

aleister crowley of the law

The Great Beast 666, perhaps one of the most controversial figures of the 20th century, Aleister Crowley, is indelibly linked to a philosophy he termed "Thelema." Often referred to as "Aleister Crowley of the Law," his teachings, centered around the proclamation of a new Aeon of Horus, continue to provoke discussion and exploration. This article delves into the core tenets of Aleister Crowley's Law of Thelema, examining its philosophical underpinnings, its ethical framework, and its enduring impact on modern esoteric thought. We will explore the seminal text, "The Book of the Law," its mystical origins, and the key principles that define this unique spiritual path, including the often-misunderstood concept of "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law." Understanding "Aleister Crowley of the Law" requires an appreciation for his life, his mystical experiences, and the profound, albeit often challenging, ideas he presented to the world.

- Introduction to Aleister Crowley and Thelema
- The Origins of The Book of the Law
- Core Tenets of Thelema: "Do what thou wilt"
- The Aeon of Horus
- Ethical Considerations and Misconceptions
- Crowley's Legacy and Thelema Today

Understanding Aleister Crowley: The Man and the Myth

Aleister Crowley, born Edward Alexander Crowley in 1875, was a complex and multifaceted individual who defied easy categorization. A poet, magician, mountaineer, and occultist, his life was marked by a relentless pursuit of esoteric knowledge and spiritual liberation. His self-proclaimed title, "The Great Beast 666," reflects his embrace of controversial imagery and his desire to shock Victorian sensibilities. Crowley's early life was steeped in a strict religious upbringing, which he later vehemently rejected, embarking on a lifelong quest to uncover what he perceived as hidden truths about the universe and humanity's place within it. His travels, his involvement with various occult orders, and his prolific writings all contributed to the development of his unique philosophical system, making him a central figure in the history of Western esotericism.

Early Life and Occult Influences

Born into a wealthy family with strong Plymouth Brethren roots, Crowley experienced a restrictive and deeply religious childhood. This environment, however, paradoxically fueled his later rebellion and his fascination with the forbidden and the mystical. After inheriting a considerable fortune, Crowley dedicated himself to the study of magic and occultism. He joined the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, a prominent magical organization of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, where he received extensive training in ceremonial magic and Qabalah. His time in the Golden Dawn was instrumental in shaping his understanding of esoteric principles, though his ambition and unorthodox methods eventually led to his expulsion, further cementing his independent trajectory in the occult world. He later formed his own magical orders, most notably the Argentum Astrum (A∴A∴) and the Ordo Templi Orientis (O.T.O.).

The "Great Beast" Persona

Crowley cultivated the persona of "The Great Beast 666," a title derived from the Book of Revelation. This was not merely a sensationalist affectation but a deliberate engagement with archetypal imagery

and a symbolic representation of his perceived role as a harbinger of a new spiritual era. He embraced this controversial moniker as a means to challenge societal norms, orthodox religious beliefs, and conventional morality. For Crowley, the "Beast" represented primal energy, liberation from repression, and the force of nature untamed. This persona allowed him to explore taboo subjects and to inspire a sense of awe and trepidation, thereby drawing attention to his teachings and encouraging individuals to question established doctrines.

The Genesis of The Book of the Law

Central to the philosophy of "Aleister Crowley of the Law" is "The Book of the Law" (Liber AL vel Legis), a text he claimed to have received through dictation from a non-corporeal intelligence named Aiwass in Cairo, Egypt, during a three-day period in April 1904. This sacred text is considered the foundational document of Thelema, outlining its primary laws and prophecies. The circumstances surrounding its reception are as mysterious and debated as the text itself, adding to its mystique and allure. Crowley considered this reception to be the commencement of the new Aeon of Horus.

The Dictation from Aiwass

According to Crowley's accounts, the dictation of "The Book of the Law" occurred under peculiar circumstances. He stated that his wife, Rose Edith Kelly, seemingly guided him to a specific room in their Cairo hotel, where he began to receive and transcribe the text. He described Aiwass as his "holy guardian angel," an intermediary intelligence that transmitted divine knowledge. The text itself is written in a distinct, almost poetic style, and comprises three chapters, each attributed to a different divine entity: Nuit, Hadit, and Ra-Hoor-Khuit. The precise nature of Aiwass and the veracity of this supernatural dictation remain subjects of intense scholarly and occult debate, forming a crucial element in understanding the mystical origins of Thelema.

Key Passages and Their Significance

"The Book of the Law" contains several pivotal pronouncements that form the bedrock of the Thelemic system. The most famous and often misunderstood is the phrase: "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law." This is not a license for unrestrained hedonism, as is often mistakenly believed, but a profound statement about aligning one's actions with one's true will, or True Will. Other significant passages include declarations about the sovereignty of the individual, the interconnectedness of all things through the goddess Nuit (infinite space), and the active force of the universe represented by Hadit (infinite points of existence). The text also announces the inauguration of the Aeon of Horus, a new spiritual epoch characterized by divine kingship and individual empowerment.

