
The Hermetic Order

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INTRODUCTION

The topic is the great and awesome figure of Hermes. As you are aware, no doubt, some religions such as buddhism and christianity, islam, confucianism possess human founders whom we can locate in history. Others like daoism, shinto and hinduism grew from early, probably shamanistic beginnings to their later condition or great development and of sublime grandeur.

Two religions however represent an exception to both of these categories. And they are: gnosticism; the gnostic tradition and its very close, indeed perhaps its very closest, representative: hermeticism. There was no special person who founded gnosticism, although the majority of the gnostic teachers, as we know, came to attach themselves to the then brand new movement of christianity. And most gnostic scriptures make repeated referential references to Jesus.

In fact we are now at the point in scholarship where in most of the normative currently published literature when such terms appear as pagan gnosticism they are most inevitably referred to hermeticism.

Gnosticism is now quite clearly recognized as a chris-

tian or at least christian related phenomenon. Similarly there was no man by the name of hermes who founded what often was translated as the religion of the mind or as it became known: hermeticism.

The origins of the hermetic teachings are lost, they are lost in the land of myth and legend which however did not stop the hermetic teachers from attaching their system to the name and the figure of hermes.

Hermes of course was the greek god of the mind or as probably today we would call it consciousness. And so he may be called a god or perhaps even the god of wisdom. We will see more about the greek hermes few lines below. Hermes of course is also known for possessing, as far as his representation is concerned in statues and images, as possessing wings on his sandals and wings on his helmet to indicate that he flies about. Any writings within a particular time and within in a certain cultural milieu that were heard to be inspired by true divine wisdom were attributed generally to the god of wisdom and they were very often said to be written by hermes himself. That is why we possess a quite extensive and very beautiful literature, some excerpts will be shared with you later on, which are called the hermetic writings and which are poetically, mythically attributed to hermes.

SOURCES OF WISDOM

Now we need to remember that these very kinds of hermetic writings where let's say personal ambition and vainglory were considered to be incompatible with spiritual, with religious pursuits and where people in all humility but all also in all honesty were able to say that when they wrote down something that was inspired by a higher source of wisdom, this was written by hermes.

Later on when kind of personalistic mindset came to prevail, such as in medieval christianity, this poetic license of authorship was taken literally. And so when we find various medieval chronicles we often see represented there as a historical person hermes the thrice great or hermes trismegistus, greatest of kings, greatest of philosophers and greatest of priests. This was a turning of an archetype permit into history which of course has been the bane of christendom after the third of the fourth century and which is still very much with us.

So we have to understand that, these were the very direct kind of unsophisticated results of a shifting of gears from a largely ahistorical, archetypal and mythological world view to the linear, concrete historical world view which

eventually came to prevail. It didn't really obtain I would say final victory until a good period after the renaissance but it kept encroaching upon things. And that is why there is that kind of confusion about hermes as a historical figure or hermes as the god, the archetype that inspired works of wisdom. We find that sort of thing in other sources, you find it for instance in the early cabbalistic work such as the zohar, which where the most of the teachings are attributed to a legendary rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, who however if he ever lived had very little connection with it. Right down to say, a good friend Dr. Karl Jung, who as again many of you know wrote a very beautiful little gnostic treatise called the seven sermons to the dead. Which again he poetically attributed to the gnostic teacher Basilides where obviously he wrote it himself. So this sort of thing went on.

Thus we must understand then that the various writings which are our principle sources today about the religion, the mystery of the hermeticists, the hermetica, the hermetic writings are in a modern sense really anonymous. But we must also be cognisant of the possibility that they were all inspired by a common mysterious spiritual principle. Which in today's language might be described as an archetype and to which the name hermes was given.

HERMES AND ANCIENT EGYPT

Now another important matter that we have to recognize, very very important from this point of view is that the hermes appearing in the literature of hermeticism, in the hermetic books, is not the greek hermes pure and simple. The name is there. Rather it is quite certain that this figure is to a major extend the wisdom god of ancient egypt, Thot or Tahuti, who has of course been one of the great gods of ancient egypt from early pharaonic times on.

As long as five-thousand years ago there existed already in hermopolis as it came to be called later on, the city of hermes or hmoun, there existed a great center of worship dedicated to this great figure. So he has been there for a very long time. He played part in the creation of pharaonic egypt, he was also the keeper and author of the records of the gods, the scribe. And also, most importantly for our purpose is a psychopomp, a guide of the souls in the underworld. He was regarded as the author of all writing and the actual scribe who wrote the ancient scriptures. He supervised the drawing up of the laws and assured that these and other holy books will be preserved in appropriate libraries. He was known as the lord of the moon who was

in charge of the mysterious and dark world of the night. And more than this he was really himself the divine word from which all the manifest words arose.

There is good reason to suspect that the logos concept, announced by the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria and utilized by Christianity, they have at least in part been derived also from the Egyptian god of wisdom. So that in essence, at least in that part of the world, he really was the first logos, the first word incarnate. For Osiris and Isis, as is explained in the discussion about Osiris, he was the master magician who taught Isis how to bring her slain royal spouse back to life, and thus conceived the conquering victorious hero Horus.

