

Trance 1

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Question #1: Define the following terms in your own words: "Trance," "meditation," and "hypnosis." (min. 100 words per definition, dictionary definition does not count toward final word count.)

In some ways this is a tricky question as all of these could be considered subsets of the others, or at least meditation and hypnosis could be subsets of trance.

TRANCE

Trance has always been, for me, a letting go, a merging with the Otherworlds in an unfocused (even if disciplined) way. It is an altered state of consciousness where awareness of external stimuli is reduced and the awareness of internal mental and spiritual stimuli is heightened. In a trance, anything can happen - visions can occur, messages from Otherworldly spirits can be received, knowings can be had.

Since I began my readings, though, I have come to the conclusion that trance could be a broad word which covers many other kinds of practice that we call other things. Kay Hoffman, in her book, *The Trance Workbook* (14), claims that there are four kinds of trance: conscious and focused, conscious and unfocused, unconscious and unfocused, or unconscious and focused. What I was referring to in my definition above would have been the conscious and unfocused type, and indeed, in my mind I tend to see this as the dominant form that trance takes for me.

MEDITATION

Meditation, on the other hand, is an extremely focused practice, where the mind is concentrated on a single experience, idea or chant, with the avowed purpose of forcing the ego to retreat and allow one to exist, for a time, totally in the present, in a state of conscious silence. Here, internal stimuli are reduced and the external ones increased. For me, trance can easily come out of meditation, though the reverse seems to be much more difficult.

According to Kay Hoffman's analysis, though, this would also be a kind of trance, the conscious and focused variety. Since I tend to do both practices, sometimes one after the other, though, I find it useful to note the distinction with the names trance and meditation.

HYPNOSIS

Hypnosis is the process whereby one person puts another person into a trance state. Normally, the subject agrees to be put into the trance. Once in the trance, the subject is guided to their own inner resources (Heller, 17) to alter behavior. This is also called the power of "suggestion." This is used quite a bit by therapists to help folks change bad habits (quitting smoking is popular) and take control of their lives. One often hears that no one can be hypnotized without their permission, but it seems to me that charismatic people have the ability to get their way fairly easily, and that is probably due to some form of mild hypnosis. In NLP, they say that all communication is hypnosis. Whenever anyone has a conversation and communicates, they are trying to induce states in others by "using sound sequences called words" (Bandler, 100).

Guided meditation is also a form of hypnosis, where folks go through a trance induction and then allow themselves to be taken to other worlds in their imaginations.

Self-hypnosis, however, is trance with intention, and this might best fit under the trance definition, as the subject is doing the work alone.

Question #2: Give a brief history of hypnosis. (min. 300 words)

Hypnosis could be said to exist in ancient times. In ancient Greece, visitors to the shrine of the healing God Asclepius at Epidaurus would be made to feel secure. Then they would be given the suggestion to sleep the night in the temple and know that they would have a healing dream, which they usually had (Hoffman, 10).

Franz Anton Mesmer, around 1770, performed "magnetic" therapies (mesmerism) that he discovered worked with sticks as well as magnets. A board of inquiry discovered that the magnets were not necessary for the healing effects to occur, and so declared that "Mesmerism worked by the action of the imagination" (Wikipedia-Hypnosis).

James Braid (1795-1860) first coined the term, hypnosis, based on the Greek word for sleep (Hathaway, 2) and through the middle of the 19th century it was used for pain control in medical operations. The introduction of ether and other pain killers, however, made hypnosis for pain control redundant.

Later researchers tried hypnosis to control hysteria, and the idea that cooperation by the subject was essential for successful hypnosis came to be generally accepted.

The Laws of Suggestion, formulated by Emile Coué, building on the work of Boris Sidis around the turn of the 19th century, postulated that there were three laws:

The Law of Concentrated Attention

Whenever attention is concentrated on an idea over and over again, it spontaneously tends to realize itself.

The Law of Reversed Effect

The harder one tries to do something, the less chance one has of success.

The Law of Dominant Effect

A strong emotion/suggestion tends to replace a weaker one (Wikipedia-Hypnosis)

While hypnosis was used for the treating of neuroses during the First and Second World Wars, the modern study of hypnosis could be said to begin with Clark Hull in the 1930's, who determined that hypnosis had no connection with sleep, but that it was true that there was such a thing as hypnotic anesthesia (Wikipedia-Hypnosis).

In the 1960's, Harry Arons invented a scale that could be used to measure the depth of a trance under hypnosis, and this had six levels, from very light to asleep.

Psychiatrist Milton Erickson (d. 1980) introduced trance and hypnotherapy to orthodox medicine and laid the foundations of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (Hoffman, 13). He would tell "boring stories" to his patients, unrelated to the reason they were seeing him, which would put them into a trance state. In this state they could confront their problems (Hathaway, 4).

Therapist Richard Bandler and linguist John Grinder took Erickson's ideas in the 1970's and used them as a basis for a new technique they called Neuro-Linguistic Programming which has been helpful in creating models of the mind (Hathaway, 5).

Question #3: Describe Neuro-Linguistic programming. (min. 300 words)

As mentioned above, Richard Bandler and John Grinder came up with this technique for changing behavior and feelings based on the work of Milton Erickson. The idea was not to take away bad

feelings, but rather to give the clients choices about how to respond to the stimuli that triggered the feelings.

Most therapists and psychiatrists listen to their clients, paying close attention to what they *say*. Bandler and Grinder decided that since this doesn't seem to work very well, they would concentrate on what people *do* instead. And then they would build a model of what they saw the client doing. This they called *modeling* (Bandler, 7).

