

Response

The law attributed to Key 9 is “Response.” This law can be stated thus: EVERY ACTIVITY OF HUMAN PERSONALITY IS REALLY A RESPONSE TO THE INITIATIVE OF THE ORIGINATING PRINCIPLE OF THE UNIVERSE. The essential thought here is that no personal activity whatsoever has its beginning, source, or origin within the limits of the personality. All *personal* activity is derived reflected, responsive.

To every one of us it seems as though all of our thoughts and actions are the expression of purely personal motives. This semblance of personal initiative effects the most illumined of wise men, (except in rare moments of ecstatic identification with the Absolute) just as it does anyone else. But the wise man knows better and thinks differently from those who attempt to live upon the assumption that personal thought, feeling, and action are self-caused.

Personality is the mask of the TRUE IDENTITY, and that IDENTITY is superior to, and unlimited by, the conditions of personality. It is from the inner and superior IDENTITY that all original impulse flows, and all of the activities of personality – the instrument or vehicle – are effects of this outward and downward movement of the energy, or working power, of the True IDENTITY or I AM.

The Ageless Wisdom teaches that there is but ONE IDENTITY in all of the universe, and every personality is but an expression of that ONE IDENTITY. It is the *single source* of all forms of existence. Its presence is the substance of everything. It is the energy of the ONE IDENTITY that is released in any particular form of activity. It is the mental quality of that ONE IDENTITY which is manifested in any particular expression of consciousness. Since your real nature is none other than that ONE, whatever laws and forces condition the activities of your personality must be laws and forces which proceed from your TRUE IDENTITY.

The Hebrew letter YOD resembles a tongue of flame in appearance. It is a component part of every letter of the Hebrew alphabet; it is because Yod is the *foundation* of the Hebrew letters that it is called the “Flame Alphabet.”

Since the Hebrew alphabet is, in itself, a symbol of everything that ever was or will be, it follows that the ONE IDENTITY, represented by Yod, enters into every mode of the Life Power's Self-expression.

Yod is a Hebrew word meaning "the hand of man." This is a clear indication of the ancient doctrine: THE PRIMARY AND FUNDAMENTAL REALITY OF THE UNIVERSE IS IDENTICAL WITH THE POWER WHICH FINDS EXPRESSION IN THE HANDIWORK OF HUMAN BEINGS. It is said of the letter Yod that its upper point represents the Primal Will, while the rest of it is assigned to the aspect of the Life Power called Wisdom. This means that all mental activity, which is the basis of all manifestation is derived directly from the ONE IDENTITY, is actuated by Its WILL.

Among the other meanings of this key is that of the act of contact, or union, or opposite forces. The hand of man is a vivid symbol of the potencies of contact of the higher with the lower, since it is the manipulator of instruments and that which creates instruments.

This Key represents attainment through union. This means that the end of the path is reached when the Inner Self meets the personality in perfect union and contact. A graphic symbol of this is the slow, steady growth throughout the ages of stalagmites and stalactites in a cave. The stalagmite represents the personality and the stalactite the individuality. When at last they reach the stage of growth where they make contact, their united form is approximately that of the letter I, which is the Greek and English form of the letter Yod.

In writing the figure 9 in ordinary script, the first part of the character is a reproduction of the Zero sign, and from the point where this circle is closed, a straight line, or figure 1, descends. In writing the circular part one describes a complete circuit, suggesting the completion of a course of action. Then the straight line is drawn, figure 1, which is the symbol of beginning. Thus the end of one cycle is always the beginning of the next. This is to show that attainment is never completed. After the union of the personality and individuality, which is the goal of human attainment, there are still greater heights to scale.

Nine, 9, is said to be the number of adeptship and of prophecy. It is easy to see how the Hermit represents adeptship, for he stands upon the mountain peak. His staff is in his left hand, which indicates that he does not need it for climbing. It is evident that he has reached the top, that he is supreme, that he has come to the end of the path of occult attainment.

