

Working with Gods: How to Ditch the Dogma and Rewrite the Rules

Presented by Jamie Waggoner
Mystic South 2026

Workshop Description: Why work with the gods? As magical practitioners, working with deities gives us access to powerful, potent opportunities for inspiration, aid and assistance, mentorship, divine union, and a bone-deep sense of acceptance and belonging. So what does this look like, when we deconstruct patriarchal notions of worship and devotion, and rewrite our own rules of engagement? Jamie has been working with gods and other Unseen Ones in her magical practice for over 25 years. You're invited to join her for a lively discussion about how to approach working with gods, the types of relationships we can build with them, and suggestions for best practices. She'll share her personal journey within the context of her relationship with Hades, with plenty of time for Q&A.

Introduction

- Hello, I'm Jamie. My pronouns are she/her.
 - I'm an author, Pagan priestess, and lover of all things spooky and occult.
 - I've been a practicing witch for 25+ years.
 - I'm the author of *Hades: Myth, Magic and Modern Devotion* (Llewellyn, 2024), and contributor to *Witchology Magazine*, *Haunted Magazine*, *The Rebis*, and *The Feminine Macabre*, among others.
 - I write and teach from my home studio, located in Alabama, U.S.A., which is the ancestral land of the Mvskoke (Muscogee) people, the "People of One Fire". I offer honor and gratitude to the Mvskoke elders and their descendants, and I acknowledge and affirm their sovereignty on those lands.
- In our time together today, we're going to cover a lot of ground...
 - Why you might want to work with the gods
 - How to deconstruct hierarchical and patriarchy notions of worship
 - How to know if a god is into working with you
 - Best practices for engagement and relationship-building
 - Vows, oaths, and commitments
- Remember: take what makes sense to you, leave what doesn't. There are many ways to approach studying and working with deities. These are just some of my thoughts and experiences.

Invocation to Hades and Acknowledgement of Unseen Ones

Your consent is important: we'll start this session with an offering and invocation to Hades. If you don't want to be in the presence of this particular deity, or you're not sure, you can access my slides and speaker notes later. No worries if you need to opt out at any time.

- I invite you to take a breath, if that feels good, and close your eyes or simply soften your gaze. Get centered within yourself.
 - I light this candle as a hearthfire, a flame of welcome, to Hades and all the Unseen Ones who join us today.
 - Invocation: "Hymn to the Unseen One" (*Hades*, chapter one)

Why Work with the Gods

- Group questions:
 - Raise your hand if you have a working relationship with a god or gods?
 - Hold up your fingers (and toes?) to indicate the number of gods you practice regular magic and/or devotional work with?
- A few reasons why you may want to work with gods or other Unseen Ones in your magical practice...
 - To power your spellwork and ritual actions
 - To protect yourself, your loved ones, and/or vulnerable communities
 - To mentor you in a specific skillset
 - As an act of respect, admiration, and/or devotion

Deconstructing the Patriarchal & Hierarchical Narrative of Worship

Hierarchical religious traditions teach us that the gods are "above" us — a more powerful force, more evolved, or more worthy of veneration. This isn't necessarily so. This has a lot more to do with controlling people and resources, than any actual spiritual benefit.

- Let's take a quick look at history...
 - As the written word gained predominance in Western Europe, it was gate-kept and propagandized for centuries by the hierarchy of the Christian church. Written words had power and permanence, and in equating the Bible with ultimate spiritual authority, the church convinced society to believe written words held more value than inner wisdom.
 - Mythology and religion are different, but related, things. Mythology is stories, religion is practice. Mythology is a body of oral and written storytelling about the gods and the universe at large, often (but not always) meant to explain or justify aspects of the natural world and of human culture. Religion is what people do because of said stories.
 - Christianity IS mythology – just like other mythology from around the world and throughout time. Because something is mythology does not mean it cannot resonate as truth and inspire belief for some people.

- Even if you are not Christian, its impact dominates Western culture — its shadow is inescapable. For example, it still drives politics and policies in the US.
- Consider who was recording the myths and traditions: whether it was Christian monks or Pagan philosophers, each had their own filter, bias, and/or agenda.
 - For example: Welsh and Norse mythology recorded by monks.
 - For example: Greek mythology reinforcing patriarchy by treating women like chattel.
- Here's a radical notion: the Unseen Ones are powerful beings, but so are we. We can do and experience things that the gods cannot.
 - Humans are embodied. We are sensory beings.
 - Humans can create art, stories, rituals, and magic that ripple outward through all the realms (physical and metaphysical).
 - Humans and gods (and many other beings!) are co-creating from moment-to-moment.
- Consider that as much as we may need their support they, too, need ours.
 - Our relationships can be based on reciprocity.
 - We have agency to negotiate the terms of our relationships with gods and other incorporeal beings.

