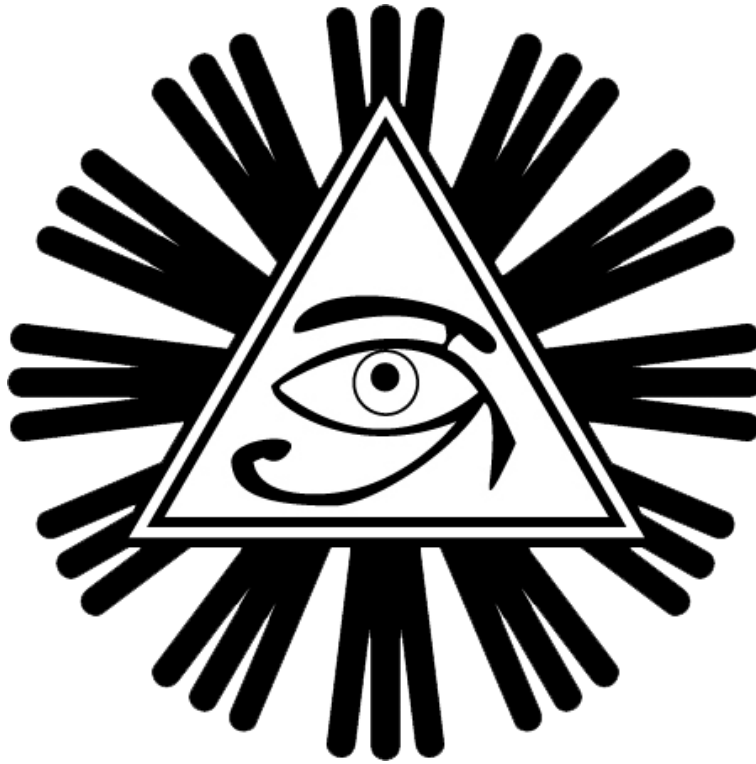


# WORKING THE A.:A.: SYSTEM ON THE TREE OF LIFE

by

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Christopher Reed Johnson, and Erica Johnson



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“It is only through holiness, sacredness, bravery, and selflessness that we help set people free. It does not involve posing as gurus possessing secret knowledge.

Anyone who convinces you that they alone hold the keys to your salvation have bad intentions. Magical concepts, as far as they can be spoken, are deceptively simple.

Like Virgil accompanying Dante through hell and purgatory, the difficulty *is* the quest for which we can serve only as guides. Service alone is our primary function.”

– Laus Priapo Deo 217

Joshua, son of Nun, was a valiant warrior  
and the successor of Moses in the prophetic office,  
destined to become, as his name implies,  
the great savior of God’s chosen people,  
to wreak vengeance on the enemies who attacked them  
and thus bring Israel into its inheritance.  
How glorious he was when with uplifted hands  
he brandished his sword against cities!  
Who could withstand him  
when he fought the battles of the Lord?  
Was it not through him that the sun stood still  
so that one day was lengthened into two?

– *The Apocryphon*, Chapter 46,  
“The Wisdom of Sirach”

# PROBATIONER OBLIGATIONS

by

Frater L.P.D. 217



## What is the A.:A.:?

The A.:A.: is a temporal organization that began in 1907 when Aleister Crowley created it with George Cecil Jones. However, “A.:A.:” is also the name for a “Secret Order” or “Inner Order” that has existed throughout time. In “An Account of A.:A.:”, Crowley writes:

From all time there has been an exterior school based on the interior one, of which it is but the outer expression.... But all exterior societies subsist only by virtue of this interior one. As soon as external societies wish to transform a temple of wisdom into a political edifice, the interior society retires and leaves only the letter without the spirit.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, the A.:A.: is a society based on the Law of Thelema, whose central tenet is “Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law.”<sup>2</sup> It is a system of three grades that correspond to the Tree of Life, namely the man of Earth, the Lover, and the Hermit. Ultimately, the A.:A.: is private and mostly individual in its work.

Further in-depth details about the history of the A.:A.: can be found in the essay “A.:A.: History” by J. Edward Cornelius (included below).

## On the Probationer

In many, if not all, A.:A.: lineages, the Oath of the Probationer is “to obtain a scientific understanding of the nature and powers of my own being.”<sup>3</sup> Essentially, the Probationer

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<sup>1</sup> Crowley, A. (1909). *The Equinox, Vol. I, No. I*. New York: Samuel Weiser, Inc., pp. 7-13.

<sup>2</sup> Aiwass & Crowley, A. (1904/2006). *Liber L vel Legis: The Book of the Law*. San Francisco, CA: Red Wheel/Weiser, LLC.

<sup>3</sup> Crowley, Aleister (1969/1979). *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley: An Autohagiography* (K. Grant & J. Symonds, Eds.). London: Penguin Arkana.

chooses his or her own practices without having been influenced by his or her mentor. The maxim is to “Know Thyself”. Aspirants determine this objective by utilizing techniques that appeal to them. Aleister Crowley himself conceived of the Probationer Grade as a foundation in the practices of Yoga and Magick. We do not feel ourselves strictly bound by Crowley’s curriculum, but we encourage revisiting Crowley’s books containing basic instructions in Yoga and Magick to get a general and historical sense of what he had in mind.

### General Information:

In these days of the Internet, there’s no reason to assign a long list of readings — although it’s historically interesting to see what Crowley considered necessary. Obviously, every Aspirant and Adept must continually read and study *Liber Legis (The Book of the Law)* and its authorized Commentaries (e.g., *The Law is for All*).<sup>4</sup>

Additionally, Probationers must read and write about the four pieces listed below, particularly, regarding the stated focus and how the concepts therein apply to one’s own magickal work. It used to be that the Probationer had the entire year to complete the reading reports. We have recently changed this requirement. Today, the newly minted Probationer has only *three months* to complete this task. If he or she is unable to complete this task, the Probationer time ends. If he or she succeeds, then the remaining 9 months is used to do such practices as one chooses.

### Oath of the Probationer:

“[T]o obtain a scientific knowledge of the nature and powers of my own being”<sup>5</sup>, which can be stated as “I pledge myself to discover the nature and powers of my own Being”.<sup>6</sup>

### Probationer Requirements:

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<sup>4</sup> Crowley, A. (1996). *The Law is for All: The Authorized Popular Commentary to The Book of the Law* (L. Wilkinson & H. Beta (Eds.)). Tempe, AZ: New Falcon Publications.

<sup>5</sup> *Liber CLXXXV-185 (Liber Collegii Sancti)* by Aleister Crowley. See “Appendix I”.

<sup>6</sup> *Little Essays on Truth* (“On Man”) by Aleister Crowley.

- 1) The Probationer must submit typed, digital reports on each of the following four **REQUIRED** readings (in any order). The Probationer must focus on how, specifically, the readings assigned inform his or her own ongoing quest to Know Thyself. This should be done in relation to the focus listed after each book title above. These reports must be submitted directly to your Teacher.
  - *The Soul's Code* by James Hillman (<https://a.co/d/9KguihH>)<sup>7</sup> — focusing on how one chooses one's True Will prior to incarnation.
  - The "Introduction" (only) to *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage*, translated by S. L. MacGregor Mathers (<https://a.co/d/a6Ai3el>)<sup>8</sup> — focusing on the devotional piety necessary for Magickal operations, especially the Knowledge & Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel.
  - *Grady Louis McMurtry: The Man, the Myth, and the Legend* (<https://bit.ly/40ceCS5>),<sup>9</sup> OR Volumes 1 and 2 of *In the Name of the Beast* by J. Edward Cornelius<sup>10</sup> — focusing on not only the history of Our Lineage, but on how the magickal motto serves to create a container that protects the "Man" behind the "Myth," i.e., the Magickal Identity.
  - *The Middle Pillar* by Israel Regardie (<https://a.co/d/hosRaHb>)<sup>11</sup> — focusing on how one needs to be balanced and possess a strong foundation before moving through the grades on the Tree of Life (e.g., through psychotherapy, meditation, banishing and purification rituals, etc.).
- 2) The Probationer should choose such practices as he or she prefers. No particular practices are required. The exception is *Liber Resh*<sup>12</sup> and daily banishment (*Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram (LBRP)*)<sup>13</sup> — see *Liber O vel Manus et Sagittae*<sup>14</sup> and *Liber E vel Excercitiorum*.<sup>15</sup> These strengthen and balance the auric egg, which is critical when raising energies. In the end, the more seriously one addresses the dangers of their magico-mystical path, the more success they will achieve in the long run.

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<sup>7</sup> Hillman, J. (1996). *The Soul's Code: In Search of Character and Calling*. United Kingdom: Random House.

<sup>8</sup> Mathers, S. L. M. (1889/1975). *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage* (trans. S. L. MacGregor Mathers). New York: Dover Publications, Inc.

<sup>9</sup> Cornelius, J. E. (2023). *Grady Louis McMurtry: The Man, the Myth, and the Legend* (C. R. Johnson & E. Johnson (Eds.)). Woodstock, GA: Privately Published.

<sup>10</sup> *Red Flame*, Vols. 12 & 13, are now only available through individual sellers at websites like eBay.

<sup>11</sup> Regardie, I. (1971/1989). *The Golden Dawn*. St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn.

<sup>12</sup> *Liber Resh vel Helios sub figura CC* in Crowley, A. (1911). *The Equinox, Vol. I, No. VI*. New York: Samuel Weiser, Inc., pp. 29-32.

<sup>13</sup> Crowley, A. (1909). *The Equinox, Vol. I, No. II*. New York: Samuel Weiser, Inc., pp. 19-27.

<sup>14</sup> Crowley, A. (1909). *The Equinox, Vol. I, No. II*. New York: Samuel Weiser, Inc., pp. 11-30.

<sup>15</sup> Crowley, A. (1909). *The Equinox, Vol. I, No. I*. New York: Samuel Weiser, Inc., pp. 23-34.

- 3) The only absolute requirement, other than the readings, is that the Probationer keep **a searchable, digital Magickal Record** for the entire year, which must be turned in for evaluation at the end of that period. This is the main document by which the Teacher will judge the Probationer's fitness to continue. This is essential for the Probationer in getting to "Know Thyself" better before entering the man of Earth. In the Record, the Probationer shall record:
- All practices, rituals, exercises, divinations, experiments, etc., along with their results.
  - The mundane events and activities of the day; other potentially relevant conditions (e.g., the phase of the moon, weather, etc.).
  - Thoughts.
  - Emotions.
  - Sensations, health, sexuality, and other things noticed in the body and sensorium.
  - Dreams remembered.
  - The music you are listening to; the movies you are watching; the books you are reading, etc.
  - Anything else that seems worthy of note.
- 4) The Probationer is encouraged to choose a motto, but, assuming he or she is ready to do so, **it must be approved by the head of his or her Clerk House**. For this reason, all potential Probationers should use their given name when filling out the "Kaaba Clerk House Membership Application".

**Believe it or not, the Probationer grade is where most students fail.** Even Crowley mentioned that seven out of every eight Probationers never adequately attain the Grade of Neophyte. In other words, approximately 13% of Aspirants succeed in finishing their Probationer year.

### Suggested Readings:

Books that would be of great value to the student (optional).

- *Essays #1-10* by J. Edward Cornelius & Erica M Cornelius (Erica Johnson)
- *The Magickal Essence of Aleister Crowley* by J. Edward Cornelius
- *Secret Sexual Teachings of Aleister Crowley* by J. Edward Cornelius
- *On Getting a Bullshit Meter* by Erica M Cornelius (Erica Johnson)
- *The Joy of Dissolution* by J. Edward Cornelius, Christopher Reed Johnson, and Erica Johnson

- *The Chalice of Ecstasy* by Frater Achad
- *The Egyptian Revival or The Ever-Coming Son in The Light of the Tarot* by Frater Achad
- *The Daemon: A Guide to Your Extraordinary Secret Self* by Anthony Peake
- *The Nag Hammadi Library Scriptures* edited by James M. Robinson, et al.
- *The Kabbalistic Mirror of Genesis: Commentary on the First Three Chapters* by David Chaim Smith
- *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* by Mircea Eliade
- *In the Dark Places of Wisdom* by Peter Kingsley
- *In Praise of Love* by Alain Badiou
- *From the Ashes of Angels: The Forbidden Legacy of a Fallen Race* by Andrew Collins
- *The Book of Archai* by J. Edward Cornelius and Christopher Reed Johnson
- *Mysteriorum Libri Quinque: Dr. John Dee's Five Books of Mysteries* edited by Joseph Peterson
- *Hermetic Qabalah Foundation: Complete Course* by Oliver St. John
- *The Flaming Sword: Volume One and Volume Two* by Oliver St. John
- *Sepher Sapphires: Volume I and Volume II* by Wade Coleman
- *The Greek Qabalah* by Kieren Barry
- *Pearls of Wisdom* by James A. Eshelman
- *Mystical and Magical System of the A.:A.:* by James A. Eshelman
- *The Secret Wisdom of the Qabalah* by J. F. C. Fuller
- *The Magick Curriculum of the Secret Order G.:B.:G.: [Gnostic Body of God]* by Louis T. Culling (based on the original curriculum of C. F. Russell)
- *Demons of the Flesh: The Complete Guide to Left Hand Path Sex Magic* by Nikolas Schrek and Zeena Schrek
- *Lunar and Sex Worship* by Ida Craddock
- *Magia Sexualis: Sexual Practices for Magical Power* by Paschal Beverly Randolph
- *The Mass and its Mysteries Compared to the Ancient Mysteries* by Jean-Marie Ragon



# ON THE A.:A.:

by

Erica Johnson

“[T]here are those who think existence even in heaven intolerable so long as there is one single being who does not share that joy. There are some who may wish to travel back from the very threshold of the bridal chamber to assist belated guests.”

