into the necessary altered state of consciousness for Carrying. These cues vary from Tradition to Tradition and from coven to coven.
- 2) Directing the rest of the group – acts as ritual emcee while the Carrier is deeply tranced, watches the rest of the group to be sure that nobody seems confused or upset by the message, stays aware of the overall flow of the ritual. Afterwards, the Anchor probably also facilitates group discussion of the message received.
- 3) Asking questions and speaking with the Deity – particularly with inexperienced participants, the Anchor acts as interlocutor on behalf of the coven, asking questions of the manifest Deity, and perhaps interpreting the Deity's answers for the coven, in the event that the answers are not clear.
- 4) Guarding and monitoring the Carrier – a person who is Carrying may not be aware of physical limits. Gwyneth reports:

*When Carrying, for me the world seems to end in a soft, fuzzy fog. Stairways, glass patio-doors, and the edges of raised surfaces become less obvious to me. I find that my pain threshold is elevated, and that I have an unusually broad range of bodily movements. Sometimes it's as if the Goddess is quite unaware of my body's capabilities, and She moves me as if I were quite a bit younger and stronger.*

*I certainly do pay for that fluency of movement in aches and bumps and bruises afterwards. I accept this risk because it balances against the gifts that I have received from Her presence within me. Even though it may leave me feeling sore and tired, I also feel remarkably exhilarated by Her use of my body.*

So the Anchor makes sure that the Carrier does not injure herself, or become chilled, or sunburned, or over-tired, while she is not aware enough of her body or her surroundings to look after herself. The entire coven assists in this effort.

5) Recalling and assisting to ground – again, there will be a series of prearranged cues for recall, which the Anchor will use. Far more important, the Anchor will stay with the Carrier as long as it takes to make sure that she has fully returned to consensus reality. This may involve making sure that she gets a good meal after Circle or even escorting her home.

### **Cautions for the Anchor**

Try to avoid guiding or anchoring trance when you are ill, tired, drugged[5] or out-of-sorts: your partner, your coven and the Gods need all you can offer.[6] Trancers take comfort from an anchor who is grounded and centered. If you are feeling unenthusiastic about the planned work, generally distracted, or out-of-sympathy with the intended trancer(s), it will be noticeable, particularly on the inner planes. This can't help but disturb the work at hand, and may impair your ongoing relationships. It's much better in the long run to take what down time you need.

You must stay with the trancer as long as it takes to make sure that she or he has fully returned to consensus reality. This may involve making sure that the trancer gets a good meal after Circle or even escorting him or her home. The deeper the trance, the more essential the aftercare. If two partners will both be Carrying at the same ritual, which is normal, it might be wise to assign this function to a third person.

These stipulations are important. Carrying requires close interaction between someone who knows how to call Deity into the Circle, and someone who knows how to prepare and open herself or himself to manifest that Presence. Neither role can work without the other, so equal care must be given to both. We are not likely to experience these rites in a fluent and comfortable way unless both of those roles are done well.

### **Challenges:**

1. **Old News:** When a person begins to explore their inner world, often the first thing they encounter is their own personal pain – bad, old memories, wounds, scars. Sometimes, right there in your Circle, the memories come up in the form of vivid and frightening flashbacks. Many are made more painful by the understanding of their lingering bad effect on the person's life. These very personal demons may well be what the old timey occultists described as the "guardian at the gateway," the Challenger.

Very few coven leaders are trained therapists. We tend to be insecure about our ability to cope with deep psychological problems or with mental illness. But the need to deal with old hurt really does mark the beginning of most people's inner work, and it will return intermittently as they progress.

The only comfort we can offer is to assure you that this is not necessarily mental illness. Everybody, even the most healthy and functional of us, has old scars and unresolved hurts that may someday come to the fore. Most of them need nothing more than a bit of active listening. Of course, you won't want this to dominate the group. Have them over for some private talk for an evening or two. If they seem to be getting nowhere, and their life seems to be distorted by their issues, you can suggest that they seek more specialized help. Be sure to take care of yourself by grounding thoroughly after hearing anybody else's trouble.

2. **Bad News:** As the student progresses from self-exploration into divination or Carrying, s/he may receive some messages that nobody really wanted to hear. The Gods may warn us of impending problems. They may confront or reprimand us on our own wrongdoings. They may suggest remedies that seem to us like very bitter medicine. This too is Their love – but it can be tough love indeed.

Don't blame the messenger. The diviner or Carrier is probably even more likely to be shaken by this kind of a message as everyone else, and more than usually in need of support and comfort from the group. The anchor needs to demonstrate and model this with an immediate caring response. And then the group needs to think together about the implications of a challenging message.

## **Changes**

If we engage in meditation, dreamwork, trancework, pathworking, divination, Carrying – in all the various methods of inner exploration – over a long period of time, will this change us? If it won't, why are we bothering? All of these practices are really just approaches to one goal: opening, clarifying, deepening and sustaining conscious contact with the Old Gods of Nature. How could we do this in truth without it also affecting our way of being in the world?

Ah, but will we like the changes? Will we think of them as benefits, or as costs that we are willing to incur to gain the great ultimate prize? That is a purely subjective question. But Initiates and Elders *do* compare notes about changes we've noticed. Here are a few that we've heard mentioned recently:

- More emotionally labile. Freely responsive, but also given to mood-swings.
- Less organized. More scatterbrained.
- More intuitive. More confident of decisions.
- More creative.

If you've noticed others, we'd like to hear about it.

### **Further readings**

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#### **Klimo, J.**

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**Shea, M.L.**

1986: Burnout!, *Journal of Practical Nursing*; September 1986, pages 36 to 37.

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[1] Cox, 1995: *Fire from Heaven*.

[2] Frances and others, pages 428 and 429. Note that ‘dissociative trance disorder’ was considered for inclusion in *DSM-IV*, and is currently represented in that classification by ‘Dissociative Disorder Not Otherwise Specified’. So, your High Priestess may have been right when she warned you that you might get locked up for going too far with trancework in the wrong company.

[3] Contraindications to trance-work are drawn from Crasilneck and Hall, 1985: *Clinical hypnosis*, page 47. Dissociative disorders are as outlined by Frances, First and Pincus, 1995: *DSM-IV Guidebook*, pages 299 to 307.

[4] Persinger, 1983: Religious and mystical experiences as artifacts of temporal lobe function: a general hypothesis; *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, volume 57, number 3, part 2, pages 1255 to 1262. See also Johnson and Persinger, 1994: The sensed presence may be facilitated by interhemispheric intercalation: relative efficiency of the Mind’s Eye, Hemi-Sync Tape, and bilateral temporal magnetic field stimulation; *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, volume 79, number 1, part 1, pages 351 to 354.

[5] Needless to say, coming to our Circles while ‘under the influence’ of recreational drugs or alcohol is grounds for a sabbatical from the coven.

[6] Ambrose and Newbold, 1980: *Handbook of medical hypnosis*, page 36.

## **Chapter 2: Entering and Leaving Trance**

### **Pre-ritual Preparation**

These are some of the ways to establish appropriate set and setting, for any Circle, whether or not you intend to do trancework within it:

#### **Understand what the ritual is about**

You should know what you are about to do in ritual, and have a clear understanding of the purpose of the rite – if you intend to invoke a specific Deity, do your homework. Research the relevant myths and lore, in context of the full pantheon and the native culture. What are Her preferred offerings, Her favorite colors, scents, types of food, flowers, whatever? Gather those items as best you can; some may be hard to find. While you do all this, you are building focus and energy that will enrich the ritual.

#### **Make the space ready**

Create an appropriate time and space for the ritual – some preparations begin a day or two before the Circle. You may be gathering ritual materials or decorations, baking or cooking, cleaning your ritual space. All of these activities can be regarded as mundane support or preparatory shitwork and they can be done on auto-pilot. They also can be done with full and focused intent, and then they become part of a long, slow build-up to the moment when you enter the Circle.

In the rush of modern life, this may not always be possible, but try sometime doing your pre-ritual housecleaning leisurely and with focused intent, perhaps while playing some meditative music, seeing each object and surface gleam with your love and care, thinking about how you want to create a beautiful space for the Gods and the people to meet. Closer to the time, you will set up the altar, possibly decorate the space, and set out whatever materials will be used. Again, doing this attentively and with all your heart will help you make the shift in consciousness smoothly.

Please also consider the benefits of building the altar as a collective project with your coveners. This is a very powerful means for strengthening the notion that, as Witches, we are equals in the eyes of the Gods, and we are all in it together.

#### **Make yourself ready**

You should warm-up and relax beforehand. Nobody's perfect: if we wait until all of our personal issues are completely worked out (and we've attained enlightenment), we may never get to Circle within our lifetime. What we actually need to let go of are the immediate, minor frustrations of our daily lives: the traffic jam, the argumentative customer, the domestic spat. These are all things that really, ultimately don't matter, and that our basic grounding, centering, relaxation and meditation techniques can usually handle. As best we can, we clear this surface static to allow focus on deeper issues.



Occasionally, our best techniques just won't do it. Maybe there's just too much of it at once. Don't beat yourself up if once in a while you can't readily set the day's small frustrations aside, but, if possible, avoid trancework on those days.

On the other hand, we cannot and should not set aside our deep and ongoing life issues, for those are some of the things that we can work on in Circle. The deeper work of personal psycho-spiritual growth began long before you entered the Craft and continues throughout your life. Here, progress is the aim, rather than perfection. More than that, interaction with the Goddess is an intense help with inner healing and growth.

So, this is what Gwyneth does:

*I start by taking a long, leisurely lustral bath beforehand: lots of warm water and salt, with some herbs strewn on the water. Add a few candles, a darkened bathroom and perhaps some soft music, and relax....*

*In the bath I try to catalogue and then lay aside my worldly worries. This doesn't mean that I am checking my brains at the bathroom door: I still know where the first-aid kit and the fire extinguisher are within the covenstead, and I do not lose track of the passage of time.*

*Once done with the bath, I stand before the bathroom mirror a moment to draw myself back into full awareness as a living person. This is an act of self-reinforcement and reassurance that I am entering the role of Priestess of a Circle rather than hostess of a cocktail-party. All of this pre-Circle ritual is aimed at developing a situationally-appropriate separation between the immediate time pressures of my day job and my formal ritual work as a Priestess.*

*For me, this constitutes part of being properly prepared for Circle, according to my Craft training, and it affords me the reassurance to approach Drawing Down with confidence.*

and here is Judy's description:

*When I do my pre-Circle preparations, and these are different in different places, a mood and an expectation begin to build. Setting up the altar, switching from electricity to candlelight, and so forth, whatever changes our surround also develops the mood. The sense of safety, that everyone present understands the Sacredness of what is to happen, and, indeed that most who are present are trusted friends, is an important component. The acts of casting the Circle, calling the Quarters, etc. add to the momentum.*

One of Gwyneth's old friends makes a point of retreating into her bedroom two hours before every Circle. She locks the door, and sets her alarm clock for an hour; then she has a good nap. When she awakes she feels refreshed and invigorated and ready to tackle the tasks of formal preparation for Circle. Gwyneth has tried to catch this habit from her, but has trouble resisting the siren call of the vacuum-cleaner.

