

Johfra and the Signs of the Zodiac

Virgo and Libra

VIRGO

VIRGO, THE VIRGIN, is a negative sign, earth in being. The sun is in Virgo at the end of August, the harvest month when the ripe corn is harvested. The planet Mercury is its ruler.

In the first six signs the self is central to the development of the personality. This stage ends with Virgo. Everything here is broken down as finely as possible (1) and this great mass is now regulated by man. This is the stage when details are examined.

Matter is characterized by the fact that it can be split up into atoms. Because of this Virgo represents material nature in the form of the Fertile

corn (2), the Roman Ceres, the Egyptian Isis with her green veil of growth (3), and Maria, the bridge of the heavens and, mediator, the world soul or



Anima mundi.

In the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* the sign of Virgo is also represented as the 'gateway to the kingdom of Osiris' (4). From a macrocosmic point of view she is the universal primordial substance from which the material cosmos is condensed (5).

That is why I have added four cherubim to the frame, those from the vision of Ezekiel; they represent the four Evangelists as well as the four elements. The angel in the top left-hand corner is Matthew and the element of air (6). The eagle at the top right (the elevated scorpion of astrology) represents the water element (7). The lion is Mark (fire) (8). The ox is Luke (earth) (9).

The life that inspires matter—fertility, in other



Mother. She is the Greek Demeter with the ear of

This is the sixth and final article on the twelve signs of the zodiac as conceived and painted by the Dutch artist Johfra, coupled with his personal commentary. Johfra, recently deceased, studied the Rosicrucian teachings. Thanks to this association, his wife, Ellen Lorien, has graciously granted the Rays permission to reprint his artwork and text.





words—is symbolized by the transparent egg with its burning flame that the virgin holds in her hand (10). The virgin wears a garland of corn and cornflowers (11). The accent here is on grain, bread, symbol of the ‘Heavenly Manna’. Her white wings bear witness to her state of chastity (birds are an ancient symbol of the soul) (12). A pentagram, the sign of the fivefold person (the five senses) glows



above her head (13).

All other symbols in this painting are determined by the ruler of the sign, Mercury. Hermes or Mercury, in his Graeco-Roman form, is shown on the left. He tries to encompass the universe—in the background—with his intellect (14).

In his Egyptian form as Thoth, the scribe to the gods, he is seen on the right in the shape of the Abyssinian baboon (15). As Thoth, he is, above all, the judge of souls. He sits at the gate of Osiris through which the dead must go to reach the fields of Aalu (the name given by the Egyptians to the the *cynocephalus hamadryas*, the Abyssinian baboon (15). As Thoth, he is, above all, the judge of souls. He sits at the gate of Osiris through which the dead must go to reach the fields of Aalu (the name given by the Egyptians to the kingdom on the ‘other side’).

Thoth weighs every soul in his scales. The heart of the dead one is placed on one scale and the feather of *ma’at* (measure) in the other. The feather represents universal order and measurement of all things (Truth) 16). The two snakes from Mercury’s staff are brought in too as astral factors (17).

The bottom corners of the painting are taken up by aspects of Mercury. To the right is wisdom, represented in Egypt as the holy Ibis (18). In front of that, to represent Jewish tradition, is a cabbalistic book, opened to show the drawing of the tree of life (19).

Pythagoras’ proposition is shown on the papyrus roll (20) to represent the Greek doctrine of the universe, and the closed book M (*materia mater*) refers to the most sacred text of the ancient Rosicrucians that contained their universal knowledge (21): A bringing together thus of three important traditions of wisdom.

In the bottom left-hand corner symbols are shown that refer to another function of Mercury, that of Transmutator: the leader of the dead to paradise, the Psychopompus. In Egypt, this function is illustrated in the form of a jackal, an animal that frequents burial grounds (22). If one takes this up in the alchemical sense, it means that if an initiate into the Mysteries manages to shake

off his human existence through death, he will be resurrected as a new and eternal being. Hermes-Thoth plays the most important role in this transmutation. He is the embalmer who renders the body eternal. He is the thought that, transmuted as *Mercurius sublimatus*, leads to a new universal consciousness. This is a process of distillation (23) and takes place in Athanor, the alchemical furnace (24), where the new human being is formed.

