

The Sacred Signs of the Zodiac—Part 1

THE ZODIACAL PATTERN is a symbol of the great Cycle of Life, the circle of material manifestation, showing the progress of the Spirit, or Ego, through the lower nature, or matter. It is the Circle of Existence into which Purusha, the first born, replete with all qualities, descends into union with matter in order to reproduce Himself as the Archetypal Man, the perfect prototype of the human race. Into this lower nature the Divine Spark descends in involution on the one side, and rises in evolution on the other, thus completing the circle. The zodiac forms the stage on which the great drama of life is now being played under the direction of the illumined Hierarchies who graduated in a former period of manifestation. It is the story of the journey of the Prodigal Son around the wheel of life, who leaves his Father's Mansion to wander in the wilderness of materiality and illusion, to be tempted of the devil, and to feed for a time on the husks of the world of shadow.

Before starting his pilgrimage through matter, the Prodigal Son was a celestial being, pure and innocent, but without knowledge. Prompted by an inner intuition which faintly told him of his inherent but latent possibilities, he aspired to wisdom and experience. This aspiration brought a momentary light, and looking out into the depths of space, he beheld a vision of what he might be. Across a valley of crystallized matter (symbolized by the zodiacal Wheel of Life) enveloped in dense clouds



Bartolomé Estéban Murillo (1617-1682), Sutherland Collection, London

Return of the Prodigal Son

Esoterically, the parable of the Prodigal Son describes the spirit's pilgrimage through matter, descending on the involutory arc from the World of God into the dense matter of the Physical World, where it forgets its spiritual identity. Through suffering the spirit is reawakened to a sense of its inherent divinity and says, "I will arise and go to my Father," whereupon it returns on the evolutionary path to its celestial home to enjoy Self-conscious communion with its heavenly Father.

of smoke and noxious odors, he saw a radiant sphere, where men once being like himself had evolved to the heights of perfection and become as gods, knowing good and evil and masters of all the powers of mind and will. It is only by passing through a world of evil that the Ego can know what evil is; and it is only by this knowledge that it can know and realize the good.

The divine purpose in physical manifestation is to blend the lower or personal nature with the higher or spiritual. The purport and goal of all gnosis is the one-making or union of the little man with the Great Man, of the human soul with the Divine Soul. The reason the Divine Spark descends and incarnates in matter is that it may eventually

overshadow, conquer and transmute the lower personal, or animalistic nature, into spiritual qualities. Separate, the Spirit, or Higher Self, is formless essence; the personal, or lower self, is devoid of mind. Together, or merged, the lower self will bring an individuality, and the Higher Self will bring a mind with knowledge and wisdom. This blending or merging of the two selves can only be

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accomplished through an alchemical process, and this is why physical life is so painful at times, because the diamond within can be made to shine only by this process of grinding and suffering. The three-fold body is the laboratory in which the Spirit works.

The mind, symbolized by the sign Gemini and its ruler, Mercury, is the tool or instrument which the alchemist (Spirit) uses in transforming baser metals (*prima materia*) into gold. By analogy, Mercury was used alchemically to transform metals of the earth.

The Prodigal Son, in his cyclic journey, is not entirely dependent upon his own resources in this quest for wisdom and perfection, for our Father in heaven has Himself prepared a way, marked with guide posts along the route, which will lead him back to his celestial mansion. But the Father speaks in a language of symbolism which reveals all the divine truths of the universe. Such truths are to be found in the sacred signs of the zodiac. They are the symbolic markers along the path of involution and evolution. In the divine plan everything must become involved before it can evolve. On the involutionary arc the Ego, as it descends into matter, passes through each sphere or department of

life and receives successive veils of matter, or bodies, and at the same time is furnished with the several faculties it has to exercise during its material manifestation.

We read in *The Cosmo-Conception* that “In the beginning of a day of manifestation a Great Being (whom we call God) limits Himself to a certain portion of space in which He elects to create a solar system for the evolution of added self-consciousness, and for the growth and exaltation of the myriad souls of humanity. He includes in His own being hosts of glorious Hierarchies of immeasurable spiritual power and splendor. They are the fruitage of past manifestations of this same Being.” The zodiac is a symbol of this certain portion of space or solar system. Everything is made in the image of God, and as the Absolute is always symbolized by the circle, or egg, so the zodiac is a miniature and an exact replica of the world egg; a microcosm in comparison with the macrocosm.

