

## THELEMA 101

## Section 1. Thelema 101: On Will and The Practice Of Will

*Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law.*

## INTRODUCTION

Thelema means “will” in the ancient Greek language that was used to write the New Testament.

And while this is a rather simple concept, discovering one’s will can be quite a complex process. Between the pressures of daily life and the circumstances of our upbringing, discovering and performing one’s own will can indeed be a life-long process.

Further, it’s worth noting that the concept of “will” does not mean doing what one wants, or what one desires. Will is not whim, but in fact something higher. “For pure will, unassuaged of purpose, delivered from the lust of result, is in every way perfect.” [Liber AL vel Legis, I:44]

So how should we perform our will? How should we act? What should we do?

## BIBLICAL GROUNDWORK

Most of Western thought and Western civilization is permeated with Judeo-Christian Biblical imagery and references. This is not only true of mainstream thought and belief, but also true of many hermetic and magickal beliefs as well. Thus, in order to answer the question of Will, it is worth noting in passing the Biblical references and attitudes towards how one should act in one’s life.

*The Hebrew Bible (The Tanach)*

The Hebrew Bible consists of the Torah, or the Five Books of Moses, the Nebi’im, or The Prophets, and the Ketubim, or The Writings. To most used to a Christian framework we think of these books as the Old Testament (or “covenant”, referring to the old covenant between God and Man), yet the order of the books within the Hebrew Bible and the Old Testament are significantly altered.

In general terms the Hebrew Bible is, in part, the story of the relationship between God and Man from the creation of Mankind to the deliverance to Man of

the Law of God, and further through the evolution of the Covenant between God and Man.

Within the Hebrew Biblical framework, the question of how one acts is codified for Hebrews into 613 separate commandments. Of these, 248 are positive commandments, or commands on what a person should do, and 365 are negative, or prohibitions against what a person cannot do. Also within the Tanach there are also the Noahide commandments, or the commands given after the flood to Mankind from God, but these 7 basic rules are not elaborated further as for the most part, the Tanach really only deals with the relationship between God and the children of Abraham.

The question of Will in this framework basically boils down to following the rules set forth by God. In a sense, will is irrelevant; so long as one follows the Law, one will be in the good graces of God.

But as we follow the story of the evolution of God’s Covenant with Man through the rest of the Tanach, new questions arise. Why is it that a powerful God of Exodus who can send the seven plagues against Egypt and kill every first-born son becomes incapable of helping Israel rise from a minor province to a major geo-political force as promised to King David? Why is it that the individual players in later writings of the Tanach are left to their own devices to save the day rather than being able to call on God’s help?

Or, on a more personal level, why is it that bad things happen to good people?

*The New Testament*

The New Testament attempts to answer these questions by raising the stakes. The cosmology of the universe is suddenly expanded beyond the Earth and God to include the concept of a literal heaven above Earth, and God’s relationship to Israel is expanded to a war between Good and Evil, with God fighting on behalf of all of mankind.

The old covenant between God and the children of Abraham is replaced with a new covenant. And with the replacement of the Old Covenant with the New comes a new code of behavior, one which is based not

on an endless series of rules, but on two basic principles: the Love of God and the Love of our neighbors. [Matthews 22:35-40]

In changing the stakes, the incarnation of God in the form of Jesus Christ and His later sacrifice at the cross answers the question “why does God allow Israel, his chosen people, to suffer” by rendering the question moot.

In raising the stakes to one of Good versus Evil, and in eliminating the Laws of the Tanach and replacing them with the principles of Loving God and one’s neighbor, the problem of how we should act becomes a little fuzzier. Within a Christian framework, we are introduced to the concept of the Holy Spirit, which grants people various powers, such as knowledge and understanding, which helps us make our daily decisions. [Galatians 5:14-26]

When the gifts of the Holy Spirit are honored, we are said to act in certain ways which are in accord to Christ’s admonition to love God and to love our neighbors. And through this higher understanding given to us by the Holy Spirit, we gain a better idea as to how we should act in the world.

Even so, why do bad things happen to good people?

