

The First Degree Lecture On the Elements and the Equinox Ritual

Version 1.2

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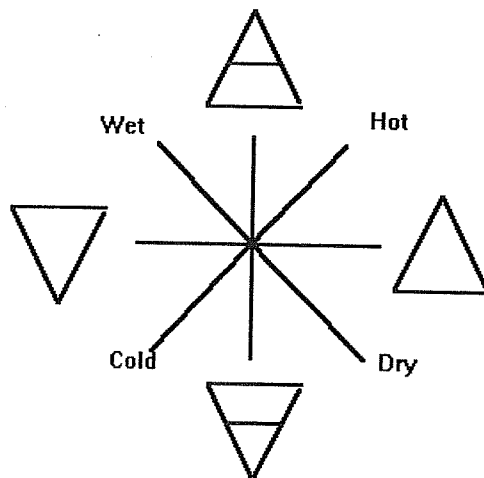


Figure 3:
The Alchemical Array

I: The Aristotelian Elements

I am going to be talking today about the magical formula of the Equinox Ritual, but before I do so I want to bring up the Aristotelian elements, which we have already met in several places in our work.

SOME REMARKS ON THE ELEMENTS

We are familiar with the way in which the four elements are generated from the pairs of contraries (hot/cold and wet/dry), and in which the fifth element, the quintessence, is found at their center. The Four appear explicitly in such places as the Tarot, the Tree, the Lodge, and the rituals; the quintessence also appears, though not as obviously -- for example, in the Tarot Aces. Although it may seem that the Fifth is absent from the symbolism of the Lodge, it does in fact appear, and this is especially clear in the Equinox ritual. This is far too complex a subject to go into fully here; instead, I want to focus on some aspects of the Elemental Communion found in the two rituals with which we have had some acquaintance, and with which we will have more as the current tide develops.

The elemental emblems, "placed upon the Altar according to the Winds", are said in the Z.1 document to correspond to the elements of the body of Osiris --

For the scent of the Dying Rose is as the repressed Sigh of my suffering:
and the flame-red Fire as the Energy of mine Undaunted Will:
And the Cup of Wine is the pouring out of the Blood of my Heart:
Sacrificed unto Regeneration, unto the Newer Life:
And the Bread and Salt are as the Foundations of my Body,
Which I destroy in order that they may be renewed.

I am the Lord of Life, Triumphant over Death.
He who partaketh with me shall arise with me:
I am the Manifestor in Matter of Those Whose Abode is in the Invisible:
I am purified: I stand upon the Universe:
I am its Reconciler with the Eternal Gods:
I am the Perfector of Matter:
And without me, the Universe is not.

The story of Primordial Man gains philosophical expression in certain interpretations of animism and involuntarism, expressed in the idea that the macrocosm reflects the microcosm because the macrocosm is developed on the basis of, and from the structure of, Cosmic Humanity. The frequent tendency to see this merely as a fragmentation is balanced by the idea expressed by Blake, that Nature was created "that Man being cast out of Eden might not fall into the Void". Being cast out was the fall into multiplicity, into perceiving the Divine Humanity in fragmented form, in the outer world, as primary reality -- which was better than not perceiving it at all, since, as Blake added, the Divine thus allures us "with Scattered Fragments of the Divine body in bird and beast and flower."

In other words, we know through what we are, and what we are is constitutive of our world. Thus the idea that the key to all wisdom is contained in the maxim Know Thyself (and "He who knows himself, knows his Lord."). The Communion is a re-membering, a re-participation in the primordial source, the "lamb sacrificed from the beginning of the world". The "world" is both time and space: each instant, each moment, is its foundation.

This communion occurs in two places: in the First Degree, and in the Equinox, which is a rite embedded within the First Degree. But there is a difference between the two. The First Degree itself is a degree of initiation, of transmutation. The Equinox is a celebration of a moment of eternity.

ON THE EQUINOX RITUAL

At the beginning, the active functions are at the periphery, the spiritual seed functions at the center. When the officers give up their powers, their functions, they withdraw those functions to the center -- and the seed functions then take the places of the officers.

One of the functions of the Equinox is the installation of officers, and in many fraternal organizations the installation of officers for the new cycle is a ceremony in which officers from the outside, from higher in the organization, preside over the change, themselves perhaps acting as the officers until, one by one, the installing officers yield their places to the newly installed officers.

In our Equinox rite, however, the prior officers are replaced not by the officers of an installing team, but by the seed emblems of the elements of the body of Adam Kadmon. This is one of the keys to understanding the esoteric significance and use of the Equinox formula.

