

Hermetic Initiation

I

By
Parush

© 2002 Heredom Trust



version 2.02 - 090204

Property of the Heredom Trust



Preamble

It is necessary to begin laying a foundation for any practical work in Hermetism by providing a bit of theory on the subject. It is important to remember that as theory some of this material you will agree with and some you won't. It is not important, generally, what you disagree with or have reservations about, or what you accept in the following discourses. The idea of providing you with this theory is primarily to give you the opportunity to see Hermetic philosophy, which underlies the Hermetic process, from my point of view. You should be aware that essentially training, from a tutors point-of-view, is a recapitulation of his own journey to the student. While what you are about to experience is not a direct retracing of my own steps it is an attempt by myself to put what I have learned into an orderly and coherent package, with all that is superfluous removed, so that you can more easily make sense of it.

Practice should be provided with a motive and a good technical justification. This is the reason behind presenting my theories concerning the work first. The theory describes the playing field, then the mechanics of the game, and finally from that a plan of attack can be outlined. The plan of attack refers directly to the practical exercises formulated to gain the greatest chance of success from walking the path of Hermetic initiation.

Next, we need to define exactly what we are talking about here. When I use terms like 'the work', or 'initiation', or 'the process' I refer most often to what I prefer to call *The Great Work*. As far as I am concerned The Great Work is foremost the process of initiation, that is, putting another person in a position where he can see the true nature of reality. Magic and alchemy both form part of the process of initiation, but are not ends unto themselves. What is commonly called *Union with God* is the ultimate outcome of the process, and it is this Union that enables anyone to be able to perceive the true nature of reality.

In the documents that follow I will endeavour to avoid the use of traditional technical language as much as possible. Wherever I can I will begin by defining traditional terms in modern language and then continue, on the main, to use the modern expressions. The reason behind this is to attempt to avoid misunderstandings that can arise from conventional definitions of traditional terminology. These conventional definitions are often very limited and very inaccurate because the conditions they refer to have been misunderstood for centuries. Nevertheless, there are some esoteric ideas for which the English language, or western culture, or common understanding, does not have a conception. In such cases it is better, or necessary, to rely on traditional technical terminology. In such cases I will provide a detailed definition drawn from my experience.

The view of The Great Work you will see me present in the following documents is what I believe to be a glimpse, albeit through a glass darkly, of the original teaching of Hermetism. So it is valuable to remember that when I use the term *Hermetism* I usually refer to the view of it I understand, not the conventional or mainstream view you might be more familiar with.

I advise you to take your time in reading through the following documents. There are many years of experience and study compressed into few words, and in order to extract the kind of understanding from this information that it was intended to provide these documents should be read several times.

Part One

Initiation and The Great Work

The heart and soul of Hermeticism is the process of what is commonly called *initiation* into the mysteries. All other material that falls under the banner of the science of Hermes must take second place, in consideration, to that of the subject of initiation. Without the leverage of this essential kernel the arts of Magic, Alchemy and Qabala, which are the machinery of Hermetism, remain impotent and produce nothing of real, lasting, spiritual or practical value.

Although the word initiation is defined as “a new beginning” in any good dictionary, within the mystery tradition it has a somewhat more extensive meaning. It not only refers to one’s beginning a new lifestyle, one devoted to the study and work involved in walking the path of the training of a student of the occult, but also to the process that follows the start of the journey into the sacred mysteries. This process of initiation, itself, is what has been traditionally called in Hermetism, *The Great Work*. We might define The Great Work as the process, from beginning to end, that must be endured on the path of the *deliberate* search for enlightenment. It should be pointed out that in order to make conversation about this subject meaningful, that The Great Work only refers to such initiatory processes that actually do lead to enlightenment ... as opposed to systems that are based on ideas that can never lead directly to enlightenment.

Enlightenment itself we might define as –

“The attainment, at the end of this deliberate search for enlightenment, of a full conscious awareness of the totality of ones own being.”

