

Magical use of voice

By Phil Hine

Speech is the main form of communication used in our culture - we are all capable of making a wide range of noises with our mouths, and as the word "en-chant-ment" suggests, the voice has played a powerful role in magick, in all ages and cultures. The aim of this essay is to examine the ways in which the voice can be used in magick, and suggest exercises which will help the reader to develop the range of vocal techniques.

In all cultures, the voice has been an important carrier of power, and most mystery traditions and religions make use of songs, chants, and prose to worship or bring about gnosis. From dramatic choruses to hymn and prayer, from working songs such as sea shanties and battle songs to children's skipping rhymes and folk spells; the power of voice is amazing. Orators, both political and religious, have used the power of their voices to project their charisma and enthuse mass audiences - look at the crowds that Billy Graham attracts for example. The sound of a spoken phrase can go far beyond its meaning to speak directly to the Deep Mind. An extreme example of this is described by Nandor Fodor, a Jewish psychoanalyst who notes the effects of listening to Adolf Hitler's "rabble-rousing" speeches. He had heard these speeches on two occasions on the radio, and recalls that although due to its raucous harshness, Hitler's German was totally incomprehensible to Fodor (who was a native Hungarian), he felt that:

"ever so slowly, my blood began to boil, and I wanted to shout and scream. It was not a rage against him. It was with him, like a flow of lava is with the volcano."

Modern politicians very often resort to a speech pattern known as "pathic", which combines tone and the pacing of words to project an underlying message that no matter what they are talking about, they are "in control", and "everything is fine - don't get alarmed". The waking mind can be easily bypassed, so that meaning is carried directly to the Deep Mind, stirring the appropriate emotions which the speaker wishes to stir.

We can use our voices to convey and project emotional messages very effectively, and tone often betrays our true feelings on a subject, despite what we actually say. Young children are often confused by a verbal threat delivered in a light tone of voice. Therapists and healers can pick up a great deal of information from a client's manner of speaking. The huge differences in accents in a country allows us to identify a person's origin, even though they have been resident in another region for years. Using soothing tones can lull people into relaxive trance states, while shouting and hyperventilating can propel us into excitatory states - as demonstrated by cults such as the Shakers. Elsewhere we find that the voice can be an aid to martial prowess - ranging from war cries and battle songs, to the articulation of short syllables during martial arts duels, which are designed to act as carriers for chin (jin) or to distract an opponent.

Speech also has a cosmological dimension. That, "in the beginning, was the Word" is a concept common to many cultures, as is the idea that the correct pronunciation of certain Divine names will bring about the end of the world. Also, there is the idea of the "Rule of Names", most eloquently expressed in Ursula Le Guin's "Earthsea" stories - that if you know the "True name" of an entity, then you can command it". William Burroughs, in "The Place of Dead Roads", puts it another way:

"As soon as you name something, you remove its power....If you could look Death in the face he would lose his power to kill you. When you ask Death for his credentials, his passport is indefinite".

This principle is well-known to all those who delve into the depths of the psyche - that vague, unnamed fears can be "tamed", once they are recognised, and having been named, can be isolated and drained of their power to terrify. I will be looking in some detail at some of the magical vocal techniques based on this principle later.

Use of Voice

The way in which we use our voices is a powerful way of projecting our personalities. the way in which we deliver speech in a given situation can reveal many things (both to ourselves and others) about our feelings. To use speech effectively we must be:

- (i) Confident
- (ii) Aware of others
- (iii) Relaxed
- (iv) Clear in our thoughts
- (v) Aware of how speech affects a situation.

With practice and experience, we can learn to use our voices so that we can carry emotions and feelings to others, ranging from stirring people to enthusiasm and action, to lulling gently into relaxation using soft words and tones.

Group Chants

Group Chants are one of the most effective (and fun!) ways of raising energy, especially when combined with dancing, stylised movement, gestures, and swaying. Some of the most popular chants are those taken from Amerindian sources, such as:

I am the Circle,
I am Healing you,
You are the Circle
You are healing me,
Unite Us
Be One
Unite Us
Be as One.