The later story of the Osiris myth includes the in the pyramid texts primarily inscribed, the tremendously lengthy story of the ongoing incredible warfare wherein Horus fights his evil uncle Seth and eventually conquers and wins the battles. And in these battles there are frequent engagements where the heroes, the leading heroes and others become wounded then the armies are exhausted then the battle wouldn't go on.

And what always happens then is Hermes appears. And like a sort of primordial doctor Henry Kissinger he runs back and forth between the armies but not for the purpose of really telling them at that point to make peace but rather to help to end the job and heal the wounded and give each side new courage to go at it again. And only when you might say the entire process has been completed when the time is right to make peace then he becomes the ambassador of both sides negotiating the final great peace of up-

per and lower egypt.

In all of this features we could really go on and on. There are extremely important esoteric overtones which become of hermeticism and of the hermetic tradition throughout the ages. Because the aionial battles between horus and seth are believe it or not the prototype for alchemy. This is the conflict of the two opposing powers. And hermes is the alchemist, the facilitator, also the alchemical mercury since mercurius is the roman name for hermes. And so he is the facilitator of the reconciliation of the opposites. But the reconciliation of the opposites occurs only at the carnimation of the process of the conflict when the time is right for such a conciliation. A premature reconciliation of the opposites leads to further trouble.

Let's say the kinds of peace treaties that are enforced from above on people who no inclination at least for that particular arrangement are the root and cause of further difficulties as I would think by now we have fairly well discovered in the history of our culture and others also. Except for the fact of course that nobody knows any history, nobody wants to know any history, they don't teach it in the schools. And the memory of the majority of our people in this country barely reaches back to the vietnam war. Which is of course a grievous calamity because out of that kind of ignorance only further difficulties can arise.

Why do you suppose there was all of this horrible going on in many parts of europe. Let's see the croatian and the serbs having a go at it and others too, well that's all the result of a certain peace treaties which were enforced on this various countries after world war one. Certainly further

back than one can expect anybody to remember after all. I was talking to a very young, very prosperous, very rich person a lady sometime back, maybe in her late thirties or early forties, and she asked me perfectly with a straight face, with a straight voice: "On whose side did great Britain fight in world war two?" Well, I said I believe Britain fought on her own side. I don't think that I have really cleared the difficulty up for her. But these are the kinds of peace treaties and arrangements which are enforced on people as after world war one at Versailles and other places. And they are premature arrangements. Processes have not been allowed to work themselves out whereby a proper arrangement could obtain, and therefore of course wait a while maybe forty years maybe thirty years whatever, maybe a century and just as soon as certain external restraints are removed the conflict is right there again. People can't understand that. Well, everybody likes peace as long as it does not interfere with what they would like to do. And the priorities change and so then difficulties arise. In any event, I don't want to overstress the point but what all of this means is that in all manner of situations of that kind in life where there are binaries, opposites engaged with each other a process must take place.

THE PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION

This is again my favorite subject of the principle of process versus an episode. To most people nowadays life is episodic, it consists of episodes. After all isn't that the way the television works, there are episodes, right? Then tune in again. So this has become a metaphor for life. Tune in tomorrow next time same station and there'll be another episode. And of course the connections are not really recognized, and so we don't see processes we only see episodes.

But hermes is the governor of the process and the prototype are the great battles in the pyramid texts where he guards the conflict and shepherds it to the point where the final reconciliation, the reconciliation, the proper solution is possible. And then he brings it about.

So all of these elements that we mention, his association with writing, his association with creation, his association with bringing osiris back to life. All of these, they all become sort of the root concepts of the function of the archetype of hermes the thrice great as time goes on.

THE GREEK HERMES

Now of course there is also the greek hermes to consider who is part of this figure. Who was really as it has been said, by Jane Ellen Harrison - the great mythologist, that hermes was the most greek of all the olympian gods. Interesting how he ended up in egypt then. Which means that he was the most baffling, the most confusing, the most complex of the gods. And if you have been around greeks, you will find that they are baffling and confusing and complex people. The name hermes is derived from Herma or Hermaion which is a pile of stones. The reason for that is that in the myth of concerning hermes he killed the many eyed guardian monster argus and was brought to trial for this by his fellow gods. And the gods voted with stone tablets, so it was like blackstoning somebody. And they voted with stone tables equipping him, they threw the tables at his feet. And so a heap of stones built around him. And all the gods threw down the stones which meant you are ok, you are exonerated. He is a son of zeus.

You read this in the prolog to Aion makes hermes introduce himself in the following manner: "Atlas who wears on back of bronze the ancient. Abode of the gods in heaven,

had a daughter. Whose name was Maia, born of a goddess: She lay with Zeus, and bore me, Hermes, Servant of the immortals." Coincidence or archetype of synchronicity, buddhas mother was also Maia. This is one of her names. And the astrological association in much of buddhism astrology with the lord buddha is the planet mercury. Mercury being that again the roman name of hermes.