*Classical Gnosticism*

“Gnosticism” is “salvation through knowledge.” Beyond that, however, the classical Christian Gnostic framework posits a universe which is inherently evil. Bad things happen to good people because we are trapped in an evil universe, created by an evil demiurge who arose from the fallen feminine divine emanation Sophia (greek for “Wisdom”), who in turn arose from an ultimate and unknowable ultimate divine.

To a gnostic, the problem of salvation is the problem of escaping the framework of the material world (which is inherently evil), and through knowledge and understanding, gain a reconnection to the innermost divine spark, and eventually reunite with the ultimate divine.

This overcoming of the material world is done

through knowledge of oneself, and through mystical experience designed to gain a glimmer or hint of God. This mystical experience could be gained in a number of ways, through ritual, meditation or through more extreme practices, as well as through daily practice designed to bring the practitioner closer to the ultimate Divine.

THE EASTERN PERSPECTIVE

The evolution of the question of will developed in the East in parallel with the West. But in the East, religious thought took a different philosophical direction.

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*According to Catholic Dogma, there are seven gifts associated with the Holy Spirit. They are the gift of wisdom, of understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. Through these gifts one is guided by the Holy Spirit to take the correct action in one’s life.*

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In India, a series of philosophical writings known as the Vedas were first written almost 5,000 years ago. These writings were later grouped into the four categories we know today:

Rig Veda (“Knowledge of Praise”), Yajur-Veda (“Knowledge of Sacrifice”), Sama-Veda (“Knowledge of Chants”) and Atharva-Veda (“Knowledge of Atharvan”). The Vedas make repeated references to prayerful contemplation (“brahman”) and the ideal harmony (“rita”), amongst other things.

*Yoga*

Within the system of Hinduism and Yoga that evolved from the Vedas, the problem of how one should act is associated with the question of finding liberation or freedom. That is, rather than codifying proper behavior in a series of rules as was done in the West, proper behavior was from the outset associated with breaking the bonds of Karma which bind one from acting freely, and to pierce the veil of Maya (illusion). Only through doing this could a practitioner shed the baggage which prevents one from living a “proper” life.

This process of breaking the bonds of Karma and piercing the veil of Maya was accomplished through the practice of four essential yogas: Karma Yoga (the yoga of work without attachment to result), Bhakti Yoga, (devotional yoga), Raja Yoga (yoga of meditation) and Inana Yoga (yoga of transcendental knowledge).

*Swami Vivekananda*

Most of the Eastern Yogic concepts of divinity and

finding the path to enlightenment remained shrouded to the West until the late 1890's when a number of writers, most notably Swami Vivekananda made a splash in the Western scene.

Swami Vivekananda was a charismatic writer and speaker who first represented Hinduism at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. He made quite an impression in the west, and his writings and extensive knowledge of both Eastern and Western thought allowed him to carry out his mission of sharing Indian Yogic knowledge with a country who regarded India as little more than a backwards land of barbarians.

### *Yogic Influence in the West*

Long before Swami Vivekananda first showed up in Chicago in the late 1890's, some concepts of Yoga, including divorcing oneself from the desire of results and finding enlightenment through prayer and mindful deeds has had an impact on the evolution of the more esoteric corners of Western philosophers. It is said in particular that both Gnostic thought and Quietist thought both take their cues from Hinduism and Brahmanism.

### THE DEBATE OVER WILL

As we've migrated from the Hebrew Tanach to Gnosticism, the question of how one should behave has evolved from simple blind obedience to a God-given law to the question of salvation, or rather, how one should behave in order to achieve reunion with God.

This evolution, from the question of blind obedience to a formula to personal salvation permeates most of the rest of the Western discourse on the question of Will.

But the question of how one should act in one's life is not exclusive to the Bible.

The Greeks with Plato theorized that a well-ordered life should be lived in reason. That is, if one's life was proper and well ordered, then deciding how one should act is simply a matter of logical reason. So striving for a well-lived life was a matter of striving for a well-ordered life, and living one's life according to reason and logic.

