

1 - First Steps

The Powers and Their Attainment

Having read the preceding pages, you now may be ready to take your first step, your initial, practical commitment to the way of witchcraft.

For your first step, it will be sufficient for you to make a token gesture. The traditional initiation rites we defer to Chapter 7; it is entitled, "The Coven and How to Form One." Here and now it will be sufficient for you to make a symbolic gesture which will ceremonially demonstrate your severance from old restraints and inhibitions that in the past have acted as the main obstacles to the development of the powers within you. Basically, these restraints can be symbolized as the yoke imposed by such established systems of irrational thought as organized religion, be it Christianity, Judaism, or Buddhism. Organized religion, let me emphasize. Of course, there are many other ironclad systems of thought without occult bases which have been imposed upon the public mind from time to time, such as Communism, Fascism, or capitalism, but these at least function under the pretence of ministering to the bodies of mankind rather than to the good of the soul, whatever that might be.

The domain of witchcraft is the realm of the unseen and the point at which it impinges upon man's psyche, and as it is in this very same area that the various churches have sought to dabble their fingers, it is with these institutions that we witches take issue in principle. Ironically, you will find that all the innovators and founders of said religions were revolutionaries in their time who took issue with their parent religions and were usually labeled heretics of one sort or another for their pains.

So enough of all the cant—religious, political, nationalist, whatever. Overboard with the lot of it. And this is where your little gesture comes in. No, we are not going to ask you to burn a draft card or an American flag; the time-honoured tradition of repeating the so-called Lord's Prayer backwards is all you have to observe. Whether you are or were a practising Christian, Buddhist, Jew, Mohammedan, Parsee, Hindu, whatever, make no difference at all. As long as you are living in a "Christian" country, the gesture is most effective.

It is a defiant relic from the days of the great witch persecutions, and though witches used not to be specifically anti-Christian, many of them became so, not unnaturally, with the advent of that tide of religiously motivated oppression and bloodshed. It is a symbol of defiance towards the dead letter as opposed to the living spirit of organized religion.

This is what you must do:

When you are quite sure you wish to take this first step, prior to going to bed on three successive nights, making quite sure you are not observed, light a candle and address yourself to it with the following words. This gibberish is, in fact, the Lord's Prayer written out backwards. It is somewhat difficult to pronounce, but struggle through as best you can. It will be no more complicated than some of the peculiar words of power you will encounter later on, and it will be good practice for you. You should find it easier to say on each successive occasion; the third time you will be fairly fluent. I have written it phonetically, hence the slight difference from the usual backward spelling.

Nema! Livee morf su revilled tub
Noishaytpmet ootni ton suh deel
Suh tshaiga sapsert tath yeth
Vigrawf eu za sesapsert rua suh vigrawf.
Derb ilaid rua yed sith suh vig
Neveh ni si za thre ni
Nud eeb liw eyth
Muck mod-ngik eyth
Main eyth eeb dwohlah
Neveh ni tra chioo
Rertharf rua!

As you chant the words, use your imagination to visualize great iron shackles struck off your hands and feet by sizzling bolts of lightning and disintegrating into molten shards to either side of you. Hear the whine and crackle of the searing flashes as they accomplish the work of liberation, and consciously try to feel the burden of all your inherited guilts, all those awful shalt's and shalt not's, all that vast edifice of twaddle and claptrap, sliding easefully from your back.

When all is over, blow out the candle, uttering the witch words "So mote it be!" Should you feel any frissons of fear creeping up your spine during the performance of what may appear to you palpable blasphemy, it is all to the good. This is a process of purgation and catharsis and often carries with it a certain echo of childhood fears. Don't worry, though; any cold shivers only herald the fact that your deep mind is sitting up and taking notice. It is through your deep mind that you will develop your powers once you have cleared away the litter and debris that usually clogs it, as indeed is generally the case of the ordinary man-in-the-street.

Each of the three successive days when you get up in the morning, you must strive to remember who you are, a witch, what you did the night before, and the reason you did it. Then, maintaining that same frame of mind, embark upon the coming day.

Strictly speaking, this "unravelling" is only necessary as a gesture for the first three nights to mark your initial step on the path.

