

# Invocation

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Why do we do invocation? Who benefits from it? I would argue that both the deity and the practitioner benefit (and hopefully so do the other coveners). Human awareness is finite and local to one particular area of space-time, that is to say, here and now. Divine consciousness seems to be both spatially and temporally unfocussed, and potentially infinite. So deities can benefit by accessing our local, temporal and focussed consciousness, and we can benefit by accessing their atemporal, non-local and multiple perspective consciousness.

Another benefit is that by practicing theurgy, some of the virtues of deities might rub off on us. In Eastern Orthodox Christianity, the divine presence is invoked into the Eucharist before it is distributed to the communicants, who then ingest their deity. This is said to bring about the process of *theosis*, which means becoming divine. Indeed, Jesus actually said, "I have said, ye are gods." (The trick is becoming aware that we are gods.) A similar practice occurs in Tibetan Buddhism, where special consecrated pills are distributed to the people. Indeed, our own Wiccan cakes and wine contains echoes of this idea, as we consecrate the sacral meal by infusing it with spirit. But invocation should, at least in theory, be a shortcut to *theosis*, because instead of eating food that has had a deity invoked into it, the deity is directly invoked into the practitioner. One possible pitfall here would be if you always did invocations with the same type of deity, for example, always "dark" goddesses like Kali, the Morrigan, and so on. I also do not see why we cannot invoke goddesses onto men and gods onto women. So I think we should take care not to get typecast. If you always go for a particular type of deity, you might want to consider why this is, and try balancing it with a different type. Later in this talk, I will be telling you about a Tantric Buddhist practice which has great potential for overcoming this problem. Another possible pitfall is that you might get so into the power and glamour of the whole experience that you become convinced that you're the most magical being since Aleister Crowley - though this might just be a pitfall of the magical path in general.

When discussing invocation, the role of the invoker is often overlooked. But it is very important; otherwise the invokee either has to say that they are not invoked (we have a convention that we will use the gesture of crossing the arms in the God position for this, though we have never had to use it). Or they have to fake being invoked (which is a bit like faking an orgasm in my opinion). Or they have to use a previously prepared charge. Or they have to quickly invoke themselves (which is a bit like self-initiation - very difficult, but not impossible). So the invoker is very important. In classical Indian music, they identify three movements of the raga, which is a piece of music that calls to a deity. The first movement is the expression of the performer's yearning for the deity; the second is the actual call to the deity; and the third is the celebration of their arrival. The Wiccan invocation - in both its verbal and non-verbal

aspects - is rather like this. The invoker must want the deity to appear. Then they must call them; and then they must be pleased to see them. A successful invocation requires these emotional states to be present in the invoker, and preferably also verbally expressed in the text of the invocation, to get the coveners in the mood and participating in the act of invocation.

Similarly, in *Magick in Theory and Practice*, Aleister Crowley identifies the process of invocation with the four elements, or the Tetragrammaton:

- Fire is the eager prayer of the magician to the deity;
- Water is the magician listening to, or catching the reflection of, the deity
- Air is the marriage of fire and water, when human and deity have become one
- and Earth is the condensation or materialisation of the three higher principles

Some of you may remember David Wadsworth's classic talk, *Kabbalah and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, where he likened the four worlds of the Kabbalah and the four stages of an invocation to the phases of a four-stroke engine: suck, squeeze, bang, blow. I quote from the maestro himself:

- 1) Suck: Initially the piston is at the top and both valves are closed. As the crank shaft turns, the inlet valve opens, the con rod pulls the piston down which draws air and fuel in. At this point in an invocation, the invoker is opening his chakras and drawing the cosmic energy which surrounds us into his body.
- 2) Squeeze: The crank shaft continues around, the inlet valve shuts, and the piston is pushed up, squeezing the gases together. This is when the invoker says the invocation and passes the power to the invokee.
- 3) Bang: The fuel/air mixture ignites and pushes the piston down. The priest/ess takes on the aspect of God/dess being invoked.
- 4) Blow: The exhaust valve opens and the piston pushes the charge into the exhaust pipe. The God/dess charges and shares his/her power with those assembled.

Also, the invokee must be in a suitably receptive state to receive the deity, and not be afraid of being possessed or the like; so they must have confidence in the invoker and in themselves and know that they will be able to de-invoke the deity at the end of the process. I was taught that learning to be invoked upon is a gradual process; the first few times, the deity only descends into the top three chakras or so, and it takes time for them to descend further into the body.

Personally, I have always objected to the practice of delivering a Charge and then not allowing the deity to speak through you. There is nothing wrong with delivering a Charge to get you in the flow, and then allowing the deity to speak

through you, but if you just do a Charge and then stop, it's hardly worth the deity bothering to turn up.

The way I see it, there are five levels of invocation in Wicca.

The first level is the light glamour that occurs when doing cakes and wine. As the priest kneels before the priestess, he may lightly invoke the Goddess such that the priestess has an overlay of Goddess energy; or the Goddess energy may well up from within her. She is then empowered to bless the cakes and wine. However, there is usually no intention of fully invoking the Goddess here, or channelling the Goddess's utterances. Similarly, the God may be lightly invoked on the priest in the blessing of the cakes and wine.