## **Cast the Circle**

When the people are gathered, it's time to create sacred space. Many Witches believe that "Circle state of consciousness" is a light, receptive trance, in which we temporarily and willingly suspend whatever disbelief we ordinarily might have, and we act as if the Gods literally are independent entities. By this willed change in consciousness, those of us who are not Deists (Gwyneth is a Deist; Judy is not) become Deists while in Circle. Only thus can we actively receive the messages that the Gods may have for us. We can get back into our left brains and swap fascinating theological theories at some other time.[1]

Although we all come to Circle with our own agendas, the act of casting the Circle also pulls us together into one temporary *gestalt*, one group mind. For a coven practiced in working together, this transition is easier and more powerful, but it happens even when Circle is cast for an *ad hoc* group. You might think of the Circle as a base camp, a supportive space from which the Carrier can open to the ever-unpredictable influence of the Sacred, and share it with the others.

## Trance

Here's a definition of trance taken from a training handout Judy received during her studies of Ericksonian hypnotherapy:

*"The words **trance** and **trance states**, describe consciousness that has been altered, generally, but not always, in the direction of greater concentration, focus, or intensity. There are also defocused or oceanic trance states, characterized by a greater openness and availability to any and all experience. Rather than focused, these are soft-eyed trances. What's common to both of these trance variations – focused and defocused – and perhaps to all trances, is a minimum of internal noise. ... Usually, although not always, trance-consciousness is internally oriented. There are also externally oriented trance states – pure attention states – in which one can see, hear, feel, smell and/or taste without distraction" [2] [emphasis added]*

We would add that there are also high-arousal altered states, suitable for raising power and doing projective magical workings, and low-arousal states, suitable for receptive workings such as divination (see **Table 2**). In current usage, the word "trance" refers to a variety of altered states in which our internal chatter is relatively stilled, and so the signal-to-noise ratio is improved.

The remainder of this chapter explores methods of entering a suitable trance state for our Mysteries.

## Representational systems

We perceive the world through our senses. We understand it through our representational systems, the ways in which we code and store information, and build mental maps and models. We recognize five major representational systems: sound, sight, smell, and touch (the four sensory channels that most people favor and that are most closely connected with consciousness) plus language, which is a more abstract representational system.

People can represent or store information received through one sense in another sense's representational system. Here is an example from Judy:

*On this hot July evening, I keep the window behind me open as I type. I hear vehicles coming off a nearby highway exit, but I can't see them without turning my head. From their sounds, I can picture a car, a truck, a motorcycle. Perhaps you can imaginatively picture or hear a roaring motorcycle simply from reading these words. Or you might feel a motorcycle roaring under your butt?*

Just as we tend to favor one sense over the others, we also tend to favor one representational system. No surprise there. If we most often model our world through one particular sense, we will learn to make finer distinctions in that sense, and create words to help us remember and communicate those distinctions. With finer categories to perceive through, we experience that sense in a more intense and complex way.

This is the basis for the old cliché about how they have twenty different words for "snow" in ski resort communities. Where people's livelihood depends on it, it becomes very important to observe and communicate about the precise quality of the snow. Similarly, an audially oriented person will hear more than others do in music, a visually oriented person will see more in a work of art or in a sunset.[3]

### **Determining, and working with, someone's primary representational system**

The major cue to a person's primary representational system is their choice of words, particularly those indicating actions or relationships. You might also notice whether their pleasures are primarily visual or aural or tactile.

Or just ask the person: when a ritual tool is magically charged, does it hum, or vibrate, or glow, or become warmer or cooler? Whatever the answer, it will provide you with a starting point in constructing their own personal trance induction.

### **Trance induction methods**

We're going to describe a variety of methods (see **Table 3**) to induce trance. Some stimuli establish the basic "Circle state of consciousness" (for example, incense scent and the tactile sense of ritual jewels), others say what this particular Circle is about (much as you would use particular decorations for Beltane or Samhain), while yet others (for example, drumming and pre-arranged gestures) signal deepening of trance.

Please also be aware that many, perhaps all, of these practices can by themselves be lifelong studies, e.g. dance, drumming, poetry. One of the great joys, and advantages, of coven work is that people can pursue strong individual interests and then also get the benefit of their coven-mates' specialities. A good coven brews a flavorful cauldron of stone soup.

Virtually any conceivable ritual form could be used to attempt to enter a trance state, but over time several distinctly different methods have been developed within the Craft. Most of these methods build upon

carefully-chosen combinations of sensory inputs as cues to deepen a person's trance from the normal "Circle state of consciousness" to that needed for the work at hand. To create the most effective combination for any particular Priest/ess, it's important to be aware that most people favor one sense, usually sight, sound or touch, above the others.

Since it's unlikely that your strengths and talents, your teacher's, and your students' will all be the same, or that all members of a coven will function exactly alike, learning to adjust the method to the individual will make it a lot easier to train new people. You can customize the method for the person because trance-inducing techniques can be audial, tactile/kinetic, or visual. Even our typical spoken invocations can emphasize the vocabulary of sight, or sound, or touch.[4] Be careful to include cues for all the senses even while accentuating one, particularly in a group situation where it's unlikely that all present will favor the same sense.

There are good books and articles about many of these techniques. Always remember that reading can only give you context, history, theory. These practices, the trance states to which they lead, and Witchcraft itself are all essentially experiential – they are Mysteries – and real understanding can only come from actually doing them.

### **Environmental factors**

Neither ambient temperature nor light level have any significant intrinsic effect on depth of trance, although candlelight is often used as a conditioned stimulus. What is quite important, however, is the need to avoid pronounced fluctuations in illumination, noise level, or temperature.[5]

Another thing to consider is the student's need for personal privacy. She or he may wish for both coven leaders to be present when the trance induction is done, or might be more comfortable with a one-on-one situation. Students may appreciate the chance to 'test-drive' a trance induction by first trying it out on their teacher in Circle, and watching how she reacts to it. This gives them greater comfort in their own first steps into formal trancework.[6]

Time of day, as compared with the subject's personal cycle of peak awareness, is significant. Morning people achieve significantly greater trance depth in the morning, and 'night owls' do so in the evening. [7]

### **Audial induction**

Around the world, people use sound, and particularly rhythm, to get into trance states.[8] There are a wide variety of sound-based methods, including percussion, tone, environmental music, structured music and language.

### **Percussion**

Pure rhythm is the essence of percussion. Virtually everywhere, people have used a variety of drums, rattles, click sticks and the like to help achieve altered states.[9] Try using rhythm by itself, clapping or stamping your feet in time with the beat; or try using simple percussive instruments such as bells, rattles

and drums. As your coven warms up to its task, try introducing variations such as jazzy syncopations, or 'skip-stop' rhythms, or antiphony, divided beats, or different tempi.

Try playing 'musical tag' by taking turns introducing new rhythms, then having the other people pick up and build on each rhythmic theme.[10] Bear in mind that some Pagan festival drummers, and some modern shamans, deeply resent our 'undisciplined' use of the drums in this way. We've seen fisticuffs erupt over disputes in how drumming ought to be done.[11]

Certain percussive frequencies (1 to 4 cycles per second) are particularly effective in that they are harmonic multiples of the human body's natural resonant frequencies (imagine the thump in your chest when the neighbors loudly play deep bass notes on their new stereo system), or they approach subharmonics of the frequencies to which our auditory systems are naturally the most acutely responsive. [12]

Other percussive frequencies (4 to 13 cycles per second) approach the frequencies of human brainwaves, particularly the Delta and Theta waves associated with deep, drowsy, hypnagogic states. Sustained drumming at these frequencies or their harmonic undertones or overtones may lead to rhythmic entrainment of the drummer's and listeners' brainwaves with the percussive sound.[13]

Neither of us could think of one tribal society that practices full possession, of either African or Eurasian style, without the use of drums.

## **Tone**

Tibetan temple bells, with their phase-shifting characteristics, are excellent tone sources for trance induction. Note that it's the change in acoustic phase (which manifests as low-frequency overtones) that produces the sought-after effect; this is an effect which cannot be produced by most other percussive instruments.

Some chants are wordless, from a simple "aum" or a howl at the rising moon to elaborate scat singing. They take us out of our analytical minds to something far more primal. Here's a description of wordless Jewish *nigun* singing:

*"Through singing-chanting wordless songs with rhythmically repeated phrases such as "yai dai dai," "bim bam" or "yai lai lai" and dancing spontaneously, many people could experience incredible joy together. Chasidic culture embraced this rejuvenating experience and through tradition nigunim flourished. ...*

*Nigun can be approached in almost limitless ways. Feel free to stand in a circle. Sway. Hold hands. Clap. The tempo can increase as the spirit does or it can remain constant. Move freely. Dance spontaneously. There is no time limit, but give yourself time enough to get into the spirit of the nigun. Experiment with the rhythmic and melodic structure. Harmonize. Sing contrapuntally. Sing quietly. Sing loudly."* [14]

Amorphous language, consisting of unstructured vocalizations, can be deeply entrancing. A familiar example of this is the Christian charism of 'speaking in tongues' as practiced by some Pentecostal

congregations. The technical term for this practice is ‘glossolalia’. Hard to fake but absolutely compelling when it is heard, it is found in numerous ancient and modern cultures. [15]

### **Environmental music**

Unstructured ‘free floating’ instrumental music whose rhythms and tones mimic the sounds of the natural environment, or actual recordings of environmental sounds such as thunder, falling water, or surf, can be an effective means to enter trance. Gwyneth is drawn to remember the sound of the raindrops falling on the slate roof above her when she was a child, and how effective it was at putting her to sleep.

One popular commercial line of environmental music tapes is sold under the label ‘*Environments*’; you could as readily make your own recordings – if you have a lot of expensive equipment; the tapes *are* cheaper.

### **Structured music**

Instrumental music, which contains a recognizable melody which may be modified by harmony or counterpoint, can be used as a background for meditation or for pathworking exercises. Consider how a film’s background music supports and amplifies the emotional undertones of the plot. Music can easily do the same for ritual or magic,[16] particularly as it involves both hemispheres of the brain, and different types of music may preferentially engage the brain’s left or right hemisphere.[17] Judy recalls:

*I had been asked by a rock band to help them consecrate their rehearsal studio. As I began to cast Circle in the space, a band member spontaneously went to his keyboard and began to improvise music behind what I was saying and doing. I felt my movements loosen into dance as I rode the power of that free-form music. It was as though I was being fed, supported by the energy of the music. I was a surfer, riding a wave.*

The adagio form of orchestral or keyboard music is particularly useful in trance induction since its rhythm approximates the human heartbeat. Adagios by Faure, Ravel, and Albinoni are among those which we have used to some success. One Priestess uses Faure’s *Pavane*: she finds that it brings back some very powerful memory associations.

Be careful with the use of music that contains obvious repetitions of a strong melodic theme: the theme may attract the listeners’ attention so effectively that they become engaged in awaiting its next recurrence. Also, be careful that your coveners do not have pre-existent associations with a particular piece of music, that would conflict with the intended state of consciousness. This is more likely to be the case with modern program music such as motion-picture soundtracks or television signature-tunes.

Mind you, with time and practice, the act of consciously remembering the music may in itself be sufficient to induce a trance state. [18] The memory of the music can bring back the memory of its associated emotions and ideas.

### **Singing of our sacred texts**

“Songs have might even to draw down the Moon from Heaven” [19]

Music can be an aid to memory of religious texts, infusing them with intense and additional power above and beyond that which is inherent in our understanding of their words. [20] Texts can easily be set to song.

