

The Bonds Between Us: Animism and Accountability in Magical Practice

Three Cauldrons Breathing

Take a moment to become aware of where your breath is at in your body
Notice the movement of your inhale and of your exhale
If it feels good and safe for you, begin to slow your breathing down
Gently inhale just a little bit deeper
Softly and slowly release your exhale
Bring your awareness to the space where your body meets the chair, the bed, the floor
– the place where you are
Let that space represent your connection to the Earth
With your next inhale, breathe the energy of the Earth up into your body
Bring it up into your lower belly
Pause for just a moment...and release
From the Earth, inhale again, this time breathing that energy up into your heart
Pause again for just a moment...and release
One more time, from the Earth, inhale deeply and breathe that energy up to the top of your head
Pause again for just a moment...and release
Inhale again deeply and release
And when you are ready, open your eyes

Animism

Animism comes from the Latin word Anima, meaning breath, spirit, or life. Animism is a system of beliefs. Within Animism everything possesses a distinct spiritual essence. It is also the belief that objects, places, animals, trees, rocks, rivers, fire, air, words – everything – is animated with a living life force and has agency. It is the belief that everything is animated and alive. The energy that animates life is always flowing, moving, changing. It is always around us and available to us. We are not separate from it. Because of this, we experience the world as though we are in relationship with it. We engage with it. We communicate with it. We respond to it and the beings, places, and energy we come in contact with. Animism is a way of life. It is a lived practice in which we form connections with our environment. These connections are a consistent part of our everyday life. In this worldview, everything is part of an interconnected web of being. Some animists like myself believe that the living life force exists in the Otherworld, that we are also in relationship with it, and that the power and life force of the Otherworld, and the beings that inhabit it, are what animates this world.

Intimate Bonds

In an animist worldview, we see everything as its own sovereign, animated being and we develop social relationships and intimate bonds with those beings. Which means that we are in community with them. We participate in community. We build and care for these intimate bonds and maintain good relations with them. This shifts our focus from the modern mindset of individualism back to the understanding that the world thrives in connection and community. The key ingredient to animism is the social connection formed in community with the living world around us. We strengthen ourselves when we strengthen the connections between the well-being of the spiritual world, the natural world, and ourselves. When we strengthen these connections we not only help them, we help ourselves and this strengthens our magical practice.

Core Values

“The future does not matter; your actions should be decided by your values.” – Seven of Swords – Tarot of the Hidden Realm

Values are what you care about and prioritize. Principles are the guidelines of conduct, the actionable boundaries and methods that ensure you live in alignment with your values. Values provide the foundation. Principles provide the map. Values are the why. Principles are the how. Some of your values are also guiding principles

- **Four Core Values**
 - Community
 - Relationship
 - Commitment
 - Action
- **Guiding Principles**
 - Consent
 - Reciprocity
 - Right Action
 - Right Relationship
- **Additional Values of Animism**
 - Consent
 - Fairness
 - Reciprocity
 - Hospitality
 - Compassion
 - Integrity
 - Discipline
 - Structure
 - Accountability
 - Authenticity
 - Safety
 - Truth
 - Connection
 - Communication
 - Justice
 - Sovereignty/Agency
 - Choice
 - Boundaries

Aligning with your values, aligns the energy of your work, the energy that informs what you do and how you do it. This alignment informs how you exist in relationship with the intimate bonds we mentioned. This alignment provides the foundation for how you practice magic and what you practice. They are part of how you do magic.

Animism and Devotional Polytheism

If we adhere to the belief that everything is made up of living life force and has agency, then it follows that animism requires active participation and conscious awareness. I am in relationship with the gods, guides, guardians, ancestors of my practice. I am in relationship with the Otherworld. I am in relationship with the flow of energy, the life force that animates all things. I am

in relationship with the living landscape. This means that I am also in relationship with myself and my values. I am a representation of my values. I am in relationship with my home and my community. I am in relationship with my culture and the culture that my spiritual practices come from.