We are at one
With the Infinite Sun
Forever, Forever, Forever

Such chants as these express and reinforce a sense of belonging, both between immediate group members, and with the wider world or universe. Chants tend to build up slowly, and pick up speed as people feel the growing rhythm and pulse of the words and beat, which "carries" people along - it is easy to get so caught up in the chant that you begin to enter a trance state - but don't just take my word for it - try it out! The Darksome Night and Shining Moon chant of Wicca is another good example of a group chant - especially when each line is chanted by a different group member. The

words of the chant serve to resume the central concepts of Wicca - the four elemental directions, the magical weapons, and the complementary natures of Goddess and God, Darkness and Light.

Spinning mantra

In the most commonly used form of chants, each member of the group repeats the entire verse. However, the "Spinning Mantra" differs in that one member intones the first line of the chant, the next person, the second line, and so on. One note can be used throughout, with the same syllables stressed in each line. Another variant is to start the Spinning Mantra off, and have the members of the group wander around, stopping briefly in front of each other to chant their lines. This can be very disorienting, but is very effective if performed with a large group.

Group AUM

This is a simple group exercise. All sit in a circle, with eyes closed. After taking a few deep breaths, begin a long drawnout A-U-M chant. It need not be synchronised, and is very effective in relaxing people. It is a common experience that the AUM is chanting itself, through the members of the group.

Hog Calls

Here, one member of the group makes up a sound, call or statement and shouts it out, and the rest of the group shout it back at them. This can be especially effective as a kind of freeform invocation, for example, if everyone is familiar with the qualities, attributes and features of a God or Goddess. It can be used as light-hearted introduction to designing invocations. This form of repetition is commonly used in tantrik ritual, as salutations given to the god who is the object of the ritual. The example below is just a few of the 108 ritual salutations to the god Ganesha:

Salutations to him who has an elephant's face
Salutations to him who wields the mace
Salutations to the son of Gauri
Salutations to the lord of planets
Salutations to him who transcends all qualities
Salutations to him who is lion-like

Humming meditation

This begins in a similar fashion to the Group AUM described above; each member of the group sets up a humming note, which can change in tone and power at will. The Humming should be kept up for at least 20 minutes for people to feel the effects of it.

Soundscapes

The idea of Soundscapes is for the group to explore how to use words, tones and sound patterns to build up a "picture" - creating the atmosphere appropriate to the chosen theme. My favourite example of a vocal Soundscape is one produced by an experimental drama group, when asked to express the theme of "Sweets". The group members each chose "mantras" used in advertising jingles and developed individual rhythms, so that the resulting Soundscape was a mix of:

"Only the crumbl-iest, flaki-est choc-late, tastes like chocolate nev-er tasted bee-fore!" (drawn out, sung high)

"Hot chocolate, Drink-ing chocolate." (Chanted fast).

"Skit-tles" (repeated with a pause inbetween).

"Mars-Bars" (Bass chant).

"Smartie-People-are-happy-people" (light refrain)

Get the idea? It's useful to get people to brainstorm ideas about a particular subject or theme, and then to choose one word or phrase to use as the beginnings of a chant. You can also use soundscapes to evoke and exaggerate moods, and develop group-grown chants for rituals and spell-casting, more of which later.

