

Inheritor of a Dying World

Initiatory Experiences in the Golden Dawn

by Melissa Seims

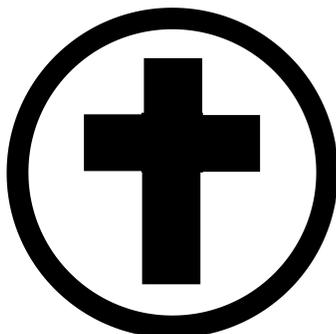
Your head is covered by a black bag suffused with the smell of incense from prior initiations. Your palms are slightly sweaty as you are led, tentatively groping for the ground in front of you, into the temple. A disembodied voice cuts through the formality of your admittance; 'Inheritor of a Dying World, arise and enter the Darkness'. This powerful phrase, loaded with meaning, beckons you onwards in your spiritual journey.

Initiations are nothing new. Societies, cultures and religions from all over the world, stretching back to the dawn of humanity, have held ceremonies or rituals to mark the significant events of a mortal life. Birth, puberty, marriage and death, for example. These are all based on visible and physical points of change in your life. But we are more than just our bodies and so it makes sense that there should also be rites marking spiritual beginnings and transitions.

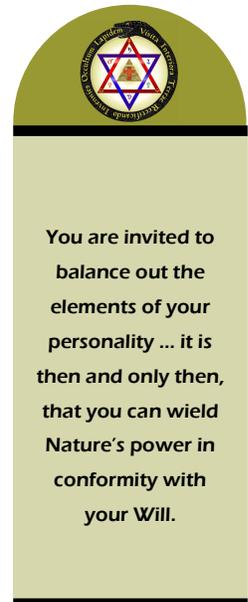
Baptism, Ordination, Attunement and Initiation are some of the terms used to describe such spiritual transition points. Some mark the start of a spiritual path; some mark the achievement of sufficient religious and spiritual knowledge, or the ability of the candidate to lead others in a spiritual capacity. Yet others are designed to incite and invite spiritual lessons to come into our lives so that we may thus transmute them and through that experience, glimpse our own personal alchemical gold, our own Sun.

In the outer order of the Golden Dawn a combination of these approaches is used. You are invited to balance out the elements of your personality, thus purified and acquainted with the building blocks of the Universe it is then and only then, that you can wield Nature's power in conformity with your Will.

Magical initiations often consist of things that you would not normally do in your everyday life. For example, being naked, challenged with a sword, or walking around with a bag on your head. You may catch yourself wondering whether you have actually gone mad, then the presence of others reassures you that if this is so, you are not the only one! This is just one of several reasons why an actual, as opposed to an astral form of initiation is, in my opinion, preferential. The benefits of walking any spiritual path with others who have done the same, are immense. Especially when, as in the Golden Dawn system, you are stripping away your psyche, taming the Ego and generally trying to discover who you really are; for this can be scary stuff!



In order to advance through the grades, you are expected to sufficiently demonstrate your knowledge of the prior grade by taking an exam. This is wise, for we all know where trying to run before you can walk, can lead! As for the actual initiation itself, some prefer to undergo them 'blind' i.e. without any prior knowledge of what that particular ritual contains. Others like to know what's coming and read ahead. Personally, I much prefer the former. Shock value and surprise can count for a lot in initiations. You certainly don't need to worry about knowing any-



Inheritor of a Dying World Initiatory Experiences in the Golden Dawn (continued)

thing beforehand. Remember that the Hegemon is there to help you and will be by your side, ready to prompt you if necessary.

The single most important thing in any initiation, whether it is astral or actual, 'blind' or not, is your own desire to wholeheartedly participate in the experience in every way. Listen to what you are being told, allow yourself to form impressions and if things start seeming overly-verbose and complex (some sections of the Golden Dawn grades are), don't worry, for you can always study the words later. Trust the process, trust yourself and have faith in the Hegemon and the Fratres and Sorores of your temple.

Initiatory Experiences

How any particular initiatory rite will affect you can often not be foreseen. Some people find them incredibly invigorating, others terrifying. In the Golden Dawn system of Magic, clues to how you may react to any particular grade can be found in your astrological chart.

It is surprising how often those with a lot of Earth in their chart, may suddenly experience weight changes following a 1=10, Zelator initiation. This grade is attributed to the element of Earth and in an attempt to transmute its lesson, it is perhaps unsurprising that the difference is seen on a bodily level. Money and finances are another area often affected by this grade.

