

THE NEOPHYTE ROBE



by

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1. What's new, pussy-cat?

Neophytes

A neophyte is just a newcomer. That is all. There's no more to it than that. Yes, the word does sound rather important, which may be why it was chosen, but it comes from a Greek word, '*neophutos*', that just means 'newly-planted'. So there you are. What could be simpler? Certainly, no one should be offended if they are referred to as a neophyte .. with the possible exception of someone who has just been elected Pope.

Neophyte is also the title that monks or nuns give to one of those eager young people who have announced that they want to join the community as soon as possible. Father Abbot or Mother Abbess know quite well that it is always wiser to make young people wait until tomorrow .. and before night has fallen they will probably have changed their minds. So, all other things being equal .. by which I mean that provided they have two legs and all that .. they are invited to bring along their backpack and try their hand at living the same life for a while. They move in on a temporary basis and take up residence in the abbey or convent. They share the communal life fully for a few months or a year just to see whether or not they really like it.

By immersing themselves totally in the daily round, and by sticking rigidly to the same system of spiritual discipline, they develop a much clearer idea of things. They can decide whether or not they wish to embrace this sort of thing on a more permanent basis. The process is given a fancy name – 'finding one's true vocation' – but if they do once make up their mind and take the plunge then they take their final vows. And at that precise moment they stop being neophytes.

As the bishop said to the actress – be careful when you nod or you could end up in pretty deep water.

Amateur drama

We are all children at heart, which is why, even as adults, we still get a thrill out of dressing up. Young soldiers use their own pocket-money to buy regimental ties; Old Age Pensioners who join bowling clubs enjoy wearing the special white clothes and flat-soled shoes; Scotsmen preen like turkeys in their kilts, while football supporters boost the coffers of their favourite team by purchasing the latest strip. Perhaps our mothers were frightened by a peacock before we were born or, as in my case, we may have had a father who behaved like one.

It is a good idea always to remind oneself that Occultists are human too. Many of them are deeply thrilled by ranks, titles, badges, costumes and passwords. A puzzled outsider could be forgiven for thinking that such people are actually rehearsing for a grand opera or taking part in some elaborate game. In most cases, it is a fairly harmless trait, although one of the functions of this kind of role-playing is to spell out the importance of belonging to a special and exclusive elite. Members of anything do like to be distinguished from people who are not members, and to an extent this is fair enough. When taken to extremes though, it perpetuates the social evil of the "them and us" syndrome .. and really and truly, this is detrimental to any spiritual progress.

Distractions

When this trait is so exaggerated, it can become a kind of spiritual snobbery and then it makes people lose sight of their original aims. We can see the consequence when, for example, a religious group shows charity only to members and does not help strangers with anything like the same enthusiasm. This is why a church hierarchy puts so much of its effort into furthering the interests of the institution itself. It will do its utmost to uphold the system even at the expense of people's individual welfare.

How often do newspapers and television reporters expose some scandal in which this or that religious organisation has been caught pursuing non-spiritual goals? Apart from urging sinners to repent and wrongdoers to reform, how many pious people actually strive to offer tangible help to those who have fallen by the wayside? And even when they do, isn't it also true that they make their help conditional upon conversion? The starving beggar is permitted to eat breakfast only after he has joined them in their prayers.

Alas, we cannot claim that Occultism is untainted by this fault. In fact, many of its members love fancy titles even more than anyone else. They go in for ritual mumbo-jumbo too, especially the kind that is riddled through with mystic rigmarole and a big dose of 'cloaks-and-daggers. I do not complain. If it helps folk to let their hair down and behave like children .. if a bit of mummery can bring them closer to God .. then I say bravo! Olé! And play it again, Sam! We should do all we can to encourage them so let's join in and show a bit of gusto. From time to time, I like to tickle my own theatricals too. I've even been known to write the occasional play.

L-plates

As far as we are concerned right at this moment, the term 'neophyte' simply designates those particular newcomers who have decided to take things a bit more seriously. They have set out on a course of instruction and, provided it turns out as well as they hope, they are now thinking in terms of applying for full membership. They haven't promised anything yet. They haven't made any formal commitment – but they are beginning to think that it might be a good idea.

I like to compare the whole situation to that of someone learning to drive a car. Until he has met certain minimum requirements and satisfied an examiner that he is safe to handle a motor vehicle alone, a Learner Driver must display L-plates and be accompanied at all times by someone already fully-qualified. Well, in Occultism, a Neophyte is someone who has got through his preliminary studies and is now tackling more advanced work. Perhaps he hopes to get a job as the driver of a fire engine.

I wouldn't wish to depress newcomers but they can be cocky and embarrassingly enthusiastic. Like crooks who have become coppers – or coppers who have become crooks – neophytes have a tendency to regard themselves as unquestioned experts whose knowledge is superior to that of anyone who tries to teach them. Officially, they are supposed to be like tender seedlings that the nurseryman is tending carefully before they are transplanted. After all, if they are going to be moved into the open garden one day then they have to be acclimatised and strengthened.