Why does singing and chanting have such a powerful effect on us? Repetitive or boring tasks are easier to perform if there is a tune in the background, or if someone starts to sing. I remember with particular fondness the "work songs" which were evolved when I spent a few months picking oranges and grapefruit in Israel, and they certainly livened up what was a boring and strenuous task. Songs and chants establish rhythms, which not only distract from the boredom of a task, but also seem to add energy and help "carry" each person along. Group spirit and enthusiasm is raised. One of the key factors seems to be rhythm. rhythms carry our consciousness along, from heartbeats, to cycles of breathing, sleeping, night-day and the passage of seasons. rhythms promote associated body movements and adjustments, and act as a signal to begin movement without conscious effort, so that less energy is expended when you begin; for example, it has been shown that soldiers can march further, and in better form, with less fatigue, when accompanied by a marching band. The feeling of being "carried" comes from the structure that rhythm gives to our time-sense, and the pattern gives a sense of continuance. It becomes a motor attitude, and one's attention is freed (if this is desired). rhythms also become "mirrored" by our brain activity, and they have powerful physiological effects on us. Music Therapists have found that people suffering from Aphasia or Huntington's Chorea (both neurological disorders which impair speech) can carry a tune, and group singing is a common element in therapeutic voice training. Rhythms are everywhere around us, and group chants and songs reflect this fact and bring us towards an enhanced sense of participation in the world.

Raving & Drooling

Modern practitioners of shamanism may come to rely on a 'silver tongue' as much as sleight of hand or any other trick. The words we use, and their underlying message, can make or break any developing situation. Knowing how to speak, when to speak, and perhaps most importantly, when not to speak comes only with experience and practice, and of course, attention. Through our voices we can lull our clients into trance, laugh away the demons of despair, and shatter smug pomposity with the unexpected crude remark - profanities may be sacred in themselves, especially when you consider the comedian as sacred clown; the feared satirist or the impersonator of public figures. Our pagan heritage around the world abounds with lords of misrule and authority-parodying jesters. Humour is a powerful weapon, especially when directed against the rich, powerful, and the self-important.

Primal Poetry

Just for the purposes of discussion, I want to distinguish between 'ordinary' speaking and 'sacred' speech. Sacred speech, in this context, refers to those occasions when we are using speech (probably combined with other modes of display) to bring about a magical change - such as in inducing group trance, communing with spirits, being a horse, raising energy, and so on. At these times, the way in which we deliver speech is different from our usual habits of talking in that there may be an enhanced deliberateness in our enunciation, or greater care taken in projecting the subtle

nuances of emotion - awe, ecstasy, gentleness or martial ardour. Whether our words well up, unbidden, from the Deep Mind, or have been carefully linked together in prolonged brainstorming sessions, it is highly likely that we will try and find a certain distinct rhythm around which to frame our words.

The Deep Mind often speaks to us in verse. Cross-cultural studies of the vocal patterns of people in the throes of possession show a striking similarity, that of a rising and falling intonation at the end of each phrase, with each phrase punctuated by a pause or groan. This pattern emerges regardless of native language and cultural background. The English version of this rhythm is known as Iambic Pentameter. You can hear it also in the frenzied oratorical deliveries of evangelical preachers and in the apparently meaningless gush of words and phrases from those who have been seized by the 'Holy Spirit'. It wells forth from the Deep Mind as unconscious or deity-inspired poetry & communications. People who are overshadowed by a deity during ritual often seem to stumble over their words, as though they are trying to fit their words around the rhythms of the trance. I would conjecture that the more complete the spirit-possession, the less laboured the sacred speech, as the persons self-awareness' will be all the more completely submerged by that of the entity.

As the Deep Mind calls to us with a particular rhythm and meter, so do we attempt to call into the depths of our being by rhythmically pulsing our speech. Sound, like light, sets up rhythms in our brains, as experiments with electro-encephalographs (EEGs) have shown. These internal rhythms reflect the sounds which propel us into varying degrees of trance, whether it is the gentle, watery lapping of the Moon or the thundering frenzy of Pan. If we are caught off-guard, and susceptible, their effect can be devastating. J.F. Hurley, in his book, "Sorcery", describes a trance condition known in the Philippines as Lata, which is brought on by a startling sound, after which susceptible people will imitate actions that they see or words that they hear. Philippino head-hunters took advantage of this susceptibility by paralysing their victims by using sharp, piercing cries.