The Law of Thelema: Core Principles and Philosophy

The Law of Thelema, as promulgated by "Aleister Crowley of the Law," is a spiritual and philosophical system that emphasizes individual liberty, self-discovery, and the fulfillment of one's unique destiny. It is not a religion in the conventional sense but rather a pathway to spiritual attainment and self-realization. The core of Thelema lies in understanding and enacting one's True Will, a concept that is both deeply personal and cosmically significant. This philosophy encourages a proactive engagement with life, a rejection of imposed limitations, and a celebration of individual sovereignty.

"Do What Thou Wilt": A Deeper Meaning

The central axiom, "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law," requires careful interpretation. For Crowley, "True Will" was not the fleeting desire or whim of the ego, but the inherent purpose and destiny of an individual soul. Discovering and executing this True Will involves introspection, self-knowledge, and a process of shedding societal conditioning and illusory desires. It means acting in accordance with one's most profound nature and highest aspirations, leading to a life of authenticity and fulfillment. The second part of the law, "Love is the law, love under will," further clarifies that these actions are to be undertaken with a sense of universal love and understanding, guided by one's True

Will.

The Aeon of Horus and its Implications

Crowley proclaimed that humanity had entered a new Aeon, the Aeon of Horus, succeeding the Aeon of Osiris (associated with patriarchal, sacrificial religion) and Isis (associated with matriarchal, mother-goddess worship). The Aeon of Horus is characterized by divine kingship, individuality, and the recognition of the divine spark within each person. This new era signifies a shift towards personal responsibility, self-empowerment, and the direct experience of the divine, rather than reliance on intermediaries or dogmatic structures. Horus, the child-god, represents energy, action, and the future, embodying the spirit of this new age.

Thelemic Ethics and Personal Responsibility

Contrary to common misconceptions, Thelema is not an endorsement of amorality. The emphasis on individual will is balanced by a strong sense of personal responsibility. Thelemic ethics are based on the understanding that one's actions have consequences, and that the pursuit of True Will should not infringe upon the True Will of others. The core principle is to act in accordance with one's own nature without being bound by external moral codes, but also without causing undue harm or interfering with the natural course of other individuals' destinies. This requires a high degree of self-awareness and ethical discernment. Thelemic practitioners are encouraged to develop their own moral compass based on their understanding of the Law.

Crowley's Legacy and Thelema's Enduring Influence

"Aleister Crowley of the Law" left behind a vast and complex legacy that continues to influence various spiritual, artistic, and cultural movements. While often controversial and misunderstood, his ideas have inspired generations of seekers and practitioners. Thelema, as a living tradition, continues to evolve,

with practitioners and scholars engaging with its teachings and exploring its potential for personal and societal transformation. Crowley's extensive writings, from his magical diaries to his philosophical treatises, remain primary sources for understanding his thought and the development of Thelema.

Thelemic Communities and Practices

Today, Thelema is practiced in various forms across the globe. Independent practitioners engage with the Law of Thelema on a personal level, while organized groups and lodges, such as those affiliated with the O.T.O. and the A∴A∴, provide structured environments for study and ritual. Thelemic practices often involve meditation, ceremonial magic, Qabalistic study, and the performance of rituals outlined in "The Book of the Law" and other Thelemic texts. These practices aim to facilitate self-discovery, spiritual development, and the attainment of one's True Will. The diversity of expression within Thelema reflects its emphasis on individual interpretation and experience.

Influence on Modern Esotericism and Culture

The impact of Aleister Crowley and the Law of Thelema extends far beyond the confines of esoteric circles. His radical ideas on spirituality, sexuality, and individual freedom have resonated with counter-cultural movements and artists throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. His writings and philosophies have influenced rock music, literature, and various forms of art, often as a symbol of rebellion and unconventional thinking. While some associate him with dark or satanic imagery, a deeper understanding of Thelema reveals a profound emphasis on self-empowerment, liberation, and the pursuit of one's authentic spiritual path, a message that continues to find new adherents.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Aleister Crowley's primary contribution to the concept of 'the

Law' in his philosophy?

Crowley's most significant contribution to 'the Law' is the principle of 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law.' This isn't a license for hedonism but a call for individuals to discover and enact their true will, their unique purpose in life, in alignment with the greater cosmic order.

How did Aleister Crowley define 'Thelema' and its relationship to his Law?

Thelema, the Greek word for 'will,' is the philosophical and religious system founded by Aleister Crowley. Its core tenet is the Law of Thelema, encapsulated by the phrase 'Do what thou wilt.' Thelema is the practical and spiritual manifestation of this Law, aiming for individual liberation and the evolution of consciousness.

