

Armor of the Gods

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Armor of the Gods

We can wear the gods. Anyone can sit in the presence or field of a deity to connect with them, exchange energy, receive gifts and insights, make offerings. This practice is common to spiritual systems. In Witchcraft it's called drawing down the moon, in Tantra it's called deity yoga, in Hellenistic ritual it's called theurgy or god-work, in Golden Dawn ceremonial it's called assumption of god-form. In all these practices you call a single deity.

There is another practice of wearing the gods. This form maps multiple deities onto the human body. The effect of this practice is to build up an energy net in and around in the subtle body to protect the practitioner physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. In Tantra it's called nyasa, which means the act of placing a kavacam, a word translated into English as armor.

I perform three specific practices. One comes from the Tantric Hindu tradition and is practiced today by millions of people. The second comes from the Kemetic tradition which is being revived in the African American community and by sincere Pagan and magical practitioners. Finally I was inspired by these practices to shape a third version in the Hellenistic tradition. I draw on each of these for my personal protection in activist work, in teaching, and in everyday life.

Egyptian Armor

The Egyptian practice comes from the 42nd chapter of the Book of Going Forth by Day, also called the Book of the Dead. There are academic translations and practitioner formulations.

The most complete version of the work was written for the scribe Ani to use in the afterlife. E.A. Wallis Budge brought the Papyrus of Ani to the British Museum where it is still located at this writing. He translated the text as The Egyptian Book of the Dead in 1895. You can find it online or buy a reprinted version.

Dr. Raymond Faulkner updated the translation in a version billed as the first authentic presentation (a clear critique of Budge's work!) The Egyptian Book of the Dead, The Book of Going Forth By Day includes translated text and full color images, with commentary by Dr. Ogden Goelet and a preface by Carol Andrews.

Chapter 42 of the papyrus instructs the deceased scribe Ani to identify the parts of his body as netjer or Egyptian goddesses and gods. Faulkner's translation is summarized in Appendix A below.

Richard Reidy shaped this idea into a ritual for everyday use by contemporary practitioners in Eternal Egypt, Ancient Rituals for the Modern World. He called the ritual "The Apotheosis Rite for Bodily Members: Divine Identifications of the Parts of the Human Body". He noted that there are other texts which associate different deities to the parts of the body, and encouraged practitioners to experiment and find their own associations. Reidy's list of deities attached to body parts is summarized in Appendix B below.

In the Papyrus of Ani, once the person has worked through all the assignments of deities to parts of the body, the prayer ends with a phrase proclaiming that the person and the gods are united. Faulkner translates the phrase: "There is no member of mine devoid of a god". Reidy gives a more poetic version.

<blockquote>

My members are Netjeru (gods); I am a Netjer (god) completely. There is not a member in me without a Netjer; the Netjeru have become my members.

</blockquote>

A third version is familiar to ceremonial magick practitioners. The Golden Dawn used this phrase in the Adeptus Minor initiation ritual and in the consecration of the Vault of the Adepts, rituals found in Israel Regardie's book The Golden Dawn.

. The line was then incorporated by Aleister Crowley into Liber XV: The Gnostic Mass: "There is no part of me that is not of the gods."

Several versions of the Book of the Dead were inscribed on tomb walls, guiding the newly deceased through the perilous process of re-assembling the scattered self to gain the important ability to move and accept offerings. This has served as a ritual template for living practitioners to assemble a divine identity while still being alive. The Golden Dawn Adeptus Minor ritual identifies the initiate with the death and rebirth of Christian Rosenkreutz. In the Gnostic Mass a team of ritualists wield a network of energies enabling the priest and the congregants to navigate a ritual death and rebirth. Contemporary practitioners of Kemetic religion say the prayer to strengthen their connection with the deities while they are still in the land of the living.

To use the prayer you may say “My ____ is ____”. For example, “My hair is Nun”. You can use either Faulkner’s list or Reidy’s list. You may also look up Reidy’s work and recite his version; in his hands it is a beautiful ritual.

Hindu Goddess Armor

It is fascinating to find the same idea of associating body parts with deities in the Hindu religious tradition. There are some differences between the Egyptian and Indian texts. While the Kemetic version was used for the newly deceased, the Hindu version creates a protection for the living practitioner. Also, the Kemetic religion was interrupted in its native land and is revived today by religious reconstructionists mostly living outside Egypt. Hindu religion is alive, contiguous with its past, and practiced by more than a billion people today.

The Devi Kavacam or Goddess Armor is embedded in the Markandeya Purana and dates to the first few centuries before the common era. It is recited by practitioners as a stand-alone prayer of protection or as a preliminary to chanting the Chandi Path. This text is known as the Devi Mahatmya and also forms part of the Markandeya Purana. It tells the story of Goddess Durga’s defeat of various demons, most notably Mahishasur, the buffalo demon. Images of Durga stabbing Mahishasur flood India and Nepal during the autumn harvest festival Navratri.

The stotram begins by listing the Navdurga or nine forms of Durga, then names the eight matrikas or mothers along with their animal vahanas or vehicles. Next goddesses are named to protect the eight directions, from

east and south-east through to north and north-east, then above and below. This surrounds the person with goddesses in a sphere. Devis are then invoked to protect left, right, in front and behind.

