

## **LABOR X: The Slaying of Cerberus Guardian of Hades**

**Capricorn, December 23 - January 20**

"The light of life must now shine forth within a world of dark," the great Presiding One declared. The Teacher understood. "The son of man who is also the son of God must pass through Gate the tenth", he said. "Within this very hour Hercules shall venture forth." When Hercules stood face to face with him who was his guide, the latter spoke: "A thousand dangers you have braved, O Hercules," the Teacher said, "and much has been achieved. Wisdom and strength are yours. Will you make use of them to rescue one in agony, a prey to vast and unremitting suffering?"

The Teacher gently touched the forehead of Hercules. Before the latter's inner eye a vision rose. A man lay prone upon a rock, and groaned as if his heart would break. His hands and legs were shackled; the massive chains that bound him were tied to iron rings. A vulture, fierce and bold, kept pecking at the prostrate victim's liver; in consequence, a trickling stream of blood flowed from his side. The man uplifted his manacled hands and cried out for help; but his words echoed vainly in the desolation, and were swallowed by the wind. The vision faded. Hercules stood, as before, at the side of his guide.

"The shackled one whom you have seen is called Prometheus," the Teacher said. "For ages has he suffered thus, and yet he cannot die, being immortal. From heaven he stole the fire; for this he has been punished. The place of his abode is known as Hell, the domain of Hades. Unto Prometheus, O Hercules, you are asked to be a savior. Go down into the depths, and there upon the outer planes release him from his suffering." Having heard and understood, the son of man who was also a son of God, embarked upon this quest, and passed through Gate the tenth.

Downward, ever downward, did he travel into the binding worlds of form. The atmosphere grew stifling, the darkness steadily more intense. And yet his will was firm. This steep descent continued long and long. Alone, yet not all alone, he wandered on, for when he sought within he heard the silvery voice of the wisdom-goddess, Athena, and the strengthening words of Hermes. At length he came to that dark, envenomed river called the Styx, a river that the souls of the deceased must cross. An obolus or penny had to be paid to Charon, the ferryman, that he might take them to the other side. The somber visitor from earth affrighted Charon, and forgetting the fee, he ferried the stranger across. Hercules at last had entered Hades, a dim and misty region where the shades, or better said, the shells of those departed flitted by. When Hercules perceived Medusa, her hair entwined with hissing snakes, he seized his sword, and thrust at her, but struck naught save empty air. Through labyrinthine paths he threaded his way until he came to the court of the king who ruled the underworld, Hades. The latter, grim and stern, with threatening mien, sat stiffly on his jet black throne as Hercules approached.

"What seek you, a living mortal, in my realms?" Hades demanded. Hercules said, "I seek to free Prometheus." "The path is guarded by the monster Cerberus, a dog with three great heads, each of which has serpents coiled about it," Hades replied. "If you can conquer him with your bare hands, a feat no one has yet performed, you may unbind the suffering Prometheus." Satisfied with this response, Hercules proceeded. Soon he saw the triple-headed dog, and heard its piercing bark. Snarling, it sprang upon him. Grasping the primary throat of Cerberus, Hercules held it in his vice-like grip. Goaded to frenzied fury, the monster thrashed about. At length, its strength subsiding, Hercules mastered it. This done, Hercules went on, and found Prometheus. Upon a slab of stone he lay, in agonizing pain. Quickly Hercules then broke the chains, and set the sufferer free. Retracing his steps, Hercules returned as he had come. When once again he reached the world of living things, he found his Teacher there. "The light now shines within the world of dark," the Teacher said. "The labor is achieved. Rest now, my son."

- F.M.

*Prologue*

The sign of Capricorn, says the Tibetan, is one of the most difficult signs about which to write and is the most mysterious of all the twelve. So we have found it. Even the symbol of the sign has never been correctly drawn, we are told, because its correct delineation would produce an inflow of force that would be undesirable; also this symbol is sometimes called the "signature of God".

At the foot of the mountain the goat, the materialist, seeks for nourishment in arid places. The scapegoat on the way up finds the flowers of attained desire, each with its own thorn of satiety and disillusionment. At the top of the mountain the sacred goat sees the vision and the initiate appears. In other writings the symbols are the goat, the crocodile and the unicorn.