– Aleister Crowley, *Book 4*, Part 1

Since puberty, I have been gripped by the innate wisdom of “a natural religion”. I have breathed this unshakeable knowledge that my body, soul, and life story provide all the “scripture” or “clergy” that I need—that somehow I am my own perfect divinity if only I can strip away all that hinders me. Perfect passion, perfect equanimity. Finding the A.:A.: was like dreaming of the one I love and then meeting him in real life! To me, it is a community of saints—or would-be saints—who help one another without interfering. Love under will. What could be more glorious?

Aleister Crowley formed his A.:A.: to be a Brotherhood originating above the Abyss. He envisioned its members as linked to Wisdom and united by Love beneath It. In simple language, he intended the A.:A.: to be populated by men of direct spiritual Knowledge, won by their own diligence and devotion: “[W]hat the propose to do is to enable such men as are capable of advancement to a higher interpretation of manhood to do so; and the proof of their ability lies in their success.”<sup>16</sup>

He proposed that each member would have a single teacher, who would “advise simple experiments” to him or her; the aspirant would perform them and record the results in his or her magickal record.<sup>17</sup> The point of A.:A.: is to directly experience Spirit, even as every other prophet and Teacher has done. Each member benefits by helping to bring up his or her student just a grade below—a “chain system”.

Although Crowley envisioned the A.:A.: as a system of individual attainment, a Thelemite might question whether such a system is necessary to anyone at all. Certainly, some aspirants are better suited to working on their own. Further, books and the internet have made the A.:A.: curriculum available to nearly everyone. Is it necessary to join? More

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<sup>16</sup> “Editorial”, *Equinox* Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2.

broadly, disobedience is the keynote of Thelema. Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law. So, is it ever lawful for any Thelemite to commit to another human being, such as an A.:A.: Teacher?

We must remember that Thelema is a philosophy of non-dualism. “Let there be no difference made among you between any one thing & any other thing; for thereby there cometh hurt” (*AL*, I:22). Any vertical aspirant who has reached the stage of the Ruach has to grapple with the true meaning of Love.

J. Edward Cornelius, who headed Grady Louis McMurtry’s A.:A.: from Grady’s death in 1985 until his own in 2023, offers the following food for thought:

If an Adept is seeking God and Loves God, he loves himself. If he loves himself, he must love other Gods—such as his student. It’s a symbiotic relationship rooted in Love. He must make no distinction between one thing and another.

Of course, defining the Laws of one’s own Universe on a practical level can take years, if not the rest of one’s life.

# A.:A.: HISTORY

by

J. Edward Cornelius

“... there are many that swim, and find no boats.  
Be it thy task to aid them.”

—Aleister Crowley, *The Electric Silence*

We must begin our story by examining the life of Aleister Edward Crowley. He was born on October 12<sup>th</sup> in the year 1875. In his youth he found himself being transferred from one school to another, until he and his mother finally settled in London. In 1894 he attended King’s College where he developed a strong interest in mountain climbing. In October of the following year, he left King’s College at Cambridge.

It was during Crowley’s vacations in Switzerland in 1898 when he met a gentleman named Julian L. Baker (1873–1958). It seems that both shared a strong interest in magic and alchemy and as they talked and walked back to their hotel, Crowley asked him if he was an occult master, or magical Adept. Baker smiled and said he would introduce Crowley to a man who is “much more of a magician than I am”. He inevitably introduced Crowley to his brother-in-law, George Cecil Jones (1873–1960), who had married his sister, Ethel. Jones, in turn, would introduce the young Crowley to the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.

A little over a month after Crowley turned twenty-three, on November 18<sup>th</sup>, 1898, he received initiation into the First, or Outer, Order of this fraternity at the Isis-Urania Temple in London. He took the magical motto of *Perdurabo* for his Neophyte (0°=0°) degree, which literally means *I will endure till the end*. Years later, when Crowley was creating the A.:A.: he changed the name of this degree from Neophyte to Probationer.

As for the initiatory structure used by the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, it was based primarily upon the ancient Tree of Life (*Otz Chiim*) that has ten spheres or Sephiroth (סְפִירוֹת), which are connected by 22 paths. This is one of the most recognized symbols in the Qabalah—a term derived from the Hebrew word קבלה that means “receiving”. However, this does not imply receiving things of a mundane origin so much as receiving Hidden Wisdom.

The Qabalistic Tree of Life is identical to the Tree of Knowledge of both Good & Evil, and, it is believed, by eating its fruit, we obtain Hidden Knowledge or Gnosis of the

Universe and, more importantly, of ourselves and, in the process, we become as Gods. This symbol represents everything, both above and below, both externally and internally and in modern times it has become a very favorable filing system for the expectations of all Adepts. In the First, or Outer, Order of the Golden Dawn, after the Neophyte (0°=0°) degree, the initiate begins working the lower four Sephiroth:

Malkuth(מלכות)-10	Zelator 1°=10°
Yesod (יסוד)-9	Theoricus 2°=9°
Hod (הוד)-8	Practicus 3°=8°
Netzach (נצח) -7	Philosophus 4°=7°

As for Crowley, over the next few years, his life became intensely complicated. Magick had become his everything and he progressed rapidly through the early degrees of the Outer Order, but problems were on the horizon. He wrote in his introductory “History Lecture” of the A.:A.: titled *Liber LXI vel Causae*,<sup>18</sup> attempting to explain what happened next:

We must pass over the unhappy juggleries which characterized the next period. It has throughout proved impossible to elucidate the complex facts. We content ourselves, then, with observing that the death of one of his two colleagues, and the weakness of the other, secured to S.R.M.D. the sole authority.

What Crowley is attempting to tell us is that of the original three founding members of the Order, Dr. William R. Woodman, died in 1891, and Dr. William Wynn Westcott discreetly resigned, which left Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers (*Deo Duce Comite Ferro*) in control. The “unhappy juggleries” of this period became further complicated when MacGregor-Mathers and his wife left London and moved to Paris. From there they both found it exceedingly difficult to control the Isis-Urania Temple.

To make a long story short, in Mather’s absence, certain petty-minded Adepts in London decided to depose him as Head of the Golden Dawn, and, in the process, they attempted to create their own link with the Secret Chiefs who reside above the Abyss.

The Abyss is an imaginary line that divides the top three Qabalistic spheres of Kether (כתר), Chokmah (חכמה), and Binah (בינה), or the World Soul, from the lower, or more Personal, Soul of individuals. The Secret Chiefs are said to oversee Knowledge manifesting below the Abyss that guides humanity and, in particular, magickal Orders. One

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<sup>18</sup> *The Equinox*, Vol. III No. 1 (1919), p. 53. About this document, Crowley states: “The Preliminary Lecture including the History Lecture. Explains the actual history of the origin of the present movement. Its statements are accurate in the ordinary sense of the word. The object of the book is to discount Mythopoeia” or myth making.

of the most influential sources discussing the character and motivations behind these beings is Karl von Eckartshausen's book *The Cloud Upon the Sanctuary* (1795). It is believed that unless one makes a connection with those individuals known as the Ascended Masters the knowledge one disseminates to others is merely mundane garble of little or no great value.

Crowley believed that the Adepts who took over the Golden Dawn failed miserably at making the connection, writing:

The rituals were elaborated, though scholarly enough, into verbose and pretentious nonsense: the knowledge proved worthless, even where it was correct: for it is in vain that pearls, be they never so clear and precious, are given to the swine. The ordeals were turned into contempt, it being impossible for anyone to fail therein. Unsuitable candidates were admitted for no better reason than that of their worldly prosperity. In short, the Order failed to initiate.

Further difficulties arose when those now in charge refused to initiate Crowley into the inner or Second Order properly known as *Rosae Rubeae et Auriae Crucis*, which means "The Ruby Rose and the Golden Cross". Like the previous Order, it worked off certain spheres on the Qabalistic Tree of Life. The Second Order encompassed these three spheres:

Tiphereth (תפארת)-6	Adeptus Minor 5°=6°
Geburah (גבורה)-5	Adeptus Major 6°=5°
Chesed (חסד)-4	Adeptus Exemptus 7°=4°

In disgust, Crowley left London for Paris, and, under the guidance of S. L. MacGregor Mathers, to whom he was still loyal, he was given initiation on January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1900 into the Second Order. His new motto was *Parzival*.

One of the major requirements for an Adeptus Minor working out of Tiphereth was to swear at their initiation to seek their Higher Genius, or Augoeides. They were *not* required to know their Holy Guardian Angel at this point, but only to acknowledge an aspiration to pursue his guidance. This quest would dominate Crowley's life over the next few years.

After Crowley left Mathers in Paris and returned to London, all hell broke loose. The story gets even more complicated depending upon who is spinning the tale. One fact is certain: on March 25<sup>th</sup>, 1900, Crowley received a letter from Mrs. E. A. (Dorothea) Hunter (1868–1958), known as Soror *Dea Data*, stating that the London Second Order of the Golden Dawn did not recognize his initiation in Paris. W. B. Yeats (1865–1939), a member of the Second Order, would write that they refused Crowley because they "did not think a mystical society was intended to be a reformatory".

It was a difficult period for Crowley, the result being that he left London and embarked on traveling worldwide. He describes this period in *Liber LXI vel Causae* wherein he “was driven of the Spirit into the Wilderness, where he abode for six years, studying by the light of reason the sacred books and secret systems of initiation of all countries and ages”. The first leg of his venture into the wilderness took him by ship from London to New York then to Mexico. He continued traveling widely over the next few years to such places in the Far East as Ceylon and India. He also headed to Egypt and France, finally arriving back in Scotland, where he owned an estate called Boleskine.

In July of 1903 Crowley traveled to Edinburgh, Scotland to visit his old friend, the artist Gerald Kelly (1879–1972). It was here that he met Gerald’s sister Rose Edith Kelly (1874–1932). Although they became instantly infatuated with each other, Rose was already engaged to another man whom she didn’t love. To alleviate this tragic situation, they acted impulsively by eloping on August 12<sup>th</sup>, 1903 at Dingwall, Scotland. (Yes, some might consider it a drastic solution to Rose’s engagement problem.)

Shortly afterwards, the newly married couple embarked for Egypt, posing as the Prince and Princess Chioa Khan. The following year is probably the most important in Crowley’s entire life. It deserves a much lengthier explanation than a mere paragraph, because the events affected the rest of Crowley’s life.

Basically, on three successive days in April of 1904, he “received” *The Book of the Law*, eventually retitled *Liber AL vel Legis*. This new Holy Book was dictated by Aiwass, an invisible entity who claimed to be the minister of Hoor-Paar-Kraat and a messenger from the forces ruling the planet during the Aeon of Aquarius. The new decree given to mankind was “Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law”.

It seemed that Christianity was dead and a new era of “Crowleyanity” was at hand, an idea that obviously appealed immensely to Crowley. When he returned to London, he was deeply inspired by these revelations of a new age dawning. He was often seen in local cafes spewing forth the laws of his new religion to anyone who would give him an ear. He particularly enjoyed the atmosphere around the Café Royal, which was considered the center of literary and artistic life in London. It is believed that he first entered the Café around 1897, shortly after leaving Cambridge, and, like many creative people of that period, he fell in love with the restaurant. Now, after returning from Cairo, he was often seen in the Domino Room, a section of the Café Royal frequented by such dignitaries as Arnold Bennett, G. K. Chesterton, and Jacob Epstein to name but a few. Many of these individuals record fascinating tales of Crowley’s verbal rants regarding his new law, “Do what thou wilt”, and the death of Christianity. Their stories are interesting and funny and often portray a unique image of the Great Beast in his early Thelemic years.