The basic concept, here, being that our daily crude mental state, and gross lack of understanding about the nature of reality, stems directly from the fact that we judge life from a point of view that is largely incomplete. When we attain to a condition that allows us to see and know all of ourselves, because we exist as a hologram of the Universal Being, we come to a (relatively) complete understanding of the nature of reality – aka: enlightenment.

The greatest obstacle to progress in The Great Work is a lack of understanding concerning what actually is required from an individual on that path. Further, many desire to take up the task without much more than the most superficial idea of the nature of the goal itself.

Any serious consideration of the Great Work, then, must surely start with a careful and detailed description of what it is that we are actually considering here.

Therefore, as we start, in this work, to build an edifice of a philosophy of Hermetic initiation, we must first look at the foundation upon which that philosophy will be built. This foundation is formed of three features, the first of which is a belief in the existence of a Supreme Being.

To the Hermetist the word *God*, in reference to *the* God, includes three simple ideas concerning that Being’s nature and authority:

- (1) God is responsible for the *existence* of every thing and every condition (omnipotence),
- (2) God is *in* every thing and every condition (omnipresence), and
- (3) God’s *intelligence* is superior to every other intelligence (omniscience).

It should first be clearly understood that the word 'every', in each of the three points above, refers to 'all' without exception. It does not refer to 'most' or any other degree less than 'completely'.

This set of ideas constitutes the most basic concept of *the* Supreme Being as far as Hermetic philosophy is concerned. A position of Being, in relation to which, *no* other thing, process, condition or situation, is greater in any way. There cannot exist any thing, process, condition or situation that can act without God having created it, being a superior intelligence within it and being in control of it. There are no exceptions to this rule. **Any philosophy that believes there is an exception to this rule is not Hermetic, in the original and classic sense of the word.**

As the essential foundation concept of Hermetic philosophy this concept is of the utmost importance. If we do not begin our journey from this premise the path immediately leads away from the process of initiation as recognised and taught through several thousands of years of *Hermetic* tradition. This fact cannot be stressed enough.

The next, or second, most important feature of the foundation concepts of Hermetism concerns the focus of the Supreme Being. Here we speak, primarily, of the purpose of existence, or the whole of the created universe. [Note: '*created universe*' does not simply refer to matter or various degrees of proto-matter. It also refers to intelligence, conditions of intelligence and matter and mechanisms of intelligence and matter.] Hermetists recognise that the primary force in the universe, the universe's motor, if you like, is a force we might call *intention* or (conventionally) will-power. Apart from God having created every thing, being with every thing, having the superior portion of intellect in everything and controlling the existence and progress of every thing, those three conditions, and the entire purpose of the universe, revolves around a particular *intent* – God's desire for self-realisation through self-expression.

In a sense, this intent-in-action is the force of evolution itself. It is the evolution of every thing, every condition, every species and every process. We might describe evolution as a growth towards greater self-awareness, and this brings us to the Hermetist's third core belief – the third feature of the essential foundation of Hermetism.

The third feature states that the condition we call *individual life*, and awareness, is **a process of attaining to personal self-realisation ... through self-expression.** It is the evolution of the intent of the Supreme Being expressed through the myriad of individual life forms.

When this feature is realised by the individual, and that individual *deliberately* aligns itself with this universal purpose, Hermetists call the resultant direction of the life of the individual *The Great Work*.

The student of Hermetic science who is committed to the discipline of attaining self-realisation, and who is fortunate enough to find himself under the guidance of a capable teacher, is traditionally referred to as an *initiate*. This is the actual technical reason for becoming an initiate – a desire to align oneself with the intention behind the creation of the universe by deliberately seeking *full* self-realisation ... **a conscious awareness of the totality of ones being (enlightenment.)**

The concept of The Great Work being (and requiring) a deliberate effort is central to the Hermetic philosophy of initiation – the individual's taking personal responsibility for effecting the direction of his personal evolution by reorientating it and focusing it upon the goal of enlightenment.

