

# **Shifting, Shamanism and Therianthropy:**

**Magical Techniques For Your Therioside**

**By Lupa**

**Self-published, 2007**

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## Also By Lupa

From Immanion Press/Megalithica Books

*Fang and Fur, Blood and Bone: A Primal Guide to Animal Magic* (2006)

*A Field Guide to Otherkin* (April 2007)

*Kink Magic: Sex Magic Beyond Vanilla* (with Taylor Ellwood, November 2007)

Self-Published

*The Lupa Liturgy* (2007)



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## Introduction

*There is a wolf in me...I keep the wolf because the wilderness gave it to me, and the wilderness will not let it go.* —Carl Sandburg, “The Wilderness”<sup>1</sup>

That’s been one of my favorite poems ever since I first read excerpts of it around the age of ten or so in a book on animal behavior. It’s not one of Sandburg’s better-known poems—at least not one of the ones that ends up in high school English text books or compendiums of famous poetry. But it speaks to me on numerous levels of my being, spiritual and otherwise.

I’ve known there was something lupine about me ever since I was about two years old. For years I often felt like I was in the wrong body, meant to be born as a wolf instead of a human. It wasn’t so severe that I couldn’t lead a perfectly normal human life, with friends and family and school (and later on, work) and hobbies and such. But no matter how I tried to ignore it, there was always this persistent feeling of “wolf” inside me. Sure, I was fascinated by wolves, and had been as long as I could remember; and maybe I just helped to condition an early imprint and convinced myself that instead of just liking wolves, I was one myself.

Telling myself it wasn’t true didn’t help, though, and years of denial only frustrated me. I discovered paganism (and totemism) right about the same time I was introduced to the concept of therianthropy in the spring of 1996. I don’t think I called it that at that point—I believe I just said “lycanthropy”—but the basic concept was the same. There were other people out there who identified as nonhuman animals on some fundamental level, and it wasn’t something external, like an animal totem.

Like many therianthropes, the first few years after I Awakened to the realization of being therian was a period of self-exploration and coming to terms with myself. It was also a time spent dealing with fairly frequent involuntary shifts (nonphysical, mind you). In my own case, at least, the shifts were caused by an imbalance between the Wolf and the Human aspects of myself. If I ignored my Wolf self for too long, it made its presence known through a shift (sometimes at inconvenient times). On the other hand, I found that if I allowed myself to be both Wolf and Human, I had much better control over both aspects.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.buchenwaldandbeyond.com/beyond/the\\_wilderness.htm](http://www.buchenwaldandbeyond.com/beyond/the_wilderness.htm)

At first, the shifts would take me completely unaware. They could be triggered by strong emotions, and not just aggressive ones, but sometimes they seemed to happen for no apparent reason. Growing tired of the inconvenience of getting hit with a shift in situations where I really couldn't do much about it, I started paying attention to the warning signs. Eventually I was able to pinpoint certain psychological and physiological phenomena that marked an impending shift. For me, this usually manifested as a particular type of anxiety, mixed with claustrophobia if I was indoors or in a crowd, and a certain indescribable "tension" throughout the muscles of my entire body. Sometimes this would be accompanied by the vivid sensation of having fur, a tail, wolf ears, etc. (what I later learned were the therian/Otherkin version of phantom limb syndrome). While I was pretty sure at the time I wasn't going to physically turn into a wolf, I could definitely see how people going through similar situations could assume otherwise!

Once I recognized these signs I was able to at the very least excuse myself from a situation if a shift would have been inconvenient. If I couldn't get away, I learned how to suppress the shift until I could get some time along from everyone else to let my Wolf self out. I also began experimenting with methods of deliberately provoking shifts so I could explore this phenomenon more fully and at my own pace. Since I was coming from a neopagan background, I drew on the neoshamanic and neopagan totemic texts that I'd been reading. I found that the techniques that were commonly used in conjunction with totems and power animals were similar to some of the practices I'd developed to get my therianthropy under control.

And that's what this little book is about—passing on what I've figured out for myself. This shouldn't be taken as Holy Writ, mind you. We're all individuals, and what works for some people may not suit others; for example, some therians don't even believe in magic, let alone practice it. I offer this writing up in the hopes that some therians who do work magic will find it of use. My goal is to explain not only the techniques themselves, but the mechanics behind them and why they work. Magic may not be as universally accepted as science, but it still has processes by which certain outcomes may be repeatedly attained with a reasonable margin of error. Maybe it's all just psychology (and there is a model of magic that explains it that way). But regardless of what the root cause of it is, if it works, by all means use it!

## Chapter 1: Therianthropy 101

Chances are pretty good that if you're reading this you're a therianthrope, or at least someone familiar with the concept of therianthropy. For the benefit of those who are new to it, though, or who have no idea what I'm talking about, this will be a brief overview of what therianthropy is (according to my understanding, anyway) as well as suggestions for further resources.

A therianthrope (or therian for short) is a person who believes that s/he is a nonhuman animal on a nonphysical level. Therianthropy differs from clinical lycanthropy in that the latter is a condition in which a person is so convinced that s/he is physically turning into a wolf that s/he is basically rendered nonfunctional. Lycanthropy is a rare mental condition generally found in conjunction with schizophrenia; the number of therianthropes far outnumbers the total number of cases of lycanthropy reported in the past century.

Theories vary as to why we identify as both human and nonhuman. Some point to the possibility of abnormal neurobiology<sup>2</sup> and resultant psychology. Another common explanation is reincarnation, the idea that the therian was a nonhuman animal in a past/alternate life (or possesses an inherently nonhuman soul) and this carries over into the life as a human. Less common but also considered is the possibility that therianthropy is metaphorical, a piece of personal mythology or the personification of human mammalian instincts. Regardless, no single theory explains all therianthropes, and while some therians would like to see a serious study of the psychology and neurobiology of a selection of the community to see if there are any common factors, the scientific community has yet to take them up on the offer.

