

# ABOUT ANGELS



**RENÉ GUÉNON**

NOTE: NO BOOK BY RENÉ GUÉNON HAS EVER BEEN PUBLISHED WITH THE TITLE 'ON THE ANGELS'. THIS FILE IS A COLLECTION OF HIS WRITINGS THAT REFER TO THIS TOPIC, TAKEN FROM VARIOUS WORKS.

*"Almost everything that is said theologically about angels can be said metaphysically about the multiple states of being."*

RENÉ GUÉNON, *The Multiple States of Being*.

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## Chapter I: THE MULTIPLICITY OF STATES OF BEING\*

Any being, whether human or otherwise, can obviously be viewed from very different perspectives. We could even say that there are an indeterminate number of perspectives, of vastly unequal importance, but equally legitimate within their respective domains, provided that they do not seek to exceed their own limits or, above all, become exclusive and end up denying the others. If this is the case and, consequently, no point of view can be denied, not even the most secondary or contingent among them, the place that belongs to it by the mere fact of responding to some possibility, on the other hand, it is no less evident that, from the metaphysical point of view, the only one that interests us here, considering a being under its individual aspect is necessarily insufficient, since to say metaphysical is to say universal. No doctrine that limits itself to considering beings individually can deserve the name of metaphysics, whatever value and interest it may have from other points of view; such a doctrine can always be called "physical" in the original sense of the word, since it is limited exclusively to the domain of "nature", that is, to manifestation, and furthermore with the restriction that it only takes into account formal manifestation

or, more specifically, one of the states that constitute it.

Far from being in itself an absolute and complete unity, as most Western philosophers would like it to be, and in any case modern philosophers without exception, in reality the individual constitutes only a relative and fragmentary unity. It is not a closed and self-sufficient whole, a "closed system" like Leibnitz's monad, and the notion of "individual substance", understood in this sense and to which these philosophers attach so much importance, has no proper metaphysical value: it is basically nothing more than the logical notion of 'subject', and although there is no doubt that it can be used under this concept, it cannot legitimately be transported beyond the limits of this particular point of view. The individual, even considered in all its possible extensions, is not a total being, but only a particular state of manifestation of a being, a state that is subject to certain special and determined conditions of existence, and which occupies a certain place in the indefinite series of states of the total being. The presence of form among these conditions of existence is what characterises a state as individual; on the other hand, it is evident that this form should not necessarily be conceived as spatial, since it is only so in the corporeal world, space being precisely one of the conditions that define the latter (1).

We must remember here, albeit in summary form, the fundamental difference between "Self" and "I", or between "personality" and "individuality", a subject on which we have already given all the necessary explanations elsewhere (2). The "Self," we said, is the transcendent and permanent principle of which the manifested being, the human being, for example, is only a transitory and contingent modification, a modification which, on the other hand, could in no way affect the principle. Immutable in its own nature, it develops its possibilities in all the modes of realisation, of indefinite number, which constitute for the total being so many different states, each of which has its limiting and determining conditions of existence, and of which only one constitutes the portion or, rather, the particular determination of this being that is the "I" or human individuality. Moreover, this development is only such, to tell the truth, when considered from the side of manifestation; outside of this, everything must necessarily be found in perfect simultaneity within the 'eternal present'; therefore, the 'permanent actuality' of the 'Self' is not affected. Thus, the "Self" is the principle by which all states of being exist, each within its own domain, which we can also call a degree of existence; and we must not think that we are referring only to manifested states, whether individual, such as the human being, or supra-individual, that is, in other words, formal or non-formal, but also, although in this case it is inappropriate to use the word 'exist', to unmanifested states, understanding as such all those possibilities which, by their very nature, are not susceptible to manifestation, as well as the possibilities of manifestation themselves in a *principled* way; but this 'Self' is only by itself, having neither nor being able to have, within the total and indivisible unity of its intimate nature, any principle external to it.

We have just said that the word "exist" cannot properly be applied to the unmanifested,

in short, to the *principal* state; in fact, the strictly etymological meaning of this word (from the Latin *ex stare*) indicates a being dependent on a principle that is not itself or, in other words, that which does not possess its own sufficient reason, that is, the contingent being, which is the same as the manifested being (3). When we speak of Existence, we are referring to the entire universal manifestation, with all the states or degrees that it entails, each of which can also be designated as a "world" and whose multiplicity is indefinite; but this term does not apply to the degree of pure Being, the principle of all manifestation and, itself, unmanifested, nor, even more so, to that which is beyond Being itself.

In principle, first of all, we can establish that Existence, considered universally as we have defined it, is unique in its intimate nature, just as Being is one in itself and precisely because of this unity, since universal Existence is nothing other than the integral manifestation of Being or, more exactly, the realisation, in manifested form, of all the possibilities that Being entails and contains *principally* in its very unity. On the other hand, this "uniqueness" of Existence, if we may use a term that may seem like a neologism (4), like the unity of the Being on which it is based, does not exclude the multiplicity of modes of manifestation that affect it, since it comprises all these modes equally as being equally possible, and this implies that each of these must be realised according to its own conditions. It follows that Existence, within its "uniqueness," involves, as we have just indicated, an indefinite series of degrees, which correspond to all modes of universal manifestation; and this indefinite multiplicity of degrees of Existence implies correlatively, for any being considered in its entirety, an equally indefinite multiplicity of possible states, each of which must be realised at a certain degree of Existence. This multiplicity of states of Being, which is a fundamental metaphysical truth, is certain from the moment we limit ourselves to considering the states of manifestation, as we have done and must continue to do, since we are only concerned with Existence; this multiplicity is true *a fortiori* if we consider both states of manifestation and states of non-manifestation, which together constitute the total being, considered not only in the field of Existence, nor even in the totality of its extension, but in the unlimited domain of universal Possibility. It must be clearly understood that Existence encompasses only the possibilities of manifestation, with the restriction that these possibilities are only conceivable insofar as they are effectively manifested, since, as long as they are not manifested, that is, *in principle*, they are at the level of Being. Consequently, Existence is far from being all of Possibility, conceived as truly universal and total, outside and beyond all limitations, including the first limitation that constitutes the most primordial determination of all: the affirmation of pure Being (5).

When it comes to the states of non-manifestation of a being, a distinction must also be made between the degree of Being and what lies beyond; in the latter case, it is clear that the very term 'being' cannot strictly be applied in its own sense; however, we are obliged, because of the very structure of language, to retain it for lack of a more suitable word, but without attributing to it more than a merely analogical and symbolic value, for otherwise it would be quite impossible for us to speak of it. This is how we can continue to speak of total being as being, at the same time, manifested in some of its states and unmanifested in other states, without this implying in any way, as far as the latter are concerned, that we should only consider that which properly corresponds to the degree of Being (6).

The states of non-manifestation are essentially extra-individual and, just as the *principal* "Self" from which they cannot be separated, they cannot in any way be individualised; as for the states of manifestation, some are individual while others are non-individual, a difference which corresponds, following what we have indicated, to the distinction made between formal manifestation and non-formal manifestation. In particular, if we consider the case of man, his current individuality, which strictly speaking constitutes the human state, is only one state of manifestation among an indefinite series of them, all of which must be conceived as equally possible and, for the same reason, as already existing at least virtually, if not as effectively realised by the being we consider under a relative and partial aspect, in this individual human state.

## NOTES:

\* Chapter I of *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*.

(1). See *El Man and His Becoming According to Vedanta*, chapters II and X.

(2). *Ibid.*, chap. II.

(3). Strictly speaking, it follows that the commonly used expression "existence of God" is meaningless, whether "God" is understood to mean "Being," which is most often the case, or, even more so, the Supreme Principle that is beyond Being.

(4). This term is the one that allows us to translate the equivalent Arabic expression *Wahdat-ul-wujûd* with the greatest accuracy. Regarding the distinction that must be made between the "oneness of Existence," the "Unity of Being," and the "Non-duality of the Supreme Principle," see *Man and His Becoming According to Vedanta*, chap. VI.

(5). Let us note that philosophers, in constructing their systems, always seek, consciously or unconsciously, to impose some limitation on universal Possibility, which is contradictory but necessary in order to constitute a system; it would even be quite curious to explain the different modern philosophical theories, which are those that present this systematic character to the greatest degree, from the point of view of the supposed limitations on universal Possibility.

(6). On the state that corresponds to the degree of Being and the unconditioned state that is beyond Being, see *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedanta*, chaps. XIV and XV, 3rd ed.



## Chapter II: MONOTHEISM AND ANGELOLOGY\*

What we have said above allows us to understand the nature of the error that is likely to give rise to polytheism: this, which in short is nothing more than the most extreme case of 'association' (1), consists in admitting a plurality of principles considered to be completely independent, when in reality they are not and cannot be anything other than more or less secondary aspects of the supreme Principle. It is clear that this can only be the consequence of a misunderstanding of certain traditional truths, precisely those that refer to divine aspects or attributes; such misunderstanding is always possible in isolated and more or less numerous individuals, but its generalisation, corresponding to an extreme state of degeneration of a traditional form in the process of disappearing, has undoubtedly been much stranger than is commonly believed. In any case, no tradition, whatever it may be, could in itself be polytheistic; it is to reverse the normal order to suppose polytheism at the origin, following the 'evolutionist' opinions of most moderns, instead of seeing in it nothing more than the deviation that it actually is.

Every true tradition is essentially monotheistic; to be more precise, it affirms above all the unity of the supreme Principle (2), from which everything derives and on which everything depends completely, and it is this affirmation which, in the expression it takes on especially in traditions with a religious form, constitutes monotheism proper; However, with the proviso of this explanation necessary to avoid any confusion of points of view, we can safely broaden the meaning of the term monotheism to apply it to any affirmation of *principled* unity. On the other hand, when we say that monotheism is what necessarily existed at the origin, it is clear that this has nothing in common with the hypothesis of a supposed 'primitive simplicity' that has undoubtedly never existed (3); on the other hand, to avoid any misunderstanding in this regard, it suffices to note that monotheism can include all possible developments concerning the multiplicity of divine attributes, and also that angelology, which is closely connected with this consideration of attributes, as we have explained above, effectively occupies an important place in traditional forms where monotheism is affirmed in the most explicit and rigorous manner.

There is therefore no incompatibility here, and even the invocation of angels, provided they are considered solely as "celestial intermediaries", that is, in short, as we have already explained, as representing or expressing such and such divine aspects in the order of non-formal manifestation, is perfectly legitimate and normal with regard to the strictest monotheism.

We must also point out, in this regard, certain abuses from the "historical" or supposedly historical point of view, so dear to many of our contemporaries, and especially with regard to the theory of "borrowings" which we have already had to discuss on several occasions. Indeed, we have very often seen some authors claim, for example, that the Hebrews did not know angelology before the Babylonian captivity and that they simply copied it from the Chaldeans; we have seen others maintain that all angelology, wherever it is found, inevitably has its origin in Mazdeism.

It is clear that such assertions implicitly assume that these are nothing more than mere 'ideas', in the modern and psychological sense of the word, or conceptions without any real foundation, when, for us as for all those who take the traditional point of view, they are, on the contrary, knowledge of a certain order of reality; it is not entirely clear why such knowledge should have been "copied" by one doctrine from another, whereas it is quite understandable that it should be equally and equally inherent in both, because both are expressions of one and the same truth. Equivalent knowledge can and even must be found everywhere; and when we speak here of equivalent knowledge, we mean that it is essentially the same knowledge, although presented and expressed in different ways to suit the particular constitution of this or that traditional form (5). In this sense, it can be said that angelology, or its equivalent, whatever name it may be given, exists in all traditions; and, to give an example, there is hardly any need to recall that the *Devas*, in the Hindu tradition, are in fact the exact equivalent of the

angels in the Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions. In all cases, let us say again, what is at stake can be defined as being the part of a traditional doctrine that refers to the non-formal or supra-individual states of manifestation, either in a purely theoretical way or with a view to the effective realisation of these states (5). It is clear that this is something that, in itself, has no connection whatsoever with any form of polytheism, even though, as we have said, polytheism may be nothing more than a result of its misunderstanding; but when those who believe that polytheistic traditions exist speak of "borrowings" such as those we have just given examples of, they seem to want to suggest that angelology represents nothing more than a "contamination" of polytheism in monotheism itself. It would be the same as saying that, since idolatry can arise from a misunderstanding of certain symbols, symbolism itself is nothing more than a derivative of idolatry; this would be a totally similar case, and we think that this comparison is sufficient to reveal the absurdity of such a way of looking at things.

To conclude these observations intended to supplement our previous study, we will quote this passage from Jacob Boehme, who, with his particular terminology and in a manner that is perhaps somewhat obscure, as is often the case with him, seems to us to correctly express the relationships between angels and divine aspects: "The creation of angels has a beginning, but the forces with which they were created have never known a beginning, but rather attended the birth of the eternal beginning... They have arisen from the revealed Word, from eternal, dark, fiery and luminous nature, from the desire for divine revelation, and have been transformed into 'created' images (that is, fragmented into isolated creatures) (6). And elsewhere, Boehme goes on to say: Each angelic prince is a property arising from the voice of God, and bears the great name of God (7). A. K. Coomaraswamy, quoting this last sentence and comparing it with various texts referring to the "Gods" in both the Greek and Hindu traditions, adds these words, which fit perfectly with what we have just explained: "We hardly need to say that such a multiplicity of Gods is not polytheism, for they are all angelic subjects of the Supreme Deity, from whom they derive their origin and in whom, as we are so often reminded, they become one again (8)."

#### NOTES:

\* Originally published in *Etudes Traditionnelles*, Paris, October-November 1946.

(1). There is "association" from the moment one admits that anything outside the Principle has an existence that belongs to it in particular; but naturally, from here to polytheism proper, there can be multiple degrees.

(2). When it comes to the supreme Principle, one should strictly speaking refer to "non-duality," placing unity, which is its immediate consequence, solely at the level of Being; but this distinction, while of the utmost importance from a metaphysical point of view, does not affect what we have said here in any way, and, just as we can generalise the meaning of the term "monotheism", we can also, in order to simplify the language, speak only of the unity of the Principle.

