

## **LABOR I: The Capture of the Man-eating Mares**

**Aries, March 21 - April 20**

### *The Myth*

The first great Gate stood open wide. A voice came through that portal: "Hercules, my son, go forth. Pass through the Gate and enter on the *Way*. Perform thy labor and return to me, reporting on the deed."

With shouts of triumph Hercules rushed forth, running between the pillars of the Gate with overweening confidence and surety of power. And thus the Labor started and the first great act of service was begun. The story that they tell carries instruction for the sons of men, who are the sons of God.

The son of Mars, Diomedes of fiery fame, ruled in the land beyond the Gate, and there he raised the horses and the mares of war, upon the marshes of his land. Wild were these horses and fierce the mares and all men trembled at their sound, for they ravaged up and down the land, wreaking great damage, killing all the sons of men who crossed their path, and breeding steadily most wild and evil horses.

"Capture these mares, and stop these evil deeds," was the command which fell upon the ears of Hercules. "Go, rescue this far land and those who live upon it."

"Abderis," cried Hercules, "come forth and aid me with this task," calling the friend he greatly loved and who ever followed in his steps as he went from place to place. And Abderis came forth and took his stand beside his friend and with him faced the task. Laying all plans with care, these two followed the horses as they ranged the meadows and the marshes of that land. Finally, he cornered these wild mares within a field wherein there was no further place to move, and there he caught and tethered them. He yelled with joy at the success achieved.

So great was his delight in the prowess thus displayed that he deemed it 'neath his dignity to hold the mares or drive them on the *Way* to Diomedes. He called his friend, saying: "Abderis, come hither and drive these horses through the Gate".

And then he turned his back and pridefully marched forward. But Abderis was weak and feared the task. He could not hold the mares, or harness them or drive them through the Gate in the footsteps of his friend. They turned on him; they rent and trod him underfoot; they killed him and escaped into the wilder lands of Diomedes.

Wiser, grief-stricken, humble and discouraged, Hercules returned unto his task. He sought the mares again from place to place, leaving his friend, dying upon the ground. Again he caught the horses, and drove them through the Gate himself. But Abderis lay dead.

The Teacher looked him o'er with care and sent the horses to the place of peace, there to be tamed and broken to their tasks. The people of that land, released from fear, welcomed the deliverer, acclaiming Hercules as savior of the land. But Abderis lay dead. The Teacher turned to Hercules and said: "Labor the first is ended; the task is done, but badly done. Learn the true lesson of this task and then pass on to further service to your fellowmen. Go forth into the country guarded by the second Gate and find and take the sacred Bull into the Holy Place." - The Tibetan

### **The Meaning of the Myth**

In combining this astrological and symbolic story with the everyday life and tests of modern discipleship, we shall tell the story of the task which Hercules undertook, and the test to which King Eurystheus subjected him; and then we shall study the significance of the sign in which it took place, for there is a close link between the two, and the labor only became possible because of the characteristics conferred upon Hercules in that particular sign. Each sign subjects the man who is working in it to the influence of certain distinctive forces, and provides him with certain tendencies. These we must understand if the meaning of the test is to emerge.

Connected with each sign of the Zodiac will be found three other constellations, which symbolically (and often in a most amazing fashion) embody the disciple's problem and indicate the solution. These we shall have to consider, for the labor, the sign, and the allied constellations with the forces let loose

through their combination, constitute a complete story which is full of instructive elements. I would like to point out for the sake of clarity, therefore, that **the constellations symbolize the threefold spirit aspect**; that **the sign gives us the field of activity of the soul**, and that **the labor portrays the work of the disciple**, living on the physical plane and endeavoring to demonstrate on the battlefield of the world his innate divinity and latent powers. In these three we have spirit, soul and body summarized. Life, consciousness and form meet in Hercules, the personal self, who, acting under the influence of the soul, the indwelling Christ, carries out the purposes of the Spirit, the Father in Heaven. We shall next consider the relationship of sign and constellations, and close each chapter with a definite application of the story of the test to the life of a disciple and to that of humanity as a whole.

In studying the twelve labours, we follow the career of Hercules as he passes around the Zodiac from the sign Aries, which is the sign of commencement, through Taurus, Gemini, etc. (anti-clockwise) to Pisces, the sign of death and of consummation. This will be in the reverse manner to that of the apparent path of the sun (clockwise) which is begun in Aries and appears then to retrograde through the signs, passing into Pisces, and then to Aquarius, and so on through all the intervening signs, back again to Aries. The man who is immersed in form and is living under the influence of the matter aspect follows necessarily the path of illusion and of appearances; **but Hercules, the soul, follows the true Way**, reverses the usual procedure and, figuratively speaking, goes against the tide. Hercules, the awakened soul, is realizing the day of opportunity. He has received his instructions to undertake the twelve labours and demonstrate his capacities, and has been promised that if he fulfils the requirements he will be translated into the kingdom of the gods. He has been equipped with all divine powers, though, as yet, he does not know how to use them, and he has hewn out for himself the club of his own endeavor, and with these he symbolically mounts the cross: the **fixed cross** of the heavens, upon which he remains in spirit until the last labor has been accomplished.