Most, though not all, therians experience shifts. These aren't the legendary physical shifts in which a person becomes a nonhuman animal in body and mind for a period of time. Rather, these shifts may occur mentally, energetically, spiritually, or in dreams. Over the past decade there's been a highly detailed pigeonholing of different types of shifts, labeling each type of shift that varies even slightly from others. While some therians appreciate having a wider vocabulary to work with, others are perfectly happy with just a couple of broad categories. It's generally accepted that physical

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<sup>2</sup> Liesk, 2006.

shifting is impossible, and no one has been able to offer incontrovertible evidence otherwise.

Therians come in many different “flavors”, so to speak. The most common are wild canines and big cats of varying species. However, there are plenty of others, from bears to horses, reptiles of numerous species and even insects. There’s some debate as to whether dragon Otherkin may be considered therianthropes, as their therioside (animal self) is not of an animal native to this plane of reality. In fact, it’s not agreed upon whether therianthropes as a whole are Otherkin or not. The Otherkin community includes a broad range of nonhuman identities, and there are a lot of people who identify (generally nonphysically) as elves, dragons, fey, and other “mythical” beings. Some therians feel right at home among Otherkin, while others think it’s much more reasonable to identify as a hawk than a gryphon.

The majority of therians have only one therioside. Two or three isn’t unheard of, though anything above that is pretty rare. In fact, those who claim multiple theriosides may come under scrutiny by other therians. It’s not uncommon for newcomers to the therian community to be completely enthralled by the concept and then assume that any favorite animal or totem must be a therioside. This can lead to “flavor of the week” syndrome, where a person may seem to acquire a new therioside with relative swiftness, but without really demonstrating any real connection to that particular species.

This shouldn’t be confused with those who change their identity because they realize that their therioside isn’t the species they may have originally thought. The main difference is that flavor of the week people generally don’t do much introspection or exploration of their therianthropy. Part of the Awakening process for a therian ideally involves questioning why you believe you’re a therian, and looking at alternative theories (totem animal, favorite animal, roleplaying game gone wrong, etc.). If you don’t ask these questions yourself, believe me—other people will ask them for you!

I’ll get more into techniques that help you to know thyself later on. For the moment, here are a few resources if you want to learn more about therianthropy. In any case, you shouldn’t take this brief chapter as your sole source of information on this topic; I’ve barely scratched the surface. Check out these sites, the articles and other information on them, and follow their links to do more research.

<http://www.werelist.com>

<http://www.otherkin.net> has articles on both therianthropy and Otherkin

[http://www.house-eclipse.org/hex/hex\\_plugins/content/content.php?cat.34](http://www.house-eclipse.org/hex/hex_plugins/content/content.php?cat.34)

<http://liesk.feralscribes.org>

<http://www.absurdism.org/therianthropy/>

## Chapter 2: The Practice of Magic

Whereas in the last chapter I went over the basics of therianthropy, here I'm going to cover magic. Since the primary focus of this work is magical, I'm going to go into a little more detail before we go bounding off into the next chapter. I highly recommend not skipping this one—or any other part of the book—as it contains important information that you'll need to understand the specific techniques I'll describe later on.

When I first started using magical techniques in conjunction with my therianthropy, I was utterly clueless as to what I was doing. While I'd been introduced to the concept, I lived in a small town and didn't know anyone else who had experience with this sort of thing other than anecdotally. My online interaction was primarily with non-therian Otherkin, and this was before I discovered the word therianthropy (which was crucial to my finding better information later on). As it was, most of what I found while searching for “lycanthropy” and “shapeshifting” was old folklore, so I was pretty much on my own.

While researching I ran across a number of “how to become a werewolf” rituals. These have ranged from rites involving walking around a tree chanting an incantation<sup>3</sup> to rubbing yourself with hallucinogenic herbs and wearing a wolfskin belt. Supposedly something in the materials you use is what triggers the shift, magically turning you into an insta-werewolf. In the case of hallucinogens, one might end up on an accidental trip that, unguided, may lead to all sorts of delusions (though people experienced in chemognosis may have enough control over altered states of consciousness to get genuine nonphysical effects). But without knowing why the ritual is supposed to work, the chance of success is pretty low, especially when shooting for such an improbable goal.

Even more recent ceremonies aimed at increasing your connection to your therioside offer a lot of drama and pageantry, though they come with the caveat that you can't become a therian if you aren't one already<sup>4</sup>. However, what these rites lack is an explanation of why they're supposed to work. The reason these and older legends attract people anyway is because there are plenty of folks out there, especially newbies, who are looking for a quick, easy fix, not understanding that what they seek is impossible regardless of where they look. Either they want to become a therianthrope,

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<sup>3</sup> Anonymous, 2007-B.

<sup>4</sup> Noctis, 2006, p. 13-19.

or they are a therian and they want to become the biggest, baddest one of them all. It's a temptation that's common across all forms of magic—and equally fallacious all around.

Go to any big chain book store and head to the metaphysical/occult section. Chances are pretty good that the bulk of what you'll find there are spell books, and basic 101 texts with a lot of rituals (and often not so much content). Part of this is because chain stores pander to the lowest common denominator—in this case, people who are just finding out about paganism and magical topics and who may need some very basic information if they're starting from scratch on their own.