When people recall a feeling or event, they usually think in certain ways, which can vary from person to person. Some people are primarily visual, some auditory, and some kinesthetic. In other words, when you ask someone a question and they have to answer, they either are generating visual images, talking to themselves and hearing sounds, or having feelings. Many people even combine these systems in different sequences. These ways of thinking are called *representational systems* (Bandler, 15). This is important because we can best communicate with people by speaking in the same representational system, e.g. "I see that you are trying....", "I hear what you're saying...." or "I understand how you must be feeling...", etc. So at the beginning of a session, the therapist would ask questions of the client and watch them for clues as to which system(s) they used. When people are thinking of an answer, for instance, their eye movements can be very instructive (Bandler, 24-26). Looking up and to the left can mean visually remembered images, up and to the right can mean visually constructed images, horizontally to the left can mean remembered auditory sounds or words, horizontally to the right can mean constructed auditory sounds or words, down and to the right can mean kinesthetic feelings, etc. There are other clues from the body as well as these eye movements.

Once the therapist has figured out how the client thinks, then it is relatively easy to change behaviors. The content of what is going on with the client is really not that important. Changing the process that a person uses to hold on to a phobia or other problem works much better (Bandler, 47).

The therapist would use anchors to tackle the client's problem. An *anchor* is a kinesthetic, auditory or visual cue which becomes associated with a particular emotional state in the client. One easy form of anchor is made through touch. When the client is in a particular emotional state (such as when remembering a terrifying time in the past, etc.), the therapist would touch the person on the knee, say. This touch at that time would 'anchor' the feeling to being touched in that place (Bandler, 84-85).

First the therapist would anchor the negative feeling, like the reaction to a phobia or something. Then the therapist would have the client recall some wonderful, confident memory, and also anchor that somewhere else, creating a *resource* for the client. The therapist would then have the client go inside themselves and re-live the bad experience, telling him or her to take the new resource with them, and then touch the positive anchor as the client is in the bad experience, causing incongruity, which breaks the hold that the memory had on the client (Bandler, 85-86).

So the NLP therapist disrupts the ingrained thought process that gives the problem power, gives the client new resources, and thereby allows the client to have choices about their behavior/feelings that they didn't have previously.

Question #4: Identify and describe three instances where trance is found in ancient Indo-European cultures. (min. 300 words each instance)

Norse – The Trance of the Volva

According to Snorri (Davidson, 117-119), there was a form of witchcraft in the Pagan north called *seiðr*, which had been taught to the people by the Goddess Frejya, who was a priestess of the Vanir. Normally, the practitioner of *seiðr* would be a woman, and it was considered a non-masculine practice, generally (though Frejya was said to have taught this practice to Odin himself). The priestess or seer who practiced *seiðr* was called a *volva*.

There was a particular instance of this practice which was said to have taken place in Greenland. It was the practice of these *volvas* to travel about the land, visiting farms and attending feasts. As *seiðr*

is primarily a divination practice (involving trance), the questions put to the *volva* were usually of local interest, concerning crops and the coming season and the destinies of young men and women, such as marriages and the like. Sometimes the *volva* would travel with a troop of musicians for help in the ceremonies.

In *Eiríks Saga Rauða* (the *Saga of Eric the Red* – see Davidson, 229), the *volva*, visiting a farm in an Icelandic settlement in Greenland, wore a costume of animal skins, and she was given a meal prepared from the hearts of all animals available. She sat on a high platform on a cushion of hen's feathers, and a special song had to be sung for the ceremony. The song was performed so well that the *volva* said that many spirits had thronged to hear.

While Snorri doesn't actually mention the *volva* going into trance, it is strongly implied. Shamanistic practices in Asia and Europe historically were used for healing and divination, and involved special costumes and drumming or music (Aldhouse-Green, 12). Indeed, there is a poem entitled *Voluspá* (literally, *Soothsaying of the Volva* – Davidson, 119), which are presented as being the pronouncements of a seeress or *volva*, about matters hidden from the sight of men. Generally, a shaman would act as an intermediary between men and the Otherworlds, and would travel in trance to obtain the information needed. It is quite probable that this is what the *volva* was doing.

Irish – Imbas Forosnai

Nora Chadwick (47-67) wrote about the practice of Imbas Forosnai (*manifestation that enlightens*) which was found in Cormac's *Glossary* in Medieval Irish literature. This is also a divinatory practice to enable the poet or seer to discover details about something he liked or wished to know.

This particular entry in the Glossary is interesting because it gives a recipe of a way for poets to receive inspiration. Of course, it also shows Christian disapproval of the Pagan practices, but that's to be expected in writings made after the Christian ascendancy.

A translation of the passage made by Whitley Stokes and published in *Transactions of the Philological Society* (1891-4), p. 156f follows below (Chadwick, 47):

"*Imbas Forosnai*, 'Manifestation that enlightens': (it) discovers what thing soever the poet likes and which he desires to reveal. Thus then is that done. The poet chews a piece of the red flesh of a pig, or a dog, or a cat, and puts it then on a flagstone behind the door-valve, and chants an incantation over it, and offers it to idol gods, and calls them to him, and leaves them not on the morrow, and then chants over his two palms, and calls again idol gods to him, that his sleep may not be disturbed. Then he puts his two palms on his two cheeks and sleeps. And men are watching him that he may not turn over and that no one may disturb him. And then is revealed to him that for which he was (engaged) till the end of a *nómad* (three days and nights), or two or three for the long or the short (time?) that he may judge himself (to be) at the offering."