When we approach the world from this perspective it provides us with an ethical foundation, a moral code of conduct to live by, to use a compass and a set of boundaries that ensures right actions. **An animist world view makes us accountable to living in right action because when we accept the agency of the living world around us it puts us in the position in which the actions we take for or against right action are conscious choices.**

Devotional Polytheism is a form of modern pagan worship characterized by profound dedication in spiritual practice and the belief that there is more than one God. An intimate bond is formed between practitioner and God through prayer, meditation, and active action. A practitioner of devotional polytheism strives to maintain conscious contact with their gods and the otherworld through consistent communication, reciprocity, and living in right relationship.

Reciprocity is an exchange. In practice it means that we must give in order to receive. In devotional polytheism a practitioner honors their gods with effort, and action, and offerings. It's not just about the support that we request, it is also about what we give in return.

Right relationship means that we live in relationship to the world around us. It means that we have an active awareness of the Otherworld, the living landscape, and our community. Living in right relationship is a commitment to protecting and caring for these relationships. It is a commitment to integrity and truth.

Right action means that we have a responsibility to live in alignment with the values that our Gods represent. It means that our actions, behaviors, and lifestyle should reflect the principles of reciprocity, right action, and right relationship and core values that include truth, integrity and others like hospitality and sovereignty.

As a devotional polytheist, If I want my practice to be authentic, my actions must reflect the relationships that I have with my gods by putting the values that they teach me into practice in my everyday life. So, I live my life as an offering to my Gods. This means that I am in service to the Otherworld, to my Gods, and to my community even if I am not in a position of authority. Even if I am not in a position of service, the choices I make on a daily basis are made with consideration of collective intention and my relationships. In short, this means that I have to pay attention to the impact I have in the world.

From the Irish point of view there is a concept called the Fir Flathemon – the justice of sovereigns – or truth of sovereigns – in which the king is responsible for the well-being of the land and resources, the people, and his relationship with the Otherworld. He is also charged with enacting justice through speaking the truth and giving true and fair judgements.

The power that he wields is a gift given to him by the Otherworld, usually in a ritual marriage with the land, when he is chosen to rule. He takes on the responsibility of mediating the relationship between the Otherworld and the physical world on behalf of the land and his people. In turn he is

given special skills and/or abilities. The support of the Otherworld is meant to flow through him out to his community so that everyone can experience the benefit.

He is also given gessi, or taboo that prohibit certain behaviors or actions. The idea here is that these prohibitions act as boundaries that ensure he takes right action and lives in right relationship.

When we apply this personally, it means the gifts that we have come from the relationship that we have with the Otherworld. The power of the Otherworld moves through us and we in turn make our magic and carry out our work with this support. It is through this relationship that we have the ability to do what we do. It is from this relationship that we build our magical practice.

Accountability and Personal Responsibility

Animism is the key to magical and spiritual ethics and to a deeper relationship with magical practice. These are not abstract concepts to be discussed online or in scholarly debate. We have to show up and practice them actively. We are dishonoring the gods and the otherworld when we are not actively living in alignment with the values that they represent. If we are living representations of these values then we are also dishonoring ourselves and compromising our spiritual integrity.

We have to come to the reality that we are responsible for our own personal work. If we are going to be a living representation of our values, we must be accountable for our healing. Spiritual practice is not a substitute for mental health and medical care. Your emotional responses and trauma are not separate from your spiritual practice. Your practice does not replace the need to address these issues or to be held accountable for the actions you carry out as a result of them.