How Do I Know a God Wants to Work With Me?

I have been dedicated to the Greek god Hades since 2016. Here's our origin story... (it is also included in the introduction of *Hades: Myth, Magic and Modern Devotion*).

- When it comes to friendships, romantic partnerships, and other types of relationships, sometimes we may find ourselves to be the initiators—making the first move, casting the first tentative line—and sometimes we may find ourselves on the other side of the equation, the ones who are being courted. Devotional relationships with the gods can be very similar.
 - You might feel called to initiate a relationship with a certain god because you are drawn to their energy and mythos, or maybe because you want to invite some of their qualities into your life.
 - In other instances, a deity may reach out to you in a distinctive way—perhaps unexpectedly—and it feels more like they are pursuing you.
 - Both of these experiences, and anything along the spectrum in between, are equally valid.

Grappling with Cultural Appropriation in Deity Relationships

Appropriation is taking things (often cherry picking them) and running with them out of context, without any sort of reciprocity or accountability to make sure you are using/approaching them correctly.

- Three Questions to explore cultural appropriation (credit to Jude Elford):
 - Am I sharing the accurate origin of the practices I am using when I practice them around others? Am I giving credit and citing my sources? Did I actually learn them from a credible source? Do I need to do more research?
 - Am I in an active and meaningful relationship with members of the culture that developed these practices? Who will give me feedback if I am using them incorrectly?
 - Am I engaging in reciprocity by supporting the survival of that culture through activism, volunteering, monetary donations, or other means? Is this an ongoing practice for me?
- For more on this, check out my collaborator Murphy's full four-part blog series ["Cultural Appropriation in Spiritual Practice"](#) on our Way of the Weaver website.

Animism and Consent

Animism is the belief that all living and non-living things — including plants, animals, objects, and natural phenomena — possess a spiritual essence or life force.

- Animism is based in the here and now, on the land, and in the body.
 - Experiences of the Unseen Ones are often felt in the body — the prickle on your skin, your heart beating fast, your hair standing on end, a sense of arousal. The divine speaks to us through the body.
 - Awareness of Unseen Ones emerges in a very land-based way, in certain places at certain times. Some Unseen Ones have names and stories that have been preserved in oral and written tradition, and some don't.
- When we believe that everything is ensouled, all of our relationships can be based on consent.
 - FRIES acronym (from Planned Parenthood):
 - Freely Given (threatening people with hellfire is coercion, for example)
 - Revocable
 - Informed (this one can be tricky with deity)
 - Enthusiastic
 - Specific (don't make open-ended agreements)

Types of Relationships

Just like human relationships, partnerships with deities and spirits involve varying levels of commitment. Some relationships may be short-term for a specific purpose or need, while others may last many years, and still others can land somewhere in the middle.

- Devotional relationships with gods
 - The best way to get to know someone is simply by spending time with them. Or, perhaps more accurately in the case of gods and spirits, by *devoting* time to them. There are myriad ways to show affection and devotion toward the gods.

