**Witchy Words**

**A Word about Words of Power**:

For my purposes, the term “words of power” is used in conjunction with performing acts of magick, especially in the context of workings. Words of power are single words, verbalizations such as spells, invocations, ceremonial phrases to invite or banish an entity, or a poem, chant or song. You have probably heard some genuinely older magick words, such as “Abracadabra”, which may have come from a Hebrew phrase that means “I create as I speak” or the Aramaic, “I create like the world”. Older grimoires, or books of magickal rites and recipes, contain verbal spells which were believed to instigate magick, or raise energy to create change.

There are many sources for words of power. John Dee, a mage at the court of Queen Elizabeth I, was said to have received a magickal language called “Enochian” from a race of angels. Lots of spells were quoted by authorities during the witch trials, which may or may not have come from the accused witches, and which may or may not have any validity. English magick-user Aleister Crowley worked on learning multiple languages, including Latin, Greek, Russian, Arabic, Hebrew, Chinese, and Hindi, for the purpose of studying ancient magickal texts. Gerald Gardener and other amateur historians with an interest in British Witchcraft borrowed words from Welsh, Irish and Scots Gaelic, and Old English for the practice of Wicca. The word “Wicca” itself came from Middle English, but Gardner had only heard it, not read it, so he misspelled it as “Wica”. Wiccans often use words from poetry written by Doreen Valiente, or chants created by modern Pagan authors, for their spells and rituals.

Many magick-users believe that saying the name of a specific entity will invoke that being. For that reason, some people used euphemisms, like calling the devil “Old Scratch”, speaking of “The Gentry” rather than using the word Fairies, or saying “The Green Man” or “Jack in the Green” rather than using the name of an older forest or agricultural deity such as Viridios or Amaethon. This might be why some Wiccans and neo-Pagans use a special name for themselves during ritual.

It is true, words have power. Names can attract specific beings, just as hollering at you across a crowded room gets your attention. Certain words, songs, or poems evoke an emotional response. These verbalizations may have built up a pool of energy associated with them, as have folktales, myths, and legends. Specific words and stories carry their own power – for example, when I say “Mother Goose”, everyone likely has the same image in mind. Some neo-Pagan chants have beautiful emotional connections. There are a few written charms, such as the SATOR square, a set of palindromes which are believed to contain magickal forces. Others employ gemantria, which assigns numbers to letters, or they might use a written talisman, sigil or “glyph”, made by inscribing letters of the alphabet in a certain pattern, then connecting them with lines. All of these methods can carry enchantment.

But let me assure you, there are no special “words of power”, spells, incantations, chants or poems that will cause any particular result, all by themselves, just from being uttered aloud. What matters is intent. You can count to ten with strong conviction and a firm image in your mind of your desired result, and ensure a majestically powerful outcome. And you can recite the oldest, most sacred incantation with no focus whatsoever, and nothing will happen. If I shout “Abracadabra!” at the top of my lungs, magick will not just automatically occur, unless I concentrate on my goal and bringing it into manifestation. Belief. Will. Intent. Focus. These things matter more than any one word or group of words.

In past times, people in Britain did not speak Modern English. They recited a spell in a proto-Indo-European language, or in a now-extinct language such as Breton or Cumbrian, or in a Celtic language such as Cymraeg (Welsh), Irish, Manx, or Scots Gaelic, or in the words of many immigrants to Britain, such as Latin, Norse, German, French, or Old English. Some used languages associated with magick, such as Hebrew or Basque. These spells, chants, and songs sounded very different than they do today. Yet there are folktales and legends that assure us that ancient incantations and charms worked just fine.

Some spells use the old-fashioned pronouns “Thee, thou, thy” or “ye” in imitation of Middle English, which might work – due to conviction of the magick-user, moreso than the words themselves. Many practitioners in past days used names, prayers, or verses from the *Bible*. Since they believed the words had intrinsic power, their intent often came into manifestation. Others liked their words to rhyme, but this is a mnemonic device, and a concentration exercise, rather than a magickal “must”.

There are a few English words, phrases, spells or invocations used in Common Magick that have traditional significance, such as “Come unto me oh come” to invoke a being or situation, and “I banish ye, malaision, ye bane, ye baleful creature, get ye hence,” to repel or cast out a harmful entity which causes illness. In East Anglia, people would shout “Karinder” to begin a ceremony, and “Ka” to end it. Cutting off half of a wart, then discarding or burning it, is accompanied with the words, “By the powers of night and day, half draws half elsewhere away.” Gerald Gardner’s “Eko, eko” chant may have come from an older source. The *Treading the Mill* chant (“make the mill of magick turn”), used by both Doreen Valiente for Gardnerian Wicca, and Robert Cochrane’s “Clan of Tubal Cain”, very probably derived from Traditional pre-Wiccan Witchcraft. These verbalizations likely work due to the Law of Priordination: speaking a word of power that had a previous effect, in order to create the same result; more than the specific sound or power of a magick word.

