

The Keryx and the Caduceus

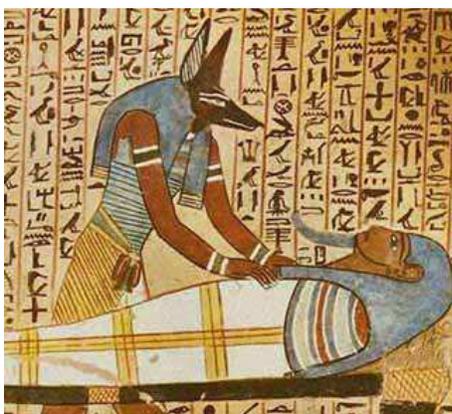
by Melissa Seims

In the Golden Dawn system there are various officer roles, each with their own tasks and correspondences. This article will take a closer look at the role of the Keryx (female: Kerykissa), who is the wielder of the lamp of knowledge and the directing power of the caduceus. They play an important part in the initiatory grades of the Outer Order, for they are an agent for the Higher Self of the candidate and serve to both warn and guide them on their spiritual path.

In the Neophyte temple opening and initiatory grade, the Keryx sits, 'within the portal', in the Southwest on the Hieres' right-hand side. The Keryx is the inner expression of the Phylax, who sits outside the portal. He or she is the herald of the temple, who also acts as a guide and caretaker of the candidate in the lower grades. The Phylax guards and watches on the outside. It is therefore not surprising that the godform associated with both the Keryx and the Phylax is Anubis. The former is ascribed to Anubis of the East and the latter to Anubis of the West, who is also known as Ophois.

Anubis was the jackal-headed Egyptian god of death and the underworld. In ancient Egypt, dogs and jackals were often found scavenging near cemeteries, in other words they recycle waste or useless things and transmute them to that which is more useful. In Egyptian belief, the entrance to the underworld was considered to be in the West, which explains the position of the Keryx and the Phylax near the Banner of the West and the station of the Hieres. According to the Unas text, Anubis was also associated with the Eye of Horus, which was said to aid people in finding Osiris, in other words, finding their own inner divine self and this is indeed a crucial part of the Keryx' job.

Anubis was also associated with funerary customs and was the father of Kebechet. Often seen has having the body of a snake, she was the Goddess of the purification of bodily organs, that were ritually placed in canopic jars during mummification. In our temple, the



Keryx ritually 'removes' the organs of the candidate which, during a neophyte initiation, are symbolically represented by the rose, cup, paten and candle on the altar. They are placed for safekeeping in the corners of the temple associated with the four sons of Horus; Amset in the Northeast, Toouamaautef in the Southeast, Kabehsonef in the Southwest and Ahaphi in the Northwest. Following the neophyte's successful entry, these are symbolically returned to the cubical altar during the Hierophant's long speech about how the candidate can attain future advancement.

The Keryx has the role of temple herald and messenger. Upon hearing the Hierophant's knock, the Keryx initiates the opening of the temple with the proclamation 'Hekas Hekas Este Bebeloi', which effectively demands that all things profane, leave. This idea is also reflected by the actions of the Keryx, who moves sun-wise from their station in the Southwest, to the Northeast, a location just before the dawning of the Sun in the East. This is where the seed of light is waiting to blossom. He or she takes up an 'L' position, with one

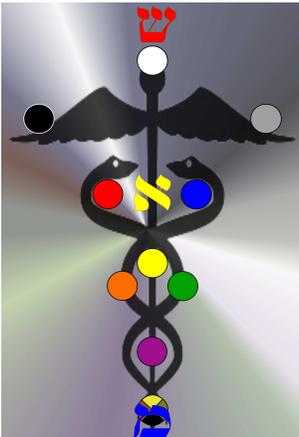


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(continued)

hand holding the lantern stretching towards the altar and the other arm raised up and holding the caduceus wand, which now acts as a 'conductor' and channel for the powers 'above' to move down to manifestation in the subsequent erection of the temple. This is why the Keryx leads circumambulations, for this officer stands between the worlds and helps to bring down the Light, which sees the profane scattering and which also defines and creates the sacred space that brings us into contact with our own Higher Selves, our own divine sparks.



The caduceus is the perfect symbol for such an action; its design encapsulates the ideas behind the phrase 'as above so below'. Composed of the three elemental Hebrew letters Shin, (fire), Aleph (air) and Mem (water) it also transposes nicely onto the Tree of Life with the 'wings' of the Caduceus connecting together the triune of Kether, Chokmah and Binah. The polar twin snakes wrap around the other sephiroth. They are the serpents of the transformative power of wisdom which they channel down from the upper parts of the Tree, to Malkuth.

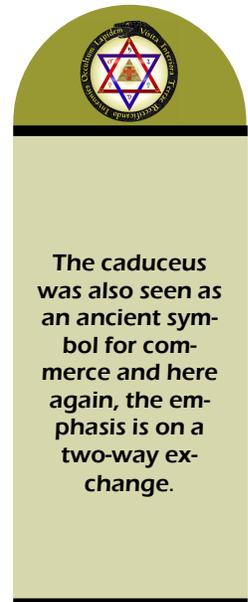
The double serpent symbolism goes back a long way. In the Louvre, there is a libation vase dating to approximately 2500BC, which depicts two snakes entwined around a rod. There is a dedication on it to the Mesopotamian god Ningizzida, reputed to be the son of Enki. The caduceus is associated with both of

them. Ningizzida's name fittingly translates from the ancient Sumerian into 'Lord of the good tree' and he was also considered to be the predecessor to the Egyptian God Thoth, also associated with a caduceus.