### *Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430 ce)*

Saint Augustine was perhaps one of the most important western philosophers who ever lived. His writings

ranged a wide variety of subjects from the mundane to the spiritual, and his works informed western philosophical debate for the past sixteen hundred years. While his works span a wide variety of subjects, the ones that concern us here is his attempts to find a common denominator between a wide variety of Christian and non-Christian sects, including some rather unorthodox gnostic sects.

Augustine spent nine years amongst the Manicheans, a gnostic sect who believed that the universe was engaged in a perpetual war between the forces of Good and the forces of Evil. Each soul, the Manicheans believed, was a particle of light trapped in darkness. But if each person lives a sufficiently ascetic life, over several lifetimes we can come to liberate that spark of light from the surrounding material darkness and eventually rejoin the larger Light.

Augustine's writings showed an eventual disenchantment with the inability of the Manichean leaders to provide a more rigorous cosmological framework to explain this perpetual war. Further, Augustine shows disenchantment with the Manichean framework as, by presupposing that the soul is inherently a co-equal fragment of the larger Good, it places personal responsibility for failing to make moral decisions on an "evil" body. As Augustine converted to Roman Catholicism, his writings show an almost merciless repudiation of this framework, it does influence his later writings.

For Augustine, the conversion to a Roman Catholic church which at the time was heavily influenced by Neo-Platonic philosophers was that its adherence to an "ordered life" failed to provide a satisfactory explanation of the problem of evil and the problem of personal choice. Eventually, Augustine turns to the concept of Will, that is, of an intuitive aspect of ourselves for an explanation.

In Augustine's framework, there are three factors which govern how a person may choose to live their life. The first is the Neo-Platonic concept of a well-ordered life—that is, that one should live one's life in a well ordered and rational fashion. However, the world is imperfect: the second factor that contributes to the decisions by which we make to live our life is the inherent imperfections in the world and in our ability to perceive the world.

In order to live our lives, then, we are forced to rely on intuition: that is, we must rely on our Will to make the decisions that allow us to live a moral or proper life, despite imperfections in our knowledge of the world.



This intuitive decision process, our Will, is in Augustine's framework the "moral fulcrum" which permits us to choose either a path of good and righteousness or a path of evil.

Perhaps it is the Holy Spirit which grants us gifts from God to help us make our decisions, but, according to Augustine, it is our own personal Will which allows us to lead the life we choose. That is, it is our Will, informed by our intuitive connection with the divine, which permits us choose our actions.

#### *Miguel de Molinos (1640-1696 ev)*

Intuition played a very important part in Augustine's concept of the will. But to what degree should we listen to our intuition, rather than our reason? One of the features of mystics has been placing more reliance on intuition as a connection to the Divine than most.

Miguel de Molinos was an ordained Catholic priest in the Jesuit order. Molinos synthesized the mystical threads of the Stoics and eastern philosophies such as Buddhism that had permeated small heretical sects of the Catholic Church into a coherent system known as "Quietism."

In essence, Quietism is a form of religious mysticism whereby the practitioner quiets his inner voices and inner will, in order to make himself more receptive to the Divine Will. Salvation comes in Quietism by quieting all but the inner voice, that intuitive connection that connects to the divine. An individual should not exercise outward influence on his life, but accept all that is about him, as they also come from God.

Naturally this form of "passive" resignation to everything, including the influence of demons and the body, lead to Molinos being branded a heretic and sentenced to life imprisonment by the Holy See. However, his writings have been incredibly influential both in Protestant circles, in mystical circles, and later with Aleister Crowley.

#### *The evolution of Will*

From the framework laid down by Augustine and the mystical philosophy of Quietism developed in its strictest sense by Molinos, the idea of Will has as both an intuitive mechanism by which the soul expresses itself in an imperfect universe and expresses the Will of God has influenced a large number of western philosophers, including Protestant philosophers looking for a more "direct" connection to God than the bureaucratic hier-

archy provided by the Roman Catholic Church.

For this discussion, however, it's worth concentrating on, of all people, a relatively obscure French Writer to understand some of the underpinnings of Thelema.