There are sources online and in books that have lists of words in various languages relating to magickal workings, which you might find more powerful than Modern English. Or you might just use the common language, and experience magickally amazing results. You can discover lovely songs and chants online, or by visiting a neo-Pagan gathering. There are spells that can be found in books and on Traditional Witchcraft websites. BUT, it’s much more imperative that you use words of power that have an important meaning to *you*.

People also use vocalizations that have no particular significance as a word, such as the Eastern mystical sound of “Om”. Animal noises, birdcalls, whistles, song vocalizations like “Fa la la”, “Io Evohe”, and sounds like “Hurrah!” to cheer a folkplay hero and “Boo!” to denigrate a villain, can be appropriate in some rituals. The “rebel yell” of “Yeee-haw!” used in the American South was actually borrowed from Celtic cattle-drovers, used to round up stray beasts and banish harmful energies. Making the sound of the wind, “Wooooo”, can bring about change and express happiness. Laughter can be magickally powerful, as well.

Here are some old-fashioned witchy words to aid you in Common Magick workings:

**Magick Users, Witchcraft**: Wicca really is the Old English word for male witch, while Wicce is the term for a female witch. This probably derives from *Wicche*, a plural word for magick- users. It might also have a connection to the same root word as “wicker”, as in furniture. In the proto-Indo-European languages, words with “wic-” connoted leadership or a body of people.

Wise men were called “*dyn hysbys*” in Welsh, *gwyddon* means a male witch, while a female witch is a *gwrach*. Older female witches were called hags, grannies, a *classap*, herb wives, old wives and crones, while a midwife was a *howdie* in Scotland, and a seer was a *spae*-wife. Elderly female witches were called *malkins*, which also meant cats as a familiar, or *hægtessa*, which is also an Anglo-Saxon spirit being. The term “biddy” probably came from the Goddess Bríd or Saint Bridget, and also means a hen. A young female witch is called an *ellyllon* in Wales, after a type of fairy. Males were called wizards, sages, and sorcerers. In Cornish a magick-user is a *pellar*. That word may have come from speller, despeller or repeller. In Irish Gaelic, a witch was called *crionna*, or wise; a male Druid a *drui* and a female a *bandrui*.

Magick-users were and are also called cunning men and women, wise women and wise men, soothsayers, oracles, seers, far-seers, diviners, prophets, healers, fairy doctors, charmers, enchanters, conjurers, willers, hedge witches (although this may be a more recent term), hedge riders, murkriders, *hexen*, and *galders*. The word “dapter” probably came from adapter or adept. A *tempestari* was a witch who could raise storms. A white witch referred not to race, but the color of their lightworking. A *wiglaer* was a diviner in Old German, while a *vitki* is sometimes used for witch. *Hægtessa* is related to hedge rider. In the American South, some practitioners of African Diasporic Religions call a priest a [*houngan*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Houngan), and a priestess a [*mambo*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mambo_(Vodou)). A [*bokor*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bokor) is a sorcerer and a witch is a [*caplata*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bokor). These terms are from African languages. Hoodoo men are also called goofers, conjure men, and root doctors.

Ceremonial Magicians often use the term “magus” to refer to a person who raises and directs magickal energy for a specific purpose. This came from a Zoroastrian concept of a magick-user or priest. A magus (plural “magi”), or male magister or female magistra, describes individuals who performed acts of thaumatergy, or active magick. “Shaman” is a word that derives from the Finno-Ugric and Tungus languages. This word is used more often to describe users of passive magick, or theurgy. It can mean a male or female, although Shamans can also be intersex or transgender. Other nations have their own terms. Irish people called them *draoi* (pronounced dree) which may have been where the word “Druid” comes from. A seer, or visionary, was a *fiosaiche*, “one who knows”. In Welsh, it was translated as *dewin*, *derwedd* or *duirwedd*, which was associated with oak trees, and *drui*, which means a wren. A *drui-dyn* in Welsh is an “oak tree man”. Shamans were also called path walkers, path workers, visionaries, vision questers, journeyers, hedge-riders, prophets, diviners, wild men, medicine people, hermits, sorcerers and wizards. Algonquian people, native to the Great Lakes region, have a magico-religious society called *Midewiwin*, *Midewin, Mediwiwin,* or *Medewiwin*, which means the grand medicine lodge. Practitioners are called *Midew*, while their art and religious rites are called *Mide*.