(3). Cf. *Le Règne de la Quantité et les Signes des Temps*, chap. XI. It is quite difficult to understand, on the other hand, how some can believe in both "primitive simplicity" and original polytheism, and yet this is the case: it is yet another curious example of the innumerable contradictions of the modern mentality.

(4). We have previously alluded to the relationships that exist between angelology and the sacred languages of different traditions; this is a very characteristic example of the adaptation in question.

(5). As an example of the first case, we can cite the part of Christian theology that refers to angels (and, moreover, more generally, exotericism can naturally only be situated here from a theoretical point of view), and, as an example of the second, the "practical Kabbalah" in the Hebrew tradition.

(6). *Mysterium Magnum*, VIII, 1.

(7). *De Signatura Rerum*, XVI, 5. With regard to the first creation, "arising from the voice of God," cf. *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, pp. 304-305.

(8). *What is Civilisation?* in Albert Schweitzer Festschrift. Coomaraswamy also mentions, in this regard, Philo's identification of angels with "Ideas" understood in the Platonic sense, that is, in short, the "Eternal Reasons" contained in the divine understanding, or, in the language of Christian theology, in the Word considered as the "place of possibilities".



### Chapter III: SPIRIT AND INTELLECT\*

It has been pointed out to us that, while it is often stated that the spirit is none other than *Atmā*, there are nevertheless cases in which this same spirit seems to be identified solely with *Buddhi*; is there not something contradictory here? It would not suffice to see this as a mere question of terminology, for if that were the case, one might very well stop there and accept indiscriminately the many more or less vague and abusive meanings commonly given to the word 'spirit', whereas, on the contrary, we have always endeavoured to carefully discard them; and the all too obvious inadequacy of Western languages when it comes to expressing metaphysical ideas should certainly not prevent us from taking all necessary precautions to avoid confusion. What justifies these two uses of the same word is, let us say in passing, the correspondence that exists between different 'levels' of reality, which makes it possible to transpose certain terms from one of these levels to another.

The case in question is comparable to that of the word "essence", which can also be applied in several different ways. As a correlative of "substance", it properly designates, from the point of view of universal manifestation, *Purusha* considered in relation to *Prakriti*; but it can also be transposed beyond this duality, and this is necessarily the case when speaking of the "divine Essence", even if, as is most often the case in the West, those who use this expression do not go beyond pure Being in their conception of the Divinity (1). Similarly, one can speak of the essence of a being as complementary to its substance, but one can also designate as essence that which constitutes the ultimate, immutable and unconditioned reality of this being; and the reason is that the former is ultimately nothing more than the expression of the latter with respect to manifestation. Now, if it is said that the spirit of a being is the same as its essence, it can also be understood in either of these two senses; and, if one takes the point of view of absolute reality, the spirit or essence is not and cannot obviously be anything other than *Atmā*. But it must be pointed out that *Atmā*, comprising in itself and *principally* all reality, cannot therefore enter into correlation with anything; thus, from the moment we deal with the constitutive principles of a being in its conditioned states, what is considered spirit, for example, in the triad "spirit, soul, body," can no longer be the unconditioned *Atmā*, but rather what in a certain way represents it most directly in manifestation.

We might add that it is no longer even the correlative essence of substance, for if it is true that it must be considered in relation to manifestation, it is nevertheless not in manifestation; therefore, it can only be properly the first and highest of all manifested principles, that is, *Buddhi*.

It is also necessary, from the moment we place ourselves in the viewpoint of a state of manifestation such as the individual human state, to bring into play what could be called a question of "perspective": thus, when we speak of the universal as distinct from the individual, we must understand not only the unmanifest, but also everything that, in manifestation itself, is of a supra-individual order, that is, non-formal manifestation, to which *Buddhi* essentially belongs. Similarly, when we understand individuality as such to be the totality of psychic and bodily elements, we can only designate as spiritual those principles that are transcendent with respect to this individuality, which is precisely the case with *Buddhi* or the intellect; This is why we can say, as we have often done, that for us pure intellectuality and spirituality are essentially synonymous; and, on the other hand, the intellect itself is also susceptible to a transposition of the kind discussed above, since in general there is no difficulty in speaking of the "divine Intellect". We will also point out in this regard that, although the *gunas* are inherent in *Prakriti*, *sattwa* can only be considered a spiritual (or, if you prefer, 'spiritualising') tendency, since it is the tendency that directs the being towards higher states; this is, in short, a consequence of the same "perspective" that makes the supra-individual states appear as intermediate degrees between the human state and the unconditioned state, even though there is really no common measure between the latter and any conditioned state, even the highest of all.

It is particularly important to emphasise the essentially supra-individual nature of pure intellect; moreover, only that which belongs to this order can truly be called "transcendent", since this term can normally only be applied to that which is beyond the individual domain. The intellect is therefore never individualised; this corresponds to what can be expressed, from the most special point of view of the corporeal world, by saying that whatever the appearances may be, the spirit is never really "incarnated", which is equally true in all the meanings that can legitimately be taken from the word "spirit" (2). It follows that the distinction between the spirit and the elements of an individual nature is much deeper than any that can be established between the latter, and especially between the psychic and corporeal elements, that is, between those that belong respectively to the subtle manifestation and the gross manifestation, which are in short nothing more than modalities of formal manifestation (3).

But that is not all: not only does *Buddhi*, as the first of *Prakriti*'s productions, constitute the link between all states of manifestation, but, on the other hand, if we consider things from the perspective of the *principal* order, it appears as the ray of light emanating directly from the spiritual Sun, which is *Atmâ* itself; it can then be said that it is also the first manifestation of *Atmâ* (4), although it must be made clear that, in itself, since it cannot be affected or modified by any contingency, it always remains unmanifested (5). Now, light is essentially one and of the same nature both in the Sun and in its rays, which are not distinguished from it except in an illusory way with respect to the Sun itself (although this distinction is no less real to the eye that perceives these rays, and which here represents the being situated in manifestation) (6); because of this essential "con-naturalness," *Buddhi* is, in short, nothing more than the very expression of *Atmâ* in manifestation. This luminous ray that unites all states with each other is also symbolically represented as the "breath" by which they subsist, which, it will be noted, is strictly in accordance with the etymological meaning of the words that designate the spirit (whether the Latin *spiritus* or the Greek *pneuma*); and, as we have already explained on other occasions, it is properly the *sûtrâtmâ*, which means that in reality it is *Atmâ* itself or, more precisely, the appearance that *Atmâ* takes on when, instead of considering only the supreme Principle (which would thus be represented as the Sun containing within itself all its rays in an "indistinguishable" state), the states of manifestation are also considered, this appearance not being, on the other hand, insofar as it seems to give the ray an existence distinct from its origin, but due to the point of view of the beings who are situated in those states, for it is evident that their "exteriority" with respect to the Principle can only be purely illusory.

The immediate conclusion that follows from this is that, as long as the being exists, not only in the human state, but in any manifested state, individual or supra-individual, there can be no effective difference for it between spirit and intellect, nor, consequently, between true spirituality and intellectuality. In other words, to reach the supreme and final goal, there is no other path for this being than the ray itself by which it is united to the spiritual Sun; whatever the apparent diversity of the paths that exist at the starting point, they must all sooner or later unify in that single "axial" path; and when the being has followed this path to the end, it will "enter into its own Self," outside of which it has never been anything more than illusory, since this "Self," which is analogically designated as spirit, essence, or by any other name, is identical to the Absolute Reality in which everything is contained, that is, to *the* supreme and unconditioned *Atmâ*.

#### NOTES:

\* Article originally published in "Etudes Traditionnelles", July-August 1947. Compiled in *Mélanges*, Paris, 1976.

(1). The use of the term *Purushottama* in the Hindu tradition implies precisely the same transposition with respect to what *Purusha* designates in its most common sense.

(2). It could even be said that this is what points, in an absolutely general way, to the clearest and most important distinction between these meanings and the illegitimate meanings that are very often attributed to this same word.

(3). It is also the reason why, strictly speaking, man cannot speak of "his spirit" in the same way that he speaks of "his soul" or "his body", implying that it is an element that properly belongs to the "I", that is, of an individual nature. In the ternary division of the elements of being, the individual as such is composed of soul and body, while the spirit (without which he could not exist in any way) is transcendent with respect to him.

(4). See *La Grande Triade*, p. 80, note 2.

(5). According to the Upanishadic formula, it is "that through which everything is manifested, and which in itself is not manifested."

(6). It is well known that light is the traditional symbol of the nature of the spirit; we have noted elsewhere that, in this regard, the expressions "spiritual light" and "intelligible light" are also found, as if they were in some way synonymous, which clearly implies an assimilation between the spirit and the intellect.



## Chapter IV: ETERNAL IDEAS \*

In the previous chapter, we noted, with regard to the assimilation between spirit and intellect, that there is no difficulty in speaking of the "divine Intellect," which obviously implies a transposition of this term beyond the domain of manifestation; but this point deserves our attention, for it is here that the very foundation of the assimilation in question is ultimately found. We will observe, then, that even in this regard, one can situate oneself at different levels, depending on whether one dwells on the consideration of Being or of that which is beyond Being; but, on the other hand, it is evident that when theologians consider the Divine Intellect or the Word as the "place of possibilities," they have in view only the possibilities of manifestation, which, as such, are included in Being; the transposition that allows one to pass from this to the Supreme Principle no longer depends on the domain of theology, but only on that of pure metaphysics.

One might question whether there is an identity between this conception of the divine Intellect and Plato's "intelligible world," or, in other words, whether "ideas" understood in the Platonic sense are the same as those eternally contained in the Word. In both cases, these are the "archetypes" of manifested beings; however, it may seem that, at least immediately, the "intelligible world" corresponds to the order of non-formal manifestation rather than that of pure Being, that is, according to Hindu terminology, it would be *Buddhi*, considered in the Universal, rather than *Atmâ*, even with the restriction that this implies for the latter, which is to only adhere to the consideration of Being. It is clear that both points of view are perfectly legitimate (1); but if this is so, Platonic "ideas" cannot properly be called "eternal", since this term could not be applied to anything belonging to manifestation, even at its highest degree and closest to the Principle, whereas the "ideas" contained in the Word are necessarily eternal like him, since everything that is of a *principled* order is absolutely permanent and immutable and does not admit any kind of succession (2). Despite this, it seems very likely to us that the transition from one of these points of view to the other must always have been possible for Plato himself, as it is in reality; we will not dwell on this any further, preferring to leave to others the task of examining this last question more closely, whose interest is ultimately more historical than doctrinal.

What is rather strange is that some seem to consider eternal ideas as mere "virtualities" with respect to the manifested beings of which they are the *principal* "archetypes"; there is an illusion here that is undoubtedly due above all to the vulgar distinction between the "possible" and the "real," a distinction which, as we have already explained elsewhere (3), could not have the slightest value from a metaphysical point of view. This illusion is all the more serious in that it involves a real contradiction, and it is difficult to understand why it is not obvious; for there can be nothing virtual in the Principle, but, on the contrary, the permanent actuality of everything in an "eternal present," and it is this very actuality that constitutes the only real foundation of all existence. However, there are those who take the error so far that they seem to consider eternal ideas as nothing more than a kind of image (which, let us note in passing, implies yet another contradiction in attempting to introduce something formal even into the Principle), which no longer have a more effective relationship with beings themselves than their image reflected in a mirror; this is, strictly speaking, a complete reversal of the relationship between the Principle and manifestation, and the matter is too obvious to require further explanation. The truth is certainly far removed from all these erroneous conceptions: the idea in question is the very principle of being, that is, what constitutes its entire reality, and without which it would be nothing but pure nothingness; to maintain the contrary is to sever all connection between the manifested being and the Principle, and if at the same time this being is attributed with a real existence, this existence, whether we like it or not, cannot but be independent of the Principle, so that, as we have already said on another occasion (4), this inevitably leads to the error of "association".

From the moment it is recognised that the existence of manifested beings, with all that it has of positive reality, can be nothing more than a "participation" in the *principal* being, there can be no doubt about this; if this "participation" and the supposed "virtuality" of eternal ideas were both admitted, there would be yet another contradiction. In fact, what

is virtual is not our reality in the Principle, but only the consciousness we can have of it as manifested beings, which is obviously very different; and it is only through metaphysical realisation that this awareness of what our true being is, outside and beyond all "becoming", can become effective, that is, not the awareness of something that in a certain way would pass from "potentiality" to "act", but rather of what, in the most absolutely real sense there can be, we are *principally* and eternally.

Now, in order to relate what we have just said about eternal ideas to what refers to the manifested intellect, it is naturally necessary to return to the doctrine of *sûtrâtmâ*, whatever form it may take, since the different symbolisms traditionally used in this regard are, in essence, perfectly equivalent. Thus, returning to the representation we have already used, we can say that the divine Intellect is the spiritual Sun, while the manifested intellect is a ray of it (5); there can be no more discontinuity between the Principle and manifestation than there is between the Sun and its rays (6). It is therefore through the intellect that every being, in all its states of manifestation, is directly linked to the Principle, and this is because the Principle, insofar as it eternally contains the 'truth' of all beings, is itself none other than the divine Intellect (7).

#### NOTES:

(\*). *Études Traditionnelles*, Sept. 1947. Compiled in *Mélanges*, Paris, 1976.

(1). It may be interesting to note that the "idea" or "archetype" considered in the order of non-formal manifestation and in relation to each being corresponds in essence, albeit in a different form of expression, to the Catholic conception of the "guardian angel".

(2). We make no distinction here between the domain of Being and what lies beyond it, for it is evident that the possibilities of manifestation considered more especially insofar as they are comprised in Being do not really differ in any way from these same possibilities insofar as they are contained, with all others, in total Possibility; the whole difference lies solely in the point of view or 'level' at which we place ourselves, depending on whether or not we consider the relationship between these possibilities and manifestation itself.