Granted, there's nothing wrong with 101 books in and of themselves. Everybody needs to start somewhere. However, the 101 books that tend to get the best reviews are the ones that actually go into the why's and how's of magical practice, rather than just passing on a bunch of prefabricated rituals and letting the reader figure the rest out for himself. It's also part of why you don't generally find much in the way of prefabricated rituals and spells above the 101 level; after a certain point you have to know what it is you're doing, exactly. It doesn't matter how big a book of spells you have or how many candles you've burned—your magic will never be as dependably effective if you don't know what it is that makes it work for you.

This is the other reason why most advanced books tend to talk more about techniques and putting theory into practice in an individual manner rather than offering even more complex rituals. Once you get beyond the basics, magic works best when you customize it to your own needs. We each have our own psychological triggers that cause altered states of consciousness necessary for advanced magical practice, and we all make our own personal relationships with the Powers That Be. A book can give you ideas, but it can't hand you the amazing key to adepthood.

However, attempts at shortcuts occur even among more experienced magicians. My husband and fellow author, Taylor Ellwood, has pointed out to me in the past that often, especially in postmodern systems, the results of magic are emphasized over the processes. This is demonstrated by Grant Morrison, speaking of applied magic as divorced from theoretical magic: “we do not need to know HOW magic works, only that it does”<sup>5</sup>. We both disagree with this assertion. While the results are important in that you need them to determine whether what you did worked, you can't adjust your magic for better results or pass on the knowledge for others to use if you have no idea what you did or why it worked. Magic is an intensely personal thing; two people performing the same ritual will still have subtle individual differences in tone, action, and energy. Magic is also partly about personalizing the process to maximize the result,

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<sup>5</sup> Morrison, 2003, 17.

and we each have different needs when it comes to getting the most out of what we do. Otherwise, there wouldn't be a need for so many flavors of magic out there!

### **Shamanic Techniques in the Modern World**

Most of what's presented to the pagan and magical communities as shamanism isn't actually a genuine indigenous tradition, no matter the label. Instead, it's either core shamanism, a derivative of the research and practice of Michael Harner; or it's plastic shamanism, elements of indigenous culture appropriated by people outside of that culture and presented as the real deal.

Harner first wrote *The Way of the Shaman* in 1980. In it he described techniques found among holy people, medicine people and “witch doctors” in various indigenous cultures, as well as ways for the reader to use those techniques himself. Core shamanism has become a sizable industry within the New Age market, and teachers routinely charge hundreds of dollars for weekend seminars that supposedly make people into shamans. The movement is often criticized by members of indigenous traditions; however, if you keep in mind that this is not traditional genuine shamanism, but instead shamanic techniques, there's a lot of useful material here.

Plastic shamanism is basically an offshoot of core shamanism (though some would say they're one and the same). In this case, authors make no disclaimer about their sources—a number of them have been openly accused of exaggerating ties to traditional cultures or even outright lying<sup>6</sup>. Even Carlos Castaneda, who predated Harner by several years, has been routinely debunked by indigenous people<sup>7</sup>. And popular authors today such as Lynn Andrews and Mary Summer Rain have had their credentials utterly annihilated as a little research showed that they had no actual tribal training, while people of Native descent, such as Sun Bear, have been revealed to be sellouts<sup>8</sup>.

The closest you'll get to solid published information on traditional shamanism is anthropology, and even then there's the common flaw of academic bias against the “primitive” cultures. While this has improved somewhat in recent years, academia is still no substitute for being raised and trained within a particular cultural tradition.

This isn't to say that core shamanism and neoshamanism (or even academia) have no place in modern magical practice. I simply emphasize the fact that although I

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<sup>6</sup> Anonymous, 2007-A.

<sup>7</sup> Zoontjens and McIntosh, unknown.

<sup>8</sup> Churchill, 2003.

use shamanic techniques derived from these paths, I am not a shaman of any sort because I haven't gone through any formal training. I want to be very clear *that what I'm talking about in this work isn't shamanism*, although it deals with shamanic techniques drawn from neoshamanism.

## **Metamorphic Magic**

Neophytes often assume that magic is all about making things happen in the world around you. This is certainly true with most practical magic, which is concerned with getting people jobs, healing the sick, and other material causes. There is second branch of magic, though, known as metamorphic (or transcendental, or "high" magic), which is primarily concerned with consciously evolving the individual person on an internal level. This is done spiritually and/or psychologically, depending on what your individual view of magic is.

Traditional forms of metamorphic magic are generally concerned (at least symbolically) with getting the magician closer to God while on this plane of existence. A good example is Qabalistic pathworking focused on studying and climbing the Tree of Life, experiencing and transcending the qualities of each of the sephiroth and paths between them. However, metamorphic magic may also be used on a purely psychological level to reprogram the self, getting rid of unwanted or harmful personality traits and conditioning, and introducing better alternatives. Robert Anton Wilson's *Prometheus Rising* does this using, among other things, Timothy Leary's eight circuit model of consciousness<sup>9</sup>. B.K. Frantzis, on the other hand, writes in his books about dissolving energetic (and also psychological) blockages using Taoist water meditations<sup>10</sup>.

One form of metamorphic magic, popularized in recent time by Chaos and other forms of postmodern magic, involves deliberately invoking different aspects of the self. Peter J. Carroll, for example, gives a detailed example of how to invoke the War self, one of eight selves based on the colors of magic in Chaos magic<sup>11</sup>. Any system of defining selves may be used, however. Pantheons of gods are maps of the human psyche as well as independent beings in their own right. I've also used totems in conjunction with four aspects described by Wilson in the aforementioned work: Friendly Strength and Weakness, and Hostile Strength and Weakness. By consciously dividing myself up into those personae on a temporary basis, I was able to examine

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<sup>9</sup> Wilson, 1992.

<sup>10</sup> Frantzis, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> Carroll, 1987.

myself in greater detail and understand subtle nuances about my personality I'd missed before—including my therianthropy<sup>12</sup>.