In April of 1905, Crowley was tempted to leave England and spend time mountain climbing and travelling. Six years from whence he “was driven of the Spirit into the Wilderness”, he returned to Liverpool. He arrived on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1906. Once in England, Crowley contacted George Cecil Jones, Frater D.D.S. 7°=4°, who was his original sponsor and mentor in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. As he reports in *Liber Causae*, he “laid his achievements humbly at the feet of a certain adept D.D.S.”. He told Jones all his accomplishments of the previous six years that culminated with him obtaining the Knowledge and Conversation of his Holy Guardian Angel. Jones, whom Crowley believed had the authority to do so, “welcomed him brotherly and admitted his title to the grade which he had so hardly won”.

In other words, Jones acknowledged that Crowley was, in fact, acting as 7°=4°, or an Adeptus Exemptus, as one who has positioned themselves in Chesed-4 (דסד) on the threshold of the Abyss.

Aleister Crowley’s diaries on July 29<sup>th</sup>, 1906 give us the very first indication that he was considering forming a new Order. He writes: “D.D.S. and P. discuss a new O.: [Order], D.D.S. wants Authority”. This marked the beginning of the A.:A.:. However, Jones was not sure that they had the authorization to create a new Order. He wanted an official sanction to come from a higher authority than them. He wanted the Secret Chiefs, who had earlier guided the Golden Dawn, to give their approval.

In the meantime, until such authority was given, they both agreed that they should go ahead and try to put together a new system of teaching. Crowley writes of this in *Liber LXI vel Causae*:

Thereupon these two adepts conferred together, saying: May it be written that the tribulations shall be shortened? not Wherefore they resolved to establish a new Order which should be free from the errors and deceits of the former one.

It is no secret that *Liber AL vel Legis* commands that all the rituals of the previous Aeon were to be abrogated, or cast out, which, of course, included the rituals of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. These, as Crowley pointed out, “had been elaborated into verbose and pretentious nonsense with their ordeals turned into contempt and it being impossible for any initiate to fail therein”. Crowley was obviously elated that his sacred volume foretold that the responsibility of disseminating its Aquarian message and to prepare new formulas was to fall upon him. He and Jones immersed themselves in this quest. They wanted to achieve where everyone in the Golden Dawn had failed, in short, to simply initiate their candidates.

The next important event regarding our Order is mentioned in Crowley's *Confessions*, subtitled *The Spirit of Solitude*. Here he writes,

D.D.S. came to see me: we celebrated the Autumnal Equinox [September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1906] and reconstructed the old Neophyte Ritual of the GD, eliminating all unnecessary features and quintessentializing the magical formulae. (p. 532)

He further mentions this period in *The Equinox* I:8, writing that, from September 24<sup>th</sup> to the 30<sup>th</sup>, "Frater P. was preparing, under the guidance of D.D.S., a certain ritual of initiation. This was to combine the Eastern and the Western methods" (p. 35). Crowley notes that on September 30<sup>th</sup>, he "[c]oncluded a draft of Sun in Aries by Mercury". The ritual was called *Liber DCLXXI vel Troa*. Crowley attempted this ritual, only in part, and recorded in his diaries, "Tested new R. and behold it was v.g. [very good]" (October 9<sup>th</sup>, 1906). However, the new initiation ritual would undergo numerous changes and additions, none of which have survived in copy. The only known copy of the manuscript of *Liber DCLXXI vel Troa* is found at Syracuse University in New York State. The copy in Syracuse is the final form that was typed out in 1908. On the title page, under *Liber DCLXXI vel Troa*, is scribbled, "[A] versified Ritual for the Feast of the Equinox". On the first page, Crowley gives a brief historical perspective which is worth quoting in full:

The Spelling of the Name of Adonai by the *Ritual of the Pyramid* being the form of Initiation to the Grade of Neophyte in the M\_\_\_\_\_ of I\_\_\_\_\_ (Ritual issued to appointed Officers, who must pass the test of efficiency).

O.M. a 7°=4° of the G.:O.: having been permitted on the 9th October 1906 to perceive the vision of I A Ω did duly write out for the third time this ritual following, it having been in its crude form of assistance to him in obtaining the chrism aforesaid.

The skeleton of this ritual was laid down (adapted from the 0°=0° of G.:D.:) by G. H. Fra. D. D. S. on ○ nox ○ preceding, written out in sketch by G. H. Fra. O. M. on 30th Sept, and revised by him on 7th Oct. and other dates. The final draft was submitted by O. M. to D. D. S.; and together did they consult, making slight alterations. This present printed ritual has received the Imprimatur of P. N. V.V.V.V.V. 8°=3° Magister Templi on ○ nox ○ 1908." \*

\* Editor's Note: M\_\_\_\_\_ of I\_\_\_\_\_ = Mysteries of Initiation. Obviously GO is a typo, referring to Golden Dawn, or G.:D.: And P. N. before Crowley's motto of V.V.V.V.V. stands for Pater Noster.



Crowley gives further references to the formation of his new Order cryptically in a piece titled *The Electric Silence*.<sup>19</sup> In this piece he refers to himself as a ship builder of an Ark trying to save humanity:

This then endured for a space; and with his aid I began ship-building. “For” (said he) “there are many that swim, and find no boats. Be it thy task to aid them.” Of my journey to the House he spake nothing. But in the shipbuilding came the fair man my brother to my help; and one evening as we sate at meat he said: May it please you to enter the House; for there is prepared for you a goodly bedchamber. But I would not at that time; for I was ashamed, being unclothed; not understanding that in the House robes are provided by him that is appointed to provide them.

Thus we laboured, and built many fair shallops upon the model of that wherein we sailed.

This piece is often overlooked by A.:A.: scholars, but it is an important piece, nonetheless. It points out that, by their own admittance, Crowley and Jones were creating an organization along the lines as they understood initiation to be, or along similar lines laid out in the Golden Dawn. Although they were doing such without having authority or guidance from the Secret Chiefs, it implies that, as “ship-builders”, they were still offered entrance into the House (Binah), but they still felt unworthy. This would change on December 10<sup>th</sup>, 1906. This date marks another important milestone in the establishment or birth of the Order. In his diaries Aleister Crowley notes:

Jones says Ou Me is 8=3. I say Mollie Lee rhymes with both. This purifies and consecrates me, so that I feel ‘I am the master’ quite genuine—without scruple or difference. No personality.

Ou Me is a reference to Crowley’s 7°=4° motto, or *Ou Mh* (The NOT), and if you do not realize the significance of Crowley’s entry, then in his *Confessions* he made it clearer when he wrote, “In the month of December the Secret Chiefs formally invited me, through G.R. Frater D.D.S., to take my place officially in the Third Order.”<sup>20</sup> Aleister Crowley had assumed the magical degree of Magister Templi 8°=3°. From that moment on, he accepted the responsibility that he was destined to shoulder a particular determination for the sake of humanity. One of the main responsibilities of a Magister Templi is for them to tend a garden that offers unique insight and knowledge not readily taught below the Abyss by others.

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<sup>19</sup> *The Equinox*, Vol. I No. 6, (1911), p. 53.

<sup>20</sup> *The Confessions* subtitled *The Spirit of Solitude*, p. 533.

It must be remembered that no member of the original Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn ever achieved higher than an Adeptus Exemptus 7°=4°, or beyond the sphere of Chesed on the Tree of Life. In some ways, they were restricted by the Old-Aeonic belief that these final three spheres on the Tree of Life were of such an exalted nature that only those not in the flesh could ever attain them. The idea of becoming one of these Secret Chiefs while still in one's mortal shell was foreign to their thinking. They had yet to recognize that a Secret Chief could easily walk amongst us.

Aleister Crowley proved them wrong when he became a Magister Templi 8°=3°. He took the motto *Vi Veri Vniversum Vivus Vici* ("By the power of Truth, I, in my lifetime, have conquered the Universe"). This single event gave Crowley the authority that he and Jones had earlier sought. Many individuals do not understand the full implications, however, in *One Star in Sight*<sup>21</sup> where it states that members of the Third Order

are each entitled to found Orders dependent on themselves on the lines of the R. C. and G. D. orders, to cover types of emancipation and illumination not contemplated by the original (or main) system. All such orders must, however, be constituted in harmony with the A.:A.: as regards the essential principles.<sup>22</sup>

It is here where Aleister Crowley acknowledges by what authority he could establish new First and Second Orders of A.:A.:, respectively called the Rose Croix (Rosicrucian) and Golden Dawn. The Inner School, or Third Order, known as S.:S.: always existed. Aleister Crowley did not create this Order.

When Aleister Crowley entered the Third Order, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn as he knew it had already fallen into disgrace. Initiations had failed. There were no Outer Schools teaching New-Aeonic magick. Crowley realized that he had to establish such a vehicle to disseminate his teachings. Thus, he created what we commonly term the "A.:A.:". The difficulty that aspirants often have is their inability to distinguish when Crowley is talking about the First, the Second, or the Third Orders. In truth, he is never quite clear on this matter. Part of the problem deals with the name itself and the interpretation of the meaning behind the sacred letters of A.:A.:. Aleister Crowley informed Frater Achad (Charles Stansfeld Jones, 1886–1950) in a letter from October of 1917 that the initials stand for the Latin phrase *Argentinum Aster*, but somehow this later mutated to *Argentium Astrum*. In Greek, the Order is known as *Astron Argon* (ἄστρον ἀργυρόν). All these phrases, and a few others, translate as "Silver Star", or S.:S.:, which

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<sup>21</sup> *One Star in Sight* is a broadsheet Aleister Crowley wrote and released at Cefalu in 1921. Republished in *Magick in Theory and Practice* (1930), p. 229.

<sup>22</sup> *Magick in Theory and Practice*, p. 233.

signifies *only* the Third Order, which encompasses the lower two Orders. As to which name you hang your coat on, it is immaterial. What you must know is that the center of this Order is the Sephira known as Tiphereth (תפארת), the Sun, or Star.

If one wants to know the philosophy behind the initials of A.:A.: you must realize that Aleister Crowley believed that the true seeker has only two real steps to take:

(1) to achieve  $5^{\circ}=6^{\square}$ , which means bringing your Energy up to your Heart Chakra, Tiphereth, where you meet your HGA [i.e., Holy Guardian Angel] & then ‘under that divine guidance’ to (2) essay the adventure of the Abyss.

In other words, the entire A.:A.: system is designed around the premise of teaching the *Arcanum Arcanorum* (Secret of Secrets), which is rooted in the Angel and Abyss. Of this, I can make it no clearer.

The next important period in the history of the A.:A.: occurred in 1907, when Crowley wrote many documents that came to be called the *Holy Books*. Some of these are *Class A*, or documents, that cannot be changed in either the style of a letter or punctuation. Their message is the utterance of a Secret Chief. It might be easier for some to consider these works as being inspired, rather than authored by Aleister Crowley, even though he did, in fact, write them.

In October of 1908, Crowley began the magickal workings described in *John St. John*.<sup>23</sup> This working is quite remarkable. Although he had typed out the final form of *Liber DCLXXI vel Troa*, it would be short lived. While meditating in the Hanged Man position within his sacred pyramid on October 4<sup>th</sup>, 1908, Crowley asked his Holy Guardian Angel for guidance while acknowledging, “I now sit down to meditate on this new ritual”. He then gives a brief outline of the new ritual in *John St. John*. What it entailed was taking *Liber DCLXXI vel Troa* and modifying it yet again into a truer A.:A.: ritual—seeing that the original was very much Old-Aeonic in that it required a candidate to be taken through the ritual by two other individuals, a Hegemon and a Hiereus. By 1908, Crowley had realized that there can be no Old-Aeonic, or Golden-Dawn-style, group rituals in the Order. This included the initiation rituals themselves, so he abandoned *Liber DCLXXI vel Troa*, along with a few other earlier rituals, and he modified the initiation to be between just the candidate and his Angel as a foundation stone for the Abyss. This new ritual became known as *Liber Pyramidos* (*Liber Pyramidos vel DCLXXI-671*). On the original typed copy of *Liber Pyramidos* he wrote, “This is the actual MS 671 referred to in John St. John”. Underneath this, in parentheses, is written, “John St. John is the diary of a magical

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<sup>23</sup> *The Equinox* I:1 (1909), Supplement, p. 1.

retirement undertaken by A.C. in Paris in 1908 and published in Vol. I Number 1 of the *Equinox*”.