(3). See *Les Etats multiples de l'être*, chap. II.

(4). See 'The Roots of Plants', in *Symboles de la Science Sacrée*, chap. LXII.

(5). This ray will, moreover, be unique in reality insofar as *Buddhi* is considered in the Universal (and then it is the "single foot of the Sun," which is also spoken of in the Hindu tradition), but it will multiply indefinitely in appearance with respect to particular beings (the *sushumna* ray by which each being, in whatever state it is situated, is permanently united with the spiritual Sun).

(6). It is these rays which, according to the symbolism we have explained elsewhere, bring about manifestation by 'measuring' it with their effective extension from the Sun (see *Le Règne de la Quantité et les Signes des Temps*, chap. III).

(7). In terms of Islamic tradition, *el-haqiqah* or the "truth" of each being, whatever it may be, resides in the divine Principle insofar as it is itself *El-Haqq* or "Truth" in the absolute sense.

## Chapter V: *ER-RÛH* \*

According to the traditional data of the "science of letters," *Allah* created the world not by the *alif*, which is the first of the letters, but by the *ba*, which is the second; and, in fact, although unity is the first principle of manifestation, it is duality that it immediately presupposes and between whose terms it will be produced, as between the two complementary poles of this manifestation, represented by the two ends of the *ba*, all the indefinite multiplicity of contingent existences. It is, therefore, the *ba* that is properly at the beginning of creation, and creation is realised by it and in it, that is to say, it is both the 'means' and the 'place', according to the two meanings of this letter when taken as a preposition. The *ba*, in this primordial role, represents *Er-Rûh*, the "Spirit" which must be understood as the total Spirit of universal Existence and which is essentially identified with "Light" (*En-Nûr*); it is produced directly by the "divine command" (*min amri 'Llah*), and, as soon as it is produced, it is in a way the instrument by which this "command" will accomplish all things, which will thus be ordered in relation to it (2); before it, there is therefore only *el-amr*, the affirmation of pure Being and the first formulation of the supreme Will, just as before duality there is only unity, or before *ba* there is only *alif*. Now, the *alif* is the "polar" letter (*qutbâniyah*), (3) whose very form is that of the "axis" according to which the divine "order" is fulfilled; and the upper end of the *alif*, which is the "secret of secrets" (*sirr el-asrâr*), is reflected in the point of the *ba* insofar as this point is the centre of the "first circumference" (*ed-dhâirah el awwaliyah*) that limits and envelops the domain of universal Existence, a circumference which, moreover, seen simultaneously in all possible directions, is in reality a sphere, the primordial and total form from which all particular forms will be born by differentiation.

If we consider the vertical form of the *alif* and the horizontal form of the *ba*, we see that their relationship is that of an active principle and a passive principle; and this is in accordance with the themes of the science of numbers on unity and duality, not only in Pythagorean teaching, which is the best known in this regard, but also in all traditions. This passive character is indeed inherent in the dual role of "instrument" and universal "medium" that we mentioned earlier; likewise, *Er-Rûh* is, in Arabic, a feminine word; but we must be careful that, according to the law of analogy, what is passive or negative in relation to the divine Truth (*El-Haqq*) becomes active or positive in relation to creation (*El-Khalq*). (4) It is essential to consider these two opposing sides here, for what is at stake is precisely, if we may express it thus, the very "limit" established between *El-Haqq* and *El-Khalq*, a "limit" by which creation is separated from its divine Principle and at the same time united to it, depending on the point of view from which it is considered; it is, in other words, the *barzakh* par excellence; (5) and just as *Allah* is "the First and the Last" (*El-awwal wa El-Akhir*) in the absolute sense, *Er-Rûh* is "the first and the last" with regard to creation.

This does not mean, of course, that the term *Er-Rûh* is not sometimes taken in more specific senses, such as the word 'spirit' or its more or less exact equivalents in other languages; thus, in certain Koranic texts in particular, it has been thought that it referred to *Seyidnâ Jibrâil* (Gabriel) or to another angel to whom this designation would apply more specifically; and all this may undoubtedly be true depending on the cases or the applications made of it, for everything that is a participation or specification of the universal Spirit, or that plays the role of the Spirit from a certain point of view and in varying degrees, is also in a relative sense, including the spirit insofar as it resides in human beings or in any other particular being. However, there is one point to which many exoteric commentators seem not to pay sufficient attention: when *Er-Rûh* is expressly and clearly represented alongside the angels (*elmalâikah*), (6) how is it possible to admit that he is simply one of them? The esoteric interpretation is that it is *Seyidnâ Mitatrûn* (the *Metatron* of the Hebrew Kabbalah); on the other hand, this explains the misunderstanding that arises in this regard, since *Metatron* is also represented as an angel, although, being beyond the domain of "separate" existences, he is truly something else and more than an angel; and this, moreover, truly corresponds to the dual aspect of the *barzakh*. (7)

Another consideration that is entirely consistent with this interpretation is this: in the

representation of the "Throne" (*El-Arsh*), *Er-Rûh* is placed in the centre, and this place is, in fact, that of *Metatron*; the "Throne" is the place of the "Divine Presence", that is, of the *Shekinah*, which in the Hebrew tradition is the "companion" or complementary aspect of *Metatron*.

Moreover, it can even be said that, in a certain sense, *Er-Rûh* is identified with the "Throne" itself, since the latter, surrounding and enveloping all worlds (hence the epithet *El-Muhîr* given to it), coincides with the "first circumference" mentioned above. (8) The two sides of the *barzakh* are also found here: as far as *El-Haqq* is concerned, it is *Er-Rahmân* who rests on the "Throne"; (9) but as far as *el-Khalq* is concerned, in a way, he appears only by refraction through *Er-Rûh*, which is directly connected with this *hadîth*: "He who sees me sees the Truth" (*man raanî faqad raa el-Haqq*). This is, in fact, the mystery of prophetic manifestation; (10) and it is known that, according to Hebrew tradition as well, *Metatron* is the agent of "theophanies" and the very principle of prophecy, (11) which, expressed in Islamic language, means that there is no other than *Er-Rûh el-mohammedijah*, in whom all the prophets and divine messengers are but one and who has, in the "world below", his ultimate expression in what is his "seal" (*Khâtam el-anbiâi wa'l-mursalîn*), that is to say: who brings them together in a final synthesis that is the reflection of his *principal* unity in the "world above" (in which he is *awwual Khalqil'Ilah*, which is the last in the manifested order, being analogically the first in the *principal* order), and who is thus the "Lord of the first and the last" (*seyid el-awwalîna wa'akhirîn*). It is thus, and only thus, that all the names and titles of the Prophet can be truly understood in a profound sense, for they are ultimately the same as those of the "Universal Man" (*El-Insân el-Kâmil*), finally totalling in him all the degrees of Existence, as he contained them all in him from the beginning: *alayhi çalatu Rabbil-Arshi daw*, may the prayer of the Lord of the Throne be upon him forever!

#### NOTES:

(\*). *Études Traditionnelles*, VIII-IX, 1938, pp. 287-291.

(1). This is also why the *ba* or its equivalent is the initial letter of the Holy Books: the *Torah* begins with *Bereshith*, the *Qur'an* with *Bismi' Llah*. Although the text of the Gospel is not currently available in a sacred language, it can at least be observed that the first word of the Hebrew Gospel of St John would also be *Bereshith*.

(2). It is from the root *amr* that the Hebrew verb *yâmer* is derived, used in Genesis to express the creative action represented as the divine "word".

(3). As we have already indicated elsewhere, *alif* = *Qutb* = 111, (*A Hieroglyph of the Pole*, May 1937 issue); let us add that the name *Aâlâ*, "Very High", also has the same number.

(4). This dual aspect corresponds, in a certain sense, in Hebrew Kabbalah to that of the *Shekinah*, feminine, and *Metatron*, masculine, as the continuation will make clearer.

(5). Cf. T. Burckhardt, *Du "barzakh"* (December 1937 issue). Translated into Spanish in the book "Símbolos" (Symbols), J. J. Olañeta Ed., Barcelona 1982) (Translator's note).

(6). For example, in *Sûrat El-Qadr* (XCIV,4): "*Tanazzalu'l-malâikatu wa'r-rûhu ftâh...*"

(7). In certain esoteric formulas, the name *Er-Rûh* is associated with the four angels in relation to whom it is, in the celestial order, what the Prophet is in the terrestrial order in relation to the first four *Kholafâ*; this agrees with *Mitatrûn*, who, moreover, is thus clearly identified with *Er-Rûh' elmohammediyah*.

(8). On the subject of the "Throne" and *Metatron*, considered from the point of view of Kabbalah and Hebrew angelology, see Basilide *Notes sur le monde céleste* (July 1934 issue, pp. 274-275), and *Les Anges* (February 1935 issue, pp. 70-88).

(9). According to this verse from *Sûrat Tahâ* (XX, 5): "*Er-Rahmânu al'arshi estawâ*".

(10). It can be observed that in this way they combine, in a certain sense, the condition of Prophet and that of *Avatâra*, which proceed in opposite directions from each other, the second starting from the consideration of the principle that manifests itself, while the first starts from the "support" of this manifestation (and the "Throne" is also the "support" of the Divinity).

(11). Cf. *Le Roi du Monde*, pp. 30-33.



## Chapter VI: THE SHEKINAH AND METATRON

Certain timid spirits, whose understanding is strangely limited by preconceived ideas, have been frightened by the very designation "King of the World," which they immediately associated with that of *the Princeps hujus mundi*, who is mentioned in the Gospel. It goes without saying that such an assimilation is completely erroneous and unfounded; to refute it, we could simply point out that the title "King of the World" is commonly applied to God Himself in Hebrew and Arabic (1).

However, as it may give rise to some interesting observations, we will examine for this purpose the theories of the Hebrew Kabbalah concerning "celestial intermediaries" which, moreover, have a very direct relationship with the main subject of the present study.

The "heavenly intermediaries" referred to here are the *Shekinah* and *Metatron*; and we will say first of all that, in the most general sense, the *Shekinah* is the "real presence" of the Divinity. It should be noted that the passages of Scripture where she is mentioned most specifically are mainly those dealing with the establishment of a spiritual centre: the construction of the Tabernacle, the building of the temples of Solomon and Zerubbabel. A centre such as this, constituted by regularly defined conditions, was in effect to be the place of divine manifestation, always represented as 'Light'; and it is curious to note that the expression "very bright and very regular place", which Freemasonry has preserved, seems to be a reminder of the ancient priestly science that governed the construction of temples and was not exclusive to the Jews; we will return to this later. We do not need to go into the development of the theory of 'spiritual influences' (we prefer this expression to the word 'blessings' to translate the Hebrew *berakoth*, especially as it is the meaning that has been very clearly preserved in Arabic by the word *baraka*); but even limiting ourselves to looking at things from this single point of view, it would be possible to explain the words of Elijah the Levite, which M. Vulliaud recounts in his work on *Jewish Kabbalah*: "The Masters of Kabbalah have great secrets in this regard."

The *Shekinah* manifests itself in multiple aspects, among which there are two main ones, one internal and one external; however, there is also, in Christian tradition, a phrase that designates these two aspects as clearly as possible: "*Gloria* in excelsis Deo, et in terra *Pax* hominibus bonae voluntatis." The words *Gloria* and *Pax* refer, respectively, to the internal aspect, in relation to the Principle, and to the external aspect, in harmony with the manifested world; and, if these words are considered in this way, one can immediately understand why they are pronounced by the Angels (*Malakim*) to announce the birth of 'God with us' or 'in us' (*Emmanuel*). One could also, for the first aspect, recall the theories of theologians about the 'light of glory' in and through which the beatific vision (*in excelsis*) operates; and, as for the second, we find here the "Peace" to which we alluded earlier, and which in its esoteric sense is indicated everywhere as one of the fundamental attributes of the spiritual centres established in this world (*in terra*).

On the other hand, the Arabic term *Sakinah*, which is clearly identical to the Hebrew *Shekinah*, translates as 'Great Peace', which is the exact equivalent of the Rosicrucians' *Pax Profunda*; and, in this way, one could undoubtedly explain what they understood by the "Temple of the Holy Spirit", just as one could also interpret, in a precise manner, the numerous evangelical texts that speak of "Peace" (2), all the more so since "the secret tradition concerning the *Shekinah* would have some connection with the light of the Messiah". Is it unintentional that P. Vulliaud, when he gives this last indication (3), says that it is the tradition 'reserved for those who followed the path that led to *Pardes*', that is, as we shall see later, to the supreme spiritual centre?

This leads us to a related observation: Vulliaud speaks of a 'mystery concerning the Jubilee' (4), which is related in a certain sense to the idea of 'Peace', and, in this regard, he quotes the text of *the Zohar* (III, 52 b): "The river that flows out of Eden is called *Iobel*," as well as that of Jeremiah (XVII, 8): "He will spread his roots towards the river," from which it follows that the "central idea of the Jubilee is the return of all things to their original state." It is clear that this is the return to the 'primordial state' considered by all traditions and which we have had occasion to emphasise somewhat in our study of *Dante's Esotericism*; and when we add

that "the return of all things to their original state will mark the messianic era," those who have read this study may recall what we said there about the relationship between the "Earthly Paradise" and the "Heavenly Jerusalem." On the other hand, to tell the truth, what is always involved in all this, in different phases of cyclical manifestation, is the *Pardes*, the centre of this world, which the traditional symbolism of all peoples compares to the heart, the centre of being, and the "divine residence" (*Brahma-pura* in the Hindu tradition), as well as the Tabernacle, which is the image and, for this reason, is called in Hebrew *mishkan* or 'dwelling place of God', a word whose root is the same as that of *Shekinah*.

From another point of view, the *Shekinah* is the synthesis of the *Sefiroth*; now, in the Sephirotic tree, the 'column on the right' is the side of Mercy and the 'column on the left' is the side of Rigour (5); consequently, we must rediscover these two aspects in the *Shekinah*, and we can immediately observe, in order to relate this to what precedes, that, in a certain way at least, Rigour is identified with Justice, and Mercy with Peace (6).