The concept of being able to work with different aspects of yourself individually is an important one in the material to come. It involves rearranging how you understand your self-image, and isn't always the easiest thing to wrap your head around. But it's something that I've found to be invaluable in my magical work, including that associated with my therianthropy. All of this is a part of the maxim "Know thyself". If you practice magic for long enough, it begins to open you up to yourself whether you like it or not. Once you begin initiating conscious change, that change also affects you. This is not a bad thing. You know how earlier I mentioned that it's a good idea for therians to explore why we believe what we believe about ourselves, and question our convictions? That's a part of "Know thyself", too, albeit not always as intense. If you're going to have full control over yourself, human and otherwise, you have to understand yourself—and that can mean some pretty brutal honesty.

Knowledge is power. Some magical orders ideally only release certain amounts of information at a time to initiates as a way of letting it absorb in realistic amounts, while saving times of overload for initiatory rituals. Abuse occurs when the knowledge is purposely withheld to make the "elders" seem more powerful. However, even in the case of initiatory traditions, the initiates are given explanations as to why they do the things they're doing. This includes both the mechanics of the rituals and practices they learn, and the reasons behind the metamorphosis that comes with each new level of learning.

You can't progress beyond a certain point without full understanding of where you've been. For example, a few years ago I had someone write out the text for the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram since I was in serious need of purification, and she was coming from the perspective of a Golden Dawn practitioner. At the time it didn't make much sense to me because I didn't understand what all those funny words were. I tried the LBRP a few times but didn't get much of a result. However, when I started practicing Chaos magic I read about the Gnostic Pentagram Ritual devised by Carroll. Since by that point I had a decent understanding of Chaos magic, the ritual made much better sense to me and was more effective for me.

That's the difference between doing a ritual because someone tells you to, and doing it because you understand why and how it works. While I have no problem with paradigmatic piracy, the art of using elements of whatever tradition of magic works for you in order to get results, skipping over the understanding of the mechanics of

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<sup>12</sup> Lupa, 2007.

whatever you work with is a sign of a sloppy magician. This is especially important if you're going to experiment with magic at all—if you know exactly what elements of a working were crucial to its effectiveness, you know what you need to make sure and include the next time, rather than trying varying combinations and hoping it works.

## Chapter 3: Therianthropy and the Guided Journey

One thing you'll find in almost any book on neopagan totemism is a guided journey to find your totem. These tend to be based on the power animal meditation in core shamanism, and follow a basic formula:

- Relax and clear your mind of extraneous thoughts
- Visualize a hole in the ground, a tree, etc. and dive into it
- Travel through a long tunnel
- (Option 1) Encounter your totem/power animal in the tunnel itself; if you see it four times from different angles, you've found your animal
- (Option 2) Come out the other end of the tunnel to a natural place where you'll find your animal
- Converse with the animal and learn what its role is
- Return back through the tunnel

There are, of course, numerous variations, but that's the basic structure most of these journeys are based on. There are two primary uses for journeys that I've found specifically in regards to therianthropy (though I'm sure creative people will be able to go even further than that): to help a therian determine hir therioside if s/he's having trouble with identifying it, and getting to know your therioside better.

I do want to emphasize that while these techniques are based on working with external totems, your therioside is an internal part of you—you are both human and nonhuman animal. I know some people refer to their theriosides in third person and give them names like characters. This is actually not conducive to integrating your human and nonhuman aspects; referring to your therioside as a separate being reinforces that idea on a subconscious level, even though consciously you may say otherwise. This can interfere with your attempts at integration. Your therioside is not a separate, possessing being—you are a person who is a therian, a nonhuman as well as human animal.

Keep this in mind as you're working with the magical techniques so that you don't start unnecessarily splitting yourself. In the following exercise in particular, you will temporarily be treating your therioside as a separate being. Note I said temporarily.

If you've ever had a conversation with yourself about something you're indecisive about, this is along the same lines. You're taking two viewpoints that you as an individual have and comparing them through dialogue.

## **Finding Your Therioside**

While some therians know their species from the beginning, others aren't so sure. For example, someone who isn't aware of anything nonhuman about themselves until their actual Awakening as a therian may know there's something vaguely "animal" about them, but nothing more. Or a person with a rare or extinct therioside may wonder why none of the more common animals resonate with hir.

The totem/power animal journey was originally created for seeking external beings. However, guided meditations in general have been used for internal pathworking for a long time. In this case we're going to take the totemic journey and turn it inward, using it to traverse the psyche rather than the external Lower or Other World. The concept is the same, but the intent is what makes the difference. You can get in a car and drive forward, but how you steer it determines where you go—you don't need a different car to go East than to go West. It's the same way with meditation; the structure is just a way to get you where you're going; where that is, is entirely up to you. Although in this meditation you're visualizing natural environments, do so with the intent that this is your mind's way of guiding you into your own psyche; your subconscious mind will choose the best environment to reveal your therioside in.

The following meditation is a modification of the one I use for my own purposes, as well as totemism classes that I teach. You may wish to memorize the basic steps, or you may have someone read it for you. I've put the approximate amount of time you'll want to dedicate to each step, though this can be changed as needed.

