GENERAL

do what thou wilt a life of aleister crowley

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Introduction

When you hear the phrase **“do what thou wilt a life of Aleister Crowley,”**you’re likely picturing a mystical figure, a counter cultural icon, and perhaps an enigmatic motto that has permeated modern occultism. Aleister Crowley (1875 1947) was a British occultist, writer, and mystic whose ideas challenged Victorian morality and redefined the spiritual landscape of the 20th century. His most famous dictum, “Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law,” has become a rallying cry for seekers of personal freedom, a cornerstone of Thelema, and a subject of controversy in equal measure. This article explores Crowley’s life, the origins and meaning of the “do what thou wilt” principle, how it can be applied in everyday living, and its lasting impact on contemporary culture.

Who Was Aleister Crowley?

Born Edward Alexander Crowley in 1875, he later adopted the pseudonym Aleister Crowley, a name he claimed was given to him by a spirit. Raised in a strict, religious household, Crowley’s early life was marked by intellectual curiosity and a fascination with the occult. He studied at Oxford, where he became involved with the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, an organization that introduced him to ceremonial magic.

Throughout his life, Crowley wrote more than 70 books, essays, and poems. He founded the religious philosophy of Thelema, which centers on the idea of discovering and following one’s True Will. His works—such as *Magick in Theory and Practice* and *777 and Other Qabalistic Writings*—continue to be referenced by scholars and practitioners alike.

Key Milestones in Crowley’s Career

- 1888: Joined the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.
- 1904: Became the first Grand Master of the Golden Dawn.
- 1910: Published The Book of the Law, the foundational text of Thelema.
- 1920s: Traveled extensively, including a notable trip to Tibet.
- 1947: Passed away in Hastings, England.

The Birth of a Principle: “Do What Thou Wilt”

The phrase “Do what thou wilt” originates from *The Book of the Law*, a text Crowley claimed was dictated to him by a non human entity named Aiwass in 1904. The line appears in Chapter III, Section 4: “Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law.” This statement is often misunderstood as a free wheeling endorsement of hedonism or moral relativism. In reality, the principle is a call to align one’s actions with their True Will—an individual, authentic purpose that transcends societal expectations.

It is important to distinguish between the literal meaning of “do what thou wilt” and the broader context of Thelema’s ethical framework. Crowley was not advocating for chaos or self destructive behavior; rather, he emphasized intentionality, self knowledge, and responsibility.

Semantic Breakdown of the Phrase

1. Do – Action; the act of bringing thoughts into reality.

2. What – The specific intention or desire.
3. Thou Wilt – The individual's True Will, the deepest purpose.

The Law of True Will in Thelema

At its core, Thelema is a system that encourages the discovery and pursuit of one's True Will. The phrase "Do what thou wilt" is a directive to follow that Will. The law can be broken down into three interconnected components:

- Self Discovery – Understanding your authentic desires.
- Intentionality – Acting with purpose, not impulsively.
- Responsibility – Recognizing the impact of your actions on the world.

In practice, this means that a person who has identified their True Will will act in ways that are harmonious with their deepest values, rather than being swayed by external pressures.

How to Identify Your True Will

1. Reflect on moments when you felt most alive and unencumbered.
2. Write down recurring themes and interests.
3. Seek feedback from trusted friends or mentors.
4. Experiment with new experiences and observe how they resonate.
5. Reassess regularly to refine your understanding.

Applying "Do What Thou Wilt" in Everyday Life

Many people wonder how a mystical principle can influence their daily routine. Here are practical ways to incorporate the idea into modern living:

Career Choices

- Choose a profession that aligns with your passions, not just financial gain.
- Set long term goals that reflect your authentic interests.
- Evaluate opportunities based on how well they fit your True Will.

Personal Relationships

- Build connections with people who support your growth.
- Communicate honestly about your values and boundaries.
- Let go of relationships that stifle your personal evolution.

Spiritual Practices

- Experiment with meditation, journaling, or ritual to deepen self awareness.
- Study various traditions to find what resonates.
- Integrate practices that reinforce your sense of purpose.

Influence on Modern Culture

While Aleister Crowley remains a polarizing figure, his ideas have permeated many aspects of contemporary society. The phrase "do what thou wilt" has been adopted in literature, music, film, and even corporate branding. Below are some notable examples.

Literature

- Robert A. Heinlein's Stranger in a Strange Land echoes Thelemic themes.
- Neil Gaiman's Sandman series references Crowley's concepts.

Music

- David Bowie's album Blackstar contains lyrics inspired by Crowley's work.
- The band Tool incorporates Thelemic symbolism in their artwork.

Film and Television

- In the film Blade Runner 2049, the character Joi uses a phrase reminiscent of "Do what thou wilt."
- The TV series True Detective includes references to Crowley's writings.

Criticisms and Misinterpretations

Despite its philosophical depth, the "do what thou wilt" principle is often criticized for being misinterpreted as a license for immoral behavior. Critics argue that the lack of a clear ethical boundary can lead to harmful actions. However, supporters counter that the principle is inherently ethical because it demands honesty with oneself and accountability to the greater good.

Common Misconceptions

- It endorses anarchy.
- It encourages indulgence at the expense of others.
- It is a simplistic mantra devoid of context.

Clarifying the Ethical Framework

In Thelema, the phrase is coupled with the law of *Love is the Law, Love under Will*. This means that while you pursue your True Will, you must also respect the Will of others. The ethical balance is achieved through:

- Empathy toward those affected by your choices.
- Commitment to personal growth without causing harm.
- Continuous self reflection to align actions with higher values.

Modern Thelemites and Communities

Today, there are numerous groups and online communities dedicated to practicing Thelema. These communities provide resources, mentorship, and a sense of belonging for those seeking to live according to the "do what thou wilt" principle. Some of the most active communities include:

- The Ordre de la Rose-Croix—a modern organization that blends traditional occult practices with contemporary life.
- The Temple of the Golden Dawn—a re established order that follows the original Golden Dawn rituals.
- Online forums such as Thelema.org and Reddit's r/Thelema, where members share experiences and insights.

Practical Steps to Embody the Principle

If you're intrigued by the idea of living a life guided by "do what thou wilt," consider the following actionable steps:

1. Set aside time each day for introspection and journaling.
2. Create a vision board that reflects your True Will.
3. Practice mindful decision making by asking yourself if an action aligns with your deepest values.
4. Surround yourself with supportive individuals who encourage authenticity.
5. Reevaluate your path periodically to ensure continued alignment.

Conclusion

The phrase **“do what thou wilt a life of Aleister Crowley”**encapsulates more than a catchy slogan; it represents a profound call to self discovery, intentionality, and responsibility. Crowley’s legacy, though controversial, offers a framework for living authentically and aligning one’s actions with their True Will. By understanding the historical context, embracing the ethical nuances, and applying the principle in everyday life, you can cultivate a more purposeful, fulfilling existence. Whether you are a seasoned occultist or simply curious about alternative paths to personal growth, the timeless wisdom of Thelema invites you to explore your own unique journey toward self actualization.

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