Listen to the second, or Love-Wisdom, principle of the Divine Triad speaking: “When He established the heavens I was there; when He set a circle upon the face of the deep” (Proverbs: 8-27). This circle of existence is bound around with a golden girdle or belt of the gods, made of star dust, and is divided into twelve signs, or constellations of fixed stars. These constellations correspond to and symbolize the twelve great Hierarchies, or Superintelligences, who are guiding the involution and evolution of the human life wave. Each sign signifies a certain department or quality of development through which the Ego passes in its journey around the circle, and each specific department is ruled over and comes under the direction of a group of these exalted beings.

In this circle of manifestation which is our solar system the vibrations of spirit are slowed down to a degree where it becomes crystallized. Spirit in this world is usually known and spoken of as empty space, when in reality it is the great ocean of Spirit, the source of all that is. In the world of matter we may compare this crystallization to ice which has frozen on a tub of water. By heating this congealed ice, which accelerates molecular vibration fire (which is spirit), it can be transformed into water. All matter is crystallized spirit, the only

difference between the two states being the relative rate of vibration. The vibrations of dense matter can be speeded up to the point where it transforms into spirit and becomes invisible to the physical eye.

The zodiac with its twelve signs, the year with its twelve months, the twelve tribes of Israel, etc., all signify twelve stages or qualities through which the soul passes. They represent the great cycle of life in which the Divine Spark first becomes obscured in matter, and then eventually rises from matter to become fully manifest in the souls of humanity at the end of the cycle. In the great scheme of involution and evolution there is a continuity of cycles within cycles and by this analogy the zodiacal wheel also symbolizes the lesser life cycle of the Ego in which it travels from one plane to another and is reborn on earth again and again until all its lessons have been learned.

The Spirit proceeds downward into material manifestation in a spiral course, and its cyclic progression is in twelve stages corresponding to the twelve signs.

The number twelve is symbolic of evolutionary completion and spiritual perfection. It is 4 plus 8, or the world and man renewed. It is also 4 multiplied by 3 (God), or the world and man in intimate union with God. The first six signs are concerned with the involution of humanity, during which time the Spirit puts on veils of matter which gradually become more dense, until it has reached the nadir of materiality. On the descending or involutionary arc it is the spiritual which gradually transforms into the material. On the ascending or evolutionary arc spirit slowly reasserts itself at the expense of the physical, or matter, so that at the completion of the circle of material existence, in the sign Pisces, the Ego will find itself free from matter and all its qualities, as it was in the beginning, but in addition having gained experience and wisdom, the fruitage of all its personal lives.

This story of involution and evolution and the “Days of Creation” can be found in the first and second chapters of Genesis, if read in their true



From *Die Bibel in Bildern*, Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld (1789-1853)

Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

Compressing epochs of evolution, this picture shows the return of the Lamb to the throne of the Father after His earthly sojourn. The specific reference to the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, the Christ, makes the image no less applicable to individual humans who follow the Wayshower, for they have the mind of Christ and may do yet greater works than He.

esoteric sense. These processes of life are the descent of spirit into matter and the ascent therefrom. The first is the divine sacrifice, or the limitation of spirit in forms; and the second is the resurrection from the dead, or the liberation of spirit from captivity in matter.

ARIES is a symbol of the first period of the cycle of life. The Ram signifies the divine sacrifice at the outgoing of the Spirit on the higher spiritual plane, in which the Higher Self limits itself to conditions of manifestation in matter. The “Lamb” is slain in involution, for the nourishment of the souls and qualities in evolution. The Ram is a symbol of the second Logos, or the divine life involved in matter. The young ram (Aries) is a world-wide symbol of the sacrifice of the Higher Self in entering upon the cycle of manifestation (the zodiac), born in order to die for human advantage. The Logos, having emanated from the Absolute, limits Its nature in the act of manifestation through material forms. The symbolical imagery of the sign Aries suggests

that the Spirit sacrifices itself (as the Lamb) and becomes hidden or crucified on the cross of matter. It is through the slain Lamb (the divine life) within the soul, that the "body of sin," or desire nature, is gradually dissipated (washed away by the blood of the Lamb). Cosmically, Aries represents the initial stage in evolution during which spirit descends into matter to bring a universe into existence.