One specific example of *imbais forosnai* would be from the *Táin Bó Cuailgne*, where Fedelm tells Medb that she has been in Alba learning *filidecht*, and Medb asks her if she knows *imbais forosnai*. When Fedelm tells her she does, Medb asks her to 'look' into her own future, Fedelm does so, and then chants out the vision to Medb (Chadwick, 53).

The act of putting one's palms on the cheeks implies cutting off the light, by covering the eyes with the fingers. This could be similar to other practices where the seer would retire to a dark place or cave. All of these could be considered forms of trance induction.

Greek – The Oracle at Delphi

One of the most famous oracles in the ancient world was that of Pytho, the sanctuary of the Delphians. This oracle may not have existed before 750 bce, but is mentioned in the *Illiad*, where its rich treasures are said to be "held fast within the door-sill of the God" (Burkert, 116).

Originally, the oracles were only given out once a year in the spring, but as the oracle's fame grew, they became available throughout the year, and at times there were three priestesses in office simultaneously. The seer/priestess of this oracle would be a woman (the Pythia) who was dedicated to the service of the God Apollo for life. She would dress in the clothes of a young girl. For each oracle, she would first take a bath in the Castalian spring and then make a preliminary sacrifice of a goat. The temple would be fumigated with the smoke of barley meal and laurel leaves, burned on a hearth fire, always burning, called a *hestia*. From there, she would descend into a sunken area of the temple where the Omphalos (navel of the world) was situated, and where there was a well-like opening in the floor. Over this opening there stood a tripod with cauldron, and it would be on the lid of this that the Pythia would sit, over the gaping hole below.

It was from here that the Pythia would go into trance and start speaking what sounded like nonsense syllables which would then be translated by the male priests into normal Homeric hexameter verse (Burkert, 116).

For a long time, scholars thought that the Pythia's trance state was the result of breathing volcanic vapors welling up from the rocks below, but that has since proved to be geologically impossible, so we can only assume that the trance state was self-induced.

While this oracle was famous all over the Greek world and used by nations and individuals alike, a couple of instances of specific oracles come to mind. In the first, King Croesus of Lydia, faced with a choice of war against the Persian Empire, asked what would be the outcome if he should invade. The oracle's famous reply was, "A great empire will fall." Croesus started the war and was subsequently conquered by the Persians. The oracle never mentioned 'which' empire would fall. Later, just before the Persian invasion of Greece, the oracle famously warned that Persia would win. When this did not come to pass, Delphi's reputation was seriously damaged, and nations stopped using it for advice in political decisions (Burkert, 116).

Question #5: Describe three ways trance can be used in personal spiritual practice. (min. 100 words each)

Trance is extremely useful in my personal spiritual practice. One important way is in creating connections with the worlds of Spirit and the Beings within it. Epiphanies and meditation are two other practices that benefit from trance.

Trance Journeys

The use of trance journeys, a form of trance or self-hypnosis, is an excellent way of making spiritual discoveries, and of cementing relationships with Deities (and other Kindreds) that have already been created through sacrifice. Trance journeys I have done include creating or visiting sacred locales for discovering Patron deities, for visiting the lands of the Dead and my ancestors, and for getting to know a deity or other form of Kindred better. I have created a sacred locale as a jumping off point for other journeys, based on a spot I discovered in Wales a few years ago, and as a member of ADF Clergy, I also visit a locale specifically reserved for us.

One vivid trance I had a few years ago involved the Goddess Brigit. I went into trance specifically to make contact with Her and ask what I could do to become closer to Her. The most memorable part was when she took the fire burning in Her hands and blew it down my throat. It was soon after this that I abandoned the use of scripts in ritual.

Epiphanies

In this context, by epiphany I am referring to the practice of divination/discovery I do that doesn't include a symbol set. While I usually do this in a ritual setting, during the workings section (so that I am in sacred space and in the presence of the Kindreds), this can also be done anytime or anywhere.

For this, I put myself into as deep as trance as I can manage, using breathing (and sometimes sonic driving as well) or through ecstatic, ascetic practices. Then, with my eyes closed, I let myself go and my mind wander. Sometimes nothing of note occurs, but occasionally the answer to a vexing problem, or an insight into my own practice or behavior will suddenly pop out and make itself known. The important thing is that unlike normal divination, there is no clear intent and no clear purpose to the trance – it's just a time to open up and see if there is anything out there for me to discover. And if there isn't anything, that's fine too. I find that if I'm troubled by a problem that needs answering, a normal, symbol-based divination may be more effective. This practice requires an untroubled state of mind.

Meditation

Meditation, as a form of trance, is something I try to do as often as possible. Finding the silence inside of me, and sitting there totally in the moment, without the distractions of thought and the worry of everyday concerns, gives me the space I need to become whole again. I also have discovered that I am more able to stay clear and unruffled when the dramas of the Grove and of my own life descend and surround me. Issues merely become problems to solve, and I don't find myself getting emotionally involved. And now that I have a deeper meditative practice, I find that my epiphanies tend to stick around, where before I would tend to forget what they were.

Question #6: Describe three ways that trance is helpful in personal ritual. (min. 100 words each)

Connections to the Cosmos

In ritual, I like to totally connect to the cosmos that I am re-creating through visualization and trance. The Two Powers meditation is a perfect form of trance induction, and through breathing can be done alone without benefit of a trance leader. And the more it is performed, the easier entering the trance becomes.

