

## Companions of the Stone Emerald Lodge Number 3

### First Degree Lecture on Trance, Initiation, and Magical Training

“Man’s first Initiation is in trance.” Or so goes an often-quoted line from one of Bulwer Lytton’s novels. This line creates certain problems for those who hold with Golden Dawn traditions, since Bulwer Lytton was an inspiring figure for many in the Golden Dawn (including MacGregor Mathers), and at the same time members of the Golden Dawn were oath bound not to submit to hypnosis or other practices that would make them “passive”. (The Guardian Companions of our order have not seen fit, for various reasons, to impose such a requirement on our initiates.) Furthermore, the first initiation of the Golden Dawn itself, which featured the oath in question, was certainly not conducted while the candidate was hypnotized or mesmerized (or was it?): could this mean that they were not yet truly initiated? Or did it mean that the often-quoted line was simply wrong?

Current understanding of what “trance” is, and what “hypnosis” is, are rather different from the ways in which those phenomena were understood in the nineteenth century. Part of this difference is due to a greater body of experience, and more careful investigation; part is due to a change in definitions that has accompanied that increased experience.

One of the breakthroughs came when social psychologists mounted a campaign to discredit the very idea of trance, trying (originally) to show there was no such thing, in the sense that trance was not a unique, special state of consciousness (T. X. Barber); a countervailing effort by hypnotists, demonstrating that whatever it wasn’t, it seemed to be quite effective (as with Milton Erickson, Martin Orne, and others) led to the development of a range of non-traditional methods of working with what had previously been regarded as trance or hypnotic phenomena.

One of the outcomes of this re-conceptualization was the idea that “trance” was that-which-is-produced-by--classical-trance-induction (e.g., a form of sleep brought on by optical fatigue caused by staring at a shiny object, a mechanical model rather like that which defines electricity in terms of the processes that produce it) but that “trance” was what happened when people were engaged in a certain kind of communication. This led to such things as a strategic communication model of hypnotic phenomena, in which paradoxical communications and double-bind use of resistances could be used to produce trance phenomena, and to the model of trance as imaginative absorption (not utterly different from the Freudian model of trance as regression to primary process mentation) -- a move which brought things like reading, game-playing and television-watching into the realm of trance phenomena.

In this sense, the Neophyte ritual of the GD had many elements of a trance induction procedure, complete with interruption of normal orientation set (blindfolding, enforced passivity), communication by implication (images displayed with no immediate explanation being forthcoming), paradoxical injunctions (e.g., “Be ye without fear,” which insists that the candidate be in control of what is almost by definition out of one’s control), and so on, while it avoids the common image of trance by being neither a form of sleep nor a form of frenzy.

There is another sense, however, in which the Neophyte ritual of the GD has elements of trance procedure. These go back to the earlier formulation of trance in mesmeric (as opposed to hypnotic) terms. That is: trance was seen as an essentially physical, or at least somatic, process, brought about by “magnetization”, a process achieved by “magnetic passes” or, as Mrs Atwood said, “manual acts”. The

core idea is that trance is created when energy structures of the body are affected by external, patterned manipulations. and that this has two effects: (a) it disengages awareness from its usual orientation toward the outer or material world, thus opening it to be oriented inward and upward and (b) it allows for the energy structures of the body to be realigned in ways that then can transform the physical body.

In Atwood, this is connected with the idea of the alchemical generation of the Resurrection Body (the conditions of the blessed: impassibility, subtlety, agility, and clarity), and there is clear evidence that the idea of the Resurrection Body (and the sources which Atwood used, among which was Vaughan) were in the minds of those who shaped the GD rituals and training.

It is clear, too, that the structure of the GD temple was deliberately based not only on the Tree of Life, but specifically on the Tree of Life as a map of the subtle body. Consequently, activities in the Temple were the equivalent of magnetic passes made over the physical body, affecting the subtle or energetic body. (This is how the Middle Pillar technique comes to be elaborated in various ways out of the actions in the Temple.) The idea was (and is) simply that the passes bring the centers to a focus and move energy between them in ways that lead to specific re-organization of the subtle body, which can then be more fit to receive inner energies. Those energies reconstitute (or reorganize) the subtle body to be a truer representation of its ideal, proper form, and this in turn has an impact on the physical body.

(This method, by the way, has its analogue in the hypnotic use of pattern command, a technique associated with Milton Erickson. It is clear that non-verbal pattern commands can in fact be effective, below the level of explicit consciousness.)

Given the obvious utility of trance and trance effects, then, why were there provisions against it in the GD oaths? The key is in the idea of passivity. Trance, especially in the older model, involved two parties: the magnetizer and the magnetized, the active and the passive. The passive, entranced person was dependent, had no authority, but was simply a tool at the service of the operator. What the GD sought was an autonomous trance, but the vocabulary (and the conceptual scheme) did not support such a formulation.

Ordinary consciousness can be seen as already passive, a sleep and a forgetting, an entrancement by the material and outer world that is only deepened, made more pernicious, by the additional passivity of hypnosis or mediumship. But, as with many other conditions (for example the phobias that are so akin to the older notion of fascination), learning to bring them on at will -- or under will -- can be the first step toward becoming free of them.

It is the impact of consciousness, increasingly awake, on the material body and on the world that lead to their transformation: this is Light in Extension.

It is by knowingly and deliberately entering into trance that we recognize it, and learning to recognize that we are entranced leads to recognizing how we are always entranced. It is then, perhaps, that we sleepers can hope to awake.