This sort of talent appears in many cultures and settings. Pat Crowther, writing in her book "Lid Off The Cauldron", mentions 'calls' which, when used in open spaces, can draw the unwary to the caller. Forcefully projected, staccato hissing noises, reinforced by jerking body movements, can also precipitate trance. Peter Redgrove, in his short novel, "The God of Glass", makes use of the syllable SATATATAT, which, when chanted, at the same time as whirling around, produces in its initiates a disassociation, which culminates in a bee-hum - the Om of ultimate being.

Mantra - Sound carrying Thought

The term *mantra* should be familiar to most readers. It is usually associated with sounds or words that when spoken or sung, evoke a particular magical power or energy. Two of the best-known mantras are AUM or Om. The term *mantra* is derived from the sanskrit root "man", which means, 'to think'. Thus the uttered sound is merely an aid to the focusing and direction of thought, and initiates of Tantrika regard the different types of mantra as vehicles for articulating spiritual energy as sound. For example, there are 'seed' mantras such as Hrim, Krim and Srim. which represents the quintessence of the power of particular deities; there are also mantras which are based on texts, and have symbolic, rather than literal meanings, and, as in most cultures, spells and mnemonic formula. In tantrik ritual, or *Puja*, the seed mantras are pronounced from the diaphragm, the throat, rolled around the tongue and finally closed off with the nasal sound "m". Mantras may be uttered 'in silence', as it were, and be none the less effective. Similarly, Cherokee shaman songs may be sung or thought, and remain effective. According to one medicine man, the same song could be used for 'every purpose there is', adding that it is 'the intention of the heart, and the knowledge, that really count.' In techniques such as *japas* (recitation), the practitioner repeats a sound or phrase repeatedly, moving eventually from spoken speech to 'silent' speech. The original words may degenerate into a

meaningless mush, but again, it is the rhythm which whirls the practitioner's brain towards ecstasy - recognisable by the perception that it is no longer you who chants, but that the chant chants itself through you. Again, don't take my word for it, have a go yourself. You don't have to use a phrase which necessarily has any 'mystical' significance - it's the rhythm & momentum that's important - try it with 'My Mum's Monkey Makes Many Mistakes' for about half an hour a day for a few weeks, and see where it takes you.

Babblogues

Another approach to the power of speech is to use 'meaningless' speech - nonsense words, baby-noises, hisses and bellows. In group work, this sort of exercise can be used to bring across the importance of tone and pitch in conveying a message. It also illustrates just how word-dependent we are. Take words away and we have to explore other forms of communication. By screaming and howling we can release tension and create startling atmospheric effects in a situation. Even heavy breathing and panting can be effective, as can imitating animal calls.

Faces & Sounds

An exercise that Sheila Broun & I used in our Shamanic Development Course consisted of encouraging members to make of their face a 'mask' of extreme emotion - rage, fear, hate, happiness, and then to forcefully vocalise the pure noise that they associated with that face. The results were startling - the sounds seemed to magnify the effect of the faces and, strangely enough, it was the 'happy' sound that people found disturbing.

Sound Projection

A well-known magical voice technique involves the steady projection of sound, towards a point in front of you. It can involve pure tones, or mantras. One exercise is to forcefully project the sound so that you imagine your body shaking; then the room or space where you are shakes; then the world, and finally the whole universe - by which time, you should be sweating. It's good to practice this exercise standing on a high peak overlooking a landscape, or atop a multi-storey building overlooking a city. Eventually, as in the mantra exercise given above, you feel that the sound is coming through, rather than from you. Needless to say, a group of people doing this kind of exercise in synchronised voice can produce interesting results. Like most ways of raising energy, the more effort you put in, the more is generated.