However, there are some branches of our Noble Order who still put their candidates through the Temple Ritual of *Liber DCLXXI vel Troa*. In fact, the two major lineages that use this ritual only do so because it has remained *unpublished*, which implies they have something to offer outsiders that is not readily available. Both William Breeze (1955– ) and Phyllis Seckler (1917–2004) personally told me this fact, which I documented in my diaries. Although I have heard their arguments, I still adhere to the fact that, according to Aleister Crowley, there are NO group rituals in the A.:A.:, and I have yet to find one shred of evidence which says “except *Liber DCLXXI vel Troa*” or that he put any of his initiates through this ritual while he was alive.

The question now to ponder is what happened to our noble Order just prior to Aleister Crowley’s death? For starters, it almost faded into obscurity. Although there were some members, in truth, only a small handful remained active worldwide, and, after his death on December 1<sup>st</sup> of 1947, even fewer. It is also no secret that Crowley left absolutely no provisions in his Last Will and Testament regarding what should happen to the A.:A.: upon his death. This has been the root of many problems plaguing the fraternity today.

We do know that there were a few individuals who held the degree of Magister Templi (8°=3°), such as Charles Stansfeld Jones (1886–1950), Wilfred Talbot Smith (1885–1957), Karl Germer (1885–1962), and possibly a few others. Of these, Germer was the closest to Crowley at the time of his death, but he emphatically believed that he was *not* the designated successor of the A.:A.: He staggered on this issue until his own death on October 25<sup>th</sup>, 1962. Therefore, contrary to what anyone would have you believe, the best we can say today is that Germer remained the Order’s senior member to whom others looked for guidance until his death.

For the next thirty years or so, no single individual came forward to assume leadership of the Order. Of course, in the early 1990s, there were ex-Marcelo-Mottaites who harped that Karl Germer was, in fact, automatically Head of the A.:A.: regardless of if he accepted such while alive—as if they, not one of whom resided the Above the Abyss, knew the inner workings of the Secret Chiefs. Their mythmaking was needed to promote the idea that their teacher, Marcelo Motta (1931–1987), assumed responsibility of leadership upon Germer’s death, since he was supposedly the highest-ranking initiate, holding the degree of 6°=5°. Then, upon acknowledging these supposed facts, it became a mere a hop, skip, and a jump in their mind to claim their right to assume the leadership of the entire Order after Motta’s death on August 26<sup>th</sup>, 1987, because, after all, *they* were the highest-ranking initiates at the time.

However, even to this day, they all refuse to prove what degrees they *did* hold at the time of Motta's death, harping on the old cliché that "we're all Hidden Masters and we don't have to tell you anything". They sounded more like the Mexican bandit leader named Gold Hat in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948) who, trying to steal something that didn't belong to him, yelled, "Badges? We don't need no stinkin' badges!" Ah, the jugglers forget, Mystery is the Enemy of Truth.

Anyway, their claims sound logical, but historical facts kick the foundation out from under them by asking the harsh question of whether Motta was really 6°=5°.

We know that Karl Germer published his edition of Aleister Crowley's *Liber Aleph: The Book of Wisdom or Folly* in September of 1961. On the inside title page, where it lists those individuals involved in the publication, Motta's symbol is listed alongside 6°=5° and followed by the title of Imperator. This title of Imperator literally means an individual whose primary function is the responsibility of hands-on management of the Order on a mundane level subject to the authority from above. Motta was obviously helping Germer get *Liber Aleph* published. There is little dispute over this fact. However, some would have you believe that Karl Germer was acknowledging Motta having attained magickally and spiritually the Qabalistic sphere of Geburah (גבורה)-5.

But is this true? Motta himself has written about his magickal accomplishments. He wrote (in the third person):

After some initial correspondence, Motta visited the Germers personally and was offered the alternative of either joining the A.:A.: or the O.T.O. He chose the former at once: He had read *One Star in Sight*, which describes exactly the kind of organization he had been looking for since he was eleven years old. It took him seven years and much tribulation to pass from Probationer to Neophyte.<sup>24</sup>

Motta informs us that his first meeting with Karl Germer occurred in 1953. However, if it took him seven years to make Neophyte, that would place him taking this degree around 1960. In other words, while he was working on *Liber Aleph*, he was not 6°=5°, but only a Neophyte 1°=10° by his own admission. To further substantiate this, in the summer of 1962, the year after *Liber Aleph* was released, and three months before Germer's death, Motta admitted that he finally "passed through the Zelator Initiation".<sup>25</sup>

Now here is the Truth. There are those who need you to believe that Motta's 6°=5° was a magickal attainment to foster the myth that he was indisputably the highest-ranking

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<sup>24</sup> Marcelo Motta & Aleister Crowley, *Magick Without Tears, being The Oriflamme Vol. VI No. 3* 1983, pp. 476-477.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid* p. 498.

initiate when Karl Germer died, but this is nothing more than a distortion of historical facts. Consider this parallel: J. F. C. Fuller is listed in many A.:A.: manuscripts as N. S. F. 5°=6°, Cancellarius. The initials N.S.F. refer to Fuller's motto, *Non Sine Fulmine*. Everyone acknowledges that this 5°=6° was an honorary degree for publishing purposes only. In truth, Fuller never got the past 0°=0° degree (Probationer). Should we now consider Fuller's 5°=6° a magickal accomplishment now that he has died? Absolutely not! The same goes for Motta. His 6°=5° is merely an honorary degree used to signify his efforts in publishing *Liber Aleph*. It does NOT refer to any magickal accomplishments, much less his possessing a leadership position over others.

There is major reason why some of Motta's ex-students needed you to believe that Motta's 6°=5° degree was magickal. Take into consideration what Karl Germer wrote: "You know that I have a high regard to P's attainment. I'm sure she has gone through 5°=6° some time ago. I'm sure she is under guidance".<sup>26</sup>

Germer is referring to one of the most dedicated, if not brilliant, A.:A.: initiates in the history of our noble Order, Phyllis Seckler. She was initiated as a Probationer on June 3rd, 1940, taking the magickal motto of *Tenax Propositi* (later *Meral*). On July 1st, 1952, she obtained the Knowledge and Conversation of her Holy Guardian Angel. She shared this belief with Karl Germer in numerous correspondences, and he acknowledges it in a letter dated July 7th, 1952:

Dear Child, your questions go to the bottom of one of the deepest problems that have puzzled and tortured all initiated men and women from time immemorial... I suppose it is the conflict with being human with a body of flesh, and the fact that you have risen to or above Tiphereth where the voice of the Secret Chiefs is gradually taking over and begins to speak to your soul.

This clearly informs us that, when Karl Germer died in 1962, Phyllis was obviously holding a much higher degree than that of Zelator that was claimed by Marcelo Motta, which means, logically, she should have assumed leadership of the Order. This is why some of Motta's ex-students needed everyone to believe that his 6°=5° was not honorary; this way they can argue that Motta held one degree higher than Phyllis Seckler, which then justifies their claim why Motta assumed head of the Order instead of her.

When this approach utterly failed, due to the obvious facts above being revealed, these same jugglers set about trashing the magickal attainments of Marcelo Motta, Kenneth Grant, Phyllis Seckler, and even Grady Louis McMurtry. In other words, if they could not

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<sup>26</sup> Letter to Jane Wolfe (1875–1958) dated June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1952.

legitimize their own claims, they set about trying to discredit all who held proper A.:A.: degrees—a tactic that they still use today.

Still, the one single historical detail that they could never easily explain away is that, while Motta was still alive, he threw all of these jugglers out of his lineage for one reason or another, which is why they had to wait until after he was dead in 1987 before they could come out trashing him—calling him a failure, making claims that Daniel Gunther was the new “World Teacher”, stating that all other A.:A.: lineages are bogus, and purporting that Gunther was the true head of the entire A.:A.:.

Be that as it may, I cannot comprehend how we’re all now expected to believe this nonsense when Motta himself wrote that Gunther “withdrew voluntarily from the A.:A.:”.<sup>27</sup> At the time he withdrew, Gunther was a failed Philosophus 4°=7° that Motta demoted to Probationer 0°=0° for failure to prove his magickal attainments in each Sephira—a problem he had until his dying day. Regardless, Gunther quit the Order, and, on that note, need I remind the reader what Aleister Crowley wrote in regards to the A.:A.: “Listen, we pray you, with attention: for once only does the Great Order knock at any one door” (*Liber LXI vel Cavae*)?

Here are the facts. Due to Karl Germer’s self-imposed isolation, his death was not discovered or openly acknowledged for many years, and Crowley’s teachings nearly vanished into the obscurity thanks to the infectious Saturnian actions of Germer (aka Frater Saturnus) against his proverbial children (i.e., initiates) that scattered them worldwide.

However, seeds planted long ago were slowly coming to birth. By the mid-nineteen-sixties, a new thirst for Crowley’s wisdom and knowledge was beginning to emerge. Somehow Crowley knew this was going to happen. He wrote to Grady McMurtry in 1944 predicting that “1965 e.v. should be a critical period in the development of the Child Horus”.<sup>28</sup> Grady explained that Crowley spoke not of an adult Horus, but of a “child”, as if to imply the New Aeon, slowly crawling along, would then be learning to walk. Crowley was absolutely right. Soon, books started appearing like water—books long out-of-print, each grooming a new generation of Thelemites. I know this because I was one of them. This period kick-started me and others with the publication of Crowley’s autobiography titled *The Confessions* (1969), followed by *The Book of Thoth* (1969), *The Book of Lies* (1970), *777* (1970), *Atlantis: The Lost Continent* (1970), *Little Essays Toward Truth*

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<sup>27</sup> *The Equinox*, Vol. V, No. 4, 1981, p. xi.

<sup>28</sup> Letter to Grady Louis McMurtry dated November 21<sup>st</sup>, 1944.

(1970), *The Diary of a Drug Fiend* (1970), *Moonchild* (1970), and *The Equinox of the Gods* (1971/72), among others.

But, the great catalyst came in 1972. This is when the entire ten volume set of Crowley's *The Equinox*, subtitled *The Review of Scientific Illuminism*—which was the official publication of a mystical organization called the A.:A.:—was re-released. Other books soon followed extrapolating Thelemic theory: Kenneth Grant's *The Magical Revival* (1972), *The Vision & the Voice* (1972), *Magick in Theory and Practice* (1973), *The Qabalah of Aleister Crowley* (1973), *Magick Without Tears* (1973), *The Blue Equinox* (1973), Francis Kings' *The Secret Rituals of the O.T.O.* (1973), *Gems from the Equinox* (1974), *Magical and Philosophical Commentaries to the Book of the Law* (1974), and *Liber Aleph: The Book of Wisdom or Folly* (1974), to name but a few. Even books by obscure writers like Frater Achad (Charles Stansfeld Jones) were being reprinted: *QBL* (1972), *The Anatomy of the Body of God* (1973), and *The Egyptian Revival* (1973). Kenneth Grant also released his second book *The Hidden God* (1973). Many Crowley-oriented books appeared in the early seventies, more than can be listed, the gist being that there was a revival underway.

Further, this period signified when old Crowleyites like Grady Louis McMurtry, his wife Phyllis Seckler, Kenneth Grant, Marcelo Motta, and others, who had been working the A.:A.: system privately for years and who were involved in publishing the books listed above, were slowly coming into their own rights. Still, and contrary to what some would have you to believe, it is during this period in our history, and not during Crowley's lifetime, that the A.:A.: started functioning to establish a real foundation and foothold in the world.

However, many of the movers and shakers listed above—from Europe to Brazil to the United States—were experiencing their own private ordeals. Each was studying a wealth of new books and starting to embrace ground-breaking and innovative ideas that had been emerging since the birth of our noble Order. Bathed in an ever-changing world of writers, musicians, poets, and artists, each branch brought new food to the table to teach their students. The Order was not standing still.

The idea that someone all of the sudden appeared over them and dictated what was right and wrong in the ways of the Order was foreign to each. This is an important fact because it created the structure of our noble A.:A.: as it presently stands worldwide — splintered into independent lineages. Still, although each bloodline often disagrees with much of what the others preach, we all believe that “Success is thy proof: argue not; convert not; talk not overmuch!” (*AL* III:42). Grady McMurtry strongly taught us to leave it up to Gods to determine who would and would not be cast to the side of the road, because “it



may be that yonder beggar is a King” (*AL* II:58), and he never wanted to second-guess the motive of Gods.

