

Chapter Two

Making Way for the Spirits

Physical, psychological and spiritual preparations need to be made in order to begin directing and uniting with the Vodoun powers and spirits.

Before engaging in any of these works, before uttering a single name or word, before drawing a single symbol given in this book, it is necessary to understand that Vodoun cannot be approached with the same nonchalance and objectivity as Western Magick. It cannot be experimented with; it can only be experienced. Once you begin on the Path of Vodoun, the spirits that you will only come to know in time will already know you with grave

intimacy. Their surveying eyes will watch you, their ancient minds will probe your thoughts, they will begin coalesce around you, often without your awareness, and they will pull you deeper into their carnal madness. If you are not willing to dive into the depths of insanity, if you are not fully exuberant to sacrifice all of your current “understandings” or presumptions about yourself, the world and the full nature of things, reconsider your desire to enter the Vodoun world.

In actuality, most westerners are not engaged in the work of making active allies of the spirits, but instead are devoted to controlling them, to dominating and subjugating them, to making servants of them. The Vodoun spirits know slavery, and are sure to never return to such a state. Only by offering yourself to the spirits without regard for your safety or reward do they in turn offer themselves to you, with an outpouring of power that no human, or demon, could ever match. Only when you have laid your life down before them will they recognize you and lift you up again, not as a groveling man but as an embodied god.

Unlike most occult disciplines, the Vodoun spirits do not wait to be called to appear, the powers do not lay inert until manipulated, and the Sorcerer cannot put on the mantle of the Bocor and take it off again like any piece of wardrobe as his fancy momentarily suits him. Either the spirits will accept you into their world, and will grant you vision and power unlike any spiritual gifts you have ever received, or they will reject you harshly and violently, not turning you away, but instead turning against you. All of this is dependant on how you first put your feet on their crossroads.

Having decided to offer yourself to the spirits as such, your first task will be the construction of an altar. The Vodoun altar differs greatly from the altars used in any other religion or spiritual practice, both in appearance and

The Spider and the Green Butterfly

function. Even the plainest altars can serve their purpose in any ritual, ceremonial, or spiritual function, and can be as simple as a nightstand covered with a cloth, candles and ritual items placed thereon, all of which can be collected after the ritual and stuffed in the closet. In the majority, ritual altars are purposefully bland in appearance, lest the mind becomes distracted by bright colors or cluttered objects, the balance of things never threatened by the altar, being the base and solid foundation of all things.

By looking at a Vodoun altar alone, it is obvious that this is not so. The Vodoun altar in appearance redefines the word, “clutter.” It is cluttered with food and drinks, images, photographs, three-dimensional structures, dolls and menageries, cloths and candles, articles of clothing and pieces of bone. The Bocor or Mambo will begin with a very basic design, the colors, images and objects being representative of a specific Loa, energy, or aspect of power that they worship, and that they wish to unite themselves with. As their worship *becomes* a union, with a gradual deepening of their conscious connection with the spirits and their more full immersion into the sea of power, they will add objects, designs, images, or other articles. Eventually, the altar will become transformed into a representation of not only the powers and the spirits, but the Sorcerer as well. The union nears completion, and this is evident most physically in the ritual altar.

Three types of Vodoun altars are used: the public altar, which is only found inside of a Homfort which is cared for and operated by a Vodoun priest or priestess; the private altar, which is set up in the Bocor’s home, and is usually not kept hidden, but is kept in a separate room reserved for ritual and worship; and the secret altar, which is indeed hidden from the eyes of visitors or even family members.

If you are skilled in woodworking, it is best to obtain hazel wood and to create the altar yourself from this wooden base. Alternatively, you can purchase a pre-made hazel wood altar and “fix” it, or cleanse and consecrate it yourself. Hazel is used quite extensively in several occult disciplines. The dense, deep grained wood is a natural house for any energies around it, drawing it deep into its core and storing it in its fibers. It seems to resonate and radiate with energy, the material of it vibrating at slightly higher frequencies than most other woods. If you are not able to find hazel, either in raw form or in a constructed table, you can use any other hard wood. Cedar and oak are great alternatives, both bearing similar occult properties as hazel, although in a lesser magnitude. Likewise, birch can be used, which is a close relative to hazel.