So already as a small child hermes is a trickster. He escapes from his cradle and he steals some of apollo's oxen. At the same time he took the shell of a turtle and strong streams across the shell and thus invented the instrument called the lira or the lyre. Which is not the appellation for lawyers, liar, but rather the musical instrument of the poets. And he gave apollo the lyre. And that is how apollo became the patron of music. And thus apollo not only forgives him but he becomes his good friend. Apollo of course is a sun god, symbolic of the light of consciousness perhaps even sort of an ego consciousness. And hermes takes the oxen from him, which means - the latin word for oxen in the plural is pecunia, and that's how you come up with something pecuniary because how many cattle you had that was the measure of riches, those were the days when everybody was a cowboy. And so he takes material things from him but compensates him by giving him poetry, imagination. And it seems that apollo is certainly wise enough to recognize that it is a good exchange.

So he is really the one in the greek mythology that introduces arts, imagination. And substitutes it for mere hoarding of material possessions. Perhaps we ought to really erect a temple for hermes in his greek form, in our culture,

it would do us a great deal of good. And he becomes the master of eloquence, god of roots of commercial transactions, good luck, of all gains including gymnastics. I am sad to say but certainly not of jogging and aerobics. And he wears that drawn head and wings and the winged sandals and carries the caduceus. Now you can see how the quality is even after this very brief description similar with the Egyptian Toth.

But of course in Egypt everything carries a grave and sort of eternal image. The Egyptians are the first whom might say in Latin again carried "full gravitas". While with Greeks it's always very, well shall we say mercurial. But it's definitely the same archetype and the truly interesting aspect of that situation is that the ancient Greeks knew that. These people had a fabulous sense of being affinitized to archetypes, to archetype a reality. And they came right out and said it yes. Hermes is Toth. Just like they said that all the goddesses are Isis. Of course they looked to Egyptians as really kind of the elders of their world but they had that wonderful sense of recognizing one archetype in several archetypal images. And giving recognition to that underlying reality, that underlying unity. Which of course is a let's say a quality that wasn't totally lost for a long time.

That's why the alchemist could say that the alchemical mercury which is both the spiritual mercury, the chemical and the mercurius hermes figure was the same as Christ. So once again: rationalists could never say that. Rationalists would say either this or that. But somebody who is affinitized to archetype realities can see: oh yes but it really means to see it fulfills the same rule.

And we might say archetype is as archetype does. If he is a reconciler of the opposites if he redeemes the light from the darkness, the luminatur and brings it out into manifestation. Then call it christ, call it mercuri it is a saviour it is a messiah it is a reconciler of the opposite it's a hermetic figure.

And so the awesome god image of the egyptians conjoined with the swift image of the greeks really became the late greco-egyptian hermes at the period of the alexandrian culture, in the alexandrian period. When after the initial conquest of egypt on the part of Alexander the Great and later on the part of the romans, Alexandria and the surrounding countryside in egypt became in many ways the spiritual, culturual capital and matrix of the mediterranean world.

And where now there reigned among others a figure called by the greek name of hermes because the language by then was greek for the educated people and coptic for the less educated. Which however was also written in the greek alphabet and was full of greek words. Bearing the greek name of hermes but having also very largely the characteristics of the egyptian Toth. This is the hermes we are dealing with.

THE MOVING SPIRITUAL REALITY

And we might then now say, well why are we concerning ourselves with this figure? And here I would sort of sound a theory to the effect, I have mentioned this before and I think it's a fairly good one, that the period of a couple of hundred years BC and again a hundred, a hundred-fifty, two hundred years AD was a messianic period. For a large portion of the mediterranean area.

An archetype of situation arose wherein we might say the archetype of redemption became extremely great importance. And it manifested in the semitic milieu but it also manifested in egypt and elsewhere. It's well known that the jews were not the only people who where expecting a messiah, a sort of a messiah, right at the time of Jesus. Well, they didn't call it by the hebrew name of messiah of course but that's what it was.

And even if we go back further, we extend it to five hundred or so BC. Alexander the Great and his partial successors such as the ptolemaic rulers, the ptolemaic pharaos of egypt where also redeemers. One of the greatest ptolemaic kings of egypt was named ptolemy soter. Soter was the most solemn name attributed to christ. And so you might

say a reality, a spiritual reality, for a few hundred years was moving and brewing and trying to come into manifest existence with as greater power and quality as possible. And various people interpreted it in a variety of ways. Of course the jews interpreted it to a large extent within their own tradition and with their own socio-political milieu of the time, he is somebody who is going to come and redeem us from the bloody romans. Very much as if you have asked people recently anywhere in russia or in eastern, in central europe if a redeemer came right now, if christ came to back to earth again what do you think he would do. They would have said, he would drive out the damn russians, they would drive out the soviets. But that's how the jews felt about the romans at that time. And who says that that's not what has happend. There could be forces just a little bit deeper at work than the politicians of this world.

But we wouldn't want to beat around the bush too much about that. So that is what was taking place and it found various manifestations. And as in the semitic milieu it came to constellate itself eventually with tremendous power around Jesus. In the egyptian milieu it came to constellate itself around the figure, no longer an embodied individual - perhaps never was, around the figure of hermes.

GNOSTICS AND HERMETICS

And so two parallel developments arose. One arose at least initially in palestine, in judea, and that was christian gnosticism and the other phenomenon arose in egypt as hermeticism. But the curious thing is that their content, their trust, their message was virtually identical. There are no two movements that are closer together than those two.

