

## **LABOR VIII: Destroying the Lernaean Hydra Scorpio, October 22nd - November 21st**

The great Presiding One, enrobed in radiant calm, said but a single word. The Teacher heard the golden command, and summoned Hercules, the son of God who was also the son of man.

"The light now shines on Gate the eighth," the Teacher said. "In ancient Argos a drought occurred. Amymone besought the aid of Neptune. He bade her strike a rock, and when she did, outgushed three crystal streams; but soon a hydra made his dwelling there.

"Beside the River Amymone, the festering swamp of Lerna stands. Within this noisome bog the monstrous hydra lies, a plague upon the countryside. Nine heads this creature has, and one of them is immortal. Prepare to battle with this loathsome beast. Think not that common means will serve; destroy one head, two grow apace." Expectantly Hercules waited.

"One word of counsel only I may give," the Teacher said. "We rise by kneeling; we conquer by surrendering; we gain by giving up. Go forth, O son of God and son of man, and conquer." Through Gate the eighth, then, Hercules passed.

The stagnant swamp of Lerna was a blot dismaying all who came within its confines. Its stench polluted all the atmosphere within a space of seven miles. When Hercules approached, he had to pause, for the smell alone well-nigh overcame him. The oozing quicksands were a hazard, and more than once Hercules quickly withdrew his foot lest he be sucked downward by the yielding earth.

At length he found the lair where dwelt the monstrous beast. Within a cavern of perpetual night, the hydra lay concealed. By day and night Hercules haunted the treacherous fen, awaiting a propitious time when the beast would sally forth. In vain he watched. The monster stayed within its fetid den.

Resorting to a stratagem, Hercules dipped his arrows in burning pitch, and rained them straight into the yawning cavern where dwelt the hideous beast. A stirring and commotion there upon ensued.

The hydra, its nine angry heads breathing flame, emerged. Its scaly tail lashed furiously the water and the mud, bespattering Hercules. Three fathoms high the monster stood, a thing of ugliness that looked as if it had been made of all the foulest thoughts conceived since time began.

The hydra sprang at Hercules and sought to coil about his feet. He stepped aside and dealt it such a crushing blow that one of its heads was immediately severed. No sooner had this horrid head fallen into the bog than two grew in its place. Again and again Hercules attacked the raging monster, but it grew stronger, not weaker, with each assault.

Then Hercules remembered that his Teacher had said, "we rise by kneeling." Casting aside his club, Hercules knelt, grasped the hydra with his bare hands, and raised it aloft. Suspended in mid-air, its strength diminished. On his knees, then, he held the hydra high above him, that purifying air and light might have their due effect. The monster, strong in darkness and in sloughy mud, soon lost its power when the rays of the sun and the touch of the wind fell on it.

Convulsively it strove, a shudder passing through its loathsome frame. Fainter and fainter grew its struggles till the victory was won. The nine heads drooped, then with gasping mouths and glazing eyes fell limply forward. But only when they lifeless lay did Hercules perceive the mystic head that was immortal.

Then Hercules cut off the hydra's one immortal head and buried it, still fiercely hissing, beneath a rock.

Returning, Hercules stood before his Teacher. "The victory is won", the Teacher said. "The Light that shines at Gate the eighth is now blended with your own".

- Francis Merchant

## Meaning of the Myth

### *Introduction*

Again we find variations in the versions of the myth and we have no longer the myth statement by the Tibetan to guide us. The story that the ninth head was the immortal head seems ruled out by the Tibetan's plain statement that there were three times three, or nine tests. The version used by Francis Merchant in the myth seems more accurate, namely that nine heads were destroyed and then the mystical, immortal head appeared. Further, the statement that this great head was "buried under a rock", gives ground for much pondering. Perhaps the use of the phrase, "hidden under the rock of the will", is revealing. All versions state that it was so buried.