Although many Houngans, especially the southern United States variety, will create two or three stepped altars, a simple, small, flat table is all that is needed here.

Before actually erecting the table and metaphysically converting it into an altar, you will need to clean your working space out, physically and psychically. This is done using water that has been consecrated by the Vodoun spirits directly.

On the day of the full moon, mix nine drops of Cedar Wood essential oil, also called Morocco Oil, with one gallon of water. A secret understanding in both Vodoun and in inner circles of the occult is that the two powerful catalysts for energy are sound and light. The sound of prayer, chanting, mantra vibration, incantations, ritual music, and even song create whirlwinds of energy surrounding the source of the sound, the intention of it being carried out indefinitely through space, growing as the sound moves farther away. It is for this reason that prayers, affirmations, incantations, and even spoken word with spiritual entities must indeed be spoken aloud. Light, on the other hand, is not as obvious an implement in ritual and

The Spider and the Green Butterfly

spiritual service, although the absence of it would definitely be noticed. In every spiritual service specific colors are employed, quite intentionally to invoke and evoke the spiritual currents aligned with such colors. This light as well creates a vibrant radiation that moves continuously away from the source, not growing brighter visibly as it travels, but culminating an ever-growing momentum as it moves. It is for this reason that I have begun, under the instruction of my Met Tet and the Lords of the Crossroads directly to add a few drops of food coloring to all of the waters and liquid mixtures used in Vodoun, and to give all of my orations and prayers vocally, to create the light and sound of service and change. Florida Water, being under the influence of Legba, of Libra, is that of the sun. In fact, its effect is very much like solar flakes bottled into a liquid substance that once applied in use cast a dozen drops of spiritual sunlight wherever they may land. Being a solar substance, I mix three or four drops of yellow food dye into one gallon of Florida Water. I have subsequently noticed that Santeria and other diasporic practices do the same, and that the color alignments that I have received from the spirits directly indeed are aligned with traditions previously out of my realm of education.

Cover this simple mixture with a white cloth and set a white candle next to it. Light the candle and let it burn for exactly one hour, then extinguish it. Repeat this process at the same time every day until the following new moon. On the night of the dark moon, sprinkle this water throughout your home, focusing especially on the area in which your altar will be placed. Houngans also understand that the most cunning, wicked, and powerful evil spirits hide in the corners of the home, waiting for darkness and sleep to begin their work. They are often seen when waking in the middle of the night, the mind still partly dreaming. Their eyes are seen first, glowing with a darkness beyond the night, and then their figures begin to

materialize, hovering like a walking shadow. These demons are extraordinarily difficult to dispel in such a mental state, the terror of the sight of them having already taken hold, the mind controlled by their sinister sway.

Another use of Florida Water, or Vodoun consecrated water as given above, is in the healing of the body, mind, and subtle energies of another, or of oneself.

As Baron DePrince delivered the chapters of this manuscript to me, I would work through them, carefully using only the implements and instructions herein to produce results. As such, I approached each of these Workings with the skepticism seemingly inherent in the western mind. The use of the consecrated water was no exception. Previous to my involvement with Vodoun, I would mix a bit of salt with cold, distilled water in my chalice, and dipping my index and middle fingers in the solution, I would surround myself with spiritual light, would breathe this into me, and would channel the light into the water through an exhalation, moving it through my chest, down my arm, and out of my fingers. Once the water could hold no more of the channeled light, I would sprinkle it around my home, Temple, or whatever other space I was attempting to cleanse, reciting various exorcisms or affirmations of cleansing as I went. Gradually, the darkness in the room would depart and the air would lighten, both visually and psycho-perceptively.

After the Florida Water had been consecrated, I bottled it and accidentally splashed a few drops of it on the floor. The reaction was like electricity. Instantly, the atmosphere changed, achieved the lightness that is usually found within five or ten minutes of my previous cleansing ritual. I sprinkled a few more drops, noticing the same effect. Not only did the room seem to change, but I did as well. I felt the spiritual rush, the afterglow, and the exhaustion that is common after the closing of a complete ritual Operation, in the sprinkling of a few drops of water!

The Spider and the Green Butterfly

I was addicted, and quickly converted to this new form of consecration.

