



Religion Today

Cassandra, the village witch

Cassandra Latham

I've been asked to create a charm for someone who is in need of protection. Basically from threats from an ex-partner.

I'm a village witch, which means I'm a member of my community, as opposed to someone who does it in sort of high days and holidays. I do it full time, it's my occupation, it's how I earn my living, and I'm registered with the Inland Revenue as a small business. So, in the little slot where it says state nature of business, I write 'village witchcraft,' and my tax deductible items are quite good because I can claim for candles and oils and incense, books, the occasional bottle of mead for a ritual, great fun.

The sort of work I do nowadays is much the same that used to be done hundreds of years ago. I mean I come – there's a well-documented tradition of village-wise women, or cunning folk, or I call myself a village witch because it's the most understandable term, basically. And people want to know about their relationships, who they're going to marry, about job prospects, health, the same things nowadays as they always used to ask.

Oh look we've got some little violets here as well, that's good for stuff like love magic. Nature gives you a pretty good guide, if it's pretty, it's usually to do with things like love and things like that, whereas the more sort of heavy duty numbers with thorns are for protection and things like that.

And I don't actually believe you need to actually have a religion to do it. You could have no religion and do the work I do. You could be Christian and do the work I do. My religion's got nothing to do with my work, I just happen to be a pagan as well, because I work very much with the energies, watching the tides, different moon phases. I'm very pragmatic. So you won't see me waving wands and looking weird, well, I suppose I look a bit weird but not in the sort of spooky sense.

You've got to think about what it looks like visually as well. If you're going to have a charm hanging in someone's house, it needs to have a visual impact as well as the actual energetics of the herb. There is documented evidence of people like myself, that goes back hundreds of years, particularly in the west country, where it never truly died out, it's part of country ways. In the old days, people couldn't afford to go to a doctor or to a vet, so people like myself would step in and work on a barter system.

There's a lot of trees in this wood. They're mostly sycamore which is not much good to me. It's sort of, it's not indigenous, therefore there's not too much old tradition about them. But we're coming up to some blackthorn now, so that's what I'm interested in.

I call myself a pagan because I believe that nature is a very, very good example of how to live. You watch things grow, you see them blossom, you see them bear fruit, you see them die back. This fits in really well with the seasons of the year. And as you watch the landscape and the growing things out there, it also happens on an inner level as well. So there are certain times that we need to discard in our lives. You can't bring in new stuff unless you discard some of the old. So, to me, the whole growth cycle is a very fine example about how to be in the world, because we are part of that world.

There's some blackthorn.

Now when I go harvesting I always approach the thing with respect. You're asking for something from it, and I just kind of have a word with the spirit of the plant or the tree, and just sort of commune with it, and have a word with it about what I want to use it for. I make sure I cut it at the point where it will grow successfully and not be wounded too much.

And I also find that if you live your life according to the natural processes, it's far less stressful than if you're sort of fighting against the current all the time. A lot of people come to me who are stressed out, and I just try and remind them, you know, you're part of the universe, to connect with it, and the average person understands that.

'Mind-your-own-business.' That's a pretty good thing to have in a protection thing, I think.

Right, that'll probably do it for now. Right. Let's go back and do some spell casting.

The image of witchcraft is the most important part of it, in my opinion, because it's so important what is in the mind of the general public about witchcraft.

I think the old image is not so much destructive but it is obstructive, it gets in the way of things. It's like, if you're going to look at any unorthodox movement, what happens is, first of all, it gets persecuted, then it gets ridiculed, and then it gets marketed, and that's what's happening at the moment.

Right before I do any act of magic, I need to call up the spirits. I mean they're here anyway, but basically it's just asking them to sort of pay attention, because I'm about to do something that I'd really like their help with. And the way I use it is, I use a bull-roarer. It's the same as setting up a sacred space to work in. Whereas, with a Wiccan, would take roughly quarter of an hour to twenty minutes to set up a sacred space, I do it in a few minutes with this, and the power of my mind is doing all that needs to be done basically. So I'm just going to step out to the space here and call them up, okay?

So, I maintain that in order to work magic effectively, you have to bring your light and your dark together in order to create that magical spark. That's how sparks are created, positive negative together. It won't happen if you're all positive, any more than it will happen if you're all negative. You have to have that frisson in the middle. And to, you know, extend that electric metaphor a bit further, because, electricity is neutral, magical power is neutral, and this is where it differs from men of the church who maintain that the power is evil. Well, it's not, it's the operator. It's how you set your circuits up basically, and you need to use your - facilitate all your energy into that, not just half of it, otherwise it's not that effective.

All of these, blackthorn, elder, ivy, and the thorn, and the 'mind-your-own-business,' are going to sort of mix together to produce the result I'm after.

Now this is not going to end up as something pretty and neat. I work in a very primitive way with things, but somehow or other at the end of the day it adds to the visual impact of it. And you think, what the hell is that?

This is the spell: 'lie in tomb, flesh to flesh, bone to bone, sinew to sinew, vein to vein, and each one shall be whole again. By knot of one, the spell's begun, by knot of two, it cometh true. By knot of three, so shall it be.

Ah, blood sacrifice. What I'm going to do now is charge it with intent. I've kind of brought it alive, now I need to instruct it.

If you want a safe and secure life don't choose this occupation because you won't get it. You live on the edge, you very much live on the edge. And you walk on the wild side, is what I call it.