Sorcerer might be used as a pejorative, but it might also mean someone who uses “low” or earth-based magick. We’ve heard that a “warlock” is a male witch, usually one who uses magick to do harm to others. Some define warlock as an oath-breaker. However, the Anglo-Saxon word *wær* is the root of English words “beware” and “aware”. To lock meant binding, crossing, and stopping the passage of something. This was done for good reasons and beneficial purposes. Negative energies and harmful spells can be locked up or locked out. The warlock could have an awareness of trouble, and work to lock it away. However, the word warlock still has a rather negative connotation.

Wiccans call their groups covens, which were called covines by Robert Cochrane, sometimes spelled cuveens. This may have come from convenes, an older word for groups that joined together. It can also be called a sodality. The word sabbat came from a French term for celebration, or the Hebrew word sabbath. Germanic practitioners attend moots, while in England, a group meeting of witches was called “Diana’s Game”. Druids met in a grove of trees called a nemeton, which likely came to us from Celtic languages by way of Latin. Sometimes Witches met outdoors at crossroads, also called four-ways, the wildwood, the greenwood, no-man’s land, the devil’s acre, the blasted acre, or a covert. Other witches met in graveyards, the last mile, or the boneyard. Indoors, a meeting space was called a temple, sanctuary, sanctum, shrine, aedes, fane, grotto, chamber, altar, lair, and library. An offering was a houzel or housel, a libation, an oblation, the eucharist, a sacrament or a tribute. It could consist of cakes and ale, bread and wine, or cakes and mead.

The term Witchcraft may have come from the Old English *Wiccacræft*, or might be a word from the Middle Ages. Cunning Craft might be older, or the invention of Traditional Witchcraft writer Andrew Chumbley. In olden times, Common Magick was called The Nameless Art (or Arte), the Art Magickal, elder-craft, the old craft, THE Craft, the uncanny, the eldritch, the occult (which simply means “hidden”), or wizardry. It was often labeled The Mysteries.

**Spells and Workings**: To cast a spell was to “witch” or “magick” someone or something, and if a person was suffering from a curse or under a spell, they were “witched” or “magicked”. Some older books called works of magick such names as charms, runes or “hexes”, but this definition of hex was not necessarily malign. Many Ceremonial Magick sources use the terms summoning, invoking, or calling forth. Traditional Witches may call it conjuring and betwitching, or a “classap”.

Anything that uses the word “energy” is not older. This term came from the New Age movement of the 1980s. However, the words power, might, and force were used to describe magickal energies. The word “whammy” came from the Little Abner comic, while “zap” came from comic book superheroes of the 1950s and 60s. Energy was called “spirament”, which had to do with breath; inspire has the same root word. Power was also called the virtue.

A *malaision*, or curse, comes from the word malaise, or malady. A curse is also called a ban, jinx, hex, or owl-blink. A blessing is a *benizion*. To enchant was to *begale*, bespell, bewitch, or charm. A *galder-sang* is an incantation in Anglo-Saxon. A bidding is a spell, as is a charm, a glamour, a conjuration, a fascination, enchantment, beguiling, or an on-lay. The practice of magick was and is called a praxis, plural praxes. To *gyre* is to rotate in order to work magick, and is probably the root word for gyrate. A fairy was sometimes called a *gyrecarle*. A *Blöt* is a Norse ritual for offering toasts, while a blout is the Anglicized word. Anything “wort” had to do with herbs, such as bloodwort or soapwort.

In Irish Gaelic, the word *geis* or *geas* means a taboo or prohibition against a certain behavior, or an obligation. For example, the hero CuCullain was under a geas to be kind to hounds, and to never eat dog meat, after he’d killed a blacksmith’s guard dog. Other *geasa*, the plural of geas, or *gwelt* in the Welsh language, meant to cast spells or curses. A geas could only be removed by adhering to certain behaviors, or by appealing to the Gods.

In Welsh, a *bendith* is a blessing, blessed be is *bendythion or bith dedwydd*. Bless you is *fenditho di*. A *cwtch* is a cuddle or hug. A blessing, translated to English, is “May your house be filled with sunshine”. In Irish Gaelic, a blessing is *beannacht*, blessed be is *beannaigh*, while bless you is *beannú*. There are dozens of delightful Irish blessings, like “May the road rise to meet you, may the wind be at your back. May the sun shine warm upon your face, and the rains fall soft upon your fields.”