First, get yourself in a comfortable position and relax your body. Breathe deeply and slowly, feeling the tension flow out of your body and into the Earth beneath you. Let the thoughts in your head slip away; concentrate on the sound and feeling of your breathing. (3-5 minutes minimum)

Now, visualize a hole—it may be in the ground, or a tree, or the clouds, or ice over an Arctic ocean. Dive into that hole, and it will take you into a tunnel. Travel through this tunnel, whether you walk, run, fly, hop, or swim. (2-3 minutes)

When you come out the other end, you will find yourself in a natural place. It could be a forest or meadow, water or sky, mountain or desert. Take some time to explore this place. (2-3 minutes)

Off in the distance, you see an animal approaching. As it gets closer, take note of its species, or at least what family of animal it is if you're not sure of exact identification (you can always research later). (1 minute)

Once the animal has arrived, spend a bit of time observing it and, if possible, communicating with it. Also, observe yourself. Have you shifted to that animal's form? If not, have you shifted to another? If you shift after the animal arrives, how does it react? Also, note whether the animal mirrors your movements. (At least 5 minutes)

It's time to head back home. Thank the animal for showing up, and that if things are right you'll meet up again. Then head back to the tunnel (if you've lost it, just look down at the ground beneath your feet, or whatever happens to be below you, and the hole should show up. Come back through the tunnel, and give yourself a few moments to "wake up" again. Stretch, get the blood flowing again, and record your results. (3-5 minutes)

There's no universal way to interpret the details of the journey, such as the animal's reaction, but you'll want to note it and record it once you're back in normal headspace. Each detail is a symbol, and the best person to determine the meaning of each symbol is you<sup>13</sup>. This is why this is only the beginning of your search for the identity of your therioside.

Part of this is because the animal you find may or may not be your therioside. What you want to do next is simply observe yourself for the next few months and see how that animal fits in with what you know of your therianthropy. If you don't know anything about that particular species (or even what species it is) do some research. Try to remain as neutral as possible, rather than succumbing to wishful thinking; accept that there are equal possibilities that it is or isn't your therioside. In a way, you're "trying on" this animal to see if you successfully got in touch with your therian self, and only you can determine in the end what the outcome was. Not every journey ends in accuracy, so you shouldn't use this technique as the do-all and end-all of your search. If the first animal ends up not working out, try the journey again. You may find that you find your therioside through a process of elimination. You can specifically modify the meditation for that particular purpose. Use it as a way of contacting each animal individually, rather than letting just any animal come up, and then again wait a few months and see if that animal manifests in your therianthropy at all.

The reason that I like this type of journey both for theriosides and totems is because it puts you in direct contact with your own psyche. There's not the potential

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<sup>13</sup> This does NOT mean your therioside is purely symbolic! Rather, your subconscious mind is using symbols to communicate information to you about your therioside.

clutter and confusion of outside sources, such as other people trying to tell you your animal, or pictures and other depictions of animals making you wonder which one you are. In this case, it's just you speaking with yourself in a symbolic, structured manner to try to access a particular part of yourself.

A bit of a warning: This isn't a perfect system. As with any form of magic, individual people respond to techniques—including journeys—differently. This is particularly crucial since you're dealing entirely with yourself, rather than a dialogue between you and another being you may be able to help facilitate the meeting. If this sort of journey doesn't work for you, take the basic idea of journeying into your psyche through symbolism and use that to access your therioside.

Also, keep in mind the possibility that you may not even be a therian. You may find that no animal appears, which might suggest to you that you're looking in the wrong place. Or you may find that after you've worked with the animal a while that it's a totem rather than a therioside. And even if you do determine what you're reasonably certain is your therioside using this meditation, that doesn't mean you should stop exploring and questioning yourself. Again, I make no guarantees as to how my techniques will work for people other than me, and this should not be interpreted as a one-size-fits-all solution.

### **Working With Your Therioside**

You can take the journey above and use it in subsequent exploration of your therioside, once you've determined your species. Simply go back through the tunnel with the intent of locating and communicating with your therioside; it generally becomes easier with practice, as with just about anything.

I've found this to be particularly useful when I've had some conflict between human-mind and wolf-mind. Since human consciousness is what I'm more familiar with through body and conditioning, I take on that aspect entirely in the journey while seeking my therioside *as if* it were a separate being. This allows me enough detachment from the situation that I can take a more rational look at it, as well as listen more carefully to what my wolf-mind is trying to tell me. It's like having a verbal argument with a significant other—while you're in the middle of screaming and possibly throwing objects at the wall (though hopefully not each other!) it's hard to really look at the situation with a rational mind. However, if you both go for walks to cool off and think things through, it's easier to communicate when you talk again.

If you have trouble creating this dialogue, travel through the tunnel to the natural setting. Then visualize yourself as literally half human, half nonhuman animal, divided right down the middle. Split yourself in half and let each half regenerate itself into a

separate whole, then start talking. When the conversation is done and you're ready to head back, merge both aspects of yourself back into one before you return.

Once you're more comfortable with your therioside, you can try dialoguing, only this time temporarily seeing your human self as the separate being. This is a great way to not only really understand what it is to be nonhuman (at least as much as one can in a human body), but it can also alert you to issues that your therioside may have with the human aspect. For example, let's say I haven't been letting my wolf-self out enough. If I talk to my therioside, I may get the message that that part of me wants to be more active in my everyday life, and some suggestions of what to do. However, by embodying myself solely as my therioside while talking to my human self, I actually fully experience the frustration that the wolf is feeling. Not only does this make the need that much more clear, but it also gives me a clue as to what warning signs to look for if I start repressing my wolf self again.

Lupa

## Chapter 4: Shifting and Invocation

To some people, the shift is what really makes the therian. Of course, we know that that's not all that there is to therianthropy, especially if you're a contherian, someone who doesn't shift but instead has a stable blend of human and nonhuman at all times. Still, shifting is a large part of the corpus of therian knowledge and a popular topic in the community.

I'm going to make what some may consider to be a bold statement, but what others may find more than obvious: shifting is a form of invocation. (I'll add the *caveat* that this is speaking from a magical viewpoint, and not all may agree.) Allow me to explain<sup>14</sup>.