2. Clothes make the man

Distinctive garb

Throughout the world, any clothing is worn primarily to protect the person wearing it. We don't have backs like a tortoise. Indeed, for animals of our size, we have a relatively soft skin .. a rather delicate pelt that has to be carefully cherished. Harm could come to it from several sources – the climate, the environment, or other creatures in the environment. One thinks here of wasps, brambles, hailstones and sunstroke – but one might be equally wary of muggers, buggers, motorists and persons with athlete's foot. The world is not exactly a safe place for such vulnerable creatures as us. At the very least, clothing has this very basic function.

Group membership

Standardised clothing may indicate membership of a particular social group, but can also proclaim one's status within that group. Subtle insignia can speak of one's qualifications or professional function. More basically though, clothing can provide useful information about one's gender and one's availability for sex. If one's dress also enhances one's appearance – better still, if it trumpets one's wealth from the rooftops – then it seriously improves one's chances of getting laid.

Needless to say, the way that we dress is a clear indication of personal taste .. or lack of it. If we happen to be religious then our choice of clothing can also attest our orthodoxy and piety. In Occultism, appropriate garb is also said to attract the type of supernatural power to which the wearer is entitled. It may also invite the favourable attention of certain spirit beings.

Recognition signals

Even in the western world, there are many sects, secret organisations, mystic brotherhoods and Occult orders. Most of them tend to follow a design laid down in nineteenth century detective novels or twentieth century Black Magic films – which is to say that their basic pattern is one of high-drama. Although claiming to be “secret”, they manage to leak quite a lot of sensational information about themselves. This is what I mean when I say that they are flamboyant or, as professional actors might put it: “they're full of swish”.

These bodies differ from religion proper in that scarcely anyone is born into membership. A person chooses to belong off his own bat, so to speak. One can see why they might do so, of course, when one looks at the prevalence of spectator sport and mass entertainment. Very little of it is participatory and, as a consequence, masses of people are quite frankly mentally bored and physically frustrated. A cynic might observe that most of them get married for very much the same reasons .. and in so doing, they make similar mistakes, only to change their minds later.

Guise or disguise?

Thus we can see that there are many groups that are made up of quite nice people. Unfortunately, they are getting older rather more quickly than they had anticipated, and feel themselves to be at a bit of a loose end. So they fling themselves into this absolutely super game of magical charades.

Better-known organisations often claim to be both “ancient” and “mystical”, but this has to be taken with a pinch of salt and put down to wishful thinking. In fact, they are pathetically young and the more fuss they make, the more intellectually shallow they seem to be.

It has not escaped the attention of sociologists .. or the police .. that spurious sects seem strongly to appeal to social misfits. They are very attractive to individuals who are somehow marginal to the main thrust of a society. This is merely an observation and not a criticism. After all, those people who are well-adjusted, and therefore quite conformist members of society, will accept the prescribed values and they may well embrace the approved spiritual system.

3. Born Occultists

Irons in the fire

It might just satisfy a lonely soul to be a member of a phoney sect. At the very least, it might furnish a set of vague meanings and give him something with which to fill an empty hour or two. But a real Occult Order would play down the bit about ‘doing magic’ and concentrate more on developing a stronger self. It would foster friendship and help each individual to claim his place alongside a community of others. Instead of viewing followers of other paths as rivals, true Occultists acknowledge their kinship. Thus the soul’s pilgrimage through life is supported by a powerful sense of ‘not being alone’.

The aims of some groups are vague and amount simply to being ‘agin the status quo’. The loose and undisciplined structure is an umbrella that shelters misfits, malcontents and dissenters who lack the energy or will positively to act on their nonconformist views. Members of one irritant group are also members of others, so that eco-warriors align with animal-rights activists, and pro-abortionists rub shoulders with asylum seekers.

Being busy in several fields gives one a false sense of commitment and of being spiritually involved. Each separate activity seems to validate another and together they justify a way of life that is, in fact, getting nowhere. They claim they are freeing the world and fighting for right, but they shout so loud that it is clear they are none too convinced by their own slogans.

Grades

One man has different kinds of friends, and groups may have different kinds or grades of members. An individual may advance through them as he tries to make progress – whether that is struggling up the ladder of wisdom, mounting the cabalistic tree, or climbing the side of the Sacred Mountain. Titles are often colourful and impressive, as are costumes and regalia. In genuine orders, a Neophyte is not yet a full member. He has sworn no oath and received no initiation. He is regarded more as a possible member for tomorrow and he is expected to prove his zeal and sincerity.

A Neophyte is not a convert. If somebody wishes to know more about the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, he is instructed by a priest until he announces that he is ready to join. But a Neophyte has merely decided to study Occultism in a group setting. He is developing himself, seeking help, and any decision is left until later.

Postal tuition

For many years, the Roman Catholic Church ran a nice correspondence course for people who were seriously interested. Once they had gone through the printed material, they were invited to attend public meetings at which a panel of priests answered questions. The individuals who went along to these meetings had not yet declared their intention to convert, but if and when they did so, then they would remain converts (and members of the church) for the rest of their life.

