

WHITE MAGIC

The mage of Mt Eden talks about magic and paganism

By Noel O'Hare

"I'm a magician. I'm not a witch, but some of my best friends are witches. I really mean that," says Michael Freedman. "Two members of the magical order are also involved in a coven." Freedman, a genial, scholarly man, is head of the Society of Guardians, an occult movement that was formed by working-class Christians, weavers and scribes in 12th-century France and now has its centre in Auckland, or to be more precise, in a suburban house in Mt Eden, known as The Sanctuary. As the literature explains: "A line drawn due west of the centre of the crater of the volcano [Mt Eden] and a line drawn magnetic west of the peak of the volcano intersect at The Sanctuary" - or as Freedman put it more usefully on the phone: "two streets up from Three Guys on Dominion Rd".

As editor of 'Magic Pentacle', a quarterly magazine for magicians, wiccans and pagans, Freedman is ideally placed to comment on a new white magic phenomenon: the rise of neo-paganism. Witches may not be coming out of the broom cupboard just yet, but other pagans are starting to proselytise, albeit often from the safety of post box numbers. There is a Pagan Revival group

at Auckland University and a Pagan Fellowship at Victoria University. Feminism and the new-age movement have led to the growth of wicca, a modern version of witchcraft or folk-magic. The pagan parade includes adherents of neo-shamanism, neo-druidism, groups such as Radical Faeries and worshippers of the Egyptian deity Isis. The women's spirituality movement is also largely pagan. "The essence of paganism is pluralism," says Freedman. "That's the difference between paganism and Christianity, Judaism and Islam, which are all monotheist." The pagan philosophy fits neatly with the green movement: the Earth and nature are holy...Divinity is immanent in all nature."

Oddly, for such an earthbound movement, pagans have taken readily to cyberspace. In the US, there are more than 200 computer bulletin boards devoted to esoteric discussions. Despite the popular stereotype of the occult as sinister and threatening, the electronic communication between magicians and witches is nothing to get excited about. I was given full access to the semi-private Auckland bulletin board Quo Inferi Regnum, and could find

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nothing more untoward than tarot programs for Windows, recipes for "barley cakes suitable for use at pagan rites" and digitised pictures of gods and goddesses.

Suprisingly too, it is the technically minded who seem most drawn to paganism and magic. In California's Silicon Valley, the home of high-tech, there are estimated to be as many as 20,000 techno-pagans. After a hard day wrestling with arcane computer languages, programmers like nothing better than dancing naked in a circle chanting such things as: "charm of onions, charm of string, evil to thine-self bring; charm of onions, and of twine, thou shalt protect this house of mine".

Maybe on reflection, it is not so odd that programmers should gravitate towards magic. As every computer novice suspects, there are strong parallels between esoteric commands used for computer wizardry and the hermetic language used to cast spells. "Magicians have always been technically oriented," agrees Freedman. "Technique has always been more important than philosophy."