If man sins and distances himself from the *Shekinah*, he falls under the power of the forces (*Sarim*) that depend on Severity, and then the *Shekinah* is called the "hand of Rigour" (7), which immediately brings to mind the well-known symbol of "the hand of Justice"; but on the contrary, if man draws near to the *Shekinah*, he is freed, and the *Shekinah* is the 'right hand' of God, that is, the 'hand of Justice' thus becomes the 'blessed hand' (8). These are the mysteries of the 'House of Justice' (*Beith-Din*), which is another name for the supreme spiritual centre

(9); it is hardly necessary to point out that the two sides we have just examined are those on which the elect and the damned are divided in Christian representations of the 'Last Judgement'. A comparison could also be made with the two paths that the Pythagoreans symbolised with the letter Y, which represented in an exoteric form the myth of Hercules between Virtue and Vice; with the two heavenly and infernal gates, which among the Latins were associated with the symbolism of *Janus*; with the two cyclical phases of ascent and descent (10) which, among the Hindus, are also related to the symbolism of *Ganesha* (11). In short, it is easy to understand in this way what expressions such as

"right intention" that we will encounter again below, and "good will" ("*Pax hominibus bonae voluntatis*"), and those who are familiar with the various symbols we have just mentioned will see that it is not without reason that the Christmas festival coincides with the time of the winter solstice), when one takes care to leave aside all the external, philosophical and moral interpretations to which they have given rise from the Stoics to Kant.

The Kabbalah gives the *Shekinah* a partner who bears names identical to hers, who consequently possesses the same characteristics (12), and who naturally has as many different aspects as the *Shekinah* herself. his name is *Metatron*, and this name is numerically equivalent to that of *Shaddai* (13), "the Almighty" (which is said to be the name of the God of Abraham). The etymology of the word *Metatron* is very uncertain, among the various hypotheses that have been put forward in this regard; one of the most interesting is that which derives it from the Chaldean *Mitra*, which means rain, and which also has a certain connection with "light" at its root. If this is the case, we should not believe that the similarity with the Hindu and Zoroastrian *Mitra* is sufficient reason to admit that there has been a borrowing from Judaism into foreign doctrines, as it is not in an external form that we should examine the relationships that exist between different traditions; and we will say the same with regard to the role attributed to rain in almost all traditions, as a symbol of the descent of "spiritual influences" from Heaven to Earth. In this regard, we should point out that Hebrew doctrine speaks of a "dew of Light" that flows from the

"Tree of Life" and through which the resurrection of the dead must take place, as well as an "effusion of dew" representing the celestial influence communicating itself to all worlds, which is singularly reminiscent of alchemical and Rosicrucian symbolism.

The term *Metatron* encompasses all the meanings of guardian, Lord, envoy, mediator; he is the 'author of theophanies in the sensible world' (14); he is 'the Angel of the Face' and also 'the Prince of the World' (*Sâr ha-ôlam*), and from this latter designation we can see that we have not strayed far from our subject. To use the traditional symbolism we explained earlier, we will gladly say that, just as the head of the initiatory hierarchy is "the Earth Pole," *Metatron* is the "Heavenly Pole"; and the latter is reflected in the former, with which it is directly related according to the "Axis of the World." "His name is *Mikael*, the High Priest who is a burnt offering and oblation before God, and everything that the Israelites do on earth is

is done according to the prototypes of what happens in the celestial world. The Great Pontiff here below is symbolised by *Mikael*, Prince of Mercy... In all the passages where Scripture speaks of the appearance of *Mikael*, it is referring to the Glory of the *Shekinah*" (15). What has been said here about the Israelites can equally be said of all peoples who possess a truly orthodox tradition; it must be said even more so of the representatives of the primordial tradition from which the others derive and to which they are subordinate; and this is related to the symbolism of the "Holy Land," an image of the heavenly world, to which we have already alluded. On the other hand, according to what we have said above, *Metatron* not only has the aspect of Mercy, but also that of Justice; he is not only the 'High Priest' (*Kohen hagadol*), but also 'the Great Prince' (*Sâr ha-gadol*) and the 'chief of the heavenly armies', that is to say, he embodies the principle of royal power as well as that of priestly or pontifical power, to which the function of 'mediator' properly corresponds. It should also be noted that *Melek*,

"King" and *Maleak*, "angel" or "messenger", are in fact two forms of one and the same word; moreover, *Malaki*, "my messenger" (that is, God's messenger, or "the angel in whom God is", *Maleak ha-Elohim*), is an anagram of *Mikael* (16).

It should be added that if *Mikael* is identified with *Metatron*, as we have just seen, he nevertheless represents only one aspect; alongside the luminous face there is a dark one, represented by *Samael*, who is also called *Sâr haôlam*; here we return to the starting point of these considerations. Indeed, it is this latter aspect, and this aspect alone, that is

"the genius of this world" in a lower sense, the *Princeps hujus mundi* of whom the Gospel speaks; and his relations with *Metatron*, who is like a shadow, justify the use of the same designation in a double sense, while at the same time making it understandable why the apocalyptic number 666, the "Number of the Beast", is also a solar number (17). On the other hand, according to Saint Hippolytus (18), "The Messiah and the Antichrist" both have as their emblem the "Lion", which is once again a solar symbol; and the same observation could be made of the serpent (19) and many other symbols; from the Kabbalistic point of view, these are the two opposite faces of *Metatron*, whom we are discussing here; We need not dwell on the theories that could be formulated in general terms about this double meaning of symbols, but we will only say that the confusion between the luminous and dark aspects constitutes "Satanism" proper; and it is precisely this confusion that is undoubtedly committed unintentionally and out of simple ignorance (which is an excuse and not a justification) by those who believe they have discovered an infernal meaning in the designation 'King of the World' (20).

#### NOTES:

(1). There is also a great difference in meaning between "the World" and "this world", to such an extent that in certain languages there are two completely different terms to designate them: thus, in Arabic, the "World" is *el-âlam*, while "this world" is *ed-dunyâ*.

(2). It is clearly stated in the Gospel itself that what is meant is not Peace in the sense understood by the profane world (*St John*, XIV, 27).

(3). *La Kabbale juive*, vol. 1, p. 503.

(4). *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 506-507.

(5). A comparable symbolism is expressed in the medieval figure of the 'tree of the living and the dead', which also has a very clear connection with the idea of 'spiritual posterity'; it should be noted that the Sephirotic tree is also considered to be identified with 'the Tree of Life'.

(6). According to the *Talmud*, God has two seats, that of Justice and that of Mercy; these two seats also correspond to the "Throne" and the "Chair" of Islamic tradition. This divides, on the other hand, the divine names *çifâtiyah*, that is, those that express attributes proper to *Allah*, into "names of majesty" (*jalâliyah*) and "names of beauty" (*jamâliyah*), which once again corresponds to a distinction of the same order.

(7). *La Kabbale juive*, vol. 1, p. 507.

(8). According to St Augustine and various Church Fathers, the right hand represents Mercy or Goodness, while the left hand, especially in God, is the symbol of Justice. The "hand of Justice" is one of the common attributes of royalty; the "blessed hand" is a sign of priestly authority and has sometimes been taken as a symbol of Christ. This figure of the "blessing hand" is found on certain Gallic coins, as is the swastika, sometimes with curved arms.

(9). This centre, or any of those constituted in its image, can be symbolically described both as a temple (priestly aspect, corresponding to Peace) and as a palace and a court (royal aspect corresponding to Justice).

(10). These are the two halves of the zodiacal cycle, which is often represented on the facades of medieval churches in a layout that clearly gives it the same meaning.

(11). All the symbols listed here would require lengthy explanations; perhaps we will do so one day in another study.

(12). *La Kabbale juive*, vol. 1, pp. 497-498.

(13). The number of each of these names, obtained by adding up the values of the Hebrew letters of which it is composed, is 314.

(14). *La Kabbale juive*, vol. 1, pp. 492 and 499.

(15). *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 500-501.

(16). This last observation naturally brings to mind the words: '*Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini*'; these are applied to Christ, whom the *Shepherd of Hermas* assimilates precisely to *Michael* in a way that may seem rather strange, but which should not surprise those who understand the relationship between the Messiah and the *Shekinah*. Christ is also called "Prince of Peace" and is at the same time "Judge of the living and the dead".

(17). This number is formed with the name *Sorath*, "demon of the Sun," and as such opposed to the angel. *Mikael*; we will see another meaning later on.

(18). Quoted by P. Vuliaud, *La Kabbale juive*, vol. II, p. 373.

(19). The two opposing aspects are represented in particular by the two serpents on the caduceus; in Christian iconography, they are brought together in the "amphisbaena", the two-headed serpent, one representing Christ and the other Satan.

(20). Let us point out once again that the 'Globe of the World', the symbol of Imperial power or universal monarchy, is often placed in the hand of Christ, which shows, moreover, that it is the emblem of spiritual authority as much as that of temporal power.

## Chapter VII: THE CHAIN OF WORLDS\*

The *Bhagavad-Gītā* says, "In Me all things (1) are strung like a string of pearls on a thread." (2) This refers to the symbolism of the *sūtrātmā*, which we have already discussed on other occasions: it is the *Atmā* which, like a thread (*sūtra*), penetrates and unites all worlds, while also being the "breath" which, according to the texts, sustains them and keeps them alive, without which they could have no reality or exist in any way. We are speaking here of the worlds from a "macrocosmic" point of view, but it is clear that the states of manifestation of a being could equally be approached from a "microcosmic" point of view, and that the symbolism would be exactly the same in either of these applications.

Each world, or each state of existence, can be represented by a sphere that the thread crosses diametrically, so that it constitutes the axis that unites the two poles of the sphere; thus, we see that the axis of this world is, strictly speaking, only a segment of the axis of the entire universal manifestation, and in this way, the effective continuity of all the states included in that manifestation is established. Before delving into the examination of this symbolism, we must first dispel a rather annoying confusion about what in such a representation should be considered "high" and "low": in the realm of "physical" appearances, if one starts from any point on the spherical surface, "low" is always the direction towards the centre of the sphere; but it has been observed that this direction does not stop at the centre, but continues from it to the opposite point on the surface, and then beyond the sphere itself, and it has been believed that the descent should continue in the same way, from which it has been concluded that there would not only be a "descent into matter", that is, as far as our world is concerned, towards what is coarsest in the corporeal order, but also a "descent towards spirit" (3), so that, if such a conception were to be admitted, spirit itself would have a "malefic" aspect.

In reality, things must be approached in a very different way: in such a configuration, the centre is the lowest point (4), and beyond that, one can only ascend, just as Dante ascended from Hell following the same direction in which he had first descended, or at least what appears to be geometrically the same direction (5), since the mountain of Earthly Paradise is located, in its spatial symbolism, at the antipodes of Jerusalem. (6) Moreover, it suffices to reflect for a moment to realise that otherwise the representation would not be coherent, as it would not be in accordance with the symbolism of heaviness, the consideration of which is particularly important here. Furthermore, how could what is "low" for one point on the sphere be at the same time "high" for the point diametrically opposite to it, and how would things appear if, on the contrary, one had started from the latter point? (7). It is only true that the point of arrest of the descent is not situated in the corporeal order, for there really and truly exists an 'infracorporeal' in the prolongations of our world; but this 'infracorporeal' is the lower psychic domain, which not only cannot be assimilated to anything spiritual, but is even precisely the furthest thing from all spirituality, to such an extent that it would seem in a way to be its opposite in every respect, if it were possible to say that the spirit has an opposite; the confusion we have just pointed out is, therefore, ultimately nothing more than a particular case of the widespread confusion between the psychic and the spiritual. (8)

The only objection that could be made to what we have just said is that if the states of manifested existence are hierarchical, that is, if there are higher and lower states among them, there is also, by the very "thread" that unites them, an upward direction and an opposite downward direction. This is true in a certain sense, but it must be added first of all that such a distinction does not in any way affect the *sūtrātmā*, which is everywhere and always identical to itself, whatever the nature or quality of the states it penetrates and sustains; and secondly, that this concerns the chain of worlds itself and not each of these worlds considered separately, isolated from the others. In fact, any of these worlds, to the full extent of its capacity, constitutes only an infinitesimal element in the whole of universal manifestation, so that, strictly speaking, its representation should be considered as reduced to a point; one could also, applying the geometric symbolism of the vertical and horizontal senses, represent the worlds as an indefinite series of horizontal discs strung on a vertical axis (9); in any case, it can thus be seen that, within the limits of each world, the axis cannot truly be reached except at a single point, and, consequently, only by leaving those limits can

considered on the axis a "high" and a "low" or a descending direction.

We can add yet another observation: the axis in question can be likened, according to another symbolism we have already discussed, to the "seventh ray" of the sun; if a world is represented by a sphere, this axis should not actually be any of the diameters of this sphere, because if we consider the three orthogonal diameters that form the axes of a three-dimensional coordinate system, the six directions opposite each other in pairs that they determine are none other than the other six rays of the sun; the "seventh ray" should also be perpendicular to all of them, for only it, as the axis of universal manifestation, is what could be called the absolute vertical, with respect to which the coordinate axes of the world under consideration are all relatively horizontal. It is clear that this is not geometrically representable (10), which shows that any representation is necessarily inadequate; at least, the "seventh ray" cannot be represented except by a single point, which coincides with the very centre of the sphere; and this also indicates that, for any being enclosed within the limits of a given world, that is, within the special conditions of a given state of existence, the axis itself is truly "invisible" and only the point that is its "trace" in that world can be perceived. Moreover, it is evident that this last observation, necessary for the symbolism of the axis and its relations with the worlds united by it to be conceived in the most complete way possible, in no way prevents the "chain of worlds" from being represented most often, as we said at the beginning, by a series of spheres (11) strung together like of the pearls of a necklace (12); and, to tell the truth, it would undoubtedly be impossible to give any other sensible representation.