A convert then is someone who chooses to embrace a religion, in contrast to someone else who was born into it. In the latter case, the whole thing is accidental since the family of birth rears him in the same faith as themselves. In the former case, however, the convert has taken the step voluntarily. He made an act of will. If he had not then he would never have been one of the faithful.

Great Mother of All

To be precise about things, no one converts to Occultism. They cannot because, strictly speaking, they are already members. We say this because all human religions do have an occult content of some sort. This is not mere casuistry but a very real and telling fact. You see, all religions have developed out of an original perception of truth that was once inherent in the human condition. To this extent then, we may assert that all pious people already have a commitment to the mainstream thrust of the occult path.

Furthermore, there is the wider point of view that all people throughout the world are members of the universal 'brotherhood of man', irrespective of the culture they belong to or what religion they follow. In this sense too, no human being can convert to Occultism for, in effect, the process is rather one of returning to the path. A person puts his feet on the original track once more, and he starts to follow the same old signposts again. He rejoins a system of wisdom as it once was – way back in the days before sectarian accretions were added to it.

4. Protean faith

Already a subscriber?

Let us be clear that I have not written this article with a view to swaying wavers or egging on stragglers. People have a right to hesitate. It is their prerogative to think things over. The only thing is that if they dither too long at the edge of the pool, one is tempted to shove them in. Great fun .. except for the ones who go hysterical and call the police!

Instead of anything so drastic, I prefer to design special instructions and tailor them to suit people who have thought things through and reached their own conclusions. If a person has decided that they wish to search for truth then I am happy to lend them a hand. As far as I am concerned, a Seeker can stay a member of whatever religion he has previously held – the one he was born in or the one he converted to. He may stay a member of any group if he can subscribe to their teachings with a clear conscience.

I am not the sole repository of truth. Mine is not the only path that goes upwards. I am not stating that all paths are equally valid neither that one path is just as good as another. Far from it! Some paths are merely a waste of time, but others lead downwards and are downright dangerous.

Not that all spiritual teachers are good people. No one becomes a saint or holy man merely by adopting the title. I don't salute all spiritual teachers as brothers. I don't agree that all paths are parallel. People are free to climb the Sacred Mountain, but some go quicker than others, and some take a fall. The summit does not move though. It is where it always has been – i.e., higher up and further on.

On your marks

In my eyes then, a Neophyte is someone who has embarked on a programme of study. He has made no other decision. Quite simply, he wishes to examine the teachings and to see if they suit him. He will consider his position only when he has understood and absorbed them. He needs to perceive their significance, their application and the advantages to be derived from them. After all, unless there is some potential benefit, what would be the point of going to so much trouble?

At some point therefore he will conduct the mental experiment of trying to visualise himself as an Occultist. He imagines what it would be like if he adopted the religion, put on the robe and placed his feet upon the path. He sees himself as an Initiate, a Master, or even as my Successor ... and only then does he decide whether or not take the plunge.

Even then, he is under no obligation at all. You will notice that his resolve to study Occultism does not in any way constitute a commitment to any particular organisation. At this point, it might just be worth pointing out that the word "Initiate" comes from Latin and it describes someone who has actually "made a beginning". In this sense, therefore, a neophyte is still weighing the situation up and getting himself ready for that beginning.

Under no obligation

If you have no wish to join an Order, fine. I've put my cards on the table and you're quite at liberty to show yours. Up to a point, you could *be* an Occultist without even joining a group, but you would still need to make a certain minimal commitment in your soul.

If the devil offered a contract, many people would sign on the dotted line. It would at least provide some sort of thrill. They may be disappointed to learn that I am not in the business of buying souls. Perhaps you won't believe me. After all, a spider would lie its head off just coax the fly into its parlour, and this is precisely the reason why most people will prefer to wait and see.

It would be impertinent to issue any invitation to you. Whether you are truly interested or just wanting to dip your toe in the water, you must be allowed to consider your next step free from pressure. I emphasise this point so as not to mislead you. The robe of itself will not confer membership of anything, but it will signal that you are endeavouring to improve yourself.

5. The design

Feeling stupid

The man in the street can be highly amused by the idea of ritual robes. He starts to think of secret societies decked in cabalistic regalia cavorting among abbey ruins, or else of witches prancing in the altogether through the heath and purple heather. Such images owe a great deal more to black magic novels and Hollywood films than ever they do to reality.

It seems never to cross the average person's mind that ceremonial robes are to be found everywhere. There they are in churches, market places and village High Streets. Surely, everyone has seen a vicar in his cassock and surplice or a Roman Catholic priest in his jaunty soutane? And how many times have we seen the Queen being welcomed at a cathedral door by a Dean in a gloriously embroidered cope?

Now that proceedings in parliament are regularly televised, the small screen brings the Speaker of the House of Commons into our homes, as well as the Lord Chancellor sitting on a woolsack. What about the speeches at the Lord Mayor's banquet in the city, or the procession of High Court Judges, or even Town Criers shouting the odds?