Our words can carry abstract ideas or even actual narratives, including Traditional teaching stories about the Gods, and so clearly connects our own religious symbolism with physiological effect and the power of habit. Song is the bridge between language and pure sound, integrating story with rhythm and tone. [21]

Some covens have selected particular pieces of music to play in the background while they cast the Circle; other covens use songs that they have written for themselves, or folksongs that have relevant lyrics.

### **Prose**

Witches can and do create their own active imagination or meditation patterns to help prepare themselves for Contact with the Gods. Here's one particularly beautiful one that Judy heard from an earlier workshop participant:

*I have my own imaginary temple, and I quiet myself and go there. Often when I get there, I meet the Lady, coming through a door that is directly across the room from the one I come through. She holds out Her hands to me, and I take them in my two hands. Then we walk through each other. I wait in the temple while She goes through the door I just came through to visit with the people.*

Language is an independent, and more abstract, representational system. We can – and we certainly should – include verbal references to all of the senses when we design or conduct an induction or a pathworking.

### **The power of repetition**

Repeating the same words and phrases time after time – short, simple phrases like "blessed be!", lengthy procedures for casting the Circle, or calling the Quarters – can give those words the momentum of habit. So a person beginning to Carry may prefer to use the same invocation every time, perhaps even writing one that will be uniquely their own.

Use this power of repetition with some caution; words that have become "fused" into ritual phrases make excellent cues to enter specific altered states, but they tend to lose their individual meanings.[22] Accordingly, we recommend limiting fused language to those moments when a shift of consciousness is desired: such as casting or closing Circle, or Drawing the Moon. Gwyneth notes:

*In Coven of the Stone and Mirror, we quite deliberately use fused language in a prayer which we recite together prior to our rites, since the mindful recitation of that prayer puts us in an appropriate headspace for casting the Circle. We also use fused language for the various ‘every*

*time' bits associated with the Circle itself – thus we all come to very strongly associate certain recitations, certain prayers, certain chunks of fused language, with the feeling of strength and security that we enjoy in Circle. Then, if ever a time of dire need comes up for any of us outside of Circle, we will be able to reach for those bits of prayer and litany, and find comfort in it.*

*But I am very careful to not let the customary words simply become formulaic. We are Gardnerian Witches, not Ceremonial Magicians, and each of our words must be said with passion and understanding. I would be very unhappy if our coven were to slip into a rut of simply doing something by the words and numbers 'because that's how it should be done'. That's the sort of reasoning I'd expect from someone who was insecure about his or her own power as a Witch.*

*In the end, intent and desire govern, and I would never interrupt a coven member to insist that they repeat a blown line. Sometimes the random slips of our tongues in Circle give us a true insight into each other's feelings.*

Perhaps this is an issue where each coven needs to find its own comfortable place – not too comfortable, though, lest we start falling asleep in Circle! As Priestesses, we believe that it is essential to keep a balance between fused and fresh language so that our rituals are both powerful and *about* something.

### **Trance-inducing poetry**

Effectiveness is amplified when the language is also patterned.[23] As a speaker entrains, or synchronizes, his or her speech and internal brain and body rhythms, so does the listener entrain with the speaker's rhythmic structure when the listener becomes aware of it. Trance-inducing poetry has several features: [24]

- 1) **Consistency** – it is free from abrupt changes in rhyme, scansion or language. It should not contain passages that compel the reader or listener to become alert.
- 2) **Steadiness** – rhythm should be steady and soothing, and not so complex or technically brilliant that it attracts our attention to itself. Two-syllable rhymes and consonantal harmonies are particularly effective at attracting the listener.
- 3) **Recapitulation** – it contains frequent repetitions and refrains. The sestina, a poetic form in which the same six rhyme-words are used in each stanza, is particularly powerful in this way.
- 4) **Cyclicity** – rhythm should be ornamented and harmonious with a regular cycle of rising and falling pitch (which is much easier in Romance and Celtic languages such as French or Cymric than in English – but it's still worth trying); the rhythm should include marked accents every half-second or so, to draw the listener along.
- 5) **Clarity** – the imagery in the poem should be sufficiently vague that it does not induce the listener to focus on it in detail, and yet it should clearly describe the overall intent of the poem.
- 6) **Obscurity** – as the poem progresses, its words should become increasingly obscure, so as to confuse the listener slightly, and draw attention away from the meaning of the words towards the sound of the words.



Trance-inducing poetry can be used to great effect in raising and focusing magical power, preparatory to Drawing Down the Moon or Sun, or raising Power. The best trance-inducing poetry comes out of writing done while in trance. The stenographic notebook and white-handled pen of art are important Circle tools. Here's part of a sestina Gwyneth wrote some years ago, in honor of her tutelary Goddess:

***Stone's Dancing Song***

*When I was young, and rich life filled my bones  
I skipped to school, upon the streets of stones  
and seldom saw the face of Lady Crone  
for child I was, my only job to dance  
and run and play, and learn the names of trees  
as taught to me beneath the mountain ash  
  
I learned my language there near Mountain Ash  
learned seven names, for seven sacred trees  
rolled rocks and cobbles while I learned the dance  
until the day the mountain broke my bones  
and I lost life awhile, entombed by stones  
and woke again, surprised to meet the Crone  
  
I wait the time when I can greet the Crone  
and look, unblinking, and walk between the stones  
and share again the beauty of the dance  
which once again will strengthen brittle bones  
and taste again the taste of sacred ash  
from fires built of seven sacred trees  
  
Cailleach takes away all but the names of trees  
and gives instead instruction now to Dance!  
Cynheidre-borne, I ring my land with stones  
and gardens full of reddened mountain ash  
and there abide awhile, and listen to the Crone  
while knowledge flows to earth from in my bones  
  
I wondered why the songs were in my bones  
I travelled far away to find new stones  
I wait the chance to dance the Dance of Crones*

Note that the same six terminal words are used in each stanza, in a different order each time. Three of these words (stones, Crone and bones) are rhyme-words; dance and ash approach rhyming, and trees is the odd word out that was chosen for its symbolic balance to 'stones'. A sestina usually has six main

stanzas [25] plus a terminal stanza of three lines which is intended to sum up the statement made by the poem. Gwyneth's terminal stanza expresses her sense of curiosity, wanderlust and hopes for her future.

Some examples of trance-inducing poetry, that you may have read in school or college, are:

- *Auld Lang Syne* by Robbie Burns
- *Kubla Khan* by Samuel Coleridge
- *The Long Trail* by Rudyard Kipling
- *Crossing the Bar* by Alfred Tennyson
- *Among School Children* (parts) by William Butler Yeats
- *The Cremation of Sam McGee* by Robert Service

Most of these poems were written during the first half of the 19th century; Yeats and Service (who although often writing with Canuck vulgarity, used pattern to great and memorable effect) are among the few more recent poets to have explored these forms.

These patterned poetic forms can, of course, be used to create more explicit invocations of the Gods. Here's just one example:

***Invocation of the Great Mother***

*Goddess of the wild places, Lady of the open spaces,*

*Mother of the Earth, come!*

*Goddess of the open sky, Lady of all things that fly,*

*Mother of the clouds, come!*

*Goddess of the summer's warmth, Lady of the winter's hearth,*

*Mother of the fire, come!*

*Goddess of the world's brim, Lady of all things that swim,*

*Mother of the oceans, come!* [26]

Poetry like this, that rhymes and scans, carries the primal power of rhythm, and the patterning is also a powerful aid to memory.[27]

Nowadays, a far less refined form of poetry has been resurgent in the streets. Although a great deal of rap music has offensive content, notice that it has elaborate and complex patterning. Because it does, it focuses listeners' attention, sticks in the memory, and is accessible to people with no formal education.[28] We have even seen rap poetry used as a means of instructing British Columbia's school-children in earthquake safety.

Having shown you some complex poetry, we'd like to add a caution borne out of the experience of those people who have trouble remembering their lines. Keep your invocations, like any other magical language, as simple and to the point as possible. Ideally, like a good spell, an invocation should be so simple that it says itself.

## Visual induction

Painting and sculpture preceded written language and survive far, far longer than either written or oral history. Therefore we can be sure that the Spirit has moved people to make art since the earliest dawn of human culture.[29] The art they made back then moves us now. Images from the Ice Age: the Trois Freres sorcerer, the Goddesses of Laussel and Willendorf stand again on our altars. When we look at them in the candlelight, sweet smoke swirling around them, we feel closer to the Gods.

Using a visual focus to help change consciousness is a widely known and widely used technique, as any graduate of a Lamaze childbirth class can tell you. Placing the visual focus so that the person looking at it raises her eyes to a forty-five degree angle makes entry into trance more efficient – think of all those paintings of saints with their eyes elevated. Raised eyes can also be an indicator that the person has achieved trance.[30] A person who wants to trance can gaze at a large variety of different things. Each probably works better for different purposes.

Visual trance foci work particularly well for deaf people, who have been obliged by circumstances to become particularly keen visual observers of the world around them. [31]

## Amorphous images

These include ink blots, tea leaves, stucco ceilings, etc. They allow the viewer to project her own pictures onto their indefinite shapes. Some possible focus-objects move (candle flames, clouds), and that's even better. Lying back, looking up into a tree's branches, is a source of calm and strength. These are aids for reaching into the personal unconscious, and are used as much by secular therapists as by Witches. By drawing on the personal imagination, they may also reach into the Otherworld.

Some Witches get particularly good results from watching candlelight through colored glass objects. Gwyneth sometimes surrounds a burning candle with a collection of glass pots, vases and balls in the four cardinal colors, using the candle as a multicolored flickering trance focus. A similar and sometimes fatal effect – “highway hypnosis” – can be caused by the monotonous passage of dashed lane-markings or headlights when driving down a highway.[32]

There is another reason to be careful with flickering lights: their trance inducing effect is due to photic stimulation, a visual variety of rhythmic entrainment of the viewer's brainwaves. Photic stimulation at certain frequencies, which will vary from person to person, can induce epileptic seizures in susceptible people.[33]

Some other Witches like to gaze *directly* at a light source as a trance focus. The Moon makes an excellent (and quite appropriate) light source, and a candle flame is probably okay, but be cautious with firelight. We all remember the glowing caves and cities in the coals from childhood hearths and campfires. Gazing too long or too intently at a fire will cause infrared and near-infrared radiation from the fire to concentrate on your retinas, and may lead to internal thermal burns of your eyes. Your mother probably told you this, but we remind you anyway: never stare at the Sun.

Good results can be had by using the Full Moon or a candle as a light source, and gazing at it through a hand-held mirror. Commence by relaxing your face and body, and allowing your eyes to go slightly out of focus. At first, try to see the immediate surroundings of the light source, allowing the source itself to remain out of optical focus; then let your attention become drawn to the light source, and allow your eyes to choose their state of focus according to what feels easiest for your eyes. You will probably find the image ‘swimming’ in and out of optical focus as your hands make fine, otherwise-imperceptible tremors, and your eyes in turn make micro-movements to track the image. If you make a conscious effort to stabilize the image in the mirror, you will be drawn into trance. This is one of the ways in which Gwyneth first learned to literally Draw Down the Moon, by mirror-gazing at Her face.

It helps if the mirror is on a string around your neck and shoulders, so as to prevent it from falling and breaking when you relax into trance.[34]

Some Priestesses prefer simply to gaze into blank space, somewhere beyond the physical limits of the place they are at, perhaps directly into the Otherworld. This is probably the method that Gwyneth most commonly uses.

### **Scrying**

Besides their usefulness to the coven, for collective work, amorphous images are also useful in the more solitary pursuit of scrying, which provides visual information to the individual Witch.

