

Transcript ~ Universal Symbols

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Symbols of divine truth were not created for the amusement of the ignorant, but are the alpha and omega of philosophic thought.

H.P. Blavatsky

In *The Secret Doctrine*, H.P. Blavatsky states that what many scholars of her day referred to as “Symbolism” was in its purest form in antiquity the “Mystery Language”¹ of pre-historic ages. Preserved to this day by the Adepts of every nation, it is universally understood by them because rooted in the “sacred Wisdom Science” granted to the whole human race at the dawn of its awakening. Esoteric symbolism, she wrote, is a language composed of seven “dialects...each referring...to one of the seven mysteries of Nature,”² none of which can be properly understood without mastering all the others, without the purest altruism, complete self-mastery, and the awakening of the highest intuitive faculties. Once understood however, it gives precise expression to *Theosophia*, the ‘thread-doctrine,’ which like the *sutratman*, “passes through and strings together all the ancient philosophical religious systems...reconciles and explains them all.”³ Without a knowledge of the inner meanings revealed through this symbology, she says, “no ancient scripture can ever be correctly understood.”⁴ Akin to what Shakespeare called “books in the running brooks and sermons in stones”, it is revealed by degrees to the mystic who through Buddhi Yoga begins to reunite with what Emerson called the “Over Soul” and the collective wisdom of all souls. Graced by this language, we would need no interpreter, for we would speak in tongues of fire, touching and elevating every being of whatever nation, kingdom or kind.

As audacious as it may seem to the modern seeker, the universal symbolism of *Theosophia* reveals a spiritual science that has been discovered, understood, tested and verified in every department of nature by a continuous lineage of Adepts and Seers. It points to the true nature of what humanity calls God, the highest Deity or One Reality beyond and within all of manifestation. It explains the logic means by which every periodical cosmos emerges from the pristine essence thereof, embracing both cosmic and human birth, sustenance, death and regeneration, as well as the grand scope and purpose of all evolutionary unfoldment. It describes the nature of karma, the one law and source of all laws in nature, as well as the specific esoteric

¹ *The Secret Doctrine*, i, 309

² *Ibid*, i,, 310

³ *Ibid*, i, 610

⁴ *Ibid*, i, 305

history of our globe and of every kingdom and nation. Most importantly, it indicates the highest form of universal benevolence and justice, the highest expression of mutual aid, and the Path by which every principle or resource of nature can be utilized on behalf of the greatest good of all. As aspects of these truths become more widely known to humanity over the coming centuries and epochs, they will not only show the unitary basis of all religion and of true spiritual practice, but will also radically revolutionize all aspects of human culture, the arts and sciences, social structures and politics. All this is possible because it is a language born from the harmonic heart of nature itself—the living, archetypal metaphysics behind every form of consciousness, element, and force in nature as well as every rock, insect, flower and fruit.

At a beginning level, we could identify three immense categories of symbolism referred to in Theosophical teaching which intersect and overlap at every point: mythology, nature and geometry.

Mythological Symbols

Mythology, wrote HPB, is “the repository of humanities most ancient science”.⁵ No mythological story, no religious cosmology, profane legend or so-called fable in the folk-lore of any ancient culture has ever been, at any time, pure fiction, she wrote, but “every one of such narratives has an actual, historical lining to it.”⁶ When rightly understood, mythology “is destined to be the death of those false theologies to which it has unwittingly given birth.” At the same time, no scripture, however sacred, “no Egyptian papyrus...or Hebrew scroll, should be read and accepted literally,”⁷ nor considered complete based on a single level of interpretation, or tradition. As she exemplified in her own writing, a comparative approach is required. In a culminating passage in an article by her titled “The Beacon Light of the Unknown” she wrote:

How can one learn this language?" we may be asked. We reply: study all religions and compare them with one another. To learn thoroughly requires a teacher, a *guru*; to succeed by oneself needs more than genius: it demands inspiration like that of Ammonius Saccas ... he learned *the language of the mysteries* by teaching the common origin of all religions, and a common religion."⁸