Anyway, the feeling of release that should accompany this little rite is a sure indication that the way is open for the powers to begin flowing within you. It is as simple as that. No risky copulation with fellow initiates on top of damp tombstones. No messy crucifixion of toads. Just a simple loosening of the mundane knot—a process of blessed unbinding.

As we witches say, I say to you: "Blessed be!"

Now you can begin developing your powers, the initial step of commitment having been taken. This is done basically in two ways: First, by making use of the four great rules of magic which form the sides of the witches' pyramid; and second, by the observance of natural power tides within the framework of the universe, which constantly ebb and flow, and may be utilized to great advantage as

indeed they always have been over the centuries by cultists and occultists alike.

But first I shall deal with that most important of subjects, that dark tower of sorcery itself, the witches' pyramid.

The Witches' Pyramid

The acquisition of a witch's basic power is rooted in the observance of four simple rules, sometimes known as the witches' pyramid. There are the four cornerstones of magic from which the whole mysterious edifice of witchcraft rises. The rules in themselves are not magical, but the joint application of them is. You must apply them sedulously, knowing that only in accordance with what you are willing to invest will you gain anything in return.

The four cornerstones of the witches' pyramid are: a virulent imagination, a will of fire, rock-hard faith, and a flair for secrecy.

Imagination being the ability to conjure up within your mind sights and scenes to delight the senses and entertain the fancy, it is the tool par excellence of the artist, inventor and inveterate onanist. The greatest and the most notorious personalities in the history of mankind have all possessed this power to a great degree, and I suspect you, the reader, also do. Otherwise you wouldn't be reading this book. The ability to indulge in a flight of fancy is of paramount importance to a witch, for it is through this dark glass that she in fact will cast her spells and set the world afire with her incantations.

Therefore, as a witch, nurture your imagination, treasure your fantasies. Magically speaking, you will probably put every one to excellent use. The more emotional and deeply knotted the roots of your secret visions are, the more potent will they be to effect the working of your charms. The success of all your spells will depend on just how much of a head of emotional steam you can work up over them. The more tempestuous the emotion, the better is your chance of success. You must really be prepared to roll on the ground and gnash your teeth in ecstasy or hate whenever you enter your charmed circle of practice.

Apropos of this, many modern witches employ the method actor's device of sense memory to jar their jaded emotional voltages into the correct spark-spitting intensity.' This is known variously in the craft as linking, commemoration, or picking up one's contacts. However, meaningful memories apart, you can use anything you like to turn you on and get the current flowing: perfumes, sounds, strobe lights, wild dancing, sex, mantrams, hymns, and so on—wherever your preference lies. Anything and everything may be pressed into service to get your imagination crackling and those cold shivers running up and down your spine.

This, of course, is the rationale behind the traditional trappings of witchcraft—quite apart from the parapsychical implications of the rituals. A suitable setting for your magical acts is therefore requisite as one of the primary stimulants to your witchly imagination. A living room or den is about the best most of us can manage in these days, but this is where your imagination comes in and invests the place of working with all the mystery and terror sufficient to start your black juices flowing. The occasional grotesque statuette or bizarre print is all to the good. In fact, as a witch, you will be obliged

to collect around yourself over the course of time a good complement of sorcerers trinkets. They don't necessarily have to be the genuine articles—real skulls and goat's-foot candlesticks are hard to come by and somewhat expensive—but seeing that atmosphere is so important, it is worth investing in the odd dime-store Pacific Island devil mask or reproduction of a medieval astrological chart. It will probably grow to be a passion with you as time passes, and you may soon find yourself having to resist sternly the lure of any junk or antique shop you happen to pass, purely in the interests of economy.

So treasure up your fantasies. The controlled daydream is one of the main keys to being a successful witch. In fact, dream on, the richer and more fantastic the better!

The second side of the witches' pyramid of power is firmly labeled "will." It almost goes without saying that the establishment of a potent will is one of the main goals of a practitioner of the Black Arts. The will in this instance is a magical one, however, and if viewed out of magical context and within the framework of everyday life, would constitute a splendid example of extravagant egocentricity or even megalomania. It is the will of a spoiled child we are dealing with here, one which brooks no opposition and impudently stares down any attempt at resistance with a basilisk eye.