The motive behind this choice should be obvious. If one aligns oneself with the primary motive-force supporting the machinery of the universe, ones progress should, by definition,

be more rapid, balanced and, it seems, ones existence more enjoyable because it harmonizes with nature.

Therefore we start with three premises:

- (1) That there is a Supreme Being, and
- (2) That It *intends* Self-realisation. (From these two premises we develop a motive for the use of initiation and a starting point for technique,)
- (3) That to seek self-realisation oneself, is the basis for an esoterically productive life.

Once we take the step to commit to the life of a Hermetic initiate the further success of our journey relies on an acceptance and effective use of these three fundamental concepts.

If we don't believe in the Supreme Being as the origin of the omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient Intent then we become, likely, a law unto ourselves and we can make up any theories about what is productive or unproductive as far as life's goals are concerned. If we don't believe the Supreme Being has an intention for creating the universe the situation is pretty much the same, anything goes.

The motives for our approach to dealing with the process of the Great work, are, then, based on these core ideas about the existence and Nature of God. Although the novice initiate cannot confirm the validity of these premises for himself at the start of his journey, I would insist that the processes that have developed out of these fundamental beliefs, and put into practice as techniques for attaining enlightenment, eventually validate what is first presented as Hermetic theory. To be objective, in supporting the sceptic's view, to a degree, we can say that at the very least measure this Hermetic approach to initiation *behaves* as if our initial essential premises about the Supreme Being are true.

I do agree that the exact nature of the divine state cannot be accurately known by the *human* mind. Therefore a novice cannot be absolutely sure that this essential theory is one that accurately explains the whys and wherefore's of the successes gained from the practical techniques. What does matter at the end of the day, though, is that the *practical techniques* used to attain enlightenment, which stem from the theory, do assure progress, as claimed by the adepts who have designed, perpetuated and followed the path.

This having been said it should be understood that those who have travelled even a small way along the path towards enlightenment, will often insist that while a rational explanation of the theory and motives for the techniques used and the desired direction the initiate travels, are important, one soon realises that the experience itself reveals a type of knowledge, or gnosis, a direct perception of the truth, that is self-validating.

I accept that this type of justification for a worldview and an approach to guiding ones future progress is often not at all acceptable to the mind trained in rational or positivist thinking. I make it quite clear, though, that this treatise is not begun and continued with the intention of arguing the reasoning behind Hermetic approach to life. On the contrary it is written for the individual who either already accepts the Hermetic point of view, or who, for whatever reason, wants to come to a greater understanding of that view and possibly apply its theory in a practical manner.

With this in mind we begin our journey into the world of the Hermetic initiate, our personal understanding of this most ancient and beautiful esoteric journey into the hidden regions of human experience and endeavour.

Part Two

Divine Intention

The primary concept upon which Hermetic philosophy is founded is that reality¹ has developed its form, nature or character out of a condition that we might define as a *formula*, or abstract mechanism, that underlies all existence. I am in the habit of referring to this universal mechanism, commonly, as *evolution*, where this evolutionary impulse is itself the primary *manifestation* of the Intent of the Supreme Being. This formula (in a conceptual sense) is the immediate response to a desire (the Divine Intent), which then *manifests* itself – in the concrete world as a universal² mechanism.

Using modern computer terminology as a metaphor to help define the concepts of *formula* and *mechanism*, we can say the formula is the software of the universe and the mechanism is its hardware.

We might then say that this trinity: a need, a plan for fulfilling that need, and a mechanism for carrying out that plan, lies at the very root of Hermetic philosophy.

Any serious understanding of any aspect of Hermeticism must be based on the concept expressed in part one. All that Hermeticism is, and The Great Work itself attains to, is based on this premise, that there is a Supreme Being³ which is the cause of existence, that It has an Intent (a need), and that that Intent is expressed in actuality as *a state of becoming* which I refer to commonly as the mechanism of evolution⁴.