Traditionally speaking, invocation involves a magician or other magic worker opening himself up so that an external being such as a deity or spirit may enter his body for a period of time. Literally, it means "to call in". This is not quite as intense as trance possession such as that seen in certain Afro-Caribbean religions or Heathen mystic traditions. Where in trance possession the spirit/deity takes total control of the person, in invocation the magician has some control over the situation and can evict the invoked being if things get out of hand.

However, invocation is not limited to external beings. It is quite possible to invoke parts of yourself in order to bring them to the forefront. We tend to think of ourselves as singular beings (most of us, anyway). We're conditioned to identify primarily with our egos, in part because in order to communicate we need to present a relatively constant persona to the rest of the world.

This persona isn't as singular as you might at first think. Look at how you act when dealing with your parents, with a police officer, and with children (whether your own or others'). There are subtle differences in how you act in each situation. This effect can be more dramatic if we consciously work to bring out the different personae we wear in each situation, isolated from the others, on a temporary basis for the purpose of understanding what makes each one unique.

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<sup>14</sup> I'm primarily speaking of conscious, voluntary shifting in this section; however, I will address how this ties into involuntary shifting at the end of the chapter.

## Shapeshifting Rituals

And this is where I get into shapeshifting rituals (aka, “how to become a (better) werewolf” rituals). While the details vary, the general structure is the same:

- Create or find a setting conducive to being an animal
- Wear appropriate costumery and use appropriate tools (may include hallucinogenic substances in the case of older rituals)
- Vocalize a chant or poem meant to call up the animal self/turn one into an animal/alter one’s state of consciousness
- Shift/work magic/experience altered state of consciousness/journey
- Banish at the end of the ritual and return to everyday consciousness/wake up the next day naked in the woods, bewildered and covered in leaves and mud

This is the same general format used in invocations of all types. Whether you’re invoking god-forms, spirits, totems, personality aspects, etc., almost every suggested ritual has most if not all of these elements.

Let’s look at each step of the invocation in turn.

Setting: Every magician worth his salt knows that the reason ceremonialists and other elaborate practitioners like to play with sensory effects in their ritual setting is to help heighten the awareness and focus on the purpose of the working at hand. In the old Russian werewolf ritual I alluded to earlier that involved circling a tree, the ritual specifically suggests going into the woods and finding a tree stump rather than just any old tree<sup>15</sup>. While there’s no obvious connection given, the fact that a specific setting is required automatically triggers the mind into “this is something special” mode.

There are a number of elements of setting to consider. Do you have a safe place you can go, either indoors or out, where you won’t be disturbed? How could you enhance that setting, especially if it’s indoors (and safe from the elements and passerby)? Is there a certain color that you associate with therianthropy? How about statues and pictures of “your” animal? If you have recordings of sounds that your animal makes or the general sounds of its environment, you may wish to add that in as well, or if you prefer, a drumming CD meant for shamanic journeying. Are there scents that produce primal feelings, or foods that you may prefer when you’re feeling less human?

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<sup>15</sup> Anonymous, 2007-B.

The War Self ritual in Carroll's *Liber Null & Psychonaut* is an excellent example of a thoroughly prepared setting, as well as costumery, which I'll discuss next.

Costumery and tools: This isn't absolutely necessary (neither is setting, for that matter), but some people find it helps. Do you have a particular piece of jewelry or clothing that speaks particularly to your therioside? How about a full costume, either made of skins and other parts, or a more vegan-friendly option of fabric? Or would a tail (real or fake) do the trick for you?

Some therians may wish to work this ritual in with formal rites from other traditions, such as casting a circle in some neopagan traditions. Do you need tools for this, or can it be done in open-handed ritual? I probably don't need to say this, but you don't need hallucinogens. Unless you're experienced in chemognosis, you shouldn't even consider mixing these two types of magic, even if you're using a legal entheogen. In fact, you may want to abstain from all drugs, including caffeine, alcohol and nicotine, to let your body clear them out of your system. I would not, however, recommend fasting or going without water. You can probably eat a small meal to keep hunger pangs and dehydration headaches (both of which can be very distracting) at bay.

In-Vocation: This is the part where most of the rituals involve a chant or saying of some sort. If you feel comfortable writing something up and speaking it out loud, go for it. I personally find it distracting, trying to remember the words, but that's just me. What I generally do instead is active visualization mixed with movement.

This is where it's good to have access to some basic works on totemism, as many of them include tips on shapeshifting dance. I generally start by visualizing myself as a wolf, and then imitating that animal's movements as best as I can based on previous shifts and observation of wolves on TV and at sanctuaries. I may ask the totem Wolf for help here, reminding me of what it is to be wolf myself. I may chant a little under my breath or in my head, but it's generally free-form. I may start by repeating "I am wolf, I am wolf" over and over in time with my movements (and drums, if I'm at a drum circle). Eventually the chant may turn into glossolalia or animal sounds, and then fall away as I complete the shift.

Being the Animal: Where you go from here is entirely up to you. I generally just prefer to experience being Wolf, and if you're still getting used to shifting I'd recommend keeping it at that. There's a lot to explore, though at the time you may not be thinking about it. However, afterwards you may want to note the differences between your mind and perception as a nonhuman animal and you as human.

Once you're used to shifting you may try using this state of mind for magical purposes. I've used it in environmental magic designed to help push through legislation that is beneficial to wolves, for example, or in totemic work—working with Wolf and other totems when I'm in full wolf mode is a very different experience from when I'm just coming from my “normal” magical mindset, which is a human-wolf blend. I may expand on this particular topic at a later point, but this is not the time or place. (You can, of course, to experiment on your own once you've got a pretty decent handle on your shifts.)