At a visit that week to a relative's home out of state with my wife, my daughter was bitten on the face by a large and very old dog. When she returned home, two puncture marks, one on her right cheek and the other under her left eye were stitched up and swollen. To reduce the risk of infection, and to speed the healing process, I began a series of energy Workings on her wounds, and quickly saw results. The swelling went down, the stitches came out, but the wound on her cheek didn't seem to be healing with the plasticity that I had hoped for. I wondered if the accelerated healing had forced her body to develop an excess of scar tissue, her body not having been given the appropriate time to do its job. I knew that if I continued the energy work, the scarring might never go away. Instead, I began to put the consecrated water on her wound at bedtime. The next morning, most of the redness had disappeared. Repeating the anointing, I saw, literally before my eyes, the indented scar raising and flushing out with her skin.

Deciding to continue to put this to the test, my wife had been asking for Chakra healing and energy work. Instead, I simply rubbed a very small amount of the water across her entire body. She instantly felt cold, and said that the water felt more like rubbing alcohol or menthol cream, tingling her skin and opening her pores. As I applied it to the remainder of her body, I could feel the negative or blocking energies rising from her body onto her skin. She later verified the same sensation. When I told her what the water consisted of, she was astonished, saying that she had expected more toxic or abrasive materials than simply water and a few drops of essential oil.

With your home and your working area cleansed of all evil, the altar can be erected. It is advised to keep it in a

room separate from the one in which you sleep. One reason for this is the fact that you will be calling forth into the altar and into the room dark and devious spirits. Aside from the more mundane effects that this can cause, such as sleeplessness, nightmares, and sleep paralysis, the spirits themselves have been known to feed off of the essence of the sleeping, causing illness, instability, and in extreme cases, even death. This “feeding” is only enhanced by the sexual activity that often occurs in the bedroom. I have known several Vodoun worshippers who have erected their altars in coat closets or closets in spare bedrooms as well.

With the physical altar in place, which at this point is merely a wooden table, you will need to cleanse it and empower it through the force of the spirits as well. Sprinkle the entire top of the table with kosher salt heavily, and cover this with a black cloth. Place a black candle on each of the four points of the table on top of the cloth. Burn the four black candles for one hour every day for seven days. At the end of this first week, replace the black candles with white and burn these for another seven days.

After these two weeks of candle burning have passed, wait 24 hours without touching the altar, after which you will uncover it, clean the salt off of the surface, and recover it with the black cloth. The salt will be saturated with a dark and powerful presence, and therefore should be dissolved in water, which should then be buried in the ground, as to return the power to the earth and to the spirits.

Your altar is now ready to be used for any n ceremonies and rituals that may be required.

The altar should hold four candles of different colors, yellow, red, green and blue, each placed in the four corners of the table, on top of the black covering cloth. The yellow candle, symbolizing air, is to be placed in the east corner of the altar, the red candle for fire is placed in the

The Spider and the Green Butterfly

south, the blue candle for water is in the west, and the final green candle of earth is in the north. When these candles are lit, they should always be done so from yellow to green.

A bottle of rum should always be kept on the altar, and a bowl or bottle of the water of purification. Before and after each ritual, the altar needs to be sprinkled with the rum. This is often referred to as “feeding” your altar, giving it a tangible substance from which it can sustain its power and replenish its energy.

A common item found on altars is a jar which appears, to the physical sight, to be empty. When asked about this, most Hoodoo and American Voodoo practitioners are happy to inform you that the jars contain a part of the essence of each of the practitioners within that Temple or home. Others might say that the spirits of their ancestors are kept in these jars. Like most other aspects of Vodoun, the explanations for these “pots-de-tete” have been scrubbed clean in hopes of erasing any blemish which might cause discomfort to the uninitiated. The jars are far from empty, holding much more in them than good wishes and ancestral memory. Pots-de-tete is literally translated as “pots of the head.” This is important, if it is understood without fear or judgment. If, as is claimed, only a minor portion or residual energy of each worshipper was housed in the pots-de-tete, such energies would likely originate from the n’ame, or the Spirit of the Flesh. This subtle aural body surrounding each person is very easy to penetrate, to break down, and to siphon through various vampiric techniques. It is assured, however, that this is not what is held in the pots-de-tete, otherwise such bowls or jars would instead be referred to as “pots-de-n’ame,” or something similar. Instead, the indicative word used is “tete,” or “head.” This is significant, as the word is never used in Vodoun lightly. The “Loa Met Tet,” or Master of the Head, spoken of earlier, is the Loa or spirit that guides, directs, and sometimes controls the individual as a whole

being. The “Master of the Head,” could easily be called the “Master of the Soul,” or the “Master of the Whole Being.” Nothing trivial is implied here. Pots, bowls, or jars which are called “Pots of the Head” can only contain one thing: the portion of the soul which would give the holder full power over the individual – Ti Bon Ange.