You might ask why I am telling you this? Why is this important? And I will respond that your emotional state will influence your relationship with yourself, with your community, and with your gods. It will be the lens through which you receive messages and view the world around you. It will influence your relationship with magic and here is why:

Magical and spiritual practices provide us with support. They help us build and maintain a connection with the otherworld and mitigate our understanding of external influences, but our lived experiences form the framework through which we interact with the world around us. Our trauma responses become the lens through which we perceive our spiritual and magical experiences. Our trauma responses become the foundation of our perception of safety. Our spiritual practices become safer, stronger, and more deeply connected when we also heal the psychological, mental, and emotional wounds of our past painful learning experiences. I do not believe that we can have one without the other.

We have a responsibility to take care of ourselves. We have to do this to be safe and in integrity in our relationships. We have to build our own practice and learn how to care for our own energy, health, and well-being so that we can be present in the relationships that form the intimate bonds we rely to support our practices. Again, the key ingredients are community and connection.

As we grow in our practice, we come to understand this. Our conscious connection to the natural world and everyone in it causes us to come into alignment morally and ethically. Through that alignment, we develop as a person. We become aware of ourselves and we begin to change mentally and emotionally. Many of us experience profound personal healing as we grow in our

practice. Personal growth and healing happen through our continued connections. As we become aligned with and experience internal evolution, we become more aware of the impact that we have on the world around us and the people we interact with.

Consent

Every being has agency and must be respected. This includes ourselves. Our boundaries, personal and magical begin with ourselves. They are an essential component of our magical boundaries. We must seek consent for the working we do from the spirits and gods we want to work with. This is why building those relationships and maintaining them through reciprocity is so important. Also, you don't have to tough this out alone but you do need to ask for support. Always keep in mind that we cannot affect change in another person without their permission. Every being is sovereign and needs to be able to make their own decisions.

Process Over Outcome

It is not what you do it is how you do it. Incorporating the principles of Animism in magical practice means magical and devotional practice are a way of life. Focus on the process, not necessarily the outcome. The outcome will happen when the process is in place. The boundary magic that I teach is a system of practices that build upon each other so that each component is a part of the whole. Each part informs the next step in the process, working together to form a stable framework that we can access at any point. This framework becomes an anchor, a foundation, a solid, stable point that we can return to at any time. Consider it a set of tools that can help you find your balance when you feel chaotic, uncertain, or unsafe.

Ritual of Practice

Much like martial arts, make your practice a process, a system. Make it repetitive, methodic, consistent. In addition to building a strong foundation, commit to the path you have chosen by building a consistent practice with it. The term ritual as it is used above describes repeating a consistent set of actions carried out on a regular basis. It doesn't have to be daily. It just needs to be consistent. There is value in repetition of the action. Begin practicing on a regular basis so that over time the process will become a part of you. It will become second nature much like the muscle memory that is built in martial arts practice. It takes practice to be comfortable with this work. Make the practice itself a ritual and do it consistently. Practice energetic safety and boundary work consistently. Build these tools and techniques into your daily life. Create a ritual from this practice. The more time you spend in sacred space, the more aligned you become with your intention, and the more you begin to understand who you are, what your gifts are, and what your guides want from you. Your personal gifts will develop and become stronger. Creating a ritual or daily practice aligns your intention with your actions. It aligns you with sacred energy. The more you do it, the easier it will become. You are training your spiritual muscles to respond without needing to remember every step. Your ritual is a part of your foundation. It is the thing that you come back to when you are anxious, overwhelmed, afraid, sick, tired, or angry. You name it. Come back to your ritual. Do it consistently. Ground yourself, shield yourself, protect yourself, cleanse yourself.

Magical Praxis

Start with the Land. An essential component of this system is creating a relationship with the land you live on. It is important to build your foundation from deep within the Earth. Forming a connection with the energy of the natural world around you. Become connected to it. Building a relationship with your land is something that happens over time through daily practice and devotion. Spend time with your land learning about it, meditating with it, caring for it, listening to it.

Give offerings to your land, clean it, and plant things in it. It isn't just about learning how to take care of yourself and what you need. It is also about learning how to take care of the land and what it needs. Over time, you will develop a strong bond with the land and elements you live with and this will provide the support you need to build a strong container for protection for both this world and the other world. That bond will become stronger and easier to connect with when you need it.