What is still important to note is that the "chain" can only be traversed in one direction, corresponding to what we have called the ascending direction of the axis; this is particularly clear when temporal symbolism is used, assimilating the worlds or states of existence to successive cycles, in such a way that, in relation to any given state, the previous cycles represent the lower states, and the subsequent cycles the higher states, which implies that their chaining must be conceived as irreversible. On the other hand, this irreversibility is also implied in the conception of this chain as having a properly "causal" character—although this essentially implies simultaneity and no longer succession—since, in a cause-and-effect relationship, the two terms can never be reversed; and, ultimately, the notion of a causal chain constitutes the true meaning of what is symbolically translated by the appearances of a cyclical succession, with the point of view of simultaneity always responding to a deeper order of reality than that of succession.

The "chain of worlds" is generally depicted in a circular form (13), since if each world is considered as a cycle and symbolised as such by a circular or spherical figure, the entire manifestation, which is the sum of all worlds, appears in a certain way as a "cycle of cycles". Thus, the chain can not only be traversed continuously from its origin to its end, but it can then be traversed again, and always in the same direction, which corresponds, on the other hand, in the unfolding of manifestation, to another level than that in which the simple passage from one world to another takes place (14), and, as this journey can be continued indefinitely, the indefiniteness of manifestation itself is thus expressed in an even more sensitive way. However, it is essential to add that, if the chain closes (15), the point of closure itself is in no way comparable to its other points, since it does not belong to the series of manifested states; the origin and the end come together and coincide, or rather are in reality one and the same thing, but this can only be so because they are situated not at any level of manifestation, but beyond it, in the Principle itself. (16)

In the various traditional forms, the most common symbol of the 'chain of worlds' is the rosary; and we will note first of all, in connection with what we said at the beginning about the "breath" that sustains the worlds, that the formula pronounced on each bead corresponds, in principle at least if not always in fact, to a breath, whose two phases symbolise, as is well known, the production of a world and its reabsorption.

The interval between two breaths, corresponding, naturally, to the passage from one bead to another, therefore represents a *pralaya* ['dissolution']; the general meaning of this symbolism is thus quite clear, whatever particular forms it may take in different cases. It should also be noted that the most essential element, in reality, is

the thread that connects the beads; this may even seem obvious, since there can be no rosary without first and foremost that thread on which the beads are then inserted "like pearls on a necklace". If it is necessary, however, to draw attention to this, it is because, from an external point of view, the beads are more visible than the thread; and this is very significant, since the beads represent manifestation, while the *sûtrâtmâ*, represented by the thread, is in itself unmanifested.

In India, the rosary is called *aksha-mâlâ* or '*akshagirland*' (and also *aksha-sûtra*); but what is meant by *aksha*? This question is, in truth, quite complex (17); the verbal root *aksh-*, from which this word derives, means 'to reach', 'to penetrate', 'to pass through', hence the primary meaning of *aksha* as 'axis'; and, moreover, *aksha* and the Latin *axis*, 'axis', are clearly identical. It

can immediately immediately here, by referring to the considerations already set forth, a direct relationship with the essentially "axial" meaning of *sûtrâtmâ*; but how is it that *aksha* has come to designate not the thread, but the beads themselves of the rosary? To understand this, it is necessary to realise that, in most of its secondary applications, this designation, that of the axis itself, has been transferred in a certain way (by a shift, one might say, from the active to the passive sense) to that which is pierced by it, and more particularly to its point of penetration. Thus, for example, *aksha* is the 'eye' of a wheel, that is, its 'hub' (18); and the idea of 'eye' (a meaning that *aksha* often has, especially in its compounds) leads us back to the symbolic conception of the axis as 'sunbeams' that illuminate the world by penetrating it. *Aksha* is also the 'die', apparently because of the 'eyes' or dots with which its faces are marked (19); and it is also the name of a type of grain commonly used to make rosaries, because the perforation of the beads is also an 'eye' intended precisely to allow the 'axial' thread to pass through. (20) This, moreover, confirms what we said earlier about the primary importance of the axial thread in the symbol of the "chain of worlds", for it is from this thread, in short, that the beads of which it is composed receive their secondary designation, just as, one might say, the worlds are not really "worlds" except insofar as they are penetrated by the *sûtrâtmâ*. (21)

The number of beads on a rosary varies according to tradition, and may even vary according to certain special applications; but, at least in Eastern forms, it is always a cyclical number: thus, particularly in India and Tibet, that number is usually 108. In reality, the states that constitute the universal manifestation are indefinitely numerous, but it is evident that this multitude could not be adequately represented in a symbol of a sensible order such as the one in question here, and it is necessary that the beads be of a definite number.

(22) That being the case, a cyclical number is naturally suitable for a circular figure such as the one considered here, which itself represents a cycle or rather, as we said earlier, a "cycle of cycles".

In Islamic tradition, the number of beads is 99, also a 'circular' number because of its factor 9, and in this case also referring to the divine names (23); since each bead represents a world, this can also refer to the angels considered as "rulers of the spheres" (24), each representing or expressing in a certain way a divine attribute (25), which will thus be more particularly linked to that of the worlds of which that angel is the "spirit". On the other hand, it is said that one bead is missing to complete the hundred (which is equivalent to reducing multiplicity to unity), since  $99 = 100 - 1$ , and that this bead, which refers to the "Name of the Essence" (*Ismu-dh-Dhât*), can only be found in Paradise (26); and this is a point that still requires some explanation.

It is well known that the Sanskrit word *loka*, 'world', is etymologically related to light and sight and, consequently, also to the symbolism of the 'eye' and the 'sunbeam'. The number 100, like 10, of which it is the square, can normally refer only to a straight line and not to a circle (27), so that it cannot be counted on the circumference itself of the 'chain of worlds'; but the missing unit corresponds precisely to what we have called the point of union of the ends of that chain, a point which, let us remember once again, does not belong to the series of manifested states. In geometric symbolism, that point, instead of being on the circumference representing the whole of manifestation, will be at its very centre, for the return to the Principle is always figured as a return to the centre. (28) The Principle, in fact, cannot appear in manifestation except through its attributes, that is, according to the language of the Hindu tradition, through its "non-supreme" aspects, which are, one might also say, the forms assumed by the *sûtrâtmâ* with respect to the different

worlds it traverses (although, in reality, the *sūtrātmā* is in no way affected by these forms, which are ultimately nothing more than appearances due to manifestation itself); but the Principle itself, that is, the "Supreme" (*Paramātmā*, and no longer *sūtrātmā*), or the "Essence" seen as absolutely independent of any attribution or determination, could not be considered as entering into relation with the manifested, even if only in an illusory way, although the manifestation proceeds from and depends entirely on it in all that it is, without which it would have no degree of reality whatsoever (29): the circumference exists only because of the centre; but the centre does not depend on the circumference in any way or in any respect. The return to the centre, moreover, can be approached on two different levels, and the symbolism of "Paradise", which we spoke of earlier, is equally applicable in both cases: if, in the first instance, only the multiple modalities of a given state of existence, such as the human state, are considered, the integration of these modalities will culminate in the centre of that state, which is effectively Paradise (*el-Djannah*) understood in its most immediate and literal sense; but this is still only a relative meaning, and if we are dealing with the totality of manifestation, it is necessary, in order to be liberated from it without any residue of conditioned existence, to effect a transposition from the centre of a state to the centre of total being, which is properly designated by analogy as the "Paradise of Essence" (*Djānnatu-dh-Dhāt*). Let us add that, in the latter case, the "hundredth bead" of the rosary is, in truth, the only one that remains, for all the others have finally been reabsorbed into it: in absolute reality, in fact, there is no longer any place for any of the names that "distinctively" express the multiplicity of attributes in the unity of Essence; there is nothing but *Allah*, exalted '*ammā yasifūn*', that is, beyond all attributes, which are only, of the divine Truth, the refracted aspects that contingent beings, as such, are capable of conceiving and expressing.

#### NOTES:

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(1). *Sārvam Idām*, 'that all', that is, the totality of manifestation, which comprises all worlds and not just 'everything in this world', as stated in a recently published translation '*d'après Shri Aurobindo*'.

(2). *Bhagavad-Gītā*, VII, 7.

(3). R. P. V. Poucel, *La Parabole du Monde*, p. III. The abuse that is so often made nowadays of the words 'spirit' and 'spiritual' certainly has something to do with this misunderstanding; but it would have been necessary to denounce the abuse instead of seeming to accept it and thus drawing erroneous conclusions.

(4). On the contrary, it is the highest point when a kind of "reversion" of the figure can be operated to effect the application of the "reverse meaning," which, moreover, is that which corresponds to the true role of the centre as such (see *La Grande Triade*, chap. XXIII).

(5). We make this reservation because the very passage through the centre or the lowest point already implies a 'straightening out' (represented in Dante by the way he contours Lucifer's body), that is, a change of direction, or, more precisely, a change in the 'qualitative' sense in which that direction is travelled.

(6). See *L'Esotérisme de Dante*, chap. VIII.

(7). Due to a similar error, but limited to the 'physical' order and the literal sense, the antipodes have sometimes been represented with their heads downwards.

(8). Let us add in this regard that, contrary to what the author we have just quoted also says in the same passage, there can be no "spiritual illusion"; the constant fear (and, it must be acknowledged, very often justified to a certain extent) that most mystics have of being deceived by the devil proves very clearly that they do not go beyond the psychic realm, for, as we have explained elsewhere, the devil has direct access only to this realm (and indirect access, through it, to the corporeal realm), and everything that truly belongs to the spiritual order is, by its very nature, absolutely forbidden to him.

(9). This representation also clearly shows that, just as continuity is established exclusively by the axis, communication between the different states can only operate effectively through their respective centres.

(10). Some might be tempted to bring in the "fourth dimension" here, but this cannot be represented in itself, as it is in fact nothing more than an algebraic construction expressed in geometric language.

(11). In certain cases, these spheres are replaced by discs perforated in the centre, which correspond



to the discs, considered as horizontal in relation to the axis, which we have just discussed.

(12). Moreover, it is reasonable to assume that such a necklace must have originally been a symbol of the "chain of worlds," for, as we have often pointed out, attributing a purely "decorative" or "ornamental" character to an object is always the result of a certain degradation that stems from a misunderstanding of the traditional point of view.

(13). This form in no way contradicts the "verticality" of the axis or the thread that represents it, since, as the latter must naturally be considered to be of indefinite length, it can be assimilated in each of its portions to a straight line that is always vertical, that is, perpendicular to the domain of existence constituted by the world it traverses, a domain which, as we have said above, is but an infinitesimal element of manifestation, which necessarily comprises an indefinite multitude of such worlds.

(14). In terms of Hindu tradition, this transition from one world to another is a *pralaya*, and the passage through the point where the ends of the chain meet is a *mahâpralaya*; this, on the other hand, would also be applicable, analogously, to a particular degree, if, instead of considering the worlds with respect to the totality of manifestation, only the various modalities of the same world were considered with respect to the totality of that world.

(15). Perhaps it would be more accurate, in a certain sense, to say that the chain *seems* to close, so as not to give rise to the assumption that a new journey along that chain could be nothing more than a kind of repetition of the previous journey, which is impossible; but in another sense or in another respect, the chain does indeed close, for from the point of view of *principle* (and no longer from the point of view of manifestation), the end is necessarily identical to the origin.

(16). We refer here to what we have said in "La jonction des extrêmes" ["Études Traditionnelles", May 1940 = chap. XXIX of *Initiation et Réalisation spirituelle*].

(17) We owe the following information on this subject to the kindness of A. K. Coomaraswamy.

(18) We recall what we have said above about various related symbols, such as the "eye" of the dome and the "eye" of the spire.

(19) It is also noteworthy, from the point of view of the doctrine of cycles, that the designations of these faces, according to the number of their points, are the same as those of the *Yugas*.

(20). The name of the *rudrāksha* bead is interpreted as 'provided with an eye, red'. (in its natural state, and before drilling); the rosary is also called *rudrāksha-valaya*, 'ring or circle of *rudrāksha*'.

(21). It is well known that the Sanskrit word *loka*, 'world', is etymologically related to light and sight, and therefore also to the symbolism of the 'eye' and the 'sunbeam'.

(22). Similarly, in language itself, indefiniteness is often expressed symbolically by numbers such as ten thousand, as we have explained elsewhere (cf. *Les Principes du calcul infinitésimal*, chap. IX).

(23). The 99 beads are also divided into three series of 33; here we find the multiples whose symbolic importance we have already pointed out on other occasions.

(24). It will be recalled that, in the West too, St Thomas Aquinas expressly taught the doctrine that *angelus movet stellam* ['the angel moves the star']; this doctrine was, moreover, commonplace in the Middle Ages, but it is one of those that moderns, even when they call themselves "Thomists," prefer to overlook so as not to clash too much with commonly accepted "mechanistic" conceptions.

(25). Although we have already pointed this out on several occasions, we intend to return to it in a future article.

(26). In the angelic correspondence just mentioned, that hundredth count must refer to the 'Angel of the Face' (who is, in reality, more than an angel): *Metatron* [in Hebrew Kabbalah] or *er-Rûh* [in Islamic tradition].

(27). Cf. *The Great Triad*, chap. VIII.

(28). This "return" is expressed in the *Qur'an* (II, 156) by the words: "*innâ li- Llâhi wa innâ râdjî'ûn*" ['Truly we belong to (or are for) God, and to Him we shall return.']

(29). The absolute transcendence of the Principle itself necessarily entails the "irreciprocity of relationship," which, as we have explained elsewhere, formally excludes any "pantheistic or immanentist" conception.