Natural Symbols

⁵ Ibid, i, 304

⁶ Ibid, i, 303

⁷ Ibid, i p. 305

⁸ *Theosophical Articles by H.P. Blavatsky, "Le Phare de L'Inconnu,"* i p. 445

In *The Secret Doctrine*, analogy and correspondence are said to be the surest guides to the occult teaching. This is because the principle of unity pervades nature, because every physical particle and every living form, “corresponds to and depends on its higher *noumenon* — the Being to whose essence it belongs”⁹. “As above as so below”¹⁰ is the well-known ancient axiom. The triadic divine logos, Word or Verbum, differentiates in seven primary stages from the formless into form, from the purely spiritual to the archetypal-akashic, to the psycho-mental to the astral-physical, “the whole animate and (seemingly) inanimate Nature evolving on parallel lines”¹¹. This is why every microcosmic form, from the smallest infusoria, to the ephemeral snowflake, to the human constitution, to the solar system, is analogous to the whole kosmos. The whole is mirrored in every part. As Sir Edwin Arnold described, “The dewdrop and the star shine sisterly, Globing together in the common work”¹².

“... As the logos is seven-fold, i.e., throughout Kosmos it appears as seven logoi under seven different forms, or, as taught by learned Brahmins, “each of these is the central figure of one of the seven main branches of the ancient wisdom religion;” and, as the seven principles which correspond to the seven distinct states of *Pragna*, or consciousness, are allied to seven states of matter and the seven forms of force, the division must be the same in all that concerns the earth.”¹³

All living things interdependently descend from and participate in the continuous divine sound and radiance of archetypal truths. Not only is there an underlying structural foundation linking macrocosm to microcosm based upon the seven-fold *Dhyanis*, but there is a repetition *ad infinitum* of self-similar stages in periodicity, of cyclic law governing fractal periods and patterns of unfoldment. The days of the week correspond to the seven great Rounds and seven Races of a given system of seven Globes. The mysteries associated with the first seven days of embryonic development are said to reenact at their own scale the early stages of cosmic manifestation. And the first seven months of the human fetus reiterate the stages of evolution which preceded the emergence of the human form as we know it.¹⁴ Though simply stated examples given by HPB provide a beginning basis for contemplation, we should not imagine they exhaust the exceedingly detailed and multi-dimensional pattern language of linkages. In the words of anthropologist, Helen Valborg,

⁹ *The Secret Doctrine*, i, 218

¹⁰ *Isis Unveiled*, i, p. 35

¹¹ *The Secret Doctrine*, i, 218

¹² Sir Edwin Arnold, *The Light of Asia*, p. 170.

¹³ *The Secret Doctrine*, ii, 29.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, ii, 187-188

Every archetypal idea has its representation in the world and thus all the forms and multitudinous expressions of growth and power that surround us are part of a vast complexity of natural symbols that reveal a reflected picture of what endures on a much vaster scale in the realm of pure idea.¹⁵

Geometric Symbols

The universe...cannot be read until we have learnt the language and become familiar with the characters in which it is written. It is written in mathematical language, and the letters are triangles, circles and other geometrical figures, without which means it is humanly impossible to comprehend a single word.

Galileo Galilei
Opere II Saggitore p. 171

In book VII of the *Republic*, Socrates taught that “the knowledge at which geometry aims is knowledge of the eternal.” When rightly approached, geometry provides a proper foundation for all true education and philosophy, “the turning around of the soul” from darkness to light, from mere objects and opinions to “essences and realities”. It prepares one for the deepest forms of learning as recollection, for *anamnesis* or soul memory, ultimately leading towards union of the individuated mind with its source in the Agathon.