What is the 'Book of the Law' (Liber AL vel Legis) and its significance to Crowley's Law?

The Book of the Law is the foundational text of Thelema, which Crowley claimed to have received through psychic dictation in 1904. It contains the pronouncements of the divine entity Aiwass and lays out the principles of the Law of Thelema, including the central maxim and the idea of the 'crown of the magical will.'

How does 'true will' differ from ordinary desires in Crowley's Law?

Crowley's 'true will' is not the same as fleeting desires or ego-driven wants. It is the inherent, unique purpose and destiny of an individual, dictated by their innermost nature and their place in the universe. Discovering and acting upon one's true will requires self-knowledge, discipline, and spiritual exploration.

What are some common misconceptions about Aleister Crowley's

'Law' and how can they be addressed?

A common misconception is that 'Do what thou wilt' promotes anarchy or selfish indulgence. In reality, Crowley emphasized that true will is aligned with cosmic order and requires rigorous self-discipline and understanding of one's responsibilities within that order. It's about fulfilling one's potential, not acting impulsively.

How did Crowley's experiences with various occult traditions influence his formulation of 'the Law'?

Crowley's extensive travels and studies in various esoteric traditions, including Hermeticism, Kabbalah, Yoga, and Eastern religions, provided him with a broad framework. He synthesized these influences into his own system, seeing the Law of Thelema as an underlying truth that unified many spiritual paths, adapting and refining them through his unique perspective.

What is the ultimate goal of adhering to the Law of Thelema as taught by Aleister Crowley?

The ultimate goal is the attainment of 'Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel,' which signifies a profound union with one's higher self and divine nature. This leads to spiritual liberation, the realization of one's true potential, and the ability to live fully and authentically in accordance with one's unique destiny, contributing to the grand cosmic design.

Additional Resources

Here are 9 book titles related to Aleister Crowley and the Law, with short descriptions:

1. The Book of the Law

This is Aleister Crowley's most foundational text, dictated to him in Cairo in 1904. It outlines the core principles of his philosophy and religion, Thelema. Key concepts include the "Law of Thelema" which states "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law," and introduces the deity Nuit and her

messenger Hadit. It is considered a sacred scripture by Thelemites.

2. The Book of Lies

A collection of short, aphoristic chapters, each with a number and a cryptic title. Crowley presents a series of paradoxical pronouncements and allegorical tales that explore various aspects of magick, mysticism, and the human psyche. The book is designed to be provocative and to stimulate contemplation, often challenging conventional understanding.

3. Magick in Theory and Practice

This extensive work serves as a comprehensive manual for the practice of ceremonial magick, as understood and developed by Crowley. It delves into the theoretical underpinnings, historical context, and practical applications of various magical disciplines. Topics covered include the nature of will, astral projection, the use of tools, and the attainment of higher consciousness.

4. The Vision and the Voice

This book details Crowley's visionary experiences during his expeditions in the Sahara Desert in 1910. It chronicles his encounters with Enochian angels and the resulting spiritual insights and knowledge gained. The text is filled with mystical visions, dialogues with otherworldly beings, and profound philosophical revelations.

5. The Equinox

The Equinox was a periodical publication initiated by Crowley to disseminate the teachings of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and his own developed magical system. It contained a vast array of essays, rituals, magical texts, and practical instructions. The journal served as a central platform for the advancement of Thelemic doctrine and magical knowledge.

6. Liber O vel Manus et Linguae

This is a foundational text within Crowley's magical system, providing a practical introduction to the basics of yoga and ceremonial magick. It outlines exercises for breath control, meditation, and visualization, intended to prepare the student for more advanced magical work. The book emphasizes discipline and concentration as crucial elements for magical development.

7. The Collected Works of Aleister Crowley

This multi-volume collection represents a comprehensive compilation of Crowley's prolific writings. It includes his poetry, plays, essays, magical treatises, philosophical explorations, and personal correspondence. The sheer volume of work demonstrates the breadth of his intellectual and spiritual pursuits across various domains.

8. Diary of a Drug Fiend

While a fictional novel, this book offers a stark, albeit dramatized, exploration of addiction and its profound psychological and spiritual consequences. It is often interpreted as a symbolic allegory for the search for ecstatic experience, and the pitfalls that can accompany such quests. The novel reflects Crowley's own experiences and his complex relationship with consciousness-altering substances.

9. Theogonies

This text is a collection of mystical poems and essays that delve into the creation myths and cosmologies of various traditions. Crowley uses these narratives to explore his own philosophical and theological ideas, particularly as they relate to the divine. The book offers a poetic and often esoteric interpretation of existence and the nature of the divine.

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