## Chapter VIII: THE "ROOTS OF PLANTS" \*

According to Kabbalistic tradition, among those who entered the *Pardes* (1) there were some who "devastated the garden," and it is said that this devastation consisted more precisely in "cutting the roots of the plants." To understand what this means, it is necessary to refer first of all to the symbolism of the inverted tree, which we have already discussed on other occasions (2): the roots are at the top, that is, in the Principle itself; cutting these roots is therefore to consider the "plants" or beings symbolised by them as endowed in a certain way with an existence and reality independent of the Principle. In the case in question, these beings are mainly angels, since this naturally refers to degrees of existence of a superhuman order; and it is easy to understand what the consequences may be, particularly for what has come to be called "practical Kabbalah". Indeed, the invocation of angels thus regarded, not as the "celestial intermediaries" that they are from the point of view of traditional orthodoxy, but as truly independent powers, constitutes properly "association" (Arabic: *shirk*) in the sense given to this term by Islamic tradition, for then such powers inevitably appear as "associated" (on an equal footing) with the divine Power itself, rather than simply derived from it. These consequences are also found, and with greater reason, in the lower applications belonging to the domain of magic, a domain where, moreover, those who commit such an error are necessarily confined sooner or later, since, for that very reason, in their case any real possibility of "theurgy" is excluded, as all effective communication with the Principle becomes impossible once "the roots are cut". We would add that the same consequences extend even to the most degenerate forms of magic, such as "ceremonial magic"; only in the latter case, if the error is always essentially the same, the actual dangers are at least mitigated by the very insignificance of the results that can be achieved (3).

Finally, it should be noted that this immediately explains at least one of the ways in which the origin of such deviations is sometimes attributed to "fallen angels"; angels are indeed truly 'fallen' when considered in this way, for it is from their participation in the Principle that they actually derive everything that constitutes their being, so that when this participation is unknown, only a purely negative aspect remains, like a kind of inverted shadow with respect to that very being. (4)

According to orthodox belief, an angel, as a "heavenly intermediary," is essentially nothing more than the expression of a divine attribute in the order of non-formal manifestation, since only this allows for the establishment, through the angel, of real communication between the human state and the Principle itself, of which it thus represents an aspect that is more particularly accessible to beings in that human state. This is, moreover, what the angelic names themselves clearly show, for they are always, in effect, designations of divine attributes; here, above all, the name corresponds fully to the nature of the being and is in fact identified with its very essence. As long as this meaning is not lost sight of, the "roots" cannot, therefore, be "cut off"; it could be said, therefore, that in this respect the error, consisting in believing that the divine name belongs properly to the angel as such and as a "separate" being, is only possible when the understanding of the sacred language becomes obscured, and, if one realises all that this actually implies, one can understand that this observation has a much deeper meaning than it might seem at first glance (5). These considerations also give full value to the Kabbalistic interpretation of *Mal'aji*, "My angel" or "My envoy" (6), as "the angel in whom is My name", that is, in short, in whom is God Himself, at least in some of His "attributive" aspects (7). This interpretation applies, first and foremost, to *Metatron*, the "Angel of the Face" (8), or to *Mija'el* (Michael) (a name of which *Mal'aji* is an anagram) insofar as, in his "solar" role, he is identified in a certain way with *Metatron*; but it is also applicable to any of the angels, for they are truly, with regard to manifestation and in the strictest sense of the term, the "bearers" of so many divine names, and even, seen from the side of "Truth" (*el-Haqq*), they are really nothing but those names. The difference is only that which results from a certain hierarchy that can be established among the divine attributes, according to whether they proceed more or less directly from the Essence, so that their manifestation can be considered as situated at

different levels, and such is, in short, the foundation of the angelic hierarchies; such attributes or aspects must necessarily be conceived, moreover, as an indefinite multitude when viewed "distinctively", and this corresponds to the very multitude of angels. (9)

One might ask why, in all this, it is only angels that are concerned, when, in truth, every being, whatever it may be and whatever order of existence it may belong to, also depends entirely on the Principle in all that it is, and this dependence, which is at the same time a participation, constitutes, one might say, the very measure of its reality; and, moreover, every being also has within itself, and more precisely in its 'centre', at least virtually, a divine principle without which its existence would not even be an illusion, but purely and simply nothingness. This corresponds exactly, moreover, to the Kabbalistic teaching according to which the "channels" through which the influences emanating from the Principle are communicated to manifested beings do not stop at a certain level, but extend continuously to all degrees of universal Existence, including the lowest ones (10), so that, to return to the preceding symbolism, nowhere could there be any being that could be likened to a "plant without roots". However, it is evident that degrees must be considered in the participation in question, and that these degrees correspond precisely to those of Existence; that is why they have all the more reality the higher they are, that is, the closer they are to the Principle (although there is certainly no common measure between any state of manifestation, even the highest of all, and the *principal* state itself). In this as in any other respect, it is important to note first of all a distinction between the case of beings situated in the domain of non-formal or supra-individual manifestation, to which the angelic states correspond, and that of beings situated in the domain of formal or individual manifestation; and this still needs to be explained in a somewhat more precise manner.

Only in the non-formal order can it be said that a being truly and as fully as possible expresses or manifests an attribute of the Principle; here, the distinction between these attributes constitutes the very distinction between beings, which can be characterised as a "distinction without separation" (*bhedâbhedâ*, in Hindu terminology) (11), for it is evident that, ultimately, all attributes are truly "one"; and furthermore, this is the minimum conceivable limitation in a state which, by virtue of being manifested, is also conditioned. On the other hand, since the nature of each being is then reduced entirely, in a certain sense, to the expression of a single attribute, it is evident that such a being thus possesses, in itself, a unity of a very different and much more real order than the completely relative, fragmentary and "composite" unity proper to individual beings as such; and, ultimately, because of this reduction of angelic nature to a defined attribute, with no "composition" other than the mixture of act and potency necessarily inherent in all manifestation (12), St. Thomas Aquinas was able to consider the differences between angels as comparable to specific differences rather than individual differences. (13) If we now wish to find, in the order of formal manifestation, a correspondence or reflection of what we have just said, we must not look for it in individual beings taken each in particular (and this is clear from our last observation), but rather in the "worlds" or states of existence themselves, for each of them, as a whole and 'globally', is more specifically related to a particular divine attribute, of which it is, if one may so express it, the particular production (14); and this is directly linked to the conception of angels as 'rulers of the spheres' and to the considerations we have already set forth in this regard in our previous study on the 'chain of worlds'.

#### NOTES:

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(1). The *Pardes*, symbolically represented as a "garden", should be considered here as representing the domain of higher and reserved knowledge: the four letters P R D S, related to the four rivers of Eden, designate respectively the different meanings contained in the sacred Scriptures, to which correspond as many degrees of knowledge; it goes without saying that those who "devastated the garden" had not actually reached a degree beyond which it is still possible to stray.

(2). See especially "L'Arbre du Monde".

(3). On the question of "ceremonial magic", cf. *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chap. XX. The use of

divine and angelic names in their Hebrew forms is undoubtedly one of the main reasons that led A. E. Waite to believe that all ceremonial magic had its origin in the Jews (*The Secret Tradition in Freemasonry*, pp. 397-99); we do not consider this opinion to be entirely well-founded, since the truth is rather that ceremonial magic contains elements taken from older and more authentic forms of magic, and that in the Western world, these forms had no other sacred language at their disposal for their formulas than Hebrew.

(4). It could be said, and it matters little whether literally or symbolically, that in such conditions, anyone who believes they are calling an angel runs a great risk of seeing a demon appear instead.

(5). In this regard, we recall what we indicated earlier regarding the correspondence of the various degrees of knowledge with the more or less 'inner' meanings of the sacred Scriptures; it is clear that this has nothing in common with entirely external knowledge, which is all that can be gained from the study of a profane language, and even, we might add, from the study of a sacred language by methods such as those used by modern linguists.

(6). It is well known that the etymological meaning of the word "angel" (Greek *ángelos*) is "envoy" or "messenger," and that the corresponding Hebrew word, *mal'ach*, also has the same meaning.

(7). Cf. *Le Roi du Monde*, p. 33. From the *principal* point of view, it is the angel, or rather the attribute represented by him, who is in God, but the relationship appears to be reversed with respect to manifestation.

(8). The name *Metatron* is numerically equivalent to the divine name *Shadday*.

(9). It should be borne in mind that we are dealing here with a 'transcendental' multitude and not with a numerical infinity (cf. *Les Principes du calcul infinitesimal*, chap. III); angels are in no way 'enumerable', since they do not belong to the realm of existence conditioned by quantity.

(10). The symbolism of these 'channels' that thus descend gradually through all states can help us to understand, if we look at them in the ascending sense, how beings situated at a higher level can, in general, perform the function of 'intermediaries' for those situated at a lower level, since communication with the Principle is not possible for the latter except through the former.

(11). Cf. *Le Règne de la quantité et les signes des temps*, chap. IX.

(12). It could be said that the angelic being *is* in act in relation to the attribute expressed by it, but *is* in potency in relation to all other attributes.

(13). Cf. *Le Règne de la quantité et les signes des temps*, chap. XL

(14). It goes without saying that such a way of speaking is valid only to the extent and from the point of view that the attributes themselves can be considered "distinctly" (and they can only be so with respect to manifestation), and that the indivisible unity of the divine Essence itself, to which everything ultimately reduces, is in no way affected by this.



## Chapter IX: NÂMA-RÛPA

As is well known, according to Hindu tradition, individuality is considered to be the result of the union of two elements, or, more precisely, of two sets of elements designated respectively by the terms *nâma* and *rûpa*, which literally mean "name" and "form" and are usually combined in the compound expression *nâma-rûpa*, which thus designates individuality in its entirety. *Nâma* corresponds to the 'essential' aspect of individuality, and *rûpa* to its 'substantial' aspect; they are therefore roughly equivalent to Aristotle's *eidos* and *hyle*, or what the scholastics called 'form' and 'matter'; However, in this case, it is necessary to guard against a cumbersome imperfection in Western terminology: "form" is in fact equivalent to *nâma*, whereas when the same word is taken in its usual sense, it is *rûpa* that should be translated as "form" (1). Since the word 'matter' is not without its drawbacks either, for reasons we have already explained on other occasions and to which we will not return now, we consider it preferable to use the terms 'essence' and 'substance', taken naturally in the relative sense in which they can be applied to an individuality.

From a slightly different point of view, *nâma* also corresponds to the subtle part of individuality, and *rûpa* to its corporeal or sensible part; but, otherwise, this distinction basically coincides with the previous one, since it is precisely these two parts, subtle and corporeal, which, in the whole of individuality, ultimately play the roles of "essence" and "substance" in their reciprocal relationship.

In all cases, when the being is liberated from the individual condition, it can be said that it is thereby "beyond name and form," since these two complementary terms are properly constitutive of individuality as such; naturally, this only happens when the being passes into a supra-individual state, since, in another individual state, and therefore still "formal", it would inevitably find the equivalent of *nâma* and *rûpa*, even if the "form" were no longer corporeal as it is in the human state.

However, it must also be said that *nâma* is susceptible to a certain transposition by virtue of which it is no longer the correlative of *rûpa*; this occurs when it is said that what remains of a human being upon death is *nâma* (2). It is true that one might think, in principle, that in this case it is only a matter of extra-corporeal extensions of human individuality; this way of understanding it is, moreover, acceptable in a certain sense, namely insofar as *rûpa* is identified with the body; there would then be no true transposition strictly speaking, but the subtle part of individuality would continue to be designated simply as *nâma* after the disappearance of the bodily part. This could even be understood as such when it is said that this *nâma* is "endless," in the sense that its end coincides analogically with its beginning, as can be seen particularly in the example of the annual cycle (*samvatsara*) (3). However, it is clearly no longer the same when it is specified that the being that subsists as *nâma* has passed into the world of the *devas* (4), that is, into an "angelic" or supra-individual state; since such a state is "non-formal", one can no longer speak of *rûpa*, while *nâma* is transposed to a higher meaning, which is possible by virtue of the supersensible character that is linked to it even in its ordinary and individual meaning; in this case, the being would be "*beyond form*" but not "*beyond name*", unless it had reached the unconditioned state, thus placing itself beyond any state which, however elevated it might be, still belonged to the domain of manifested existence. We can emphasise that this is undoubtedly what is meant in Western theological doctrines by the conception that angelic nature (*dêvatva*) is a pure "form" (which could be translated in Sanskrit as *shuddha-nâma*), that is, not united with "matter"; in fact, taking into account the particularities of scholastic language that we have pointed out above, this is exactly equivalent to saying that it is what we call a "non-formal" state (5).

In this transposition, *nâma* also corresponds to the Greek *eidos*, but understood here in a more Platonic than Aristotelian sense: it is the "idea", not in the psychological and "subjective" sense given to it by moderns, but in the transcendent sense of the "archetype", that is, as the reality of the intelligible world, of which the "sensible world" offers only a reflection or shadow (6); it can then be understood that the "sensible world" symbolically represents the entire domain of formal manifestation, while the "intelligible world" would be that of non-formal manifestation, that is

that is, the world of the *devas*. It is also in this way that we must understand the application of the term *nâma* to the "ideal" model that the artist must first contemplate inwardly, and according to which he subsequently realises his work in a tangible form, which is properly *rûpa*, so that when the "idea" has been "incorporated" in this way, the work of art can be contemplated, just like the individual being, as a combination of *nâma* and *rûpa* (7). There is then, so to speak, a "descent" (*avatarana*) of the "idea" into the formal domain; this does not mean, of course, that the "idea" is affected in itself, but rather that it is reflected in a certain sensible form, which proceeds from it and to which it gives life in some way; it could also be said, in this regard, that the "idea" itself corresponds to the "spirit", and that its "incorporated" aspect corresponds to the "soul". The parallel with the work of art allows us to understand more precisely the true nature of the relationship between the "archetype" and the individual, and, consequently, the two meanings of the term *nâma*, depending on whether it is applied in the "angelic" realm or in the human realm, that is, depending on whether it designates the non-formal or "spiritual" principle of being, which can also be called its pure "essence", or the subtle part of individuality, which is "essence" only in a completely relative sense and in relation to the "spiritual" principle. or "spiritual" principle of being, which can also be called its pure "essence", or the subtle part of individuality, which is "essence" only in a completely relative sense and in relation to its corporeal part, but which represents the "essence" in the individual domain and can therefore be considered as a reflection of the true transcendent "essence".