If one were to transfer their own Ti Bon Ange into the pots-de-tete, and then were to place this upon the altar, they then will essentially be sacrificing their soul to the spirits that reside on and around that altar. No act of dedication could shadow this unholy sacrifice.

For these reasons, I must conclude that a good deal of pots-de-tete adorning altars throughout the world are indeed empty. Those that are not belong to the Master Bocors and Grand Houngans.

If a pot-de-tete is desired on your altar, it may be placed there empty until you possess the secret keys which will allow you to fill it. It is not until after the ritual of Lave Tet in which your head is washed and spiritually opened, at which point the spirit of your head, or the Ti bon Ange, can be removed, placed into the pot-de-tete, and Met Tet can then be placed inside of the head. Essentially, the individual identity, the assumption of the “I,” is removed and a greater Self is assumed through the union of the whole being and the Met Tet. While this is an extreme ritualization and spiritual practice, literally sacrificing the soul for power and union with the Loa, it is the supposed goal of every religion and practice, albeit none have ever so forthrightly gotten to the point as Vodoun.

A good deal of these deeper meanings behind the common ceremonies of Vodoun and Voodoo are understood in their fullness only by those Grand Houngans in Haiti, who until now have withheld their secrets from all of the uninitiated.

The center of the altar should remain clear, waiting to hold upon it the Veves or the signs of the spirits.

The Spider and the Green Butterfly

An important idea that needs to be understood in order to understand *any* of the Vodoun practice at all is that the powers and the spirits of the religion operate quite independent of the will, belief, or understanding of the would-be Operator. In western Magick, it is solely the Magician's task to consecrate the sigils and the signs, to fortify the Circles, to charge the ritual tools with power and purpose, and to will into appearance the desired spirits or forces. In contrast, at times the Houngan feels as if he is a spectator to the energetic play that he witnesses all around him, and his only option is whether or not he will dive into the swirling din or be washed by its peripheral waves.

In the above instructions for the creation of the altar, never once does the Bocor lay his right hand upon the wood and transfer his energy into it. Never once does he bring a pillar of light into its center and charge it as a creature of wood and of Magick. The single task of the Houngan here is to sprinkle the salt, to cover and uncover, to light the candles, and to allow the energies to rise.

In my practical initiation into Vodoun, this was perhaps the most difficult barrier of ego to surpass. I assumed, as most western-trained adepts do, that if I didn't put the energy into it, if I didn't consecrate it myself, if I didn't erect the wards and call the spirits into the Temple, that none of those things had been done. The universe does revolve around me, does it not?

On the path of Vodoun, the metaphysical universe revolves not around you as the individual, but it revolves around the invisible and unreal third entity formed in the union between the Houngan and the spirits. Reality does not lie in Guinea, the land of the spirits, nor does it lie in earth, but absolute reality is only found when the two intersect at the crossroads of power. This communion, this uniting of the dying and the undead, is the all-important function not only of the ritual, the ceremonies, and songs and the dances, but of the very life and breath itself.

The spirits listen and they see, and once they have entered your existence, especially if you have been entered into the Vodoun current through initiation, they never leave your side and they never leave you be. They are an endless well of power and knowledge, if you graciously accept them as they have accepted you. When you make the signs and the sacrifices, they are there, consuming the force and the subtle matter that has been laid down before them.

It is then the hands of the spirits that touch the altar and transfer inordinate power into the wood. It is their joining of limbs around the altar that calls down from heaven and up from hell all of the powers of Magick into your sacred Temple. It is the alchemical knowledge known only by the spirits that transmutes the elements of the wood into particles of light, opening the altar as a gateway into the Eternal.