Similarly, H. P. Blavatsky states that “Geometry is the *fifth* divine Science,” the fifth key in a series of seven keys to “Universal esoteric language and symbology,”¹⁶ a language so profoundly suited to expressing the Mysteries of Nature, that from “the very beginning...in time and space in our Round and Globe,” the perfected “heavenly men” of our races used the language of geometry to pass divine knowledge to their pupils, “from one generation of wise men to the next.”¹⁷ “Such is the mysterious power of Occult symbolism” she says, that a few pages of geometrical signs and glyphs record the entire Secret Doctrine, “the accumulated Wisdom of the Ages,” whose “cosmogony alone is the most stupendous and elaborate system.”¹⁸

One of the most well-known and evocative myths which brings these three categories of symbolism together is that of the Garden of Eden. For Christians, Jews and Muslims alike, the idea evokes an idyllic state of existence, a terrene paradise mirroring heaven in which men and women lived in innocence and harmony with one another, with all the elements, kingdoms and

¹⁵ *Symbols of the Eternal Religion II*, “The Mountain,” p. 103.

¹⁶ *The Secret Doctrine*, ii, 471.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, i, 612

¹⁸ *Ibid*, i, 272

creatures of nature, as with the omnipresent divine. No strife, greed, selfishness or indifference marred the continuous, loving communion of that Garden of God from which four rivers flowed. In *Isis Unveiled* and the *Secret Doctrine*, H.P. Blavatsky explains that the Hebrew Bible borrowed this much mis-understood myth from Babylonian traditions who in turn inherited it from the cradle of humanity, that of pre-historic India. It is no fanciful tale at all, she says, but one of those instances in which the Bible is “not to be taken allegorically”. The Garden of Eden, she explains, represents the sacred mountain perpetually inhabited by the hierarchy of Adepts and Masters of Wisdom, the Mystery “colleges” known to the Initiates of every nation.¹⁹

“...*Eden Illa-ah* — means in one sense Wisdom, a state like that of Nirvana, a paradise of Bliss; while in another sense it refers to Intellectual man himself, the container of the Eden in which grows the tree of Knowledge of good and evil: man being the *Knower* thereof...”²⁰

In addition, the myth refers to the pristine golden age which prevailed at the dawn of the human race. At its birth, we are told, all of humanity shared in divine knowledge and divine light. Both Past and Future were known, both eternity and time. The Promethean fire which had been awakened within us was not only that of self-conscious awareness, choice and responsibility, but of penetrating spiritual sight and hearing uninhibited by time, space, or matter. As the *Bhagavad Gita* teaches, in the Divine Dynasties of the *Satya-yuga* ruled by enlightened solar kings, humanity was taught all the arts and sciences. The “Secrets of Nature” and the “Science of Wisdom were public property”²¹ wrote H.P.B. In this timeless golden age of spiritual intuition and natural, over-flowing devotion, humanity spoke a common language rooted in effortless solidarity with all. However, over the vast epochs which followed, as the moral stature, natural benevolence and innate spiritual faculties of humanity were eclipsed, this “yoga of wisdom was lost to the world”.²² The keys to the sacerdotal tongue were purposely hidden. They became the province of the Mystery Schools, known and preserved by the great Lodge who are “ever ready to impart the secrets of ancient thought to the earnest student”.²³

The four rivers of Eden, wrote HPB are symbolized by the cross of the *Crux-Ansata*, or the Egyptian ankh, rich with layers of meaning. The four termination points of the cross are first of all the Tetrad or Tetraktis, the three-in-one by which the Pythagoreans swore their most sacred

¹⁹ *Ibid*, ii, 494

²⁰ *Ibid*, ii, 204

²¹ *Ibid*, ii, 319

²² *The Bhagavad Gita*, IV, 2

²³ *Ibid*, i, 306

oaths. It corresponds to the two wings, tail and head of *Kalahansa*²⁴ the Great Swan of both Being and Non-Being, the sacred word or *pranava* of the Upanishads. Geometrically, the four is also “the primordial abstract triangle” quitting its “one dimensional quality...in order that the Universe should manifest intelligibly.”²⁵ It is therefore said to combine within itself all the materials from which the universe is produced”²⁶. Reminiscent of the four-fold Vach of the Hindu tradition, the Pythagorean monochord was another powerful symbol of this four-fold unity in multiplicity, where the first four numbers generate the primary symphonic ratios underlying the diatonic musical scale. This remarkable fact reinforces the idea that the Tetraktys is not simply a human concept, but a fundamental harmonic reality of nature itself.

