

Unlock the Mysteries of Thelema

Your Ultimate Guide to Aleister Crowley's Spiritual Philosophy

By Entelecheia



Introduction

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

When I began studying Thelema over a decade ago, I found it easy to learn how to do Thelemic magick, and I found it easy to understand what the true will was. What I couldn't understand is how it was all supposed to fit together.

What is all this fancy ritual and obscure symbolism *for*?

If the point is to be free to live life on our own terms, it seemed to me there were better ways to accomplish that than through meditation or ceremonial magick. And if one were already practicing magick—or following almost *any* alternative spiritual path one wasn't raised with—one was *already* expressing themselves authentically. It didn't seem to me as though Golden Dawn practitioners, folk magicians, witches, or New Agers were missing anything by not being Thelemites—other than maybe engaging in a particular style of ritual. And nothing about Thelemites made me think they had cornered the market on personal freedom or self-expression.

As I began to read Crowley, I was struck more than anything else by the *scope* of what he was trying to do, especially as compared with how others were explaining Thelema to me. Here was a man who opens his magnum opus, *Magick*

in Theory in Practice, with a discussion of philosophical theories of the nature of the universe. To say his approach differs from that of most occult writers is putting it mildly.

Received wisdom said Crowley's own ideas about the world—and arguably even Thelema—weren't important. All that mattered was doing your will. Five years into my journey as a Thelemite, I decided to reject all of that and go in the opposite direction.

I didn't just read Crowley. I entered his world. I wanted to see the world through his eyes, as only he understood it. Though as I entered his universe, I brought along my training as a philosopher.

Startling parallels began to emerge for me between Thelema and Neoplatonism, and connections between Thelema and more modern philosophies such as those of Leibniz, Kant, and Hegel became evident. As I began to appreciate the extent to which Crowley was influenced by Darwin and Spencer, connections opened up between Thelema and modern dynamical systems theory and cognitive science.

As Crowley's worldview began to take shape for me, I realized Thelema was not just spicy Golden Dawn. Nor was it authentic self-expression mashed together with occultism. Crowley's project had a scope similar to that of Stoicism or Buddhism. It contained a uniquely modern view of the nature of reality, the individual's place within it, and a coherent path to liberation based upon that understanding.

Since 2018, I have elucidated that theory and explained the more familiar elements of Thelema in light of it in a series of lectures, articles, and a book, *Erotic Liberation*.

The guide you're reading represents another step in my evolving understanding of Thelema. This time I looked online and found the most frequently asked questions about Thelema. I picked ten of them and answered each of them in my own voice.

Unlike my other works, this one contains no footnotes, and there are relatively few quotes from Crowley himself. These are just off-the-cuff responses that represent in condensed form how I answer these questions at this point in my spiritual journey.

Please do not take my answers as definitive. This guide may be the "ultimate" in terms of pithy answers, but if there's one thing I can tell you about Thelema, it's that you should not remain satisfied with soundbites, no matter how clever they may sound. Rather than taking anything I say as authoritative, I hope these responses spark your own curiosity and ignite an ardent desire to explore the works of Aleister Crowley on your own.

May this be your first step into a new world!

Love is the law, love under will.

Entelecheia

Seattle, Washington

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Frequently Asked Questions about Thelema

What is Thelema?

Thelema is a religious and spiritual philosophy founded by the English occultist, Aleister Crowley, in the early 20th century. Central to Thelema is the idea that each person has a divinely appointed purpose in life which is referred to as their *true will*. Crowley said it is each person's duty to discover what their will is and to do it with one-pointedness, detachment, and peace. This is summed up in Thelema's supreme moral injunction, "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law."

Who was Aleister Crowley?

Aleister Crowley (1875-1947) was an English occultist, poet, mountain climber, novelist, and painter. A one-time member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, he is best known for having founded the religious philosophy of Thelema. Crowley was a controversial figure in his lifetime, in no small part because he was bisexual and gender fluid. Summarizing his mission in life, Crowley said, "My mortal part was to help humanity by Jupiterian work, such as governing, teaching, creating, exhorting men to aspire to become nobler, holier, worthier, kinglier, kindlier and more generous."

What is the meaning of “Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law”?

“Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law” is considered to be a summary statement of Thelema. It means that in each and every instance, the only “lawful” choice is the one that accords with your true will. As the *Book of the Law* says, “thou hast no right but to do thy will.” One’s true will is the only morally relevant fact in any case. As Crowley says, “From these considerations it should be clear that ‘Do what thou wilt’ does not mean ‘Do what you like.’ It is the apotheosis of Freedom; but it is also the strictest possible bond.” For this reason, self-knowledge and self-discipline are essential to walking the Thelemic spiritual path.

What is the *Book of the Law* (*Liber AL vel Legis*)?

The entirety of Thelema is based on *Liber AL vel Legis* or the *Book of the Law*. The central and most sacred text of Thelema, Crowley claimed to have received it by divine revelation in Cairo, Egypt in the year 1904 from a being calling itself *Aiwass*. In the *Book of the Law*, *Aiwass* describes himself as the “minister of Hoor-paar-kraat,” the Egyptian god of silence. *Liber AL* can therefore be understood as the *speech of silence*. It is divided into three chapters, and each chapter is written in the voice of one of three Egyptian deities: Nuit, Hadit, and Ra-Hoor-Khuit respectively. Among other things, *Liber AL* proclaims the advent of a new age of human history in which old religious and moral codes are swept away and are replaced with the supreme decree of *Do what thou wilt*.