It is not so obvious that he represents prophecy, although his white beard and venerable aspect suggest the traditional conception of what a prophet ought to look like. Yet the idea of prophecy is really represented by this picture. In the first place, a prophet is not merely one who makes predictions. If he is a true prophet his predictions must be correctly founded upon accurate knowledge, just as an astronomer predicts an eclipse hundreds of years ahead of time by his accurate knowledge of the principles governing astronomical movements. Hence a true prophet is one who understands the Law. He knows the principles upon which the self-expression of the Life Power is based. He has, so to say, been over the road, and this is what makes him competent to guide others.

The Hermit stands looking down over the path by which he has ascended, and which others are climbing. He knows every step of that path. He foresees all of the difficulties that the climbers will encounter. And this is something we need to keep remembering. For the Hermit, you recall, is the symbol of the I AM that is above every personality. Thus Tarot subtly intimates to us through this picture, that we are in continual contact with a Reality which already knows all that we have thought, all that we have done, and knows, also, every step on the path ahead of us.

This does not mean predestination, or fate, as generally understood. No outside force drives us remorselessly onward. Instead an indwelling Presence, timeless and eternal, knows already every experience we must go through in terms of time and space for the fulfillment of its purpose. It guides us, lovingly and sympathetically and sends the light of its omniscience into your personal consciousness to give us courage to continue the struggle against seeming limitation and bondage, which It knows are but appearances. Just as in the story of the Prodigal Son, the Father was waiting, and saw his son returning while yet he was far off, so does the One Identity seated in the hearts of men watch, from that pinnacle which is both above and within the personality, the approach of each soul toward the goal of true Self-realization.

The zodiacal sign Virgo is attributed to Key 9. Its ruler is Mercury. Virgo is the harvest sign, thus relating to food. The connection here is that Virgo rules the intestines, where food is assimilated and transmuted into bone, sinew, and tissue. At one stage of intestinal digestion, the food is transformed into an oily milky substance called chyle, from which the lacteals absorb nourishment for the bloodstream. When under proper manipulation, the finer forces always present in chyle are liberated into the bloodstream, they energize certain brain centers, and the result is a proper condition for illumination. And characteristic of illumination is the direct perception of the actual presence of the ONE IDENTITY.

It will pay you to pursue this thought as far as you can beyond this explanation. Consider the fact that in all of the legends of World-Saviors, the great one is always born of a Virgin. Consider, also, that Jesus is said to have been born in Bethlehem, which means "The House of Bread." The liberating power is born or released, in the dark cave of the House of Bread.

Mercury, which is the ruler of Virgo, and which is also exalted therein, represents the Life Power working at the self-conscious level, through the brain. This means that the highest expression of self-conscious activity is manifested in its control of the activities of the intestinal tract. This may sound strange, but it is perfectly true. We control the activities of the intestines from the self-conscious level by carefully choosing what we eat, and by utilizing the law of suggestion to bring about the release of the subtle forces in chyle.

This last seldom happens unless one knows of the possibility, understands to some degree how such release of subtle force will bring about illumination, and definitely takes himself in hand for the sake of accomplishing the Great Work. It has been said that God chooses the weak things of the world to confound the wise, and certainly the fact that illumination depends upon the release into the bloodstream of a subtle force that is generated in the intestinal tract is not one that will produce any feeling of pseudo-aestheticism. But there it is, a stubborn fact, and there is real beauty in it too, for those with eyes to see. For is not anything which contributes to illumination something that makes for the perception of true beauty?

The Hermit is he who stands alone, or he who is solitary. The ONE IDENTITY, because it includes all manifestation, is unique. It has no support other than Itself. Thus a certain book of Hebrew wisdom says that the letter Yod is “above all (symbolizing the Father) and with Him is none other associated.”

He who stands alone symbolizes the adept, also, because, while he consciously identifies himself with all that is, by that very act he has set himself apart from the rest of humanity, because he cannot share his knowledge with those who cannot comprehend it. Thus he will always be, in a sense, a Hermit, by reason of his superior knowledge. This is not the prideful separateness of the egotist, by any means. There was no tinge of egotism in Einstein’s assertion that not twelve men in all of the world could understand his theory of relativity perfectly. Superiority and loneliness are inseparable. Yet the loneliness of the sage is not as the loneliness of the unenlightened, because the sage has what the less enlightened cannot enjoy, the constant companionship of the Supreme Self, the constant sense of union with that one Reality which is his own IDENTITY.