Thus he sets out on his first labor, little realizing the magnitude of his task, and unprepared for failure. The delightful part of the story of Hercules is his impulsiveness and the fact that he was not always successful. He failed sometimes and had to redo the labor until success followed on his efforts.

He is told that Diomedes, the son of Mars, the god of war, possesses a large number of brood mares. These were running wild, devastating the countryside, doing much damage and subsisting on the flesh of human beings. No one was safe from them and terror had settled down on the neighborhood. Besides this, these brood mares were breeding great numbers of war horses, and Diomedes was very concerned with the outcome of the situation. Eurystheus, the King, ordered Hercules to capture them. Many attempts had been made to do so, but always the mares had escaped after killing the horses and men sent against them. But Hercules, having caught the horses, gave them to Abderis to hold, whilst he strutted on ahead, not realizing the strength of the horses, nor their savagery. Before he could take steps to prevent it, the mares turned on Abderis and trampled him to death, and again escaped and started anew to ravage the countryside. So he had to start his labor all over again, and after strenuous efforts he again succeeded in capturing the mares. This first labor, therefore, starts with a partial failure, as is so often the case with the inexperienced and impetuous aspirant. Such is the story, brief, dramatic and encouraging. What of the sign in which it was undertaken?

### ***The Sign***

The sign Aries, which was the field of this first activity, is always spoken of as the first sign of the Zodiac. At this sign the great wheel begins its cyclic turning. It is, therefore, the sign of commencement. Cosmically speaking, it is the sign of creation, and this thought underlies the words in the Bible, "The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," (Rev. XIII, 8) for this sign is called the sign of the Ram or of the Lamb. In the life of the human being it marks the beginning of the first subjective, latent consciousness of existence, and the start of the human being upon the circle of experience. In the life of the aspirant to discipleship it connotes the period of reorientation and of a renewed self-conscious effort, and his start upon that final stage of the evolutionary path which will carry him out of the human kingdom and enable him to make the transition into the kingdom of the gods. Such is the promise made to Hercules

and such is the reward held out to all disciples. This first labor marks the first step upon the "path of translation".

Aries is the sign of outgoing power, of the streaming forth of divine energy from the central deity, God, or from the human being, a son of God. This energy streams forth in two directions (thus the point becomes the line, the One becomes the first): it streams forth into the world of forms, and also into the world of being or of spirit. One stream of energy expresses the path of return, of inward-going, and **the two together constitute the two arcs of the great circle of existence**. In this sign starts the path on which form is taken and dominates; on it likewise begins the life of inner unfoldment and the domination of the soul, or of subjective Being. **Reorganization, reorientation, repolarizing and regeneration**, are the characteristics of this stage, and all of them are expressions of the same life force. The two uses of this force are dependent upon the mental attention of the being, divine and human, who is utilizing it. It is the same force, but used in two different ways, dependent upon whether the divine user has focused his attention upon form-taking, or upon treading the path of liberation from form.

For aeons, this life force has been applied to selfish ends, to the purposes of self-gratification and to the satisfaction of desire. Little by little form-life loses its attraction until, having passed around and around the zodiacal wheel, the man finds himself back again in Aries, only this time with a new focus, a fresh interest and a different vision. He has had held before him the promise that, having achieved certain objectives, he may cease from incarnating and attain the kingdom of the gods; he has learned from experience something of his own essential duality and yearns to cease from satisfying the lower aspect of that duality and to meet the need of the higher, and he is beginning to respond to impulses coming from the world of souls, and to vision group ends and group objectives. Now he has to **learn to use the life force with unselfish intent**, and not for the satisfaction of his personal greeds.

### *The Three Initial Impulses in Aries*

Three outstanding urges characterize this sign. There is, as we have seen, the urge to begin. This may express itself simply as the urge to take form, to become involved in matter; or it may reverse the process and focus itself in the urge to achieve liberation from form, and the emergence of the soul from the prison of the form nature. Then this urge is followed by the consequent urge to create, that activity of the Deity which results in the formation of worlds of expression and satisfies His desire to incarnate in a solar system, and to begin the great life cycle of the universe. It may be likewise the urge to individual creation, of the soul to take a body, or of a human being to create something which shall be specially his own. In ancient Accadian days, this sign Aries was called that "wherein the sacrifice of righteousness was made," or the sign of "the fallen angels". The sons of God, impelled by this basic urge, fell from their high estate, took form, and started upon their individual round upon round of the Zodiac.

