

WITCH CRAFT

ACTIVISM



*a toolkit for
magical resistance*

Includes spells for social justice, civil rights, the environment, and more

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Introduction

It's hard to say which came first in my life: activism or magic. Being a rather unusual child (as is the nature of many magic workers), I was always hyperaware of injustice toward people, animals, and nature. Some of my earliest memories were of being bullied and then, later, seeing the bullies get bullied by others. I noticed a pattern of harm early on, where innocent people would have bad things done to them and then go on to repeat the cycle themselves. It always struck me as odd, because it didn't seem like anyone enjoyed either end of the cycle.

As for me, wishing to escape all of that pain that I couldn't solve on my own, I retreated to the safety of the natural world. In the rust-belt city of Buffalo, New York, where I grew up there wasn't a whole lot of obvious nature around, but there were some places where I found sanctuary—the shores of Lake Erie, a grove of oak trees in the corner of the little neighborhood park, and the little creek that ran alongside my road, 7th Street. On many days of solitude, nature became a teacher, friend, and guide. From nature, and the spirits inhabiting it, I learned that being othered in a rough world was not just a burden, but also an opportunity.

As I grew up, I'd find opportunities for myself and those around me through both magic and activism. Magic came into my life around the age of twelve, when I met a Wiccan priestess in my hometown who became my mentor.

I got involved in activism in a more organized way around age fifteen, when I began organizing for LGBTQ, environmental, and animal rights through groups in high school. These days, I spend my time as a professional political organizer in Washington, D.C., and help lead one of the region's most active and outspoken witchcraft traditions. You could say that I'm really in the thick of things when it comes to magic and activism.

Each thing informs the other. Through magic, I learned that I was not only responsible for myself, but for the world around me as well. I learned that if I carefully cultivated my inner power, I could create changes that made the world just ever so slightly easier to be in. Through activism, I learned how to develop the inner confidence and cunning required to make changes that actually last and remain effective. Most importantly, each thing has provided a check to the other. Activism kept me grounded and encouraged a sense of personal responsibility. Magic reminded me that even when the world seems fraught with terror and oppression, the ingenuity of the human spirit—that hidden spark of angelic fire within us all—is enough to see us through.

I truly believe that there is no separating magic from the spirit of revolution. The personal is always political, and the political is always personal.

Did you know that just one cubic inch of your bones can hold 19,000 pounds? Ounce for ounce, they're roughly five times stronger than steel. We are all stronger than we think. There is a great power in our bones and in our bodies. Magicians are often called "workers" for a reason. Nearly every tradition of the Craft teaches the importance of the body as the prime tool and impetus for magical strength, which doesn't necessarily mean physical strength. In learning

magic, we train our bodies to enter different states of consciousness to connect us with other worlds. By building up the strength of the mind, we can project and manifest our desires. Our existence alone is a miraculous set of circumstances worthy of marvel. A seemingly impossible set of cosmic circumstances had to perfectly align for us to be here. Choices made by our ancestors for thousands of years crafted the DNA that makes us who we are today as individuals. Just like our bodies, the land is an inseparable source of the witch's power. Stones, roots, flowers, trees, stars, and bones have all been sources of inspiration for witches since time immemorial.

The body has also always been politicized. We may think of issues of body image, reproduction, surface sexuality, and more as relatively modern, but all of these topics are deeply embedded in human existence. There is no separating our body from politics. There is no separating witchcraft from the body. That goes for the bodies of humans and the body of this Earth itself. This power we seek to know and wield is embedded as deeply in the soil as it is in our bones.

Magic will always respond to a world in crisis. We are meant to weave together the broken fibers of humanity; the solar cloth of Bríg, the Golden Fleece, Ariadne's thread, the Red String of Fate. The political landscape of magic workers is as varied as the people, with all their views, hopes, and dreams. But where a dream most often stays a hidden secret of the mind, witchcraft is the unconquerable shout at midnight. It screams to be heard because it is the lighthouse for the voiceless.