I go into trance pretty deeply for much of the rite – more deeply than I dare let myself during public rites, though I do go as deeply as I can even then. I can let my conscious mind go much more in personal rites than I can in public ones, as I don't have to worry about being heard and seen by the People. In addition to the Two Powers, I am in trance visualizing the connections of the Well to the Underworld, the Fire to the Upper World, and the Tree here in the Midworld growing and connecting them both. And when the Gates open, that is quite visual as well.

All this is only possible for me in trance. I 'see' the Kindreds arrive when they are called, taking as much time as necessary to see this done. And I 'see' the blessings descend into the Waters of Life during the Return Flow. Without trance, ritual for me would be a hollow, empty thing.

Taking the Omen/Divination

Another form of trance I use in my personal ritual work is to enable the world of Spirit to flow through me when doing the omen. And since I usually only pull three symbols during a rite, they need to encompass large concepts, such as the blessings and wisdom I'm receiving in return for my sacrifices. My friend Nora Ford wrote a chant for divination (which I have modified slightly) that I use that sums up this idea very well:

Sacred symbols, speaking to me,
Sacred symbols, speaking through me,
It's your wisdom we're receiving,
Words unspoken whispered now.

Since the Kindreds speak to us through the divinatory tools, more is needed than just reading symbols. I need to feel the symbols as well, and open my mind to allow the actual meanings of each card or few

to join with the printed ones I've learned, so that the actual intent of the Kindreds who are showing me that symbol can also be discovered.

Magic

While there are many kinds of magic that I practice, all of them require letting go of the mundane world and entering the Otherworlds, through trance, in order for any magic work to be effective. Often, there is an energy-raising followed by a release of the energy to send the spell or other working off into the cosmos. In Chaos Magic, a state of *gnosis* needs to be attained before the discharge of the energy. Phil Hine (190) refers to gnosis as "the 'peak' of no-mind, one-pointedness which is the high point of any route into magical trance" (Hine, 190). Gnosis can be achieved in a variety of ways, I find, but the main point is that it can be a part of trance, and very useful in magic.

Question #7: Identify and explain three methods of attaining a trance state. (min 300 words per method)

The three methods I will describe here are breathing, auditory confusion techniques, and dance/movement practices.

Breathing

Breathing as a method of inducing trance is something that I learned by accident years ago, and which has since become my most standard form of trance induction, useful in ritual as well as in my personal, spiritual practice.

Back when I was in the theatre, and fairly new at it still, I suffered from stage fright. Right before going on stage I would suddenly get extremely nervous, even though I knew that I'd be fine the minute I started speaking. To cope with this, I tried breathing slowly, in through the nose and, even more slowly, out through the mouth. As I exhaled, I would whisper the word, "calm," drawing it out for the entire exhalation. After a minute of doing this, I felt much better and had no trouble getting on stage. Later, I discovered that my heart-rate would go down by 10 beats per minute when I did this.

Working on the meditation requirement, as it was called in the old version of the Dedicant Program, taught me to count the breaths so that I would have something to hold on to while trying to find the silence. Often I would end the meditation session by closing my eyes and letting go, but maintaining the breath work without the counting. I found that I could descend into trance quite quickly and deeply. Now I've trained myself to go into trance almost automatically just by using the breath alone.

As in my 'calming' breathing from my old theatre days, I concentrate on breathing slowly, in through the nose and out through the mouth, only without whispering during the exhalation. I like to hear my exhalation as well, to hear and feel it take so long and be so drawn out. I un-focus my eyes and just let go. In no time I'm deep into trance and anything can happen.

Auditory Confusion Techniques

I had never heard of this type of trance induction until I started this course. Kay Hoffman mentions it in her book (96), with enough detail that I felt I could give it a try.

This technique was used by Milton Friedman and the NLP folks, and may be much older than that. Carlos Castaneda mentions it in his books as something he underwent in his training.

For Friedman, two therapists would speak different things simultaneously, one into each of the patient's ears, causing confusion in the patient. He could hear everything, but lost the meanings of each message because of not being able to distinguish both at the same time. This resulted in a new, combined meaning. This stereophonic confusion alters the consciousness of the individual.

I didn't have two therapists to speak into my ears, so I decided to try using music. I turned the TV in my room onto a satellite music channel, and put a CD into a portable CD player. I sat with one ear facing the TV, and the other one facing the CD, and turned them both on. I was using classical music because that's what I have at home, though I suspect than songs with words might have worked better.

At first I had problems because of the different dynamic levels that classical music tends to have, and at times one ear would overwhelm the other, which made me 'hear' one ear over the other, and nothing happened as far as trance is concerned. But then I had a long period of fast, loud music in both ears, and off I went. In fact, I ended up going far deeper than I had expected, and the trance state persisted for a few minutes even after turning the music off.

For this to be useful for journeys or other trance outcomes, it would be necessary for the music or words to have similar dynamics, and for them all to be preset so that one could just let go and not worry about keeping the volumes, etc. balanced.

Dance/Movement Practices

Dance and movement, forms of kinesthetic trance, have long been used to enable trance in participants of tribal and/or religious rites over the millennia. Dancing with wild abandon can force the conscious mind to concentrate on the body instead of the ego, enabling consciousness to alter and blur into ecstasy. Nowadays, in this secular and rational age, dance clubs and some pagan rituals are about the only places where people can feel the power of movement to change our inner landscapes.

The Whirling Dervishes, part of the Islamic Sufi movement, became famous for (among other things) their slow spinning in place, which is an ecstatic practice they employ in the worship of their god. I decided to give this a try myself as a means of attaining gnosis in my work with Chaos Magic.