In some accounts it is stated that Hercules burned off the heads, and the divine fire would indeed be needed for this destruction. However, it is impossible to negate the powerful picture of the world disciple in this supreme test, sinking to his knees in humility and raising the monster (all the accumulated evils, mistakes, failures of his long past) into the air of the spirit, where by its very nature the hydra could not live, and so drooped and died. The use of the fire, in the preliminary effort, still keeps that symbol in the picture.

While sex, under the test of at-one-ment of opposites and the double rulership of Mars, has its special place, the over-emphasis of this one facet is not sufficiently inclusive. All pairs of opposites are to be at-oned in this great sign, an advanced sign of the integrated, conscious disciple; not a sordid one of the unevolved man, as is often thought. Again, one must read carefully and distinguish between people on the ordinary wheel and disciples on the reversed wheel. All of which is submitted for the pondering of the reader, not with authority.

### *Psychological Analysis of the Myth*

Hercules was told to find the nine-headed hydra that lived in a stench-drenched bog. This monster has its subjective counterpart. It dwells within the caverns of the mind. In the murk and mud of unlit mental recesses, it flourishes. Deeply lodged within the subterranean regions of the subconscious, now quiescent and now bursting forth in tumultuous frenzy, the beast establishes permanent residence. Its existence is not easily discovered. A long time passes before the individual realizes that he is nourishing and sustaining so fierce a creature. The burning arrows of flaming aspiration must be discharged before its presence is revealed.

Fighting so formidable a foe is indeed a heroic task for a son of man even though he is also a son of God. Lop off one head, and another grows in its place. Every time a low desire or thought is overcome, others take its place.

Hercules does three things: he recognizes the existence of the hydra, searches patiently for it, and finally destroys it. Discrimination is needed to recognize its existence; patience, to discover its lair; humility, to bring slimy fragments of the subconscious to the surface, and expose them to the light of wisdom.

As long as Hercules fought in the bog, amid the mud, slime, and quicksand, he was unable to overcome the hydra. He had to raise the monster into the air; that is, translate his problem into another dimension, in order to solve it. In all humility, kneeling in the mud, he had to examine his dilemma in the light of wisdom and in the elevated atmosphere of searching thought. From these considerations we may gather that the answers to many of our problems come only when a new focus of attention is achieved, a new perspective established.

One of the hydra's heads is immortal, we are told. This would imply that every difficulty, however terrible it may appear to be, contains a jewel of great value. No attempt to dominate the lower nature and discover that jewel is ever futile.

The immortal head, dissevered from the hydra's body, is buried beneath a rock. This implies that the concentrated energy which creates a problem still remains, purified, redirected, and increased after victory has been gained. Such power must then be rightly controlled and channeled. Beneath the rock of persistent will, the immortal head becomes a source of power.

### ***The Nine Heads of the Hydra***

The task assigned to Hercules had nine facets. Each head of the hydra represents one of the problems that beset the courageous person who seeks to achieve mastery of himself. Three of these heads symbolize the appetites associated with sex, comfort and money. The second triune group concerns the passions of fear, hatred and desire for power. The last three heads represent the vices of the unilluminated mind: pride, separativeness and cruelty. (See *Esoteric Astrology*, p. 205 et seq.)

The dimensions of the task which Hercules undertook are thus plainly apparent. He had to learn the art of transmuting the energies that so frequently precipitate human beings into catastrophic tragedies. The nine forces which have wrought unspeakable havoc among the sons of men since the beginning of time had to be redirected and transmuted.

Men today are still striving to achieve what Hercules succeeded in accomplishing. Problems arising out of the misuse of the energy known as sex engage our attention on every hand. The love of comfort, luxury and outer possessions still grows apace. The pursuit of money as an end instead of a means shrinks the lives of countless men and women. Thus, the task of destroying the first three heads continues to challenge the powers of mankind thousands of years after Hercules accomplished his extraordinary feat.