The next critical stage in the developmental cycle of the A.:A.: occurred when many of the students of the above-mentioned individuals began coming into *their* own rights in the mid-nineteen eighties, shortly after Grady McMurtry’s death. Unfortunately, Hadit warns us, “the Eighties cower before me, & are abased (*AL* III:46). This was a period of pettiness and mythmaking, of fighting, and of lawsuits and the outright degradation of our once-noble Order.

In Truth, we should not fret over the actions of our Secret Chiefs. For all practical purposes, the A.:A.: was simply transmuting in an alchemical furnace into a far more Thelemic organization by offering diversity of thought, rather than the rigidity of only one way. Grady often used the analogy of a Tree for the A.:A.:. He said the roots are well-founded in Crowley, but all its branches (i.e., lineages) grew in different directions. The fruits of this Tree are distinctly dependent upon the leadership of each branch or lineage. This was his way of explaining how others could be in the same Order but not be connected to him.

To me this shows the beauty of our Order: never trying to corner the market on Truth, while being so eclectic in Our labors that it aids the diversity of humanity, rather than the Egotistical Wants of a select few. This is true Thelema. Whether this was Crowley’s intent when he set up the Order, it has now evolved as such over the period of years since his death.

In other words, the A.:A.:, guided by the Secret Chiefs, is a beautifully growing tree whose branches reach toward the heavens with each lineage intended to fulfill the varied needs of Thelemites worldwide. Ironically, some branches face the Sun more so than others. The branches bathed in the Sun’s light produce fruit rooted in the True Will of Humanity (Universal Consciousness), while those furthest away from direct sunlight tend to produce fruit mimicking the needs of a specific individual’s Personal Will and ego.

I should point out that there is a modern movement afoot to discourage, if not adamantly deny, the concept of lineages. As an example, a noted member of Gunther’s lineage, James Wasserman (1948–2020) writes in his autobiography:

I will add that had he [Marcelo Motta] and Grady [McMurtry] been able to work out the agreement I tried so hard to help them craft, the entire modern

fallacy of A.:A.: “lineages” would never have developed. That unfortunate conceptual model was born in 1976.<sup>29</sup>

For the record, both Grady Louis McMurtry and Marcelo Motta were Magister Templi 8°=3°, while Jim Wasserman was a mere Probationer 0°=0°, and had yet to even officially join the Order. Is there any wonder why they ignored his suggestions? His ego failed to consider the possibility that perhaps Grady and Motta knew better than him. Anyway, if there was *any* modern fallacy fostered back in 1976 it is *his* belief, and that of other ex-Mottaites, that there are no A.:A.: lineages. Still, we must acknowledge that if there is a Magister Templi 8°=3° in *any* lineage, then they have the undisputed right to descend below the Abyss and tend a garden that offers unique insight and knowledge not readily taught below by others. That is our Law. But what should be a warning to all is something Aleister Crowley wrote in *One Star in Sight*: “Certain swindlers have recently stolen the initials A.:A.: in order to profit by its reputation.”

This was true in his lifetime and is true even today.

Still, all other lineages, Grady McMurtry’s included, have never denied that there is only one A.:A.: above the Abyss. We all strongly believe that the roots and trunk of this ever-growing Tree is firmly planted on this foundation established by our prophet, Aleister Crowley, back in 1907. But, many of the branches on this Tree have mutated and grown, and today there are no two lineages alike in either leadership or teachings. Should all branches adhere to the rule of one? Hardly. Such behavior is contrary to the tenets of Thelema and simply fostered by a new breed of Restrictionists.

As for Grady Louis McMurtry’s role in the A.:A.:, he was born on October 18<sup>th</sup>, 1918, in Big Cabin, Oklahoma. He took Minerval and First-Degree Initiation into the O.T.O. on June 13<sup>th</sup>, 1941. He served in World War II and, while stationed in England, met Aleister Crowley, who not only acknowledged him a IX° initiate, but also sent him the now-infamous “Caliphate letters”. Crowley felt that if he was the prophet of the New Aeon and of Thelema, as Mohammed was to Islam, then the title “Caliph” fits quite nicely to designate the spiritual aspect of descent, while the position of O.H.O. represents the material aspect. In these letters, he prophesied about the possibility that someday Grady might need to step up and assume this role. More importantly, he chose Grady’s magickal motto, this being *Hymenaeus Alpha 777*.

Fratr Achad (Charles Stansfeld Jones, 1886–1950) had previously held the sacred number 777, which signified the Magickal Son, or heir to the Beast’s legacy, but, as history has shown, he ultimately failed. Grady later commented in a letter to Phyllis Seckler as to

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<sup>29</sup> *In The Center of the Fire* (2012), p. 210.

why Crowley had given him the number 777 and how it signified that he was his new “adopted son”.<sup>30</sup> In a letter to Phyllis, he mused, “[W]hy didn’t he ‘publicly’ say so?” He later answered this himself, saying that he believed the answer is found in Crowley’s November 21<sup>st</sup>, 1943 letter in which Crowley laments, “It has been hell; so many have come up with amazing promise, only to go on the rocks”. The reference is, of course, in part to the failure of Achad. Grady admits that Crowley knew that in “the ordinary course of events, finding a student, training, schooling him, had not produced the heir”.

Grady added that, in the past, Crowley’s proclaiming Achad as the son “may have even have prevented it [*sic*] by letting loose Goetic forces that destroyed the ‘crown prince’”. Grady used the ancient Chinese parable of the Grandmother who,

when confronted with some idiot complimenting her on the beauty of her latest grandchild, immediately throws the demons off the scent by proclaiming loudly how ugly it is, how deformed, how poor in appearance, etc., for she knows, from ancient wisdom, that the maleficent forces only attack the rare, the good, and the beautiful, for why should they attack that which is already ugly, deformed and of no value?

How did Crowley come to learn to circumvent this problem? Grady claims, that “[Crowley] adopted the role of indirection”. Grady felt that Crowley did not want

to blast my chances, and possibly me, by holding forth his hand [to acknowledge Grady as his son] because he knew by then, from very sad experience, what frightening, and unknown, forces could be set in motion simply by the holding forth his hand.

In other words, to keep the Goetic forces at bay, “[h]e could help an individual create certain possibilities, but he could not complete those possibilities. That was up to the individual involved”. He merely wanted to plant the magickal seed of 777 to let it grow. Grady acknowledged this belief by writing that Crowley

accepted me as his magical son, but felt that, for various reasons, it would be best not to say so at the time... I think that he did, on pronouncing my number to be 777, accepted me [*sic*] as the magical son he had been talking to when he wrote *Liber Aleph*.

Yes, throughout his life, Grady would be torn between trying to live up to Crowley’s interpretation of the number 777, while at the same time grooming his tree to stand tall to fulfill the task wherein Achad had failed. Although Crowley had chosen Grady to be his

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<sup>30</sup> Letter dated January 28<sup>th</sup>, 1969.

magickal heir, it took Grady more than twenty-plus years to fulfill this role and assume its responsibility.

On April 24<sup>th</sup>, 1970, he swore the Oath of the Abyss, thus becoming a Magister Templi 8°=3° in the A.:A.:. Grady also assumed the position of Outer Head of Order of the O.T.O., or X°. Years later, on October 12<sup>th</sup>, 1977, as both Caliph and Magus 9°=2° he uttered his Word, this being “O.T.O.”. This affirmation established the magickal current necessary to revitalize the Order that has since spread worldwide. How can we dispute the power of a Magus?

Grady also chartered Thelema Lodge (i.e., Grand Lodge) in Berkeley, California on the same day. Sadly, Grady died on July 12<sup>th</sup>, 1985, in California after a long illness.<sup>31</sup>

The question that now needs to be addressed is, “What happened to Grady McMurtry’s branch or lineage of the A.:A.: after he died”? The story begins with me, J. Edward Cornelius.

I joined the A.:A.: in the summer of 1979. I moved up grade by grade, and, on April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1984, after deeply searching my soul, I swore the Oath of the Abyss in front of Grady in Syracuse, New York and assumed the degree of Magister Templi 8°=3°, as well as taking the VIII° of the noble Fraternity of Ordo Templi Orientis. Later that day, Grady gave me his personal copy of *The Book of Thoth*—the 1969 Shambhala Press edition. As I stood with my friend Luis Alvarado, Grady told me, “Someday, that’ll mean something to you.” At the time, I simply wrote his comment in my diary. It would be weeks before I noticed that this book was a numbered edition, it being number 777. The ultimate question that plagued me for years was why Grady carried this particular book, of all books, all the way from California to give to me? It reminded me that a few years earlier, in 1980, when Grady published Crowley’s 777, he sent me a copy inscribed with the following words: “Jerry, Here’s to a Bear for Work!” About a month later, he visited me in Connecticut and told me never to take this pamphlet lightly. He told me, and I quote, “there was a secret that someday I’d discover about.” I would spend years trying to figure out the secret behind the inscription until one day, thinking about *The Book of Thoth*, I realized the obvious about both—it was the number 777.

Grady, like Crowley before him, was trying to circumvent the Goetic problem by giving me the many references to 777, which was like planting the seed “indirectly” for me

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<sup>31</sup> To read the full biography of Grady Louis McMurtry see *Grady Louis McMurtry: The Man, the Myth, and the Legend* (2023) by J. Edward Cornelius.

to be his heir. This meant, similar to his predecessors, Grady McMurtry left no written provisions for anyone to take over his branch or lineage of the A.:A.:.

However, the ordeals that I was going through at the time of Grady's death were severe—myself being honed in my own alchemical furnace—and I felt that I should remain in my Magical Retreat, but I also remembered something that Aleister Crowley had written to Grady in November of 1944:

One of the (startling few) commands given to me was this: 'Trust not a stranger: fail not of an heir.' This has been the very devil for me. Fr. Saturnus is of course the natural Caliph; but there are many details concerning the actual policy or working which hit his blind spots. In any case, he can only be a stopgap, because of his age; I have to look for his successor.

At the end of this letter Crowley added a note paraphrasing John Bunyan's (1628–1688) book *The Pilgrim's Progress from this World to that Which is to Come; Delivered under the Similitude of a Dream*, as if to tell Grady that this was how he had to assume leadership: "My Sword to him that can get it".

Knowing these circumstances, I knew exactly what must be done. On April 22<sup>nd</sup> of 1989, I officially "grabbed the sword" and assumed the head of Grady McMurtry's branch of A.:A.:.

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Addendum (1/5/2025):

## Recent History of Our Lineage

by

Erica Johnson

As of this writing, two years have passed since J. Edward “Jerry” Cornelius (1951–2023) shed his incarnation. Like his predecessors, he left no written provisions for an official head to take over his branch of the A.:A.: In his case, it was intentional. He had ample time to name someone, and he created a clear Last Will and Testament. Having examined the history, he must have trusted in the Gods.

At the end of his life, Jerry told me he considered me his 777 and willed me the 1969 Shambhala Press edition of *The Book of Thoth*, numbered 777, the very same volume that Grady had given him to communicate that possibility. In my view, the true reason that he looked toward me is that, as a workhorse who got along well with Jerry, I was the last person standing who was willing to take the job.

In any case, it turns out that he was wrong. Rather, I was destined to serve as the glue between Jerry and his successor, Christopher Reed Johnson (1980– ). Having trained closely with Jerry from 2013 until his death, I embody the continuity between Jerry’s leadership and Christopher’s (that of *Laus Priapo Deo* 217).

In 1998, Chris self-signed the A.:A.: Probationer Oath, affirming his solemn intention to undergo the A.:A.: Ordeals and pursue the Great Work. In November of the same year, he took his Minerval initiation into the Ordo Templi Orientis (O.T.O.), followed by First Degree and Second Degree over the next two years. For almost a couple of decades, he performed the Great Work on his own while also spending his time attending and providing service for over a dozen Vipassana meditation courses. Then, in November of 2019, after taking Third Degree the previous year, he finished the man of Earth in the O.T.O. by taking Fourth Degree and P. I.

Soon thereafter, in January of 2022, he joined the McMurtry lineage as a Probationer, rapidly rising through the grades to Tiphareth while Jerry was still alive. On May 23, 2023, at 3:33 AM, he took the Oath of the Abyss.

Early on, numerous signs and synchronicities were apparent to me that he had arrived on the doorstep of Our Lineage to fulfill a special destiny. Prior to these events, he

had never thought of taking the Oath of the Abyss, much less assuming the head of the A.:A.:. Yet, during the second meeting they had before Jerry died, Jerry gave Christopher the black rock that Grady had given to him years earlier, saying, “Don’t trip on this. It is your destiny.”