Spinning can be a bit of a trick, as dizziness can occur. Professional dancers learn how to "spot" a place on the wall where they keep their attention, only moving their heads in one quick movement so that they spend most of the time in their spin staring at that spot. This eliminates dizziness, and is a trick I learned in the theatre. But "spotting" doesn't allow trance to happen, which is probably good, or we'd have dancers flying off into Neverland on a regular basis.

I found, however, that by keeping my head upright and by staring out into space horizontally (and certainly not at the ground!) that I could spin and not get dizzy. In fact, I found that I could spin quite quickly without falling over. I also found myself getting deeper and deeper into trance, even though my body had to work at keeping the spin going.

I did find a use for this method of trance induction. In doing Chaos Magic, a state of gnosis, a peak of no-mind was needed, as well as a way of launching the spell. By spinning quickly I could build energy as well as go deep into a no-mind state, and then when I couldn't go on any longer, or when I felt a peak occur, I would simply drop to the floor and the magic would launch in a very clear and obvious way.

Question #8: Using one of the three methods described in requirement 7, describe in depth a single experience you had while in the trance state from an experiential point of view (i.e. what did you feel, see, sense, etc.) (min. 600 words)

The method I shall write about is the one involving the breath.

At Wellspring Festival a couple of years ago, I was given the task of doing the invocation and sacrifice for the Deities, and I decided I wanted to do something that would be new and creative for myself.

About an hour before we were to gather for the rite, I got dressed and sat down in my tent on the edge of my air mattress so that I could sit and keep my back straight, and then I began to slowly breathe. As I began to feel myself sink into trance, I closed my eyes and thought, "How can I call on the Gods?"

I could feel the thickening of my trance as the outer world seemed to shut down. I was suddenly aware that I would be singing this invocation again, even though I knew that Ian, the lead celebrant, didn't care much for that technique. But this time it seemed like something I had to do. It was clear to me that I would need the trance state I could achieve in ritual through the use of a sustained breath in order to do what I would soon find out was the invocation They wanted of me that evening.

As I sat there, I suddenly saw a view in my mind's eye of the trees around the ADF Nemeton at Brushwood, with a dark, night sky filled with stars beyond them. As I watched, I suddenly was aware that the wind had come up, rustling through the trees with a sighing sound, moving the branches around, and bringing with it a feeling that something was about to happen. The wind was warm, and soothing, but I felt the hairs on my arms suddenly start to stand on end.

In the distance, over the trees, I slowly became aware of a number of places through and beyond the trees that seemed to throw a glow into the night sky, and these glowing areas were moving, moving towards me. I could hear branches being brushed aside, and the sound of foot treads. I began to be filled with a strong feeling of awe.

Over the trees I could see what had to be the Gods moving towards me – huge beings standing at least 40 feet high, glowing in the night, and walking purposefully towards me and the Nemeton. The warm wind was blowing on my face, and my (inner) eyes were wide with wonder – I could make out Morrigan, and Brigit, and Cernunnos and Rhiannon, Manannan mac Lir, and Lugh Lamfada, and even the Dagda, with his huge penis dragging on the ground from under his tunic, as well as other Gods that were further away and not clear to me. As I watched, they strode around the Nemeton, where I had to be sitting in my vision, and stood in a circle around the place.

Then they raised their arms and let out a huge sound, like the intoning or Druid Buzz that we sometimes do in ritual, only much grander, and the whole world seemed to vibrate and shake. This carried on for a few moments, and then, when They suddenly stopped, the sound echoed into the distance.

The Gods lowered their arms, and Cernunnos looked down at me. He smiled his kindly but amused smile and spoke to me, saying, "You must sing what you have seen."

Then the vision faded and I found myself in my tent once more.

That night at the ritual, when my turn came, I got up and opened my mouth, with the vision I had just experienced clear and fresh in my mind. I did not plan the words I would sing, but rather trusted in the power of inspiration and the Gods to see me through. I don't recall what I sang that night, but folks told me afterwards that the invocation I made was very moving. What I do remember is that the hairs on my arms were standing on end as I sang.

Question #9: Describe what happens to the body during a trance state from a physical standpoint. (min 300 words)

There are no studies that I could find describing what happens to the body during generalized trance states, but there is a lot of data out there about physical changes that occur during meditation, which is a form of trance.

There is something called the Relaxation Response which is able to negate the ill effects of an overactive Fight or Flight response. Meditation has been shown to enable the practitioner to achieve this Relaxation Response, with effects becoming greater with practice. Effects of this Relaxation Response include decreased breath rate, heart rate, blood pressure, body metabolism and decreased sympathetic nervous system reactions. Meditation may improve health, increase energy, reduce insomnia and even reverse biological aging to some degree (Rutgers).

Apparently, advanced meditation can produce more startling results as well. The Harvard University Gazette reported in April, 2002, that Herbert Benson, an associate professor at the Harvard Medical School, performed a series of studies (with the blessing of the Dalai Lama) on Tibetan Buddhist monks. He found that monks performing the *g Tum Mo* meditation could raise the temperatures of the fingers and toes by as much as 17 degrees. He also found that monks in Sikkim, India, could lower their body metabolisms by as much as 64%. Sara Lazar, a colleague of Benson's and an Instructor of Psychology, used functional magnetic resonance imaging scans of people doing kundalini meditation (and who had been practicing this form of meditation for at least 4 years). She found a marked decrease in blood flow to the entire brain, while certain areas of the brain, controlling attention and autonomic functions like blood pressure and metabolism, became much more active (Cromie).