Now come the magical seals and signatures. The astrological symbol of Virgo is below the Virgin’s foot, contained in an eight-pointed star; this is because Mercury the ruler is associated with Hod, the eighth sephira on the tree of life (25). Top left, behind Mercury’s left foot, is his planetary sign (26). Above his head is the seal of his Olympic planetary spirit Ophiel (27).

Top centre is the signature assigned to the archangel Michael under which Mercury comes (28). To the right is the sign of the spirit Taph Thar Tharath (29). Right below the baboon is the sign of the planetary intelligence Tiriël (30). The planetary seal of Mercury is shown on the shield in Thoth’s hand (31). Both signs below are alchemical symbols for *Mercurius sublimatus*, the noble quicksilver (32).

LIBRA

LIBRA, THE SCALES, is a positive sign, air in being. The sun stands in this house at the beginning of autumn as it passes the equator to com-

mence the winter. The ruling planet is Venus.

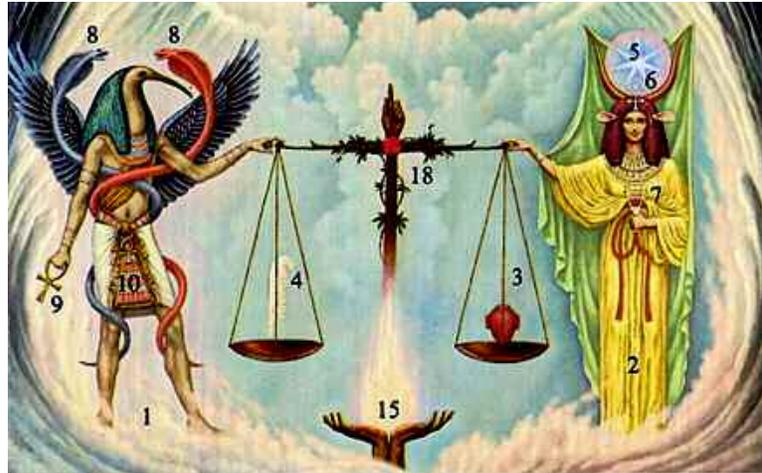
The special characteristics of this sign are balance and harmony. That is why the composition of the painting, like that of Gemini, has been kept symmetrical. In Libra, the accent is on the soul. In the six former signs the emphasis was placed on the evolving self; the non-self is central to the way experience is gained through the following six signs.

Venus, goddess of love, harmony and beauty, rules here. The point of Libra is, above all, the balance between head and heart, intelligence and feeling. To the symbolism surrounding this sign I have added Mercury, ruler of knowledge, in his Egyptian form of Thoth (1) and, correspondingly, the goddess Venus in her Egyptian form as Hathor, goddess of festivity and love, with her cow's ears and horns (2).

Both figures keep the scales in balance. In one scale lies a heart, in its Egyptian symbolic form of an urn (3). The feather of maat is in the other (4). Here again, we have the judgement of souls, clearly linked though with loving wisdom.

Mercury is placed to the left and Venus to the right of the scales in accordance with the Cabbala

have absolute need of each other. Reason without emotion is sterile and deadly. Emotion without correcting reason is no more than sentimentality



and creates chaos. Each is dangerous without the presence of the opposite pole.

Netsah is the seventh sephira. That is why there is a seven-pointed star between Hathor's horns (5). Under this is the astrological sign of Venus (6). Hathor is holding a sistrum, the ritual ringing instrument of the Hathor priestesses. The horizontal rods that snake round the frame suggest the four elements that sound together harmoniously in the cosmos (7).

The famous snakes of Mercury's staff (the negative and positive powers united in harmony) coil round the Ibis-headed Thoth (8.) He holds in his hand the Ankh cross: symbol of immortality in ancient Egypt (9). The astrological sign of the planet Mercury is in the centre of his girdle (10).

