

Cosmic Consciousness

The Tarot Keys for this lesson are the 7th, 14th and 21st. Review the lessons dealing with these Keys and their letters. After the review, consider this parable:

On an uncharted island in the Southern Seas there grew a tree. Its bark, its flowers, and its fruit were different from those of trees in other lands. Its leaves, like those of the tree of life described in Revelation, were for the healing of the nations.

Blown out of their course by storms, occasional voyagers came to the island, found the tree, ate the fruit, and were healed by the leaves. Some sailed from the east, some from the west, and others from the south. Each believed himself to be the original discoverer. Each supposed that the course he sailed was the only way to the island. Each wrote a record of his journey, described the tree, and proclaimed the healing virtue of its fruits and leaves.

Some there were who believed these tales, but there were more who scoffed. Nobody could form any clear image of the tree, because no man may picture anything that differs radically from all that he has experienced. The believers said: "See, this one left us a sick man, but now he is whole. Nor is it his body only that has been healed. His very heart is changed." But the scoffers laughed. "It is nothing but a change of air," they asserted. "The sea voyage helped his body, and because his body is well, his temper is naturally sweeter. Yet what good is a well body, or even a sweet temper, with a sick brain? The man is mad! If there be such a tree as he dreams of, why did he bring us none of its leaves? Why has he no samples of its fruit? Not even a shred of its bark! Just a wild tale, without any evidence to support it."

The believers, nevertheless, preserved the story, and as the years passed, added to it many wondrous fancies of their own imagining. So the tale of the tree passed into the folklore of many peoples.

Then came one whose travels in strange countries gave him opportunity to study the customs and compare the beliefs of many races. He journeyed to the south, and to the east, and to the west. Wherever he journeyed, he heard stories of the island and the tree. No two accounts agreed as to details. Some said the island lay to the north, some had it that the seeker must go west, others insisted that the course was to the east. And when it came to describing the tree, human fancy ran wild.

The traveler, however, saw that all this disagreement about ways to reach the island really meant nothing. Those who lived in the south had to travel north; for dwellers in the east, the island lay to the west; and for those whose homes were in the west, the course was to the east. On one point all were agreed. There was a tree on an island, whose leaves were for the healing of every disease, good for sickness of soul as well as for ailments of the flesh.

So our traveler set out to find the island. Nor was his search in vain. Carefully comparing the old tales, he made a rough calculation as to its true location. Then he sailed a circular course round the area he had marked off on his chart, making his circles smaller and smaller as the days passed. He stopped at many an island during the long months of his quest. Some were fair, and had lovely exotic trees and fruits. Once or twice he believed he had found what he sought, but when he tested the leaves of some of these strange trees, he found that while some brought forgetfulness, and others invited strange dreams, none had the power to cure the ills of soul and body. More than once, too, he had narrow escapes from shipwreck, from being killed by dreadful beasts, and from other perils.

At last his patience was rewarded. Then he learned why no other traveler had been able to bring home any tangible evidence of the existence of the magic tree. When its fruit was plucked, it must be eaten at once, for within an hour it began to rot. So with the leaves and bark. They crumbled into nothingness when separated from the tree.

Yet the moment the traveler saw the tree, he knew it, and perceived that in all the tales about it there was truth. Whatever in them had seemed meaningless became intelligible when he saw the tree itself. Yet he knew that no man would ever be able to describe the tree so that it could be imaged truly by one who had not seen it. Whoever had not visited the

island must belong to one of two classes of persons. Some would believe; more would scoff. None could know save those who had made the journey to the island. So the traveler returned to his home, and wrote the story of his own search. He illustrated it with maps and charts. He marked the soundings and the ocean currents. He put in the latitude and longitude.

Yet the world continued to mock at the story. Some called him a madman. Some said he was a fool. The men of science and the other schoolmen, particularly the physicians, declared him to be a dangerous charlatan. They derided his book, laughed at his charts, and even tried to imprison him for obtaining money under false pretenses, because he had accepted pay for his books and lectures.