An article in the Wall Street Journal Online reported that neuroscientist Richard Davidson of the University of Wisconsin ran some tests on a series of Buddhist monks (again with the blessing of the Dalai Lama) and a set of novice volunteers using functional magnetic resonance imaging. The volunteers all did a form of compassion meditation, and while some change was noticed in the novices, the monks had readings higher than any seen in science before. Most activity seemed to occur in the left frontal lobe (where positive emotions such as happiness are found) with very decreased activity in the right frontal lobe (where negative emotions tend to be found) (Begley).

Question #10: (Crossover requirement) Keep a journal for five months detailing the trance work that you have done. Write an essay based off those journals that examines your practice over the time you journaled. In this essay, explain how you can apply the trance work to divination, magic, and other workings you do in ritual and personally. Entries occurring less than weekly will not count toward completion of this requirement. Your journal must include work from the exercises found in support material for this course. [This requirement matches up with Req. 3 in Magic 2] (min. 1000 words)

On October 26, 2006, I began my journaling for this course, Divination 2 and Magic 2. I performed a personal rite with trance, divination and magic at least once every week up through the first week of April (five months) missing only one week during this time due to illness. I then took some time off for ADF festivals. During this entire time, I also participated in the Two Powers trances done in the weekly public rites of the Grove, either as a participant or as the trance leader. Beginning with the clergy trance journey at Wellspring, I have restarted my trance journal for Trance 2.

This requirement mentions that I have to include work from the exercises found in the support materials for this course. As of now, none have as yet been approved, so I think I may be a guinea pig for this course. To make this as wide ranging as possible, I determined to try as many forms of trance work as I could manage.

The types of trance I have tried out are breathing, body postures, sonic driving, ascetic practices, spoken guidance, auditory confusion, visual concentration, dance/movement, chant/mantra and meditation. I only tried out visual concentration once as I feared it might confuse me in my meditative practice, where I loosely stare at a spot on the floor or wall in an unfocused manner while remaining totally present in the here and now.

In questions 7 and 8, I mentioned my use of the breath for entering and maintaining trance. I continued to use breath on numerous occasions, as I find it easy to do. I found this sort of trance extremely useful when I performed the magic work of healing that I did for my friend Bryan in the stone circle. I got deep enough that I could clearly feel and see (and even hear, like a hiss) the 2 Powers as they flowed out of Brigit and the Dagda, into me, and then into Bryan. It was also useful in the ritual I did where I created the Druid's Fortress as outlined in Ian Corrigan's *Celtic Sorcery* (96), where I used the breath to enter trance as well as to sustain and increase the 2 powers for me as I worked the visualization. This is one form of trance that I can do anywhere, at any time, and without any special preparation. It is also the primary form of trance that I can use as a participant in public ritual (the others being chant/mantra when we do magic workings and, very occasionally, sonic driving - drumming). Both as a celebrant and as a participant in public ritual, accessing trance through breath, and sustaining the trance this way, is extremely effective. In ritual, both public and private, I try to

remain in a light trance (at least) for the entire time, allowing myself to sink lower during certain ritual segments, such as the Two Powers meditation, the Three Hallows, Opening the Gates, and all Kindred invocations. Singing (chant/mantra and breath combined) at specified parts of the rite also helps create/sustain a light trance.

Another trance type that I gave some attention to is body postures, particularly the ones mentioned in the books by Felicitas Goodman. The three trance postures I tried were the Olmec Diviner (Goodman, 173), Calling the Spirits (Goodman, 113), and Horned Man of Gundestrup – Cernunnos (Goodman, 116) (I have since done more postures).

The Olmec Diviner is supposed to be used for divination, and the first time I tried it I found it to be very effective, much to my surprise. I was casting about trying to come up with ideas for doing a healing for my friend Bryan, who had just been diagnosed with cancer of the esophagus. I knew I wanted to do a rite of some kind, but what? During the trance I clearly saw myself doing some of Michael Harner's Core Shamanic work, doing extractions and a soul retrieval on Bryan. Then I saw us in the stone circle, during a full ADF rite, with me projecting the powers of the Upper and Lower Worlds into him. Then I saw myself in my room, in front of my indoor altar, practicing the projection of power, seeing it shoot through the air to just over the pool, where it would drop into the water harmlessly. About this time I came out of the trance. On another occasion I performed this posture with my drumming CD playing in the background, and got images of my friend Bryan recovering in bed. It wasn't clear at the time how successful my magic would be.

The other two posture trances were designed for spirit journeys. My notes on the "Calling the Spirits" posture remind me that this one was a bit less successful. I got quite high, full of endorphins, but the spirit contact was very fleeting. I think I may have seen Brigit for a moment. And I suspect that the discomfort of the posture may have had something to do with the endorphins. My notes on the "Horned Man of Gundestrup – Cernunnos" posture, which is based on the image on the Gundestrup Cauldron, remind me how uncomfortable the posture is, sitting cross-legged with a torc in one hand and a stuffed sock (to represent the ram-headed snake) in the other. My back started to hurt and I had to finally lean back against the side of the bed before I could go into trance. The book says that this trance is to experience the Three Worlds (Goodman, 82), but I mostly only visited Cernunnos in his Underworld Throne Room, so this trance was mostly an opportunity to visit with my Patron. I remember that when I saw Him He was naked, as He was when I first experienced Him, but then He laughed at me and was suddenly dressed in a long, white robe.

