

# Living the Ancient Mysteries in the modern world

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First, we could ask, what are the Mysteries, and why Ancient? Secondly, what relevance are they in the modern world? Mystery, by definition, is that which is hidden and not comprehensible by the mind. Part of its root comes from the Latin 'muo' meaning to close (the mouth or eyes). The word 'Mystic', one who attempts union with the Divine, is of course related.

Therefore, the Mysteries deal with the realities of a spiritual, esoteric or hidden life, beyond the understanding by the mind. This is vital to appreciate. Though study, and knowledge held by the mind are necessary and useful, the real mystery is a state of consciousness, an experience. One may 'know' something, yet again and again discover greater depths and realities within it. One ascends, layer upon layer, the 'lower' reflecting something of the truth of a higher layer, yet a pale reflection when the 'higher' is known. The new discoveries also seem to occur in cycles, or perhaps in spirals: Similar truths and circumstances, yet different, deeper, broader on each encounter as one travels up the spiral.

A further point is that these perceptions and states of being are known and perceived with certainty and sense of reality. By "getting beyond the mind" these Truths can be discovered for one's self, indeed one can discover the 'real self and the nature of the universe. One becomes a knower or Gnostic. J. Krishnamurti wrote in his book 'At the Feet of the Master' "... there are only two kinds of people in the world, those who know and those who do not know"

This gnosis, or knowing, is one of the main steps of evolution of this world and for humankind as it journeys from the One Divine Source, through manifestation and separateness in the experience of duality, developing awareness and self consciousness, and then offering a now self conscious 'person' or individuality back to the One Source, now knowing that through love and wisdom, there is no separation between one manifestation of the Divine (for instance an individual person) and another, or between Man's 'spirit' and God's spirit. All is one Spirit, one Being. This is the supreme Truth taught in all Religions and Mystery Schools.

This step may have different names, or none. We speak of being one in Christ, or in 'Krishna Consciousness' using Hindu terminology, or nirvana if we come from a

Buddhist perspective, depending upon which ladder one has climbed. But above all, it is an experience, a state of 'Being' beyond Time and Space.

This state of being is the goal of evolution. It seems helpful to move as quickly and effectively as possible. To this end religion and the mystery schools came into existence, all part of the Divine Plan. Bishop C.W. Leadbeater wrote *"the world is ruled, under the will of the Most High, by a Brotherhood of Adepts, who have Themselves attained Divine Union but remain on earth to guide humanity, that all the great religions of the world were founded by Them, according to the needs of the races for which they were intended, and that within these religions there have been schools of the mysteries to offer to those who are ready a swifter path of unfoldment, with greater knowledge and opportunities for service, that this path is divided into steps and degrees, the Probationary Path or the Lower (Lesser) Mysteries, wherein candidates are prepared for Discipleship, and the Path proper, or the Greater Mysteries, in which are conferred within 'The Great White Lodge' itself five Great Initiations, which lead the disciple from the life of earth to the life of Adeptship in God"*

'The Mysteries' is then also a technical term for these schools, a structure in which the Truths of Life, the Divine Wisdom, were taught: First through knowledge of the mind, gradually through knowledge of the intuition to the realities of Life and its relationship to form.

In the Lesser Mysteries, this was primarily through dramatic symbolic representations of the mysteries of cosmogony, nature and man's evolution represented by the priests and candidates using ritual in successive steps or initiations. Ritual because it is a physical representation and therefore a mirror of the realities it attempts to embody and enact: A physical mirror of the heavens and the beginnings of manifestation of the Divine on earth, to Divinise matter.

In the Greater Mysteries, under the guidance of a Master of the Wisdom, the truly selfless disciple passes through five profoundly secret and power-bestowing rites or Initiations on successively higher planes of consciousness. He is admitted to one plane and, as he understands and masters it, he is ready to be admitted to the next plane. With the fifth Great Initiation he reaches the supreme attainment of the Path of Holiness, the pilgrim becomes an Adept, a Master of the Wisdom.

The Ancient Mysteries, as you know, were and are worked in many countries; ancient because from the dawn of humanity, when it became capable of working with them, the Mysteries have been the guides to help mankind to find its purpose and to evolve. Most notable and known to us were those of Ancient Egypt, Greece, Crete, Chaldea

and other centres in India and South America. Many of the Egyptian tomb paintings, and the legends of Gods and Heroes (especially of Greece) are survivors of Initiatory teaching of those times. The images of Gods and heroes were used to represent different aspects of the Divine Life in manifestation and their relationships with one another and the story of this manifestation and evolution back to unity in the One.