The scene of Key 9 is a direct antithesis of Strength. In the 8th Key we see a fertile valley, warmed by the Sun. Here is an icy, wind-swept peak, wrapped in darkness. This does not mean that they who experience the demonstration of the primordial glory receive naught for their pains but a sterile, icy perception of abstract truth. The Hermit, himself is warmly clad, and carries his own light. The cold and darkness are but symbols of the latency of the fiery activity of the ONE FORCE, and thus are in direct antithesis to the lion in the preceding Key. The heights of spiritual consciousness seem cold and dark for us, who have not scaled them; but they who stand upon those cold and lofty peaks suffer no discomfort.

The ice at the Hermit’s feet is the source of the river in the Empress’ garden, the same river that flows behind the Emperor and the Chariot. Here its power is arrested and crystallized, because the symbolism of this Key refers to THAT which does not, Itself, enter into action, though it is the sum-total of all of the activity in the Universe.

The central figure is a bearded ancient. He is the “Most Holy Ancient One,” identified in Qabalah with the Primal Will. He is clad in gray, a mixture of black and white, the colors of the High Priestess’ pillars, of the wand and

rose of the Fool, and of the sphinxes which draw the Chariot. The Hermit has achieved equilibration, union of all pairs of opposites. His blue cap is in the shape of the letter YOD.

He has brought his lantern and staff with him from the valley below whence he came. The staff, a branch of a tree, is a product of the organic side of nature. It refers to the fiery activity, symbolized in Key 8, which he has used to help him on his Journey. Here he holds it in his left hand, to show that he no longer needs it for climbing.

The staff grew, but the lantern was made. It is of glass and metal, representing the inorganic side of nature. The basic principles upon which our understanding of cosmic law is founded are discoverable in the physical and chemical laws of the inorganic aspects of matter as they have been modified by man. We rely, however, upon the Life Power's self expression through organic beings to assist us in our efforts to rise above self-conscious limitations to the heights of Super-consciousness.

The light in the lantern is from a six-pointed star. This star is composed of two interlaced equilateral triangles which, from time immemorial, have typified the union of opposites. One of the great Masters of the Wisdom once made a statement to the effect that "he who understands this symbol, in all of its aspects, is virtually an adept."

The picture of the Hermit tells us that above the merely personal level of our daily existence there is a real Presence which now IS all that we aspire to be. That Presence, however far off it may seem to be, however inadequate our definitions of it may seem to us, however shrouded in darkness and obscurity its real nature, is friendly and definitely helpful.

Comprehend it we may not. Touch it we can, and as often as we remember to do so. For only by an illusion are we separate from it. In truth it enters into every tiniest detail of our lives. Actively present in all that we think, or say, or do is the ONE IDENTITY, the Ancient of the Ancient Ones, the fundamental and sole WILL, whence all manifestation proceeds.

Key 9 has a direct connection with each of the Keys preceding it in the series. As the number 9, it is the end of the numerical cycle, and includes with itself each of the preceding numbers. For instance, the Hermit is connected with the Fool in many ways. He is the Fool after his ascent up to

the heights from which he fell, thus symbolizing the successful termination of a complete cycle of involution and evolution. The Fool is young Eternal Youth. The Hermit is aged, experienced. Yet both are the same, for both youth and age are but appearances of the No Thing. It is at once the oldest and youngest thing in the Universe. It is ageless, sexless, and changeless, yet has all of the potencies and causes of all phenomenal activities.

This week try to establish a logical connection between Key 9 and each Key in the series preceding it. You will find this exercise of great benefit in your Tarot work, for it is essential that you learn to recognize the relationships existing between the various Keys. This is entirely a matter of practice, and though it seems very difficult at first, you will find that it becomes increasingly easy with practice. Be sure to make the attempt. Write what you discover in your diary notebook.