Sound carries feedback. Some sex therapists, for example, teach their clients the value of vocalising their excitement during sex - it's a valuable source of feedback & encouragement. The change in voice patterns mentioned above with regard to ritual trance works in a similar way. Hearing someone's voice patterns change as they are overshadowed by a spirit heightens other people's state of awareness as well. Hearing one's own voice change can aid or impede relaxation, which is crucial for successful delivery of a speech, for example. Anyone who's ever spoken in public should know this. When you are nervous, your voice pitch rises, and you talk faster 'n' faster, until the words are tripping over each other in their hurry to get off your tongue. Alternatively, your flow becomes broken up into a succession of er...er...um, well let me see, and so on. Trainers say that if you can manage to keep the illusion that you are relaxed, calm and confident for the first two minutes, then you will become confident. The trick is stopping your body going into 'escape' mode and deliberately pacing your voice, among other tricks. (I'll be looking at this in more detail in part three, which looks at Invocation).

You can learn a great deal about the power of speech from people who use their voices to forcefully project their personalities onto the audience. It can be useful to watch someone, for example, Ben Elton, Margaret Thatcher, or Billy Graham (Ok - so pick your own examples) on television, then watch them with the sound off, and then listen to them with the picture blanked out, paying close attention to how they pace and pitch their voices. Performers, be they political or entertainers, often slightly exaggerate different emotional tones, in the same way that gestures and eye contact is over-emphasised.

Voice and Status

Another powerful use of the voice is how we project Status to each other in a situation. In all situations, we accord each other status, not only on the basis of visual cues, such as dress, bearing, etc, but also upon the basis of speech inflections, and how we address each other. Such transactions go on all the time, but we only tend to notice them when they go wrong in some way. Sociologists say that we unconsciously collude with each other to maintain status transactions. Obvious ones are Teacher-Pupil, Master-Slave, Guru-Chela, Healer-Client. The problem is that we tend to get stuck in either a high-status or a low-status mode, when it would be better to adapt our status position according to the situation. This happens a lot for example, with people who professionally advise others - such as doctors, tarot readers and so forth. Having been given a high status role in transactions, they often find it difficult to 'get off their high horses'; not from any conscious intention, but because they're not aware of the problem. One of my favourite memories of status manipulation comes from a friend who did a great deal of work on the telephone, in a management role in a large hospital. I used to sit fascinated, as he rang up people at different levels of the hospital hierarchy, and by subtle inflection - negotiated favours with superiors, and implanted suggestions into the heads of subordinates. Status games get everywhere. It's been observed that anyone who marches confidently into our local unemployment benefit office, head held high, whistling and generally exuding a sense of well-being (in other words, playing high status), is going to attract unwelcome attention. On the other hand, slinking in looking decidedly dejected, crushed and pathetically grateful for your allowance will tend to ensure that you'll go unnoticed. The system is geared up for dealing with people who rattle the bars and snarl, and what it doesn't expect is people who go out of their way to be as nice and polite and helpful as possible, without actually bending under pressure.

Our understanding of status and status games is another clue to developing shamanic technique. After all, one of the most celebrated shamanic roles is the fool or sacred clown, who is allowed to mock or satirise the social order. A voice-related game is known as Gurus & Chelas. Here, people pair up and adopt spiritual teacher vs pupil roles. The 'teacher' is allowed to spout complete nonsense for a few minutes, while the pupil hangs on their every word, full of respectful awe and tentative questions. The roles should then be swapped, and then people's experiences discussed. For further discussion, the exercise can be replayed using non-meaningful vocalisations.

Invocations

Invocation is a battery of magical techniques which, when used, allow the individual to identify with a particular entity so passionately, that some quality or attribution associated with that entity manifests in the person - such as enhanced oracular perception or knowledge of 'hidden lore'. While this ability may be developed by anyone who practises magick, most people don't do it, and thus a shamanic practitioner may be asked to act as the incarnation of a particular entity as part of an event - or to bring about a similar experience in another person - 'invoking upon someone', as it is known. An extreme degree of this type of trance is possession, which, while quite common in shamanic cultures, is rarely found in modern approaches to ritual. It is not uncommon, for example, for a

Voudoun Houngan or Mambo to search out 'hidden lore' (i.e. knowledge) by allowing themselves to be 'ridden' by entities (known as Loa) who speak through them, providing the answer. More common, in our culture, is the phenomena of overshadowing, where the individual's awareness is partially submerged in that of the entity. This also happens to actors, who sometimes find that, while playing a particular role, become so identified with that role that they, while on stage, can perform tasks - such as singing or dancing - that are associated with the character, but that they themselves are not usually able to do. This is no different from magical invocation, and the techniques involved are virtually the same - visualisation, speech, gestures, posture, and other senses - particularly smell for example, with regard to incense or essential oils. For the moment, though, I'm going to concentrate on voice technique .