And we find for instance if we try to look at these in a manner which is always to a certain extent helpful within what has happened in a socialological context. We find for instance in that very fine early part of this century work, "the thrice greatest hermes" by a man whom I very much respect GRS Mead. We find it in the first volume of his work where he presents on the basis of the various historians, he presents a graphic account of the tremendous religious enthusiasm and the kind of messianic inventive enterprise of the hellenistic age.

And he demonstrates how great role the figure of the greco-egyptian hermes played in the spiritual movements active within this period indicated. Hermeticism and Gnosticism, the two movements. Now once again let me indicate that the two have much more in common than many

writers assumed and that is becoming increasingly clear now.

The principle difference really was only that the hermeticists utilized the figure of hermes as the archetype of salvific wisdom, while the latter - the gnostics accepted the recently arisen messianic figure of Jesus in a similar manner.

Both hermeticists and gnostics used the term gnosis to describe the experience of liberating interior knowledge. Both regarded the physical world of cosmos as a place of confinement from when gnosis can liberate the human spirit. The affinity existing between the two schools is also worn out by the fact that in the increasingly famous Nag Hammadi library of the egyptian gnostics several works of purely hermetic character were found. It's very likely that christian gnostics and so-called pagan hermeticists freely availed themselves of each others literature and derived benefits there from. It is quite likely that the hermetic communities were primarily egyptians. Egyptian men and women for having been brought up in the memorial traditions of their land preferred an egyptian archetype of structure to the semitic one of christian gnosticism or jewish essenism or even the greek orientation of the neoplatonic and neo-pythogorean mysticism. Like the gnostics these devotees of hermes were people who as Jung said about the gnostics worked with original compelling forces and images, if you want to put it psychologically, of the deep unconscious. They were individuals who experienced deep realizations and communed with powerful images in states of ecstasy and of visionary transport.

The writings, as any reader can easily recognize, are full of beauty and poetic written, they are replete with intense feeling generated by profound individual experiences. Gnostics and hermeticists both really base their lives and work on the position that and this is very important, this is the cornerstone, without that there is no hermetic and no gnostic point of view. Mainly that intimate first hand and personal knowledge of divine things is possible for human beings. Indeed it maybe said that they have held unless a human being enters into an intimate relationship with the divine that person is lacking anything that could be called true fulfillment.

And so all the hermetic practices, the hermetic teachings were organized in such a fashion that they would lead toward that kind of an objective. The gnostic and the hermetic systems are really all in the nature of circumambulating the center. Circumambulating the center after the fashion of a spiral and coming closer and closer to it. And so, at least it is my view I'm much more familiar with the gnostic writings than with the hermetic but I know that in the gnostic writings that I have been exposed to I feel there is really no extremious material at all. Everything that is there is designed to somehow lead the individual closer and closer to the experience of gnosis. It is all organized around that gnosis, very little window dressing there is very little garnishing it all has to do with that.

And of course the principle reason for that being that as far as the evidence indicates this scriptures were written by people who themselves have experienced. And who therefore could phrase things in such a manner that everything

would lead the reader, the hearer in whatever it is communicated to the experience again.

This is of course the principle that when the blind lead the blind they both end up in the hole or in the ditch. And this is what is happening in the world in many ways, this is what has been happening for the world for a long time. When the people who teach, when the people who decree dogmas, when the people you lead countries, religions, societal groups - whatever they may be - themselves have not experienced what they are talking about. They obviously don't have, can't have the ability to lead others to the experience.

And then however when the "Urerfahrung" as old Jung has called it in German the source experience, the original experience is still reasonably near. Let's say if you go to the Carmelite monks some years after Saint John of the Cross, Saint Teresa of Ávila were there, well some of the experience of these great mystics will still linger on there. And that is why the saints, the mystics, the experiencers have really been the salt who kept things moving. Because they brought some of that experience back in again, aha it can be done, these people have actually been there. They've experienced, they knew, you don't have just to believe. You actually can go there, they have done it. They have done it so it maybe can happen to us again. This sort of thing is a terrific boom.

But later on in come the rationalists. And they say well this all can be figured out, we don't need all this stuff it's a matter of neat categories, it's a matter of reason and work on that basis. Well of course then these are the people who

to use the biblical adage referring to the ferry seats; that kind of bunch. They sit in the door like nasty old dogs, they sit in the door and growl at everybody who comes to the door and won't let people come in and they themselves will not go in either. That is always a terribly awful and difficult thing. These were the people who were very close to these things and who worked with these images.

And as I mentioned before we possess no names or writers and teachers of the hermetic works because that was not their method. They would not sign their name to things. We know of no hermetic master for instance to be compared with the gnostic masters. We know at least of a lot of the greek gnostic teachers, we have their names, Valentinus, Basilides, Carpocrates, others. But this should not lead us to believe however that great teachers and initiators did not exist in hermetic communities, they certainly did exist. One of the most fascinating treatise is to come to light in more recent times within the context of the Nag Hammadi materials for instance is the book the eighth reveals the ninth or the treatise of the eight and the nine, which describes the spiritual experiences of a hermetic teacher who is referred to as father and of a student called son. That gives us a charming picture of the spiritual relationship as it apparently existed between master and disciple in hermetic community.