If you’ve ever watched *The Wizard of Oz*, you might be forgiven for concluding that a crystal ball is the Witch’s version of a television set; crystal balls are, sadly, rather too expensive for most Witches’ budget. Equally good amorphous images can be obtained by scrying in a mineral crystal – sometimes these images attain great clarity and detail. If the crystal is quartz, some believe it has independent powers of its own. At minimum, such beliefs have power, making it easier for those who hold them to scry. For some of us, the knowledge that most quartz crystals come from strip mines detracts from the suitability of this method. Judy feels that if you have an old crystal, from before you knew better, wasting it helps nothing and only makes the injury worse. Much the same applies to the use of items made from old ivory, animal hide, or bone.

There are many other possibilities for a scrying focus. Bowls of water work well. In some older Traditions, one catches the reflection of the Moon in the water bowl (or in a handy pond, etc.). Black mirrors are Wiccan classics, but any ordinary mirror (like Gwyneth’s mirror-on-a-string) can be used. You can catch the Moon in the mirror, or the candle, the firelight, the beautiful, glowing blue sky. Try also placing a small candle between yourself and the mirror, below your direct line-of-sight.[35]

Becoming practiced at scrying may help students later learn how to use visual aids in entering trance.

### **Abstract geometric patterns**

These patterns are fascinating, and interesting of themselves, and so are more helpful than unstructured shapes in shutting down the internal chatter. In their own culture, they are often a shorthand for complex

religious meanings (Haitian *veves* and Hindu *yantras*) that are too big to put into a picture. For those of us who do not know these meanings, tracing the patterns can still be an efficient way out of normal consciousness in times of stress.

We can also draw our own, and that would be more respectful. Besides, patterns work best if you work with them actively. You can make your own mandala. If you really can't draw a straight line, a colorful yarn God's Eye pattern will work just fine. Or get some of the Dover coloring books and simply color in the patterns.

An example of highly rhythmic, patterned abstract art from our own heritage is, of course, Celtic knotwork.

### **Entoptic phenomena**

These are natural visual phenomena that originate within the retina of the eye and the cerebral cortex of the brain. [36] They occur when the eyelids are closed, and after any after-images have faded; thus they have nothing to do with external scenery.[37] Entoptic phenomena can be induced by light finger-pressure on the globe of your eye, through your eyelid, or by simple movement of the closed eye behind the eyelid. They may also be induced by electrostatic stimulation of the retina: try rubbing a piece of fur against your hair and then drawing across your face and closed eyelids.

Entoptic phenomena vary from person to person. They may manifest as lines, dots, grillworks, pinwheels, spirals, webs, or checkerboards, in one or two or many colors. Golden-brown, dark brown, yellow, deep red and bright blue are commonly-reported colors. These patterns are associated with trance experience, and are commonly found in cave- and rock-art produced by shamanic peoples world-wide.[38] Concentration on viewing these shapes can lead to a very effective, highly-focused, low-arousal trance state.

### **Representational art**

Picture has a double effect – it provides a visual focus and it tells a story. So, just as song adds the power of myth and meaning to rhythm and tone, picture adds the power of myth and meaning to visual fascination.

Choices range from the cave art, through all the wealth of classical Paganism, to the living visual traditions of many tribal cultures that practice indigenous Pagan religions to the contemporary Pagan artists who Circle with us and bring their work to our gatherings. The range of available media, styles and subjects is nearly infinite. Add to that photography of the natural world. Add to that the literally hundreds of interpretations of the Tarot. [39]

Many of us have statues of the God and Goddess on our personal or coven altars. Some Witches have found that they can use such a statue as a trance focus for Drawing the Moon or Sun. Painted icons, in the Russian Orthodox style, might also serve us in this way, although to our knowledge no Witches have ever thoroughly tested this approach to trance.

## **Gesture**

Gestures communicate the meanings that people have assigned to them, and often have different meanings in different cultures and different generations. As Judy recalls:

*I graduated from high school in the early Sixties. When I raise the first two fingers of my right hand, it means "peace." To my parents, who were young adults during World War Two, the very same gesture meant "V for Victory." When and how the meaning inverted, I have no idea, but it made for some confusion in our family during the American invasion of Viet Nam.*

There are some near-universal Wiccan gestures, like drawing a pentagram, and the hand-signs of the Corno and Fico, as well as others that are specific to particular Traditions.

Trance can be successfully induced in deaf people by measured, sequential counting-down in sign language. As the hypnotist counts down, she progressively makes the hand-signs more slowly, and she gradually moves them downwards within the subject's visual field. [40]

Gesture can, of course, offer kinaesthetic as well as visual inputs. Judy makes use of this kinaesthetic power of gesture when she moves her hands in a particular way while asking the Gods to help her find a place to park the car.

Although it can be quite difficult to describe gestures in writing, symbolic systems have been developed for the recording of gestures in a way that they can be easily reproduced by the reader. The classic work on the subject is *Motion Study* by Herbert C. Sampster.

## **Sacred dance and mime**

A visual option far less frequently selected is performance-type dancing, in which one or a few people mime sacred story, while the "audience" watches. This is information we take in through our eyes, quasi-linguistic, and it has more in common with visual driving, indeed with representational art, than it does with kinetic driving. It has a place in large, public rituals, which require a certain amount of spectacle.

In our intimate coven Circles, however, nobody should be relegated to "audience." [41] Participatory dance is discussed below under the heading of kinaesthetic induction.

## **Olfactory induction**

The sense of smell is the most primal sense we have, since the pathway from the nose to the brain is short, but paradoxically we are least aware of its inputs: most olfactory information that we receive is processed at an unconscious level. We can distinguish about 10,000 distinct odors, most acutely those odors which relate to issues of reproduction or survival. [42] Even when we are not conscious of an odor, we may be subconsciously processing it and experiencing the triggering of memories or behaviors associated with that odor.

## **Incense**

As Witches, we make conscious use of the influential power of odors when we burn incense. Incense is particularly useful in reinforcement of trance states; many of us are accustomed to the use of a particular incense for all of our covens' work together. Incense smoke obscures vision in the Circle, lending an atmosphere that is half-intoxication, half-dreaming. [43] When we come home to either of our covensteads after a long journey, the incense makes a substantial part of the comforting 'home smell'.

Some covens use the same incense every time – it carries a constant message of “this is sacred space/time.” Other covens have an entire vocabulary of smells for different occasions or purposes. Which approach do you think would work best?

## **Kinaesthetic induction**

Like many other animals, most of us have four limbs: two in front and two behind. One of the consequences of advanced primate evolution is our bipedality: unlike most other animals, we spent most of our lives moving around on our hind legs. Unlike cats and dogs, we have no tails (braided hair does not count), so responsibility for balancing falls mainly upon our arms. In order to co-ordinate our motions, our brains are constantly assessing the position of our limbs and bodies so that we don't fall on our noses. The same applies to those of us who use wheelchairs in Circle, except that we have to be a little more careful about where our weight is being carried since we have not yet worked out how to extend nerves into our wheels.

Kinaesthetic (positional and movement) inputs can be effectively used as means of trance induction. These inputs may come from specific postures, or from patterned movements such as dances. Associated with kinaesthetic inputs are the practices of breath control (as acceleration via hyperventilation, or as deceleration via hypoventilation) and blood control.

## **Posture**

Hatha Yoga *asanas* and Balinese *mudras* [44] are a familiar trance technology. More recently, anthropologist Felicitas Goodman noticed that certain postures appear again and again in tribal people's art from around the world. When Goodman began experimenting with these postures, she discovered that people who use them reach consistently similar altered states.[45]

Meditation postures, which affect muscle tension and blood flow, and also stimulate particular nerves or shiatsu points, have a direct physiological effect. When people assign meanings to certain postures, and the associational link becomes reinforced by habit, the effectiveness is amplified. Many of us make use of stylised postures, such as the "Goddess Position" in Carrying, at least as we are entering into the trance.

## **Participatory dance**

Dance steps don't have to be complex in order to be entrancing. In fact, the simpler steps such as the grapevine or skip-step might be better for those of us who are less nimble on our feet. The use of trance

dance, [46] either by itself or combined with breathing exercises, [47] is widespread in non-European cultures:

*“Under the icy white moon of the winter grey sky of Anatolian December, there can be heard an ancient voice that speaks in tones of gentleness of love for every creature of the earth. It is the ‘Ney’, the humble flute of the brotherhood of the Mevlevi dervishes, those ardent practitioners of the rite of turning, forever turning, to ecstasy-inducing music.*

*At first, the dervishes sit motionless while the music captivates their hearts. Stringed instruments, miniature drums too, now play along with the flute. The dervishes are seen rising to their feet. They bow and then proceed in dignified parade around the hall. A chanting falls upon the ears of those who watch while the members divest themselves of their capes. And now begins the strange and utterly beautiful whirling. The dervishes pivot with ease on their left foot. The right foot supports the turns. The right hand of each dervish is held high throughout the whirling, symbolising their receiving spiritual enlightenment. The left hand is turned downwards, as if distributing that which has been received in this state of spiritual elevation.*

*Strangely, the dervishes never stray from their appointed course. Some move in an inner circle, some in a larger one, while an older dervish moves in and out of the two circles – all counterclockwise, representing the revolutions of the revolving stars and moon.[48] With the music becoming more and more hypnotic in its monotonous repetition, it becomes more and more compelling, bringing the dervish to a state of ecstasy, to their union with the universe, the purpose of their ritual.*

*Although their accompanying instruments repetitiously sound their monotony, there is a complete air of stillness prevailing, which permeates the viewers and suggest that the dancers are suspended in the air. Even at their highest moment of ecstasy, you are soundlessly in contact with the universe. Gradually, the intensity recedes, and slowly, very slowly, the revolutions become calmer and calmer, ending in the complete stillness of spirit and body.*

*To me, who has been using the turns therapeutically in their outward forms for some years already, it was a revelation.” [49]*

Sacred dance is also making its way into ‘mainstream’ European and American cultures.[50] For example, this dance exercise came from New York:

*“The session began with the participants holding hands in a circle, standing with knees slightly bent, eyes closed, letting the natural body rhythms lead into swaying back and forth as a group. When members of the group were ready and felt well grounded and centred, they opened their eyes and began to stretch, making stretching noises – grunting, groaning, sighing. After more stretches in all directions and some swings with accompanying swishes, the group joined hands and hummed on a low note. Still in a circle, the members moved together toward the centre; the humming grew higher and louder. Repeated one or two times, the volume eventually increased to a good loud open scream. From experience the leader has found this to be an easy shortcut to get patients to open up their breathing and their vocal chords, and its is also an unthreatening way to learn to use voice sounds with movement. The next suggestion as for each participant to put a feeling into a movement accompanied by any sound. “do whatever feels good to you, whatever*



*feels right, and let your body and your voice move you.” Moving around the circle, members of the group took turns leading and following or accompanying the leader, at first taking very short turns each, and then letting the sounds and movements grow naturally and end naturally. Once loosened up, individuals began to move to their own rhythms with their own sounds. They related their movements and sounds to other members of the group. Some participants worked in pairs or in larger groups. The room became animated with energy – full of sound and movement related to anger, play, aggressiveness or quietness, until slowly the group came to a quiet and sensitive stop.” [51]*

Songdog, a Feri Initiate from Canada, offers the following comments on patterned dance as means of trance induction:

*“Patterned dance, such as dancing the Labyrinth, is highly trance-inducing. Traversing in and out of a seven-ringed Cretan Labyrinth takes much more time than our logical minds are prepared to accept. This contradiction may be one of the trance triggers.*

*In dancing the Labyrinth, we use a drumbeat similar to a heartbeat. Dancers move into the Labyrinth at spaced intervals, carrying small pairs of antlers, moving as the deer move at Mabon. About ten dancers may be in the maze at any one time, then they give their antlers to another dancer and take a turn at the drums, or simply watch the dancers and their shadows moving in and out.*

*This dance finished with a rapid crescendo where dancers run into the maze and tear up the hockey tape that marked it out on the tiled floor. One of our only problems has been with dancers who became so deeply entranced that they stopping moving and brought the Circle to a standstill.*

*This dance is repeated by request every two or three years.” [52]*

One more thought — as we age, we will find that more and more Craft Elders just aren't up to dancing around. Although for most Elders it is still safe, even in the presence of heart disease,[53] it may simply be uncomfortable. Gwyneth's getting close to that point now. It's okay to sit in the middle of a circle of dancers and help guide things along from within.

