

An Introduction to Banishing Rituals

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If I had a £1 for every person I've met over the years who's said, "oh I don't bother with banishing rituals" - and then wondered why they started to have problems with their magic - I'd probably have, er..well enough money for a meal in a decent London restaurant. A Banishing Ritual is one of the first practical exercises that you should learn in magic (in my view, anyway), and by doing so, you can save yourself a lot of trouble later on.

Banishing is also known as Centering, which in many respects, is a more accurate term for the exercise.

So what is a Banishing Ritual? Essentially, Banishing has three aims. The first is that it 'warms you up' as a preparation for doing further ritual, meditation, or whatever, enabling you to put aside 'everyday thoughts' - "what's on TV later", etc. It allows you to take on the role of 'magician' (I'll go into this later on), and to place yourself in the 'centre' of your magical universe - the axis mundi. Secondly, Banishing sets up the space you are working in as 'sacred', so that the loft, bedroom, basement or wherever you are becomes, temporarily, a 'temple' space. Thirdly, a Banishing 'clears' the atmosphere of the area that you're working in of 'psychic debris' - I'm not entirely happy with this description, so I'll try and expand on that later as well.

Most Banishing rituals have three basic components:

1. A section to focus awareness on the BodyMind.
2. A section which demarcates the main zones, gates, quarters or dimensions of the chosen magical universe - at which you are the centre.
3. An identification with a chosen source of inspiration - merging the macrocosm (total psychocosm) with the microcosm (self).

Example Banishing

There follows an example Banishing ritual that I will explain in terms of the above. It was developed for use in a group known as 'The Circle of Stars' which was active in Leeds a few years ago.

1. Begin facing East¹ and stand, arms by your sides, head tilted slightly upwards, breathing slowly and regularly. Clear your mind of thoughts. Reach upwards with your right hand breathing in, and bring it down the centreline of your body whilst breathing out, visualising a beam of white light passing down through your body, from above your head to below your feet.

Next, turn your head to the left and point with your left hand, then turn to your right and stretch your right arm out, forming a Tau Cross.²

2 - breathe in, hold, and breathe out, visualising a ray of white light running across your body, from left to right. Then, whilst breathing in, bring your arms across your body and fold them across your chest. Breathe out, and visualise a cross of white light expanding outwards from your chest, along the two axes you have made. Feel yourself to be supercharged with energy, yet at the same time, calm and ready.

This completes the first stage of the Banishing, and is known in some magical systems as 'The Cross of Light'.

3. With your right hand, draw a Pentagram in the air before you. Begin at the apex and draw down to the left-hand point, then across to the right, across to the left, down to the lower right, and back up to the apex. Visualise the Pentagram glowing with energy. Then point your right hand into its centre and slowly intone the letters I-A-O³ - drawing out each letter and visualising the pentagram glowing brightly with more energy as you do so. Turn and repeat this for South, West, and North.

3. Facing East, raise your arms and say:

"About me flare five-pointed stars,

Above my head, the Infinite Stars

Within my breast there flames a Star

Every Man, and every woman is a Star

Behold, A Circle of Stars."⁴

In this example, the first section of the Banishing focuses attention on your BodyMind, the second makes the space demarcation - marking out the four quarters, and the third is the 'union' with the infinite - 'as above, so below' if you will. After the third section, you are ready to begin your exercise, other ritual work, etc. If you were doing the Banishing as an exercise in itself, repeat the first section, and then after a pause - clap your hands together as a sign of ending the exercise. To close using this Banishing, do the rest of your work and then run through Sections 1 - 3 again.

Notes

1. When working indoors, I often designate 'East' as the wall with a window in it.
2. The Tau Cross has a lot of magical information attached to it - go look it up!
3. The letters I.A.O signify the 'magical' formula of growth (Isis), destruction (Apothis) and Rebirth (Osiris).
4. This rubric is quite 'Thelemic' in style - we chose it for its 'poetic' quality.

Do it with Style!

As with all kinds of magic, it's not so much what you do, it's how you do it. A little dash of theatricality does help a lot. For example, when using a Banishing to open a working, I let a tone of awe and anticipation creep into my voice. I try and create, using voice, gesture, and posture, an atmosphere of expectation and tension. Similarly, when using a Banishing to close a working, I try to project an air of finality, satisfaction, and success. My spoken words are less strident and commanding, and much gentler in intonation. This is certainly useful in group workings, but also useful in solo work - since the feedback that you give yourself also contributes to the atmosphere that you create. As Granny Weatherwax says - "it's Headology that counts".