#### *François Rabelais (1490?-1553? ev)*

While predating Molinos, Rabelais certainly was not unfamiliar with the debate over Will and mysticism that was one of the cornerstones in the schism in the Catholic Church which would lead Martin Luther to nail up his 95 theses on a church door. However, while Rabelais studied under the Franciscans and apparently showed a fair amount of aptitude towards religious studies, he eventually left the church and became an author. His writings were described as "revolutionary", and it is said that his last words were "Draw the curtain, the farce is played out."

Rabelais is best known for his four book romance titled "La Vie de Gargantua et de Pantagruel." In the first book of this series he describes an "Abbey of Thélème" where free, well-bred and well-born men and women would live according to the law "Do what thou wilt." Rabelais described the dwellers of this "Abbey" as "thelemites", derived from the ancient greek word for "will."

It is worth noting that while the utopian society that Rabelais described definitely had influenced Crowley's concept of Thelema, the sort of utopian society whereby well-learned or well-bred individuals would live good and proper lives by their own free will not unique to Rabelais or Crowley. This same utopian ideal is also core to Marx's ideal communist state, as well as a fundamental principle to Freemasonry and to our Republican Democracy.

#### ALEISTER CROWLEY

It is in this religious and philosophical setting that we come to Aleister Crowley.

Born to a wealthy religious family in England, Edward Alexander (Aleister) Crowley was a student at Trinity College at Cambridge University and briefly worked in the Diplomatic Service before departing for a more spiritual path.

At the age of 23, Aleister joined the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. The Golden Dawn was dedicated to the task of synthesizing Kabbalah, alchemy, tarot, astrology, divination, numerology, Masonic symbolism

and ritual magic into one coherent and logical system.

### *The Book of the Law*

It is while Crowley was a member of the Golden Dawn when he traveled with his newly wed wife to Egypt for their honeymoon. While trying to unsuccessfully summon sylphs for Rose, his wife, Rose entered into a deep trance and received a powerful message from Horus. Crowley quizzed his wife on a series of questions she could not possibly know the answer to, and when she answered them successfully, Crowley took her to the Boulak Museum. Upon asking Rose to point out Horus to him, she pointed across the room to the Stele of Revealing, depicting Horus receiving a sacrifice from the deceased, a priest named Ankh-f-n-khonsu.

Crowley started to listen to Rose, and at her direction starting on April 8, 1904, Crowley received the three chapter book *Liber AL vel Legis*, or The Book of the Law.

Some of the core points of The Book of the Law can be summed up in three key phrases: “Ever man and every woman is a star,” “Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law” and “Love is the law, love under will.” Crowley believed that the book heralded the dawning of the new aeon of Horus, governed by the Law of Thelema, and proceeded to spend the rest of this life working on developing and establishing Thelemic philosophy.

### *Crowley and the O.T.O.*

In 1910 Crowley was contacted by Theodore Reuss, the head of an organization based in Germany called the Ordo Templi Orientis. This group of high-ranking Freemasons claimed to have discovered the supreme secret of practical magick, which was only taught in its highest degrees.

Reuss had accused Crowley of revealing this supreme secret in one of his writings. Mystified, Crowley had no idea what Reuss was talking about until, during an exchange with Reuss, he learned that this supreme secret had been published by Crowley, reportedly in The Book of Lies.

Crowley joined the O.T.O. shortly thereafter, and became the head of the English speaking branch of the O.T.O. He later rose to become the World Head of the O.T.O. in 1925.

### *Crowley's Influences*

It is clear that Crowley's own writings are heavily influenced by the same Gnostic roots described above. Further, Crowley also appears to be heavily influenced by the Yogic teachings of Swami Vivekananda, as well as other hermetic traditions which themselves are heavily influenced by the writings of Saint Augustine. And his core philosophies appear to borrow heavily from the Quietism of Molinos as well as the idealistic utopian attitudes in the writings of Rabelais.