The idea of the snake being a creature that could travel between the worlds is also seen in Mexico, where the snake was seen as a god that connected Heaven and Earth. The snake also features in the story of Inanna, where it upsets her by making a nest amongst the roots of her huluppu tree. This is analogous to the Tree of Life and the biblical story of the Garden of Eden and indeed, serpent imagery can be seen in mythologies from all around the world.

There is a Greek myth pertaining to the origins of the caduceus, concerning Tiresias, a prophet of Thebes. It was said that he came upon a pair of snakes copulating and he prudishly struck them. Hera, queen of the gods of Olympus, punished him by turning him into a woman in an attempt, it seems, for him to open his eyes to the dualistic nature and polar dance that is endemic throughout most of nature. The caduceus was also seen as an ancient symbol for commerce and here again, the emphasis is on a two-way exchange.

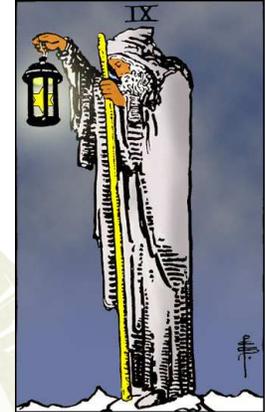
Nowadays, the caduceus is most commonly associated with Hermes, the 'messenger of the Gods' and his Roman equivalent Mercury, both of whom are later variations of Thoth. They also relate to the Hermit tarot card and most decks will show the Hermit with a staff and lantern of knowledge. In the original Golden Dawn a simple staff was used, though this was later fittingly replaced by the caduceus by the Stella Matutina's Bristol temple. The Hermit is the questing Fool, who has made significant progress on his spiritual journey. No longer are the hounds of materialism snapping at his heels. This is why the Keryx makes such a good guide for the candidate in the elemental grades, for the Keryx hears the whispers of their own path, on the journey lying before the candidate.



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The Keryx and the Caduceus (continued)

On the Tree of Life, the 20th path leading from Tiphareth to Chesed is ascribed to the Hermit. It is balanced by the 22nd Path leading from Tiphareth to Geburah. Associated with Justice, this card has a connection with the Hegemon in a Golden Dawn temple, who also acts as a guide for the candidate in some sections of the grades. It is very fitting, then, that the Hegemon and Keryx are both linked to Tiphareth and help to facilitate the candidate's access to their own personal Tiphareth consciousness, their own Higher Self.



The Keryx is not, however, as harmless as the Hermit outwardly appears. The Keryx is 'cruel to be kind', for having gained admission to the candidate, the Keryx must now test the worthiness and suitability of the candidate to receive access to their own divine wisdom. Unpurified and unconsecrated, the candidate cannot advance. It is their own Higher Self, acting through the Keryx, that is challenging them, beseeching them with a firm blow of the caduceus to their chest, to look into their own hearts. This enables the candidate to see into the darkness of their own soul. Thus our own Higher Self, acting through the Keryx, becomes our first initiator. We initiate ourselves through the choices we make. It is ourselves that are solely responsible for our starting, progressing, and finishing any spiritual path. The prompting of our own Higher Self drives us past the spiritual gates and into the temple. It's all a veritable 'Never-Ending Story'⁽¹⁾.

In the subsequent grade of Zelator, it is the great archangels Samael (Hiereus) and Metatron (Hegemon) who challenge the advance of the candidate. The Keryx, as Anubis, acts on the behalf of the candidate, leading him or her toward their stations and then pulling the candidate back when their way is barred. The only path open to the candidate is the middle path, which leads to Sandalphon (Hierophant), archangel of Malkuth, who strides forwards and with an upward glance of his sceptre, removes the sceptre and sword of the Hegemon and Hiereus that are blocking the candidate's way.

In the Theoricus grade, the active roles of the Hegemon and Keryx are balanced, with both acting equally as a guide to, and the voice of, the candidate. When the title of the 32nd path is about to be given, it is the Keryx who steps forward and stands on the candidate's left-hand side, taking his or her hand. The candidate's Higher Self and inner guide is now symbolically connected to the candidate, with the Keryx visualising the transfer. Having left Malkuth and the 1=10, behind the Candidate is now 'between the worlds' aspiring to Tiphareth-consciousness and the emphasis on the Keryx carrying this connection on his behalf, as seen in the earlier grades, is now reduced. So much so, that the Keryx has no role at all to play in the next two grades, that of the 3=8 and 4=7.

As has been shown, the Keryx is a vital part of the lower elemental grades. This officer also has the most physically active and perhaps challenging role in the temple, for it can easily get confusing when trying to move about in symbolically meaningful ways involving circles, spirals, hexagrams and various other geometric shapes! However, this is all rewarded when one discovers that the Keryx also gets to go last in the Mystic Repast, which usually means that they get the most to drink! Perhaps this is why in mythology, Hermes helped with the birth of Dionysus, for being a Messenger to the Gods is indeed thirsty work.

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⁽¹⁾ I am referring to the movie. For those who have not seen it, there is a scene where the 'hero' has to pass through a series of gates guarded by sphinxes. Only if his heart is pure and his intentions are honourable, does he escape their wrath.



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