The three qualities of character that Hercules had to express were humility, courage and discrimination: humility, to see his plight objectively and recognize his shortcomings; courage, to attack the monster that lay coiled at the roots of his nature; discrimination, to discover a technique for dealing with his mortal foe.

Uncovering the cesspool of base desires and egotistical urges that fester in the subconscious nature has been the work of modern psychoanalysis. The latter technique brings the unsavory data of repressed impulses to the surface, it is true, but often stops at that point. The individual realizes that a monster lies concealed in the subterranean areas of consciousness, yet feels baffled and bewildered in trying to deal with this formidable enemy.

Hercules invokes a brighter light than that of the analyzing mind. He seeks to raise his problem to a higher dimension, not to stir endlessly in the slough of the subconscious. Endeavoring to see his dilemma in the light of that wisdom which we name the soul, he confronts it from a new angle of vision. By so doing, he breaks the hydra's grip, and eventually subdues the beast.

### ***Fighting the Hydra: Modern Version***

A consideration of the nine problems that confront the person in this day and age who seeks to slay the hydra, should shed light on the strange forces at work in that keg of explosive, the human mind.

1. *Sex.* Victorian prudishness and psychoanalytical prurience are both undesirable. Sex is an energy. It can be inhibited, unrestrainedly exercised, or sublimated. Repression or inhibition are no true solutions; promiscuity coarsens life, and makes a man a slave of a master passion. Sublimation involves the use of the energy of sex in creative endeavor.

The transmutation of human energies opens up a field of speculation and experiment. In physical science, the energy of motion can be transformed into electricity, and that of heat into movement. To what extent, then, can human energies be redirected? First of all, the energy of matter, represented by food, is obviously used to produce that of motion. Can the impelling energy of the emotions analogously be rechannelled into the activity of thought? Can the energy of seething passions find expression as aspiration? Can the drives and compulsions of human nature be so transmuted that they become beneficent powers? Can the energy that produces thought be utilized as the power of synthesis that results in a sense of identification with all living things?

The experience of Hercules indicates that such possibilities exist, and that he who would subdue the hydra of the passions and the separative mind must solve problems of this nature.

2. *Comfort.* An eternal sense of dissatisfaction spurs man to ever greater heights of achievement. Comfort is often a brake upon such striving. Clogged down with possessions and blunted by the beguiling sense of comfort, the spirit wilts and fades. The prisoner of comfort sinks back in apathy, forgetting the struggles and trials that temper the keen blade of spiritual

striving. The will to search, the impelling drive to solve the mystery in the acorn of life, is alien to the narcissistic inclination to make comfort a central motive in life.

3. *Money*. The accumulation of money is a master passion that lies behind the activities of people and nations. Ethical and human values are disregarded in the mad endeavor to gather power-conferring gold. Inevitably, choices are determined by money considerations rather than by spiritual convictions or ethical principles. The urge to accumulate wealth is insatiable. No matter how much a person may have, he still avidly craves more.

A crippling effect of this form of mental distortion is self-centeredness. The individual suffering from this affliction too often wishes to receive everything and to give nothing. The state of the universe is determined for him by what he succeeds in acquiring. He regards himself as a terminal point, and acknowledges no responsibility to confer on others the benefits he himself has received.

Are not intellectual riches and spiritual treasure aspects of wealth that should claim our efforts? They may be shared with all, and he who gives away all he has, finds himself richer than he was before. The urge to acquire material goods may some day be transmuted into the desire to amass knowledge and the will to acquire the jewels of the spirit.

4. *Fear*. In countless ways the phantoms of fear torment the sons of men. These illusory shapes perplex and frighten them, acting as shackles on their feet and a millstone around their necks. Many people cower cravenly when haunted by the harrowing fears of ridicule, failure, the unknown, old age, chance and death.

Can these fears be eliminated? The experience of Hercules suggests that they can be overcome by raising consciousness to a higher point of integration. When a person's life is refocused about a higher purpose, the threatening shadows of fear are pressed back to the periphery of thought. As long as the indeterminate monsters of fear prowl in the twilight of the subconscious, they will have the power to blanch the cheek and turn the heart to ice.