Towards answering the question of Will, Crowley makes a very powerful argument towards using western hermetic traditions along with heretical Christian teachings and synthesizing them with the Yogic teachings of Vivekananda and others from the East towards finding a true connection with the Divine. That is, “Will” becomes more than just intuition, but divine intuition—and a divine intuition which requires years of focused magickal work to overcome attachment to the lust of result and piercing the veil of illusion to discover one's own essential connection to the ultimate Divine Reality.

### DISCOVERING ONE'S TRUE WILL

There are many different approaches to discovering one's true Will. As Will is more than just rational thought but also a degree of intuition and divine inspiration, philosophical musings as well as religious and mystical practices all can help one find his or her own Will. There are also a number of Thelemic organizations which exist devoted to helping one discover one's Will: the A.:A.:, the O.T.O., the B.O.T.A., and the T.O.T., just to name a few.

But one does not necessarily need to be a member of any organization to discover one's Will. One approach to finding one's True Will can be summarized as follows: first, understand thyself. Second, practice, and record your results to learn your progress. And third, attempt a higher connection to your Holy Guardian Angel.

*Disclaimer: the following information should be read as “informed opinion” and not an absolute statement of Truth. As always, the only person who can honestly know yourself and the tools you need on your own personal road to self-discovery is you.*

### *Understand Thyself*

It is difficult to know yourself. For lack of a better phrase, we lie to ourselves so we can avoid having to face ourselves in the mirror. But Crowley alludes to a number of tools which can be used to break through the illusion of self-deception.

The first of these tools are various mystical frameworks, such as the Qabala and Gamatria to find deeper meaning in common-place ideas or concepts.

The Qabala, or the Tree of Life, is a mystical system which attempts to categorize the various higher planes of existence into 10 sephiroth and 22 paths, and is of central importance to the mystical system of the Ordo Templi Orientis. There are a number of good discussions on the Qabala, listed at the end of this document.

Gamatria is a system of finding hidden relationships between words. Each letter of a word is assigned a numerical value and added up; it is said that related words have the same numeric value.

Beyond using these two systems to analyze the universe around and within us, there is also the practice of Yoga to find better self-control. Yoga, coming from the Sanskrit word “union”, is composed of several different practices to help the practitioner find union. Crowley himself practiced Yoga extensively, and wrote at length about the various practices, notably in his work “Eight Lectures on Yoga.” The topic of Yoga will be covered more extensively in a latter unit in this series.

A third practice to help one find and understand oneself is the practice of Magick to project one’s own Will. Crowley’s definition of Magick is “the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will.” The topic of Magick will be covered more extensively later.

#### THE HOLY GUARDIAN ANGEL

In a Thelemic context, the Holy Guardian Angel (or H.G.A.) is a higher spiritual “being” which helps us establish a higher connection with the overall Divine. As one’s True Will can essentially be summed up as divine intuition, the path to discovering one’s True Will in Thelema eventually will take you to your H.G.A.

The concept of the Holy Guardian Angel traces itself back to Abramelin the Mage. Like most hermetic philosophers of his time, Abramelin attempts to explain in greater detail the spiritual hierarchy only hinted in the Old and New Testaments.

Abramelin posits a universe of higher angels and lower spirits, with the higher (good) angels having control over the lower (evil) spirits. Material existence is controlled, in essence, through a hierarchy of control where the highest spirits transmit their “will” to the lower spirits and down into the material world.

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*The Thelemic phrases “95” and “95/95” allude to the Gamatria values of Thelema (“will”) and Agape (“love”) in the Greek Language. Often “95” is used to signify “Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law”, and 95/95 signifies “Love is the law, love under will.” It is also worth noting that mathematically 95/95 is unity.*

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Abramelin further posits that every man has with him a Guardian Angel and a Malevolent Angel. In order to achieve control over the Malevolent and thus gain power over one’s material existence, Abramelin states that you must first gain contact with your Guardian Angel.

In a sense, the Angels, and specifically the Holy Guardian Angel is related to the Catholic concept of the Holy Spirit in that communion imbues each of us with higher “principles” or power which allows us to perform our True Will more effectively.