This will is switched on during the actual magical operation, and it functions hand in hand with the bubbling and boiling emotions evoked by means of your wicked imagination. It is in effect the lens through which the burning emotions are focused. In order to sharpen your will to the correct needlepoint, you may wish to employ one or two aids in the form of simple exercises designed to help concentration. Eastern disciplines such as certain yoga meditation exercises can be used. They are very wearisome, but they do work, with perseverance.

Meditating on the single flame of a candle is also good, as is keeping the attention fixed upon a painted dot within a circle for half an hour without budging. The attempt to gaze at the second hand of a watch completing the circuit of one minute, maintaining one's awareness of the hand at every second is also very rewarding, and is frequently used by witches as a toning-up exercise for the will, here used to direct the attention.

You must begin to assert yourself; it doesn't matter on precisely what, but generally. Then, once you have begun to feel the intoxication of a powerful will growing within you, you should start exercising it in little matters of no consequence. To use it disinterestedly at first is the best way to begin, so concentrate on inconsequential things that you normally wouldn't give a fig about, and before you embark on them, become aware of the fact that you are now switching on your magical will. Getting the best of an argument is a good exercise, where brute force may be unnecessary, but persistence often wins success. Every day will bring a mass of little opportunities to sharpen your will; they are all grist for the mill. As I say, persistence is the watchword here. A whole host of clichés spring to mind to illustrate the point, and they are all equally valid.

"If at once you don't succeed, try, try, try again." "Perseverance brings success." And so on.

One word of caution, however. Don't try willing anything which deep down you yourself are convinced is impossible. In all probability it won't come about, and this will prove a serious blow to

your faith in yourself. Start with little things which you know can be effected. Leave the extinguishing of candles by mental action or the levitating of ashtrays to the adept for the time being.

Remember, the point is to make the "bendable" world bend to your will. After all, your ambition is to become a witch, not God, and it would be wise to bear in mind that there is a difference. To cultivate your magical will means that first and foremost you must know what you want; you then proceed to narrow down your field of attention to encompass just that one thing, keeping it before your awareness all the time. Then you go and get it. Keep at it. This doggedness and the attitude of mind it engenders has to be part of your witch personality during the magical operation.

"As my will, so mote it be!" These are the magic words.

Which brings me to the third side of the witches' pyramid on which is etched in mighty letters of refulgent gold the word FAITH. Now this may seem a strange thing for a witch to concern herself with, but it is quite true to say that all magical power is largely dependent on this, whether it be wielded by people calling themselves witches or saints, as the case may be. Whether you cast a spell for the sake of a church, yourself, or anyone else makes not one jot of a difference. A spell is a spell, whether it sounds like a prayer or an incantation.

Paracelsus put the matter in a nutshell when he wrote: "Through Faith the Imagination is invigorated and completed, for it really happens that every doubt mars its perfection ..."

Unless you possess a rock-firm faith in your own powers and in the operability of your spell, you will not achieve the burning intensity of will and imagination which is requisite to make the magic work. Faith is the vice in which you hold steady your crucible will, into which you pour the molten metal of your virulent imagination. If you reflect on it, you will see in effect that imagination and faith are both very intimately connected with the will. Faith is that which sweeps away all remaining objections and clears the decks for immediate action. It is one of those valuable props which support you temporarily, in the course of your magical operation, and allow you to believe in the inevitability of the success which is bound to be attendant upon it. It is one more means of attaining that special state of self-imposed and hopefully temporary megalomania which is the sine qua non of all true acts of sorcery.

You must be well aware of the great part faith plays in the dealings of those individuals who wrestle with the more arcane aspects of fate in one way or another. A spiritual healer or a master gambler would no more approach a prospective patient or crap game cold, without the flame of faith I in their powers to warm them, than would a microscopist approach his specimen without a microscope. At a rudimentary level, if you didn't have the faith you could do it, you could no more put one foot before the other and cross the road in the manner you do every day, than could a two-month-old baby. In magical matter, faith is de rigueur, and due to this fact it merits a whole side of the witches' pyramid to itself.

