

Why Consult An Oracle?

I was on holiday touring around mainland Greece last month. I visited Delphi, home of the famous Delphic Oracle. In ancient times people visited the temple there to consult the oracle through the offices of the priestesses. My visit set me wondering why it is that people consult oracles, read their stars, have their palms read, or any one of the other many and varied ways there are of finding guidance.

If you had a burning question and you had travelled long distances to find the answer, you would almost certainly have thought long and hard about what it was you wanted to know. This is important because the shape of the question determines the shape of the answer. You would have realised that a general question about the future would be a waste question since the future will reveal itself in due course anyway. You would begin your question with a “how” or “what” in order to get some practical and specific guidance because questions beginning with “why” tend to produce answers that are abstract and philosophical.

A question seeking guidance about your own behaviour would be most useful since your own behaviour is something you have a reasonable chance of having some influence over. By the time you had reached Delphi you would most likely have formulated a question which sought guidance rather than prophesy, began “how” or “what”, and related to your own behaviour.

Of course the best person to answer a Delphic question is the questioner themselves. Oracles are like psychic echo chambers. They make manifest and attenuate our own thoughts and opinions.

Those of us who sometimes act as modern day oracles: friends, therapists and priests occasionally worry that we may give the wrong advice. We need not worry too much though. Wrong or badly timed advice is generally ignored or subtly altered all the better to conform with what the questioner is telling themselves.

What question would you have for the oracle if you were in Delphi now?

You can become your own oracle. Become skilful at posing the sort of questions which generate useful answers. Sit quietly and respectfully with yourself. Ask your question and wait expectantly for an answer. Pay close attention to whatever experience moves into the foreground of your awareness. The answer may come in words but its just as likely to come as a bodily sensation, or an image or a memory.

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Comments and feedback on this article are warmly welcomed.