

The Ladder Between Heaven and Earth

by Mithravedos

OF ALL ESOTERIC CRAFTS, ASTROLOGY is the one *most* talked about and least understood in our time. Dismissed by science and trivialized by the media, its beauty, depth of wisdom and value to the occultist are hidden to all but the very few. Yet one cannot fully engage in Magic, Qabalah or the Gnostic Mysteries without it. For example, an understanding of astrology is essential to understanding the idea of a Ladder between Heaven and Earth that underlies much Western magic, thinking and practice.

What constitutes the structure of the ladder of heaven and earth?

According to this scheme, out of the vast and unfathomable *One* emerges a Divinity (God) with a name: Beauty, Truth, Love, Pleroma [fullness], Ain Sof [the Limitless] or whatever one wishes to call it; and from that Divinity unfolds in sequence the spheres of the Fixed Stars and the seven planets: Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the Sun, Venus, Mercury, and the Moon, arranged in the "Chaldean order," that is, in order of their speed as viewed from the earth. Below the Moon we enter the sublunary world, a realm created by the intermixing of the four elements (air, water, fire and earth), whose unstable combinations account for the changeability of the manifest world.

The Soul, divine in nature, descends from the higher realms through the planetary spheres and into embodiment. Consequently the way to illumination or even to complete freedom from incarnation is to climb upward the way one came down.

This seems to have been a very ancient teaching. We find it explicitly stated in "The Three Steles of Seth, one of a group of Gnostic writings discovered

in upper Egypt in 1945: "The way of ascent is the way of descent." But almost exactly the same words appear much earlier in one of the fragmentary aphorisms of Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher of the late sixth and early fifth centuries b.c.e.

This path of ascent was incorporated into some of the ancient mysteries, specifically the Roman mysteries of Mithras.

Strongly influenced by the Persian god Mithras, these mysteries came to Rome by way of Phoenician pirates during the first century b.c.e. By the second century c.e., Mithraism was well established.

The mysteries, which were open to men only, first subjected the aspirant to ordeals, and then purified, initiated, and feasted him.

The Pagan apologist Celsus describes the Mithraic upward way: "There is a ladder with seven gates and at its top an eighth gate. The first of the gates is of lead, the second of tin, the third of bronze, the fourth of iron, the fifth of an alloy, the sixth of silver, and the seventh of gold.

Incidentally, Celsus either betrayed his personal ignorance of the Mithraic

Mysteries or, to protect the Mysteries, deliberately set down the correspondences to the planetary spheres, gates, and metals incorrectly both in order and in detail.

He inverts the customary sequence, which usually begins with gold or silver, by starting with lead (which corresponds to Saturn).

Traditionally the order and metallic correspondences of the Mithraic mysteries are: silver (Moon), quicksilver or alloys (Mercury), Copper or bronze (Venus), gold (Sun), iron (Mars), tin (Jupiter), and lead (Saturn) in the order of the planetary orbits as viewed from the earth.

Magicians and alchemist use these correspondences in the preparation of talismans and amulets, or in laboratory work.

Celsus' description of a ladder with seven gates is supported by archaeological evidence. At one Mithreum in Ostia, Italy, the floor is laid out with seven stations decorated with appropriate symbols. These represented seven grades of initiation,

Korax	Raven	Mercury
Kryphios	Veiled	Venus
Stratiotes	Soldier	Mars
Leon	Lion	Jupiter
Perses	Persian	Moon
Heliodromos	Courier of the Sun	Sun
Pater	Father	Saturn

They were the mundane counterparts to the higher spheres. The attainment of each of the seven grades certainly implied that one had risen to, and perhaps mastered, the corresponding level. It is not clear whether the Mithraic initiates actually had the mystical experience of these places, as one might today in magical work using the Qabalistic Tree, for instance. However, there are descriptions of ecstatic journeys through these spheres in Egyptian Gnostic texts, especially *Zostrianos* and *The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* to be found in the Nag Hammadi Library.

The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth is written as a dialogue between a spiritual guide and an aspirant who has already prepared himself for the mystical experience of the highest levels.

He begs his teacher, "My father, yesterday you promised me that you would bring my mind into the eighth and afterwards you would bring me into the ninth. You said that this is the order of the tradition" (*Discourse 1:17*).

The aspirant has apparently passed through the lower levels, for he announces, "We have already advanced to the seventh, since we are pious and walk in your law. And your will we fulfill always" (56: 279).

This certainly sounds as though he has fulfilled the demands of Saturn, the overlord of the seventh level, associated with the cosmic order.

Finally the two do attain to the eighth and ninth, where, beyond the mutability of the lower seven worlds, they perceive the unchanging.


*Rejoice over this!
 For already from them the power,
 which is light, is coming to us.
 For I see! I see indescribable depths.
 How shall I tell you, my son?
 How shall I describe the universe?
 I see the one that moves me from pure
 forgetfulness.
 You give me power!
 I see myself
 I want to speak! Fear restrains me.
 I have found the beginning of the power
 that is above all powers,
 the one that has no beginning.
 I see a fountain bubbling with life.
 I have seen!
 Language is not able to reveal this.
 For the entire eighth, my son, and the souls that are in it,
 and the angels, sing a hymn in silence. And
 I, Mind, understand*

(Discourse, - 57.-28-33, 58.-1-22).

The eighth sphere, also mentioned in the Mithraic Mysteries, is the sphere of the fixed stars. It is analogous to the divine world because of its relatively unchanging nature.

The seven levels below, realms of the planets (literally “wanderers”), whose orbits vary and whose movement was now forwards and now backwards, represent the mutable world.

To look up at the star-scattered heavens through which the planets wandered is to see the changeable imposed upon the unchanging, a dramatic experience of the paradoxical nature of existence.

	<p>Sanctuary of the Guardians Mount Eden Phone 846 8890</p>	<p>Sunday 20th April 1997, 7.30pm Sun into Taurus ♉ “Melkitsedeq, Priest and Prince of El Elyon”</p>
	<p>Friday 21st March 1997, 7.30pm Sun into Aries ♈ “Autumn Equinox - Putting on the Armour of Light”</p>	<p>Wednesday 21st May 1997, 7.30pm Sun into Gemini ♊ “The Twin Torchbearers and Mithras, The Lord of the Sun”</p>