While we are on the subject of faith, it would be as well to mention at this point that you as a witch must never break your word. If you do not think you are going to be able to fulfil a promise, do not make it, even if there is only the faintest possibility that you may not be able to come through. The reason for this should be readily apparent to you, bearing in mind all we have said already on the

subject of the magical will and faith. You are trying to cultivate a state of mind which you can switch on at will, whereby it is absolutely natural and in accordance with the nature of things that whatever you say is going to come true. In this case, the words of the spell. Each and every time you break your word, whether the reason for it be outside your control or not, you chip away a little of that assiduously worked for faith in yourself, which you are trying so hard to cultivate. That's all. Nothing to do with morals or ethics in this case, A witch's word is a witch's word, and is never given lightly.

The fourth and last theoretical consideration of the pyramid to contend with as a witch is the important one of secrecy. Now witchcraft consists of knowledge, and knowledge brings power. Power shared is power lost. Although we have entered the Age of Aquarius, along with its attendant freedom and loosening of restrictions, it will still be very much in your own interests as a witch to shroud certain of your doings in a reasonable veil of secrecy. Apart from the fun and glamour involved in so doing, there are one or two practical considerations in addition to a magical one which also make this maxim of secrecy meaningful. If someone obliquely gets to hear that you, a witch, are performing a magical operation for or against him, whether or not he believes or disbelieves in your powers, way down inside him his deep mind will hear and take notice. And this is half the battle won. Nothing so arouses the deep mind's attention in anyone than the call of the dark, arcane, and mysterious.

Deep calleth unto deep; there is a natural affinity in all men's souls for that which is half hidden in a twilight world, and once you have gained the attention of a person's deep mind, you may then proceed to work on it, using your own as a broadcasting unit for your wishes. This is the essence of witchcraft.

So any half-told hint that you are actually about to cast a spell can do wonders to prepare the ground in your victim, even before the operation is actually performed. Hence much of the half-veiled secrecy of witches. This is no matter purely of fun and frolic, although undoubtedly this comes into play also. Secrecy per se can get remarkable results. Nothing succeeds like a secret, whatever it may be, however puerile or nonsensical, when you are striving to draw someone's attention. Once you have that attention, then you can begin your sorcery in good and earnest.

So practise dropping the occasional portentous hints about your magic, never of course being too explicit, but always striving to convey just enough to activate people's curiosities without making them too sceptical. Of course, you will have to be selective with what you say to people. Not everyone is susceptible to the same pitch. With some, after being pressed in vain to say more, you may find yourself confronted with the retort, "Well, don't tell us if you don't want to; see if we care!" But they do. And it has aroused their interests sufficiently for them to expend energy on an emotion of petulance. The worst kind of response to your engineered secrecy is one of "Oh, really ... Did I tell you about that movie I saw the other day?" So be discriminating with your portentous hints. Sum up your audience or victim before you slyly murmur in their ears.

Another, more mundane reason for preserving a modicum of secrecy is this: Though the burning days are over, you must still keep one eye open for the law on one or two points. For instance, should one of your wax voodoo dolls be brought into court and shown as sufficient evidence of your practice of psychological intimidation upon an intended victim, you could find yourself in trouble with a lawsuit on your hands and heavy damages may be awarded against you.

Witchcraft pure and simple may not be illegal in Western non-Catholic countries any more, but you as a practising witch can find yourself in faintly treacherous waters if you are not always wary of where you are heading. As a witch, you should, for example, familiarize yourself with the existing witchcraft laws, if any, of the place where you reside. For instance, in certain of the states of America, to take money for any form of occult work, including witchcraft, can under certain circumstances still be regarded as a criminal offence.

In England, since 1951 when the old witchcraft laws were finally repealed, there now operates a law entitled the Fraudulent Mediums Act, which states that persons taking money for fraudulent practices involving purported supernatural activities can, in fact, still be held subject to prosecution by due process of the law. But only for fraud, not heresy. So it pays to watch your step.

If in the course of your career in the Black Arts a friend asks you as a witch to do some special favour for him, take care not to ask money for your services, however strong the temptation. Allow your friend to purchase the necessary materials for the spell. There is also no objection to his returning favour for favour after the operation. But no hard cash, if you're wise. Apart from the legal aspects, a direct financial transaction is also counselled against by a very ancient magical law. For some reason real monetary involvement appears to vitiate the potency of the magic. Try it if you don't believe me. Most witches I know have generally found it to be the case.