Build your boundaries from the relationship you have with the land. Build daily and cyclically with a process through a ritual of practice.

Portable Boundaries

Before you begin, you will want to gather a few objects to use as boundary markers. I would suggest using items that have been created by the natural world and that are free of plastic and chemicals. You can use stones, plants, and other items from your yard. Take these items to your altar or space where you meditate and spend a few days connecting with these items, chanting, praying, or infusing them with protective energy. You can also carve or paint symbols of protection into these items if you feel called to do that. Include the positive energy that you want to have in your home in the intention that you are putting into these objects. You can even write your intention on paper as a poem or prayer and bury it later at one of the entryways to your home or place it in a corner of your home.

After your objects are prepared. Take the time to walk the boundaries of your home. Begin at the doorway that you feel most called to and walk in a clockwise motion. In the traditions that inform my practice, clockwise is the direction we move in for creating something, and counterclockwise is the direction we move in to undo something. Walk the boundary once, cleansing the space. You can use cleansing herbs, clearing sprays, water, or salt. The second time you walk the boundary of your house, lay down your boundary markers along the walls, in corners, and at the doorways in and out of your home. The third time that you walk the boundary, visualize the energy of the Earth growing up from the ground and up into your boundary markers, making sure to also anchor these markers down into the Earth. As you walk the boundary, use the energy of the Earth to connect the energy of the boundary markers together. Seal the energy into the walls of your home. Complete this action by giving an offering to your land and house spirits, your guardians. You can pour an offering or give an offering outside of the front door or back door of your home.

You can also use this technique for the boundaries of your property. As you build a relationship with your land, your house spirits, and your guides, you will learn what they want from you as offerings and what items they would like to have as boundary markers. Remember boundaries are a part of your living landscape and the relationship you build with your land is essential to maintaining safe boundaries.

Anchors

An anchor is an item that you carry with you in this world that can also be with you in the otherworld to remind you of where you are. Anchors help you to stay stable and grounded when you are doing intense work or you are in place where there are too many things to pay attention to. Anchors can help you process all of the energy that you have moving through your body. They can be points of focus. They also serve the purpose of helping to balance your energy when you are dysregulated. They can help ground you in the present moment.

An anchor can be any object that has meaning to you. I recommend starting with an object that you can hold in your hand like a stone so that you can take it with you wherever you go. Anytime you use it will be a signal of safety for you. Form a bond with your anchor. The more you do this, the stronger the connection will be. You can also make your anchor a concreted item dedicated to a guardian, ancestor, guide, or deity. Anytime you use it, it will activate the bond you have with that being.

Everyday Gestures of Connection

- Prayer
- Invocation
- Offerings
- Listening and communication
- Service

Nexus for Guardians

- Make them a home
- This will be personal and unique to the guardian
- Different guardians for different types of boundaries
 - i.e. land, money, health
- Bowl of dirt
- Tattoos
- Shrines

Petitioning Spirit Allies:

- Invite
 - Prayer and song
- Petition
 - Ask for what you need
- Anchor
 - Make them a home or place to be
 - Create a home for them
 - Focus point, home, anchor
 - Nexus or locus of spirit alliances – the objects the spaces
 - Place of reverence where the spirit may reside
 - Items and places inhabited by spirits
- Offerings
 - Typically, food and libation
- Give care support and reciprocity
 - Feed them, clean them etc.
 - Seasonal custom of washing them and feeding them
 - Feeding them, carrying out a task, giving them something, honoring them, building a relationship with them

Concentrating Tools:

- Cleanse
- Grounding/Shielding
- Blessing Prayer
- Sacred Space
- Intention
- Prayers or Chants
- Repeat for Three Days
- Bring down sacred space
- Blessing prayer
- Cleanse again