### **Breath control**

Many of the kinetic methods of trance induction cause their recipients to hyperventilate due to rapid and repeated muscular exertion. This may be intentional or unintentional, but in any case it causes changes in blood chemistry which may in turn change the ways in which the recipient's brain functions. Hyperventilation will ordinarily lead to a high-arousal altered state of consciousness, although if it is carried too far it will lead to exhaustion or physical collapse.[54] Hypoventilation, through deliberately-slow breathing, may reduce the level of oxygen in the Carrier's bloodstream, thus in turn reducing the amount of oxygen available to her brain, changing (usually slowing) her consciousness of the outside world.

Breathing exercises can help us learn to effectively control our state of physiological arousal. For example, long, slow, deep exhalations help us relax and enter a pleasant state of low arousal; the breaths bring sensations of sinking, widening, opening-up, and softening, as well as feelings of comfort and heaviness. [55]

### **Blood control**

A low-arousal altered state of consciousness can also be effectively by physical constriction of the blood vessels serving the Carrier's brain. This may be accomplished by voluntary exercise of the Carrier's neck and shoulder muscles, or by several of the Hatha Yoga *asanas*.

### **Tactile induction**

In the religions of transcendence, there are many techniques for dissociating from one's body in order to reach Spirit. While there may be practical reasons for learning some of these skills, since most of us will have to deal with illness or injury at some point in our lives, they are not always consonant with immanence-based geocentric theology.

Instead, we find the Sacred within our own bodies, and those of our lovers. Understanding that all acts of love and pleasure are Her rituals, we employ a wide range of techniques in which our bodies serve as a means of communication with the indwelling Divine through our sense of touch.

### **Touch**

Touch is as effective as it is primal as a method for entering trance. Much of its effect is that of habit. If you respond to the agreed-upon touch every time, before long that response will become easy to the point of feeling automatic.

Here are some examples of tactile stimuli: the warm, scented bath water on your skin, the uncommon feel of the air on your skylad body as you walk around your house doing final preparation (or the soft swish of your robes). The feel of your ritual necklace or your bracelet.

Tactile stimulation can be combined with rhythm, as in stroking or patting your partner in time to the music. This may also evoke a pleasant memory, as children's "pattycake" games use the touch/song combination.

Touch can also have direct physiological effects if the Anchor is touching shiatsu points, so you may want to learn where those points are. For example, there is an exceptionally high concentration of shiatsu points and nerve endings in the "active triangle" at the base of the spine.

### **Combined methods of induction**

It's good practice to address several senses at once. These many sensory aids to trance induction can and should be worked in interesting, complex combinations. Although each person has a primary or preferred

sensory input channel, primary is not the same thing as exclusive. Input through other channels at the same time reinforces and multiplies the effect.

We encourage you to use your imagination and creativity, and to experiment until you find what works best for you, your students and your coven. The following are some effective combinations:

### **Maskwork with mirrors**

Masks provide both visual and tactile inputs to the Carrier. Others can chant or drum while the masked Carrier gazes at herself in a mirror — this is a classic method of improvisational theatre. As a general rule, most any visual focus combines well with any auidial input.

Masks are a form of representational art, and a particularly powerful ritual tool. To see yourself as Deity, make a mask of the particular God/dess you want to invoke, and consecrate the mask with formal ritual. Then put the mask on and gaze at your own masked face in a mirror or other reflecting surface.[56] The feel of the mask on your face and the visual image will reinforce each other.

For a more advanced version of this exercise, leave your face unmasked, but wear a crown, jewellery, makeup appropriate to that Deity. Eventually, when you are strong enough to face the Immanent Divine, just gaze at your own face.

For any of these exercises, it helps if the mirror is attached to a cord that goes around your neck, so that it doesn't break if you drop it when you trance. Sitting before a wall-mounted mirror or one on a table stand is equally safe.

### **Drumming and dancing together**

Rhythmic entrainment is also an important way of pulling a group together. Rhythm is often combined with movement. In the Afro-diasporic traditions, specific rhythmic patterns and dance steps are assigned to particular Deities, so the beat also carries a symbolic function.[57] Just listening can combine kinaesthetic stimulation with the auidial, if the drum is loud enough that we can feel it vibrate in our bodies.[58] This example from Brazil indicates the effects that can be achieved:

*“The community had gathered in one of the tin sheds which served as a garage in everyday use. Eight drummers were lined up on the two opposite sides of the room, four on each side. In the middle, white robed members, men and women, were moving in parallel movement in front of the drummers. The drumming was persistently monotone on a 4/4 beat and the movements of the dances similarly monotone. In the centre, between the two rows of dancers, a priestess was throwing her arms in a constant rhythm upward and sideways, while her bare feet were stamping the earthen floor. Suddenly, she let go of her restraint, and threw herself into violent motion. Her whole body shook, her head was thrown about as if detached. The tempo of the drum and dancer increased, although their movements remained simple, unified and supportive. The priestess and the drummers accelerated their frantic tempo and intensity until a crescendo, at which point, the priestess fell to the floor. She remained there unmoving, while the drummers gradually decreased their sound and speed without, however, stopping.*

*After a short pause, the whole dynamic sequence, was repeated. Each sequence could have lasted from a seemingly long 8-10 minutes. Each time the priestess awoke with an expression on her face of serene happiness, it was if she were reawakened to life.” [59]*

### **A caution about overload**

Something to bear in mind when attempting the use of a complicated trance induction is that the human brain has a limited capacity to process multiple inputs simultaneously.[60] If we engage more than about four sensory channels simultaneously, we run the risk of overloading the Carrier. When overloaded, we become confused and disoriented.

Overload may be useful in the induction of divinatory and meditative trances. It may not be the best way of bringing people into communion with the Gods, because their own ability to hear Their messages, let alone adequately convey them on to the People, may become severely compromised. On the other hand, overload may play an important part in successful raising of Power.

### **Direct Method**

In this method of entering trance, the Priestess just lets go, by her own will, without any special outside cues or assistance. This is the simplest way to do it, but it's the hardest way to learn. It is also extremely susceptible to fakery or self-deception on the part of the Priestess, particularly before an inexperienced group of people. On these grounds alone it should be approached with great caution. This takes us back to the 'bottom line' of quality control — be careful who you teach any of these skills to, and be mindful that the Gods have their own means of calling bad Priestesses to account.

The Direct Method has a severe drawback in that it isn't necessarily accompanied by an external indication that it is happening; this makes it very hard for the coven to follow along and support the Priestess. If the Anchor is her regular working partner, long familiar with the signs of her entry into deep trance, the Anchor can cue the other people who are present in the Circle. Failing that, the direct method is probably best kept to Elders-only Circles. Where everybody present is experienced in many methods of facilitating and entering altered states of consciousness, nobody is likely to get too upset by anyone else's unannounced entry into trance

### **Contraindications to the Direct Method**

Direct entry into a trance state for religious purposes is risky for people who have any sort of untreated dissociative disorder, severe depression, bipolar affective disorder, or suicidal or masochistic tendencies.[61] What these people most need from us is our care, concern and perhaps referral to professional assistance — not instruction in free-form entry into altered states of consciousness.

Our psychiatrists are liable to tell us that we are crazy, if we say that there is a voice (or a Voice) speaking to us. It is not easy to accept possession as being an ongoing part of your life. It's not just Witches who face this issue: the Kodia priestesses of Egypt do this as well. [62]

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- [1] LeShan, 1976: *Alternate Realities*. LeShan uses the example of the physicist's two desks (pp. 54-59), one solid enough to hold computers, books, papers and the other consisting of energy pulses dancing in space, to show us how different models of reality serve us best for different purposes. For us, this was the breakthrough into the notion of willed change of consciousness. State-specific epistemology is just a special case.
- See also Bridger, 1997: *Pagan Deism*. She uses the metaphor of a triangular system to discuss different ways in which we perceive and interact with the Gods.
- [2] Fitelson, 1995.
- [3] Grinder and Bandler, 1976: *The structure of magic II*, pages 4 through 12. Also note that the senses of taste and smell, while not so much associated with consciousness, are strongly associated with emotion, habit and memory. The applications for ritual design are fairly obvious. For example, the presence of a certain type of incense can cue us that we are in sacred space.
- [4] Gilligan (1987) p. 228-231 presents examples of a basic hypnotic induction modified to use primarily visual, kinetic, and aural vocabulary and images.
- [5] Ambrose and Newbold. 1980: *Handbook of medical hypnosis*, page 38.
- [6] Ambrose and Newbold, page 37.
- [7] Mann and Sanders, 1995: *The effects of light, temperature, trance length and time of day on hypnotic depth*.
- [8] Rouget, 1985: *Music and trance*.
- [9] Deren, pages 233 to 239, and 244 to 246; Hart, 1990: *Drumming at the edge of magic*; Metraux, 1972: *Voodoo in Haiti* pages 177 to 186; and Wilson, 1992: *The drummer's path*.
- [10] Adapted from page 75 of Keen (1971).
- [11] Gwyneth's pacifist answer is to simply go home before the drummers start playing. She reckons that if she wanted to hear lots of loud thumping noises she'd buy herself a jackhammer or a concrete tamper as a household toy.
- [12] Moore, 1983: *The frequency selectivity of the auditory system*.
- [13] Maxfield, 1993: *The journey of the drum*.
- [14] Turk, 1995, page 82.
- [15] Goodman, 1972: *Speaking in tongues*; and Zusne and Jones, 1982: *Anomalous psychology*. This subject is currently the focus of intense debate among scholars of religion; for a review, see Short, 1996: *Mysticism, mediation and the non-linguistic*.
- [16] Rees and Rees, 1961: *Celtic Heritage*, page 137.
- [17] Aldridge, 1993: *Music and Alzheimer's disease*.
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- [19] Virgil, *The Eighth Eclogue*, line 65; translated by J.W. MacKail and cited in Lowe, 1929: *Magic in Greek and Latin literature*.
- [20] Godwin, 1987: *Harmonies of Heaven and Earth*.
- [21] Cowan: *Fire in the head: shamanism and the Celtic spirit*, pages 70 to 103.
- [22] Bateson, 1974: *Ritualization: a study in texture and texture change*.
- [23] Snyder, 1930: *Hypnotic poetry*; see also Aldridge, 1989: *Music, communication and medicine*.
- [24] Freely adapted by Gwyneth from a list given in Snyder and Shor, 1983: *Trance-inductive poetry*.
- [25] Ordinarily a sestina has six long stanzas plus one short stanza. Gwyneth chose to leave two stanzas out in the interests of conservation...