In all probability then, you will be able to bind your spells blithely without police interference as long as you do not actually get caught taking money for them or instigating any obvious antisocial activities such as blackmail, extortion, intimidation, or flagrant sexual practices of which the state may not approve.

With these mundane considerations disposed of, we can now return to our study of the final cornerstone of the magical pyramid, namely magical secrecy.

When you cast a spell, you will in effect be putting some very delicate "machinery" into operation. The machinery itself is made out of the stuff that dreams are made of, and the electricity that flows through it will be your own pulsating emotions and desires. Now in order to assemble this machinery in the first place and then make it move, you are going to have employed your burning will, rock-firm faith, and virulent imagination in equal, strenuous amounts. You will have slaved away to work yourself into the right intense frame of mind where it would be inconceivable that the magic could possibly fail.

Now supposing at just that precise moment the door to your place of working were to open and your husband or maybe your mother-in-law were to confront you, uttering words to the effect of, "Audrey! What are you doing dressed up like that in here? And why haven't you got any lights on? You'll strain your eyes ... And what's all that terrible smoke? Are you trying to set the place on fire? ..."

Total anticlimax. And probably the finish of your witchcraft for quite a while. You may well try to employ your basilisk gaze at that point, but unless you have a very well developed magical will, it will probably avail you naught.

No, all possibilities of authorized intrusion must be strictly limited. It is not worth the battering to your newly burgeoning witch's ego. A disaster like that can set months of hard work to little or no account.

So, bearing all these considerations in mind, shroud yourself with a certain amount of reasonable secrecy, especially about the time and place of your magical operations. Of course, if it is a rival witch or maybe a whole coven that is interested in busting up your operation, then should they know the nature of the magic you are going to work, they will probably be able to figure out the time when you are going to perform—say around the full moon. If they are worth their magical salt, they may also even figure out the place, by means of a divination.

Then it will be a matter of may the best witch win; magic against countermagic. But this is more properly a subject for Chapters 5 and 6, which deal with countermagic and attack. Here I shall restrict myself to sensible advice concerning the relatively simple matter of preserving a modicum of secrecy about your personal magical activities. You don't have to become paranoid, just avoid inviting trouble.

Now we have dealt briefly with the four cornerstones of magical practice, and they should speak for themselves. They reward contemplation. All successful witchery stems from their accurate employment. You can burn your Cabalistic books and drown your yoga sutras—they will avail you nothing in your quest for power unless you have already understood and mastered the ideas embodied in the witches' pyramid, the four great rules of magic which are the keys to all practical operations in the world of the unseen.

Casting Your Spells

Whenever you wish to work a piece of witchcraft, it is always best if you tie all your supercharged will, faith, and imagination into a single, sizzling bolt with the help of a pattern of spoken words: the charm, or incantation.

Witches, like poets, painters, and chefs, have always taken a bit from here and a bit from there in the exercise of their craft, so much so that in many cases the original wisdom has been almost totally overlaid.

Everything that seems to have an inherent power in it, that triggers the emotions strongly, is pressed into use for the purposes of magic. Snippets of folklore, religion, myth, and herbal lore, all are blended together with notorious in difference to mixing of styles and cultures. All that matters is the item's effect on you and your deep mind.

While on the subject of religious components, "words of power," Cabalistic names of God and the like, here is a tip for the wise witch: Better results will always be obtained if you happen to subscribe to the religion from which your words of power derive, in the case of the Cabala, Judaism, or maybe unorthodox Christianity. However, always remember, it is only the awe, the shiver of emotional excitement, aroused by the name or quotation, which is its chief magical value. If you can do this with an Arabic name of God, Roman Catholic saint, or Tibetan demon, so much the better. Go ahead and use it. Likewise, the name of your husband, wife, lover, favourite politician, film star, or most hated

dictator will all be equally magically potent, so long as they give you that extra little kick to stir your deep mind out of its usual sluggish sleep. So much for barbarous Cabalistic words of evocation!

Usually, therefore, you will find it advantageous to devise your own incantations, as the majority of witches do. Of course, there are all the traditional charms such as you will find in the following text which have accumulated a magical charge of their own through the years, and as such, of course should be used to your fullest advantage. (And admittedly some of these do contain the occasional word of Cabalistic derivation.)