The traditional robes worn by all these dignitaries do not strike us as the least bit odd, but that is only because we have come up against them so often that we have become accustomed to seeing them. They are common, everyday sights and we are so used to them that we no longer find them strange.

Who is this?

In all religions – and Occultism *is* a religion, remember – ritual garments serve several, interconnected purposes:

1. when symbolic vestments are donned, this indicates that the wearer has put aside his usual, everyday identity.
2. as a form of spiritual livery they show that one is a member of the group and has sworn allegiance to the same cause as others.
3. they can declare a person's status, duties and entitlements.
4. like a uniform protects a soldier, they can protect from 'friendly fire' as well as affording protection from the enemy.
5. robes respect a 'hygiene barrier' that stops 'this world, here and now' from contaminating 'that world, there and then'.
6. a person's dress shows what function he plays in a ritual, e.g., celebrant, dancer, singer or sacrifice.
7. their psychological effect induces an elevated or altered state of consciousness.
8. imbued with magic, they empower the wearer and activate his personal energies.

Wow! With all that going for them, it is surprising that they are not stocked by Debenhams or Marks and Spencer. In the Christian Church, there are quite routine blessings for garments, rings, holy water, incense, candles and so on – and what are blessings but magical conjurations .. albeit under a more acceptable guise?

Laughing up his sleeve

The Neophyte robe is a very basic garment, but the sheer simplicity of its design is a clear indication of its venerable age. Early man was technically primitive. He possessed very few skills other than those that were necessary for survival, so he wore the skins of animals that had been killed for food. This was partly for protection against weather, partly for camouflage, and partly for the magical purpose of identifying with the prey and so becoming one with the whole of nature.

Only after man had developed a more elaborate culture did he discover the arts of spinning and weaving. Perhaps it is no mere coincidence that the age during which the making of cloth first appeared is also the very period in which religion first developed out of primitive magic.

When he used his home-made cloth for garments, early man knew nothing at all about cutting, shaping or tailoring. The concepts of fashion and haute couture were much later developments. Indeed, it is sometimes suggested that they were unnecessary outgrowths bearing witness to a civilisation that was becoming decadent. In his pristine state, man sought merely to convert sheets of crude cloth into coverings for his body and the oldest method on record happens also to be one of the most pleasing. A piece of cloth, its length being twice the height of the person, has a hole cut in the centre. He sticks his head through this opening, lets the material drop back and front, and ties a cord round his waist. That is it!

6. Art and Cunning

Loose fit

Yes, well, that description is quite true, and when the material "fell" into graceful folds, it was a most effective garment. Of course, this meant that the 'sides' were very loose and open. Not that anybody was particularly worried about what you might see – after all, people were quite used to going about naked – no, the problem was the sneaky draught that sometimes drifted up the drapery. The whole of the olive trade could be ruined if buds got nipped by frost and Olympic athletes looked silly if they shivered while throwing the discus.

So it wasn't long before they got the idea of pinning the open sides of the garment together, fastening them with brooches or using laces to lash the front to the back a bit like a sail on a windmill. Later on though, they discovered how to use simple stitching to sew up the side seams. Once they had hit on this, it led quite logically to another invention – the inserted sleeve.

Up to this point, the arm poked through convenient holes and surplus fabric was bunched up over the shoulders. I won't even discuss the evolution of trousers! Now though they discovered how to cut away the redundant folds to leave a 'shaped' piece of cloth that formed a detached sleeve that pinned to the main garment at the shoulder in rather the same fashion that cowboys wear detachable chaps on their legs. Before you could blink an eye, someone had the bright idea of actually sewing it in permanently. Sleeves were now assembled independently and sewn into the main body of the garment separately.

Roots and origins

A book on costume would show that this basic garment appeared in all early civilisations and is still found in simple societies today. The design arises from the inherent qualities of a piece of woven fabric as it leaves the loom, i.e., uncut and unshaped, when no tailoring skills have been used. Thus the robe is a point of contact between a neophyte and antique wisdom. Putting it on is a symbolic act that joins him to ancestral origins and the golden age before mankind abandoned the spiritual path.

The drawing on the title page shows clearly how the elements are derived from those venerable origins. Today, most of us know a great deal more about sewing. The majority of children learn to sew at school, and their homes probably possess a sewing machine. Housewives make their own curtains, household linen and children's clothes while the more ambitious buy paper patterns with which they create outfits indistinguishable from expensive garments bought from top-class designers.

Evening classes are available. Books and magazines explain the tricks of the trade. We can now improve on old designs and make robes that are neater and more durable. For example, it is a good idea to reinforce the raw edges of fabric so that they do not fray or tear. This is done either by clever seams or by using facings to make the neck and arm openings more elegant. If we wish, a duplicate garment made of flimsier fabric can be inserted inside the first. This is the lining – 'doublure' in French – and it helps a garment to hold its shape.

But for these finishing touches, clothes would lose their nature when washed. Shape would be lost and raw edges would lose threads. This Neophyte robe is graceful, robust and it will survive years of vigorous washing.