- [26] Gwyneth notes: I wrote this invocation for workshop use. It works for me, but I have my own private invocations which I prefer because they more closely embody my personal understanding of the Sacred.
- [27] Rees and Rees: *Celtic heritage*, pages 140 and 141.
- [28] see any issue of *The Formalist: A Journal of Metrical Poetry*.
- [29] Pfeiffer, 1982: *The creative explosion: an inquiry into the origins of art and religion*.
- [30] Spiegel and Spiegel, 1978: *Trance and treatment*.
- [31] Isenberg and Mathews, 1991: *Working hypnotically with deaf people*.
- [32] Williams, 1963: *Highway hypnosis: an hypothesis*.
- [33] Ambrose and Newbold, 1980: *Handbook of medical hypnosis*, page 48; also see Kroger and Schneider, 1959: *An electronic aid for hypnotic induction*.
- [34] Gwyneth's mirror-on-a-string is a heliographic signal mirror, commonly sold in sporting goods shops. The best feature of the signal mirror is that you can look through its unsilvered centre 'target' at a light source while simultaneously tracking an image of that light source across your face.
- [35] Thoth, 1992: *The art of scrying*.
- [36] Hunchak, 1980: *Hypnotic induction by entoptic phenomena*; see also Moses, 1975: *Adler's physiology of the eye*.
- [37] Dronfield, 1995: *Subjective vision and the source of Irish megalithic art*.
- [38] Roach, Mary "Ancient Altered States" in *Discover* Vol. 19; No. 6. (June, 1998) pp. 52-58.
- [39] Gadon, 1989: *The once and future Goddess*, and literally hundreds of other books about the arts of prehistoric, Classical and tribal Pagan peoples.
- [40] Isenberg, 1994, page 94.
- [41] Deren, *Divine horsemen*, page 230.
- [42] Axel, 1995: *The molecular logic of smell*.
- [43] For an Egyptian example, see El Guindy and Schmais, 1994: *The Zar: an ancient dance of healing*.
- [44] Illustrated in de Kleen, 1970: *Mudras: the ritual hand-poses of the Buddha priests and the Shiva priests of Bali*.
- [45] Goodman, 1990: *Where the spirits ride the wind: trance journeys and other ecstatic experiences*.
- [46] Bourguignon, 1960: *Trance dance*. This book is held in few libraries, but is worth getting on inter-library loan.
- [47] Nina Epton, *Through breath and words to ecstasy*, pages 221 to 227 in Wavell, Butt and Epton, 1967: *Trance*.
- [48] And here lies a place where many Witches disagree. Some wouldn't dance widdershins if you paid them to; others see widdershins dancing as drawing up the powers of Earth, and deosil dancing as drawing down the powers of the Sky. Branwen (knowing that few readers ever look at footnotes) reckons that in the face of such a disagreement, maybe Western line-dancing would be a good compromise.
- [49] Espenak, 1974: *Trance and ecstasy in dance therapy*, pages 105 and 106. See also Sachs, 1952: *World history of dance*, for a discussion of the shamanic aspects of dance.
- [50] Deren, *Divine horsemen*, pages 240 to 243. Also see Lewis, 1990: *Spiritual dances and walks*, and Kalinin, 1988: *Power to the dancers*.
- [51] Andelman, 1973: *Sound in movement, or whatever*, page 191.
- [52] Personal communication from Songdog to Gwyneth, December, 1996.
- [53] Pepper, 1984: *Dance - a suitable form of exercise?*
- [54] King, 1988: *Hyperventilation - a therapist's point of view*.
- [55] Jencks, 1978: *Utilizing the phases of the breathing rhythm in hypnosis*.
- [56] Napier, 1986: *Masks, transformation and paradox*; see also Gwyneth's favourite book on the subject, *Impro* by Keith Johnstone.

- [57] Amira and Cornelius, 1992: *The music of Santeria: traditional rhythms of the Bata drums*.
- [58] Maxfield, 1993: *The Journey of the Drum*; this is a summary of her 1991 Ph.D. dissertation, *Effects of Rhythmic Drumming on EEG and Subjective Experience*.
- [59] Espenak, 1974, pages 104 and 105.
- [60] Kosslyn, 1994, page 54.
- [61] McBride, 1985: *Legal, religious and professional issues*.
- [62] El Guindy and Schmais, 1974, page 110 for an example from the Zar dancers.

## Chapter 3: Return, Reorientation and Recuperation

### Return

It is every bit as important to take care in bringing your covenmates back from trance as in ping them enter trance in the first place. Return may be more difficult when you are working with someone other than your usual working partner. Although it is true that people eventually return to ordinary waking consciousness whether they want to or not, incomplete or delayed return can leave lingering and unpleasant after-effects. Some of these are:

- 1) **Unusual cognitive functioning**, such as lack of customary mental alertness; lapses of memory; difficulty in concentration; spaciness; and heightened suggestibility (that is, an increased tendency to be influenced by other people or external stimuli.)
- 2) **Unusual negative emotion**, such as fear, sadness or anxiety that does not appear to relate to anything immediate in the person's life, or atypical mood swings.
- 3) **Atypical and disturbing imagery** in the person's dreams or meditation that do not seem related to anything immediate in her life or in the developmental issues she is currently working on. Undesired intrusions of dream or meditation imagery at inappropriate times (flashbacks).
- 4) **Atypical body appearance, sensation or mobility**, such as headache, nausea, dizziness, slow or stylised movement, difficulty walking or talking normally, perceptions of heaviness or lightness in the person's head, body or limbs, unfocused eyes.[1]

### Recalling someone from trance

Return should never be rushed. It is unwise and inappropriate to follow an elaborate trance induction with a perfunctory recall. *This risks incomplete return.* It takes about the same length of time to intentionally and safely change one's state of consciousness in any direction – rapid recall can be dangerous, insofar as it can push someone into a psychotic state.

Even if return is complete, the person may not receive enough emotional support, or the recall from trance may simply be so rapid as to be jarring and shocking to the person. As a concrete example, compare the experiences of gradually gaining speed on a bicycle and then being abruptly pulled off that bicycle and bouncing off the sidewalk. It hurts, right? So, when Anchoring for someone, let your care and concern show through.[2] This makes it easier for the person to make a comfortable return. Remember that this is your friend or your lover that you are working with.

### Methods of recall

There are several gentle, supportive, and thorough ways to recall someone from trance. A simple and effective method is to have the Anchor call the person by name, several times if necessary. When she seems to be back to the level of trance from which she started (Circle state of consciousness,

enhancement), have her repeat her own name. If she still seems disoriented, ask her to move around the room, or to hold and identify ritual tools or other familiar objects. Gentle movement, like stretching or shaking out, is also a help.

In an ongoing working relationship, you may have other pre-arranged cues for return, usually complementary to the ones you use to help her deepen her trance. Again, any consistently used combination of visual, audial or tactile cues will do. For example, a bell, preferably, deep-toned and rich-sounding, makes a good signal for entry and return. The sound of the bell is also a useful cue for the other participants in the ritual. Similarly, dancing the Priestess home, [3] essentially performing a grounding by means of patterned movements, may assist in a comfortable return. A cup of sweet tea might help. Warm, grounding hugs are good. Food may be the most reliable means of grounding, and that points to the benefit of doing Cakes and Wine after trancework.

Imagery can help people make the return transition from a trance state to the Circle state of consciousness. For example, the Big Toe method works. Mention to the persons involved that we can see them, as their own selves, in the corners of their big toes. Tell them that no matter how far they have gone, they can never totally lose track of their own realities (and this, by the bye, is true). Tell them that you can see them in their toes, and call on them to help you by climbing back out of their toes, through their knees, into their belly, up their spine and into their head again.

Of course, you can devise your own imagery for return from altered states. The possibilities are limitless, but images drawn from your coven's usual imaginative repertoire will probably work best. If you have used any travel imagery to induce the trance, reverse the imagery to bring the person back. For example, if in your trance induction you have described a descent in an elevator, have the elevator come back up during the return journey.

Sometimes the coven may think that it's time for the trance to end, but the entranced person (and perhaps also the Gods who are interacting with or through that person) may still be busily in-process. It is very, very hard to distinguish between plain old 'ordinary' auditory hallucinations and genuine internal sacred discourse, if you happen to be on the outside looking in. Cues that someone may still be in-process include:

- seeing her lips move slightly
- observing that she seems to be talking to herself
- she appears to be distracted while in ordinary conversation, or uses atypical language
- she become silent in the midst of a conversation with others
- her speech may be slurred

If, as Anchor, you feel that you need to know what's going on 'in there', ask your partner: "(Name) are you hearing the God/dess right now?" Perhaps you will want to follow-up with "(Name) do you wish to come back now?"

## **Reorientation**

Remember that bringing someone back to Circle state of consciousness is just the first part of the task at hand. When she is back, but while you are all still together in Circle, it can be important for the group to talk about the message that was received. This will help to transfer fast-fading trance memory into more stable long-term memory, in just the same way that we are advised to record our dreams immediately upon rising. If the person yielded her own awareness, it will allow her to know what happened. And if the working raised any emotionally difficult issues, processing it will help all present to put what was learned into context and incorporate it into normal life.

Closing the Circle formally and with care is at least as important as casting it well. This is the signal to our deep minds that it's time to return to normal waking consciousness, to function again in the everyday world.

Once Circle is closed, we advise our students to avoid discussing what took place in Circle at all for a minimum of twenty four hours, to give whatever was planted in that ritual a chance to take root. Even among others who were there (for whom the basic confidentiality rules still apply) this silent period is good practice. It applies as much to messages received from the Gods while in Circle, as to workings or to anything else we might do in Circle.

## **Recuperation**

Respect counts for a lot!

Don't hassDDDDon't hassle someone who has just returned from trance. This is absolutely the wrong time to run up and complain about the kettle having blown its fuse, or the corkscrew having gone missing. It's a fair bet that the Gods, or the High Priestess, didn't cause those problems anyway. If you have the resources to spare within your coven, appoint someone to stay with the person after she returns from trance, to provide a warm blanket and a hot drink, soup or fruit juice to help her replace the blood sugar that she may have lost while in trance.

Under rare circumstances, a person who is entranced may not yet want to return to ordinary reality, or the Goddess may not want to end the sacred discourse. This is not in itself a dangerous state of affairs, and it should be no cause for alarm, since the person will eventually either wake up spontaneously, or drift off into normal sleep. Should the person fall asleep[4], it might be interesting to leave matters as they are, and then see what new insights the person wakes with. More often than not, we don't have the option. We might be in rented space, or have to go to work the next morning. If you try this anyway, in the morning you must make very certain that reorientation is complete.



No matter what else you do, do not *ever* allow a person who is tranced, intoxicated or otherwise incapacitated to get in a car and try to drive. The notion of the 'Designated Driver' may be as valuable in the coven as it is in the tavern.

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[1] Heikkinen, 1989: *Reorientation from altered states: please, more carefully*, page 520. The first, second and fourth items on this list come from Heikkinen, Judy added the third.

[2] Crawford and others, 1982: *Transient experiences following hypnotic testing and special termination procedures*.

[3] We use a simple Greek grapevine dance. The object of the exercise here is to wake up the Priestess' body awareness, not to raise Power. There may be more intimate actions that you and your beloved partner would prefer to use; surely we don't need to spell them out in detail...