#### *The H.G.A. and Thelemic Magick*

The framework of Abramelin posits not only a strict hierarchy of emanations, but also a system of controlling those emanations through imploring the higher powers for assistance in controlling the lower (malevolent) spirits which directly affect material reality. Through a series of inflamed rituals and prayers, one can ally oneself with the higher spirits and thus control the lower spirits.

This system of Abramelin lays the groundwork for many Thelemic magickal operations, as most of those operations involve commanding the higher spirits (through banishings and invocations) in order to control the lower spirits, and thus gain power over the universe.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The problem of discovering one’s Will originates with the problem of Good versus Evil. Originally “Good” was the strict observation of a set of rules hand-

*The invocation of Angelic Forces, then, is an idea common in works of Magic, as also are the Ceremonies of Pact with and submission to the Evil Spirits. The system, however, taught in the present work is based on the following conception: (α) That the Good Spirits and Angelic Powers of Light are superior in power to the Fallen Spirits of Darkness. (β) That these latter as a punishment have been condemned to the service of the Initiates of the Magic of Light. (This Idea is to be found also in the Koran or, as it is frequently and perhaps more correctly written, "Qur-an".) (γ) As a consequence of this doctrine, all ordinary material effects and phenomena are produced by the labour of the Evil Spirits under the command usually of the Good. (δ) That consequently whenever the Evil Demons can escape from the control of the Good, there is no evil that they will not work by way of vengeance. (ε) That therefore sooner than obey man, they will try to make him their servant, by inducing him to conclude Pacts and Agreements with them. (ζ) That to further this project, they will use every means that overs to obsess him. (η) That in order to become an Adept, therefore, and dominate them; the greatest possible firmness of will, parity of soul and intent, and power of self-control is necessary. (θ) That this is only to be attained by self-abnegation on*

*every plane. (ι) That man, therefore, is the middle nature, and natural controller of the middle nature between the Angels and the Demons, and that therefore to each man is attached naturally both a Guardian Angel and a Malevolent Demon, and also certain Spirits that may become Familiars, so that with him it rests to give the victory unto the which he will. (κ) That, therefore, in order to control and make service of the Lower and Evil, the knowledge of the Higher and Good is requisite (ie., in the language of the Theosophy of the present day, the knowledge of the Higher Self).*

*From this it results that the magnum opus compounded in this work is: by purity and self-denial to obtain the knowledge Of and conversation with one's Guardian Angel, so that thereby and thereafter we may obtain the right of using the Evil Spirits for our servants in all material matters.*

*This, then, is the system of the Secret Magic of Abra-Melin, the Mage, as taught by his disciple Abraham the Jew; and elaborated down to the smallest points.*

- The Sacred Magic of Abramelin The Mage  
Introduction and Book I

ed won by God. With the Greeks, "good" behavior was rational behavior: a well-ordered life could be lived by applying the laws of logic to a well-ordered universe. But the universe is not well-ordered, and Saint Augustine posits the concept of Will as the divinely inspired intuitive ability to discover the right way to live one's life in a turbulent and chaotic universe.

Finding one's will has also evolved, from finding one's will based on the principles of love of neighbor and of God through to Molinos' concept of Will as a vacant channel to the divine and blind acceptance of our condition. And through to Rabelais "Abbey of Thelema" and his utopian vision of perfectly informed and learned men and women creating a society living in harmony.

But at each stage of this evolution, older concepts are not discarded, but built upon. As the New Testament builds on the Old, so that passages in Matthews make no sense without an understanding of Psalms or

Proverbs, so too later concepts from Crowley's Liber AL vel Legis build upon a foundation of Vivekananda's writings on Yoga and Molinos' Quietist philosophies.

So the problem of Will is essentially the problem of finding our higher connection with the Divine, and in finding our essential "orbit" through a process of meditation, yoga and magick. Through our practice we can then aspire to gain knowledge and conversation with our Holy Guardian Angel, receive the gifts of knowledge and wisdom, and eventually find our own true path through the Universe.

*Love is the law, love under will.*



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