One myth puts the emphasis on the descent into hell to free humanity (in the figure of the tortured Prometheus). Another deals more with Cerberus, some slaying him, others bringing him up to earth. We submit these variations for the reader's consideration of their spiritual significance.

One remembers that, according to the Creed the Christed Jesus "descended into hell". Why? Surely because his all inclusive love covered the so-called "lost souls", since we are told that the Christ broods over humanity until the last "little one" shall have come home.

And who are we to interpret the "signature of God"? With humility we submit these points for pondering. We are told that it is on his knees that the Capricornian offers heart and life to the soul and only then, when self-initiated, can he be trusted with the secrets of life and the higher powers.

### **Interpretations of the Labor in Capricorn**

There are two gates of dominant importance: Cancer, into what we erroneously call life, and Capricorn, the gate into the spiritual kingdom. Capricorn, the gate through which we finally pass when we no longer identify ourselves with the form side of existence but become identified with the spirit. This is what it means to be initiate.

An initiate is a person who is no longer placing his consciousness in his mind, or desires, or physical body. He can use these if he chooses; and he does, to help all humanity, but that is not where his consciousness is focused. He is focused in what we call the soul, which is that aspect of ourselves which is free from form. It is in soul consciousness that we eventually function in Capricorn, know ourselves to be initiates and enter upon two great universal signs of service to humanity. For it is interesting that, in Aquarius, we are dealing symbolically with animals in bulk, since in that sign Hercules has the job of cleaning out the Augean stables, his first work as a world disciple. But in Pisces he captures, not the bull, but all of the oxen, carrying into our consciousness the idea of the universality of world work, of group consciousness, of universal consciousness and of universal service.

If you were born in the sign Capricorn, please do not get the idea that you are an initiate. We should lay emphasis on a sense of proportion and the status of evolution. Aspirants either suffer from an inferiority complex that makes them feel it is not possible to do anything, or they have an exaggerated idea of their importance; they have a touch of soul consciousness, but only a tiny touch, which they think is the whole thing and they become inflated. This shows no sense of proportion.

This sign symbolizes the third initiation, the first of the major initiations. In Matthew 17 we read that Christ took three disciples, Peter, James and John, up into a high mountain and was transfigured before them. They fell on their faces and Peter said, "Let us build three huts". In Hindu philosophy this is called "initiation of the man who builds his hut." **Peter**, a rock or foundation, is the symbol of the physical body. **James**, the deceiver, symbolizes the emotional nature, the source of all glamor. **John** symbolizes the mind, the name meaning, "The Lord has Spoken." There you have the symbolism of three aspects of the personality, on their faces before the glorified Christ, in Capricorn at his transfiguration.

### ***Meanings of the Sign***

This is the sign of the goat; it is a superhuman sign, a universal and impersonal sign. All the labors of Hercules heretofore have been concerned with his own liberation. Now we enter upon three signs that have no relation to his personal achievements. He is free. He is an initiate, a world disciple. He has passed round and round the zodiac, learned all the lessons of the signs and climbed the mountain of initiation; he has undergone transfiguration; he is perfectly free and so can work universally on labors that have no

relation to himself whatsoever. He works as a superhuman being in a human body. The great stages of development upon the path of expansion, which we call initiations, are recorded in the brain and will not be told to you by someone else. I never met a true initiate who was willing to admit that he was one, never. **The hallmark of the initiate is silence.** Capricorn is a sad sign, it is the sign of intense suffering and loneliness, for these also are marks of the initiate.

Impersonality is based upon a fundamental personality achievement. You must have been tremendously attached before you can know the meaning of impersonality. That is a paradox, but there is no achievement in being impersonal if there is no temptation to be personal. The impersonality we must develop is an expansion of the personal love we have for an individual, our family, our circle of friends, into exactly the same attitude for humanity, but it has nothing to do with sentimentality. We can love all mankind because we know the meaning of personal love, and we must give the same love to everybody that we have given to the individuals close to us. Impersonality is not shutting yourself off, putting up walls; it is loving everyone because we are able to see people as they truly are with their faults, their failings, their achievements, everything that goes to make them what they are and, seeing them clear-eyed, to love them just the same. In the Rules of the Road it is written: "Each sees and knows the villainy of each. And yet there is, with that great revelation, no turning back, no spurning of each other". That is the condition to be attained in Capricorn. That which we have to develop does not come by hardening the heart, nor by tremendous detachment, nor by climbing a pedestal.