Christianity, especially Sacramental Christianity, was and still is a Mystery Religion, St. Paul and the Apostles use the allegorical language of the Mystery schools, including such terms as 'born again' or 'twice born' to describe the initiate, as did Jesus himself (for instance to Nicodemus).

Jesus' life story can also be seen as symbolic and descriptive of the five great Initiations He underwent, and the pattern set before us on our pilgrimage back to the Father. These steps are mirrored in the Church's calendar of festivals, and in the journey that each of us may undertake in the church (the sacred place of the Mysteries celebrated by the "Stewards of the Mysteries") through the lesser mysteries and as we live the reality, eventually the Greater too.

The Candidate<sup>i</sup> leaves the chaos and ignorance of the outer world and enters the Church by the west door. He walks along the north to the Lady shrine in the northeast corner of the edifice. The feminine is the earthly place of transformation, an essential part of our journey. Her compassion shining through our suffering, aids the purification of our personality. The Christ consciousness (of Love/Wisdom) gestates (through Advent) and is born in the dark cave of the heart (at Christmas): The first Initiation.

The candidate next journeys south, the flight into Egypt, clockwise (or sun-wise) until he reaches the southwest, the traditional place of Baptism. The priest formally admits him into the stream of the spiritual life of the church: The second or water initiation.

With his body, and now emotions (associated with water) thus purified he continues his path up the aisle of the church from west to east. Here the mind aflame with knowledge, enthusiasm and light is now capable of consciously dedicating the whole active life, as the Bishop confirms the candidate. This is a reflection of Jesus' third Initiation, the Transfiguration. He is seen as a white light on mount Tabor. The "eye is one", as the head chakras now function as one, and light shines.

Confirmation now permitted the candidate to fully participate in the Holy Communion and receive the Host. He now offers his lower personality, together with the fruits of earth, wheat and wine (even in pre Christian rites symbols of body and blood, life

and love), to 'die', to be transformed, to be crucified, thus liberating the 'Higher-self in resurrection.

He also partakes in the limitation or 'death' of the second (son) aspect of Trinity, the love/wisdom of Christ consciousness, into matter, the sacrifice that created and sustains the world.

So we have the symbol of the Cross; as the love/wisdom aspect of God descends from the Divine into matter, and rising, liberated from earth again, perfectly balanced in humanity: The priestly figure on the cross; Christus Rex. Here, as we have all done in the Eucharist, we stand in the Presence of the Master: The fourth Initiation.

In the Liberal Catholic Rite (but not in any other as far as I can see), in the passage following the Communion, in which we become one with the Master, where the love/wisdom aspect of the God 'within' becomes one with the God 'without' and the soul is known to be the 'real self in Christ, we have the following: "*that the true disciple be brought by Him with exceeding joy before the presence of His Father's glory*": The Ascension into heaven, the fifth Initiation.

What then, are some of the main themes in living the Mysteries in the modern world?

The Mysteries are perennial, and will only become unnecessary when all of humanity has returned to its source. The essential key is that life and spirit in man are one with the Spirit, which is God. Therefore, upon spirit we must focus our attention. This is the only path that is effective and safe.

In its simplest form it is to be loving and to seek the spiritual growth and greater good for another. For one can see all emotion and action as either giving love, or asking for love. Many painful emotions, such as fear and anger, can be seen as requests for love. From this perspective one can look for the Divine in all people and manifestation, however hidden it may be. We will also know that 'as you think, so you become' as energy follows thought, and action flows from thought. Therefore as we constantly become aware of our thought and train ourselves to aim for peace of mind, we will find ourselves taking the highest perspective we can.

In doing so we will notice that we must discriminate between the demands of the personality and the life of the spirit. The personality -our physical, emotional and mental bodies- is a very necessary tool in the Divine Plan, with incarnation a huge but painful privilege. But it tends to selfishness, taking, contraction and limitation, having possessions, and a desire for forms. It is interested in separateness and

particularity. The soul meanwhile, is selfless, giving, expansive, infinite, is interested in life and 'being' (rather than having), in unity, harmony and generalities (or the laws that govern the movement of the particulars).

