

Meanderings of the Spiritual Path

AS THE TITLE of this story, "Meanderings of the Spiritual Path," unfolded, a curiosity about the word *meandering* led me to the dictionary to find out what exactly this word means? Where did it come from? What stories are behind it? Looking up a word in the dictionary always points me on a trail of learning and exploring, and this is what I discovered about the word *meandering*. It derives from the name of a river in ancient geography called, what else? the Meander River, in Phrygia. *Meander* is based on the Greek word *maiandros* and the river was known for its circuitous windings.

Phrygia! Asia Minor. Now, I turn the pages to look up the word *Phrygia*. In my mind, I remember seeing some beautiful art murals, done in a classical style in the impressive state capitol building of Wisconsin. It is considered to be one the most beautiful, if not the most beautiful, of all the state capitols and is located on a hill in the middle of an isthmus between two lakes—the lake of the morning (to the southeast) and the lake of the evening (to the northwest). But back to rivers—the Meander River of Phrygia, and to my memory of an art mural in the state capitol—the one in the massive dome, 200 feet above the marble floor and high above the numerous galleries and the Corinthian colonnade.

Inside this dome, the artist portrays the state of Wisconsin as a female form surrounded by other feminine forms and objects symbolizing the

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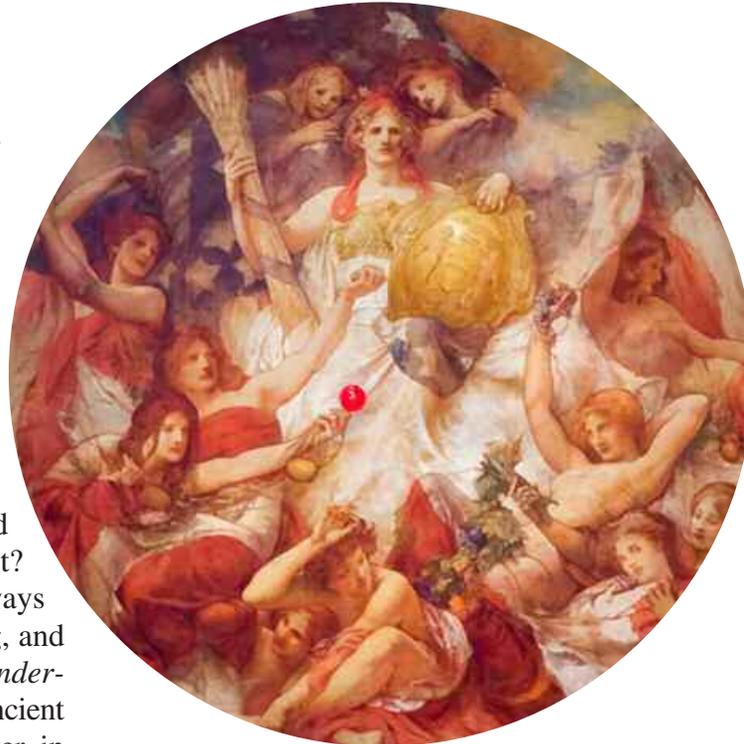


Photo: James Potter

Mural (detail), dome of Wisconsin State Capitol, Edwin Howland Blashfield, Madison

Resources of Wisconsin

Lady Wisconsin, wearing a Phrygian cap and bearing the state escutcheon and a sheaf of wheat, is surrounded by female figures proffering samples of the states resources.

resources of the state—twelve in all, twelve feminine forms holding twelve objects, and the central figure among them, Wisconsin, with amber hair and wearing what appears to be a soft, brimless, cone-shaped, snug-fitting hat with tails trailing on either side of the head. This soft cap is a warm red color. I remember that the tour guide told us that Lady Wisconsin was wearing a "Phrygian Cap."

Aha! Phrygian Cap. I am hot on the trail with another clue, searching for another bit of information. Do you like treasure hunts? That was one of my favorite activities as a child. You can have your own treasure hunt, all by yourself, ferreting out little witticisms and wisdoms and building stories around them and this greatly develops your intuition.

So, in the dictionary, I searched for *Phrygian Cap* and the text read "see liberty cap." "Liberty Cap"! And, lo and behold, the dictionary described

the very cap which I have described to you and said that these caps were presented to slaves in ancient Rome upon manumission. What is manumission? As you might assume, it means, emancipation from servitude or indentured status, when the slave is given his freedom.

These caps were used as symbols of liberty by the French revolutionaries and were worn by regular people in the United States in the late 1700s, both for their style and as a symbolic statement.

For more information, we turn to classical mythology and find Phrygia, that ancient community of Asia Minor, and now the diggings bear much gold. It was the domain of King Midas! He was the second King of Phrygia. Don't you love how you can drift from actual history right into mythology and in and out on a meandering spiritual path? You see, we have no plan. We do not follow any charted course. We just follow our noses and let the gentle breezes blow to guide us.

Now, in Phrygia, the Phrygians were seeking a king. They consulted the oracle at Delphi and were instructed that they were to choose the first person they met who would be riding on an oxcart headed toward the temple of Zeus. Well, the first person to come along on an oxcart, heading toward the temple, was Gordius, a guy called Gordius. So, they made him their King! Afterwards, Gordius, by-and-by, dedicated his cart and its yoke to Zeus on the Acropolis of Gordium, evidence that the citizens of his polis got around to naming a city after him.