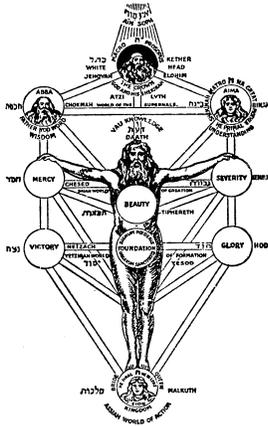
The 2=9 air grade may see a smoker, quit and psychic sensitivity increase. The 3=8, water grade, associated with Hod, is often good for communication and the mind. The 4=7 fire grade, attributed to Netzach, is about love and understanding what it really is. These last two grades always hit you in whatever weak points you have because they are unbalanced and take you off the Middle Pillar. Remember though, that in order to know the 'middle', you must first know where the extremes lie.

If you have been used to other elemental systems, the association of water with Hod, or air with Lunar Yesod, may at first seem counter-intuitive. This is in part because the Golden Dawn system was influenced by old alchemical and philosophical ideas about fire and water creating air. Thus you have fiery Netzach, acting with watery Hod to create airy Yesod. There is more to this 'mystery' for you to uncover and without giving too much away, it is important to recall how the Sephiroth on the Tree of Life are connected to each other by paths, each with their own attributes, which feed into the sephiroth, colourising and enhancing them through this interaction.



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As we are all 'Adam Kadmon'; microcosmic manifestations of macrocosmic expression, the effect of a grade can occur not only on an individual level. Often your attention will be drawn to an element's power in the larger world around you. For example, shortly after my own 2=9 (air), my garden fence unexpectedly blew down in freak winds and I found myself cursing the power of air whilst trying to salvage my prized Buddleia bush. In another example, as a teenager I painstakingly spent hours creating a fan made of feathers. I travelled all the way down to Glastonbury and climbed up the Tor one dark, moonlit night in order to consecrate the fan. Immediately afterwards, it promptly blew away never to be seen again!

I am sure that some readers will be able to identify with these retrospectively humorous accounts of dealing with elemental forces (or should that be 'farces'?) Though initiations can be highly subjective and personal experiences, conversation reveals that there are also resonating, common threads to be found. Whatever magical initiation you are dealing with, you will be meeting the same archetypal energies and Godforms that many before you have encountered.

This leads on to the concept of the initiatory current. This is the belief that there is a spiritual force or link, which is passed by the initiator to the initiate, thereby plugging them into a particular egregore. In some areas, much emphasis is put on 'lineage', with people eagerly recounting how many generations they are from Person A or Temple B.

Personally, I think that with the right knowledge and approach, it is possible to plug oneself into most spiritual and magical currents, independently of any particular initiator. This is why astral initiations do work, though there are other reasons to consider if one is in the fortunate position of having a choice between astral or physical initiation.

Personal accounts of initiation

Here are some extracts written by people who have undergone a Golden Dawn initiation. Readers who have also experienced the power of the outer order grades will find some echoes of their own experiences here. For those who haven't, they will give you some idea as to how powerful the initiatory process can be.

Frater S., after having just taken his Neophyte exam with a view to attaining his 1=10, had the following dream;

'I dreamt that Soror E.T.A.T.C. and I were about to embark on a journey to find the tomb of Anubis. We were with other people, one of whom was a close friend. We were walking along a road that we knew would lead us to the underground tomb but the entrance had been blocked by a rockfall. I instinctively knew that it had been caused by

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Inheritor of a Dying World Initiatory Experiences in the Golden Dawn (continued)

Horus, who was trying to prevent us from finding the tomb of Anubis. All the people around with us got frustrated that we could not go any further. I was a little frightened because I realised that the godform of Horus was trying to stop Soror E.T.A.T.C. and me but the two of us found a way through. We followed the underground tunnel and came to the tomb of Horus. I realised that directly opposite the tomb of Horus was the tomb of Anubis. We opened the door of Anubis' sarcophagus. Within it were the mask of Anubis, two red sandals and a book of rituals



dedicated to him. There were also other magical implements such as a lamp. I took the mask and the red sandals. I knew it was important to wear the red sandals if I wanted to invoke Anubis but as I put them on, the forces of Horus became activated. It was like a jet engine starting up, with flaming jets accelerating.'

People often report peculiar dreams prior to, or following an initiation. Many of these dreams seem to be an astral echo of the initiatory process that is undergone by our physical selves and can be seen as a sign that the initiation has 'taken'.