After Jerry passed in December of 2023, he was presented with the opportunity to “grab the sword” as Hymenaeus Epsilon, which he did without question.

Soror Absorbeo 410

# ON WHY NOT TO JOIN THE A.:A.:

by

Erica Johnson

Though it might not seem so when you first enter it, the A.:A.: path is one of service to all humanity. This can prove inconvenient or even dangerous—especially if you venture beyond the man-of-Earth Qabalistic spheres, Malkuth-10 and Yesod-9. We offer this essay to give fair warning. Really! Walking a spiritual path sounds like such a nice idea, but it can have its price. Remember, you can remain a good person and not give up your ordinary life. If you feel any hesitation about losing control of your life to a higher Will, it's best not to take initiation. There is no free lunch.

Although I'll be talking in this essay about Aleister Crowley's vertical school, the A.:A.:, the same considerations apply to undergoing the chakra-opening rituals of the Ordo Templi Orientis (O.T.O.), Crowley's horizontal order. Some people who do so experience no problems, whether because they were ready or because the rituals didn't work. However, no one should consider the ceremonies "safe", despite the casual way in which they are sometimes encouraged. Don't get me wrong—I cherish the O.T.O. rites as they were originally intended. They are brilliant and powerful. But even without the reprehensible Oaths of personal loyalty with which they have been adulterated, they can wreck marriages, careers, and health. It all depends on how far out of alignment you are with the Will when you effectively invite the Universe to take corrective action.

Many people have heard of the "ordeals" of the magickal path. In short, every time you take a serious step on the vertical path, Nature tries to drag you down again. It's just the nature of duality: every action is compensated by an equally powerful reaction. Some of the most seductive ordeals are pleasant: new love, a juicy job-offer, an unexpected chance to travel the world, etc. The worst they can do is negate your intent and land you back at square one. They don't harm you other than by enmeshing you more deeply in the world-illusion, and they may even make your life feel richer.

Unfortunately, the ordeals just as often take unpleasant forms—a break-up, death in the family, personal illness or injury, excommunication, social abandonment, financial stagnation, job loss, reputation damage, family problems—and the list goes on. I make this list easily by casting my mind back over what I've either experienced or witnessed. The general thrust of this natural compensatory movement: anything to distract you from the Path.



The further up the Tree of Life you climb, the trickier the challenges and the more serious the consequences if you fail. After fasting for 40 days and nights in the desert, Jesus Christ is said to have been offered the whole world by Satan. The only way to have the fortitude to turn down such an offer is to see clearly how hollow and transitory its supposed benefits are.

The more responsibility you assume to help humanity by offering your lifetime as a pure vehicle of the Will, the higher the stakes. The basic trajectory is to realize progressively that all ideas of personal benefit enmesh their bearer in soul-destroying illusions. Pure Joy consists in the realization of Unity in the No-Self. Unfortunately, it is always possible to pervert the Power of Universal Will toward the ever-lurking egoic delusion. The aspirant must develop the necessary safeguards against tragedy: discipline, purity, patience, devotion, self-awareness, a bullshit meter, among others. I will write of the specifics for each magickal Grade in a separate essay. Here I simply intend to warn the would-be aspirant, especially those who are fond of their ordinary life: if you don't want to be disillusioned, don't come here. Personally, I love this life and wouldn't trade it. But I won't lie to you: to get here I've had to spend years in hell overcoming my own demons. To some degree or other, no one can avoid such things. But if you take initiation, you hasten the process. We just thought you should know.

# THE WORK OF THE A.:A.:

by

Laus Priapo Deo 217

As Thelemites, we study *The Book of the Law* constantly to live in accord with the Law of Freedom. *The Book of the Law* can guide, not only our conduct, but also our engagement with our Divine Star.

In that spirit, the following commentary by Aleister Crowley on *Liber L vel Legis* III:63-67 describes the spiritual practitioner's climb up the Tree of Life. Thus, it gives an overview of the whole vertical system—"Berashith."<sup>32</sup>

The first ordeal corresponds to the work of the A.:A.: man of Earth.

The second ordeal corresponds to the work of the A.:A.: Lover.

The third ordeal corresponds to the work of the A.:A.: Hermit.

The fourth...

In summary, the cumulative, ongoing work is 1) to embrace your body and sexuality, 2) to confront and overcome your mental phantoms, 3) to realize your identity with God, and 4) to realize that nothing exists.

Though not described in what follows, the vertical A.:A.: work must always be counterbalanced by the horizontal work of *Liber ThISHARB*, thinking backward through one's life to trace the original cause, which is the intent with which one (as the Angel) took the incarnation. In other words, in addition to looking ahead up the Tree, the practitioner must equally look back to his or her past on Earth.

## *Liber L vel Legis*, III:63-67

63. The fool readeth this Book of the Law, and its comment & he understandeth it not.

64. Let him come through the first ordeal & it will be to him as silver

65. Through the second, gold.

66. Through the third, stones of precious water.

67. Through the fourth, ultimate sparks of the intimate fire.

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<sup>32</sup> I strongly recommend studying Crowley's "Berashith: An Essay in Ontology," for the philosophical heart of the Thelemic doctrine.

Crowley's Commentary from *The Magical and Philosophical Commentaries on The Book of the Law*:<sup>33</sup>

The "Tree of Life" in the Qabalah represents ten spheres arranged in three pillars, the central one of these containing four, and the others three each. These spheres are attributed to certain numbers, planets, metals, and many other groups of things; indeed all things may be referred to one or other of them. The four ordeals now to be described represent the ascent of the aspirant from the tenth and lowest of these spheres, which refers to the Earth, unregenerate and confused, in which the aspirant is born. He riseth in the first ordeal to the sphere called the Foundation, number 9, and containing, among other ideas, those of the generative organs, Air, the Moon, and Silver. Its secret Truth is that Stability is identical with Change; of this we are reminded by the fact that any multiple of 9 has 9 for the sum of its digits.

The initiate will now perceive that the sum of the motions of his mind is zero, while, below their moon-like phases and their Air-like divagations, the sex- consciousness abides untouched, the true Foundation of the Temple of his body, the Root of the Tree of Life that grows from Earth to Heaven. This Book is now to him "as silver". He sees it pure, white, and shining, the mirror of his own being that this ordeal has purged of its complexes. To reach this sphere he has had to pass through a path of darkness where the Four Elements seem to him to be the Universe entire. For how should he know that they are no more than the last of the 22 segments of the Snake that is twined on the Tree?

Assailed by gross phantoms of matter, unreal and unintelligible, his ordeal is of terror and darkness. He may pass only by favour of his own silent God, extended and exalted within him by virtue of his conscious act in affronting the ordeal.

The next sphere reached by the aspirant is named Beauty, numbered 6, and referred to the heart, to the Sun, and to Gold. Here he is called an "Adept". The secret Truth in this place is that God is Man, symbolized by the Hexagram, (in which two triangles are interlaced).

In the last sphere he learnt that his Body was the Temple of the Rosy Cross, that is, that it was given him as a place wherein to perform the Magical Work of uniting the oppositions in his Nature. Here he is taught that his Heart is the Centre of Light. It is not dark, mysterious, hollow, obscure even to himself, but his Soul is to dwell there, radiating Light on the six spheres which surround it; these represent the various powers of

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<sup>33</sup> Crowley, A. (1974). *The Magical and Philosophical Commentaries on The Book of the Law*. Montreal: 93 Publishing, pp. 295-297.

his mind. This Book now appears to him as Gold; it is the perfect metal, the symbol of the Sun itself. He sees God everywhere therein.

To this sphere hath the aspirant come by the Path called *Temperance*, shot as an arrow from a Rainbow. He hath beheld the Light, but only in division. Nor had he won to this sphere except by Temperance, under which name we mask the art of pouring freely forth the whole of our Life, to the last spilth of our blood, yet losing never the least drop thereof.

Now once again the adept aspires and comes to the sphere called the Crown numbered I, referred to the God Ra-Hoor-Khuit himself in man, to the Beginning of Whirling Motions, and the First Mode of Matter. Its secret Truth is that Earth is Heaven as Heaven is Earth, and shows the aspirant to himself as being a star. All that seemed to him reality is not even to be deemed illusion, but all one light infusing star and star. The Many, each of them, are the One; each individual, no twain alike, yet all identical; this he knows and is, for now the Word hath lightened his soul's girders. (The logic of the Ruach – evidently, impossible to “explain” how this can be.)

In the Number 6 he saw God interlocked with man, two trinities made one; but here he knows that there was never but one.

Thus now this Book is ‘stones of precious water’; its Light is not the borrowed light of gold, but is shed through the Book itself, clear-sparkling, flashed from its facets. Each phrase is a diamond; each is diverse, yet all identical. In each the one Light laughs!

Now to this sphere came he by the Path called the *High Priestess*; She is his Silent Self, virgin beyond all veils, made free to teach him, by virtue of this third ordeal wherein, passing through the abyss, he has stripped from him every rag of falsehood, his last complexes, even his phantasy that he called ‘I’. And so he knows at last how the soiled harlot's dress was mere disguise; naked in Moonlight shines the maiden Body! Beyond the One, how shall he pass on? What is this One, which is in every place the Centre of All? Indeed the logic-girders of our souls need lightening, if we would win to freedom of such Truth as this!

Now in the ‘stones of precious water’ the Light leapt clear indeed, but they were not themselves that Light. This sphere of the One is indeed Ra-Hoor-Khuit; is not our Crowned and Conquering Child the source of Light? Nay, he is finite form of Unity, child of two married infinities; and in this last ordeal the aspirant must go even beyond his Star. finding therein the core thereof of Hadit, and losing it also in the Body of Nuith.

Here is no Path that he may tread, for all is equally everywhere; nor is there any sphere to attain, for measure is now no more.

There are no words to make known the Way or the End, where the End is one with the Way; this only is said, that to him that hath passed through this fourth ordeal this Book is as 'ultimate sparks'. No more do they reflect or transmit the Light; they themselves are the original, the not-to-be-analysed Light, of the 'intimate fire' of Hadit! He shall see the Book as it is, as a shower of the Seed of the Stars!

# PROBATIONER READINGS

## 10-Malkuth (מלכות)

### AN OPEN EPISTLE ON THE NOTION OF VERTICALITY

by

Frater ZLA<sup>282</sup>

Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law. –AL I:40

*Saladin: “Chafe not, therefore, at the apparent restrictions which your obligations place upon you. They are designed solely to enable you to do your will.”*

–Minerval Degree, O.T.O.

In our Ritual of the Pentagram, we create The Universe daily. In the Center Stands the Six-Rayed Star, Above and Below come into being with the Qabalistic Cross, and the Four Directions are birthed with the Four Quarters of the Elements, where we place the Archangels as Protectors and Watchers of this our Sphere of Existence. This personal Universe centers around three Cartesian Planes which define three-dimensional Space, the intersections of all three planes being the Point, the invisible origin of our Star. This may sound elementary and appear self-evident, yet we often forget this most basic sense experience of Malkuth.

One of the three planes that defines Infinite Space (Our Goddess Nuit, may She be Blessed) is of course the one that delineates Above and Below, the vertical plane, therefore the notion of Verticality. One most basic assumption in Magick is: As Above, So Below. Chapter 1, Verse 3 of our Holy Book of Thelema states: “Every man and every woman is a star.” Neither of these ideas makes any sense without the notion of Verticality. Spirit

cannot soar and Soul cannot reach its depths without this notion. More commonly we say, “What goes up must come down.”

The experience of Verticality is inherent in the species homo sapiens. The infant inherently comes into Being with the notion of Verticality. If you place a toddler of the appropriate age onto a piece of transparent glass where below the glass are wooden steps, the toddler will crawl to the edge of the top step but will refuse to go further perceiving that there is a drop that could harm it. An older child will of course perceive the transparent barrier and gladly walk across the glass surface unharmed.

The human being incorporates the notion of Verticality into the very structures of its culture: there is an Above and there is a Below and a tension or power differential between them. Our first experience of this tension is that between child and parent, our first experience of Authority. Whether this is justified or not, the human being translates Verticality to the notion of Authority, which means to have dominion or power over something or someone. There are only two responses to Authority, submission or defiance of the lower to the higher, of the inferior to the superior, of the weaker to the stronger. In other animal species this submission or defiance happens with no judgments and usually without the loss of life. With human society elitism is born, with elitism envy, and with envy the justification for murder; refer to the story of Cain and Abel for a better understanding of this experience of Verticality.