Plain & functional

It is a basic, one-piece garment, made from a single length of material. Like those ancient robes, a simple hole is cut in the centre to admit the head and the front is sown to the back without closing the sides completely. The length is adjusted to reach mid-calf. The lower part, or skirt, is open from about hip-level and resembles an old-fashioned night-shirt with very long laps.

It also looks like a Chinese garment called a "cheong sam", except that it is not fitted to the body. There is no ornament or decoration, and the only fastening is a cincture or tie-belt. It is an austere garment, pleasing, with simple lines. The excess material is gathered in by a sash which is wrapped twice around the waist. The sleeves are not separate pieces that have been 'set in'; they are an integral part of the garment itself.

7. Can you see me, mother?

Seemliness and decorum

The long side opening might worry people who are reserved by nature, timid, modest or shy. They will ask if it is decent to wear something so revealing. Boy scouts however would immediately see the practicality of such an arrangement .. likewise anyone whose bowels have an independent streak. Perverts, of course, might imagine more titillating possibilities – only to be amazed at how easily an intriguing ankle loses all fascination when the rest of the leg is on show.

Man may not proclaim that Nature is immoral or that the human body is indecent. There are few ritual occasions when complete nudity might be apt, but baptism would be an example in the Christian church, or in Occultism an exercise called 'the Amethystine Cycle'. The choice is ours, of course, but if we feel any anxiety about wearing this robe then it is possible we are actually ill at ease with our own 'inner self'.

We are mammals, warm-blooded animals that need to keep our bodies at an even temperature. While this is the main function of clothing, donning a ritual garment also expresses the putting aside of mundane thoughts and entering upon an appropriate spiritual attitude. Decency is not the prime consideration at such moments. Not that Occultism advocates indecency, but our minds should not be preoccupied with thoughts of shame, embarrassment, guilt or fear. The occult robe is an all-purpose garment that allows movement but precludes vanity. If you are reluctant to wear it, perhaps you are not ready for occult studies.

Animal, vegetable or mineral

There are a few simple restrictions upon your choice of material from which the garment is made. Avoid fabrics made of animal fibres, such as wool, silk or fur. This has nothing to do with sentiment or conservation of wild life. After all, a sheep's life is not threatened by being shorn. Rather it is a question of 'vibes' or spiritual emanations. All living creatures have them and so do all inert substances. Moreover, each set of vibrations is quite specific and could be identified as clearly as if it were analysed by forensic scientists in a laboratory.

For similar reasons, it is wiser to avoid man-made fibres too. Some, like nylon, are mineral in origin while others, like rayon, derive from wood-pulp. All have been heavily tampered with and are not appropriate for use in a spiritual context. Linen and cotton are ideal, and they happen to be the oldest fibres known to man. They carry no aura of having been hunted or killed; they exude no animal scent, and they permit the skin to breathe while having excellent absorption properties.

Nature enhancing

Another precept is that the material should be thin and light-weight. It ought not to be so substantial as to inhibit movement or restrain the limbs. Ideally, one should scarcely be conscious of wearing it.

It is a practical bonus if the garment can be folded into a packet the size of a small library book, and a good old standby in the material of the type called "lawn". Lawn can vary. For pillowcases and bed-linen, it can be fairly heavy, while for handkerchiefs it is very fine and delicate. You need something light but certainly not transparent. What we are looking for is a reasonably-priced fabric that is easily laundered and simple to sew.

If you should in future decide to proceed further in your occult studies, then this garment will remain the basic part of any later costume. This robe is always worn next to the skin. Even when Masters don their most splendid robes, this one is still worn underneath – as if to say: "beneath the skin, we are all really seekers after truth".

Rainbow hues

Now we come to the question of colour. It is just possible that you may be able to obtain material of this type already dyed, but it is more commonly found as pure white. In either case you should not use white for the finished garment, and you must certainly avoid black. Apart from those two restrictions you may use any colour you wish, though it would be more appropriate to give the matter careful thought and choose a hue that you felt harmonised with your character, or your own "vibrations". But whatever colour you finally settle upon, it must be a pastel shade. You should not wear a strong colour or a saturated one. The garment should be pale and quiet.

Needless to say, all patterns are prohibited. It has to be one over-all colour. No shading, no tie-dying. Remember, the principle is harmony without ostentation. Any fripperies would smack of vanity or a feeling of personal inadequacy. Incidentally, if you are obliged to dye the material yourself, it is better to do this before you start cutting your pattern out. Some material can shrink in the dyeing or washing process, and so it is better to be safe than sorry.

8. Working by Numbers

Adjustments for size

The pattern as shown in Figure 2 would be quite suitable for anyone of average build, i.e., people up to 5'10" tall and with chest or bust measurement up to 40". Do not be worried if these measurements seem rather large because there is no need at all for a perfect fit. As a matter of fact, the whole thing looks better when it is loose. On the other hand, it would be restrictive if the garment were too tight so, if you are larger, simply increase the width of the pattern at the point marked "chest 21" on the diagram. Whatever the final size, the two pieces of the garment – the back and the front – each account for one half of the total measurement.