It now remains to explain the symbolism inherent in the terms *nâma* and *rûpa*, which allows us to move from their literal meaning, that is, from the meanings of "name" and "form", to the applications we have just considered. The relationship may seem more obvious at first glance for "form" than for "name", perhaps because, as far as "form" is concerned, we do not ultimately depart from the sensible order to which the ordinary meaning of the words directly relates; at least this is the case when it comes to human existence; and, if it were a question of another individual state, it would suffice to consider that there must necessarily be a certain correspondence between the constitution of the being manifested in that state and that of the human individual, simply because it would always be a formal state. On the other hand, in order to understand the true meaning of *nâma*, it is necessary to appeal to less widespread notions, and it is necessary above all to remember that, as we have already explained elsewhere, the "name" of a being, even understood literally, is effectively an expression of its "essence"; this "name" is also a "number" in the Pythagorean and Kabbalistic sense, and it is known that, even from the simple point of view of historical filiation, the conception of the Platonic "idea", which we were discussing a moment ago, is closely linked to that of the Pythagorean "number".

That is not all: it is important to emphasise that the 'name', in the literal sense, is properly a sound, and therefore belongs to the auditory realm, while the 'form' belongs to the visual realm; here, the "eye" (or sight) is taken as a symbol of sensory experience, while the "ear" (or hearing) is taken as a symbol of the "angelic" or intuitive intellect (8); likewise, "revelation" or direct intuition of intelligible truths is represented as "hearing" (hence the traditional meaning of the word *shruti*) (9). It is clear that, in themselves, sight and hearing correspond equally to the sensory realm; but in their symbolic transposition, when they are placed in relation to each other, a certain hierarchy must be considered between them, which results from the order of development of the elements, and consequently from the sensible qualities related to them: the auditory quality, being related to ether, which is the first of the elements, is more "primordial" than the visual quality, which is related to fire; and we thus see that the meaning of the term *nâma* is directly linked to traditional ideas that are truly fundamental in Hindu doctrine, in particular the idea of the "primordality of sound" and the idea of the "perpetuity of the *Vêda*".

#### NOTES:

(\*). Originally published in *Études Traditionnelles*, March 1940. Compiled in *Études sur l'Hindouisme*, Edit. Traditionnelles, Paris, 1966.

(1). In English, the misunderstanding could be avoided to a certain extent if it were agreed to translate the scholastic "form" as *forma* and the "form" in the ordinary sense as *shape*; but in French, it is impossible to find two words that allow this distinction to be made.

(2). *Bṛihadâraṇyaka-Upanishad*, III, 2, 12.



(3). *Jaiminiya Upanishad Brâhmana*, 1, 35.

(4). *Ibid.*, III, 9.

(5). It is no less true that angelic nature, like everything that is manifested, necessarily involves a mixture of "act" and "potency"; some seem to have simply assimilated these two terms to "form" and "matter," which indeed correspond to them, but which normally have a more restricted meaning; these terminological differences have given rise to some confusion.

(6). The symbolism of Plato's cave will be recalled here.

(7). On this point, and also for many of the other considerations set out in this article, see A. K. Coomaraswamy, 'The Part of Art in Indian Life', in the commemorative volume for the centenary of Shri Ramakrishna, *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. III, pp. 485-513.

(8). Cf. *Brihadâranyaka Upanishad*, I, 4,17

(9). It should be added, however, that in certain cases, sight and its organ can also symbolise intellectual intuition (the "eye of Knowledge" in the Hindu tradition, or the "eye of the Heart" in the Islamic tradition); but this is another aspect of the symbolism of light, and consequently of "visibility", different from the one we are considering here, since the latter mainly involves the relationships between sight and hearing, or the corresponding sensory qualities; it should always be remembered that traditional symbolism is never "systematic".



## Chapter X: THE LANGUAGE OF BIRDS

Wa-s-sâffâti saffan  
Fa-z-zâjirâti zajran  
Fa-t-tâliyâti dhikran  
("By those who are ordered in orders  
and those who expel by  
repelling and those who recite  
the invocation...")  
*Quran*, XXXVII, 1-3

Often, in various traditions, there is mention of a mysterious language called "the language of birds"; this is clearly a symbolic designation, since the very importance attributed to knowledge of this language, as a prerogative of high initiation, does not allow it to be taken literally. Thus, we read in the *Qur'an*: "And Solomon was the heir of David; and he said: O men, we have been taught the language of birds (*'ullimna mântiqâ-ttayri*) and filled with all good things. ..." (XXVII, 15). On the other hand, heroes who defeat dragons, such as Siegfried in Norse legend, are seen to understand the language of birds immediately, and this makes it easy to interpret the symbolism in question. Indeed, victory over the dragon has as its immediate consequence the conquest of immortality, represented by some object that the dragon prevents one from approaching, and this conquest of immortality essentially implies reintegration into the centre of the human being, that is, the point where communication with the higher states of being is established. This communication is represented by the understanding of the language of birds; for, in fact, birds are often taken as a symbol of angels, that is, precisely, of the higher states. We have had occasion to quote elsewhere (2) the Gospel parable which speaks, in this sense, of "the birds of the sky" that come to rest on the branches of the tree, the same tree that represents the axis that passes through the centre of each state of being and links all states together. (3)

In the Quranic text that we have reproduced as a motto, the term *es-saffât* is considered to literally refer to birds, but at the same time it is symbolically applied to angels (*el-malâ' ikah*); and thus, the first verse signifies the constitution of the celestial or spiritual hierarchies.

(4) The second verse expresses the struggle of the angels with the demons, of the celestial powers against the infernal powers, that is, the opposition between higher states and lower states (5); it is, in the Hindu tradition, the struggle of the *Dêva* against *the Asura*, and also, according to a symbolism entirely similar to the one we are dealing with here, the struggle of *the Garuda* against the *Naga*, in which we find, moreover, the serpent or dragon mentioned a few lines earlier; the *Garuda* is the eagle, and in other cases it is replaced by different birds, such as the ibis, the stork, the heron, all enemies and destroyers of reptiles. (6) Finally, in the third verse, we see the angels reciting the *dhikr*, which, in the most common interpretation, is considered to indicate the recitation of the *Qur'an*, not certainly not the *Qur'an* expressed in human language, but rather its eternal prototype inscribed in the "preserved tablet" (*el-lawhu-l-mahfûz*), which extends from the heavens to the earth like Jacob's ladder, that is, through all degrees of universal Existence. (7)

Similarly, in the Hindu tradition it is said that the *Devas*, in their struggle against the *Asuras*, protected themselves (*achhan dayan*) by reciting hymns from *the Vedas*, and that for this reason these hymns were given the name *chhanda*, a word that properly designates 'rhythm'. The same idea is contained in the word *dhikr*, which, in Islamic esotericism, is applied to rhythmic formulas corresponding exactly to Hindu *mantras*, formulas whose repetition is intended to produce a harmonisation of the various elements of being and to determine vibrations capable, through their repercussions across a series of states in an indefinite hierarchy, to open communication with higher states, which is, moreover, in general, the essential and primordial *raison d'être* of all rites.

We are thus led back, as will be seen, to what we said at the beginning about the "language of birds", which we can also call "angelic language", and whose image in the

The human world is rhythmic language, for the "science of rhythm", which has many applications, is ultimately the basis for all the means that can be used to communicate with higher states. That is why an Islamic tradition says that Adam, in the Garden of Eden, spoke in verse, that is, in rhythmic language; This is the "Syriac language" (*logah sūrianiyah*) that we discussed in our previous study on the "science of letters" (8), and which should be considered a direct translation of the "solar" and "angelic" illumination as manifested in the centre of the human state. That is why the sacred books are also written in rhythmic language, which, as we can see, makes them something other than simple "poems" in the purely 'profane' sense of the term, as the anti-traditional prejudice of modern "critics" would have us believe; Moreover, poetry was not originally the vain "literature" it has become through a degradation whose explanation must be sought in the downward march of the human cycle, but had a truly sacred character. (9) Traces of this can be found even in classical Western antiquity, in which poetry was still called the "language of the Gods," an expression equivalent to those we have indicated, since the "Gods," that is, the *Devas* (10), are, like angels, the representation of the higher states. In Latin, verses were called *carmina*, a designation referring to their use in the performance of rites, since the word *carmen* is identical to the Sanskrit *karma*, which should be taken here in its particular sense of "ritual action" (11); and the poet himself, interpreter of the "sacred language" through which the divine Word was revealed, was the *vates*, a word that characterised him as gifted with a somewhat prophetic inspiration. Later, due to further degradation, the *vates* was nothing more than a vulgar "fortune teller" (12); and the *carmen* (from which the French word *charme*, 'charm', derives), an "enchantment", that is, an operation of low magic; this is another example of how magic, and even sorcery, constitutes what remains as the last vestige of disappeared traditions. (13) These few indications will suffice, we believe, to show how wrong those who mock stories that speak of the "language of birds" are; it is indeed too easy and simplistic to dismiss everything that is not understood as "superstition", but the ancients, for their part, knew very well what they were saying when they used symbolic language. True "superstition", in the strict etymological sense (*quod superstat*), is that which survives itself, or, in a word, the "dead letter"; but even this preservation, however unworthy of interest it may seem, is not so despicable, for the spirit, which 'blows where it wills' and when it wills, can always come to revive symbols and rites and restore to them, with the meaning they had lost before, the fullness of their original virtue.

#### NOTES:

- (1). Published in *Le Voile d'Isis*, November 1931.
- (2). *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Vêdânta*, chap. III.
- (3). In the medieval symbol of *Peridexion* (a corruption of *Paradis*), birds are seen on the branches of the tree and the dragon at its foot (cf. *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, chap. IX). In a study on the symbolism of the "bird of paradise" (*Le Rayonnement intellectuel*, May-June 1930), L. Charbonneau-Lassay reproduced a sculpture in which this bird is depicted with only a head and wings, a form in which angels are often represented. [Cf. *Le Bestiaire du Christ*, chap. LVI, p. 425.]
- (4). The word *saff* is one of many in which some have sought to find the origin of the terms *Sufi* and *Tasawwuf*. although this derivation does not seem acceptable from a linguistic point of view, it is nonetheless true that, like many others of the same kind, it represents one of the ideas actually contained in these terms, since "spiritual hierarchies" are essentially identified with the degrees of initiation.
- (5). This opposition is reflected in every being by the two tendencies, ascending and descending, called *sattva* and *tamas* by Hindu doctrine. It is also what Mazdeism symbolises by the antagonism of light and darkness, personified respectively in *Ormuzd* and *Ahriman*.
- (6). See, in this regard, the remarkable works of L. Charbonneau-Lassay on the animal symbols of Christ (Cf., *Le Bestiaire du Christ*). It is important to note that the symbolic opposition between the bird and the serpent only applies when the latter is focused on its evil aspect; on the contrary, according to its beneficial aspect, it is sometimes united with the bird, as in the figure of *Quetzalcóhuatl* in Amerindian traditions; moreover, the combat between the eagle and the serpent is also found in Mexico. In the case of the association between the serpent and the bird, we may recall the Gospel text: "Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (St *Matthew*, X, 16).

(7). On the symbolism of the Book, to which this refers directly, see *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, chap. XIV.

(8). [See the article "The Science of Letters"]

(9). On the other hand, it can be said in general terms that the arts and sciences have become profane only by virtue of such degradation, which has stripped them of their traditional character and, consequently, of all higher meaning; we have explained this matter in *L'Esoterisme de Dante*, chapter II, and in *La Crise du monde moderne*, chapter IV. (See also *Le Règne de la quantité et les signes des temps*, chapter VIII).

(10). The Sanskrit *Dēva* and the Latin *Deus* are one and the same word.

(11). The word "poetry" also derives from the Greek verb *poieîn*, which has the same meaning as the Sanskrit root *kr* from which *Karma* comes, and which is also found in the Latin verb *creare* understood in its primitive sense; in its origin, therefore, it was something very different from the simple production of an artistic or literary work, in the profane sense, which seems to have been the only one Aristotle had in mind when he spoke of what he called "poetic sciences".

(12). The word "diviner" itself is no less deviated from its meaning, as etymologically it is directly related to *divinus* and means "interpreter of the gods". The "haruspices" (from *aves spicere*, "to observe birds") drew omens from the flight and song of birds, which is to be related more especially to the "language of birds", understood here in the most material sense, but identified, even so, with the "language of the gods", as it was believed that the gods manifested their will through such omens, and birds thus played a role as "messengers" analogous to that generally attributed to angels (hence their very name, as this is precisely the meaning of the Greek word *-ángelos*), albeit in a much lesser capacity.

(13). (On this subject of the origins of magic and sorcery, see the article "Shet", last paragraph).



## Chapter XI: ON THE ANGELOLOGY OF THE ARABIC ALPHABET\*

The divine "Throne" that surrounds all worlds (*El-Arsh El-Muhîr*) is represented, as is easy to understand, by a circular figure; in the centre is *Er-Rûh*, as we explain elsewhere; and the "Throne" is supported by eight angels who are placed on the circumference, the first four at the four cardinal points and the other four at the four intermediate points. The names of these eight angels are formed by eight groups of letters, taken in order of their numerical values, so that the set of these names comprises all the letters of the alphabet.

It is worth noting here that this is, of course, the 28-letter alphabet, but it is said that the Arabic alphabet originally had only 22 letters, which corresponded exactly to those of the Hebrew alphabet. Hence the distinction made between the small *Jafr*, which uses only these 22 letters, and the great *Jafr*, which uses all 28, taking them all with different numerical values. On the other hand, it can be said that the 28 ( $2 + 8 = 10$ ) are contained in the 22 ( $2 + 2 = 4$ ) as

10 is contained in 4, according to the Pythagorean *Tetraktys* formula:  $1 + 2 + 3 + 4 = 10$ ; (1) and, in fact, the six additional letters are nothing more than modifications of the same number of primitive letters, formed by the simple addition of a dot, and immediately reduced by the removal of this same dot. These six additional letters are those that make up the last two of the eight groups we have just mentioned; it is clear that if they were not considered as separate letters, these groups would be modified both in terms of their number and their composition. Consequently, the transition from the 22-letter alphabet to the 28-letter alphabet must necessarily have introduced a change in the angelic names in question, and therefore in the "entities" that these names represent; but, strange as it may seem to some, this is actually normal, since all modifications of traditional forms, and in particular those affecting the constitution of sacred languages, must in fact have their "archetypes" in the celestial world.