Each of us carries within us these experiences of Verticality, of our experiences of Authority, and it cannot be helped nor denied.

Every culture imagines Verticality differently. If we accept, for the moment, that all culture is born from Religion, or worship of the Gods, then Verticality must have Divine origins as well, and we can look to the Gods of a culture to better understand that particular culture’s integration of Verticality.

The Ancient Greeks described Verticality as Father Uranus, the Sky and Mother Gaia, the Earth. Uranus hid his children within the Earth until the time that his son Saturn castrated him and freed his siblings. For his part, Saturn swallowed his own children born to his sister Rhea, until his son Zeus overthrew him and imprisoned him within the Earth. Mark well our particular culture’s imagination of Verticality.

No matter the variety of ways that Verticality comes into being, each of us must come to terms with it. We are all born helpless, and throughout our lives we find ourselves helpless and newborn repeatedly, if we are fortunate, for change is stability. Every time we are newly born, we must submit, for we are helpless and untried, inexperienced and callow, confused and confusing. If we are lucky, we are given at least one nurturing parent who

protects us, nurtures us and sees the Future of what this newborn is meant to become. Abuse happens, which is why every system of human culture finds ways to protect the most vulnerable. Issues of trust and submission belong in this landscape, and we must all come to terms with these as well.

Religion comes into this discourse because Verticality is most distinctly articulated within the religious imagery of God and Human.

Thelema is a religion whether we wish to accept this or not. The pursuit of the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel is a religious activity whether we wish to accept it or not.

In fact, an Atheist cannot and will not accept the idea of Verticality. It is impossible for that person to know Verticality outside of their very limited Ego. The best they can hope for is the admittance of the wholly material idea of verticality, of power and control. The most an Atheist can hope for is existential angst! Epiphanies, the greatest turning points in our lives, cannot happen if you believe there is no God and all you have is Ego. Grace for certain cannot happen, because Grace is of the Gods.

How can you claim to seek your Angel and not believe in God? How can you come before your Elders if you do not believe in God? How can you be a Student and submit before a Teacher if you do not believe in God?

The only answer to right Submission without pride, guilt, or shame—Reverence—comes from believing in God. We submit to the Teacher because he or she is a regent of God; we submit to our Parents because they are regents of God (as the Jewish Commandments tell us); we submit to the Priest or Priestess because they are regents of God.

I would like to share a story. In my graduate classes of three years, every time our cohorts met, we built an altar with images we each brought to class. During our last week together, our instructor Aftab Omer gave us a challenge the very first afternoon: could we all build an altar with our individual images that we could all bow before and honor?

This threw the eighteen of us into complete upheaval; needless to say, that altar was never built, although many attempts were made.

“Every man and every woman is a star.” The reason we could not build that altar was so simple in hindsight: we forgot that behind every Star there is a God or Goddess. When we bow to another we bow not to their Ego, not to the very limited sense of who they may be, we bow because there is a God or Goddess within them, through them, and beyond them. “And the Elohim created Ateh-ha-Adam: in the image of the Elohim created they them; female and male created they them.” It is instructive that this prayer from the



Rituals of the Golden Dawn is recited before the Earth Quarter, Malkuth, Our Bodies—ashes to ashes, dust to dust. This dust is sacred.

God is dead in Western culture. All human beings are fallible, so why should we bow before anyone? Where there is no God there is no Authority beyond the Human, so abuses happen daily.

Thelema is very attractive to the Godless. “Do what thou wilt” becomes do what you want, because they forget that the “thou” in the sentence refers to God, to a person’s Angel.

In a way, the challenge of Thelema is precisely the task I was challenged to do in my graduate class: creating a world altar with individual images (Stars) that we can all bow before and honor. It is the ultimate challenge to humanity, which has not done a great job of it, although there have been periods and cultures that have come closer than others.

These are all complex ideas and careful meditation on the notion of Verticality is necessary.

This Epistle is really about the student-teacher relationship.

Crowley wrote that the relationship between student and teacher should be so strong that if the student takes an oath of obedience and the teacher tells the student to jump off a cliff, the student should most studiously jump forthwith without hesitation. This is, of course, hyperbole. What I see in this idea of Crowley’s is that we should practice with our beloved Teacher all these complex layers of Verticality. We come before our Teacher with reverence and trust and submission, and our Teacher must never betray that trust; it is a sacred bond. No true Teacher would tell their Student to jump off a cliff. Beware, for there are False Teachers around every corner.

If you cannot and will not yield to your teacher, how can you yield before your Angel?

Dear Student, this Epistle is about what it means to be a student, and what it means to be a teacher. The A.:A.: is a system that requires we learn the roles and the tasks of both sides of this sacred relationship, and the cornerstone of this relationship is the notion of Verticality. Come to terms with that!

Love is the law, love under will. –*AL I:57*

# ON THE ART OF BEING A STUDENT (AND OTHER INTENTIONAL FOLLY)

by  
Erica Johnson

“Every intentional act is a Magical act.”  
—Aleister Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice*

It may seem that you already know how to be an A.:A.: student. However, the first thing to understand about joining Aleister Crowley’s A.:A.: is that you have entered a New World. It may look just like the old one; however, it is anything but, and there is no worse mistake than treating it as ordinary. Here your Teacher and Superiors are—or should be—a mirror for you. They have already assumed the position as your servants, so why not?

It is an error to receive your Superior’s speech as if debating an opinion with your philosophy buddy, or even as if taking notes from an esteemed professor. You are performing a magickal invocation of your Holy Guardian Angel, achieving at first the Vision of the H.G.A. in the mirror of your Teacher (and elsewhere). Hear and see your Self in him or her—and act accordingly. Learn how to dream lucidly and intentionally while awake.

Especially if you just want to express your pre-formed opinions as if you are already the highest authority, why be here? You could have done that on your own. There is no truth below the Abyss, so learn how to wield your words and actions to coax out your Ineffable Truth. This is the gateway to Selfless Service.

The Angel is Within and Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law. So why would you subject yourself to an external teacher through the A.:A.:? Or why would you pretend to? Why would you join the A.:A.:? Obviously, you must answer these questions for yourself.

While you ponder your own decision, consider the following quote from Aleister Crowley:

The best vow, and that of most universal application, is the vow of Holy Obedience; for not only does it lead to perfect freedom, but is a training in that surrender which is the last task.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Book 4, Part II, Chapter VI, “The Wand”.

Why would Crowley say this regressive-sounding vow is the best one? Before we examine this question, let's just state the obvious. No teacher or lineage is the be-all and end-all. We're all prophets in our own little ways, right? So how in the world could Holy Obedience ever be appropriate? Isn't your Angel your only authority? Yes. The trick of Holy Obedience is to discover your Angel in your teacher without projecting your own authority externally.

Thelemic Holy Obedience—maybe not suitable for a beginner—trains the aspirant in distinguishing the Wants of the ego from the True Will. The clue to this is found in Crowley's statement that it is “a training in that surrender which is the last task”. By “last task”, he refers to giving up the illusion of personal will upon crossing the Abyss. Few aspirants will approach this task in the present lifetime, but all will have set foot on the road that inevitably leads there. So, by “taking a vow of Holy Obedience”, Crowley means heuristically adopting a practice in which the “pupil must obey his teacher... In the A.:A.: the superior is, so to speak, the sparring partner of the pupil”.<sup>35</sup> If you prefer a lighter version of this eyebrow-raising oath, you could always vow to consider the teacher's instruction a true synchronicity worthy of integrating. In any case, Crowley likes the idea of the allowing your A.:A.: teacher to irritate you on purpose. You would do this as a way to conquer your internal demons and do your Will regardless of circumstance. Again, just something to ponder as you figure out how to use an external figure as a true magickal Guide.

People often forget, or don't realize, that your True Will lies entirely above the Abyss, such that nothing manifested contradicts it:

If therefore the Master should enjoin upon you a Vow of Holy Obedience, compliance is not a surrender of the Will, but a fulfilment thereof. For see, what hindereth you? It is either from without or from within, or both. It may be easy for the strong-minded seeker to put his heel upon public opinion, or to tear from his heart the objects which he loves, in a sense: but there will always remain in himself many discordant affections, as also the bond of habit, and these also must he conquer.<sup>36</sup>

Under Crowley, a student took a vow of Holy Obedience to master his or her own internal inertia. This should provide an insight into the all-important art of being an A.:A.: student. One way or another, you should interact with your mentor in such a way that they mirror your Angel, that hidden and divine part of yourself.

Related to the art of being a student, Aleister Crowley says that the A.:A.: Probationer is tested in loyalty to the Order. Once the aspirant affiliates, this ordeal arises

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<sup>35</sup> *Confessions*, Chapter 64.

<sup>36</sup> *De Lege Libellum*, I.

naturally as a rebalancing of that person's magickal Universe. Actually, it can happen any time. Entropy sooner or later furnishes the aspirant with opportunities to betray the Order.

Few people ever stop to examine the idea of loyalty in this context. What is loyalty? Can this seemingly old-Aeonic virtue ever resonate with the law of Thelema? If so, under what conditions?

Really, the problems that haunt the question of loyalty within the A.:A.: linger around any committed relationship in a New-Aeonic context. Other than not Restricting a fellow Star, what do you ever owe to another human being? Does it ever make Thelemic sense to dedicate yourself unselfishly to an earthly relationship? Are we all just atoms floating around (ideally) doing our individual wills, occasionally "loving the one we're with", then moving on to the next conquest, or is there still a place for unselfish commitment within a Thelemic universe? The short answer is, yes. Of course, this does not mean that everyone's Will requires it at all times.

In the A.:A.:, Loyalty is the recursive and modest virtue of not thwarting the magickal invocation of the Order's Head or of any of its loyal members. Minimally, it requires neutrality in thought, speech, and action toward their magickal projects. Conversely, betrayal occurs when someone within the manifested Order opposes his or her Force to that of someone else in that Order. As Jerry Cornelius always used to say, true Stars do not collide. Within a perfect Thelemic Order, negative unity prevails.

Consider re-reading the last paragraph. Loyalty just means playing nice while a guest in someone else's House. If you truly find that your lineage promotes a version of Thelema that you find reprehensible, by all means, leave. Again, there are so many prophets around these days—albeit, some with more purity than others. Although if you believe that no one should have the right to give you advice or make observations, you might want to work on controlling your ego before you go.

Anyway, the Loyalty ethic composes the skeleton of the A.:A.:’s magickal chain system. That is, because the Order's Teachers receive no monetary compensation, loyalty is structurally necessary. Whereas the mutual fulfilment of manifold Wants structures any contingent, capitalist organization or relationship, the unselfish fulfilment of the Universal Will structures the magickal chain system. Money betokens the fulfilment of Wants on the horizontal level of appearances; Loyalty composes the vertical, real, and magickal bonds through which multiple aspirants may form a chain capable of channeling the Will. We're all here to help one another.

As we know, in commercial relationships, the professional gets paid while the client or customer relinquishes the right to receive anything apart from the contracted product or

service. At the same time, “the customer is always right” and gets to make demands of the provider within the bounds of the contract.

By contrast, an A.:A.: Teacher acquires only a karmic debt in respect of his or her agreement to mentor the chosen pupils. In particular, the Teacher takes a sacred oath to “deny myself utterly” on behalf of their Probationers. In doing so, that person gives himself or herself unconditionally to the student—somewhat as if they had adopted a child, subject only to their own Will and the student’s fitness and Will to remain there.

Through the Teacher’s sacred commitment, the Order’s members inherently and automatically acquire the right to the Probationer’s loyalty. Since the Teacher took an oath to share the Order’s force with the student, to permit the student to undermine that very force would violate his or her own oath. To use a good, old metaphor: The Order cannot allow the student to saw off the very branch on which he or she sits. Loyalty is structurally required for the Order to exist at all.

Some members, though willing to receive the benefits of Order’s reputation, power, and collective expertise, suppose they owe nothing in return. Even such people are technically loyal so long as they never actually think, speak, or act in ways that oppose the Head’s and loyal members’ invocations.

The problem of betrayal actually arises in two cases: 1) The aspirant allows Wants to overwhelm their magickal aspirations in ways that interfere; 2) The aspirant’s Will is actually incompatible with those of the lineage’s Head and loyal members.