Yet there were some few who put his words to the test of actual experiment. In large vessels and in small, they set sail for the island. And because the traveler's directions were clear and true, they found the tree and were healed of all their miseries. So, as the years passed, there came to be in the world an association of "Knowers of the Tree." And because their minds and bodies were strong and sound, their lives spread a contagion of health and understanding and love wherever they spent their remaining days. Thus the world became brighter and happier for their presence in it.

As you study this lesson, keep this parable in mind. The tree is what Jesus called "the kingdom of God". The island is an actual place within the body of man. The fruit and leaves of the tree are states of consciousness, for the tree is the Tree of Life, which is the Key to All Things. The eating of the fruit of the tree leads to a state of consciousness beyond thought, a synthesis of all experience, in which all sense of separateness is blotted out, and direct knowledge of unity and eternity takes the place of the time-bound multiplicity of ordinary consciousness.

No man who has eaten the fruit of this tree may describe it as it really is. Yet he will understand the meaning of all descriptions of this experience. He will find it in the pages of the Sufi poets. He will recognize it in the strange language of alchemists and magicians. He will find it in the writings of Hindu philosophers and Chinese sages. It will speak to him from the simple phrases of that humble American seer, Jacob Beilhart. But for variety of

description and expression, he will find it, among all the books of the world, no better put than in the books composing the Bible, and of all the words in the Bible, the words of Jesus tell the story best.

He who has eaten of the fruit of the Tree of Life will know how hopeless are all attempts to define this experience. Thus he will free from slavish adherence to creeds (though he will oppose no creed, however crudely expressed, that bears the unmistakable signs of being based on genuine inner experience.) For he knows the inadequacy of all endeavors to define the indefinable, the futility of all efforts to limit the limitless. The consciousness beyond thought is crystal clear, sharply defined, and free from the least suspicion of haziness. This very clarity is what makes it ineffable. We have no words to convey such fullness of meaning. Our common tongue is intended to describe piecemeal experience. How may it express what one has recorded as “being everywhere, and all at once”?

Expect no one, then, to tell you “just what” the consciousness beyond thought is like. St. Paul has told us that of these things it is unlawful to speak. Be content with what you can learn about the way that leads to this final liberation, and then follow the way yourself. It is not enough to read travelers’ tales, even if they be most convincing and most scientific. He who would be rid of misery, he who would taste the fullness of joy, must find the island for himself, must himself eat of the leaves and fruit of the magic tree.

First of all, then, know that the Way is an Art. The consciousness beyond thought is, to be sure, a gift of the Life-power; but we receive this gift through the operation of another benediction. The Life-power has made us able to take natural conditions as we find them, and then adapt them so as to produce novel results, not spontaneously produced by nature. This ability is pictured in Key 7. Wherever you find the city-symbol in the texts of Ageless Wisdom, you find a hint of this human adaptation of natural forces and materials. A city is a collection of houses. It therefore represents the development of the consciousness represented by the letter Beth (the house) and Key 1. This “house” consciousness is what we have termed “self-consciousness” in all our lessons. It is a mode of consciousness which enables us to put into a new order the conditions of our environment. Thus the chariot in Key 7 is really a symbol of the same idea, for it is a sort of house on wheels. It is the vehicle which carries us from thought to the consciousness beyond thought.

By slow processes of evolution the Life-power brings its vehicles to the point where self-conscious thought can be expressed. By right thinking, man discovers the laws hidden behind the various appearances which constitute his environment. Then, by the operation of creative imagination at subconscious levels, combined with inspiration coming from super-consciousness, man learns how to make a new combination. Thus he begins where nature leaves off. Before he can see the glory of the Shekinah, he must build a house for it. Thus we, who follow the ancient craft of the sages, call our work an Art, and name ourselves “Builders of the Adytum.”

The chariot in Key 7 is a type of the adytum, or shrine of Deity. Its proportions are those of an oblong square, the form of the lodge in Freemasonry. The chariot is more than the lodge, and yet not more. More than the lodge, in the sense that the chariot is not merely a Masonic symbol, restricted to the meanings given to the lodge in modern Masonic interpretations. Not more, in the sense that all who know what the “lodge” really is, understand that it is “the dwelling-place of the Most High.” Therefore is the letter Cheth, to which Key 7 is related, said to be the representative of that Path of Wisdom named “The Intelligence of the House of Influence,” and the influence is none other than the direct influx of that Divine Presence which the Hebrews called *Shekinah*.