Sonic Driving, such as drumming or rattling, is essential for any spirit journey work done using the Harner method of Core Shamanism (Harner, 50-51). He claims that certain numbers of beats per minute have the ability to move us out of the normal, waking consciousness of brainwaves in the beta state into a more relaxed alpha state. The deeper theta state, obtained by beats of 4 to 7 cycles per second, have been found in spirit dances of the Indians of the NW coast of North America (Harner, 52).

These Core Shamanism spirit journeys, moved along by sonic driving (including a special "call-back" beat) are undirected journeys into any of the three worlds. Usually, the shaman is accompanied by a power animal (mine is a black jaguar). I have extensive experience and training in this technique, and now respond extremely well to drumming (though not so well to rattles). I use this technique primarily for healing and for divination, for my personal practice primarily. I have also used it in the workings section of a personal ADF rite. The two cosmologies are so similar that they go together very well, in my opinion.

In my forays into magic, particularly Chaos Magic, I have found that reaching gnosis can be very easily done using a combination of dance/movement and chant/mantra. I tend like to spin in place while chanting the 'sigil', falling to the floor when the time feels right, and as the trance breaks apart, I can feel the magic launch into the cosmos.

I have gone into auditory confusion techniques in question #7, but I would like to say that this is not a particularly practical method for ritual at all. However, it can be useful to attain a fairly deep trance

which can lead to sudden messages and epiphanies on a personal spirituality basis. The problem seems to me to be finding two separate yet equal sound sources to use for the ears.

I mentioned above that visual concentration is something I've only tried once, due to fears that it might confuse my meditative practice. I was doing a working to bless and fill a candle with the 2 Powers so that I could send it to my friend Leilani, with whom I had done another healing, and while lighting the candle from one that had been lit from a candle that had been lit from the perpetual Brigit fire in Kildare, Ireland, I suddenly realized that this would be a good opportunity to try this type of trance out. After staring into the flame for a while, I suddenly became very sleepy. I then closed my eyes, but no visions came. However, when I opened them again, I suddenly realized that I had gone even deeper into trance. This technique might be good for light trances and workings (at least for me), but the sleepiness is not a response I want to encourage.

Question #11: Create a self-hypnosis tape to put yourself in trance and go on a spirit journey and bring yourself back out. Submit a script as well as a summary of your results. (min 600 words for the summary)

I shall start with the summary, and the script for the trance journey is below. A .wav file of the trance journey is also available at www.druidkirk.org/SoundFiles/Trance/TranceJourneyIslesOfDead.wav (8.86 MB).

This journey is a trip to the Isles of the Dead, over the western sea, in a coracle piloted by Manannan mac Lir himself. It would be especially appropriate for Samhain, but could be used at any time, and perhaps could be helpful for someone who has recently lost a loved one, or who would like to reconnect with someone long gone. In writing this, I attempted to put in the pauses needed for good visualization, and have three pause lengths – short (about three or four beats), long (about twice as long as a short one) and very long (one or two minutes). The very long pause is designed to give enough time for a short conversation to be made with the dead. On my tape, this pause lasted about 45 seconds, and could have been longer.

The journey begins with relaxation – breathing and the releasing of tension from the body. This is to facilitate the trance induction, getting the visualization process going while simultaneously relaxing the body and mind. Once this has been accomplished, the breath is used to create a 'mist' out of the breath, which surrounds and envelopes the listener, allowing him to be taken elsewhere, coming out of the mist while lying on a beach near the sea. I attempted to include visual, auditory and tactile elements in this journey ("Looking out over the sea, you can see a fog bank out over the water" or "you can hear the sounds of the sea, of waves gently breaking upon a beach" or "then you can feel the boat move backward, keel scraping on sand"). I felt this to be important since NLP has established that different folks think in different ways – visually, aurally, or kinesthetically.

In the distance, Manannan mac Lir appears on his coracle out of a fog bank and arrives on the beach, where he holds out his hand to the person in trance. Thus begins a trip over the sea to the Isles of the Dead, stopping on the largest one, with a mountain at its center. There, the person gets off the boat and climbs up to a meadow where 'someone' is waiting for him. They have time for a short conversation, and then the person returns the way he came, down the mountain, over the sea with the God, and then floats back home in the mist, where the person comes out of the trance.

By the time I had written and recorded the journey (it took two tries to get the recording), I was extremely familiar with the imagery, and I suspect that this might have been more effective had it been more of a surprise. I also think, however, that it could be of value to others as recorded, so I've put the recording up on my personal website.

I certainly had results with this trance, personally. I had gone into the trance assuming that I'd meet my father on the island, due to other journeys I've taken, but to my surprise it was my mother that greeted me. At first she was the age she died, and then she was a young woman again, and then she was sort of both, somehow. She was amused by my Druidic path, but supportive as well. It was good to be able to hug her – I hadn't realized how badly I still missed her – she died in 1994. And now I

think that I'll be able to create a new relationship with her, like I had done with my father. For that, if no other reason, this has been a very profitable exercise.

Trance Journey To Visit the Isles of the Dead

A Celtic Trance by Rev. Kirk Thomas

(The following is to be read out loud by someone not taking the journey, or into a recorder for playback at a later time. A *pause* lasts about 3 beats, based on the speed of the reading. A *long pause* lasts about twice as long as a pause. There is also one very long pause of at least a minute in duration. Read this gently, slowly and deliberately.)

First of all, make yourself comfortable. Loosen your clothes and either sit or lie down, and close your eyes.

(long pause)

Now, I want you to breathe slowly and evenly. Breathe in – breathe out. Breathe in – breathe out.