The first case involves someone rebelling after taking the mentor’s concern or advice highly personally. This is the case in which the aspirant’s ego is leading the Angel instead of following. Let’s say you believe the mentor is wrong about you. Or you don’t want to do the remedial task they assign. Fine. You might even detect personal flaws that are distorting their viewpoint. Even so, if you feel outrage, consider taking a step back. If they are truly restricting you or playing horrible head games, yes, leave. But be careful. Check yourself to see if any of the anger is simply a dominance move on your part. If they truly mean to help, why get angry? Do what thou wilt and let them have their own perspective.

Even though the first case is more common, the second holds a great deal of philosophical interest. Any Adept who is rising higher than Tiphareth must commit everything to their magickal invocation. Such an aspirant can’t remain content to hide his or her proverbial light under a bushel. Yet even growth like this can dovetail with the Work of the Order. As an example, take an Adept who Works in a private field, such as raising children. If someone like this takes issue with the Head’s doctrine or methods, he or she

can simply keep it to themselves. There's no need to oppose the Head's invocation, even internally, because it has nothing to do with their own project.

More frequently, burgeoning Hermits must distance themselves from the lineage because their Wills turn out to clash with the lineage's particular vibration. Some such Hermits genuinely must assert their authority and dominance, which has no place under within the parent Order. In that case, the Hermit goes out and forms his or her own School, under a new name. (The Hermit can still use the name A.:A.:, if appropriate, but must acknowledge that he or she is founding a new line.) He or she "moves away" from the Order, ceasing to trade on the affiliation. Needless to say, there is nothing wrong with this, and everything right. Even if that A.:A.: lineage helped them grow for a while, now it's time to "seek their fortune" on their own.

Of course, swindlers who advertise as if they were still within a particular A.:A.: lineage even though disloyal to it trade on "stolen glory". Such deceptive and self-serving behavior dishonors themselves and deceives innocent students.

Betrayal is really nothing more than deceiving oneself or others about the fact that one's Will is not currently aligned with that of the A.:A.: lineage's Head and loyal members. If it's not, that's ok—of course! Just leave and do what thou wilt!

# POSTCARDS TO PROBATIONERS

by  
Aleister Crowley

## THEOREMS

- I. The world progresses by virtue of the appearance of Christs (geniuses).
- II. Christs (geniuses) are men with super-consciousness of the highest order.
- III. Super-consciousness of the highest order is obtainable by known methods. Therefore, by employing the quintessence of known methods we cause the world to progress.

## ESSENTIALS OF METHOD

- I. Theology is immaterial; for both Buddha and St. Ignatius were Christs.
- II. Morality is immaterial; for both Socrates and Mohammed were Christs.
- III. Super-consciousness is a natural phenomenon; its conditions are therefore to be sought rather in the acts than in the words of those who attained it. The essential acts are retirement and concentration -- as taught by Yoga and Ceremonial Magic.

## MISTAKES OF MYSTICS

- I. Since truth is supra-rational, it is incommunicable in the language of reason.
- II. Hence all mystics have written nonsense, and what sense they have written is so far untrue.
- III. Yet as a still lake yields a truer reflection of the sun than a torrent, he whose mind is best balanced will, if he become a mystic, become the best mystic.

## THE METHOD OF EQUILIBRIUM

- I. THE PASSIONS, Etc.

I. Since the ultimate truth of teleology is unknown, all codes of morality are arbitrary.

II. Therefore the student has no concern with ethics as such.

III. He is consequently free 'to do his duty in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call him.'

## II. THE REASON

I. Since truth is supra-rational, any rational statement is false.

II. Let the student then contradict every proposition that presents itself to him.

III. Rational ideas being thus expelled from the mind, there is room for the apprehension of spiritual truth. It should be remarked that this does not destroy the validity of reasonings on their own plane.

## III. THE SPIRITUAL SENSORIUM

I. Man being a finite being, he is incapable of apprehending the infinite. Nor does his communion with infinite being (true or false) alter this fact.

II. Let then the student contradict every vision and refuse to enjoy it; first, because there is certainly another vision possible of precisely contradictory nature; secondly, because though he is God, he is also a man upon an insignificant planet. Being thus equilibrated laterally and vertically, it may be that, either by affirmation or denial of all these things together, he may attain the supreme trance.

## IV. THE RESULT

I. Trance is defined as the ek-stasis of one particular tract of the brain, caused by meditating on the idea corresponding to it.

II. Let the student therefore beware lest in that idea be any trace of imperfection. It should be pure, balanced, calm, complete, fitted in every way to dominate the mind, as it will. Even as in the choice of a king to be crowned.

III. So will the decrees of this king be just and wise as he was just and wise before he was made king. The life and work of the mystic will reflect (though dimly) the supreme guiding force of the mystic, the highest trance to which he has attained.



## YOGA AND MAGIC

I. Yoga is the art of uniting the mind to a single idea. It has four methods.

*Gnana-Yoga* Union by Knowledge

*Raja-Yoga* Union by Will

*Bhakta-Yoga* Union by Love

*Hatha-Yoga* Union by Courage

add *Mantra-Yoga* Union through Speech

*Karma-Yoga* Union through Work

*These are united by the supreme method of Silence.*

II. Ceremonial Magic is the art of uniting the mind to a single idea. It has four Methods.

The Holy Qabalah. Union by Knowledge

The Sacred Magic. Union by Will.

The Acts of Worship. Union by Love.

The Ordeals. Union by Courage.

add The Invocations. Union through Speech.

The Acts of Service. Union through Work.

*These are united by the supreme method of Silence.*

III. If this idea be any but the Supreme and Perfect idea, and the student lose control, the result is insanity, obsession, fanaticism, or paralysis and death (add addiction to gossip and incurable idleness), according to the nature of the failure. Let then the Student understand all these things and combine them in his Art...

## ON MY MISSION

I was born into a world on the brink, not only of destruction, but of spiritual bankruptcy. Amid materialism, rationalism, and scientific deification—at a moment when I had all but given up, I received a lifeline from the McMurtry A.:A.:. The Angel and the Abyss are no longer conceptual. With that encouragement, I found within myself something with which I would identify as the Gnostic Christ. Call Him Set, Pan, Abaddon... however you choose to name the Truth in Whom All Things are One in the Void.

Feeling the presence and ecstasy of the God within all of us, I am lucky. Luckier still, I now find myself at the A.:A.:’s helm; I now have a way to serve my brothers and sisters.

I am adamant to Redeem the Power that is being stolen from us through our ignorance. I offer all I have and all I am to help us banish the false web of names, images, and beliefs that serve to bring only grief to the Soul. Holiness, faith, straight-forwardness, bravery, and selflessness: by developing these qualities we can Free ourselves.

The alignment of man and woman in the New Aeon enshrines the central mystery of Thelemic Freedom.

— Frater **⌘⌘⌘⌘⌘**.

## APPENDIX I:

### ESSAYS RELATED TO THE PROBATIONER GRADE

ESSAYS IN BLACK (Nos. 1-37) ARE THOSE INCLUDED IN *ESSAYS No. 1*

ESSAYS IN DARK BLUE ARE THOSE BEING INCLUDED IN *ESSAYS No. 2*

ESSAYS IN DARK GREEN ARE THOSE BEING INCLUDED IN *ESSAYS No. 3*

ESSAYS IN RED ARE THOSE BEING INCLUDED IN *ESSAYS No. 4*

ESSAYS IN ORANGE ARE THOSE BEING INCLUDED IN *ESSAYS No. 5*

ESSAYS IN PURPLE ARE THOSE BEING INCLUDED IN *ESSAYS No. 7*

ESSAYS IN GRAY ARE THOSE BEING INCLUDED IN *ESSAYS No. 8*

ESSAYS IN LIGHT BLUE ARE THOSE BEING INCLUDED IN *ESSAYS No. 9*

ESSAYS IN LIGHT GREEN ARE THOSE BEING INCLUDED IN *ESSAYS No. 10*

ESSAYS IN AUBURN ARE THOSE CURRENTLY UNPUBLISHED OR WEB ONLY

## **STUDENT-PROBATIONER:**

### **No. 16 – ON THE MAGICAL DIARY**

by J. Edward Cornelius (February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014), 7 pages

The fundamental task of any aspiring magician is to keep a Magickal Diary. This essay illuminates Crowley's literature on how and why that tool is so important.

### **No. 26 – ON THELEMOTES**

by J. Edward Cornelius (April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012), 2 pages

Do what you want shall not be the whole of the Law. And that ain't the half of it.  
Being the folly of Thelemites.

### **No. 29 – ON THE LESSER RITUAL OF THE PENTAGRAM**

by J. Edward Cornelius (May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014), 7 pages

This essay provides practical instructions and theoretical notes on one of the most critical rituals in Western esotericism.

### **No. 30 – ON LIBER RESH VEL HELIOS**

by J. Edward Cornelius (May 12, 2014), 7 pages

In *Liber Aleph*, Crowley adjures, "Neglect never the fourfold Adorations of the Sun in his four Stations, for thereby thou doest affirm thy Place in Nature and her Harmonies." Cornelius details the benefits of performing 'Resh,' upon three progressively advanced levels.

### **No. 31 – ON THE PROPER USE OF 93**

by J. Edward Cornelius (May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2006), 2 pages

The simple truth behind why Thelemites greet one another with '93' and the importance thereof.

### **No. 94 – ON THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH, BEING A REQUIREMENT FOR JOINING THE A·A·:**

by J. Edward Cornelius (April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2015), 2 pages

The A·A·: is a college, and like any college it requires its applicants to "sell themselves" in an autobiographical sketch. This essay details that requirement.

<https://www.corneliuspublications.com/about/>

## APPENDIX II: ORIGINAL PROBATIONER TASKS

*This paper is to be returned to the Chancellor of the A.:A.:  
by the Neophyte introducing through his Zelator.*

A.:A.:  
Publication in Class D.

Imprimatur.  
D.D.S. Præmonstrator.

Date. ....

No. ....

A.:A.:

### The Task of a Probationer

0. Let any person be received by a Neophyte, the latter being responsible to his Zelator.
1. The period of Probation shall be at least one year.
2. The aspirant to the A.:A.: shall hear the Lection (*Liber LXI*) and this note of his office; IF HE WILL, shall then procure the robe of a Probationer; shall choose with deep forethought and intense solemnity a motto.
3. On reception he shall receive the robe, sign the form provided and repeat the oath as appointed, and receive the First Volume of the Book.
4. He shall commit a chapter of *Liber LXV* to memory; and furthermore, he shall study the Publications of the A.:A.: in Class B, and apply himself to such practices of Scientific Illuminism as seemeth him good.
5. Beside all this, he shall perform any tasks that the A.:A.: may see fit to lay upon him. Let him be mindful that the word Probationer is no idle term, but that the Brothers will in many a subtle way prove him, when he knoweth it not.
6. When the sun shall next enter the sign under which he hath been received, his initiation may be granted unto him. He shall keep himself free from all other engagements for one whole week from that date.
7. He may at any moment withdraw from his association with the A.:A.: simply notifying the Neophyte who introduced him.
8. He shall everywhere proclaim openly his connection with the A.:A.: and speak of It and Its principles (even so little as he understandeth) for that mystery is the enemy of truth. One month before the completion of his year, he shall deliver a copy of the record to the Neophyte introducing, and repeat to him his chosen chapter of *Liber LXV*.
9. He shall hold himself chaste, and reverent toward his body, for that the ordeal of initiation is no light one. This is of peculiar importance in the last two months of his Probation.
10. Thus and not otherwise may he attain the great reward, YEA, MAY HE ATTAIN THE GREAT REWARD!

Liberty Power Destiny	<div>The Seal of V.V.V.V.V. 8°=3°</div>	Life Putrefaction Death
<div>The Seal of O.S.V. 6°=5°</div>	A.:A.:	<div>The Seal of D.D.S. 7°=4°</div>
<h3>The Oath of a Probationer</h3> <p>I, _____, being of sound mind and body, on this ____ day of _____ [An ____ ☉ in _____ ° of _____] do hereby resolve: in the Presence of _____, a Neophyte of the A.:A.: To prosecute the Great Work: which is, to obtain a scientific knowledge of the nature and powers of my own being.</p> <p>May the A.:A.: crown the work, lend me of Its wisdom in the work, enable me to understand the work!</p> <p>Reverence, duty, sympathy, devotion, assiduity, trust do I bring to the A.:A.: and in one year from this date may I be admitted to the knowledge and conversation of the A.:A.:!</p> <p><i>Witness my hand</i> _____</p> <p><i>Motto</i> _____</p>		
Love Passion Debauch	<div>The Seal of N.S.F. 5°=6°</div>	Light Perception Darkness