Thirdly, we find the urge to resurrection. In Aries, which has seen the beginning of form life and which has initiated the creative work, there begins to be felt the urge to achieve freedom from the form, to roll away the stone from the door of the sepulchre of the soul, and to stand in the liberty of the sons of God. In Aries is found the impulse which leads to the building of the form, which for ages will constitute the prison house of the soul. This reaches its mass form in Cancer, and its human form in Leo; the densest point of illusion in form is reached in Scorpio, and in Pisces the form dies, only to be rebuilt again in the wearying round of form experience. But in this sign the Way of Liberation is first sensed, and the building of the spiritual body is begun. This is the sign of germinal spiritual activity, which later leads to the birth of the Christ child, in Virgo, to that of the world Savior, in Capricorn and in Pisces. Physical commencement and spiritual commencement, physical creation and spiritual creation, physical emergence and spiritual liberation: these are the initial impulses sensed in Aries.

It is the sign, therefore, of strong and potent impulses, and of violent fluctuations and exaggerated efforts; often a sign of failure, but always of ultimate success. In its opposite sign, Libra, it reaches its consummation of balance and of equilibrium, for the intervening experience and the lessons learned from the intermediate five labours bring about that poise and balanced attitude which we shall note in Hercules when he captures the Boar, in Libra ....

In the Brahmanical zodiac, Vishnu presides over Aries and Vishnu is the second person of the Hindu Trimurti, or the cosmic Christ in incarnation, as he initiates the process of form-taking, and ultimately brings about the final episode of resurrection. Thus Vishnu or Christ embodies the two urges, the urge to create and build form and the urge to liberation, or resurrection out of form. It is under this urge to liberation that Hercules starts upon his labours.

### *The Sign of the Mind*

Aries governs the head. It is consequently the sign of the thinker and, therefore, a powerful mental sign. All beginnings originate on the mental plane and in the mind of the creator, whether that creator is God or the soul of man. This universe had its origin in the thought of God, the cosmic Thinker. The soul started its career in matter through the same process of thought. The human family, the fourth kingdom in nature, came into being when mind emerged and differentiated man from the animals. The aspirant begins his labours when he truly becomes the thinker, and in full awareness proceeds to function as the arbiter of his own destiny....

It is apparent, consequently, that in Aries right direction and right orientation have their beginning, and Hercules, the newly-thinking disciple, begins his work. The key to this labor and to the significance of the sign is to be found in the words of an ancient Indian scripture: "Man does not rightly know the way to the heavenly world, but the horse does rightly know it." In the very ancient days in India, the horse sacrifice was linked with the sun god, and, yearly, we are told, the sun god, as the zodiacal horse, was supposed by the Vedic Aryans to die to save all flesh. The sun chariot of Apollo is depicted as drawn by horses, and the "princely sign of the Ram" is closely connected with the horse symbology, a fact to which this first labor bears witness.

Reference to books on symbology will show us that the **horse stands for intellectual activity**. The white horse symbolizes the illumined mind of the spiritual man, and so we find in the Book of Revelations that Christ comes forth riding upon a white horse. Black horses represent the lower mind, with its false ideas and erring human concepts. The brood mares, such as we meet in this first labor, indicate the feminine aspect of the mind as it gives birth to ideas, to theories and to concepts. The thought-form making tendency of the mind is here symbolized, embodying the ideas conceived, and which are let loose upon the world, devastating and destroying when emanating from the lower mind, but constructing and saving when coming from the soul.

The exoteric ruler of this sign is Mars, the god of war, and so Hercules, acting under the right direction of thought and beginning his work on the mental plane, takes his stand as the warrior. His outstanding characteristic in this sign is the pioneering, militant spirit. The mares were in the possession of Diomedes, the son of Mars. (But the esoteric ruler is Mercury, which "illumines the mind and mediates between the soul and the personality.")

### *Constellations in Aries*

As is usual, there are three constellations connected with Aries.

First, there is **Cassiopeia**, the Enthroned Queen, the symbol always of matter. It is most interesting to note how in the circle of the Zodiac we come across three women. In connection with Aries, the sign of commencement, we find Cassiopeia, the Dominant Woman. Woman and Child and as we shall later see, mother-matter is the nurturer of the infant Christ, the **Virgin Mary** gives birth to Jesus. In Pisces, at the close of the great round, we find **Andromeda**, the Chained Woman. First the woman enthroned and dominant, then the woman caring for the infant, Christ, and then the woman, representing matter that has been dominated and controlled. Cassiopeia will be found seated on the Arctic Circle, close to **Cepheus** the King, or Lawgiver, whom we shall meet later as one of the three constellations in Pisces. At the commencement, Law; at the close, Law; for Cepheus has a close relation with the first and the last sign of the Zodiac. It is interesting to note that Mahomet, the founder of the most militant religion, was born in this sign, and legend says that Moses also was born in it; Moses, the lawgiver, and Mahomet, the warrior. The problem of Hercules, as he enters upon his labours, is to demonstrate his power over matter and form, and so he has to recognize Cassiopeia from the very beginning, the hitherto enthroned queen.