What does “Love is the law, love under will” mean?

Every event in the universe—every change from one thing into another—is an expression of the ecstatic union of Nuit and Hadit with one another. So in the context of Thelema, *love* means *change*. It is a cosmological principle rather than a feeling. “Love *under* will” means that every change in one’s life ought to be subordinated to one’s true will or divinely appointed purpose. It means organizing one’s life into a coherent whole and surrendering it, in its entirety, to the will of God. And since Crowley defines *magick* as change in accordance with will, love under will is identical with being a magician.

What is True Will?

True will is the central concept in Thelema. Will can be thought of as a universal energy of creation and destruction. Similar to *chi*, it is an interconnecting force that is responsible for manifestation. The way in which will manifests through your body and mind is called your *true will*. It is like an energy welling up from a hidden spring within you. It flows through you, out into the universe, dynamically fitting you to your environment. When you are doing your will, every change is an opportunity for self-development, exploration, and growth. It is to live one’s life to the fullest.

Are there any rituals or practices in Thelema?

Thelema contains a diverse ecology of spiritual practices. Aleister Crowley studied and taught ceremonial magick, the eight limbs of yoga, and deity devotion, along with various forms of self-reflection. The purpose of these practices is to lead a person to develop self-discipline and stability, to discover who they truly are, and ultimately to transcend themselves and to attain union with God or the Absolute. For this reason Crowley thought the spiritual path of Thelema aimed at the same summit as the world's other mystical religions such as Buddhism, Hindu yoga, and esoteric Christianity and Islam.

What is the role of the A.:A.: and the O.T.O. in Thelema?

The A.:A.: has two meanings. On the one hand it refers to the teaching order Crowley established as a successor organization to the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Sometimes called the Outer College, he designed it to teach and test individuals in ceremonial magick, yoga, and the philosophies and theologies of the world's religions. The A.:A.: also refers to the Hidden Church or the Communion of Saints. This is like an invisible tradition working behind the scenes of history to spiritually advance humanity through religious teachings and world events. One becomes a member of the Communion of Saints upon Crossing the Abyss, which is a mystical attainment in which one transcends their personality. Crowley identified Aiwass as one such being.

The O.T.O. or Ordo Templi Orientis was founded by Carl Kellner and Theodor Reuss in the early 20th century. Its purpose was to consolidate the teachings of esoteric Freemasonry and to safeguard and communicate its secret wisdom. Aleister Crowley joined O.T.O. in 1912, rewrote many of its initiatory rituals in light of Thelema, and eventually became its head in the 1920s. In addition to communicating its secret teachings, Crowley described the O.T.O. as serving as a model for Thelemic society and for helping individuals discover their true will by teaching them the secrets of birth, life, and death.

How does Thelema view traditional religious beliefs?

Thelema is often considered eclectic and syncretic. It borrows and integrates elements from various mystical and religious traditions. These include Rosicrucianism, Sufism, Neoplatonism, Kabbalah, Buddhism, and Daoism. Thelema's Holy Books and Crowley's writings refer to God and several gods and goddesses by name, including Pan, Isis, Horus, Nuit, Hadit, Ra-Hoor-Khuit, Dionysus, Jehovah, Shiva, and many others besides. However, despite these borrowings, Thelema represents a unique religious and philosophical tradition. The *Book of the Law* denounces Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, sweeps away all previous mystical, moral, and religious codes, and declares the advent of a New Age, The Aeon of Horus, in which divinity is only to be encountered in and through the individual.

What is the significance of the Aeon of Horus?

According to Thelema, human history is divided into different Aeons, or eras, each dominated by different spiritual and cultural paradigms. The current Aeon is the Aeon of Horus, characterized by individualism, self-realization, and the pursuit of true will. It follows the Aeon of Osiris, which was marked by themes of self-sacrifice and submission to external authorities.

About the Author

Entelecheia is a writer and lecturer on Thelema, philosophy, and the western mystery tradition. He is the author of *Erotic Liberation: Selected Lectures on Thelema 2019-2023*, along with numerous articles including “Thelema as a Path of Erotic Liberation,” “What is Consensus Thelema?” and “Is the Gnostic Mass a IX° Magical Ritual?” He has presented on Thelemic metaphysics, soteriology, and aesthetics. He holds an MA in Philosophy from New School for Social Research in New York. He lives in Seattle, Washington.



Praise for Erotic Liberation

“These essays and lectures ... show the possibility of Thelema as a real tradition: something substantial, encompassing, and relevant. They reveal a Thelema worth studying, worth being part of, and worth dedicating oneself to as an expression of that timeless Light of the Gnosis passed down through the aeons.” —IAO131, author of *Fresh Fever From the Skies* and *HRILIU*

“[*Erotic Liberation*] is a foundational text for 21st Century Thelema ... Entelecheia has a sharp intellect and writes with purpose and relevancy ... *Erotic Liberation* is a book for Thelema’s future...” —Bob Freeman, occultdetective.com

Erotic Liberation is available through [Barnes & Noble](https://www.barnesandnoble.com) and [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).



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Seattle, Washington

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