The next part of the chant launches into a list in the form of a petition: may this devi protect this part of me. The scan begins at the top of the head and works down to the soles of the feet. Along the way the list includes interior organs and fluids. Then the prayer branches out to include less tangible aspects of personhood: vital energies, life force, shadow, knowledge, success, wealth. The protection reaches out to include spouse, children, relatives and animals. Finally goddesses are asked for protection on the life journey, everywhere, and including anything that wasn't specifically mentioned in the list. It is a very thorough prayer. Appendix C gives an outline of the goddesses and their associations.

A web search on “Devi Kavacam English” turns up transliterations of the Sanskrit into the English alphabet. These are helpful to chant along with the recordings. There are fewer actual English translations of the text. Swami Satyananda Saraswati's book Chandi Path is one of them, although he does not list the actual names of the goddesses but translates them as forces - for example, Maheshwari becomes “the Energy of the Great Seer of All”. However Dr. Dinesh Sehgal gives an English translation which includes the names of the goddesses.

I've been fortunate enough to receive the Sanskrit alphabet, study pronunciation, and to receive the Kavacam, so I chant it from the Chandi Path transliteration. My teachers encourage us all to learn even a little bit of Sanskrit as the sounds themselves are energy forces. However you can speak it in the English translation. You can also listen to one of the recordings of the chant and just put its energy around you.

Hellenistic Armor

Theurgy is the Greek term describing the human interaction with the gods. In theurgic practice gods can be called into statues, into other people, or into yourself. All these operations work with just one deity at a time. I don't know of a surviving practice which places multiple deities on the body in the same way that the Book of the Dead and the Devi Kavacam do.

The Roman poet Manilius wrote the *Astronomica* in the first century of the common era. We are very lucky that the entire book has survived. It describes the signs of the zodiac and how to cast a horoscope. In one paragraph Manilius gives a paragraph linking the twelve astrological signs to the twelve Olympian deities.

One day as I was reading Manilius it struck me that the gods could map onto the human body. Verses 443-452 link the twelve astrological signs to the twelve Olympian deities. The verses immediately following, 453-465, link the zodiac to the parts of the human body. Here is a table with the two associations.

Deity	Sign	Body part
Athena	Ares	Head
Aphrodite	Taurus	Neck
Apollo	Gemini	Arms and shoulders
Hermes	Cancer	Chest
Zeus and Cybele	Leo	Sides and shoulder-blades
Demeter	Virgo	Stomach
Hephaestus	Libra	Hips
Ares	Scorpio	Genitals
Hestia	Capricorn	Knees
Hera	Aquarius	Thighs
Poseidon	Pisces	Feet

If we remove the center column, the deities are mapped onto the parts of the body. I hasten to add that no one has suggested that Manilius intended this, but the idea jumped out at me immediately.

I engaged in a year of theurgic practice in which I invoked each of the deities during their astrological month. To test this idea, at the end of the month I touched the body part and said the name of the deity. When the entire set was completed I had established the complete set. There is no part of me that is not of the gods!

Here is the completed armor.

Start by saying “I am protected by:”, then touch each body part in turn and say the deity’s name.

Head: Athena
Neck: Aphrodite
Arms: Apollo
Chest: Hermes
Sides: Zeus and Cybele
Stomach: Demeter
Hips: Hephaestus
Genitals: Ares
Knees: Hestia
Thighs: Hera
Feet: Poseidon

Finish by saying: “I am protected by the gods.”

Appendix A: Faulkner’s list

Here are the deities associated with body parts in Faulkner’s translation of chapter 42 of the Papyrus of Ani.

Hair: Nun
Face: Re
Eyes: Hathor
Nose: She who presides over her lotus leaf
Lips: Anubis
Molars: Selket
Incisors: Isis
Arms: Ram, Lord of Mendes
Breasts: Neith, Lady of Sais
Back: Seth
Phallus: Osiris
Muscles: Lords of Keraha
Chest: He who is greatly majestic
Belly and spine: Sekhmet
Buttocks: Eye of Horus
Thighs and calves: Nut
Feet: Ptah
Fingers: Orion
Toes: living uraei

All my flesh: Thoth

Appendix B: Reidy's list

Here are the deities associated with body parts in Reidy's translation of chapter 42 of the Papyrus of Ani.

Hair: Nun, the Primordial One

Face: Ra, Lord of Life

Eyes: Hwt-Hrw (Hathor), Lady of Jubilation

Nose: Amun, the Hidden One

Lips: Heka, Eldest Magician

Teeth: Khepera, the Becoming One

Blood: Min, Lord of Fertility

Neck: Aset (Isis), Great of Magic

Hands: Khnum, He who shapes and forms the Ka

Fingers and leg-bones: Uraei, gracious protectresses

Shoulders: Wadjet, the Rising One, protectress

Forearms: Neith, Lady of Sais, the Veiled One

Backbone: Sutekh (Set), Slayer of the serpent, the Chosen One of Ra

Phallus: Osiris, Lord of those who are 'true of voice'

Vulva: Bast, lady of love, lady of joy

Flesh: Anpu (Anubis), Seer of Hearts, wise guide and counselor

Muscles and back: Sekhmet, the Great One of healing

Buttocks: Eye of Heru (Horus), the Complete One, the Perfected One

Hips and Thighs: Nut, the Azure One

Feet: Ptah, He Who Hears Prayer

Toes: Living falcons, carrying me where I would go in safety and in peace

All my flesh: Djehuty (Thoth).