During the last fifty years or more, occult literature has teemed with references to the “lodge.” Much has been written about what seems to be an external hierarchy of great beings who rule the earth, the planets, and the sun. Beyond these, we are told, are others even higher in the scale. As we contemplate this scheme of a great interlocking system of celestial government, our minds are dazzled by its splendor.

We are always glad to know that Builders of the Adytum are learning something about the organization of this great “external” hierarchy. In recent years, much that seems to us to be of importance has transpired concerning it. The special work of the Builders of the Adytum, indeed, has very definite connections with certain Western representatives of the terrestrial or planetary lodge. Yet you will find little information about the hierarchy in these lessons, because the work of imparting that information has been entrusted to others.

The aspect of the Great Work with which we are chiefly concerned has to do with what may be denominated the “internal” hierarchy. It is concerned with the doctrine of the microcosm, which Jesus plainly and simply declared when he said, “The kingdom of heaven is within you.”

All the great beings of the “external” hierarchy dwell within this “internal” lodge. They may seem to have a “local habitation” somewhere in the Himalayas, or in some distant planet or sun, or somewhere in those metaphysical realms we call the “higher planes.” But remember always that every real Master and adept dwells also, and always, in the “internal” lodge. Even the Great Lodge of Sirius has its abode in the little world as truly as in the *great* world.

Not one single personality who is actually a member of the macrocosmic hierarchy but is also a member of the hierarchy within. Tales of wonder and imagination are told about the Masters. Some of these are true. Others are utter nonsense. But know this: there is no real Master or adept, no actual member of the macrocosmic hierarchy, who is not with you now and always, even unto the end of the world.

The Masters do not arrive and depart. Neither need you go to them. Because of human dullness and weakness of vision, it is sometimes permitted to appear that great Beings go and come, but Ageless Wisdom tells us over and over again that this is mere illusion and warns us against falling into the many delusions that ignorance fashions from the stuff of this illusion. The macrocosmic lodge, in its entirety, is present always in the macrocosm.

Thus we find that in Hebrew Wisdom the secret knowledge of the higher planes and of the hierarchy is called *Maasseh Mercavah*, which means literally, “the work of the chariot.” It is to this that the title of Key 7 refers. The word *maasseh* signifies labor, a production of art, human conduct, and divine creation. It implies just what, a few paragraphs back, we said about making new combinations.

But the Qabalah shows us clearly what is really meant by the “chariot.” For the word מרכבה, *Mercavah*, is the number 267, and this is the number of the word מרכז, *Merkaz*, which signifies “center.” The work of the chariot is the establishment, in human personality, of a living center for the reception of the influence of the power of the lodge.

This work is the WAY, and the Way leads within. Where you are, there is the “lodge.” You may “travel in foreign countries” without ever leaving your house. Follow the advice of Lao-tze: “Having emptied yourself, remain where you are.” To empty yourself is to be rid of the delusion of separate existence. Then, no matter where you are, you may enter the Inner School, and pass from grade to grade.

The radio gives us a faulty, mechanical reproduction of a distant voice; but we are so fearfully and wonderfully made that within us we may experience not the voice only, but also the complete presence, of great Beings whose macrocosmic abodes may be on far-off stars. Before this may occur, however, we must make the instruments whereby such contact is established. The materials are at our disposal. We must do the work. Art must complete what nature has begun.

Primarily this is an art of speech, for by words the body-consciousness is controlled, and through language the patterns of the Temple are communicated to subconsciousness. Thus “the work of the chariot” begins with the study of words spoken or written by Master Builders who have preceded us. These we find in sacred books. Self-consciousness must grasp intellectually these statements of the law, and must formulate the plans. All this is the beginning of the art of right speech. In Freemasonry, therefore, Hiram or Hermes, is the Master Builder who marks out the patterns on the trestle-board for the guidance of the workmen. Furthermore, the whole mystery of Masonry has to do with a WORD possessed by Hiram. In the Masonic enumeration of the seven steps completing the staircase that leads to the Middle, or Interior, Chamber, which steps are said to symbolize the seven liberal, or liberating arts, the first step named is Grammar, the art concerned with the right use and application of the rules of a language in speaking or writing — an art based on the science of the true classification and functions of words.