The world disciple does not only do what Hercules did, go down into hell to conquer Cerberus, but he works among men all the time, interested in his fellow man. He is impersonal. I wonder if this impersonality does not refer to ourselves rather than to the other persons. We talk, about being impersonal in our dealing. If we were quite impersonal in dealing with ourselves, our reactions to our fellowmen would be just right.

### ***Constellations***

There are three constellations connected with the sign Capricorn. One is called **Sagitta**, the arrow. It has no connection with the sign Sagittarius. In that sign we had the bowman with the arrow whereby the achieving aspirant pierced the personality. Here you have the arrow that comes from a cosmic source, piercing the heart of the son of God, called the Christ, the nearest to us of the great world saviors, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He was pierced by the arrow Sagitta, the cosmic arrow.

The Hebrew name for this arrow means "the desolate one", and the path that every disciple treads is necessarily a lonely one. The path of the initiate is more lonely still. The path of a world savior is the most lonely of all. I think that this condition is going to be alleviated. Down the ages we have had these tremendous comings out, one here, one there. Have you ever considered their loneliness? They had none who understood. Perhaps they were canonized hundreds of years after they died. But now there are so many aspirants, so many upon the path of discipleship, that perhaps the group consciousness which is beginning to demonstrate in world affairs will result in a group loneliness rather than in individual loneliness.

**Aquila**, the eagle, is regarded as being as closely related to Capricorn as to Sagittarius. You have the bird of light (symbol of the highest aspect of man) manifesting as the soul (the second aspect) which has achieved.

In **Delphinus** you have a very interesting constellation that holds in it an amazing piece of symbolism. It is pictured in an ancient zodiac as a fish full of life leaping out of the water into the air and playing. That is the symbol of the son of God who, working under the law, takes form and lives in the water and the air; and since he is no longer held by the physical law he can play with the forces of nature. We are beginning to learn about these forces, but it will be some time yet before Delphinus, the dolphin, will have much personal significance for us.

### ***The Climbing of the Mountain***

Capricorn tells the story of the climbing of the mountain and of the descent into hell. There are three great ascensions of every soul. Masonry down the ages has been a custodian of this tradition. First there is

the raising of matter into heaven. We find that in Virgo. Then there is the raising up of the psychic nature from below the diaphragm. You are no longer emotional and self-centered, living in the solar plexus, but are focused in the heart and are conscious of the group; your feelings and desires are related to the group.

You no longer live in the animal nature, interested in creation on the physical plane, but you become a spiritual creature working in mental matter. You are no longer held by form, but have so dealt with it that you have raised it to the head consciousness and from the head you control your throat, your heart, your solar plexus and every part of your body. You do this not by centering on them, not by thinking about them, but by living as a conscious son of God seated on "the throne between the eyebrows", the ajna center (or pituitary gland) as the Hindus name it. That is the second great ascension.

The final ascension is that which marks the emancipation of the initiate of very high degree who becomes consciously a world savior. **But it is the second initiation, the raising up of the lower psychic nature, on which we have to work so that every desire, mood and every emotion is lifted up into "heaven".**

### *Preparation for the Descent into Hades*

There were three things that Hercules had to do before starting down into hell. The order in which they came is interesting. First he had to purify himself. Hercules, the son of God who had triumphed, been transfigured, was going down into hell to work and the word came to purify himself. He thought he was so pure. How he underwent the process of purification we are not told, but I have the idea that he had to demonstrate freedom from irritability and selfishness in that uninteresting circle where he was living as a human being. It is a rule in occultism that, on the ladder of initiation, if you cannot live purely in your own home circle you are of no use in heaven or hell. What do I mean by "pure"? We use the word largely in its physical sense but "pure" really is freedom from the limitations of matter. If I am in any way imprisoned even by my mind, which is a form of subtle matter, I am not pure. If I have any selfish emotions, I am not pure. Hercules had to purify himself.

Then we read that he had to be initiated into the mysteries. As far as I can understand it (and I may be wrong) this means that you go through your own personal hell before you can go through the universal hell. You have a terrible time in your own life and you are initiated as you undergo your own hell. You learn the nature of the universal by individual experience; only that is realization. You cannot learn by hearsay.