In the structure of the human brain this same symbol (the sign Aries) is shown, which is suggestive of the downpouring of spirit, or the avenue through which the Life Spirit enters and flows through the human anatomy. This Life Spirit continues to flow down the spinal cord of man until it reaches the lower extremity, or the coccygeal region, which region can be compared to the sign Libra, the nadir of materiality. Here abides the spinal spirit fire, the Father fire, ruled by Neptune. In time this force will return by way of a new spinal cord which will be forged by the rays of the planet Uranus, reuniting the positive and negative poles in the brain of man. Then the power of creating at will, will be within himself. This is the secret of Initiation, the short cut to the heights of spirituality symbolized by the staff of Mercury. As the first step downward Aries signifies the World of Divine Spirit. The typical Aries person has all the characteristics of the ram who, with his head down, butts into everything and everybody in his desire to get somewhere. He is on his way although he knows not where.

TAURUS is a symbol of the second stage around the wheel of life. Just as Aries represents the masculine or positive aspect of divinity, so Taurus is the opposite pole, the feminine, negative aspect. It is the second plane to which the Ego descends in manifestation, the World of Life Spirit, in Rosicrucian terminology. Taurus signifies the divine outgoing activity in the creation of forms. The Bull represents the matrix of forms on the spiritual plane which are infused with the potencies and qualities afterwards to be evolved in the souls of humanity. The ecliptic (Sun's apparent path) is termed the *yoke of heaven*, bound as it is upon the neck of the Solar Bull. During this second period of cosmic activity divine Will created, on the plane of Life Spirit, the foundation for all living

things upon the astral and etheric planes, and therein placed the mental germ of the lower activities and forms. According to Max Heindel the first and second great creative Hierarchies, which correspond to and direct the activities of the first two signs of the zodiac, Aries and Taurus, have passed beyond the ken of anyone on earth. He informs us they gave some assistance at the beginning of the evolution of our life wave and then retired to liberation or to greater spheres of activity. These first two Hierarchies are nameless.

GEMINI is a symbol of the third period in the cycle of life. The great Hierarchies in charge of this department of the zodiac are called Seraphim. They were active in the Moon Period and aroused in man the germ of the Human Spirit. The sign Gemini symbolizes the Celestial Twins, Adam-Eve before their separation. It signifies the intellectual faculties brought forth from a divine Father (Aries) and a divine Mother (Taurus). In the constellation Gemini are the two stars, Castor and Pollux, sometimes called the twin gods. They are symbols of the positive and negative qualities (father-mother), also heaven and earth, matter and spirit, etc. Castor and Pollux represent the celestial androgyne, the two-headed Mercury of the alchemists.

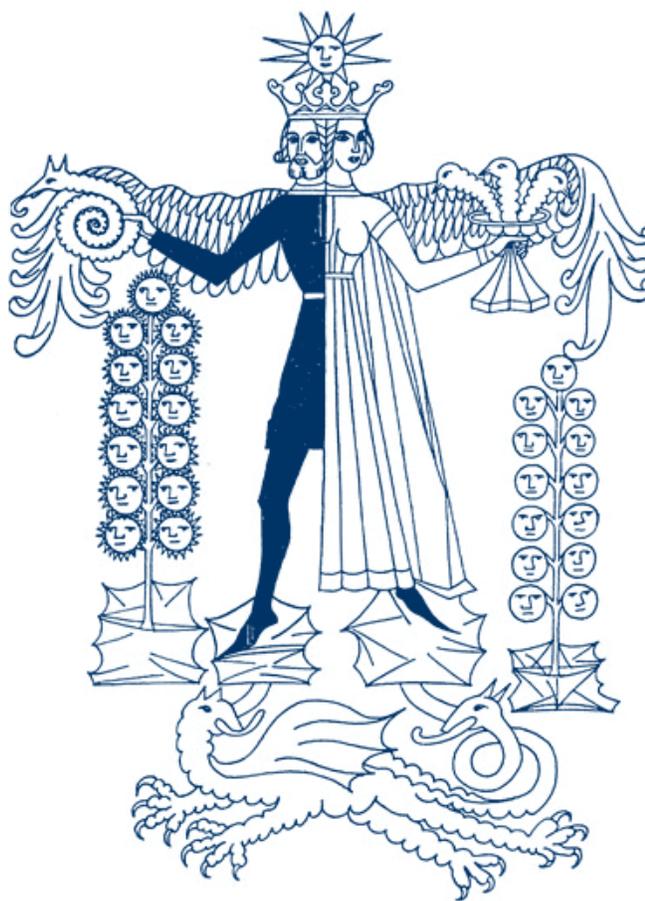
The first three signs of the zodiac make up the divine triangle: Thought, the Word, and Vibration. The number three signifies completeness; it is the perfect number of the higher planes. It is a super-material world representing The Garden of Eden, or Paradise, just before the descent of the Celestial Twins into material existence. The story of the Fall of Man is the story of the descent of mind (man) and emotion (woman) into the underworld or lower nature. The twin gods (Gemini) symbolize this dual nature of mind and emotion (man and woman). Gemini marks the first descent of the Spirit into the mental planes, the first two signs signifying the higher spiritual regions. The sign Gemini represents the World of Abstract Thought, and it is not until the next sign (Cancer) is reached, that the Ego takes on its first semblance of a body, which is the sheath of mind. Cancer signifies the Concrete Thought World.