The highest expression of occult speech is found in special exercises where thought, sound, and color are united in “words of power.” Hindu occultists call this *mantra* yoga, but the science has been developed in other than Oriental forms.

Its purpose is the modification of every cell of the body, the transmutation of the body consciousness from the illusive race-thought of separateness into the true reflection of the Inner Light. With this change in consciousness come changes in function and structure. Nerve centers that in the ordinary man are dormant are awakened in the body of the advancing practical occultist. Barriers are burned away. Certain formless clusters of cells take on definite form. Bit by bit the mechanism for contact with the Inner School is built and, as each part is completed, a new realization is experienced. The completion of this work is the transmutation of the corruptible mortal body into one that is incorruptible. Long before this final consummation, connection is made with the Inner School.

This is what is meant by the angel in Key 14. On his robe the name יהוה, I H V H, is written, for he is the One Existence of whom all persons (including angels and devas) are expressions. He is the one of whom it is written “Except יהוה build the house, they labor in vain that build it.” (Psalm 127, 1.) When subconsciousness has been turned, like a mirror, away from the illusions of the external world, and made to reflect the light of the Life-power, that light is transmitted to every cell of the body, and the “house” is built anew.

The 14th Key shows plainly that the path of unfoldment begins on the physical plane. What many students do not understand is that the path ends on the same plane. This is what the Qabalah means by saying that Kether, the Crown, is in Malkuth, the Kingdom, while Malkuth is also in Kether. Our aim is not to escape from the physical plane. It is to know experimentally that the Kingdom is truly “embodied in our flesh.” Therefore is the path symbolized by the 14th Key called that of “Temptation or Trial,” because it is associated with verification, and verification is established by experiment.

Does this mean that we deny the teaching, “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God”? On the contrary, we affirm it. The consciousness beyond thought cannot be inherited by flesh and blood because it is achieved by personal effort, and cannot be transmitted from one generation to another. It is an “acquired characteristic,” not transmissible by heredity. Neither is it the outcome of physical evolution. The most that evolution can do is to bring man to the stage of unfoldment where he can

begin the Great Work. The fact that we cannot enter the kingdom of God by the inheritance of the flesh has nothing whatever to do with the fact that the completion of the Great Work is a physiological transformation.

St. Paul, indeed, speaks of this very thing in the same fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians where he denies that flesh and blood can transmit the higher consciousness by heredity. He says that we shall be changed, and that the change will be the transmutation of a corruptible natural body into an incorruptible spiritual one; but this “spiritual body” is one that we can and do use on the physical plane. Its *nature* and *qualities* have undergone a transformation. In its corruptible state it is called by St. Paul the *psychical* body, but the translators have obscured the meaning of this passage.

The *soma psychikon* is the physical body dominated by the changing emotions and variations of the *psyche*, which is none other than subconsciousness, untrained by occult practice. The “spiritual body,” or *soma pneumatikon* is a physical body also, but it is under the direction of the *pneuma*, or spiritual life that we have termed superconsciousness throughout our lessons.

We have to learn that the physical expressions of the Life-power are just as spiritual as the others. We must know that the separation of the ethereal from the gross is not by any means permanent. When we are perfect, we shall be able to take up our physical bodies and lay them down, at will. More than one Master now known to us can do this. The more we try to get away from the physical, the more we shrink from it, the more we think of it as being gross and disgusting, the closer are we bound to it. What says *Light on the Path*? Many have read, but few have understood. “Remember the soiled garment you shrink from touching may have been yours yesterday, may be yours tomorrow. And if you turn with horror from it, when it is flung upon your shoulders it will cling the more closely to you.”

The separation we employ in following the directions of *The Emerald Table* is really classification. It is getting things into their proper order. Never forget that the same authority tells us that the work of the One Thing is completed “when it is turned into earth.” So, too, the golden city of the New Jerusalem, described in the Apocalypse, is represented as coming down from heaven, and the consummation of the Great Work is there described as a new heaven and a new earth.