In universal symbolism, the logoic Tetrad is four, seven and ten, both square, cube unfolded and decade. As the manifested square it is the archetype of Law and of all cyclic time, the solstices, equinoxes and eclipse nodes of planetary rotation, and the four points of the compass guarded by the four Maharajas.²⁷ As the cube unfolded, it represents the seven-fold principles of macrocosm and microcosm, the seven *Dhyanis*, the Pythagorean harmony of the spheres. As a symbol of initiation, wrote HPB, the cross of the Crux Ansata signifies all the human passions and lower forms of identity which have to be crucified before the Yogi can pass into and through the crowning egg, the third eye and “the “strait gate” that leads to the kingdom of heaven...the narrow circle that widens into an infinite one...”²⁸ With the middle square neutralized as common to both, the three vertical squares suggest the awakened Christos, the higher triad of Atma-Buddhi-Manas, united to Hiranyagarbha, the macrocosmic egg of wisdom-substance in Alaya-Akasha. The horizontal line then represents the seven-fold robes of matter, the purified vestures by which the Bodhisattva serenely descends like a swan upon a mountain lake. 32) With rupa and arupa combined within the boundless circle, the Tetrad sacrificially becomes the decade. As Adam Kadmon or the “Ancient of Days”, the number ten is that of “all human knowledge”, “the culmination of divine incarnations on earth” and the “androgynous synthesis of the creative builders.”²⁹ This will eventually prove, wrote HPB that “the decimal system must

²⁴ *The Voice of the Silence*, 5fn

²⁵ *Ibid*, ii, 600

²⁶ *Transactions of the Blavatsky Lodge*, 89

²⁷ “...the “four Maharajahs” or great Kings of the Dhyani-Chohans, the Devas who preside, each over one of the four cardinal points. They are the Regents or Angels who rule over the Cosmical Forces of North, South, East and West, Forces having each a distinct occult property.” -S.D., i, 123

²⁸ *The Secret Doctrine*, ii, 549. For an extended discussion on this theme see “Cross and Circle”, ii, pp. 545-562.

²⁹ *Ibid*, i, 98fn

have been known to the mankind of the earliest archaic ages, since the whole astronomical and geometrical portion of the secret sacerdotal language was built upon the number ten.”³⁰

In this sense the Garden of Eden is the deathless Shamballa of diamond-hearted Masters. It is the godlike capacity within each to consecrate all energies and resources to service of the whole, to both utterly transcend and empathically see, hear, know and nourish all beings, to breathe through and elevate all monads that arise through 33) the boundless creative fecundity of nature in cyclic time. Like the loving mother who knows the needs of the child before the child knows it and without a word being spoken, it is the understanding that comes from above, via the deva-sight and deva-hearing spoken of in *The Voice of the Silence*. These capacities first descend in droplets like mana from heaven with the grace of the sacred teaching and the guru. Through continual growth in the three perfections of *shila*, *samadhi* and *prajna*, the cleansing waters of wisdom begin arising spontaneously from within like the current of a mighty perennial river. The listener or *Shravaka*, becomes a stream entrant *Srotapatti*,³¹ who eventually blossoms into Seer and Bodhisattva joining as grateful servant to the mighty hidden Lodge of Mahatmas, the ever-present spiritual parents, guides and guardians of all sentient life.

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³⁰ *Ibid*, i, 362

³¹ *The Voice of the Silence*, 40fn, 50fn.