Appendix C: Devi Kavacam

The invocation starts by listing the nine forms of Durga or Navdurga:

Shailaputri, Brahmacarini, Chandraganta, Kushmanda, Skandamata,
Kayayani, Kalaratri, Mahagauri, Siddhidatri

Next the prayer lists the eight matrikas or mothers, along with the vehicles on which they stand or sit:

Chamnunda on a corpse, Varahi on a buffalo, Aindri on an elephant, Vaishanvi on a condor, Mahewari on a bull, Kaumari on a peacock, Lakshmi on a lotus holding a lotus, Ishwari on a bull, Brahmi on a swan

Goddesses are invoked in the ten directions, the eight points of the compass plus above and below, and one additional goddess for all ten.

East: Aindri
 South-east: Agni Devata
 South: Varahi
 South-west: Khadgadarini
 South-west: Varuni
 North-west: Mrgavahni
 North: Kaumari
 North-east: Shuladarini
 Above: Brahmani
 Below: Vaishnavi
 All ten directions: Chamunda on a corpse
 Front: Jaya
 Rear: Vijaya
 Left: Ajita
 Right: Aparajita

Then the text launches into the list of devis associated with the body and other aspects of the person.

Dyotini: topknot
 Uma: head
 Maladhari: forehead
 Yashswini: eye-brows
 Trinetra: between the eye-brows
 Yamaghanta: on the nose
 Shankini: eyes
 Dwaravasini: ears
 Kalika: cheeks
 Shankari: ears
 Sugandha: nose
 Charchika: lip
 Amrtakala: lower lip

Saraswati: tongue
Kaumari: teeth
Chandika: throat
Chitra-ghanta: soundbox
Mahamaya: crown of the head
Kamakshi: chin
Sarvamangala: speech
Bhadrakali: neck
Dhanurdhari: back
Neelagreeva: throat
Nalakubari: windpipe
Khadgini: shoulders
Vajra-dharini: arms.
Dandini: hands
Ambika: fingers
Shuleshwari: nails
Kuleshwari: belly
Mahadevi: breast
Shuladharini: abdomen
Lalita: heart
Kamini: navel
Guhyeshwari: genitals
Kamika: reproductive organs
Mahishavasini: anus
Bhagavati: waist
Vindhyavasini: knees
Mahabala: hips.
Narasimi: my ankles
Tajjasi: feet
Shri: toes
Talavasini: soles
Danshtrakarali: nails
Urdhvakeshini: hair
Kauberi: pores
Vagishwari: skin
Parvati: blood, marrow of the bones, fat and bone
Kalaratri: intestines
Mukuteshwari: bile and liver
Padmavati: Chakras
Chudamani: phlegm (or lungs)

Jwalamukhi: lustre
 Abhedya: all the joints
 Brahmani: semen (contemporary practitioners may say fluids)
 Chatreshwari: shadow
 Dharmadharini: ego, superego and intellect
 Vajrahasta: five vital breaths
 Kalyanashobhana: pranas (life force)
 Yogini: sense organs
 Narayani: knowledge, action, desire
 Varahi: the life
 Vaishnavi: dharma
 Lakshmi: -success and fame
 Chakrini: wealth and knowledge
 Indrani: relatives
 Chandika: cattle
 Mahalakshmi: children
 Bhairavi: spouse
 Supatha: journey
 Kshemakari: way
 Mahalakshmi: king's court
 Vijaya: everywhere
 Jayanti: any place that has not been mentioned in the Kavach and has thus remained unprotected

Appendix D: The lists of Manilius

This is the translation in the Loeb edition of the *Astronomica*, book 2, lines 439-447.

Ram: Pallas
 Bull: Cytherean
 Twins: Phebus
 Crab: Mercury
 Lion: Jupiter and the Mother of the Gods
 Virgin: Ceres
 Balance: Vulcan
 Scorpion: Mars
 Hunter: Diana
 Capricorn: Vesta

Aquarius: Juno
Fishes: Neptune

Here is the same list using the modern names for the signs and the Olympian deities.

Ares: Athena
Taurus: Aphrodite
Gemini: Apollo
Cancer: Hermes
Leo: Zeus and Cybele
Virgo: Demeter
Libra: Hephaestus
Scorpio: Ares
Capricorn: Hestia
Aquarius: Hera
Pisces: Poseidon

Here is the Loeb edition's English translation of the signs and body parts.

Ram: head
Bull: handsome neck
Twins: arms and shoulders
Crab: breast
Lion: sides and shoulder-blades
Maid: belly
Balance: loins
Scorpion: groin
Centaur: thighs
Capricorn: knees
Waterman: shanks
Fishes: feet

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