Where will you put the dividing line between the physical and the higher aspects of Spirit? Recently we have heard that the astral plane is wholly evil, and that nothing good ever comes from it. Do the propounders of this preposterous doctrine understand what they mean when they talk, as they do, of the *omnipresence* of Spirit? It is true that many subtle, relatively “evil” forces reach us from the astral; but they need only to be understood, and redirected, just as man by understanding the lightning has turned it into all the beneficent uses of electricity, to cease wearing their inimical appearance. There are astral poisons, and poisonous astral entities, just as there are physical toxins and poisonous snakes and spiders. The one thing these entities desire is to be let alone, so that they may pursue their natural courses unhindered. Thus they are always putting into human brains, addled by one-sided metaphysical speculation, the foolish notion that the only thing to do with the astral plane is to let it severely alone.

Indiscriminate astral adventuring is foolish. Opening oneself to astral influences through the practice of negative psychism is suicidal insanity. But Spirit pervades the astral plane just as certainly as it pervades all other planes, including the physical. All this talk about planes is arbitrary, a mere convenience for the sake of intellectual classification. So many of us are tied up in these arbitrary classifications! We are like Tom Sawyer, when he was up in an airship with Huckleberry Finn. Huck ventured, “I guess we’re over Illinois now.” “No, we ain’t,” Tom contradicted. “Illinois is pink. I saw it on the map.”

Now look at Key 21. All through this lesson the thought has been stressed that the higher consciousness is realized through Art. See how the symbols of this picture tell the same story.

First consider the wreath. It is artificial, a man-made thing. At its top it is fastened with a red ribbon in the form of a horizontal figure 8, and another ribbon like it ties the wreath at the bottom. Both are red, to indicate the cyclic motion of the Mars force. This 8 symbol is what we see over the heads of the Magician and the woman in Key 8. The woman fastens it at the bottom.

The twenty-two parts of the wreath refer to the twenty-two forces represented by the Hebrew letters and the Tarot Keys. Each part is triple, because each of the twenty-two forces has three aspects. Each force

integrates form; each holds form in temporary equilibrium; each disintegrates form.

The wreath also suggests the operation of the productive power of cosmic imagination, for it is green, the color attributed to Venus in our color-scale. By its shape it is a big zero sign, so that it represents the realization of the vision of the Fool through the operation of the image-making power of the Empress.

The proportions of the wreath, moreover, are 5 units wide by 8 units high, so that it reminds us of the rectangular sides of the vault described in the Rosicrucian *Fama Fraternitatis*, and therefore suggests the spiral generated by the whirling square, as explained in *Tarot Fundamentals*, lesson forty-six. It might be said in passing that the same logarithmic spiral is a conspicuous and distinguishing mark of the Ionic Order of architecture, which Freemasonry associates with wisdom and with mastery.

The dancing figure at the center seems to be a woman, but tradition says that her veil conceals masculine reproductive organs. The consciousness beyond thought transcends sex-differentiation. The personal mind, in union with the One, is swallowed up, and whoever experiences this consciousness does not think, “I am a man,” or “I am a woman.” One does not think at all. One simply knows the full meaning of I AM.

Here human language fails us. We have no words to fit this experience. The Hindus made a brave attempt when they termed this realization “Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute,” but this label has no real content of meaning unless we have entered the Light. The 21st Key, however, sets symbols before us that we shall understand better and better as we unfold more and more of the latent potencies of Spirit.

The dancing figure has her legs crossed, like those of the Hanged Man and the Fool. But whereas the Hanged Man is bound, she is free, and whereas the Fool seems about to fall into an abyss, she dances on air, as if the law of gravitation had no power over her.

The letter-name connected with this picture also gives us a clue. It is spelt TV , T V, which may be read “Cross-And.” The cross of equal rays, or Tav, denotes the perfect union of self-consciousness and subconsciousness, in

which Subject and Object are perfectly blended, and all their forces held in equilibrium. Of this cross it is written, by a commentator on the works of Jacob Boehme:

There is one character by which God has characterized both Himself, and all the creatures, and shown that His presence is in all things. This is the cross in the sphere and mercurial wheel of nature, which goes through all the three principles.