The ideal form for the incantation is that which has a beat to it. Some practitioners insist on a rhyme as well as rhythm. Rhyming couplets are the favourite metrical style, I would say. They are certainly among the simplest to construct.

Again: the deep mind is, as always, the target with this use of rhyme and rhythm. Verse, however doggerel and bad, is always potent for stirring the depths, especially when there is a certain amount of frenzied repetition involved.

In view of this particular attitude to incantation, most of the processes of medieval sorcery that are now available to the general public are seen by the average witch as extremely clumsy and, as such, highly unsuitable for performance. Not only are they closely bound up with Judeo-Christianity, but they are also always bogged down with endless preachy pages of invocation, as you will see if you ever consult one, which, far from awakening the deep mind of the operating witch, will generally tend to send it even more securely to sleep.

Apropos of religious beliefs, the modern witch tends to "reserve judgement" generally; there are those who devote themselves entirely to the fertility cult of Habondia and her horned consort. This is by no means universal, however. The gods are there if and when you need them. But more of this in a later chapter.

As a witch, you do not necessarily have to worship any complete and permanent hierarchy of supernatural beings if you don't want to. There simply exists power to be tapped— to do good or to do evil, both of which are remarkably relative concepts. Of course, as a witch, you should know from tradition as indicated in the last chapter, that there exist certain entities who will aid you in your spells; what these beings ultimately are, whether they predated man, or whether man himself created them, we cannot tell. You may call these entities gods, spirits, or watchers; or depersonalize them as powers or forces, but you must realize that they are now as dependent on your attentions as you in your spells are on theirs. However, in whatever relationship you happen to enter with them, always remember, you are the master of the occasion, albeit a courteous one! Some of these powers will be useful for one type of operation such as a love spell, but useless for another, one of vengeance, say.

What their order of precedence is in that place or state they exist in, we cannot tell, merely surmise. Only through what tradition tells us can we gain any clues. The only sort of hierarchy that exists seems to be a general one which can be classified thus:

At the top we have Great Entities, often known as Watchers, Mighty Ones, or gods by more classical-

minded witches. These include the so-called witch deities Habondia and Cernunnos, whose acquaintance you will make on a later page. They are generalized powers existing within the deep minds of all of us, Jungian archetypes, if you like, which can be contracted to bring a certain power to your rituals.

Then there are spirit entities or demons, halfway between men and gods in their constitution, traditionally predating us in their evolution, however—the remnants of the Nephelim, in fact. Vassago, who you will also encounter in a later chapter, is one of these beings.

Finally, there are the spirits or shades of the dead themselves, such as will be dealt with in the rituals of necromancy in Chapters 3 and 4.

Gods, demons, shades—these constitute the chief inhabitants of the witches' pantheon. Of course, there are many minor, elemental spirits which you will be dealing with in the course of your career, but they will generally be those which you yourself create. Any talisman, image, alraun, or mandragore you may make will partake of the nature of an elemental. They are unseen versions of the homunculi of alchemical legend, servants of your will, called into being by an application of your witch power for the performance of a task. As such, they should be treated with firmness, as opposed to the respect and deference you will show to gods and demons. They should never, under any circumstances, be let out of the command of their witch creator. Mickey Mouse's "Fantasia" broomsticks were based on a very old magical legend incorporated into Lucian's *Philopseudes* and later into *The Lay of St. Dunstan*, which graphically illustrates what can happen psychically if you ever let your elemental servants get out of control!

Magical Times and Seasons

Finally, as a novice witch or warlock, you will need to know about the times and seasons of the witches' year. These are the correct times when you will be able to recharge your magical batteries and draw down to yourself the new currents of elemental power to work your spells. The elemental power tides of the universe are marked by the movements of the stars, the sun, and the moon, but chiefly the latter two. Though these heavenly bodies are not the actual sources of the power, they are the main indicators of its ebb and flow in our universe. Whenever you wish to perform a magical act, you must work taking these power tides into consideration, in the same way a navigator of a boat times his movements to utilize the sea tides to his best advantage. Of course, you can work against the tide, but it is self-defeating for the beginner, and is best left for times of emergency or until such a time as you have reached a degree of sureness in your practice.