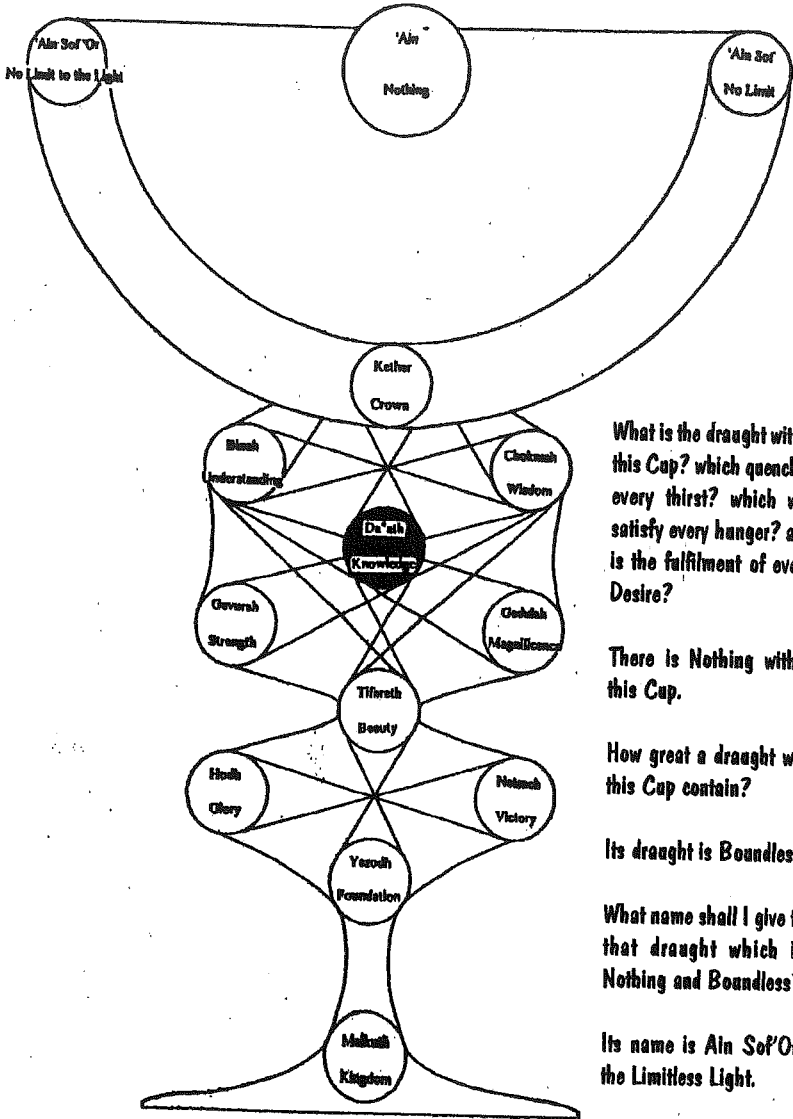
According to the 'Times' of London, paganism is on the rise, with an estimated 250,000 practitioners "throughout Europe, America and New Zealand". Inexplicably, New Zealand has always had more than its share of sects and cabals. Among the Notice Board ads for incontinence aids and Sega Games for hire in a recent 'Listener', was an 0900 number for "Satanism".

Ring the number and you get a spiel about how courses in satanism and magic are ideally suited to people "with low self-esteem and lack of confidence". Satanists, though, are not among Freedman's favourite pagans. "One of the reasons why Satanists make very bad pagans is because virtually every one of them comes from a fundamentalist Christian background. All they're doing is giving the finger to Mum and Dad. "Contrary to the beliefs of some in the sex abuse industry, however, Satanists tend to be harmless middle-class folk who prefer cabernet sauvignon to babies' blood.

Fundamentalist Christians can be the bane of a decent pagan's life. It is largely because of abuse and threats that many pagans use pseudonyms and post box numbers. "We've always had a saying in our order - 'First stone through the window, and we go underground again,'" says Freedman. "It hasn't happened as yet. We've been here for nearly 20 years."

For Christians who rail against heathen practices such as yoga, the sight of Freedman's front room would probably provoke an attack of apoplexy. Painted on the floor is a large pentagram. The walls are adorned with gods and goddesses. "The high altar is left and right, female and male. There are gods on one side, goddesses on the other. The altar has 27 candles," Freedman explains cryptically, as he takes me on a tour of the room. "That's supposed to be light bursting from the cosmic egg," he says, pointing out a crys-

The Holy Graal



What is the draught within this Cap? which quenches every thirst? which will satisfy every hanger? and is the fulfilment of every Desire?

There is Nothing within this Cap.

How great a draught will this Cap contain?

Its draught is Boundless.

What name shall I give to that draught which is Nothing and Boundless?

Its name is Ain Sof'Of, the Limitless Light.

tal in a container. "The whole table is laid out in the form of the cabbalistic Tree of Life.

"Using symbolic and mythological forms all the time enriches your life and makes it easier for people to take control of their lives," he adds. "That's very important. The major problem with monotheist systems is the tendency to have leaders and true believers." Rituals are performed in the room once a month in conjunction with the solar and lunar cycles. "In summer, when the light comes to its fullness, we go up to Mt Eden for the sunrise. We've been doing that for over 20 years."