CANCER is the fourth department of the Spirit's cycle. It signifies the lower mind energized from

the astral plane. The Crab is a symbol of the lower nature into which the soul descends in involution. Cancer is the gateway to materiality, the gateway to life on the earthly plane, but death to the Ego on the spiritual plane. Its opposite sign, Capricorn, symbolizes death on the material plane and birth in the spiritual worlds. The great Hierarchies who rule over the constellation Cancer are the Cherubim. The Seraphim and Cherubim are custodians and executors of transcendental energies on the spiritual planes, divine laws applicable to the higher nature but not to the lower, and which cut off the lower consciousness from the higher. According to the story in the Bible the Cherubim were placed at the east of the Garden of Eden with a flaming sword which turned every way to bar the direct return to heaven, which is now only to be attained by struggle. The lower mind was cut off from the higher mind. The flaming sword is a symbol of the spiritual strength which it is necessary to possess in order to gain the secret of life eternal.

The Fall of Man, which began in the sign Cancer, is a symbol of the descent of the evolving soul, or consciousness, from higher to lower planes due to the mind and emotions being attracted by the desires and sensations of phenomenal existence. Through the fall, man exchanges a blissful state of passive receptivity for a condition of active responsibility, becoming thereby a moral being, knowing higher and lower, and involved in a struggle between good and evil, during which time the potential qualities within him are evolved into dynamic activity. Cancer is a symbol of the great ocean of Spirit or space, which is the source of all things. It is the symbol of water which signifies truth, unity, and oneness. Cancer is the sign in which conception takes place, the sign in which the germ of the physical form is planted.

A division of the zodiacal signs into quaternaries gives an interesting field for study, for it reveals the period of conception of the human embryo in Cancer; the time of the quickening in Scorpio, the last sign in the second quaternary; and also the launching forth of the perfected child in Pisces, the last sign in the third quaternary. You will note that each quaternary is completed by a water sign, which suggests unity and completeness. Cancer



Manuscript of Michael Cochem (ca. 1530), Vadian Library, St. Gallen

The Hermetic Androgyne

Hermaphrodite in the earlier stages of their development, humans separated into genders to make possible the building of a larynx and brain. Eventually they shall again become whole or self-generating, as the Adepts, joint king and queen, the new Adam-Eve. This attainment signifies control of all earthly forces (the dragon of Nature) and the balance and full use of the solar and lunar trees (voluntary and sympathetic nervous systems). Wings signify the angelic ability to function consciously in the etheric region. The king holds a coiled serpent, suggestive of the spinal spirit fire.

completes the first which might be called the celestial quaternary. The second is completed by Scorpio which we would call the quaternary of form. The third is completed by Pisces, the quaternary of perfection. The first (Cancer) quaternary is the home of the celestial family, the father (Aries), the mother (Taurus), and the twins (Gemini). The next (Scorpio) quaternary symbolizes the abode of animalistic man, or form; and the last (Pisces) quaternary is the sphere in which man becomes perfect, wise, and godlike. (Continued) □

—C.R. Bryan