[4] Ambrose and Newbold, 1980, page 50. Gwyneth reminds you that if you should hear snores, this should be a fairly strong indication that he or she is indeed asleep!

## **Chapter 4: What Happens while in Trance**

Trance can be relatively farther from or closer to ordinary waking consciousness. We call this "deeper" or "shallower" trance. It's an infinitely variable range, like a spectrum. It's easier to think and talk about things that shade in this way if we create a model that names some divisions, just as our culture has divided the continuous rainbow into six or seven distinct colours, and given those colours names. There are many other ways in which the rainbow could have been divided and the colours named.

Similarly, what follows is just a model we created, not The Truth, and it only really reflects the experience of two Priestesses and their own direct students. Other people may see fewer, or more, categories, or simply divide things in different places. Models like this work very much like holograms. Even a little bit of the negative will show you the whole picture, but it will be blurry and indistinct. If you have more of the negative, your picture will have that much sharper resolution and that much more detail to it.

### **Levels of Trance**

We recognise four progressively deeper levels of trance. We perceive these as four recognisably different stages of altered consciousness. Each has different characteristic indicators, and is best reached by different methods. No level is "better" or more valid than any other, but each is most useful for specific purposes, both in and out of a ritual context.

We call these four levels, in order from shallowest to deepest: enhancement trance, inspiration trance, integration trance and possession trance.

#### **Level 1: Enhancement Trance**

As someone enters enhancement trance, she holds the centre stage, and is supremely in control of herself and her space, confident and vibrant with energy. The doors of perception are open for her now, and she is exquisitely aware of all that is going on around her.[1] She will retain full memory of this shining time.

Enhancement trance is the root of stage presence. Anyone who is acting as ritual leader, for any kind of ritual, uses it all throughout the rite. It is every bit as useful while teaching or just giving a speech. It's all you need for outer court rites, simple occasions of worship, celebration and learning. It's particularly critical for large, public rituals, which require far more theatricality than does the intimate Circle.

The Priestess who is well-skilled in enhancement trance will eventually have a strong enough sense of self and fine enough control to confidently and comfortably let go of control.

#### **Level 2: Inspiration Trance**

Someone who is in a state of inspiration trance is fully aware and in full control, while also receiving information from the Gods or from the Otherworld. By her own will and choice, the Priestess may choose to report to the others present what she is hearing and seeing. Her memory of this time is likely to fade fast. If any memory traces remain, they will most likely be surreal, blurry, fragmentary, much like dream memory a few hours after waking.

In inspiration, the Priestess is standing just barely on this side of the Veil. Although she is still completely in control, she willingly takes direction from the Gods. Since this willingness is the first step to full surrender, many of us pass briefly through the inspiration stage whenever we are on our way to deeper levels.

Inspiration trance is wonderful for receptive workings of all kinds, in or out of Circle, for divination, healing, counselling. When confronted with human need, when we seek Divine guidance through the mechanism of inspiration trance, it is often there for us. Then we will instinctively and spontaneously know what to say or do in order to help. We feel and seem "turned on," spontaneous and free. A familiar example is the touch healer who tunes into her hands and follows them while offering touch.

In Circle, inspiration is the ability to "wing it," to jettison the whole idea of having a script and to go with the flowing moment. Generally this kind of free-form ritual works best where people know and trust each other enough to relax, and are confident with the basic ritual structures of their tradition. Not just covens — outer court or study group situations would work fairly well, but not open public gatherings which might include total strangers, some of them either hostile or unstable, others simply clueless about what's going on.

### **Level 3: Integration Trance**

In integration trance, the Priestess retains awareness of her identity and her surroundings while at the same time entering into and fluently working with information from the Otherworld or from the Gods. What we call Carrying begins at this level; enhancement and inspiration are actually precursor states.

While in a state of integration trance, the Priestess may experience "split-field" or side by side simultaneous awareness of humanity and Divinity in any or all of her sensory input channels. [2] Others present may notice changes in the Priestess' demeanour and tone of voice, possibly shifting back and forth as Priestess and Goddess share control. Her eyes may defocus or track anomalously. When deeply into a state of integration, one of her eyes (often the left one) may track movements of the coven members while the other eye remains fixed on a candle flame or other attractive object.

In Wiccan rituals, integration level trancework seems to work best for "interactive" situations, where the people want to ask the Gods for some specific answer or action, or just to dialogue with Them in some way. Also, it is advisable for the Priestess to hold herself at the delicate balance point of integration, not slipping farther away from waking consciousness, whenever there are any external security or safety concerns.

Integration trance, when sought from the human side, is best achieved by following a well-habituated sequence of activities (such as formal casting of a Circle) although the Gods may sometimes choose to come under other circumstances. In any event, relax and let it happen.

Theatrical games are excellent preparation for integration trance, since they afford good practice in attaining and maintaining divided consciousness. Good actors, like good ritualists, learn to see the division of consciousness as a natural and useful thing.[3] A striking visual image of integration may be found in the *inua* masks of the Pacific Northwest, where one eye socket of the primary face is enlarged to contain an image of the indwelling spirit.[4]

#### **Level 4: Possession Trance**

In possession trance, the Priestess voluntarily and completely sets aside her self-awareness, *and her awareness of her surroundings*, in favour of the Indwelling Divine. Possession trance is best done within a full, formal Circle properly cast by the procedures that you have been taught. When you go that far out, the well-worn path of habit is a great help and comfort. Strong trance reinforcers are also extremely useful.

While in possession, the Priestess will display a whole different personality, that of the Deity that is currently acting within her. Her voice will probably sound different. Her vocabulary, perhaps even her language, will change. She may move or act very differently. Changes in the way she holds tiny muscles may even actually change her face. She may want to eat or drink things that, in normal life, she would violently dislike.

The Priestess almost never has any conscious memory of what she did while in possession.[5] If she is well practised in dream recall, she may eventually retrieve a few fragmentary impressions.

The Priestess needs the Anchor's care and protection during the time when her own consciousness is absent from her body. She will probably be less aware of heat or cold,[6] and their effects. She may also have a diminished awareness of pain[7] or fatigue. She may dance or move in ways that are not within her normal range. This increased fluidity and stamina put her at risk for some strains and injuries, and for exhaustion.

*"The ancient, partially crippled woman possessed by a young Erzulie (the Goddess of love) doing the young, lively dance, will break no bones nor suffer any ill while she is mounted by the Goddess; in fact, the knee that has been locked stiff by arthritis for the past five years is for that moment as limber as that of a young girl. But when the loa leaves, the body collapses in a heap and the old woman may be in a critical condition for days afterwards."* [8]

During such deep trances, the Anchor must work hard to keep up with the Priestess' actions. It is particularly important that the Anchor remain mindful of the safety and well-being of the Priestess and of the other people in the Circle.

## Fluctuations in depth of trance

Repetitive actions or transactions with someone in trance can have a cumulative effect of driving that person ever-deeper into the trance, to a point where they may become exhausted. This will hit them hard when they return from trance. Make allowances for such effects when you design a ritual.

Bear in mind that although absolutely involuntary entry into trance is unlikely, beginners to trance work may not always have enough control to resist the temptation to slide into trance, particularly if the ritual is accompanied by drumming. Sometimes this is a beneficial side-effect in ritual, but it should be discussed beforehand in order to ensure that all participants' levels of comfort are taken into account. *Nevertheless, someone may go deeper into trance than the ritual leader might have intended: this possibility should not surprise us when it happens.*

## Assessment

Highly-responsive people tend to describe their trance states in terms such as 'relaxation', 'calmness' and 'well-being'. [9] Thus, it is very difficult to tell, from external signs alone, whether someone is in an hypnotically-induced altered state of consciousness, or whether they are in a state of deep bodily relaxation. [10] **Table 5** presents a correlation of hypnotic states as reported in the medical literature, with levels of trance as we understand them, and experiences and behaviours typical of each level.

## Amnesia

Following the experience of deep trance, the person may experience amnesia, a loss of memory concerning what has transpired. The potential for amnesia on the part of the entranced person increases in proportion to the depth of trance which she has experienced. In contrast, the potential for amnesia on the part of the other people increases in proportion to the complexity of actions and messages that were part of the trancework. This difference in effects, which may be subtle or may be quite pronounced, suggests that different psycho-physiological factors may contribute to amnesia.

Possession trance may be unsettling to even the veteran practitioner. In psychological terms, amnesia may therefore be in part due to self-protective functions of the mind. In physiological terms, willed surrender of consciousness is taxing to the brain, in much the same way that a computer's functions may become bogged-down if too many concurrent process 'windows' are open to its user. These physiological limits to perception effect human performance in high-input situations:

*"Neurons in the parts of the brain that subserve vision, memory and reasoning not only require oxygen and glucose to operate (quantities of both of which are limited) but also must be stimulated by other parts of the brain. There are certain 'arousal' systems in the brain, which regulate alertness and mental energy. These systems can stimulate only a certain number of brain regions at the same time, because of limitations in the availability of necessary chemicals."* [11]

Integration and possession trances are high-input situations, pushing the limits of the processing capacity of the brain. Under these circumstances, the exhaustion of those areas of the brain dealing with memory and reasoning may result in amnesia, and exhaustion of the visual mechanism may account for the blackout which is most commonly associated with possession.

The other people in the Circle may also experience amnesia, owing to their inability to retain complex messages in their short-term memory. Inexperienced coven leaders, when faced with this situation, may conclude that the lack of memory is indicative of lack of due care and attention on the part of the people. In fact, it is due to limits in the brain's ability to retain multiple inputs, due to limited short-term memory capacity:

*"We can hold in mind only about four perceptual units, or other sorts of chunks, at the same time. Short-term memory is a dynamic state; information is retained because neurons are actively firing.*

*Neurons quickly adapt, and continue to fire only if repeatedly stimulated, but there are limitations on how quickly they can be restimulated. These limitations may involve the speed with which certain chemicals are produced and absorbed."* [12]

The limit of four perceptual units is not hard-and-fast; some studies suggest that the limit might be as high as seven, and it probably varies from person to person, and perhaps from day to day for a given person. If you have gone deep into possession trance, it shouldn't be at all surprising that you might feel left out and disappointed if none of your coveners had sufficient recollection of the Message to be able to recount it back to you. After all, you weren't there when it came through. Therefore, the wise coven leader will consider appointing someone who has good short-term memory skills to be Scribe for the Circle, charged with the task of recording what transpires therein.



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- [1] This is the “trance consciousness” described by De Zoete and Spies, 1938: *Dance and drama in Bali*.
- [2] This experience is well-documented by secular students of hypnosis. See Hilgard, 1986: *Divided consciousness: multiple controls in thought and action*.
- [3] Spolin, 1963: *Improvisation for the Theatre*; also see the later and more readable *Impro* by Keith Johnstone (1979).
- [4] Fitzhugh and Crowell, eds., 1988: *Crossroads of Continents: Cultures of Siberia and Alaska*, p. 256.
- [5] Yap (1960) considers subsequent amnesia to be indicative of complete possession.
- [6] Chandra Shekar (1989) concludes that trance-induced anaesthesia to pain and heat is across-cultural indicator of possession trance.
- [7] Yap (1960) describes skin anaesthesia to pain as being one of the hallmarks of complete possession trance.
- [8] Deren, *Divine Horsemen* p. 231.
- [9] Kirsch and others, 1992: *Expert judgments of hypnosis from subjective state reports*.
- [10] Edmunston, 1977: *Neutral hypnosis and relaxation*.
- [11] Kosslyn, 1994: *Elements of graphic design*, page 270; despite its unprepossessing title, this book contains a wealth of information concerning human powers of perception and cognition.
- [12] Kosslyn, page 269; for a fuller treatment of the problem, see Baddeley, 1986: *Working memory*.