Banish and Finish Up: “If you start it, it's a good idea to finish it” is a good rule of thumb in magic. Banishing involves dismissing or sending away anything or anyone you've evoked or invoked to signify that the ritual is at an end. It sounds harsher than it often actually manifests—I like “holy hail and farewell” myself—and can be done with great respect. Internally, it's a way to get yourself back to your everyday state of consciousness. In old rituals, the magic ended when the werewolf turned back into a human, either returning home or, one might imagine, being deposited unceremoniously in the middle of the woods if the change back is unintentional. In this case, though, there are a variety of ways to bring yourself back down to Earth, so to speak. Many people like to eat and drink a little to ground, which focuses the attention on the mundane, physical form. You may also consider meditating a bit, visualizing your therioside sliding back under your skin. Try doing something very human-oriented, such as reading, or writing about your experience (keeping a journal is a good idea anyway).

If you don't banish, the consequences may not be particularly life-threatening, but they can be inconvenient. If you find yourself feeling light-headed or “spacy”, or if you can't seem to quite get back to your normal consciousness, you may need to ground a little more. You may want to avoid driving or being around other people (at least those who aren't aware of and comfortable with your therianthropy) until you've banished entirely.

Once you're more comfortable with shifting you may try experimenting with going outside of the ritual area still shifted. The ritual area is a training ground, but you shouldn't associate it with shifting so much that you can't induce a shift anywhere else. Be cautious, of course, when taking your environment and the people and things in it into account. This shouldn't be attempted until you are capable of banishing at will, in case of an emergency.

Eventually you'll find you no longer need all the props and such to shift consciously. At this point you can experiment with integrating your nonhuman animal-mind with your human-mind until both are present to some degree at all times. You

might try thinking of it as adjusting the hot and cold water in the shower to get it just the right level of warm. Or, after a shifting ritual, imagine the therioside melding with your human body rather than sliding away underneath. Again, you should be able to completely undo the shift at will before attempting this in case things get out of hand.

Just remember that this exercise is meant to help you gain more control over yourself as a whole. It's not meant to make you a ferocious beast 24-7. Rather, your goal should be to find the happy medium between human and not-human so that both can be a part of your perception and mindset at all times. Each person's balance varies; you have to determine that one for yourself.

Finally, I would highly recommend picking up a copy of William G. Gray's *Magical Ritual Methods*. It's out of print as of this writing, but used copies may be found on Amazon. It's by far the best explanation of the mechanics of ritual magic I've read. The writing style may be a little difficult for those not used to denser writing, but with a little time and patience it's definitely worth the effort.

### **What About Involuntary Shifts?**

Well, yes, what about them? After all, most of this chapter has dealt with voluntary shifting through invocation. This is very important when dealing with involuntary shifts, which are more akin to stereotypical possession. It is my belief that many (though not necessarily all) involuntary shifts are as a result of a therian not having as much control over his therioside as s/he could, as well as not giving the nonhuman self enough "space", as it were. In my own case, I rarely shift any more as a direct result of being able to access my wolf self almost any time I want. Most of the time I walk around perceiving the world with both human and wolf perception at just the right balance for each situation. That balance may shift subtly depending on the specific situation and what's called for, but both are present almost all the time. The only times I really have involuntary shifts any more are either when I'm under a lot of emotional stress and don't have as much self-control, or when I've been repressing my wolf-self more than is healthy (anything we repress lets us know that it doesn't like that treatment!).

It took me years of work to get to this point, and there were times of backsliding and frustration. This isn't something a ritual or three can magically "fix". People in general are complex beings, and exploring the self literally is a lifelong process as we continually add to our experiences and how they affect us. The techniques I have described here are the manner in which I have managed to balance myself out as both wolf and human, and I haven't just set them up on a shelf to collect dust now that I am where I am. I continue to improve myself, and this is one manner of doing so.

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I won't guarantee you instant results, or even any results at all. If these sound like something that may work for you, by all means give them a try. If you need to alter them to fit your personal needs, there's nothing wrong with that. As with any form of magic, all I (or anyone else) can do is offer ideas. It's up to you to find your own best path.

## Chapter 5: Are We Just Splitting Hairs?

I'd like to take this last chapter to veer off into a different direction. These are some thoughts that have been bouncing around in the back of my head for quite a while, and this is the first chance I've had to really get them into verbal form. No doubt I'll continue to refine them, but I offer them here for interest's sake, and to see what sort of feedback I might get from other folks.

One argument I've heard brought up quite frequently when discussing therianthropy with magicians who aren't therians is the possibility that we're just misinterpreting an internal bond with a totem or other animal spirit. I hear this especially from Chaos and other postmodern magicians who tend to blur the lines between microcosm and macrocosm, and who may view totems and even entire pantheons as psychological constructs.

While I personally allow for the various entities I work with to have independent existences apart from the inside of my head, these magicians do raise an interesting point. In my own practice, I view the internal and the external as intimately linked. As Above, So Below = As Within, So Without. And while it's not my sole explanation for my own therianthropy, I do consider it quite possible that I am a therian in part because of my strong bond with my Wolf totem. I have met several exceptional cases of experienced magicians who essentially became therians through intense rituals that bound them to their spirit guides (or a portion of the guide's energy) so that they were, for all intents and purposes, no longer entirely human. In talking to two of these people in particular who are friends of mine, I have seen no difference in them when comparing them to "born" therians I've met.

