

MAGIC, POWER AND CONSCIOUSNESS

by Fran Mosley

Fran Mosley is a teacher, author, group facilitator and a trainee at the Serpent Institute

When I was a young child I desperately wanted to be able to 'do magic' (probably because I had so little power or control over my world). I was sure that books existed somewhere with spells I could read and carry out - if only I knew where to find them. Later I was taught that magic didn't exist. And still later I found that it did, but in a different form to what I had longed for as a child. Now magic meant something like 'the psychological power we have over ourselves or each other'. So magic existed, whether we liked it or not, and could be used, abused, ignored - but was bloody powerful in any case.

Starhawk has a different definition. In her book *Dreaming the Dark* she defines magic as the art of changing consciousness at will, and she goes on to say that magic works because consciousness shapes reality (and therefore changing consciousness changes reality). There seems to be some link between what she means and what I mean, but what the link is I can't get clear.

Will

First of all, I don't really know what will is. So many things happen in life, and I influence them, or let them happen, or try to stop them, or make use of them. But when do I will them? What is it to will them? I'm confused about willing.

I do know a little about changing consciousness, so perhaps I'll start there. There seem to me to be two different things we can mean by consciousness changing. One is changing the basis or bases of my understanding, the paradigms of my thought. The other is changing the state of my consciousness. Perhaps the truth (!) is that changing the bases of thought often happens via changing the state of consciousness. Is that it?

I experience many changes in my state of consciousness. For instance: sometimes when I walk into my therapist's room I step into a different world, like stepping into a room full of water, which I and he can somehow breathe. In this water no defences or pretences can exist. This is a palpable and immediate change of consciousness; the very nature of my experiencing alters. And out of this experience in therapy comes a changed consciousness in the other sense, changed paradigms. (That is almost the essence of what successful therapy is all about.) And the reality

of my world also changes - for instance, I am changing my work, branching out in various ways, making new friends and losing old ones. So therapy is close to magic in Starhawk's sense (a changed reality through changed consciousness) and in mine (the psychological power there is between and within people). But where is the will? It feels I don't exactly will the changes, but let them happen, let things develop as they seem to need to develop. It is like tending a garden where I don't will the plants to grow, but encourage some and discourage others, by watering and weeding and feeding and pruning.



Starhawk

DREAMING THE DARK

Magic, Sex and Politics

New edition

STARHAWK

Starhawk is a witch, writer, teacher, counsellor and political activist.

Publication March 1990

£6.99 net P/B ISBN 0 04 440592 8

272pp 197 X 129mm

British Commonwealth X Can

Being in a state

So much for that particular change in state of consciousness. What about other changes: when I move into a state of sleeping, of dreaming, a hypnagogic state, regressed state, meditative state, trance...? Being in one of these states, as opposed to my 'ordinary' waking state may or may not change my consciousness in the first sense. But I can certainly use them to do that. I use hypnagogic states and dreams to explore my past, my unconscious, and so to widen, enrich and alter my consciousness and my life. This too is magic in both Starhawk's and my sense of the word.

But consciousness can change its paradigms without changing state. For instance: I was part of a group of people who worked together under a very strong, manipulative, boss. She exerted a hold over us, instinctively using techniques that are probably familiar to people who understand groups, but that I fell for in my naivety. (One technique was to treat those in the group as the Chosen People, the bright ones, who had possession of certain understanding and truths that no-one else was clever enough to understand.) We were decent people living and breathing in a world that we couldn't perceive, in the way that a fish doesn't perceive the water

it moves in. It was only when the boss started behaving even more outrageously than usual that I and a couple of others slowly and painfully levered ourselves out of the water, as it were, to see the world we inhabited - and found it stank. Most of my colleagues, poor fishes, didn't do this, and stayed with her while her empire collapsed around her.

Left with questions


That was a change in the paradigms of consciousness, which happened without benefit of any states of consciousness other than the 'ordinary'. (Though maybe change would have been quicker if I had made use of other states??) In my sense of 'magic', i.e. psychological power, magic was being used all the while, because the boss used it to keep us, the group, under control. (This is like the magic that an entertainer or preacher or demagogue uses to hold an audience.) Then, with great effort, I used Starhawk's kind of magic, changed consciousness through use of the will, to see things differently. Is that right?

I seem to be left with questions rather than answers. What is the relationship between Starhawk's and my understanding of the term magic? I still can't put it into words. What is will? Or am I putting too much emphasis on that word in her definition? One thing I do know about using will power is that when we want changes - in ourselves or in the world - it is better to ride the storm, to harness existing forces, than to set ourselves in conflict against the status quo. And so to use Starhawk's kind of magic it is a good idea to have a sound knowledge of the interpersonal and intra-personal forces that I call magic.

SALENSIDE

RESIDENTIAL COURSES

in the beautiful Scottish Borders



MOVEMENT : The Inner Mind
(May 17th - 19th, 1991)
Personal growth explored through dance/movement therapy led by Kedzie Penfield.

UNDERSTANDING MOVEMENT
(July 20th - 27th, 1991)
Supervision and personal processes facilitated through dance movement therapy. Led by Kedzie Penfield. Of interest to anyone working with others in movement.

THE BODY SEEN AND HEARD
(August 3rd - 10th, 1991)
Experiential workshop in Gestalt, Psychodrama and Dance Movement Therapy. Led by Kedzie Penfield and Jane Puddy.

*For information about any of the above, contact:
Kedzie Penfield, Salenside, Ashkirk, Selkirk, Scotland TD7 4PF
Telephone : (0760) 32213*