That said, the distribution of languages and names is as follows: In the

four cardinal points:

East: A B J to D; (2)

West: Ha Wa Z;

North: H to T to Y;

South: Ka L Ma N.

At the four intermediate points:

Northeast: Sa A Fa C

Northwest: Q to RS ha T;

Southeast: T ha Kh to D

h; Southwest: D to Za Gh.

It can be seen that each of these two sets of four names contains exactly half of the alphabet, or 14 letters, which are distributed as follows:

In the first half:  $4+3+3+4=14$ ; In the

second half:  $4+4+3+3=14$ .

The numerical values of the eight names, formed by the sum of their letters, are, taking them naturally in the same order as above:

$1+2+3+4=10$

$5+6+7 = 18$ ;

$8+9+10=27$ ;

$20 + 30 + 40 + 50 = 140$ ;

$60+70+80+90 = 300$ ;

$100 + 200 + 300 + 4070 = 1000$ ;  
 $500+600+700 = 1800$ ;  
 $800+900 + 1000 = 2700$ .

The values of the last three names are equal to those of the first three multiplied by 100, which is obvious if we observe that the first three contain the numbers from 1 to 10 and the last three contain the hundreds from 100 to 1000; both being equally distributed in  $4 + 3 + 3$

The value of the first half of the alphabet is the sum of the first four names:  
 $10+18+27+140 = 195$ .

Likewise, the value of the second half is the sum of the last four names:  $300 + 1000 + 1800 + 2700 = 5800$ .

Finally, the total value of the entire alphabet is:  $195+5800 = 5995$ .

This number 5995 is remarkable for its symmetry: its central part is 99, the number of the "attributive" names of *Allah*; its extreme figures form 55, the sum of the first ten numbers, in which the denarius is, moreover, divided into its two halves ( $5 + 5 = 10$ ); furthermore,  $5 + 5 = 10$  and  $9 + 9 = 18$  are the numerical values of the first two names.

One can better understand how the number 5995 is obtained by starting from the alphabet according to another division, into three series of nine letters plus one isolated letter: the sum of the first nine numbers is 45, the numerical value of the name *Adam* ( $1+4+40 = 45$ , that is, from the point of view of the esoteric hierarchy, *El-Qutb El-Ghawth* in the centre, the four *Awtâd* at the four cardinal points and the forty *Anjâb* on the circumference); that of the tens, from 10 to 90, is  $45 \times 10$ , and that of the hundreds, from 100 to 900, is  $45 \times 100$ ; the sum of these three series of nine is therefore the product of  $45 \times 111$ , the "polar" number, which is that of the "developed" *alif*:  $45 \times 11 = 4995$ ; we must add the number of the last letter, 1000, the unit of the fourth degree that ends the alphabet as the unit of the first degree begins it, and thus we finally have 5995.

Finally, the sum of the digits of this number is  $5 + 9 + 9 + 5 = 28$ , that is, the same number as the letters of the alphabet of which it represents the total value.

Undoubtedly, many other considerations could be developed based on this data, but these few indications will suffice to give at least an idea of some of the procedures of the science of letters and numbers in the Islamic tradition.

#### NOTES:

\* *Traditional Studies*, VIII-IX, 1938, pp. 324–327.

(1). See *La Tetraktys et le carré de quatre*, (April issue, 1927).

(2). Undoubtedly, the *alif* and the *ba* are placed here like all the other letters of the alphabet, in their numerical place: this does not in any way affect the symbolic considerations that we set out elsewhere, and which give them another, more special role.



## Chapter XII: CHIROLOGY IN ISLAMIC ESOTERISM\*

We have often had occasion to point out how alien the concept of "traditional sciences" has become to Westerners in modern times and how difficult it is for them to understand their true nature. Recently, we had another example of this misunderstanding in a study devoted to Mohyiddin-Ibn-Arabî, whose author was surprised to find in it, alongside purely spiritual doctrine, numerous considerations on astrology, the science of letters and numbers, symbolic geometry, and many other things of the same order that he seemed to consider as having no connection with this doctrine. Moreover, there was a double mistake here, since the strictly spiritual part of Mohyiddin's teaching was itself presented as mystical, whereas it is essentially metaphysical and initiatory; and if it were "mystical", it could not, in fact, have any connection with any sciences whatsoever. On the contrary, since it is a metaphysical doctrine, these traditional sciences, whose value he was otherwise completely unaware of, result from it as applications, just as consequences result from principles, and as such, far from constituting elements that are in some way adventitious and heterogeneous, they form part of *et-taḥawwuf*, that is, the body of initiatory knowledge.

Of these traditional sciences, most are now completely lost to Westerners, who know only vague traces of the others, often degenerated to the point of having taken on the character of empirical formulas or simple "divination arts," obviously devoid of any doctrinal value. To illustrate how far this view is from reality, we will give here some indications of what chiromancy (*ilm el-kaff*) is in Islamic esotericism, which, moreover, is only one of the many branches of what we might call, for lack of a better term, "physiognomy," although this word does not exactly reflect the full scope of the Arabic term that designates this body of knowledge (*ilm elfirâsah*).

Palmistry, strange as it may seem to those who have no knowledge of such things, is directly related, in its Islamic form, to the science of divine names: the arrangement of the main lines traces the number 81 on the left hand and the number 18 on the right hand, or a total of 99, the number of attributive names (*ḡifûtiyah*). As for the name *Allah* itself, it is formed by the fingers as follows: the little finger corresponds to the *alif*, the ring finger to the first *lam*, the middle finger and index finger to the second *lam*, which is double, and the thumb to the *ha* (which should normally be traced in its "open" form); and this is the main reason for the use of the hand as a symbol, so widespread in all Islamic countries (a secondary reason refers to the number 5, hence the name *khoms* sometimes given to this symbolic hand). In this way, we can understand the meaning of this phrase from *Sifr Seyidna Ayûb* (*Book of Job*, XXXVII, 7): "He has put a seal (*khâtîm*) on the hand of every man, so that all may know His work"; and we would add that this is not unrelated to the essential role of the hand in the rites of blessing and consecration.

On the other hand, the correspondence of the various parts of the hand with the planets (*kawâkih*) is generally known, as preserved by Western palmistry itself, but in such a way that one can hardly see anything more than a kind of conventional designation, whereas in reality this correspondence establishes an effective link between chiromancy and astrology. Furthermore, one of the main prophets, who is their "Pole" (*El-Qutb*), rules each of the seven planetary heavens; and the qualities and sciences most especially attributed to each of these prophets are related to the corresponding astral influence. The list of the seven celestial *Aqtâb* is as follows:

Heaven of the Moon (*El-Qamar*): Seyidna

Adam. Heaven of Mercury (*El-Utârid*): Seyidna

Aïssa. Heaven of Venus (*Ez-Zohrah*): Seyidna

Yûsif. Heaven of the Sun (*Es-Shams*): Seyidna  
Idris.

Heaven of Mars (*El-Mirrûkh*): Seyidna Dâwud.

Heaven of Jupiter (*El-Barjîs*): Seyidna Mûsa.

Heaven of Saturn (*El-Kaywân*): Seyidna Ibrahim.

The cultivation of the earth is related to Seyidna Adam (Cf. Genesis, II, 15: "God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden to cultivate and keep it"); to Seyidna Aïssa, knowledge of a purely spiritual nature; to Seyidna Yûsif, beauty and the arts; with Seyidna Idris, the "intermediate" sciences, that is, those of a cosmological and psychic nature; with Seyidna Dâwud, government; with Seyidna Mûsa, who is inseparably associated with his brother Seyidna Harûn, matters of religion from the dual perspective of legislation and worship; with Seyidna Ibrahîm, faith (which is why this correspondence with the seventh heaven should be related to what we recently recalled about Dante, in terms of his position on the highest of the seven steps of the initiatory ladder). In addition, around these main prophets are distributed throughout the seven planetary heavens, the other known prophets (that is, those who are called by name in the *Qur'an*, 25 in total) and unknown prophets (that is, all the others, the number of prophets according to tradition being 124,000).

The 99 names that express the divine attributes are also distributed according to this septenary: 15 for the heaven of the Sun, because of its central position, and 14 for each of the other six heavens ( $15 + 6 \times 14 = 99$ ). Examination of the signs found on the part of the hand corresponding to each of the planets indicates the proportion ( $s/14$  or  $s/15$ ) in which the person possesses the qualities related to them; this proportion itself corresponds to the same number ( $s$ ) of divine names among those belonging to the planetary heaven in question; and these names can then be determined by means of a very long and complicated calculation.

We should add that in the region of the wrist, beyond the hand itself, is located the correspondence of the two upper heavens, the heaven of the fixed stars and the empyrean heaven, which, together with the seven planetary heavens, complete the number 9. In addition, the twelve signs of the zodiac (*burûj*) are located in different parts of the hand, in relation to the planets of which they are the respective domiciles (one for the Sun and Moon, two for each of the other five planets), as well as the sixteen figures of geomancy (*ilm er-raml*), since all traditional sciences are closely linked to each other.

The examination of the left hand denotes the "nature" (*ettabiyyah*) of the person, that is, the set of tendencies, dispositions, or aptitudes that in some way constitute their innate characteristics. The examination of the right hand reveals acquired characteristics (*el-istiksâb*); these are constantly changing, so for a continuous study, this examination must be repeated every four months. This four-month period constitutes a complete cycle in the sense that it produces a return to a zodiac sign corresponding to the same element as the starting point; it is known that this correspondence with the elements occurs in the following order: fire (*nâr*), earth (*turâh*), air (*hawâ*) and water (*mâ*). It is therefore a mistake to think, as some have done, that the period in question should only be three months, since the three-month period corresponds only to one season, that is, to a part of the annual cycle and not to a complete cycle in itself.

These few indications, however brief, will show how a regularly constituted traditional science is linked to the principles of doctrinal order and depends entirely on them; and they will also make it clear what we have often said, that such a science is strictly linked to a defined traditional form, in such a way that it would be completely useless outside the civilisation for which it has been constituted according to this form.

Here, for example, the considerations relating to divine names and prophets, which are precisely those on which everything else is based, would be inapplicable outside the Islamic world, just as, to take another example, onomantic calculation, used either in isolation or as an element in the preparation of horoscopes in certain astrological methods, could only be valid for Arabic names whose letters have specific numerical values. In this order of contingent applications, there is always a question of adaptation that makes it impossible to transfer these sciences as they are from one traditional form to another; and there is also, without doubt, one of the main reasons for the difficulty in understanding them for those who, like modern Westerners, have no equivalent in their own civilisation. (1)

Mesr, 18 Dhul-Qa'dah 1350 AH (Mûlid Seyid Ali El-Bayûmi).

NOTES:

\* *Le Voile d'Isis*, May 1932, pp. 289-295.

(1). The information on which these notes are based is taken from the unpublished treatises of Sheikh Seyid Ali Nûreddin El-Bayâmi, founder of the *tarîqah* that bears his name (*bayûmiyah*); these manuscripts are currently still in the possession of his direct descendants.

## REVIEWS:

**Ananda Coomaraswamy, *The Darker Side of Dawn*** (Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections, Washington) This booklet contains very interesting observations on cosmogonic dualities, mainly as represented by an opposition between "light" and "darkness," and on certain related issues, including the symbolism of the serpent. We should also note a very curious similarity between the plot of *the Mahâbhârata* and the Vedic conflict between the *Devas* and the *Asuras*, which could also evoke similarities with what is found in other traditional forms, as is also the case with regard to the colour black as a symbol of the unmanifest. It is only regrettable that the author has limited himself to indicating all these considerations in a somewhat too succinct manner, in barely twenty pages, and we can only hope that he will have the opportunity to develop them more fully in subsequent works.

Published in *Le Voile d'Isis*, 1935. Compiled in *Études sur l'Hindouisme*.

**Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Angel and Titan: An Essay in Vedic Ontology*** (Excerpt from *the Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 55, no. 4).

This important study is a continuation of *The Darker Side of the Dawn*, which we reviewed previously. The main idea developed by the author is that the *Dévas* or "Angels" and the *Asuras* or "Titans", respectively, powers of Light and Darkness in the *Rig-Vêda*, although opposed in their actions, are nonetheless of the same essence, their distinction arising in reality from their orientation or state. The *Asura* is a *Dêva* in potential, and the *Dêva* is still an *Asura* by its original nature; and the two designations can be applied to one and the same entity according to its mode of operation, as seen for example in the case of *Varuna*. On the other hand, while the *Devas* are usually represented in the form of men and birds, the *Asuras* are represented in the form of animals, particularly snakes; hence a series of considerations of the greatest interest on the various aspects of snake symbolism, mainly from a cosmogonic point of view. Many other issues are addressed in the course of this work, and we cannot list them all in detail: let us mention only the nature of *Agni* and his relationship with *Indra*, the meaning of sacrifice, that of *Soma*, the symbolism of the sun and its rays, of the spider and its web, etc. Everything is considered in a clearly traditional spirit, as these sentences from the conclusion show: "What must be seen from the outside and logically as a double operation of alternating sleep and awakening, of potentiality and act, is inwardly and really the pure and simple nature of the Supreme Identity... Neither Vedic ontology nor the forms in which it is expressed are, moreover, particular to *the Rig-Veda*, but can also be recognised in all extra-Indian forms of the universal and unanimous tradition."

Published in *Études Traditionnelles*, 1936. Compiled in *Études sur l'Hindouisme*.