

MAGICAL KNOWLEDGE
BOOK ONE

FOUNDATIONS:
THE LONE
PRACTITITONER

BY JOSEPHINE MCCARTHY

SECOND EDITION



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Dedicated to Lawrence Dunne, my father,
who opened Pandora's Box for me.

No enunciation of the Truth will ever be complete, no method of training will ever be suitable for all temperaments, no one can do more than mark out the little plot of Infinity which he intends to cultivate, and thrust in the spade, trusting that the soil may eventually be fruitful and free from weeds so far as the bounds he has set himself extend. . .

— Dion Fortune (1995 [1987]: 86–87)

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Foreword

My journey into magic began quite suddenly, with a compulsion to buy a Tarot deck displayed in a shop window. From there, things developed quite quickly and quite seriously. But there came a time when I encountered a serious blockage that I had no technique to deal with. It was then that this book—well, its first edition—arrived in my life. It gave me the particular tool that I needed to get moving again magically. The necessary tool was extremely effective yet perfectly straightforward to use, and considering how much I had read and attempted to practise magic, it was telling that I had not already encountered anything similar.

Many a human system, whether sacred or profane, aims to form people into those predetermined shapes it regards as optimal. Rare is the system that wants to teach people to form themselves. Probably the easiest way for a system to stop people from forming themselves is to limit their tool set—and generally to some subset of tools, or even perhaps merely items of tool-like appearance, which cannot possibly cause harm to the system itself.

Life, however, evolves, through periods of stability and periods of crisis. Both of those are in Ma'at. They have to be: you can't physically get outside of her. But by altering your form, you alter the nature of the reactions that everyone else—who are also, naturally, in Ma'at—finds necessary to deal with you. Fair's fair: do you not, after all, have all sorts of reactions that you find necessary for dealing with them?

The optimal form, then, does not really exist while life exists. Or to put it another way, the only optimal form is the combination of all that is, has been, and ever shall be. This is a freeing realization. Act to change your form, and you change others' reactions to it; react to others' actions by acting to change your form. The combination of action and reaction is always in Ma'at. And in that engagement, the boundary between you and everything else can get pretty blurry.

As I write, my little corner of the universe is experiencing various crises, chief among them Brexit and Coronavirus. Faced with these, various human systems must adapt their structures in various uncomfortable ways. Various adaptations are possible, with each one benefiting different sets of beings to different extents.

With various balances possible, one must know what a magical act to “bring balance” is really aiming at. An ‘unbalanced’ explosion of the rabbit population will naturally lead to more food for foxes, and then more foxes, and then fewer rabbits, and then fewer foxes, and then more rabbits... *It is impossible to get outside of Ma’at*. An exploding rabbit population, and the resulting exploding fox population, occupy opposite ends of a perfectly balanced scale.¹ The apparent imbalance at any one time is an observer error, brought about by keyhole scrying (see p. 145): one has failed to see that Ma’at’s inevitably perfectly balanced scales extend through time as well as space.

What we often want is the balance that particularly suits us. (The best definition of “us” is left as an exercise to the reader.) We may prefer to hasten or prolong rebalancing, but we cannot avoid it. Often when we decide to prolong rebalancing by undertaking further imbalanced actions, our ultimate reckoning becomes all the worse. But perhaps that’s no problem: perhaps we intend for scapegoats (p. 60) to take the hit for us. (And what does that say about our definition of “us”?)

Or we can embrace the necessary change. Indeed, periods of uncomfortable change (p. 193) offer us rare opportunities for self-discovery and self-development: we can use them to learn what really makes us tick, and what our ethics and limits really are (p. 190). And we can work unconditionally, aiming to catalyse whatever is necessary—which is not the same as whatever we *think* is necessary. This is the approach Josephine convincingly argues for in this book (e.g. pp. 59, 65). It is also the approach she has taken in preparing its second edition.

The second edition of this book has been significantly revised and expanded. The body of the book has much added detail, and two new appendices explore what magic does, and how it relates to a moral framework. Josephine’s aim was to make the book more relevant to today’s needs, and she has succeeded at this; but in doing so she has

¹This is the predator regulation hypothesis. The reality, naturally, is more complex (Banks 2000).

also made the book more relevant to a reader of any time, not just today.

This book's first edition was written before Josephine knew she had been lined up to write the Quareia course. And whereas the Quareia course trains magicians (in astonishing depth) much as the Vaganova method trains ballet dancers, the Magical Knowledge series is less a training course than a box of tools, with instructions for their use and suggestions for projects attached. This makes the Magical Knowledge series quite flexible; on the other hand, it also makes it a bit dangerous. The second edition has a few more warning notices and slip hazard signs than the first, but still no safety barriers or training wheels: there is no babying or hand-holding, here! Explore curiously and eagerly, and be polite and respectful to others, use divination appropriately, remember the principles of necessity and balance, and make proper use of unconditional working.

And whether the book in your hands heralds the start of a whole new path for you, unsticks you from some old and unnecessary pattern, or simply helps you deepen and strengthen your current magical path, I hope that it proves as useful for you as it proved for me.

Michael Sheppard, March 2020.