A soldier, intent on defeating the enemy, risks life itself. A mother, snatching her child from danger, forgets her own fears. The motorist, hurtling down a highway at breakneck speed, jeopardises life and limb for the sake of adventure. These persons have focused their attention above the point where fear is found. The spiritually-oriented individual has centered his thought at a level too rarefied for fear to reach.

5. *Hatred*. Hate is rooted in negation. It is the opposite of the desire for union. Raised to a higher dimension, hate is transmuted into the repudiation of all that is unreal. When hate is divested of all emotional content, it can become an energy that causes a man to reject the form for the sake of the life which animates it. Upon the lower arc, it is assuredly destructive; upon the higher, when thoroughly purified, it may be seen as the obverse side of love.

6. *Desire for power*. During the past few hundred years man has released the energy of power far more than that of love. The result is imbalance and disequilibrium. Power, when unrelated to love, is a corrupting force. Many tragedies in human relations result from the uncontrolled desire to dominate the lives of others, to prescribe and regulate their conduct. He who substitutes power considerations for ethical principles engenders perpetual strife. The high ideals that have served as beacons over the centuries, brotherhood, cooperation, idealism, glow dimly as long as power is the determining factor in society.

When transmuted, however, the will to power becomes the will to achieve and the will to sacrifice. The harsh, self-centered will is transformed into a distributing agent of beneficent gifts. Then, indeed, power serves love and love glorifies power.

7. *Pride*. The walls built by pride incarcerate a man more securely than prison bars. Fastened by the heavy chains of self-exalting thoughts, he looks at other human beings with condescension. Thus he weakens the link that binds all men together in indissoluble brotherhood. Setting himself apart, he steps further and further beyond the circle of human sympathies.

Hercules falls to his knees as he struggles with the hydra, symbolizing in this posture the spirit of humility that must be attained. The exaltation of personality inclinations must be replaced by the expression of self-sacrificing tendencies.

8. *Separativeness*. The analytical mind divides and subdivides, prizing the part above the whole. Greater emphasis is placed upon the indications of diversity than on the over-arching fact of unity. Such fragmented thinking militates against the impulse toward synthesis.

The separative attitude is more conscious of the differences between men than of the similarities; it conceives of religion as a series of antagonistic units rather than a single expression of spiritual impulse; it considers the opposition of classes in society to be more important than the common humanity that makes men brothers; it views the earth as a series of disparate nations, rather than as one world.

Hercules had to see the hydra as one monster, not a beast with nine different heads. As long as he sought to dis sever the heads, one by one, he remained unsuccessful. When he finally dealt with it as a unit, he gained the victory.

9. *Cruelty*. The satisfaction men experience in hurting others is a testimony to the existence of evil tendencies that corrode the mind. Delight in causing suffering to our fellow men is a disease. This ugly head of the hydra must be destroyed once and for all before a man can declare himself to be humanised. Modern life offers many examples of brutality and wanton cruelty. In many families sensitive children are taunted, ridiculed and disparaged by those who refuse to take the trouble to understand them; husbands and wives are daily proclaiming to the world in divorce appeals that they are victims of mental torture; the courts and hospitals produce cumulative evidence of the irrational pleasure which human beings take in tormenting each other. "We do it for thrills," said a teenage gangster lately, "not for money".

When this monster cruelty is held high in the air in the light of reason and compassion, it loses its power. The task of translating the energy of cruelty into that of active compassion still remains. In two tests Hercules "killed" when he should have loved, but in Scorpio he achieved this transformation, rooting out of his own nature a tendency which would have crippled him in every future undertaking.

Such is the achievement of Hercules, psychologically speaking, in this labor. He has admitted light into the dark recesses of the subconscious, grappled with the monstrous forces that wallow in subliminal slime, and has overcome the enemies of his own household. A cleansing process has taken place, and Hercules is now ready to embark upon the next labor in which he will have to demonstrate his ability to control the powers and potencies of the mind.