Its vertical line is a symbol of self-consciousness, like the letter I in English, for when man's self-consciousness is at work during his waking hours, he stands upright. The horizontal line signifies the position of sleep, when the body is parallel to the surface of Mother Earth, and subconscious powers are predominant.

Other meanings there are, of course, but this one is a clue to many secrets. To this cross the letter-name Tav (T V) adds the Hebrew sign of the conjunction "and" (V), a symbol of addition and also of progress. The letter Vav, moreover, is the letter of the Hierophant, who, in the consciousness beyond thought, reveals to us the secrets of the cosmic plan.

Note well that the numbers of the Tarot Keys corresponding to Tav and Vav add up to 26, the number of יהוה, J I H V H. To enter the consciousness beyond thought is to be one with the Father of Lights, to be a conscious participator in His government of the universe, to see the Great Plan and know precisely our own part in the execution of that great design.

This is the freedom within the Law, experienced by those who know. Seek this first, and to you shall be added all things. Many wish for freedom. Many bewail their limitations. Many protest their desire for illumination. Yet not one in ten thousand really seeks, to say nothing of putting this quest before every other consideration.

Like those who were bidden to the feast, most persons make excuses. Those only are truly ready who have grasped the truth that nothing else in life is quite as important as to be a citizen of the kingdom of the Life-power. Whoever sees that to abandon everything for this quest is to gain infinitely more than the value of anything left behind, sees indeed. The world may say, "How can he make such sacrifices?" But there is no sacrifice. So long as one feels that any giving up is a sacrifice, so long as one prates of paying

karmic debts, one is caught in the delusion of separateness. When one really sees, the whole matter resolves itself into a question of discrimination, of the recognition of true values.

The Way to Freedom is open to you. Do you want freedom hard enough to follow it? Are you merely “interested in occultism,” or have you put liberation above every other consideration? Each must answer this question for himself. To forsake all is to gain the ALL. The forsaking is only the last illusion. Nothing is really lost when ALL is gained.

Here, lest we be misunderstood, it may be well to say that if some course appears to be a duty, or to involve a sacrifice, and one is perfectly willing to make a sacrifice, one is further on the Way to Liberation than he who refuses to give up anything for the Life of the Spirit. The surrender of self-will is a marked advance for those who are at the stage where they must make it.

But so long as self-will appears to the student to be a *reality*, so that he feels a wrench in giving it up, he has not become one who really knows. If one can interpret one’s adversities as karmic debts, and rejoice that they are finally being paid, that is a step in the right direction, also.

Experience shows, however, that those who really do tear the giant weed of self-will out of their hearts with the accompaniment of awful pain and suffering, are not likely to say much about it. Nor are the persons who are making a brave effort to give up self-will to the Divine Will likely to say very much about it, either.

There is a spurious humility which betrays itself to all beholders. Not a few persons compensate for their feeling of inferiority by talking a great deal about how they are paying their karmic debts. These are the ones who remember, with great detail, their gaudy sins in wondrous “recollections” of former incarnations. These are the ones, who when they speak of guidance, mean “The Lord hath spoken to *me*, and woe to you if you don’t take my word for it!” One sure test of the mental honesty of any person who is forever talking about self-sacrifice and reliance on guidance is to set him to work at the dull drudgery of learning the preliminary technique of concentration. Depend upon it, he will always find the best possible reasons, “an inner leading,” usually, for avoiding some real hard work.

Because learning Tarot and what goes with it calls for not a little of this very kind of drudgery, it soon separates the real seekers from those spiritual Pharisees who seek in occultism for occasions to rejoice that they are not as other men are.

Turn your face steadfastly toward the ONE, and you shall find in THAT full satisfaction for your every need. For your spiritual needs, for your mental requirements, for full emotional satisfaction, for external physical necessities. And the measure is full, pressed down, and running over. There is no niggardliness in the Life-power's provision for us, once the channels are open.

Here we but repeat the words of the wise, uttered and written in every age. To their testimony let us add ours. Far from perfection though we are, yet have we tasted the fruit of the magic tree and found it good. May this same knowledge be yours, and may these words of ours encourage you to follow the path, step by step, until you reach the Great Center, the Palace of Holiness in the Midst, where sits the Creator on His Throne.