The second constellation is **Cetus**, the Sea Monster, the Enemy of Little Fishes ... One of the great symbols of the soul is the fish swimming in the ocean of matter, and Cetus, the sea monster, is the symbol of what we call evil, that seeks to destroy the soul in incarnation. The sea monster, in the ocean of existence, and the enthroned queen, spoke to Hercules of the magnitude of his problem, but the third constellation spoke to him of victory.

**Perseus** is the third of the three constellations, called in the zodiac of Denderah, in Egypt, "the one who subdues"; sometimes called "the breaker", that which can chain the enthroned woman, and that which can conquer the monster. We are told that Perseus possessed the helmet of invisibility, the sandals of swiftness, the buckler of wisdom and the sword of the spirit. Thus Hercules saw himself reflected in the heavens, and as he started upon the capture of the man-eating mares, he discovered in himself the guarantee of his ultimate achievement, even though at the time the difficulties with which he was faced seemed insuperable.

### ***The Crux of the Test***

The conquest of matter and the overcoming of illusion loomed large before Hercules and indicated from the very outset of the twelve labours the nature of his final achievement. It has been said that the keynote of the sign Aries is hope and as he faced his twelve labours, hope was all the guarantee that Hercules then had that he would achieve. Hope, his untried divine equipment, his personal club, and much enthusiasm: so start all disciples.

The meaning of the test is now surely plain. Hercules had to begin in the world of thought to gain mental control. For ages the brood mares of thought had been breeding war horses and, through **wrong thought, wrong speech** and **erroneous ideas**, had been devastating the countryside. One of the first lessons that every beginner has to learn is the tremendous power that he mentally wields, and the amount of harm that he can cause in his neighborhood and environment through the brood mares of his mind. He has, therefore, to learn the right use of his mind, and the first thing that he has to do is capture this feminine aspect of the mind and see to it that no more war horses are bred. Any would-be Hercules can easily prove that he possesses these devastating brood mares, if for one entire day he pays close attention to his thoughts and to the words he speaks, which are ever the result of thought. He will rapidly discover that selfishness, unkindness, love of gossip, and criticism constitute a large part of his thought content and that the brood mares of his mind are constantly being fertilized by selfishness and illusion. Instead of these brood mares giving birth to ideas and concepts which have their origin in the kingdom of the soul, and instead of being fertilized from the spiritual realm, they become the parents of error, falseness and cruelty, which have their origin in the lower aspects of man's nature.

Hercules realized the harm that the brood mares were doing. He rushed gallantly to the rescue of his neighborhood. He determined to capture the brood mares, but he over-estimated himself. He did succeed in rounding them up and in capturing them, but he failed to realize their potency and strength, so he gave them to Abderis, the symbol of the lower personal self, to hold. But Hercules, the soul, and Abderis, the personality in unison were needed to guard these devastating horses. Abderis alone was not strong enough, and what had been happening to the people in the neighborhood, happened to Abderis; they killed him. This is an instance of the working of the great law that we pay the price in our own natures of wrongly spoken words and ill-judged actions. Again the soul, in the person of Hercules, had to deal with the problem of wrong thought, and only, when he becomes a one-pointed aspirant in the sign Sagittarius and in that sign kills the Man-Eating Birds, does he really attain complete control of the thought processes of his nature.

The practical significance of the power of thought has been well expressed for us in the words of Thackeray: "Sow a thought, and reap an action. Sow an action, and reap a habit. Sow a habit, and reap character. Sow character and reap destiny."

\*From *Esoteric Astrology*, Volume III of *A Treatise on the Seven Rays*, p. 108. Received three years after AAB gave the Hercules lectures in New York.

- *The Labours of Hercules An Astrological Interpretation*, Alice A. Bailey p. 27-38

<b>Aries:</b>	<b>the Ram</b>
Element:	Fire sign (as are Leo and Sagittarius)
Quality:	Initiating. Beginnings. Will or Power expresses itself through the great creative processes. In the early stages, activities are directed toward the material side of life; later toward the spiritual.
Polar Opposite:	Libra, an Air sign (balance).
Rulers:	Exoteric, Mars; Esoteric, Mercury.
<b>Keywords:</b>	
From the form angle:	Let form again be sought.
From the soul angle:	I come forth and from the plane of mind, I rule.
<b>The Lesson:</b>	Through the capture of the Man-Eating Mares, we see Hercules make his start, react to thought impulse, and learn something of mind control. As the intelligent disciple, he starts out upon his career, beginning with an undefined spiritual urge to righteousness and ending as the world savior.