Similarly, the neck opening will suit any collar size up to 20". If something larger is needed then it is a simple matter to increase the size of the hole (and the facing).

Shoulder-width plus sleeve is a single dimension and this is governed by the width of the material that you buy. If you are tall with longer arms then, instead of buying wider material that is more expensive, you can lengthen the shoulder plus sleeve measurement by attaching an extension at that point only. Any sewing manual would show you how to do this.

As for height: the garment should be mid-calf length. Take the measurement from your Adam's apple to the floor, while standing straight. Double this figure and it represents the amount of material to buy. In most cases, 3½ to 4 metres should be ample. Do remember that if you are going to dye the fabric, do so before you start cutting or sewing because there may be some shrinkage.

This is not a correspondence course in tailoring or dressmaking. Neither can I give you a lesson in sewing. Many excellent books are available, but surely you know someone who could show you what to do.

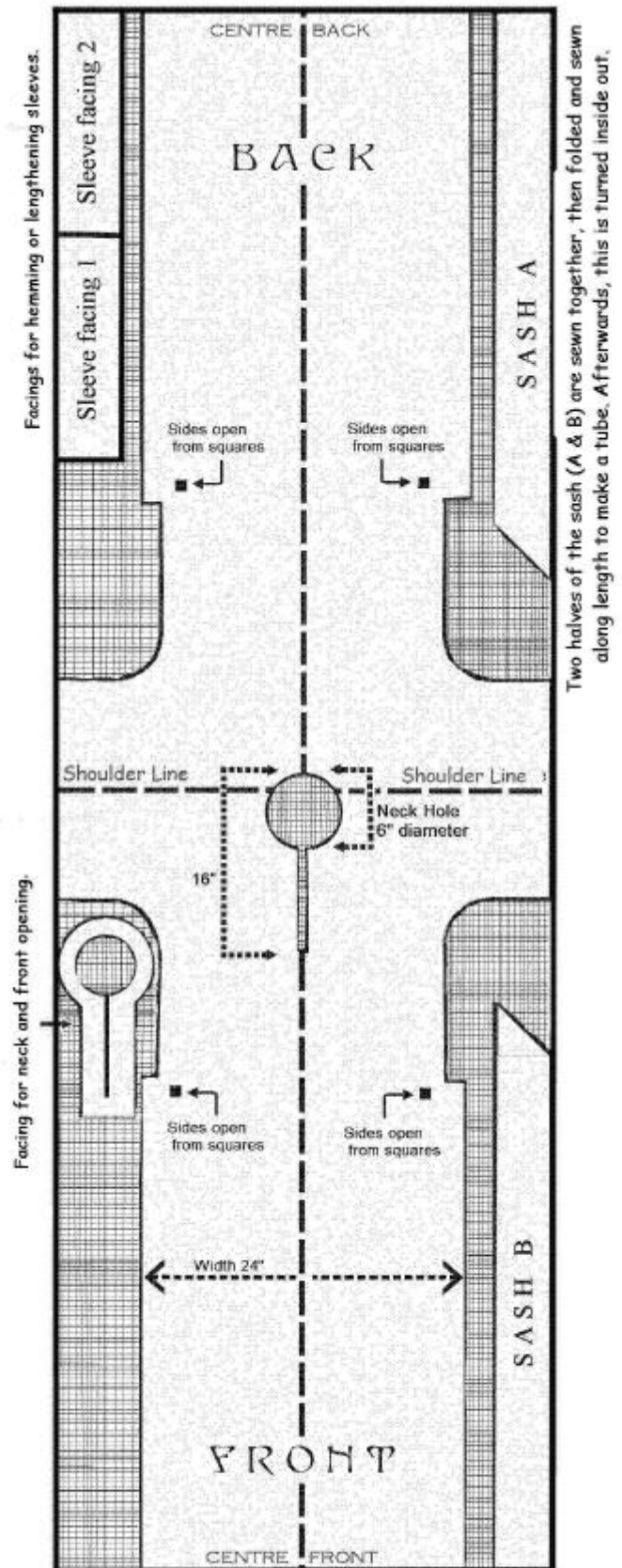


Figure 2 : Layout of pattern on Fabric
Pattern pieces marked in white. Shaded areas are waste that can be discarded.
This design is copyright by Amado Crowley, 1999

I have concentrated on keeping the instructions simple and easy to understand. Follow them step by step:-

Step 1

Fold the material in half across its width. Mark this fold with a crease, a chalk mark or pins. This is the shoulder-line. Fold it in half lengthways. Mark again. This is centre-front and centre-back.

Step 2

Open the material again. Draw a 6" diameter circle, its centre 2" from where centre-line and shoulder-line cross. This is the neck opening. Cut an 8" slit from the edge of the circle down the centre-front. This is the front opening that allows you to put the garment on. In most people, their head is bigger than their neck. If yours is not, visit your doctor.

Step 3

From spare material below the sleeve, cut a 10" circle of cloth with a flap 4" wide and 8" long extending out from it. From the centre of the circle, cut away another 6" circle inside it, leaving you with a ring that has a "handle" to it. Pin this ring on to the neck-hole, with the flap lying under the slit. Now slit the flap too, to match the main garment.