The sun and the moon are the two great hands of our cosmic clock. Whereas the hour hand or sun governs the seasons of the year, the moon or minute hand governs the sea tides and the hidden workings of the deep mind. As such, this heavenly body rather than the sun is the main concern of witches. In European mythology the sun has always been seen as a symbol of a male divinity, the moon a female one. However, worship of the moon as a supreme deity evolved much earlier than that of the sun. It is said among witches that in England at least the cult of the moon goddess predated the Druidic, solar religion, and that it is from this early Prytanic religion that four of the great annual witch festivals are derived.

These are the nights of October 31 (Halloween); February 2 (Candlemas); April 30 (Beltane), and August 1 (Lammas). Of these, Beltane and Halloween are the more important. The four solar fire festivals of the Druids are also observed, though to a lesser extent. These are midwinter, spring, midsummer, and autumn as marked by the solstices and equinoxes, and these together with the preceding four make eight Sabbats, or festivals, of the witches' year.

The practical import of the Sabbats is this: Halloween, Candlemas, Beltane, and Lammas mark the beginning of each quarter of the solar-tide cycle; first the tide of destruction and winter is initiated with Halloween, the feast of the dead, the first day of the witches' year. The dark tide of destruction reaches its high point at midwinter, the winter solstice. Candlemas marks the end of the reign of the King of Winter, Lord of Misrule, and the first stirrings of the bright tide of summer. At the time of the vernal equinox, the bright and dark tides stand equally balanced, with the bright tide on the increase; Beltane marks the beginning of its fullest spate, which reaches its high point at the mid-summer solstice. From here it begins to wane. The first stirrings of the dark tide are then felt at Lammas, the time of fruition and harvest when the crops are gathered in and fruits begin to ripen. At the autumnal equinox, the two tide again stand equally opposed, the bright tide waning, the dark ever increasing. At Halloween the tide of darkness again enters its full spate, and so the cycle recommences.

To farmers and those whose work is subject to the seasons the ebb and flow of the solar tide is, of course, second nature, for it influences the entire life cycle of all that grove upon the earth. But for witches, it is observed chiefly in coven activities directed at drawing down elemental group power, hence the timing of their Sabbats. The coven is seen to consist of a group mind which needs to be periodically recharged with power. This belief they hold in common with many organized religious cults, which is one of the reasons why the witch festivals often coincide with Christian or Druidic holy days.

When you organize your own coven, you should be fully aware of the import of the various Sabbats, as will be explained in the last chapter of this book. For the time being it suffices that you know when they occur and mark them off in your calendar accordingly. For all practical magical purposes, however, the phases of the moon are the most important thing for you to observe. The method of their employment is extremely simple.

Basically, there are two sides to the moon's character; when she is waxing, the bright moon; and when she is waning, dark of the moon.

All spells of a constructive nature should be performed when the moon is bright, that is, waxing to full. These would include love magic of any sort, sorcery designed to bring luck or success, fertility charms, protection, countermagic, and of course divination.

An old witch verse goes thus:

*Pray to the Moon when she is round
Luck with you shall then abound
What you seek for shall be found
In sea or sky or solid ground ...*

As soon as the full moon is passed, we embark upon the dark of the moon, as the light wanes and nights get blacker. During this period you will perform all operations of a destructive or "black" nature, such as spells of attack and vengeance, binding operations (ligature) to prevent people from doing certain things, agricultural magic designed to eliminate pests or weeds, charms to cool off passions in another, and certain works of necromancy, that is, summoning ghosts of the dead.

Many witches when they form their own coven tend to, hold informal monthly or bimonthly Esbats (as opposed to Sabbats, from the French, esbattre, "to frolic") around the full or new moon, in order to have a general coffee klatch and maybe perform a collective ritual to aid one of the members or an outside friend who has requested help in some way. Whether you hold your Esbat at full or new moon, of course, depends on the nature of the spells you intend to cast.

So these then are the red-letter days on your witches' calendar. There are quite a lot of them. Thirteen full moons, thirteen new moons, and eight Sabbats. None of them are mandatory, except insofar as you need to make use of them. As a witch, however, you will find that the Sabbats are fun. and worth making an effort over, especially the Grand Sabbats of Beltane and Halloween.