Dramatic Awareness

I use this term to emphasise the parallel already drawn between ritual and stage performance. Together, the performers and audience of a masque or play can build up an atmosphere which can be felt by all present. The audience listen to what is happening onstage, empathise and react. This reaction is communicated to the actors, which in turn affects their performance. Thus an atmosphere of "Dramatic Awareness" - a shifting of awareness towards the mythic arena of experience - can quickly be generated. If the audience is familiar with the myths or struggles being displayed onstage, then the experience may be cathartic for all concerned. This is particularly important with regard to voice - if you can successfully use your voice to project emotional tones - such as awe, reverence or passion then those listening; both yourself and others, will pick up on the emotive undertones and become drawn into the atmosphere you are generating. I've noticed that as people enter different stages of trance, their voice pattern changes. Others present pick up on this, if only unconsciously, and so the atmosphere of dramatic awareness is generated. In a ritual sequence, all speech can be used to project appropriate feelings which generate the group atmosphere. This is performed best when the people speaking are confident and relaxed about what they are saying. Hence the problem with (a) reading from textbooks and (b) using very long speeches. If possible, I prefer to either learn a speech so that I don't need to look at bits of paper, which tends to be bothersome - especially when reading someone else's writing in a dark room or wind-swept moor; or improvise something at the spur of the moment. Like all practical techniques, being able to do this is simply a matter of practice and confidence. Unless you are doing something that is particularly stylised, simplicity is usually the most effective approach.

Delivery

The way we speak is a powerful way of projecting our intentions. The "delivery" of a speech quickly transmits to both self and audience one's degree of confidence. A fine invocation may be written, but can quickly be rendered ineffective if it is read out in a deadpan voice and punctuated by ...ers and ...ums. Words can be paced, so that speech can excite or relax the listener - which can be oneself or others. A good delivery of an invocation serves to raise dramatic awareness in both self and others. If you think of it in terms of a feedback loop, then the more enthralling the speech, the more intense the degree of dramatic awareness, and the more people will become 'caught up' into the ritual atmosphere. When one person, for example, is performing an invocation, others present may temporarily become the 'audience' - and participants can shift between active and passive involvement throughout a ritual. The key to remember is that, if such be your intent, then everything that happens inside the ritual space can be used to enhance the atmosphere. Try exploring the effect of pacing your speech, deliberately breathing louder, and, when reaching the climax of the invocation - becoming breathless and adding a bit of tremble. You don't have to shout to be effective - a whisper or can be just as effective (if not more so) than a loud voice.

Structure and Rhythm

An invocation to a particular figure is often based on a resume of the qualities and energies associated with them, or referring to legends or deeds associated with them. The rhythm given to words when delivering an invocation can quickly generate appropriate moods in those using or hearing them. An invocation to Pan, for example, might have a fast and frenetic rhythm which leaves the speaker breathless, bringing to mind the wildness of Pan; whilst an invocation to Cronus, God of Time might be slow and ponderous. Remember, rhythms are known to have distinct physiological effects, serving to relax or stimulate breathing and heartbeat.

You can create a powerful effect by stressing the same syllables throughout the entire piece, or by repeating certain words or phrases - particularly keywords that are appropriate to the subject of the invocation. Simple rhythms and jingles can be very effective, as they are easily learnt and can be repeated over and over, becoming mantra-like. Many folk-spells are of this nature. William S. Burroughs quotes such a spell in his "The Place of Dead Roads":

Trip and Stumble, Slip and Fall, Down the Stairs ... And hit the wall!

