

The Art of Theurgy

by VH Sr SM (part 1 of 3)

To get us started, let us pose some questions at the outset:

- What is theurgy, and what does it mean to practice theurgy in the contemporary world?
- Why is it still relevant to practice magical and mystical ritual in this day and age, and how do they contribute to our lives?
- What can we learn from magical and mystical practices? What skills can we develop? What knowledge can we gain? What states of mind do we experience?
- Why are all of these important and useful?

I. Theurgy: very brief definitions and origin

- The term originates with Iamblichus. The essence of his meaning of the word is that while it is possible to coerce lower gods or daimons through magic, higher gods cannot be coerced: they respond only to prayer and sacrifice. The act of theurgy therefore does not work on the gods but works on the soul; rituals acting on the soul allow the practitioner to communicate with the gods by making the practitioner fit for communion with the gods. The premise is that internal liberation of the soul appeals to the higher gods. So: theurgy is ritual aimed at recovering the transcendent essence which is latent in all humans.

- Iamblichus described theurgic practice as “ritualised cosmogony” that endowed embodied souls with the divine responsibility of creating and preserving the cosmos. In other words, they take on the same role as the higher gods.

- There is a higher and a lower form of religiosity and people must practise the type they are suited for. Education is the key to what kind of magical practice is proper.

- The term was later used by Christians to speak about using ritual calling on angels, saints, and instruments of God, as opposed to demonic forces. The term was also used later

on in the Renaissance by magical practitioners.

- So to define my own terms, what I mean by theurgy is using magical ritual to transform the practitioner and to attain gnosis: that is, a greater understanding of the self, of the universe, of the human’s role in the universe, of the relationship between humans and God/ the gods. For me this is best described as a combination of magic and mysticism.

II. Magic = ritual with the intention of creating change in accordance to the will, often (though not always) using intermediaries. The practice of magic teaches us:

✿ Focus

- To accomplish a magical act, we must be completely focused on what it is we wish to achieve. We can take any example: something everyday such as obtaining money or a job, or something more lofty such as union with the higher self. The magical intention is key or we will not achieve results. To be able to truly activate the Will takes full focus. We can’t have a wavering focus if we are trying to achieve something: we need to learn single-mindedness. (What it means to have a magical

intention will be discussed later.)

- Focus in the contemporary world is perhaps more important than ever. Internet, advertising, distractions, we are inundated with information. But no matter what it is, if it something we really want in life, we have to learn to focus on it. Magical ritual teaches us to tune out everything else.

☞ Discipline – hand in hand with focus

- Magical ritual involves specific props, precise instructions to follow, states of mind to hold, visualisations, precise intonations or vibrations.
- Although many of these are not strictly necessary, they build up the practice of discipline: following instructions precisely, not being lazy, not taking shortcuts, being willing to work hard (and therefore willing to work with no immediate gratification). This builds up character (and focus).
- The very natural human tendency of creating habits is turned on its head by introducing discipline. We take that need for repetition and turn it to our advantage. This can be applied to everything in life, anything that needs practice, repetition, and patience.
- Note that magic is of course not the only way to get focus and discipline! It just happens to be a very good technique for those who enjoy it.

☞ The training and strengthening of Will

- Discipline and focus are the only ways to build the true Will, which is to want without desiring. That is, to have a full intention of the result without being attached to the result.
- Will can be described as single-pointedness at the beginning, but it develops into something

much more than that: a force of its own, a channeling of great power and energy through the practitioner to achieve almost anything.

- This fully activated Will is of course a great help in everyday life, although it becomes fundamental to have the right intention (more on this next).

☞ To understand what our intentions really are (conscious and often subconscious)

- Often we have an idea of what it is we want, but magical practice throws that into relief. We find out what it is we have to do to get what we want, what pain we may cause to others or ourselves and what sacrifices might need to be made to achieve a goal.
- Very often we find that we want something else than we thought when the subconscious comes in and gives it to us. Magical practice forces us to see the difference between Will and Desire. Desire always trumps the Will. If we desire something it is an incredibly powerful force (the power of emotion is related to this), so learning to overcome that desire needs training.
- Magical ritual, therefore, helps us see what it is that makes us tick, what we really want, what we are willing to do get it, and whether those needs and wants are ethical/moral, acceptable, and selfish or selfless. It will therefore not only reveal ourselves to ourselves, working with the principle of 'Know Thyself', but also make us question what is right and proper, what is acceptable in the world, and what role we wish to have in the world and/or the cosmos.

☼ Taking responsibility

- This is one of the first things any magical practitioner should learn. The laws of cause and effect are the same as law of physics: every action has an equal and opposite reaction. This means anything we do has an effect.
- Only by taking responsibility can we make decisions about what we do with knowledge and clarity. There is no action without consequences, however small. To acknowledge we have responsibility is to become a mature adult. Ethics and morals are personal and not dictated by magical practice, but once we know that what we do has consequences, we will be careful about what we do and be willing accept them.
- Taking responsibility builds integrity. It means that we accept what we can control consciously, and if we do create a consequence we had not anticipated, we can see that and be willing to accept it with grace. We can also learn how NOT to take responsibility inappropriately if blamed wrongly, because we will see clearly where the responsibility lies.

☼ The ability to think clearly

- Practically: In magic, we need to be able to plan, to lay things out spatially, to work and coordinate with others at times, to arrange our time and space, and to do magical things subtly or overtly as we wish, with conscious decision. Magical ritual teaches us to take responsibility (as discussed above), to decide on a magical intention and predict the possible consequences of it (both according to our Will or sometimes in spite of it), and to measure the possibilities of failure of the magical operation. All of these take clear, calm, rational, no-nonsense thought.
- Philosophically: We need to be able to think

through what forces we are working with, and why. We need to decide what forces will listen, and why. We need to think about our relationship to the cosmos, and how we use that in magical ritual. We need to consider different arguments about the way the universe is built, consider them, weigh them, think through them, decide what we agree with and what we don't (even if our opinions change). We constantly need to compare theory with our experience, calmly and rationally – not build an entire universe from nothing, but base it on greater minds than ours from the past and the present, and see what pieces fit together for us. This develops a useful state of rather cold observant thought, even if the experience is passionate.

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