In fact it would appear from the available evidence that what would happen is that there were these initiators, hermetic teachers, so they were the psychopomps in a physical body and they would lead the initiates into the heavens into the deeper experiences. And it is that kind of

a dialogue between the guide and the person who is now given to experience all of these that we find in the hermetic works.

PRAYERS FROM THE CORPUS HERMETICUM

Well let me just get hold of a few examples of this to give you an idea as to what kind of material we are dealing with here. Let me read to you at this point a few prayers from the hermetic corpus that are addressed to hermes. To give us a feeling of the attitude and the spirit of these people and how they approached hermes. Here is an invocation to hermes.

"Come unto me lord hermes, even as into womans wombs come babes."

What an interesting metaphor, I want to become pregnant with the god. Come into me so that I can give birth to you.

"Come unto me, lord hermes, who dost collect the food of gods and men. Lord Hermes, come to me, and give me grace, and victory and health and happiness, and cheerful countenance, beauty and powers in sight of all. I know thy name that shineth forth in heaven; I know thy forms as well; I know thy tree; I know thy wood as well. I know thee, Hermes, who thou art, and whence thou art, and what thy city is. I know thy names in the egyptian tongue, and thy true name as it is written on the holy tablet in the

holy place at hermes' city, where thou dost have thy birth. I know thee, Hermes, and thou knowest me; I am thou, and thou art I. Come unto me; fulfil all that I crave; be favourable to me together with good fortune and the blessing of the good."

These are invocations, these are magical formulae whereby hermes is called. Here is another one.

"Come unto me, Lord Hermes, O thou of many names, who know'st the secrets hidden both beneath the poles of heaven and underneath the earth. Come unto me, Lord Hermes, thou benefactor, who doest good to all the world. Give ear to me, and give me grace with all that are on earth; open for me the hands of all that give like thee; and make them give me what their hands contain. Even as Horus, if ever he called on thee, O greatest of all gods, in every trial, in every space, against gods, and men, and daimones, and things that live in water and on earth,—had grace and riches with gods, and men, and every living thing beneath the earth;—so let me, too, who call on thee. So give me grace, form, beauty. Hear me, O Hermes, doer of good deeds, thou the inventor of all incantations, speak me good words. Hear me, O Hermes, for I have done all things that I should do for thy black dog-ape, lord of the nether ones. O, soften all towards me, and give me might form, and let them give me gold, and silver too, and food of every kind continually. Preserve me evermore for the eternity from spells, deceits, and witchery of every kind, from evil tongues, from every check and every enmity of gods and men. Give unto me grace, victory, success, and satisfaction. For thou art I, and I am thou; thy Name is mine, and mine

is thine; for that I am thy likeness."

And so forth and so on. There is another very beautiful one at the beginning. It's another invocation to hermes as the good consciousness, the good mind.

"Come unto me, O thou of the four winds, almighty one, who breathest spirit into men to give them life; Whose name is hidden, and beyond the power of men to speak; no prophet even can truly pronounce it; yea, even daimons, when they hear thy name, are fearful. O thou, whose tireless eyes are sun and moon, eyes that shine in the pupils of the eyes of men. O thou, who hast the heaven for head, aether for body, and earth for feet, and for the water round thee oceans deep. Thou the Good Daimon art, who art the sire of all things good, and nurse of the whole world. Thy everlasting revelling-place is set above. Thine the good emanations of the stars,—those daimons, fortunes, and those fates by whom are given wealth, good blend of nature, and good children, good fortune, and good burial. For thou art lord of life,—Thou who art king of heavens and earth and all that dwell in them;"

And here again the formula comes up again. "For thou art I, and I am thou. Whatever I speak, may it for ever be; for that I have thy Name to guard me in my heart."

The text which we possess and which had come down to us the Corpus Hermeticum; the body of hermetic writings, the work of Stobaeus, a 6th century scholar who prepared a kind of anthology and the perfect sermon or Asclepius. The story had it that there were forty-two books of hermes. Hence the rituals given to hermes and embodied in the book is Poimander which means the shepherd

man. This is really the egyptian form of the good shepherd. What is meant by the facilitator of consciousness. What is meant by this figure as far as we are able to discern in hermetic writings is that the mind is like a flock of sheep, not a very nice analogy for those who are acquainted with sheep. I like it better as the good shepherd than when it becomes the lamb of god. Because at least the good shepherd is human and gods are these stupid sheep but when you associate divine with a lamb of god that is really somewhat of a sacrilege. Because it's really the stupidest animal on gods earth. All you have to do is you have to go to a place like new zealand and go around for a while. The mind say the hermetic writings is like a flock of sheep. It is unruly, it scatters easily and it is impaired easily. And so there is a need for a center of shepherd who keeps these together.

Hermes the hierophant is the shepherd of the psyche, who keeps the psyche together. And so he is called also the pychopompos - the guide of the soul.

Here is another very nice little text about that that you will like. This is from the Corpus Hermeticum, it's clearly an indication of the primal vision of a hermetic devotee.

"Once having begun to think about the existent things and my mind having eagerly soared to a great height while my bodily senses were held back just as in those who are with sleep." He is describing an alter stage of consciousness.