The Equinox ritual has five parts. First, there is the First Degree opening. This purifies and consecrates the sphere of the Lodge and its members. Second, there is the constellation of the Equinoctial pattern. Now, the Equinox is a time of balance between ebb and flow, waxing and waning, day and night, and the equinoctial formula is locked in by the rehearsal of the formulae of balance, of equilibrium. At this moment, the constant interchange and metamorphosis of the elementary, sublunar world is suspended. In the interval between inhalation and exhalation, time stops. It is here that the active functions are withdrawn, and the spiritual seed functions come to take their places. In the last moment of this phase, all members of the Lodge who have not attained the Third Degree (at least by imputation) are dismissed, to conduct their own inner work in the antechamber.

The third phase has two simultaneous activities: one is the ceremonial installation of the new Dirigent, and the other is the legitimation of the installation by a renewal of the inner contact with the Guardians of the Order. In other words, it is at this moment that the structures of time are opened to eternity for "the pulsation of an artery", which is equivalent to the whole of history. It is this impulse that restarts time, and reconsecrates and reorients it. Time is the moving image of eternity. The steersman corrects the course of the vessel.

The fourth phase is the unwinding of the second, and the outcome of the third. The new Dirigent installs the other officers, who take up their places -- after which the Chief of the rite (who has presided over the first manifestation of the new Dirigent) finally returns the spiritual seed elements to their central place. This sequence contains some important practical points, which will yield much when considered in discursive meditation.

The fifth and final phase is the First Degree closing, which is finished in the elemental communion, in which participation in the re-collected body of Adam Qadmon sustains each of us in our quest.

The magical uses of the formula of the First Degree have received a great deal of attention, but little has been published on the uses of the formula of the Equinox, although to anyone who works with the First Degree formula a great deal will be obvious. I have laid out the key structures above, but I will provide here, in terms of contemplation, what computer people might call an instantiation of the Equinox formula.

The first phase represents the stilling and purification of the faculties; it might or might not be assisted by ritual. The second phase is the locking into balance of the various interior opposites whose interchange constitute the "modifications of the thinking principle" of ordinary consciousness. The practitioner would here want to achieve what might be called an equilibrated stasis of the psychophysical matrix. Everything -- all the internal opposites -- would be locked into stillness (including the interplay of subject and object). One perhaps over-concrete interpretation would suggest that this "equilibration of the breaths" would involve, finally, an actual cessation of breathing. In the suspension of the ordinary activities of the mind, the meditator would have invoked the root energies of being to take their places on the thrones of the faculties. (John of the

Cross describes something of this sort, though as something much more than a meditative exercise, when he describes how faith, hope and charity come to replace intellect, memory, and affect during the dark night of the spirit.) This last step is very important, because it is the presence of these holy living powers in the sphere of the meditator that give access to their transcendent root.

It would be in this moment (no matter how long) of stillness that the attention would be directed away from the ordinary mind (the dismissal of the outer order members) and toward the inner root of being, outside time, yet speaking to this unique instant. It is here that the Mystery is revealed in its active silence. It is here that the higher and lower palaces are made one, and Malkuth sits on the throne of Binah, and causes the Influx, the Everflow from beyond Kether, to be realized.

It would be that utterance of this instant that would be brought back, then, into the fourth phase, in which it would serve as the governing principle that once again began to set time and ordinary mind into motion, infused, as it were, with a new vitality. The meditator in the fourth phase carefully re-implements the ordinary faculties as though they were now pledged to, and deriving from, this contact with the eternal center -- and then proceeds to allow them to rule, and to withdraw the more interior senses back to the center.

In the final phase, then, the meditator would make the careful transition back to ordinary consciousness, ending with a commemoration of the veils of ordinary life as themselves being each an embodiment of the energies of eternity.

This is, in a very interior and contemplative form, one realization of the formula of this profound rite. There are many others. Embedded in this rite are some of the supreme acts, magical and spiritual, of western esotericism. It is a formula that is so simple, and so adaptable, that it can be worked for a lifetime without being worked out. Although the Equinoxes are the great emblems of the formula of this rite, it reverberates in each moment of equilibrium, whether it occurs by nature or by art. And, if we remember that equilibrium is not only a state but an ongoing act, each moment is a moment of equilibration, each moment, each pulsation of the artery, is open to eternity, infinite and holy.

The fact that the Equinox Ritual is open to all members implies that the Equinox formula too is open to all, to the extent of their skill and understanding. Fortunately, it is a formula that does not tend toward disequilibrium! Anyone who wants to progress in magical skill and experience could do worse than to work with it in each of the modalities open to us -- in ritual, in vision, in discursive meditation, in invocation, and in the inmost temple of the heart. I have only dealt with one, rather simplified aspect of the Equinox rite here. It will fully repay any and all efforts that are made to work with and comprehend it, at every level of activity, with any or all of the tools in which members of this Order are being trained.