There are different approaches to structuring invocations, and one popular approach is to structure the invocation into 3 parts. The first part is a description of the physical attributes of the Mythic figure being invoked and is spoken in the third person; the second is a commemoration of the deeds and powers of the figure, and is given in the second person; in the third part, the person invoking asserts the merging of self with the figure, and speaks in the first person. Thus, as the speech proceeds, you are moving from a position of describing that figure as a separate being, and becoming identified with that figure to the extent that you (for all ritual intents and purposes) become that figure. Following which, for the rest of the group, you are the earthly avatar of a Mythic figure. Having taken on the role, you can now act, using the power & attributes of that figure, which can range from delivering an oracular speech to leading a frenzied dance. In the western mystery tradition (such as it is), it is usual for one person to act as vessel or channel for a mythic figure, and other participants to take on the role of celebrants (or congregation). However, in other cultures, it is not unknown for several people at once to become 'possessed' by the same deity. In Haiti, there was once a celebrated case of about 300 people, all possessed simultaneously by the God Legba, who marched in protest of the political situation to the presidential residence!

In western magick, people tend to stick to one approach - usually what they've been taught in a group or coven. This is often a pity, because there are often good alternatives to be found in, for example, the study of drama or oratory. Status shifts also occur in invocations, as noted by Aleister Crowley in his excellent essay on Bhakti Yoga, *Liber Astarte*. During a vocal invocation, you might begin with the status position of a supplicant reaching up to a deity, and eventually act with the status of that deity, whilst others will (or should) regard you appropriately. This often leads to a confusion of roles, as some people find it hard to distinguish between the role someone might take within a ritual setting, and how they behave outside of it. Someone who becomes, within a ritual a goddess, should not be treated like one in the pub afterwards!

Hence the prime danger in identifying ones self with Mythic figures is one of blowing up one's ego to massive proportions. If you continually identify with a figure who reinforces some idea which you have about yourself, all you will do is imbalance yourself towards those particular tendencies. I have known at least three people become quite seriously disturbed because they worked exclusively with lunar, oracular figures who accentuated their already-present tendency to slip into passive, oracular trance states. As in all practices, an understanding and continual assessment of one's self in

terms of strengths, weaknesses, and ego-identifications is necessary - especially if you are working with others in a teaching or 'group leader' role.

I think it's fair to say that the more you put into an invocation, the more intense the effect will be. There are more elements to consider, such as the use of gestures to reinforce speech; the use of lighting and props; smell, taste, music and stage-setting. Of course the absence of speech can be as equally effective, as can be the use of grunts, howls and cackles. Having an infectious laugh can be a very useful skill, as well - you can literally laugh your way out of some situations - the anti-hero Thomas Covenant the unbeliever defeated his enemy Lord Foul by encouraging an assembly of shades to laugh at him until he withered away. Humour is an important element of ritual, which is often neglected by some of the ever-so-serious people one runs into occasionally.

One approach to experimenting with invocations is to assemble a variety of speeches written by other people and try reading them aloud until you hit on a delivery that feels effective. It can be useful to tape such experiments, and even use them as background effects in ritual work. Using appropriate music can also be very productive. While it's useful to look at other people's written invocations - so you can grasp the way that structure and rhythm can evolve through the way lines are delivered, it's generally considered better to use your own attempts at invocation. Not only does this build confidence and give you a good 'feel' for what works and what doesn't, but it allows you to build up a close 'contact' with the figure you are identifying with. Generally, it's easier to invoke humanic figures than non-human ones. Using the same principles as an approach to shape-shifting, it would be appropriate for you to observe a particular animal - look at its characteristic postures, facial expression, its vocalisations, and characteristic behaviours. You would become the animal by close identification with its characteristics. The intensity of trance would probably very much depend on the degree of abandonment that you allowed yourself to have.

**Versions of this essay have appeared in both Moonshine magazine and Chaos International.*