(pause)

And while you are breathing, imagine all the tension in your body flowing down and out, into the floor.

(pause)

Feel the tension in your head and neck flow down and out. Let Mother Earth absorb it all – She can take it.

(pause)

As you continue to breathe slowly and evenly,

(pause)

Feel the tension in your shoulders drain away, down and away. And now the tension in your chest and stomach and back just drains away, down through the floor into the earth.

(pause)

Feel the tension in your hips drain away,

(pause)

and the tension in your legs and in your feet drains away, down, down, deep into the earth below us.

(pause)

And while you are breathing, in your mind's eye, you are aware of a mist coming out of your mouth as you exhale.

(pause)

And as you breathe, this mist grows thicker and thicker, until you are completely surrounded by the mist. This mist is warm and bright, and glows gently.

(pause)

Now you can feel yourself floating in the mist, gently floating, with no sense of movement or of direction. Let yourself float for a while, gently enveloped by the warm mist.

(long pause)

Now, as you float in the mist, you can just feel ground beneath you, and you can hear the sounds of the sea, of waves gently breaking upon a beach.

(pause)

And as you listen, you are aware that the mist starts to thin, and as it thins you can see that it is a warm, sunny day, with blue sky filled with the sounds of seagulls, calling to and fro.

(long pause)

Looking out over the sea, you can see a fog bank out over the water, and then, out of the fog bank, you see a small, round boat approaching the shore. And on this boat there is a man.

(pause)

As the boat comes closer, you can just make out the figure. He is dressed in a blue robe, and he has long, white hair and a white beard. There is a small bag tied to his waist, and you can just make out his face. He is young, and very good looking. And he seems very tall.

(pause)

You suddenly realize that this is Manannan mac Lir, God of the Gateway to the Otherworlds, and he is coming to meet you.

(pause)

The boat approaches the shore, effortlessly, with no visible means of propulsion, and it comes to rest on the beach. The God looks at you with a smile and extends his hand.

(pause)

You slowly approach the boat and take his hand. With his help, you manage to get up into the boat.

(pause)

You find yourself standing in the prow of the boat, with the God behind you. And then you can feel the boat move backward, keel scraping on sand, as it then floats freely on the water once again.

(pause)

The boat turns around, and you are heading out to sea, towards the fog bank ahead.

(long pause)

The fog is cold and darker than you thought it would be, but the boat goes on, slapping the waves as it moves.

(pause)

And then just as suddenly, the boat breaks out of the fog and is filled with bright sunshine, the sun in your eyes directly in front of you. The boat moves faster and faster over the waves, and you can feel the ocean spray on your face and the wind in your hair.

(pause)

The sun is sinking towards the horizon ahead of you, and you can just make out a few islands in the distance. The one you are heading for is larger than the others, and has a mountain at its center. As you approach, you can see waves breaking on the beach, and trees beyond.

(long pause)

And you realize that these are the Isles of the Blest, the land of the Holy Dead.

(pause)

The boat comes to rest on the sand, and you see a path leading through the trees and up on to the mountain. You turn around and see the God staring at you. He gestures with his hand towards the path, and you know you must go there.

(pause)

You climb out of the boat

(pause)

...and walk across the sand, feeling the hot sand beneath your feet, hearing it crunch as you walk. You look back, and see the God standing in the small, round boat. He gently gestures to the path once again.

(pause)

You turn back to the path and begin the climb through the trees, hearing them gently sighing in the wind as you go.

(pause)

Beyond the trees, the path starts up the slope, and you climb, going higher and higher.

(long pause)

Now you stop and look back. You can just make out the boat on the beach, the God still standing in it, watching you. Beyond the beach you can just make out the fog bank far to the east.

(pause)

And you return to your climb.

(long pause)

You are now at the top of the hill, and before you there is a small meadow surrounded by trees on three sides. And in this meadow there is someone standing with their back to you.

(pause)

Could this be one of your sacred Dead, an ancestor of heart or blood standing there? You approach, and stop a few feet away from the person.

(pause)

And then the person turns around and faces you.

(long pause)

And the two of you begin to speak with one another.

(very long pause – this should be for a minute or two in length)

You suddenly realize that the light is starting to get dim, and the person smiles at you and turns to go. You look back towards the path behind you, and then when you turn back towards the person you met, you realize that they have gone.

(pause)

So you turn around and head back down the path, more quickly than when you climbed it.

(long pause)

You find yourself on the beach, and the boat is ahead of you. The God is still there, and he gestures to you to join him.

(pause)

You climb on the boat, and no sooner are you onboard than the boat pulls away from the beach, turns around, and heads back toward the fogbank, now glowing orange in the light of the setting sun behind you.

(long pause)

The fog is as cold as before, but the boat is going so fast that it seems like only moments before it breaks clear of the fog...

(pause)

...and you see the beach ahead of you, growing dim in the dying light of day.

(pause)

The boat comes to rest on the sand, and you get out, turning back to face the God, and to give him your thanks.

(long pause)

As you watch, the boat with Manannan mac Lir pulls away from the sand, turns around, and heads for the fog bank, quickly disappearing into it.

(long pause)

You are suddenly very tired, and you lie down on the sand and as you breathe, you see a mist begin to surround you, and thicken deeply.

(pause)

And once again you are gently floating in the warm mist, floating in comfort and in silence.

(long pause)

And now you feel the floor underneath you once again. The mist begins to clear, and you are once again where you started.

(pause)

Take a moment to get your bearings, and then open your eyes.

(pause)

Welcome home!

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