This doesn't mean that I think that all you have to do to become a therian is click your heels three times and say the magic word. As I said, these cases are exceptional and a definite minority. But by now I think I've demonstrated that although not identical, there are some similarities in the functionality of therianthropy and animal totemism, and I think that in some people the two concepts can be very closely interwoven. Just because in the past "totem" meant an external being, it doesn't mean that our understanding of what totems are can't change. We no longer think the Earth is flat, just because people 300 years ago thought so. On the other hand, unlike a flat Earth, seeing totems as internal doesn't mean they can't also be seen as external. And just because the concept of therianthropy originally dealt with people who were "born"

therians (often from a psychological viewpoint) doesn't mean that the semantics of the word can't evolve. A lot has happened in the years since alt.horror.werewolf gave birth to the modern concept of therianthropy, and if we're going to understand what therianthropy really is we can't close off possibilities without substantial, irrevocable evidence either way. As it is, what we have it primarily anecdotal, with little universal and empirical data to work with, and so I choose personally to keep my options open as to the final word.

Yes, there are plenty of therians who neither practice nor believe in magic and totemism. And there are therians whose totems are an entirely different species than themselves. However, if you look at the psychological model of how magic works, all it really is, is a particularly advanced and self-aware form of psychology. There are practitioners of neuro-linguistic programming and other experimental types of interpersonal psychology who are basically doing the same thing that psychological magicians are—creating change in their lives through conscious manipulation of their behaviors and thought patterns. The former group may not use high ritual, but as I've discussed already the type of ritual and action you use to make the process create the result doesn't matter so long as it functions properly for the individual. If two people doing the same thing call it different names, I don't see why one has to try to debunk the other. If wrapping your psychology in spiritual or magical trappings makes it more effective for you, then there's no sense in stripping it down to the bare bones just to match a more rational image.

And the same thing goes for a psychological model of totemism. If you believe that totems are (at least in part) psychological constructs that are a part of you, and that each totem corresponds to a different aspect of yourself, then why can't the totem that corresponds to your primary self—your ego—be a possible explanation for therianthropy? It still allows for a person to have a “therioside” (ego-based totem) and other “totems” (totems associated with less-used aspects of the psyche). This doesn't necessarily negate the idea that totems are also external beings, especially if you connect the personal microcosm with the external macrocosm.

One thing that I have learned as a magician over the years is that reality is more subjective than commonly thought. Part of magical practice is recognizing that and using that awareness to shape your reality to your needs and desires. This doesn't mean that you can indulge in outright delusion without harm, such as believing that you can shoot fireballs from your ears or something equally improbable. However, even science is belief-based because we have to trust our senses—and as everything from optical illusions to quantum physics demonstrate, our physical senses aren't always as correct as we assume.

When you get into something even more belief-based like therianthropy, reality becomes even more subjective. There's no way to prove that there are no cases of therianthropy that are totemic in nature, even if you get ten thousand therians together who say it's all in our heads. And even if we were able to pinpoint a very specific neurobiological quirk common to all therians, that doesn't automatically negate the spiritual realities of individual people. After all, we can measure the chemicals in the brain of a person who's in love and show that they're very similar to a person with obsessive-compulsive disorder<sup>16</sup>, but does that undo thousands of years of romance?

Of course, this is all entirely speculation on my part. Belief is a very personal thing, and if you want to believe that your therianthropy is wholly due to neurobiology, I won't argue with you. I figure you have just as much of a chance of being right as I do, especially at this point when nobody's managed to do any serious research on the brains of therians. I tend to think that there really is no single explanation for therianthropy, and that it's probable that some are psychological, some are reincarnation-based, some are totemic in nature, and so forth.

So take my thoughts as you will, agree or disagree.

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<sup>16</sup> Johns, 2006

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## Afterword

I hope you've enjoyed your romp through my brain. I know I enjoyed writing all this out, and I'm curious as to what people think of it. As with anything, I'm not the ultimate authority, and my understanding of the concepts herein is subject to change as I learn and experience more with each year. Think of this as a snapshot of my journey at this particular junction of space and time.

My eventual goal with these thoughts is to include them in my next, as-of-yet untitled, book on animal magic, the sequel to *Fang and Fur, Blood and Bone*. So really what this is, is an excerpt of a working draft. The final content, once it's in the book, will be a lot more fleshed out and polished.

And I encourage people to take these concepts and run with them. Experiment, see what results you get, and build on what I present here. No body of knowledge can remain viable and healthy if it stops growing and stagnates. Curiosity and wonder drive us to explore, whether we're therians or not, and it is that which keeps us vital.

I'd love to hear readers' thoughts on this; you may contact me at [chaohippie@excite.com](mailto:chaohippie@excite.com).

## About the Author

Lupa was born in the late 1970s and currently resides in the Pacific Northwest with her husband and fellow author, Taylor Ellwood. She is an artist who creates magical jewelry, ritual tools and sacred items out of fur, bone, leather, feathers, beads and other such things. Her lupine therianthropy is one of many threads weaving a subtle tapestry throughout her life.

She is also a published author and has had articles featured in newWitch, PanGaia, Sagewoman, Circle, If... Journal, Witchvox, The Wiccan/Pagan Times, Key23, Rending the Veil, and many other hardcopy magazines and ezines (Googlemancy will help you find more information on any of these fine publications).

Her professionally published books include *Fang and Fur*, *Blood and Bone: A Primal Guide to Animal Magic*, *A Field Guide to Otherkin* (April 2007), and is cowriting *Kink Magic*, *Sex Magic Beyond Vanilla* with Taylor; all are or will be available from Immanion Press/Megalithica Books (<http://www.immanion-press.com>). She has also informally published several ebooks, including *The Lupa Liturgy*.

She, Taylor, and their respective creative pursuits may be found online at <http://www.thegreenwolf.com> and <http://www.kinkmagic.com>. Her personal blog is <http://lupabitch.livejournal.com>, while <http://lupabitch.wordpress.com> is her book review blog.

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