As has happened before in the myths, Hercules then had to pause and perform an act of service before he could advance upon Cerberus. He saw two people bound and being attacked by cattle. He had to deliver them before he could meet his own problem. Always for the initiate service comes first; the letting go of what he has set himself to do if there is need to help. That is the story of the initiate always, because it is based on group consciousness.

### *The Symbol of Cerberus*

The three-headed dog Cerberus with a terrific bark, with snakes growing out all over his body and with snakes for a tail, was the guardian of Hades. The three heads symbolize sensation, desire and good intentions. It is love of sensation that drives humanity hither and thither to satisfy hunger in the economic world or to satisfy desire for happiness in the world of pleasure. The violent impacts of sensation are sought to keep the mind occupied. The central head was grasped by Hercules first because it was the most important, since desire underlies all sensations; it is what desire seeks to express and so gain satisfaction in the outer world. The third head is good intentions, not carried out. So you have desire in the center, on one side you have sensation typifying all impacts, and on the other side the third head of good intentions not thought through, never performed, of which it has long been said: "Hell is paved with good intentions".

The tail made of serpents typifies all illusions that impede the progress of spiritual life; the materiality that holds us down; the lower psychic nature that causes such destruction; fear along every possible line; the fear of failure which holds so many back from activity and breeds only inertia, the great fault, we are told, of aspirants and disciples.

Hercules grasped Cerberus by the central head and conquered him, because all sun gods are occupied with the problems of humanity and because desolate they go down into hell alone to save humanity; hence all sun gods are born in the sign of Capricorn.

(Lecture by A.A.B., condensed and edited.)

**Epilogue**

The great swing in Capricorn is epitomized by the keywords. Upon the ordinary wheel these are, "And the word said: let ambition rule and let the door stand wide." This is the key to the evolutionary urge and the secret of rebirth. (The Tibetan). When a true sense of reality supersedes both earthly and spiritual ambition the man can say with truth, "lost am I in light supernal, yet on that light I turn my back." So goes the world disciple, initiate in Capricorn, on his way to serve humanity in Aquarius. In that sign he cleans the Augean stables (of the karma of all past ignorance and error, the Dweller on the Threshold) and so becomes in Pisces a world savior. One remembers that the last act of the Christ on his way to Gethsemane and Calvary was to wash the feet of his disciples.

It has been said: "Christianity has not failed: it has never been tried." Are we now, after two thousand years, really beginning to try, individually and in group formation? This is the work that makes it possible for the Christ to reappear and also which prepares humanity to recognize him and to be able to endure the quality of the emanations that attend his coming. (Amplification of *Esoteric Astrology*, pp. 153–174.)

Let every man remember that the destiny of mankind is incomparable and that it depends greatly on his will to collaborate in the transcendent task. Let him remember that the law is, and always has been, to struggle; and that the fight has lost nothing of its violence by being transposed from the material onto the spiritual plane. Let him remember that his own dignity, his nobility as a human being, must emerge from his efforts to liberate himself from his bondage and to obey his deeper aspirations. And let him above all never forget that the divine spark is in him, in him alone, and that he is free to disregard it, to kill it, or to come closer to God by showing his eagerness to work with Him, and for Him.

- Le Comte du Noüy.

- *The Labours of Hercules* An Astrological Interpretation, Alice A. Bailey p. 169–179

<b>Capricorn:</b>	<b>the Goat</b>
Element:	Earth sign (as are Taurus and Virgo).
Quality:	Extreme characteristics of the worst and best type. Ambition. Crystallization. Struggle overcome. Transfiguration. Initiate consciousness. The Unicorn of God.
Polar Opposite:	Cancer, a water sign (first door to incarnation).
Rulers:	Exoteric, Saturn; Esoteric, Saturn
<b>Keywords:</b>	
From the form angle:	Let ambition rule and let the door stand wide.
From the soul angle:	Lost I am in light supernal, yet on that light I turn my back.
<b>The Lesson:</b>	Hercules becomes an initiate and appears before the world as a savior, a liberated son of God, able to work in Hell, on Earth, or in Heaven. He carries Cerberus up from Hades, and through the symbolism of the 3-headed dog portrays the elevation of the personality (mind, desire, and physical bodies), the triple matter aspect, into Heaven. Thus he demonstrates that he has undergone the necessary development and experienced the strengthening tests which will enable him successfully to pass through the experience of the third initiation, that of the Transfiguration.