Step 4

If you are lengthening the sleeves, now is the time to stitch the facings or the extensions to the sleeve edges.

Step 5

Stitch along the inner edge of the circle and down the edges of the slit. Clip the raw edges so that you can turn in the facing, i.e., fold the smaller piece into the inside, enclosing the raw edges and the stitching. You now have a neat edge to your collar.

Step 6

Fold the garment in half along the shoulder line. Pin the back to the front along the side edges. Sew these edges to each other, from the sleeve edge to the hip level. Below this point, turn the edges in without joining them, and sew them down neatly.

Step 7

Turn up the sleeve edges and hem them.

Step 8

Sew together the two pieces of material that will form the sash. Then fold in half along the length and sew. Turn this 'tube' inside out and press. Neaten the ends by turning them to the inside and sewing them closed.

Step 9

Put the garment on and get someone to turn up the hem and pin it. Turn this up properly, press it and sew it permanently.

Step 10

Do not put on the garment again until it has been ritually prepared. For the present, steam-press it and fold it neatly. It is now ready for the magic ritual that will sanctify the robe for its future use.

9. Occult procedures

Before cutting

When you have bought your material and dyed it the colour you wanted, it should be dried and ironed to make it smooth. Then fold it carefully and keep it for seven full days before you make any attempt to start cutting or sewing.

Throughout this seven-day period, the neatly folded material should be kept carefully on your bed, slid unobtrusively under the bottom sheet. Here it will absorb moisture and heat from your body, but it will also be affected by your spiritual emanations, and any influences that stem from sexual activity.

If you sleep in a double bed with a partner, then simply make sure that the material lies under your half and not under your partner's half of the bed. There is no need to be paranoid about this. No great harm is done if it happens to gather a slight amount of someone else's charge – so long as the major influence comes from you.

On the eighth day, at dawn, remove the material from the bed and lay it flat on a table. Unless you live in a banqueting hall or a school refectory, you are unlikely to have one that is four metres long so make do with whatever surface you've got. Make sure that the central point of the material lies on the very centre of the table and let the rest of the fabric drape evenly over the table edges.

Start and finish

Now follow the earlier instructions for marking out the neck-hole, but before you cut the circle out – pause a moment, and think about the use to which this robe is going to be put. Try to cleanse your mind and focus on the fact that this will be a sacred garment and resolve that whenever you put it on you will also adopt the right mental attitude of harmony and peace.

This mental reflection is not quite the same thing as meditation because you are addressing yourself ... or rather you are addressing your over-self and resolving never to touch this garment again except when your mind is in an appropriate state of readiness. In fact you are giving birth to a ritual robe ... and only when you feel you have developed the right degree of inner resolve should you start to cut the material.

You may of course leave the material on the table until a more convenient time. The important thing is this: do not begin until you are in a good frame of mind. The garment should be completed in one sitting. You can delay the start as long as you wish, but once you do begin, you must keep on until you finish. It is quite all right to have someone else make the garment for you .. as long as you can trust them to observe this rule.

First wearing

You may try on the robe at any point in order to check progress, but do not put it on again once it has been assembled ... not until it has undergone the ritual preparation.

First of all, it must be washed by hand in natural water. This can be done outdoors in a stream or pool, or you can do it in your home using water that you have carried in for the purpose. However, you must not use any kind of soap whatsoever. If it is possible to do so, the garment should be allowed to dry in the sun. If this is not feasible, because of climate or season, then dry it indoors by artificial means, but afterwards leave it hanging in the open air in unfiltered daylight for one whole day. Then it is ready for the first wearing.

It will come as no surprise to learn that this cleansing process becomes quite unnecessary if the robe is blessed by a Master.

Vibes and things

First wear the finished garment to perform some ritual exercises, such as the Amethystine Cycle. As you stand naked for a moment, think about the purpose of the exercise before donning the robe in a reverential manner. As the fabric tumbles down your body, resolve to guard against all intrusive thoughts, and as you tie the sash around your waist, gird your astral body with fixity of purpose.

Like anything else, the robe will gradually acquire its own 'vibes' and careful handling will ensure that these are in perfect harmony with your intentions. If you later join a group or become accepted by a Master, then wash the robe in natural water again and ask your Master to bless it. No blessing is needed if you use the robe only in private – but of course it would always help!

You may keep any occult pendant, but remove all ornament and decorative jewellery before putting your robe on – this includes pins, clips, slides and hair fastenings. It is also advisable to remove cosmetics, but perfume may be worn.

10. On your way

Playing Around

Most people will grasp these instructions and understand my call for caution. How silly to approach magic with the simplistic outlook of a child who wanders into the Beyond believing that bunny rabbits live there. There is danger. Anyone who leaves his cosy cave is taking risks. To climb the Sacred Mountain though, you must get out of bed and stop dreaming.