With practice, the personality demands are gradually given up and 'forgotten', or rather the feelings and thoughts purified, the vibratory rate is raised in the same way as a radio station can be tuned into. The station is, at that moment, our reality. The more we tune into one station and the more we become familiar with it, the more it becomes our reality.

As our personality is now offered to the soul and works for the Divine life (rather than itself), it has been 'converted' to a new direction. The person is converted and knows his place in the scheme of life, thus both genuinely humble yet confident. Humility is essential in this process; otherwise the personality will run away in false confidence. One will know that all is but the one life, which one has the privilege and responsibility to serve, and that any apparent success may not only be temporary but is in fact only the one life flowing more freely.

As this purity in service grows, the focus of consciousness rises, literally in the higher chakras (or energy centres) within the body, from the base to the solar plexus, to the heart, throat, forehead and crown. Each rise is a jump of consciousness or initiation, is a release from past limitation, which we have now outgrown to a new field of exploration.

These steps are climbing the ladder up the spinal cord. On reaching the crown chakra one becomes a free individual, an Adept. The whole is symbolised by the caduceus, with intertwining serpents up a central column, and on achievement is liberated, thus becoming the winged caduceus, or the eagle.

In this progression, the place of experience of joy and suffering in this world of duality is recognised and seen for the teacher it is. Gradually the unity is formed. The opposite are two sides of the same coin. As we see more clearly from above the opposites, from the point of unity, we are no longer 'caught' by those opposites and can see the point of unity from which they come. Now we can see and act with dispassion or impersonality, an absolute essential in the spiritual life.

The qualities for the probationary path have already been given, discrimination self-forgetfulness, love and right action and can be found as the intentions given in the Liturgy for the four Sundays in Advent, the period of preparation for the first initiation at Christmas. As we progress, we reach a stage of development where we become teachable directly and safely. Extra inspiration and help is given by those

who have gone before on the spiritual journey, by a Master or one of his pupils. The real path of discipleship, now lived, the Mysteries become reality.

We can only commence the path from the point we have reached now in our lives. Today, now, is the only point of change. Our past has brought us to this moment, our future we are creating. As we value that point and see all aspects of it clearly, we can begin to move on. As we aim for the star of Initiation of perfected humanity, and offer our lives in service, we are assured of reaching the destination eventually, - absolutely guaranteed. We will study the laws of nature, the arts and sciences, sound and symbol, colour and architecture, astrology, music and psychology. We learn to cooperate with the Angelic Kingdoms and understand the patterns of energy in manifestation. All these, but always in the context of seeing the underlying Divine attempting to manifest on this earthly plane, which is still part of the One Life of course. Beauty is God made visible: The third aspect of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit.

Daily we are encouraged to meditate, to open the door to the Master, the Higher Self, aided by whatever means we find helpful, including service to others and ritual.

The personality purified, 'shaped' and offered can be symbolised by the chalice, the Grail which is opened to receive the Divine wine, or Spirit. The Grail is the main symbol of the Western Mystery Tradition. The Holy Grail is sought by the Knights of King Arthur's Round Table, but is also found in pre-Christian legends of bowls, cauldrons, chalices, and sometimes sacred stones. The Grail connects heaven and earth. It understands the old statement of the Mystery Schools, '*As above, so below*', that heaven will be mirrored and manifested on earth, that '*Thy will be done*'. It understands the injunction of the Mysteries '*Man know thyself*'. For as man knows himself, from the lowest to the highest, he will know that he has found God too. This is the heritage of all humanity, and our task.

The door to the lesser and Greater Mysteries is still open, and always has been open to those who approach humbly, reverently and selflessly. The Master stands ever ready to guide and receive disciples and, as we become worthy, Initiate, until we become co-workers in the Divine Plan. The Great Plan for the Divination of this earthly manifestation and the evolution of humanity back to the source in God from whence all came, but now consciously aware of the great fact. He becomes truly a Son of Man, and a Son of God: One in the Eternal Silence.

Such then is the task for us, individually, as a church community and as mankind. The task the Plan is designed to complete. We can take our part in living the Mysteries now, in manifesting the Reality of the One Life.

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<sup>i</sup> I am indebted to Bishop Maurice Warnon for some of these insights.