This mechanism is directly related to Divine Omniscience, in that as an orderly function, based on a design, and with a direction and purpose, it is a manifestation of pure intelligence.

Nature has placed this mechanism, so that it can express the universal formula of evolution in every seed, in the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms. The mechanism of evolution, being a universal process, is not absent from any department in nature. This means that to the Hermetist everything in existence is evolving. While Hermeticism does not necessarily recognise an end to evolution, or a specific end-state which evolution seeks to attain, it does recognise evolution, the response to the Intent of the Supreme Being, as a mechanism inherent in all things that urges a refining of function and condition in each department of Nature. Every *thing* is constantly *becoming* more perfected.

We might define *perfection* as a condition that embodies the best of both *economy* and *beauty*.

While the formula for evolution is a universal field (if you like), lying *behind* and actuating every thing, the universal mechanism of evolution itself, which is the immediate response to the formula, can be found *in* every thing. The relationship that exists between the formula and the mechanism of evolution might be equated, metaphorically, to the relationship that exists between a magnet and its magnetic field. The formula contains the *idea* of attraction and

¹ Reality: in this sense refers to everything that *actually* exists. This includes not only everything in the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms, but also the processes that drive these manifestations, and the relationships that exist between each department of nature.

² Universal, as in, found in every thing, condition and situation,.

³ A more modern term for *Supreme Being*, conveying a better understanding to contemporary students, might be *Universal Intelligence*.

⁴ By evolution I do not mean Darwinian evolution. I am talking about the natural progress of any thing in creation, not necessarily towards a certain goal, but along a path that is defined by a refining of function and condition.

repulsion and the mechanism, being the focus for and manifestation of, this idea, in the physical realm, attracts to itself what it needs to evolve and repels from itself that which retards its evolution. While this is a somewhat crude analogy it is nevertheless apt, as the magnet and its forces have a close relationship to the universal mechanism and its formula.

This force, which I have called *Divine Intent*, *The Formula* and *The Mechanism*, was termed, rather crudely, *spagyria* by the ancient alchemists.

Spagyria is a Greek term derived from two roots: *spao*, which means to separate, and *ageiro*, meaning to recombine. The word spagyria itself, therefore, makes a rough reference to a formula that is well known by every experienced student of laboratory alchemy, the spagyric formula – to separate, purify and recombine. Hermetic Philosophy informs us that it is, in a very simplified form, the formula or program of Divine Intent that we have been discussing.

There is a single universal formula for evolution which lies untouched behind physical manifestation, and a single universal mechanism for expressing that formula that exists in all things in physical manifestation. This mechanism, as we have said, attracts to itself those things that it needs to develop in the created universe. In so doing its original, universal and homogenous nature is changed, *exteriorly*, and it becomes differentiated, firstly, into each of the three natural kingdoms. By this means we begin with one universal mechanism and it alters itself into three expressions: animal, vegetable, and mineral life and structure.

Within each of these three kingdoms the universal mechanism alters its *appearance* yet again, diversifying into the various species and even each individual entity therein. Each successive step in the diversification process has two primary effects on the universal formula and the universal mechanism. Firstly, it allows the primal mechanism to become increasingly more complex in its manifestation. Secondly, the complexity of the heavily evolved mechanism dampens the effect of both the original formula and of the original mechanism.

In this way a horse, for example, while being one of many 1000's of types of animal, and one of many 1,000,000's of individuals within its species, is nothing more than the original, simple, universal mechanism evolved to a very complex and specific state.

The machinery of evolution is composed of three parts. Alchemists refer to these parts as the 'principals'⁵ and name them, mercury (the manifestation of omniscience), sulphur (the manifestation of omnipotence), and salt (the manifestation of omnipresence.)

⁵ The correct spelling here is 'principal', meaning foremost, primary and first, not 'principle', which makes reference to morality, ethics or law.