"I seemed to meet a vast and infinitely great being, who called me by name and asked me, "What would you hear and see, and learn and know by meditation?" I said, "Who art Thou?" and he replied, "I am Poimandres, the supreme

mind." I answered him, "I desire to learn the things that are and to understand their nature, and to know god; about these things," said I, "I long to hear." He spoke to me again, "I know what you desire, for indeed I am with you everywhere. Hold in your mind whatever you would learn, and I will teach you." As soon as he had said this, immediately everything changed in aspect before me and was opened out in a flash. And I saw a boundless vision; and all became light, soft and joyous; and I loved it at sight. But after a while a terrible and gloomy darkness had come settling down in one parts, twisting in coils like a serpent. Then I saw the darkness change into a sort of moistness, tossed about unspeakably and pouring out smoke as from a fire; and I heard it giving out an indescribable sound of wailing, for an inarticulate cry was sent out of it. But out of the light came forth a holy word and stood upon the moistness, seeming to me the voice of light. And pure fire sprang forth out of the moistness and up to the heights - radiant it was, and swift and active. There upon air also, being light, followed the fire, rising up so that it seemed to hang down from it. But earth and water stayed apart, so mingled together that the earth could not be seen, yet they were kept moving by reason of the breath-like word stirring over them."

Now what have you got here. You have the description of a vision. You have the description of an altered state of consciousness. And in it several important elements stand out, we can sort of very briefly analyze them.

TRULY EXISTENT REALITY

First of all there is a precondition, he said "When I came to think about existent things. When I came to think about the things that are, that was when I was lead into this."

Now how often do we think of the things that truly are. So here is the initial discrimination. You have to being to discern what truly exists. Authentics, one who does thinks himself, that's what that means.

A primary reality, real being contemplating real phenomenon. We talked about buddha in the last occasion, we said for instance that the buddhist turn for what the hindus came up with originally as karma is dependant origination.

Now you might also say when you direct your consciousness toward something that, using those terms, that is outside of and above the realm of karma. Something that acts out of itself that is no longer within the process of dependant origination that primary reality. Then you create the precondition for this kind of a vision. What is it that you are asked? Are you asked the things within the process, down here - whatever it is? Things within the dependant origination, things that you want to change or the things that you want to see to come to task, back and

forth, up and down? Then hermes doesn't come to you, so you have to direct your consciousness towards something that is above these things. And when he speaks with hermes, hermes tells him, I know what you want. I am with you everywhere. You see, I have been here along and you say well if you have been here along, now how come you haven't done anything for me before. Well, because I was not in the right frame of mind. I was not oriented toward the things that hermes can do something for. And there was no real change of consciousness, once again is the principle. You have to come into his world. He cannot come into yours. How are you going to do that? Well the main issue is after all, unlike many other figures, archetype of figure, maybe even unlike the glorious figure of christ - you see, hermes was also called lord of consciousness, lord of the mind.

Now it's obvious what has to be done here. There has to be an altering of your state of mind. You have to be able to function with your mind in a different fashion from the manner in which you are fashioned before.

But isn't that precisely what the calvinists and all the kind of repressive stupidity of our culture if constantly trying to inhibit us, stop us from doing? Right down to such stupid things as to why, why can't a mormon drink coffee? Well it can, did you realize that some time ago there was an argument at that Brigham Young university, that the cafeteria would be segregated into the coffee drinking section and a non coffee drinking section. After all it might harm the good mormon boys to inhale some of this coffee films in that way. That's how we are getting. It'll be that way,

there will be the chicken eating section in the restaurant and the sprout munching section and so forth.

THE ALTERED MIND

Because the notion runs through in all kind of ways in the culture that anything that might affect the mind, anything that might cause some kind of a change, a little bit of stimulus, a little bit of excitement, a little bit of altering this way or the other is bad. You are supposed to stay in the great triviality of your everyday consciousness, day and night and never let it move. That is what is what is pleasing on to the jehovic god. That way you never reach out of your world. So you just sit there and stand there and you get commandments, you get things to do and you just keep on doing. If something changed in your mind, even for a little while even for an half an hour or an hour, you might say wohh, to hell with it. I am not going to move this anymore, why should I?

Jerald Hurdle blessed memory was once to say that you listen, at that time it was mostly radio, you listen to these things about the advertisement and so forth. And you face the change of consciousness, it takes a kind of new relation to get out of it, to stay up and say, to hell with it, I will not take juice fruit gum. Whether it's juicy fruit gum or whether it's jehova. Whether it is all the shibboleth of

the culture, it takes a change of consciousness, it takes a change of mind to be able to break out of that. And that is why you have really the great tendencies, all of the gnostic oriented spiritual disciplines are ultimately ecstatic in orientation. They all tell you and motivate you in various ways to stand outside of yourself, outside of the world. Outside of the ordinary routine because that is where you might learn and understand something. If you could learn and understand by being of the same mind all the time, don't you think we would have learned and understood already? Haven't you tried it long enough, haven't humanity tried it long enough? If wisdom arose out of sheer stupidity shouldn't this world be already tremendously wise. But you see it has not done so it couldn't do so, there has to be a substantial and essential change, an essential movement of mind. And as we already can see in that particular description there arises the great light, what kind of vision does he have just in that short passage. He really has a vision of the light and of the dark. So we can see it's a very gnostic picture and it runs through all the hermetic writings, really the awareness of both of these. But there are many others.