The second level occurs in the rite of Drawing Down the Moon. Here the Goddess energy is much stronger than in the blessing of cakes and wine, and it is specifically the Moon Goddess being invoked, but again, we are just conveying Goddess energy to the other participants in the ritual, rather than channelling the Goddess's utterances. (Similarly for the newer ritual of Drawing Down the Sun.) As an aside, some mythologies have Sun Goddesses and Moon Gods, so there is no need to restrict Drawing Down the Moon to priestesses, or Drawing Down the Sun to priests.

The third level doesn't have a name, but it feels as if the invoked deity is standing just behind you and whispering in your ear, and you are translating what they are saying for the benefit of the rest of the coven. You (the invokee) and the deity are both standing in the realm of the gods, but they are not fully in you.

Sometimes the third level happens very briefly as a preparatory phase just before the fourth level.

The fourth level is where the deity is in you but not intermingled with your consciousness; it's more as if they're alongside you inside your body, and have just borrowed your voice to say what they have to say. This level is invocation proper; but it's like one of those executive toys with oil and water in a transparent chamber, where the oil and water can be shaken up but do not mix.

The fifth level is where the consciousness of the deity is intermingled or merged with your consciousness (the oil and water have been shaken up and formed an emulsion). In this level of invocation, it is difficult to know where the deity ends and you begin. It feels to me as if they have descended into me through the top of my head, and I have opened up to receive them. Other people have told me that it feels as if they have stepped in through their back (I have also experienced this feeling).

There are further levels of invocation, but they do not seem to be generally practiced in Wicca.

The sixth level is where your consciousness is entirely displaced, so that the deity has completely taken over and you don't remember anything about what happened during the period while the deity was present. I do not think this is a beneficial practice. This is apparently what happens during a Voudun possession, and in certain shamanic traditions. In his classic travelogue about the Caribbean, *The Travellers' Tree*, Patrick Leigh Fermor says that possessed practitioners retained an awareness of themselves, albeit dimmed; but more recent accounts by anthropologists and by practitioners themselves have stated that they did not recall anything that happened during the possession. Interestingly, practitioners are always "ridden" by the same *lwa* in Voudun, another practice which I do not consider beneficial. Interestingly, the *lwa* are said to enter the human body at the base of the skull.

In October 2008, I attended an academic conference in Heidelberg on the dynamics of ritual. There were five days of talks by anthropologists, theologians, psychologists, scholars of religion, sociologists and so on. Many of them were also practitioners of various paths. I attended a strand entitled "The Inner Work of Ritual" chaired by Geoffrey Samuel. One of the papers in this strand was by an anthropologist who had compared shamanic possession with Tantric Buddhist invocation. The shamanic possession was similar to the experience of being ridden by the *lwa* in Voudun - the shaman left his body for the duration of the possession trance.

In Tantric Buddhist practice, however, the practitioner invokes a Buddha or a deity (such as Tara) and "ascends" to the realm of the deities (remember that up and down are just metaphors here). There, the practitioner merges his or her self with that of the deity, and then goes beyond the deity to the nameless divine ocean of bliss. This practice solves two problems: the problem outlined at the beginning of the talk about getting typecast or acquiring the characteristics of a particular type of deity; and it also means that we can go deeper and merge with the infinite without losing our awareness in the process.

I have not yet succeeded in attaining the Tantric Buddhist level of invocation, but I am working on it. Interestingly, Aleister Crowley appears to have experienced this level, because in *Magick in Theory and Practice*, he writes:

This consists of a real identification of the magician and the god. Note that to do this in perfection involves the attainment of a species of Samadhi; and this fact alone suffices to link irrefragably magick with mysticism.

Another question we might ask about invocation is whether it is all happening internally, or whether there is an external consciousness actually entering us.

Patrick Leigh Fermor discusses the dynamics of possession by the *lwa*. He suggests that possession works by calling up some unconscious aspect of the self from the depths of the psyche and allowing it to take over from the ego for a while. He is sceptical of any external consciousness being involved. However, the idea of something arising out of the depths of the psyche is a useful one, as according to Jungian psychology, it is our subconscious that is connected to the collective unconscious.

It is also worth comparing the Wiccan practice of invocation with that outlined in Aleister Crowley's *Magick in Theory and Practice*. Crowley identifies three main methods of invoking deities. The first is devotion to the deity; the second is straightforward ceremonial invocation; and the third is to enact a drama of the deity's legend. He says that in invocation, the macrocosm floods the consciousness; whereas with evocation, the magician identifies with the macrocosm and creates a microcosm (the triangle into which the spirit is evoked).

Crowley outlines six phases of invocation, using the method where the magician identifies with the deity: First, the magician studies the symbolic form of the deity and builds up a mental picture, with as much care as the artist would bestow upon a model. The invocation begins with prayer to the deity, commemorating their physical attributes, but mindful of the symbolic meaning of these. Then the magician recites the deity's characteristic utterance, and then asserts the identity of his or her self with the deity. Then the magician invokes the deity again, but this time it is as if the deity's will that he or she should manifest in the magician. Finally, the magician becomes passive, and then the deity speaks through the magician.

### *Questions for discussion*

- How does invocation feel to you?
- Where/how does the deity enter?
- Has it benefited you?
- Any issues with it?
- Should you deliver a Charge, or allow the deity to speak through you, or both?