

C.G. Jung: The Hermit, The Lamplighter by Jeni Bethell

Last week whilst visiting a friend my eyes were drawn to a beautiful lamp on his bureau. ‘The Hermit’s lamp!’ I exclaimed, ‘Where did you get it?’ then ‘Would you mind if I bought one too?’ For I felt I just *had* to have one - not my usual response to friends’ acquisitions, I hasten to add. I was particularly taken by the lamp’s sky blue glass; most apt for The Hermit, I mused. But when I got to the shop (not 24 hours later) there was no blue lamp to be had, only...lipstick pink. And somehow it soon felt like the ‘right’ hue through which the lamplight might shine in the doorway of my tarot reading and teaching room. Within a day or two of having acquired my new treasure, I had an unexpected urge to write an article for The Magician. Flicking through the most recent issue to establish the forthcoming focus card, it was not surprising to find it was to be The Hermit. So here I sit in front of the computer with my pink lantern, hopefully, lighting the way.

My first thoughts are about Carl Jung representing, for me, the archetypal Hermit, both as seeker and as guide. I contemplate his psychological theory of individuation – the process of in-depth personality development through extensive inner work that inevitably exposes, then balances our personal limitations with our strengths. I am reminded that this process puts us in touch with our Self - that is, our godly aspect which Jung deemed ‘a transcendental concept’. Jung’s understanding of the human psyche undoubtedly contains a spiritual dimension. He maintained that the need for humans to explore their individual, numinous experiences is as ‘natural’ as their need to understand their personal essence; indeed the two processes are inextricably linked.

With this in mind I reconsider Rachel Pollock’s 3-tiered model of the Fool’s journey through the Major Arcana, as described in 78 Degrees of Wisdom. I am not altogether comfortable with the notion of a clear delineation between her second row - during which we are said to ‘destroy the mask of the persona’, and her third level - when we gain solid understandings of, if not union with, ‘the spiritual foundations of reality’. During the turning inwards phase of our journey she concedes that, through The Hanged Man and Temperance, we may briefly tap into an understanding of a universal essence; but ultimately we return to ‘the illusion of separateness’ from the divine even as we have attained much greater understanding of our personal being. Yet for many of us the journey of self-discovery is undertaken in parallel with our spiritual discoveries and growth. My reflections on The Hermit card presume this interconnectedness of, and interaction between, the personal and the spiritual awakenings taking place as we journey through cards VIII to XXI. And of course the operative word here is ‘journey’. For how many of us will attain Nirvana in this lifetime? As Jung expressed it, “*The goal is important only as an idea; the essential thing is the **opus** which leads to the goal; **that** is the goal of a lifetime.*”

When I first acquired the Shining Woman tarot deck some years ago, I was particularly taken by Pollack’s image of the Wheel of Fortune. It is a spiral rather than a continually rotating wheel, each 360 degree turn expanding our consciousness until, ultimately, ‘breakthrough’ to enlightenment. Now as I contemplate the Hermit symbolically, I too see a spiral; but in his case the spiral rotates inwards, starting from an enclosing circle that represents our most outer conscious façade, the persona. Increased understanding and awareness of self, Self and beyond is frequently a gradual and progressive process as the inwardly revolving spiral suggests. With

the deepening of our Hermit experiences, as we apply new understandings to our conscious environment, so merging of the personal and spiritual dimensions intensifies. This is the spiral inwards towards our centre, towards *the* centre. Jung too represented the personal journey as one leading to the centre. During his years of intensive inner exploration just after World War I, a time when he was surely operating principally as The Hermit, Jung describes being 'compelled' to draw mandalas. *It became increasingly plain to me that the mandala is the centre. It is the exponent of all paths. It is the path to the centre, to individuation.*

Contemplating further my spiral, my inclination to visualise our growing personal and spiritual awareness as a journey downwards, or inwards, rather than outwards and upwards, I consider a more 'rational' explanation, one emanating from my strong feminist leanings. Within the feminist movement there is considerable suspicion of god-centred, patriarchal religions that tend to glorify only the masculine principle and men deemed to represent it, and that claim man's soul will be redeemed in some 'higher' place 'beyond' earth. Feminists argue that the 'taming' of Mother Nature and her human reflection, woman – both mythically and literally, has had unfortunate consequences for all of earth's inhabitants. Hence, those feminists of a 'religious/spiritual' persuasion frequently go to great pains to 'ground' these beliefs, so to speak; to glorify the earthly, the feminine and the Mother as creator. The spiral inwards can thus be seen as the journey back to the Mother's womb, much like the paleolithic and neolithic cultures ritually conducted in the caves of central Europe and the Mediterranean thousands of years ago. But even without this feminist slant, the downward/inward model can apply. For the religious hermits of Middle Ages' Europe frequently retired to so-called hermitages, eastern seekers to caves in the mountains. Gautama Buddha contemplated beneath the bodhi tree in the jungles of northern India; Carl Jung periodically retreated to his country house at Bollingen.

I have always felt there to be a close connection between The Hermit and The Star cards. Perhaps it's the luminous star symbol common to both. In decks such as the Ryder-Waite, the light from The Hermit's star is contained within his lamp. Perhaps the strength of the star's light is limited because the Hermit understands that, for most of us, it is wise to explore the unconscious slowly, deliberately and with great care. Yet gentle rays filter through the glass. They illuminate The Hermit's cane with golden light, suggesting that all is not necessarily as it may first appear. The cane thought to be merely a tool to support life's daily drudgery, when viewed through the glow of spiritual awakening, becomes a creative instrument, a wand that can empower us, magically transforming us from victim to controller of our life's journey. And, as we travel within, each of the lamp's rays sheds illumination on a small corner of unfamiliar territory, on one of the many archetypes previously inaccessible to our conscious being. Seeing ourselves through this broader, more loving light, our godliness begins to radiate. The critical personal perception of self as a limited, flawed, unexceptional individual is challenged as the rays reveal our unique complexity and the boundless potential of the true Self. Of course, by the time we have reached the card of The Star on our heroic journey, there are multiple stars fully illuminating our unconscious world which Jung so aptly defined as the source of our imagination, the centre of our personal creativity, and the channel to the collective soul.

The Hermit may come to us in the conscious world through the guise of wise friend, therapist, or the like. The archetypal Hermit of my imaginings is usually the wise old man, seldom if ever the Crone. This might be because, at a conscious level, I can more easily access the High Priestess

than the Magician. The dualist model would suggest I therefore require a masculine counterbalance from within. By contrast, those with a more consciously active Magician might find the feminine Crone a more appropriate representation of the Hermit.

Particularly in the past decade, I have had regular visitations from my wise old man via dreams and meditation. He rarely fails to make me feel very 'young' - sometimes like the toddler who responds to everything with the question 'why?', sometimes like the slightly older child who, from the rear of the touring car continually harps, 'are we nearly there?' On occasions, I am reminded of that very old television serious, Kung Fu. I see the Master shaking his head, bemused that Grasshopper can often, momentarily, grasp profound wisdoms, but then allows them to slip through his fingers like granules of sand. Often it is an aging Jung I perceive, his somewhat small, beady eyes peering quizzically at me over the top of his glasses, and I sense I am 'permitted' to use him as a guide but am 'expected', ultimately, to find my own pathway. As he once wrote, "*I can only hope and wish that no-one becomes 'Jungian'. I stand for no doctrine, but describe facts and put forward certain views which I hold worthy of discussion...I proclaim no cut-and-dried doctrine and abhor 'blind adherents'. I leave everyone free to deal with the facts in his (sic) own way, since I also claim this freedom for myself.*"

No matter what his guise, my Hermit is always dressed in grey, the color associated with wisdom, and with the blending of the polarities of black and white. But for me grey also has a strong connection with the state of depression. And aren't such 'unbalanced' states of mind often what instigate our withdrawal, our turning inwards, when we start to question our previous, limited awareness – if only to 'save our sanity'? Certainly the sacrificial journey of The Hanged Man alludes to this, but we are often introduced to the process via The Hermit. His lamplight is held out, almost as a lifeline, to the fragile psyche whose conscious grasp on life feels like it is slipping away, is out of control.

It is oft repeated that the individual's true personal and spiritual journey is, in the end, a solitary one. And when we are in Hermit mode we may in fact withdraw from the outside world. Yet most individuals who consciously choose to engage in the literal role of hermit on this physical plane of existence usually do not, should not, remain cut off from humanity indefinitely. Even the Buddha ultimately elected to return to the outside world to share his revelations with others. Jung spent many of his later years in hermit mode yet still maintained contact with certain trusted friends and colleagues, and he continued with his writings that serve as a guide to others to this very day. This should not surprise given Jung's stated belief that the individuating individual has a societal responsibility to "*bring forth values which are an equivalent substitute for his (sic) absence in the collective personal sphere;*" in other words, to become the bearer of the lamp for others.

With this in mind my final reflection on The Hermit card concerns how it particularly applies to those of us working within the esoteric disciplines such as the tarot. In the role of reader/seer we are inevitably working as the Hermit when consulting with clients. Should we feel inadequate given that we may still have a long way to go, and that sometimes find the going gets tough? I think not. In the same way that a therapist need not necessarily have a complete handle on every aspect of her personal life in order to successfully counsel others, so we can often offer wisdom through the cards when we still may not always be applying it to ourselves. Indeed how often it

happens that the messages we receive for clients are equally apt to our own situation! Jung's synchronicity at work!

As I look up again now at my lantern I am aware that, for me, The Hermit is the initial guide to, if not the catalyst for, my ongoing inner work. And I consider how I project *my* hermit's lamp to others – family, friends, colleagues and clients. Again, I am thankful my new lantern is pink. I remind myself of the symbolic associations with that colour: warmth, sensitivity, tenderness. Can I project my Hermit energy through that pink hue? Well, I can try! So,....what colour is *your* Hermit's lamp?

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