Whether you like politics, advocacy, and civic engagement or not, you are engaging in political action when you perform and embody magical principles. Witchcraft is not

a spectator sport. It is in our bodies, our communities, our lands, and our streets. We cannot separate ourselves from the world because we are the world.

In this book you won't find me critiquing various forms of magic and activism, both topics that are as widely debated as they are practiced. Instead I'll be piecing together a practical manual based on my experiences within both worlds. You'll notice that I weave together what we may think of as "the physical" with magical application, sometimes without a strong distinction between the two. This is important and intentional. I'd like you to think about one while you're doing the other, so much so that they feel as seamless and inseparable to you as a flag to its pole.

Finally, I will caution you to use your best judgment while you navigate the waters of the magical activist. There are always situations one cannot prepare for, and no book can tell you how to become a smarter leader, strategist, and worker all at once. Your lived experience from engaging with a variety of actions will ultimately be more valuable. Still, I've tried to provide the tools necessary to help you feel prepared. Whether you're a seasoned advocate or just starting out, I'm sure you'll find a trick or two in here to help you on your way.

This work can be messy, hard, stressful, and painful. It can also be rewarding beyond measure. Most of all, it is important and worth your effort. There has never been a time when the world needed our activism and our magic more. For those who feel called to bring the two together, I believe that the groundwork for miraculous change can be laid.



The Basics

Activism in Its Many Forms

When I discuss activism with people in my community, I notice two very common assumptions: either someone thinks that activism looks like a very specific thing and nothing else or that it's too many things and entirely overwhelming because of that. Of course, the real nature of activism lives somewhere in the middle. It can be simple, complicated, strategic, spontaneous, lighthearted, aggressive, done by one person, or engaged in by a whole collective. Because of the diversity of tactics and tone, people can get pretty heated up when talking about the “right way” to go about creating change. While there are certainly methods that are more effective for certain goals than others, there is a lot of room for discussion.

As with any topic that's hotly debated—and magic and activism are debated in equal measure—we can help close the gap by developing some common language and considering what we mean when we talk about different actions and when, how, and why to take them. It's important to know the basic forms so that you're ready to move when the moment strikes. I tend to break down the major forms of activism into roughly six different types. Let's look at those now.

Learning and Educating

It is easy to underestimate the value of having a conversation. In our fast-paced world of social media and texting, we consume so much information that it can be challenging to have any sort of meaningful exchange with others. When we do, we're often so focused on getting a point across that the message gets lost in the process. To start our journey into effective advocacy, we must understand the essentials of learning and educating. These concepts aren't just valuable on their own, but also dependent upon each other. You can't educate others without being willing to learn, and you can't learn if you don't know how to express your ideas back to the world.

Psychologists know that humans learn through a variety of methods and experiences. By understanding the way we learn, we can position ourselves to better absorb information and help others do the same.

Observational Learning. This is learning by seeing or sensing something directly. For example, you probably learned how to tie your shoes by seeing someone else do it first. Learning through observation is a core process within activism because we're often trying to tell stories to get people to experience or empathize with the plights of others. If you can create an experience that a person can observe well enough for it to "sink in," then your work is going to be that much more effective. In the magical principles of Hermeticism, we might relate this to the Principle of Mentalism that everything in the universe is of one mind and what we do is the result of a thought that came before the action.

Associative Learning. Connecting two or more events or situations and drawing a conclusion from those events is called associative learning. When the outdoors go from being sunny to dark suddenly in the middle of the day, we might instinctively look up to the sky in anticipation of rain. Seeing the correlation between two things helps us predict what might come next. Understanding that humans learn by association is helpful because people bring their own ideas of all kinds about what activism is when it's presented to them. Sometimes those experiences are bad, which means you'll need to retrain the person to associate your work with the positive change you're trying to bring about. In looking at our Hermetic principles, we might relate this to the Law of Correspondence: everything is connected (for good or ill) to something else. Understanding these connections grants us the extraordinary ability to rewire them in pursuit of our goals.