F.M.

### **Applications to Life**

(condensation of lecture by A.A.B.)

Scorpio is the labor that from certain angles has engrossed us and will engross us for a long time because, unlike Hercules, we have not triumphed over the hydra. Most of us are occupied with the futile methods first employed by him in this test.

This primarily is humanity's problem, but individually we are so profoundly concerned with our own evolution that we forget the larger view. If ever we are going to climb the mountain top in Capricorn we must lose sight of the personality and begin to function as souls.

In my highest moments I know theoretically what my attitude and actions should be, but I go muddling along. Why? Because of a fundamental law that everything in nature evolves sequentially, step by step, line upon line, precept upon precept. It might be a devastating experience if I so quickly cleared up my personality that the whole force of my soul could pour in. I would be swept off my feet by the power and light, the omniscience and omnipotence of my soul. I would not know what to do with what I had. That does not mean that all I have to do is sit back and let the law work, rest on my oars and evolution will carry me along until at some time I achieve. It does mean that at this time I am on the

battlefield, Kurukshetra, and I am going to deal with this hydra in Scorpio, for it is this labor which is engrossing humanity today.

The true Scorpio test never takes place until one is coordinated, until one's mind, emotional nature and physical nature are functioning as a unit. Then the man passes into Scorpio where his equilibrium is upset and desire seems rampant when he had thought he had got rid of it. He is fluidic, and he had thought he was balanced. The mind which he was quite sure was beginning to control his personality does not seem to function. As we study Hercules, we see ourselves.

Remember that there are three things the disciple has to do in Scorpio. He has to demonstrate, not to the Hierarchy, not to the onlooker, **but to himself, that he has overcome the great illusion; that matter, form, cannot hold him any longer.** Hercules has to demonstrate to himself that form is simply a channel of expression whereby he contacts a great field of divine manifestation. From reading some books on religion one might come to the conclusion that form, emotion and mind are all evil, undesirable things, to be got rid of. To my mind, it is fundamental to grasp the thought that if I get rid of physical form I have no means of contacting one divine expression, because God is in my fellow man, in this physical, tangible world in which I live, and if I have no form, none of my five senses, I shut off from myself God in one form. **The personality is not to be killed, not be stamped out; it is to be recognized as a triple channel of expression for three divine aspects.** All depends upon whether we use that triple personality for selfish or divine ends. The great illusion is the utilization of that personality for selfish ends. To sum up the whole story, in the sign Scorpio, the Self is determined to kill the little self in order to teach it the meaning of resurrection.

#### *What is Death?*

There are three death signs in the zodiac; three great deaths take place as we progress around the field of life. In Cancer, we have the death of the elemental being (namely, man) in order that the human being can come into existence. Right through the zodiac we can always say: "Here is death in order that ..."

Always, death is an entrance into a fuller life, fuller experience, fuller realization and scope. It is the death of the personality in order that the soul may take over the personality and express life through it. In Pisces we have the crucifixion, the death of a world savior because he has perfectly fulfilled his function.

Death in astrology may mean many things. Perhaps it may mean that we are going to die. That is one interpretation. Perhaps we are going to die to an old emotion. It has passed away—"death". Some crystallized, long-held ideas, dogmas, that have governed our activities until now have simply come to an end and we wonder how we could possibly have thought as we did. That line of thought has died. It is valuable to get the big picture and learn to interpret it in the various aspects of the personality.