There is another very interesting and very beautiful one, I'll give you a little bit of it and then we'll comment on it and go on. These are all from the Corpus Hermeticum. "But mind, the father of all, he who is life and light, gave birth to the human, one like himself." This is the great discourse of the Corpus Hermeticum of love. "With whom he fell in love as being his own child; for he was most beautiful having the likeness of the father, so naturally the father

fell in love with his own form. And he entrusted to him all creation. Then, taking his place in the sphere of creation, man observed what his brother had created, and he too willed to create. Then the father gave him leave, having in him all the energy of the rulers." And then he goes on. "With whom he fell in love as being his own child; for he was most beautiful having the likeness of the father, so naturally the father fell in love with his own form. And he entrusted to him all creation. Then, taking his place in the sphere of creation, man observed what his brother had created, and he too willed to create. Then the father gave him leave, having in him all the energy of the rulers." And then he goes on. "These fell in love with him, and each one gave a share of his own nature. Then, having gained full knowlegde of their being and shared in their nature, he willed to break through the circumference of the orbits and to wear down their might. So he looked down through the harmony and showed to the downward-tending nature the beautiful form of god."

So the first love is the universal soul, the nous, the true mind that gives birth to the human. And divine falls in love with the human. The second is the love affair of the rulers or planets with the human, that is the one I just read. Each having shared in his own nature. And what does he do there, they love us and they each give us a share of their planetary nature. Let's say mars gives us strength, venus gives us passion, mercury gives us quick thinking, jupiter gives us majesty and benevolence, saturn gives us lawfulness, the moon gives us mystery, the sun gives us conscious light and so forth.

OVERCOME THE MATRIX

It all sounds very well and and sort of very positive and that's why all the hermetics are much more optimistic than the gnostics. But listen what he said then after that.

"Then, having gained full knowledge of their being and shared in their nature, he willed to break through the circumference of the orbits and to wear down their might."

So first you learn, first you know, first you are in this kind of intimate interaction with the powers of this world and the planets then rule it. And then eventually tell them, now you know I'm running the show. "Sapiens domi- navitor astris" to use a certain magical motto that somebody is supposed to use. The life shell rule over the stars. But you can't just do it by decree. You see. First you have to have a relationship with everything. The result of this relationship is that then you learn and understand and overcome, so we have that gnostics who consider themselves as such.

We have to be wise and smart about this. Yes, we want to overcome. And of us it has been said probably, even more so than about others that we shall overcome. But we must overcome the right way. Just to will ourselves out of

the maze will not do it. You can stand in there and say: "I want to get out of here." You stand in the middle of the maze and you stump your feet and "I want out, I want out". Then I understand that but how you are going to get out then. You are going to get out by taking one step after the other and walking through it right way and getting out. I know that's tedious and we have done a lot of it. And we are tired and our feet hurt and who knows maybe we've done it even life after life. It's a mess, I agree with you. But it still has to be done that way.

So there has to be an intelligent understanding of where we are and what is running the show. And then after that in the same passage there is "The third love is the love affair of the human with nature." The planets, that's the outer nature, the world. And now here again we look down from the archetypal level so to say and we show nature our consciousness. So there is an interaction with nature, which is in the nature of a love says the hermetic principle. But again a love that is combined with wisdom. There is an interaction with the outer world that brings for new experiences and the new self and then allows us to overcome that too. There is always the understanding that the human didn't originate here. He didn't come out of nature. Not even a creature of the planets, although it picked up all energies of all these. It's a being apart from that it has to play a delicate game that is loving but at the same time also sovereign, an individual and directed toward overcoming. We can learn from each other. The planets can learn from us and we can learn from the planets. Nature can learn from us and we can learn from nature. But it's a delicate

interaction, a delicate dance that goes on. Certainly the hermetic was very very aware of this delicate relationship. It is true that we don't find so much of it expressed in those terms in the gnostic scriptures that we know. Although frequently they are also there. But we must recognize there we are dealing for a very large extent at least originally with a semitic matrix, with a hebrew matrix that has a different relationship with and to the outer world than the egyptian, the greco-egyptian did.

But there's a very beautiful notion, a very beautiful concept which does not reject out of hand but does not subordinate oneself to these either. But please that delicate play wherein as the right relationship is accomplished one can overcome.

So it's incidentally not to forget such things that I am convinced, and I am not certainly the only one, that the word hiram is a disguise for hermes. And so there is a great deal of hermetic initiatory wisdom that has gone into very secret organizations such as freemasonry and others.

And there always the key is one comes up against certain initiatory guardians and they have to let you pass otherwise you don't get further in the lodge. And how do you do that, you don't do it by kicking the guardian away, in fact they usually have the power. You are blindfolded, various things, old rituals. They hold maybe something at you, menace you a bit. But you have to give the right words, this means you have to have the right relationship to that person. You have to address him the right way. So you address the planets the right way, you address nature the right way. You address all these guardians the right

way and by addressing them the right way they will be compelled to withdraw and let you pass.