- Devotional acts both large and small can be performed with the reciprocity of *kharis* (“I give, so that you may give”) in mind, or simply because you feel called to signify feelings of adoration or gratitude with meaningful actions.
 - Devoting time to your gods will help you learn to recognize their unique energy and qualities, and integrate them into your own self (if you so desire). You may also uncover new or forgotten talents, gifts, skills, and preferences in the process!
 - It’s easy to turn community service and volunteer work into an act of devotion by choosing activities that align with your deity’s purview.
 - Ask your deity directly if there is any service work they’d like you to do in their name. For example, working in hospice or cemetery maintenance for Hades.
 - If your lifestyle or physical abilities preclude volunteering your time, you can research causes and groups that are in alignment with their energy and support them through monetary donations.
 - Furthermore, if you have a specialized skill, such as reading tarot cards or offering energetic healing, you can donate your services in the name of your god or spirit being.
 - Small spontaneous acts can be dedicated to your deity with a quick prayer:
 - Picking up trash along a trail
 - Putting money in someone’s expired parking meter
 - Can you think of more examples?
 - Tip: there’s a helpful list of clarifying questions in chapter 9 of *Hades* that will help you pin down what you are looking for in a relationship with deity.
- Working relationships with gods
 - Working relationships with the gods are similar to the Roman custom of *vota*. In ancient Roman religious practices, a *votum* (or *vota*, plural) was a vow or promise made to a deity, but it also referred to that which fulfilled a vow: the actions, offerings, statues, or temples that were promised.
 - *Vota* represented contractual agreements between mortals and gods. It functioned on the supposition that if mortals delivered their end of the bargain, the gods would deliver theirs. *Vota* were indicative of the Latin phrase *quid pro quo*, “something for something” or “a favor for a favor.”
 - It is not necessary to adopt a god as your patron or consider yourself their devotee, in order to have this type of contractual working relationship with them.
 - When you approach a god for a working relationship, or if one approaches you with a specific request, be extremely clear when negotiating the terms of your agreement with them.
 - Refrain from making open-ended bargains.
 - Clearly state when the service you are offering will be considered complete and your understanding of what you will receive from them in the exchange.
 - The ways of the gods are not always copacetic with human ethics, morality, and cultural understandings. You may have to initiate conversations to help them understand concepts like consent, etc.

- Adopting a patron god
 - A patron or matron is a god whom you invite into your life over for a longer period of time; your involvement with them is something more than just engaging them for one ritual, for example, or calling on them to empower the odd spell every now and then.
 - A god can be the patron of one part of your life—for instance, Hades might be your patron of financial planning—or of your life in general. I like to use the word devotee to describe my role in these types of relationships, such as, “I am a devotee of Ceridwen, and she is my matron goddess of poetry and storytelling.”
 - If you prefer to use a gender-neutral term for this relationship, you can call them your benefactor, prime, mentor, or zatron. Zatron is a gender-neutral term that was suggested by one of the participants in our Way of the Weaver program. Can you think of more creative terms?
 - Choosing to adopt a god as your patron is oftentimes a natural result of performing acts of devotion; over time, you begin to resonate with them more and more. You find their presence in your life to be beneficial in some way. You might even feel a sense of existential or transcendent love for them.
 - In my own experience, this type of relationship is very similar to having a beloved, close friend: you enjoy each other’s company, have similar interests, spend a lot of time together, do nice things for one another, and celebrate holidays and significant life events together.
 - Patronage relationships tend to be open-ended, with a natural ebb and flow of attention and activity. They wax and wane organically; it is the generous quality of kharis that feeds these partnerships. People may have more than one patron god in their life at a time or over the course of their lifetime.
 - If your life or desires change, you are not required to continue honoring a god as your patron if you’ve not made any formal promises or commitments to them. However, just like human relationships, plan your exit strategy with gratitude and respect.
- Taking an oath of dedication
 - We’ll dive into this topic in a few minutes. Let’s pause here for a bit of discussion around boundaries and service to the gods in daily life.

Service and Boundaries in Daily Life

What happens if you are feeling strained and stressed by a relationship with an Unseen One?

- Boundaries with gods: what do you need to re-establish balance?
 - Consider asking the Unseen One for the financial resources and other support you require to give this the time and attention it needs.
 - Think about what you are giving to your gods, and what they are giving to you. Does it feel in balance? Like any long term relationship, who is giving the most may ebb and flow with time, but it should not be a perpetual drain on your time, resources, and/or energy.

- You can ask for the Unseen One's consent to "take a break" from tending your connection with them. Pick it back up when you feel more resourced. And, yes, you can break up with an Unseen One.
 - Do this with clarity and respect whenever possible.
 - Occasionally people need to set a very firm, emphatic boundary with an Unseen One who doesn't want to let go. Don't hesitate to do this if it is what you need.
 - Tell the deity to leave you alone in no uncertain terms.
 - Tell them that breaking your consent on this is not okay.
 - Consider planning an official breakup or cord cutting type of ritual with witnesses present (seen and Unseen).
 - Use elemental cleansing to release symbols of your devotion (i.e., burn, bury, cast stuff into moving water, or let the wind take it).
- Boundaries with other humans: how do we navigate sharing (or not sharing) our devotion with others?
 - This is a personal choice — you don't have to share anything about your spiritual beliefs or practices if you don't want to. Consider these questions:
 - Who is in my "circle of safety" for sharing?
 - Do I share more/less about my devotion with some people?
 - What is my response if I am asked about it?
 - What does the Unseen One I am working with have to say about it?
 - Seek a balance between safety and normalizing devotional work.
 - For example, you can be quiet or overt about the fact that community service is an act of devotion for you.