## Chapter 5: Conclusions

We offer these notes in the belief that Witches can and should continue to develop new ritual techniques while striving to better understand and improve upon the tools and methods passed on to us by our forebears in the Craft.

This book is a work in progress. We intend to continue to study the ways and means by which we can ourselves become better Anchors in trancework, as well as teaching these skills to other people. We can't do this work all by ourselves – in the complex world in which we live, it takes the hands and hearts and wisdom of many Witches to keep developing new tools for the Craft. We hope that you will join us in that work, and do new work of your own as well.

### Acknowledgements and Caveats

Thanks are due to our Craft kin for their willingness to discuss the concepts and practices presented in these notes. Corrections will be received by us with gratitude and grace. Nevertheless, mistakes contained herein (and Goddess only knows, there must be some) are still our responsibility.

We advise you to consult with your own Elders to determine whether they have specific teachings that may add to or supersede the materials presented in these notes.

As we opened, so do we close: opinions expressed within these notes *are solely those of the authors* and are not to be construed as being the opinions or positions of any of the organisations to which we belong, or of any particular lineage within the Craft. May these words and the manner of their sharing bring good to many and harm to none.

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# Pathworking: Wiccan Guided Meditation

## a basic orientation

Make yourself comfortable, sit still, breathe deep, relax, and listen very closely while I tell you a story ...

Witches call this "pathworking," and we do a lot of it. Some secular therapies use a lot of it as well, calling it "guided fantasy" or "guided meditation." Pathworking, an intensely effective way of sharing the stories, feelings and values of our religious Path, relies on trance.

One of the classic definitions of magic is "the art of changing consciousness in accordance with will." Witches work to reconstruct the almost-lost indigenous shamanic traditions of Europe. Shamans, in turn, have been described as the "technicians of the Sacred." The word "technique" is a synonym for "craft." So, working with consciousness is the craft of the Witch. Because the techniques of working with consciousness are magic-related skills, we seek to learn as much as we can, from any source or from our own experimentation, about them.

Many different states of consciousness are available to us. The second part of the definition of magic is "in accordance with will." Different states of consciousness work best in different situations or for different purposes. Our newly found, wilful freedom of movement among states of consciousness carries with it a responsibility to figure out what works best when, and to choose appropriately.

The common feature of all trances is a minimum of internal noise. The advantages and benefits of trance states are the advantages and benefits of awareness: you can see more, hear more, feel more, remember more, relax more.

There is a wide spectrum of trance states. De-focused or "oceanic" trances are characterized by a greater openness and availability to any and all experience. De-focused states are sometimes called "soft-eyed" trances. The most familiar forms of meditation - called "awareness" meditation - are also intended to open us to receptivity. It is one of the ways we can listen deeply for the voices of the Gods.

Externally oriented trance-states also include pure attention states. In these, one can see, hear, feel, smell, taste (or experience any combination of these sense perceptions) without distraction.

For example, watching movies, we often become absorbed in the world of the movie, so it temporarily becomes our reality. We feel its emotions, and even seem to be a bit disoriented when the movie ends.

Such a state of consciousness is the right one for pathworking: relaxed, yet intensely focused, free from both internal chatter and external distraction, deeply receptive to the story, the feelings, the underlying values that are being presented. Hypnosis is simply one aid towards reaching that state; there are many others.

And what happens then? Myth and metaphor. Secular therapists tell their clients stories that will help them understand their life issues or access their own inner strengths. We do some of that, too, but we also do more. In pathworking, in guided meditation within a Pagan religious context, we retell the myths, the great teaching stories that convey the core values of our religion. We guide people to a deeper understanding of our shared religious symbols and their interactions.

The trance state activates the listener's imagination. Older writings on the occult speak exclusively in terms of the visual imagination, identifying visualization -- "seeing with the mind's eye" -- as a critical skill of magic. But more modern psychology has taught us that people work through a variety of primary representational systems. Many of us have visual imaginations, but imagining might just as well take the form of sound, touch, any sense. The important thing to develop is active imagination, so you can enter vividly into the story in whatever way works for you.

You could read the same material in a book or even simply discuss these topics without the preliminaries of a hypnotic induction or the indirect approach of metaphor. But then it might well remain a sterile intellectual exercise, and you'd wind up "knowing about" instead of *knowing* in a deep, holistic, emotionally engaged way. As much as we value the learning of the mind, we know it is incomplete unless the heart learns as well.

The hypnotic induction, and the hyper-attentive state that it creates, transforms the story from words to imaginative experience. Those who listen in trance enter the story, seeing, hearing, feeling the tactile or kinetic sensations -- and also sharing the emotional responses. By the vividness of this experience, the message inherent in the story is planted deeply, to root in our deep minds, to connect us to each other and to our Gods.

Judy Harrow and Gwyneth Cathyl

# Progressive Deep Muscle Relaxation

## "Jacobsen's Technique"

Note: this self-massage technique goes back to the 1930's, and has been reinterpreted many times.

This practice is absolutely safe, harmless, good for you, and you can use as little or as much of it as suits your purpose. For a quick stress-buster at work, clench and relax your shoulders once or twice. If you're having trouble sleeping, do the full-body routine (but don't feel guilty if you fall asleep before completing it). It will always do you good to release muscle tension, even if you take it no further than that.

However, you can take it a great deal further, because releasing muscular tension can also give you the necessary space to release emotional or mental stress. So deep muscle relaxation can be a precursor to self-exploration, and beyond that, to developing your personal spirituality. The bodymind is one system; the body is the most accessible part of that system to start working with.

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Close your eyes and take some deep, slow breaths. Feel into your body. Notice how your body feels right now.

Bring your awareness to your right leg. Inhale deeply and lift leg up slightly tensing the foot and leg. Tense up tighter. Hold (about 10 seconds). Exhale and let the leg drop gently. Roll the leg from side to side and relax. Breathe fully and deeply.

Repeat the same for the left leg and foot.

Now raise and tense your arm and make our hand into a fist. Tense up and hold. Exhale and drop the arm. Roll the right arm from side to side.

Repeat with the left arm. Breathe.

Now contract the buttocks. Tighten, hold, and release tension.

Suck in your belly as tight as you can. Tighten, hold and release. Breathe.

Inhale and fill your belly with air, as if you were filling up a balloon. Hold ten seconds and then exhale fully out of the mouth. Try it again, this time making a whooshing sound as you exhale.

Bring the shoulder blades together in back. Squeeze tightly, hold, release.

Bring both shoulders up to your ears. Hold. Exhale and let them down. Repeat 3 times. Now push shoulders downward. Hold and release.

Tighten the facial muscles. Make your face like a prune. Squeeze tightly. Hold. Exhale and release tension. Breathe deep.

Now stretch your face. Open your mouth as wide as possible. Look up as far as you can. Stick your tongue out and extend it down towards your chin. Hold - hold - and now, relax.

Now, wriggle, roll, or gently shake out any residual tensions.

Take at least 10 more deep, slow breaths. Feel how your body feels now. Notice any differences from the way it felt when you began.

Remember that you can repeat this, wholly or in part, whenever you find it helpful or convenient.



## Table 1: Tentative Classification of Dissociative States

	<b>Psychological Model: (Dissociation or polypsychism)</b>	<b>Psychological Model: (Dissociation or polypsychism)</b>
<p><b>Functional</b> (perceived source of wisdom)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Jungian archetypes inner child work</li> <li>● Childhood imaginary companions</li> <li>● Tutelary ghosts?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ritual Deity assumption: Drawing the Moon or Drawing the Sun spirit possession</li> <li>● Pentecostal charisms (the Holy Spirit)</li> <li>● Channelling</li> <li>● Mysticism</li> </ul>
<p><b>Dysfunctional</b> (perceived source of confusion)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Dissociative Identity Disorder (was called MPD)</li> <li>● Dissociative fugue states</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Possession by 'demons' or other destructive spirits</li> <li>● extreme austerities</li> <li>● martyrdom; self-sacrifice</li> </ul>

Also consider — is the state of being culturally-sanctioned or disapproved? Does it increase or decrease the person's quality of life?

**Table 3:**  
**Survey of Trance Induction Methods**

<b>Sensory Mode</b>	<b>Primary Method of Trance Induction</b>	<b>Refinements of These Methods</b>
<b>Audial</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Percussion</li> <li>● Tone</li> <li>● Environmental Music</li> <li>● Structured Music</li> <li>● Prose</li> <li>● Trance-inducing Poetry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Singing our Sacred Texts</li> </ul>
<b>Visual</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Amorphous Images</li> <li>● Abstract Geometric Patterns</li> <li>● Representational Art</li> <li>● Gesture</li> <li>● Sacred Dance and Mime</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Scrying</li> <li>● Entoptic Phenomena</li> </ul>
<b>Olfactory</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Incense</li> <li>● Perfume</li> </ul>	
<b>Kinaesthetic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Posture</li> <li>● Participatory Dance</li> <li>● Breath Control</li> <li>● Blood Control</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Hyperventilation</li> <li>● Hypoventilation</li> </ul>
<b>Tactile Induction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Touch</li> </ul>	
<b>Combined Methods</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Maskwork with Mirrors</li> <li>● Drumming and Dancing Together</li> </ul>	

**Table 5:**

**Criteria for Assessment of Hypnotic State and Level of Trance**

<p><b>Hypnotic State</b> (Medical model)</p>	<p><b>Typical Experiences and Behaviours</b> (As felt within and as observed by others)</p>	<p><b>Level of Trance</b> (Religious model)</p>
<p><b>Waking State</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eyes smart or water</li> <li>• Eyelids heavy</li> <li>• Eyelids flutter</li> </ul>	<p>Pre-trance relaxation</p>
<p><b>Sub-hypnotic State</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduction of general muscle tension</li> <li>• Feelings of reassurance</li> <li>• Expressive and fluent speech</li> </ul>	<p>Integration trance</p>
<p><b>Light Hypnosis</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eye closure</li> <li>• Overall physical relaxation</li> <li>• Sensation of pressure or rearrangement of skin</li> <li>• Swaying of arms or body</li> <li>• Breathing slows down</li> <li>• Slight reduction of pain</li> <li>• Tunnel vision</li> <li>• Blurring of visual focus</li> <li>• Occasional pauses to “check in”</li> </ul>	<p>Integration trance</p>
<p><b>Medium Hypnosis</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alterations of skin sensitivity to touch</li> <li>• Feelings of warmth or cold</li> <li>• Changes in skin colouration</li> <li>• Relaxation of the facial planes</li> <li>• Visual effects: changes in colour perception; split-field or doubled vision</li> <li>• Eyes not tracking together</li> <li>• Alterations of sense of time</li> </ul>	<p>Integration trance</p>
<p><b>Deep Hypnosis</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General insensitivity to pain</li> <li>• Increased range of joint movement</li> <li>• Intense emotional affects</li> <li>• Subjective blackout</li> <li>• Major changes in expression, posture and voice; possible slurring</li> <li>• Unaware of passage of time</li> <li>• Total spontaneous posthypnotic amnesia</li> <li>• Possible posthypnotic collapse</li> </ul>	<p>Possession trance</p>