Psychic Debris

I said at the beginning that I wasn't happy with this, so here goes. A Banishing can be a magical equivalent to tidying up (which you should do before working anyway). Since most of us are not fortunate enough to have a room which can be used solely for magical work, we have to use areas which are used for day-to-day living as well. This creates an atmosphere which you can pick up through unconscious cues, which it is well to 'Banish' before starting focused magical work - or it might well disturb you.

Similarly, after a working, you need to dispel the particular atmosphere that you've created, or you might well find that it 'clashes' with the everyday atmosphere that you associate with the room. On this point, it can be useful to Banish a room if there's been a particularly bad argument in it (the tension lingers), if you or someone else have been pouring out emotions all over it, or if you feel 'tired' within it. This sort of effect is covered by the term 'Psychic Debris'.

Practice

Your chosen Banishing can be done as a daily practice - on awakening, and before retiring. It should be used to open and close any magical activity. In time, you will find that the ritual can be done almost on 'autopilot', and the associated feelings arise without conscious effort. It should be taken as an encouraging sign if you start having dreams about Banishing. I've often, during a nightmare, resorted to Banishing whatever-it-is that's bothering me, and nine times out of ten it does work. An interesting note, on Banishings & dreams is that, despite the fact that over the years I've used many different forms of banishing exercise, when in dreams, I always seem to use the Golden Dawn Lesser Pentagram ritual - probably because that was the very first one that I was taught.

Different Strokes

The basic Banishing ritual that I have given above combines gesture, breath control, visualisation, energising, colours, symbols, and invocation. These are all essential elements to ritual magic that practice in, will stand you in good stead later on. Different Paths have different approaches to Banishing. As a Wiccan Neophyte, I was taught a method of 'Casting the Circle' which, on average, took a good 10-15 minutes. This is an excellent way of setting up a sacred space for a few hours' worth of ritual. It combined not only the elements given above, but also circumbulation (in a manner that suggested 'rising on the planes'), elemental invocations, altar consecration, establishing a sacred space using salt & water, incense & fire (candle). As a beginner I found this useful because it helped me build up my ability to visualise slowly (not everybody is good at visualisation automatically) and it had a strong emotional power to it, which is also important. In the circle, I felt 'safe', guarded, and ready for further

magick - which all helps you gain the confidence you need. We did use the Lesser Banishing as well - but more for 'shorter' workings. But whether a Banishing is elaborate or minimalist, is up to you. The important thing is to know why you're doing it (and some people don't get told the whys in magic - just to do it), and that once you have the basic elements, you can add to them as you like. It is important that the symbols, images etc. are meaningful to you. Each time that you do a Banishing, you are balancing the different aspects of yourself & your psychocosm into a more dynamic whole. The underlying structure of the exercise remains similar whether you are working Wicca, Qabalah, Tantra, Thelema, or even Chaos.

The Magical Personality

Why do people take on magical names? Possibly to impress their friends, but more often because they wish to create a distinct magical persona which they can slip into when doing their magical stuff. This is why the magical scene is littered with Merlins, Morganas, Taniths, Circes, Taleisins, etc - all names of wizardly folk. The 'magical personality' is what you become when you put your robe on, light candles & incense, and start fiddling with causal reality. The basic distinction is that 'you' as your normal personality might have all kinds of doubts about this magic business, and enjoy long conversations about archetypes and such-like, but your 'magical' self, if nothing else, is 110% sure (fingers crossed) that what you're doing is effective, and is going to work, even if it takes you all night! If you've ever played 'Dungeons & Dragons', you should know what I mean. A D&D game is a few bits of cardboard, coffee cups, lead figures, lots of dice, and scattered sheets of notes. Yet you take on your character to such an extent that when he/she/it is killed, it can be quite a shock. In magic, all the preparation - and here the Banishing is one of the most important bits - gets you 'into role' as the (hopefully) powerful and confident magician. And when you finish off your working, the second banishing stops you going down the pub and still acting as though you rule the Universe. Okay, well you might, but not everyone will appreciate this.

Outdoors

It must be said, I've never felt entirely happy doing the standard forms of Banishing outdoors. I think that this is in part due to the different sense of space that I have when working in some wild spot. I find that this is particularly true if the place I am working at is a Power Spot. Power Spots may be natural areas, or places where other magicians have worked at in the past.

I think that outdoors working is something that you have to get a feel for by intuition, and that the 'rules' of indoor ritual don't always apply. Perhaps someone else would like to take this point up.

Finally, as you read your way through the multitude of occult how-to books available, you'll find lots of different Banishing ritual formats. Remember, there's no one right way to do it, just the way that works for you.