This dream, rich in symbolism, clearly reveals a 'descent' – this is unsurprising for this Frater is aiming for the 1=10 Earth grade. Anubis is the perfect archetype to have in this case, for he is a godform of the Keryx who is the guide of the paths. This dream reveals the intention and desire of this Frater to find Anubis, to start the descent into the Earth from which he can then ascend the Tree of Life. In the Golden Dawn, Anubis is also the Godform associated with the Phylax, the watcher, who helps to protect the temple by ensuring that no malevolent entities try to intrude on proceedings.

Horus is the Egyptian God of wisdom and his presence in the dream seems to be revealing the Magician's desire for knowledge and tuition. As Horus is also described as being in a 'tomb', it could be that the dreamer is seeking specific knowledge about the Earth grade. Alternatively, this may be a quest to wake up the Horus aspect of himself ready for his spiritual journey along this particular path.

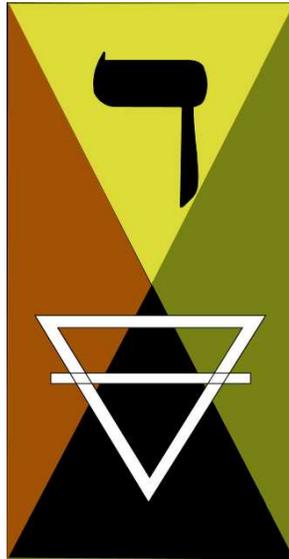
Whilst the Golden Dawn system uses a lot of Egyptian imagery, you may not always see Egyptian godforms. For example, if, prior to your Golden Dawn studies, you had a strong interest in the Greek pantheon, you may see Hermes instead of Anubis.

People often report peculiar dreams prior to, or following an initiation. Many of these dreams seem to be an astral echo of the initiatory process that is undergone by our physical selves and can be seen as a sign that the initiation has 'taken'. In other words, the initiatory lesson has been taken in by the inner self, assuming a real meaning in the realm of our subconscious which provides us with a personal link to the upper realms of the Tree of Life.

Inheritor of a Dying World Initiatory Experiences in the Golden Dawn (continued)

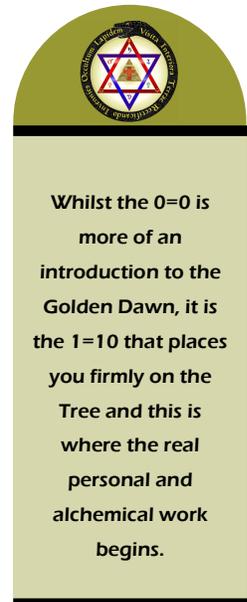
Soror E.A.S., whilst waiting for her 1=10 Earth initiation recounts;

'...I was meditating and saw the letter dalet, which stuck with me for a while and gave me the impression that I door and out of my comfort throughout the ritual, was in contrast to the 0=0 introduced to the light light but it was veiled in its entirety. I almost felt from the beginning again, from the 0=0 were being ences I will be having I shall they will be more meaning- 'light' experiences, but will can be built upon. So in a back in darkness so that I become a stronger person. being pushed downwards, lie on the floor and descend. I was quite surprised by this, as my 0=0 experience was very much one of light, whereas during the 1=10 I tried to push myself upwards, although I was being brought back down to Earth again.'



was taking a big step through a zone. I felt a great heaviness which was powerful but which where I felt light, as I had just been then. During the 1=10, I saw the darkness, like it was there but not afraid as I felt that I was starting and that all of the experiences taken from me. The new experi- have to work harder to get, as ful because they will not be just have a true solid foundation which sense it felt like I was being put could work my way out of it to During the ritual I felt like I was almost to the point of wanting to

This Soror, has captured the essence of the 1=10 Earth Grade. Whilst the 0=0 is more of an introduction to the Golden Dawn, it is the 1=10 that places you firmly on the Tree and this is where the real personal and alchemical work begins. Many people in the 1=10 report feelings of heaviness, of being dragged down, of walking through treacle. This is the Earth element revealing its full power to you. This very solidifying force, in its worst extremes, can lead to depression, disillusionment or abandonment of the Golden Dawn system. This is precisely what the challenge of this grade is about. Learn from Earth, feel its power and transmute its lesson into something that you can call upon when the times are right, when you need to 'stand your ground'.