#### *Scorpio, the Sign of Magic*

Magic does not mean doing curious things: true magic is the expression of the soul through the medium of the form. Black magic is the use of form in order to gain what we want for the form. Black magic is unadulterated selfishness. White magic is use of the soul for purposes of human uplift, utilizing the personality. Why is Scorpio the sign of magic? An ancient book says: "Virgo is the witch, she prepares the ingredients which are weighed in the balances in Libra, and in Scorpio the magical work is carried forward". In terms of the aspirant this means that in Virgo I discovered the Christ in myself, that down the ages my form nature has nurtured a Christ; in Libra. I fluctuate between the pairs of opposites, form and the Christ nature, until I achieve balance and the Christ and matter are in a stage of equilibrium. In Scorpio I am tested as to which will triumph, the form or the Christ, the higher Self or the lower self, the real or the unreal, the true or the illusion. That is the underlying story of Scorpio.

#### *The Constellations and the Stars*

Taurus, which is the opposite of Scorpio, is the sign of desire expressed predominantly on the physical plane as sex. At the heart of Scorpio we find Antares, one of the four royal stars, a red star. Red

is the color of desire and this is the reddest star in the heavens; it symbolizes that red of desire that underlies every manifestation of divine life.

In Gemini, in the gathering of the golden apples, Hercules also wrestled with *Antares*. Here again in Scorpio we are up against the red star. Why? Because the problem of humanity in this great solar system of ours is that of the attraction between the opposites (meaning desire). Always there is duality, that which is desired and the one who desires. Aquila, the eagle, is interchangeable with Scorpio. The eagle has much to do with the United States and the arrow of Sagittarius, the next sign, is also dominant in the seal of the United States. Aquila, the eagle, is the bird out of time and space and as Hercules struggles with the hydra he looks up, sees the eagle, and is reminded that he has come forth into incarnation and will fly back from whence he came.

There are three constellations connected with this sign which are tremendously interesting. First, there is *Serpens*, the serpent of illusion, the serpent we meet in Genesis, which deluded Eve. The second one is *Ophiuchus*, the man who wrestles with the serpent. The ancient zodiac portrays the serpent in the hands of this man. He seizes it with both hands and treads on its heart, which is the red star of desire. As he does this, he looks towards the constellation that we saw in Libra, the crown. So we have personality, symbolized by Ophiuchus, struggling with the serpent of illusion, with the crown held before him, towards which he aspires.

The third constellation is called *Hercules* and portrays the aspirant looking not at the crown but at the eagle, Aquila. Personality looks at the crown but says, "I am having such a difficult time, my environment is against me, my home conditions are difficult. but I will get a crown some day." Hercules, the disciple, is not concerned about the crown, he is looking at the eagle, the spirit aspect. He is occupied with that marvellous symbol of light emerging, which makes all victory possible.

Keep your eye on the eagle; call down fire; do not look at the ground; be centered in divinity.

A. A. B.

- *The Labours of Hercules* An Astrological Interpretation, Alice A. Bailey p. 140–154

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| <b>Scorpio:</b>      | <b>the Scorpion</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Element:             | Water sign (as are Cancer and Pisces)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Quality:             | Conflict. Test. Trial. Triumph. Points of crisis. Moments of reorientation. Turning point in the life of humanity and of the individual. Hercules became the triumph disciple in Scorpio.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Polar Opposite:      | Taurus, an earth sign (desire, and growth of the soul light).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Rulers:              | Exoteric, Pluto/Mars; Esoteric, Mars                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Keywords:</b>     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| From the form angle: | Let Maya flourish and let deception rule.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| From the soul angle: | Warrior I am and from the battle I emerge triumphant.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>The Lesson:</b>   | Hercules enters upon his supreme test, which is also the supreme test for humanity, and which, if we study the times and seasons, appears that to which humanity is subjected at the present time. The problem before Hercules was his emancipation from illusion and the freeing of perception from the mists and miasmas, the glamour and the appearances, behind which Reality veils itself. In this sign he passes successfully through his greatest trial and thenceforth his problem changes. He has controlled and demonstrated his capacity to overcome desire; he is poised and balanced in his point of view; now, because he is no longer taken in by that which appears and because he can walk one-pointedly in the Light, he becomes a world worker. |