The new age may have swelled the numbers of pagans, but it has also attracted the faddists and the crystal fondlers. Aged 70 plus now, although he looks 20 years younger and still sports a ponytail, Freedman doesn't fit those categories. "I cast my first spell when I was eight," he says. "I sold my soul to the devil when I was 13. As far as I can make out he gave it back a couple of weeks later, saying, 'I don't want it, thank you'. I was 18 when I read some stuff by Dion Fortune, and the only way I can describe it is that it was like coming home."

He was living in his native Australia at the time. "I was part of the Beat generation in a modest sort of way. I used to recite poetry in jazz clubs in Melbourne." Through a career as meditation teacher, advertising executive and psychologist, magic has always been

central to his life. When he joined in the 1960s, the Society of Guardians was rapidly becoming the black robin of magical orders. All the members of the German branch had been wiped out by the Nazis in the 1930s, and the English group had all emigrated to Australia to escape the Holocaust. Freedman was the sole Australian recruit and, by the time he moved to New Zealand in 1970, he was also the last surviving member. Under his leadership the society flourished as much as any society can be said to flourish whose membership is restricted to 22.

To the rationalist, magic of the non-conjuring variety is just so much mumbo jumbo. But that is to take a narrow view. For Freedman, it is so much more than that. "Some of us think it has quite a lot to do with what psychologists call role-playing, and what we tend to call reality creation. Paganism expresses beautifully the fact that we do really live in a universe of our own; to some extent we are discovering the universe and to some extent creating it." Sometimes magical processes have effects in the real world. "Alchemists 2000 years ago developed most of the techniques for metal alloys when looking for gold. The reasons for doing what they were doing were all over the place, but what they actually did was develop alloys and a whole lot of chemistry ... Esoteric becomes exoteric as you find out more about it. Magic tends to work at the very fringe."

Freedman's faith in magic is shored up by the 8000 books that line every room

of the house: heavy volumes of cabbalistic lore, learned treatises on astrology, popular works on ESP and witchcraft, tarot, every aspect of the occult. His conversation is peppered with axioms from his magical studies. "Compassion isn't a virtue, it's a technique," he says. "You can train yourself to share other people's feelings, even if it's only for a short time." He has even managed to empathise with politicians such as John Banks. "It's very annoying." He laughs. "Because, after that, you can't really hate them in the same way."

Practising compassion may ultimately be humans' route to ESP. "I had one very odd experience - the only ESP experience I personally feel I've had. It was with my cat. I was sitting there practising this compassion thing,

imagining how I'd see everything as a cat. All of a sudden there swept over me this feeling of comfortable warm darkness and my mouth was flooded with the taste of raw fish. The experience was only momentary, but it was so intense. I really believe that for a moment I shared the cat's experience." Imagination or reality? For Freedman the two are not mutually exclusive. It is like his belief in reincarnation. "When I use the word 'believe', it's an opinion I hold without solid ground for evidence, but it suits me and I believe I'm being reasonable in believing it. But that's as far as it goes. If it turned out not to be true, I'm never going to find out anyway."

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CONTRIBUTIONS ARE CORDIALLY WELCOMED

We encourage articles on every kind of magic, and magical working. Original art and poetry on magical themes, news of what your group is doing, rituals and new applications of old principles.

Submissions should be typed on one side of the paper. If you have any illustrations that may be suitable to accompany your article please provide these on a separate sheet of paper. Illustrations should be black and white line art, although some half tone illustrations may be suitable.

Articles may be adjusted in length and the use of illustrations, either provided by author or sourced by the New Pentacle Collective, is at the editors discretion

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Computer Users

Articles and graphics can be supplied on 1.4Mb PC formatted floppy disk. Articles should be saved in standard text only ascii format. Proprietary word-processor format files may not be able to be imported. Almost any graphic format is acceptable, although GIF and JPEG are preferred. It is advisable to send printed copies along with the disk, to be absolutely sure that we can process your article.