Cultural factors also play an enormous role in our ability to process information and learn from it. This is challenging for people doing activist work because everyone comes to the information with a huge array of cultural experiences we may know nothing about. For example, working alongside a person of color on racial justice issues is going to present a different set of experiences than working alongside a white person whether we are white or a person of color ourselves. While we can learn from both colleagues, the way we learn and what we offer in return are often going to be different. The same is true for any other number of identities, cultures, and personal backgrounds that inform how individual activists live and work.

Understanding how we learn, the next step is to actually seek out the knowledge. Of course, learning is a life-long process that should hopefully never be complete for any of us, but we have to start somewhere. For the activist, the most vital source of information is what we can glean through listening to the communities affected. I cannot stress this enough. Listening to the people you are trying to help and ally yourself with must always be the first thing in any effort. This work is not easy and will often result in discomfort. Learning is not always fun, and it is not always invited. But we must remain constantly willing to be open to it. This is partly out of respect, but it is also crucial to the integrity of your work and to ensuring that the work is serving in the best and most welcome way possible.

Staying open to learning is only a first step; it doesn't do much good to keep it all to ourselves. One of the major roles of the activist is to educate our own communities about the issues that are important to us.

Just like learning from others, educating others requires skill, integrity, compassion, and will. We need the skills of a teacher to present the information in ways that will be best absorbed by our audience. We need integrity to ensure that what we're teaching is honest, ethical, and right. We need to educate with compassion, knowing that everyone comes to learn about issues new to them at a difference pace and from different perspectives. Without compassion, we risk having our audience shut down and block out the message entirely. Finally, we must have the will to share what we've learned and make the choice to do so. Without the will to do this work, our methods of teaching will start to look like a chore—forced and unnatural.

When educating others on an issue, try to keep the following core principles in mind:

- ★ **Focus on the message rather than the messenger.** Unless you are part of the community being directly affected by the issue you're working on, it's important not to center efforts on yourself when you can help it. Prop up the message rather than yourself as the delivery person. This doesn't just go for discussions, but for events as well. If you're lobbying government officials, avoid anything that might sidetrack people's attention. For example, dress so that your message is the focus rather than what you are wearing. Is it fair for people to judge your message based on you as the delivery person? No. But it is the reality.

- ★ **Choose arguments carefully.** While debate is a form of education, it can quickly turn into an argument. It's important where possible to avoid heated discussions more focused on feelings rather than facts, which often become personal. Arguments don't often result in the other person walking away considering what you've brought to the table. While it can be extremely challenging, it's better to try and be the bigger person. There are other benefits to going this route. Others observing an argument will often side with the person who remained calm and presented clear facts. They'll remember that you had the confidence to keep your cool, which could make them more interested in learning about what you have to say. It's also possible that the angry person will later regret acting rudely to someone who

kept their cool, which might cause them to reconsider the information at a later time. Finally, arguing with someone who isn't open to your message is a waste of time. That energy can be better spent doing good things elsewhere.

- ★ **Keep it simple.** At least at first, meet people where they are. A major problem among some progressives is the use of extremely convoluted “social justice jargon” when explaining something. People don't like to feel like they're being lectured. Humans respond better to conversations with people who they share some common ground with. If someone seems brand-new to your issue, start with the basics and work your way up from there. Remember that it might take more than a moment for the person to grasp some initial concepts. Gradually build up your level of education from there. This requires some time and commitment and isn't something you're always going to be able to do well, so be patient. Recognize that with a stranger on the street you may only be able to plant a seed of a positive connection rather than sharing your whole program all at once.

Learning and educating are tasks that will be woven into every form of activism you engage in. As you look at the different ways activists push for change, try to identify how these concepts can be put into motion.