Inheritor of a Dying World Initiatory Experiences in the Golden Dawn (continued)

Soror M.R.C.A had a significant dream after taking her 2=9 exam but before actually having the 2=9 air initiation itself;



'In my dream I was with my daughter, which in itself is quite unusual as I don't often dream about her. There was a tornado coming and I ran with her, to a building that reminded me of my senior school. Once inside, there were windows everywhere, many more than you would normally expect – there was one particular wall which seemed to be made from windows. There were no cupboards in which to hide for protection from the tornado. We also seemed high up, like we were overlooking some sort of valley. I looked down and I could see

a knight-like figure threatening a red dragon into submission. I watched as the red dragon retreated into a wooded area. The sky was getting darker and darker and the tornado was getting closer and closer. I remember thinking 'oh no, it is going to hit us!' I proceeded to do the LBRP and suddenly all this light flooded into the scene, dissipating the dark and stormy tornado, whose swirling then mutated into two dragons, one black and one white. They were chasing each other's tails and spinning round and round in the air. In my dream, I said 'It's OK now, look, everything is back in balance as it should be.'



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This dream suggests that this Soror sees herself as a student, which indeed she is. The dragons and knight are alchemical symbols, rich in meaning. Interestingly enough, this Soror had never paid much attention to alchemical symbolism or dragons before and reported being extremely surprised by the appearance of such archetypal symbols in her dream.

Frater D.P.A.L following his 4=7 Fire grade wrote;

'Increased feeling of dedication to the Order following the 4=7 ceremony. Synchronistic events involving Fire since paths of the 3=8, (paths of Shin and Resh). Two clients having house fires... Unfortunately one of these was fatal. More recently the local school on the estate where I live was burned down for the second time. Obviously I am not suggesting a causal link between these events and the initiation, more likely a raised awareness of fire resulting in me noticing fire-related issues. Synchronicity? Possibly, as this relates to meaningful coincidences. However, only meaningful to myself or anyone else in the grade.'

This experience of feeling more attuned to any particular element is a very common one. An elemental initiation makes your subconscious mind more aware of that particular element. Resultantly, you start seeing that element manifest everywhere; in the same way

Inheritor of a Dying World Initiatory Experiences in the Golden Dawn (continued)

as when you or a loved one is pregnant, you suddenly start seeing pregnant women everywhere.

With the elemental grades of the outer order, once you have started on the path, it is very important that you finish the work or you will be in danger of being unbalanced. This can give rise to a phenomenon seen on various magical internet groups – that of the person who comes across as decidedly unbalanced. This is because, kabbalistically speaking, they may well be! Again, in a good temple, or even on a good internet forum or list, it is important to try and watch out for each other and extend that brotherly or sisterly compassion to those who may be struggling. For it is almost guaranteed that there will be times when you will be struggling too!

Finally, the portal is reached and the gateway to the inner order beckons you. Frater I.U.S. says of his Portal experience;

'It was as if part of my self was extinguished and I had no choice but to make drastic changes in my life to achieve the balance I needed to go further. I packed my bags, dumped my neurotic, dependant and violent girlfriend and started a new life.'

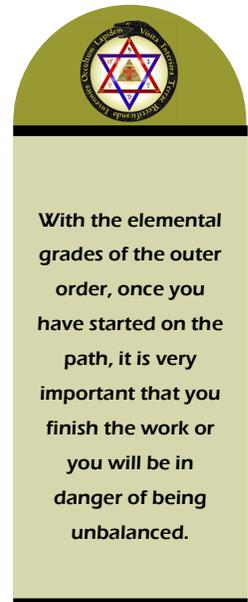
Whilst in the portal grade, all your elemental experiences are transmuted into a golden whole. Having thus acquainted yourself with fundamental forces and successfully balanced them, you are now ready to take the next step into the inner order and adepthood - where the real magical work begins.



Icarus by Henri Matisse

The painter Henri Matisse, though talking about his own creative career, succinctly describes the initiatory process; *'An artist must possess Nature. He must identify himself with her rhythm, by efforts that will prepare the mastery which will later enable him to express himself in his own language.'* As Magicians we are artists. The sephiroth are our palette and our Will is the paintbrush. By opening our minds to the wisdom of our higher selves, we can paint the Universe, transforming it and ourselves in the process.

In closing I should like to say a heartfelt thanks and express my gratitude to those Fratres and Sorores who so kindly contributed their experiences to this essay, without whom it would not have been possible.



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