Oaths and Commitments

I took an oath of dedication to Hades in March 2018. We made our magical contract for nine years, and are still in the midst of fulfilling it with each other.

- How do you know the time is right to take an oath of dedication? Some possibilities:
 - You've spent significant time with a particular god at your altar, performing acts of devotion, and studying their mythos.
 - You've worked with them in ritual (solo or in a group).
 - You've spoken with them in trance journey so many times that you've lost count.
 - Perhaps you've even found a few of their other devotees, and asked them to share their thoughts and experiences.
 - You've arrived at a place of clear discernment, beyond the initial thrill of infatuation.
- Let's be clear: dedicating yourself to a god or gods is NOT a prerequisite of being Pagan, polytheist, or an adept magical worker.
 - It does not make you cooler, more badass, or part of some elite club.
 - You can have a plethora of deep, life-changing, ecstatically amazing experiences throughout your entire lifetime having never ventured down the path of dedication.

- Look at taking an oath of dedication as a horizontal move, rather than a vertical one. Slow your roll, and investigate your motives with honest self-reflection:
 - Are you feeling pressured to take this step? You should not feel forced or peer-pressured to take an oath by gods, humans, or any other beings.
 - Is this a passing phase or interest? Taking an oath is not a reversible scenario like when you get tired of the awesome cereal you've been eating on repeat for three months, and suddenly decide you never want to taste it again. Oaths are magically-binding contracts.
 - Is an oath of dedication a "filler" for something else you feel is missing in your life or existing relationships?
 - Do you have codependent tendencies? Could this be influencing your decision?
 - The ways of the gods are not necessarily our ways. Perform a risk assessment: do you have the mental, emotional, psychic, and spiritual preparation necessary to navigate oaths and contracts with gods? Do you need to build more skills before taking this step?
 - Do you have a spiritual and/or magical support network in place?
 - Are you ready for your life to change, possibly in unexpected and/or uncomfortable ways?
- After considering all of the above, here are some ways to help determine if, YES, it is the right time for you to take an oath of dedication:
 - You can clearly articulate why you feel called to take this oath, including how you (specifically) are prepared and suited to fulfill it, and how it might benefit you and/or others.
 - You are prepared to enter into a magical contract with a god.
 - Remember, when you bind yourself to an Unseen One through an oath of dedication, you are inviting them to co-create your life.
 - You have received affirmative synchronicities and signs concerning your decision, either spontaneously or by asking for them.
 - You have confirmed your intuition with divination, such as tarot, runes, etc.
- Tips on how craft your oath and plan a ritual:
 - That's a whole other presentation (lol) - !
 - Chapter 10 of *Hades* is all about crafting oaths and sealing them in ritual. There are sample oaths included, as well as an example format for an oath-taking ritual.

Group Sharing and Conversation Time

- Would anyone like to share their reactions and/or experiences?
- What other questions do you have about working with the gods?
- Discussion prompts:
 - How do you incorporate devotion into your daily routines?
 - What reciprocity can we engage in when working with deities outside our culture?
 - What do we do when deities in our own lineage are not as well-documented and harder to learn about than analogous deities from another culture?

How to Connect with Me

- Purchase my books:
 - *Hades: Myth, Magic and Modern Devotion*
 - *The Feminine Macabre vol. IV*
 - *The Rebis: Devil Edition*
- Join the River Styx Book Club! Winter 2027 cohort is enrolling now:
<https://jamiewaggoner.ticketspice.com/river-styx-book-club-winter-2027>
- Check out the Underworld Rising retreat, Oct. 15–19, 2026, in north Georgia:
<https://www.jamiewaggoner.com/events/underworld-rising-retreat>
- Way of the Weaver – Magic, Justice, and Community: www.wayoftheweaver.com
 - Check out our Way of the Weaver podcast on your favorite app
 - Study trance journey with us! Our winter 2027 module, Traversing the Realms, is enrolling now: <https://jamiewaggoner.ticketspice.com/traversing-the-realms-2027>
- My website: www.jamiewaggoner.com
 - Sign up for my email list to check out all of my upcoming events
- My socials: @jmwaggoner on Instagram, Facebook, YouTube

Thank You!

- Gratitude to Hades and His Underworld retinue
- Gratitude to the Mystic South team
- Thank y'all for your time and attention today!

My Linktree:

