

FESTIVAL OF SCORPIO
New York, November 10, 2011

Sarah McKechnie

Good evening, friends, and welcome to the Festival of Scorpio. At this time we are working in the lower interlude of the annual cycle. This parallels the phase in the breathing cycle that follows exhalation – a moment to pause after the breath has been released and before the next inhalation takes place and the breathing cycle is resumed. Understanding the flow of energies available throughout the annual cycle, and relating it to the four phases of the cycle of the breath – inhalation / higher interlude / exhalation / lower interlude – helps us to understand the creative opportunity of each phase of the yearly cycle. As we learn to see the wheel of the zodiac as a depiction of energies, we can then cooperate more consciously in the reception and distribution of spiritual energies, which is the main purpose of these monthly meditation meetings.

The lower interlude of the year actually covers a period of three signs: Libra, Scorpio, and Sagittarius. Interestingly, Scorpio stands midway between two signs of balance and equilibrium: Libra and Sagittarius. Libra marks a point of balance before the strenuous testing and trials of Scorpio. After those have passed, Sagittarius then marks another point of balance. For the Archer in Sagittarius has to demonstrate that he has achieved a steady eye, hand and stance before he fires the arrow which, if it's rightly directed, will carry him through the portal of initiation in Capricorn.

The entire cycle of the zodiac governs the annual flow of energy and it governs the evolutionary cycle of the soul. In Scorpio the tests and trials of discipleship become “real and earnest”; they cut right to the quick, so to speak – to the essence of the aspirant's sense of himself and his view of life. These tests are a fundamental and unavoidable part of the spiritual Path, for they cover the whole period of the first three initiations. The ancient prayer, the Gayatri, expresses beautifully the nature of the Path, the need for a steady pace and an unwavering gaze on the goal – “the face of the true spiritual sun” - dim and distant though it is now. Let us hold this vision of Reality in mind as we say the Gayatri, affirming the shared experience of the Path and our alignment with the worldwide group of meditators who are meeting, as we are, in groups large and small throughout the world.

O Thou Who givest sustenance to the universe,
From Whom all things proceed,
To Whom all things return,
Unveil to us the face of the true Spiritual Sun
Hidden by a disc of golden Light
That we may know the Truth
And do our whole duty
As we journey to Thy sacred feet.

Libra, the festival we observed last month, is the sign in which the evolving life is weighed or measured in the scales. Libra is a sign of equilibrium which, if it's achieved on a high enough level, admits the soul into the vortex of energies which is the Scorpio experience. Scorpio is called the great constellation which influences the turning point in the life of humanity and in the life of the individual human being. As we look at the world today, and the severe and exacting tests and trials which are being undergone by individuals and by whole nations – tests as to the values they have lived by and the choices they must make for a better future – the significance of the Scorpio experience takes on deep meaning for us all.

Scorpio concerns three tests which measure the readiness of the personality to reorient to the life of the soul – or to continue pursuing the personality's identification with form, with the material world and selfish desire; to demonstrate readiness for initiation – or to postpone its inevitability in order to indulge

the separateness of the personality life; and to demonstrate sensitivity to the Plan – or to remain focussed in the narrow, self-centred view of the separated self.

It should be obvious to all of us that these three tests, which span the first three initiations, hold great significance for the soul. The thoroughness of the testing can be seen in the fact that each test is itself triple in nature, making nine tests in all and covering every aspect of the individual life – the physical, emotional and mental planes as well. As I mentioned, the tests and trials of Scorpio cut right to the bone, leaving no aspect of the personality untested or unexamined. The equilibrium that was carefully established in Libra now is disturbed as the quality of the soul's "equipment", so to speak, is tested in Scorpio.

Specifically, the nine tests cover the three physical aspects: sex, physical comfort, and money; three emotional conditions: fear, hate, and ambition; and three states of mind – of the lower mind, that is: pride, separateness, and cruelty. If we sincerely ponder on these nine tests, we probably begin to suspect that we, each of us, have a long history of failure to meet and pass these tests. That realisation shouldn't defeat us, though – only give us compassion for the failures we witness in our fellowmen and an unwavering determination to summon our personal reserves to gain victory over them – eventually.

But victory doesn't come on demand; it comes only through repeated effort and failure followed by renewed effort. The story of Hercules' labour in Scorpio, to kill the nine-headed Hydra, is an excellent metaphor for the disciple's experience in Scorpio. For each time he thought he had eliminated one of the hydra's heads, it grew back stronger and more fearsome than ever. Only when he finally raised the Hydra high overhead, exposing it to the light of day, did it die. Only by the light of the reasoning mind, unwavering and unflinching in the face of reality, does the disciple gain victory over the lower nature.

The difficulty of these nine tests can be seen in the occasional lapses and failures even of disciples, for we're told that not until the third Initiation of Transfiguration has been achieved, which is quite an advanced stage of spiritual development, does the disciple stand free and secure from potential downfalls. Chapter IX of *Initiation, Human and Solar* explains this in detail. This realisation that even the initiate hasn't achieved perfection should make us all more merciful in our judgments of those we admire and respect when they succumb to the pull of the lower appetites, desires and mental crystallisations.

In Scorpio the spiritual seeker plumbs the depth of the well-known platitude, "There but for the grace of God go I." Each of us has covered the well-known ground of the nine tests, or will cover it in the future. This recognition awakens memory, which is a powerful creative force in the life of the disciple. What we retain of the past, the legacy of the experience we've accumulated, is stored up in our memory – in essence but not in detail. Memory is a tricky thing, for what we remember is not necessarily the same as the Truth; this is the gist of the Japanese story "Rashomon". Memory can be selective and it can be highly creative, which makes it both a resource and a liability to the soul. This is an issue for the individual and for whole societies as well, when they enshrine and adhere to a collective memory that might go back hundreds of years.

The sum total of our memory is called the Dweller on the Threshold, in the sense of all the personality characteristics which remain unconquered – all that stands in the way of the soul's fulfillment of its purpose. This unrecognised past, embodied in the Dweller, at some point has to come face to face with what could be called our future, potential but as yet unrealised higher Self, the Angel of the Presence. "When the Angel of the Presence and the Dweller on the Threshold stand face to face", the Tibetan said, "something must be done. Eventually, the light of the personal self fades out and wanes in the blaze of glory which emanates from the Angel. Then the greater glory obliterates the lesser. This is, however, only possible when the personality eagerly enters into this relation with the Angel, recognises itself as the

Dweller and – as a disciple – begins the battle between the pairs of opposites and enters into the tests of Scorpio.”

This willingness to battle lies at the heart of discipleship, and the keynote of Scorpio, the sign of discipleship, is “Warrior I am and from the battle I emerge triumphant.” The spiritual Path as a field of battle is the theme of the Bhagavad-Gita, one of the essential texts for the serious disciple. Alice Bailey wrote that “The Bhagavad-Gita can be read entirely from the standpoint of the disciple’s combat with glamour and students would be well advised so to study it.” The story centres upon Arjuna, representative of all spiritual aspirants, who observed the field of battle that had swept up his closest family members and created deep divisions between the two sides of the family, and he was appalled. But Krishna would not permit him to sit out the battle. “Nothing is better for a warrior than a righteous battle”, he said.

This need to do battle is deeply embedded in the very substance of our planet and even the solar system, according to *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, and it constitutes a profound mystery. Somehow harmony, which we associate with peace and which expresses itself in beauty and creative power, is gained through battle, through stress and strain. The other day I heard an interview on NPR with the Israeli writer and peace activist Amos Oz, who was speaking about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He was born in Jerusalem some 70 years ago and a young boy when the State of Israel was founded, so he has a long-range view of the conflict yet he remains optimistic about its peaceful outcome. The reason, he says, is that the two sides are rapidly approaching exhaustion, and this is good, because it will prepare the way for peace. It doesn’t mean that everybody will suddenly join hands in friendship, but out of sheer exhaustion they will come to desire – to aspire to – a resolution of the battle in some kind of peaceful co-existence.

Amos Oz’s view seems to echo what the Tibetan said in *The Rays and the Initiations* about the fourth Ray of Harmony through Conflict, which is a powerful conditioning force in Scorpio and the governing ray of humanity as a whole. As such, the fourth ray is a controlling factor in human relationships. The Principle of Conflict, we’re told, acts as the agent of the Principle of Harmony by producing the stresses and strains which will lead to renunciation and, finally, to liberation. The conflict raging in the world today, the Tibetan says, “is so acute that it will finally exhaust itself, and men will turn, with relief and with a longing to escape from further turmoil, towards right human relationships ; this will constitute the first major human decision leading to the longed-for harmony. The attitude of the masses will then be soundly tending towards harmony, owing to the work of the men and women of goodwill as they implement the ‘streaming forth of the love of God into the hearts of men.’”

These words from the Great Invocation, with which we close every meditation, describe the channel which conflict, rightly handled, creates for love to pour in. The fourth Ray of Harmony through Conflict works through the heart – the focal point through which the energy of love can flow, the Tibetan said. “When the Christ founds His focal point on Earth, it will be in the nature of a tiny heart centre through which the love energy of the Hierarchy can persistently flow. The harmony (which the Principle of Conflict produces) causes an alignment, so that the love—streaming forth from the Heart of God—enters the hearts of men; so that the Hierarchy (which is the heart centre or the place where love prevails upon our planet) is brought into relationship with humanity; so that the New Group of World Servers (implementing the love of God and enlightened by the Mind of God) are brought also into relation with the men and women of goodwill in all lands whose task it is to make men’s hearts responsive to and receptive of the love of God”, he said.

This is the outcome we all must work for in the present world crisis. The Scorpio experience forces the disciple to face a turning point, a spiritual crossroads that tests every value, every assumption, every bit of the “accepted wisdom” he has lived by. This applies to the individual disciple and it applies to the world disciple, humanity. The world today has brought humanity to a crossroads where it faces a turning point,

a decision, as to whether it's going to choose to remain submerged by selfish materialism, or whether it's going to choose the path of liberation into the realm of spiritual values. This decision now confronting humanity must be made in perfect freedom, by individuals, groups and whole nations freely choosing the way they think is right. This was affirmed by the Tibetan when he said that the major battle in the world today is for the freedom of the average citizen to think for himself and to come to his own decisions and conclusions. We can see this playing out in the struggle for freedom now raging in the Middle East. How can we who live at such a safe distance from the conflict aid those who struggle for their freedom to think and plan for themselves—to work out their own destinies in the light of their soul?

The Great Invocation is a powerful means for inspiring and redirecting human consciousness. As the Tibetan wrote, "The Great Invocation..., rightly used, could reorient the consciousness of humanity, stabilise men in spiritual being, disrupt and rebuild the planetary thoughtform which men have created in the past and which has had (and is having) such disastrous and cataclysmic results, and open the door into the New Age, thus ushering in the new and better civilisation. This could be done so rapidly, that the needed changes would come about almost overnight;...and the race of men could settle down to a life of group goodwill, individual harmlessness and right human relations."

Let us work in meditation now with this goal held clearly in mind, working with the seed thought for Scorpio, "Warrior I am and from the battle I emerge triumphant."