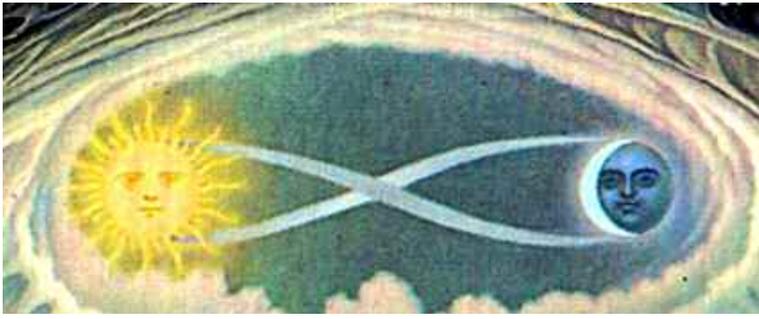
The harmoniously resolved dualism of the sign of Libra is further illustrated by two Assyrian sphinxes at the bottom of the painting (11). These refer back to the Tarot card associated with the sign of Libra, the 'victory chariot'. Here the two sphinxes that pull the chariot represent the opposing

cosmic powers harmoniously operating together in harness.

In the painting, the mystery animals also represent the symbols of the four elements, both positive (male sphinx) and negative (female sphinx): the head is the element of water, the lion's



where Hod, the sephira that rules over man's intellect, is at the bottom of the left tree of the pillar of life (the pillar of severity) with Netsah, feeling, standing opposite at the bottom of the right-hand pillar, that of mercy. In this way perfect balance is again expressed between reason and emotion. Both



various aspects of ‘the conjunction of opposites’:

The Chinese Yang-Yin symbol in connection with the poles in the concentrated primordial matter (20); above that, in the ∞ shape (the lemniscate, symbol of infinity), are the two polar powers of sun and moon, spirit and soul, which affect each other eternally (21). □

forepaws fire, the wings air and the hindquarters of the ox earth. A complete analogy to the four creatures of Ezekiel’s vision and the four Evangelical symbols of the previous sign, Virgo. The black and white tiled floor is another reference to the harmonious working of the pole’s powers at the cosmos’ foundations (12). It is also the floor of the freemason temple. The lily in the foreground represents serenity, the result of perfect balance between head and heart (13).

There is another freemason symbol in the middle of the tiled floor: an altar in the form of a cube (14). The cube represents the foundation because it is made up of squares. This cube is the ‘cornerstone,’ the Christ. It is the philosopher’s stone of alchemy. This “holy altar in the temple where the Light of the Spirits (15) always burns and never dies” was the Hindu symbol for our sign of Libra.

The cube ought, strictly speaking, to be black, not transparent. I have painted it as crystal however in order to show the ball, the golden embryo (16), contained inside and on which the astrological sign for Libra has been drawn (17) (again with a seven-pointed star because Venus stays linked with Netsah, the seventh sephira of the tree).

If the cube were opened out, the six surfaces would form the Christian cross and the golden embryo would be lying in the centre of the cross, a direct reference to the Rosicrucian belief where the rose is also placed in the centre of the cross (notice the rose-cross form in the scales above) (18). I chose the sign of the rose cross because the Rosicrucians strove for balance between head and heart in the forming of the perfect person.

The red rose is the flower of Venus because it stands for self-sacrificing love (19).

Then some other symbols which also refer to

WEAVING LIFE’S GARMENT

Whatever Gods there be to dower
Our mortal lives with good or ill,
We hold within ourselves the power
To weave life’s fabric as we will.

We weave with threads of gold when love
The shuttle guides and holds the hand,
But tangled are the threads we move
When hate is woven in each strand.

We wind the skein that we must use,
And pick the pattern that we trace;
Through many tears we learn to choose
The silken skeins of Christian grace.

Within the warp and woof each day
We weave our joys, our hopes, our fears;
Bright golden hues, or silver gray,
The cloak of laughter hemmed with tears.

To ravelled ends of doubt we cling,
With trembling hands the Truth we hold;
The web of pain and suffering
Grows lighter as our souls unfold.

The garment incomplete as yet
Is torn and tattered into shreds;
While over the loom of life we fret,
The burden borne with bowed heads.

So toil we on with greater skill
To weave anew life’s garment fair;
Throwing the shuttle of our will
Across the web of doubt and fear.

Weaving the robe of life each day
A perfect raiment for the soul;
To clothe us with its stellar ray
And fit us for the heavenly goal.

—George Edgar Frye