When young, my mother worked in a Yorkshire woollen mill. Safety was minimal and I was allowed to visit her as a child of six. The shed was full of clattering machines and whirling wheels that were driven by great leather belts running on pulleys. The air was filled with slapping noises and if a girl's hair got caught, she was snatched to the roof and slammed to the floor again. The machines did not even stop while they took her away. Maintenance men often lost a finger. People joked liked soldiers in wartime or giggled like nurses wheeling trolleys to the mortuary. Uncowed by the danger, they coped with defiant humour.

Lads started in the mill at fourteen and the mill-girls teased them. The fun was lewd and when a boy struggled past with a basket of bobbins, the girls groped him mercilessly. During the break at midday, a gang might drag one behind the skips and have some fun. The monotony and fear were softened by giggles and quips. "You've kept this one in a greenhouse," they teased, "It looks like a bloody cucumber!" The youth would actually be beetroot red, of course. "No matter how much you've played with yourself, an old hand will now show you how!" Whenever in future they caught sight of that particular lad again, they made obscene wrist-gestures and dribbled some spit onto the floor. "Never look at your knob," they yelled. "Keep your eye on the belt!"

Belted knight

Why did I tell you that? Well, that bit of mill-girls' advice was crude and vulgar, but also valuable and effective. Familiarity with danger can cause a person to lower their guard. Wiser by far never to relax so completely .. never to become so off-hand or casual .. that you inadvertently allow something from the outer darkness to slip across your line of defence into the soft interior. All it takes is one unguarded moment .. a brief instant of passion .. a second of mental abstraction or inattention .. and then it is too late.

Those shameless mill-girls did sometimes fall silent. In hushed voices they spoke about the lad whom they goaded too far. He became sexually over-excited and went behind some bales of wool to do what lads his age do to seek a moment's furtive ecstasy. But he jerked too much at climax. He twitched in his spasm of joy. Not only was one arm torn off, but he was horrendously mutilated .. and never married. He never found a woman to love him.

Many po-faced Occultists are wary of me, and my sense of humour wearies them. I tell them that the Devil does not like being laughed at and that ridicule hurts him. People who take themselves too seriously are closer to the Lords of Chaos than the Lords of Creation. Other people keep themselves intellectually aloof, as if life were indeed conveniently divided into seasons at Mayfair, Henley and Ascot. Yet the tears of a princess are every bit as bitter as those of a mill-girl, and the skull of an aristocrat will break as easily as that of an apprentice garage mechanic. It becomes no one to view the truth with a jaundiced eye or to sneer at a man of god.

The nub of it all

There is neither time nor space to explain everything in great detail as I go along. It is not the purpose of a short article such as this to cover all the ground thoroughly. Can

an encyclopaedia be condensed into a dozen pages? What would be the point of trying? I have written what is necessary and I can assure you that:

(a) this robe is an essential piece of occult equipment. Look after it and store it carefully.

(b) you will be greatly helped in your studies by using it. Whenever you put it on, always try to arrive at a suitable frame of mind.

(c) it is highly personal so don't let it be handled or worn by others. But you may use it with 'special' others for the purposes of sacred love magic.

You are free to do as you wish, of course, but my advice would be to treat the robe with reverence and to protect it from all harmful or even mundane influence. The robe would gain a magical charge if it were worn during, or as a preliminary to, sex that is happy, natural and wholesome. Since moods change, and since one can rarely be sure what is passing through a partner's mind, it would be more prudent to stay with exercises such as 'waece' at the outset. Need I say more?

I provide these instructions for all who are interested in following the pilgrim's path. I am quite happy for them to be used by anyone, whether or not they are my own students. That said, I regret that I am unable to provide more detailed, personal advice except to those individuals who have indeed become my students. Not wishing to cause the slightest offence to anyone else, please allow me to explain.

Song of a Wayfarer

Like many people of my generation, I am very fond of Fitzgerald's poem, "The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayam". It is a simple but thought-provoking piece of work, written by a man who, by all accounts, found beauty and inspiration in spite of great personal anguish. Ostensibly the poem is a philosophical treatise about God and Destiny, and it describes human life as a trek across a vast, mysterious desert. The journey is given point if one follows a guiding star, and the soul may find spiritual nourishment in the companions that it encounters along the way and with whom it chooses to travel. Belief then is a beacon, while love is the tinder that first sets it alight.

In so many ways, an occult master may be likened to the master of just such a caravan, i.e., a group of travellers who have indeed chosen to undertake the journey to eternity as a group. He it is who guides their steps; he it is who picks out the route to be followed, and he it is who cares for his charges more than they care for themselves.

None of them will ever find the desert quite as empty as the master does. He travels with them .. or without them .. because he cannot order the sun to stand still any more than he can hold back the straining camels. He fixes his eye on that distant star knowing that for many a long year it will not appear to be getting any closer. The members of the caravan will complain, many will grow weary, and a few will drop out and go off in a different direction. Only he can remind them that they are not aiming for the star but only in the direction towards the star. It is not the star itself so much as where the star leads.

Wise men wear robes in the desert. The robes have a function that has very little to do with outward appearance. With those words to inspire you, let the making of your robe be itself a ritual operation that achieves great success. May the gods bless you.