HUMANS ABOVE COSMOS; INTERACTION WITH THE COSMOS

So, two things. On the one hand, don't identify with your surroundings and with your situation to say that I am just a part of it. If you are just a part of the planets, then you know what is going to happen to you. You going to go around, around, around and then you go around for ever and ever and ever. And why all of us like to be in orbit now and then maybe that's not quite the orbit that you want to be. So you are not part of it. You are not cosmic, you are more than cosmic. You are above the cosmos. This may sound arrogant, this maybe sound inflated and all of that and maybe it is. But a bit of arrogance, a bit of inflation is sometimes quite nice. Especially if it is based on something that is true. So don't identify with it. Don't say I am just a glob within a bigger glob within all the rest of the glob. Recognize that you are there as a separate being.

But at the same time realize that there is a relationship between yourself and these other factors. And that this relationship has to be conducted in an insightful manner. Hermes always negotiates, hermes always interacts. There is always an I and thou in hermes. So it is the overcoming

of limitation by learning the right relationships with everything. Very tricky. Very difficult, needs a lot of intuition, needs a lot of insight and sometimes also quite a bit of a knowledge of deities.

HERMES AND THE MYSTERIOUS ARTS

Hermeticism suffered a somewhat different fate for gnosticism. Because while both sort of went on the ground to a certain extent the hermetic wisdom never went quite as deep under ground as the gnostic. And it was unearthed rather easily and christian, even christians who were very afraid and very hostile to gnostics still managed to deal with hermeticists and hermetic material. Hermes was regarded as a sort of unhonorary saint of the christian church for a long time. And in fact our chemical, magical and related mysterious arts were all subsumed under the name of the hermetic arts. They were considered to be as ruled by hermes, why was that? Because all of these, alchemy and magic and astrology, divinations and things like that, what are these? These are really the part of the arts of relationships with these powers, with these guardians. The magician can relate himself towards water, fire, air and various entities or otherwise. This is the way of relating, this is the way of understanding. What they do, how they are, how to talk to them and then one can overcome their power, with knowledge. And transformation which is the great art of alchemy.

These are the ways in which the doer of the hermetic work overcomes the world. But remember now, he doesn't practice magic just in order to be powerful and to make money and get gold, that's the work of the stupid role of magician eventually always comes to an evil end. And the alchemy also doesn't do that just to make gold but to learn the art of transformation. These are the intricacies whereby this work. Then came the period just prior to the renaissance when the turks were pressing in on particularly the byzantine empire already. A whole number of hermetic works were brought for safety to rome and to italy from the byzantine empire which were all hermetic works and were there under the patronate let's say with the grants coming from the Medici family. Were translated by people as Marsilio Ficino and others into latin and into italian, languages that people understood.

And it was a real mind blower. And it literally caused most of the renaissance. There are really two renaissances, there a so called humanistic renaissance and there is the hermetic renaissance.

Frances Yates was the great uncoverer of this particular historical fact. So you might say everything from the artistic renaissance in italy to the english renaissance, people like Shakespeare, were deeply influenced by the hermetic revival, the hermetic renaissance. And it's really out of that hermetic renaissance, in a kind of spiritual intellectual fashion, we have been living off that practically to the present time.

There isn't anything left now anymore, we kind of sucked it dry, but we have. And now of course there is a possi-

bility of another renaissance. And I've often felt that the Nag Hammadi findings are very much like the hermetical corpus at that time. Now again something has become available. This is no longer hermetic, this is gnostic. Very very similar and perhaps there is a synchronicity also. So it would seem that these two old brothers, the hermetic and the gnostic, really hermes and the gnostic christ; like the two serpents of the caduceus of hermes have been moving and twisting back and forth through history around a center axis of gnosis. Around the center axis of gnosis. And that perhaps now the other serpent, the serpent of wisdom of the gnostics is coming into its own and supplying now what the hermetic has supplied at the time of the renaissance. And the story goes on and perhaps in an interesting way we are part of that story. This is the age of amplification, so maybe as they amplify other things so we need to amplify our own hermetic vision. Some years ago I had a kind of momentary encounter with what I thought was hermes and he waved his wand over the countryside, it was on an island, he waved his wand over the countryside and everything burst into an incredible glory, nature tranfigured away in an absolutely fabulous aspect. And I asked in my mind why are you showing this, is this the way things really are? Is this the way we ought to see things? And the answer came back: "No, you are shown this because this is a faint reflection of the way things really are in the land were you came from and were I am." So the most beautiful, the most glorious transformation of this world is a reflection of the true glory of hermes in his place. And this is really the delicate interaction, see what

is around you, see the beauties and the intricacies and the magnificence and the power the magic of earth, water, fire and air and aether. See it as the reflection, the manifestation of the glory and the magnificence that is pertaining to the world of hermes. And follow the psychopomp, follow the poimander, the shepherd of the soul and with his staff and with his light and with his wings he will take you to blessed land, he will shepherd you, he will guide you because he is the good shepherd; whether he's Christ Jesus or whether he's called hermes trismegistus. He is our friend, he is our leader, he is our wise guide. And as the scriptures in those prayer which I read you before, he is also within ourselves and we are in him. And perhaps we have thus seen on other and in many ways perhaps the most closely related, the most magnificent manifestation of another christ of another great figure and installation of the gnosis.