In fact, he tied the knot of the yoke so skillfully that an oracle declared that whoever could untie it would be ruler of all Asia. So, guess who came along? Alexander the Great. Along comes Alexander the Great, who had heard about the oracle and decided to apply it to himself. He pulled out his sword and—whack!—cut the knot in two. I guess nobody argued with him, because from this legend, we have the phrase "to cut the Gordian knot," which means to solve a problem or end a difficulty in a vigorous or drastic way.

Back in Phrygia, however, there was a union between Gordius and Cybele and they had a child named Midas. Midas studied under Orpheus and became King of Phrygia. Midas, as you may know, made a request to Dionysus that everything he

touched be turned to gold, and the wish was granted.

Because of this, even his food became gold, which was disastrous. It was not until he bathed in the Pactolus River that the fatal gift was transferred from him to the river. In another legend, Midas was to be the umpire in a musical contest between Pan, playing the flute, and Apollo, playing the lyre. Midas decided in favor of Pan. Apollo got so angry that he turned Midas's ears into Ass's ears!

Sadly, Midas hid his deformity under his Phrygian cap, but could not hide it from his barber. The barber was sworn to secrecy, but he felt heavily burdened by the secret he could not reveal; so heavily burdened that he dug a hole in the ground and whispered into it, "King Midas has ass's ears." He then filled up the hole and his heart was lightened, but out of the ground sprang a reed which whispered the shameful secret to the breeze.

We will come back to Phrygia in a little while, but what follows is a look at two of the activities of the mystic or occultist as he meanders along his spiritual path, for there are as many spiritual paths as there are virgin spirits in our life wave. According to Heindel, the activities in which we, as spiritual individuals, engage ourselves can be defined and listed as seven distinct practices, each with its own attributes and its own process.

These seven practices are retrospection, concentration, observation, discrimination, meditation, contemplation, and adoration. The two that we will study here are concentration and meditation.

Concentration, deductive in its process, focuses on a single object and holds it steadily and exclusively in consciousness. All of one's attention converges pointedly, just as when one extends the hand to grasp an object, and all other objects fall from it. With the chosen object firmly in the grasp, the practitioner holds it steadily for as long as he wills. Now, we will use some basic astrological concepts.

I hope that those of you who do not know any astrology will follow the basic concepts as I try to present this amalgamation of ideas. Basic understandings are organized in the astrological mandala, which illustrates the divine order of things, of creation.

Therefore, in concentration, the practitioner

focuses on a single object and holds it steadily in his consciousness for as long as he wills. Predictably, the ability to fix this image is stronger when fixed signs are prominent in the natal chart. It's like a fixation. Mercury, the planet of cognitive process, in Taurus, Scorpio, Leo, or Aquarius, gives the required tenacity. The planetary rulers of two of these signs—Mars and Pluto for Scorpio, and the Sun for Leo—we associate with will, which is one of the three attributes of God, the other two attributes being wisdom and activity.

Of these four signs of the fixed cross, Aquarius is ruled by the planet, Uranus, which is the higher octave of Venus (Venus is personal love, whereas Uranus is the ability to love everyone). We associate Aquarius and its planet Uranus (universal love) with personal detachment and the ability to draw from the divine will. It is the planet of invention, the planet that "makes all things new." It is exalted in Scorpio, one of the other fixed signs and the sign of regeneration (healing). The ruler of the fourth sign, Taurus, is Venus. We find all four of the elements represented in the fixed signs: air, fire, earth and water, or I, N, R, I, the first letters of the Hebrew words for these elements.

After learning the attributes or qualities of these signs, it is understandable that these four fixed signs form the fixed cross of the Zodiac, signify the four Gospel writers, and contain formulae of Christian mystic initiation: Matthew-Aquarius, Mark-Leo, Luke-Taurus, and John-Scorpio. Incidentally, the altar at the Prince of Peace Monastery (over on the next hill across from Mount Ecclesia in Oceanside, California) displays the symbols of these four fixed signs of the zodiac in its contemporary representation of Christ.

We began this astrological side-trip with our discussion about concentration and the importance of fixed signs in the ability to concentrate. Let us now consider meditation.

Whereas concentration is deductive in its process, meditation is inductive and opens the door of the imagination. It is divergent in nature, and lets thoughts come willy-nilly (nil of the will!), passively, without order or plan.

Many of us are stronger in one or the other, (divergent or convergent thinking) and therefore

not quite balanced and not as completely flexible or as creative as we would like to be. The creative occupations draw heavily on both concentration and meditation.

Concentration is positive, as is the Sun, and is practiced by the Occultist. It is also required in the fervent prayer of the Mystic. Meditation is negative and reflective, like the Moon, and we may look at the qualities of the Moon for a better understanding of the meditative state—its fluidic quality, its mutability, its receptive fecundity. There is nothing fixed about this. The Moon and Neptune, rulers of the watery signs Cancer and Pisces, together with Mercury (quicksilver), ruler of the airy Gemini, alike relate to what is subtle and elusive; there is nothing to grasp hold of here. In a meditative state one's consciousness is not fixed but mobile and open.

Keywords for these three planets and signs are: elusive, changeable, illusion, the trickster. The crescent of the moon, contained in the symbols for moon, mercury, and neptune, while used to signify the cup of the New Testament, the holy grail, can also refer to an all-containing receptacle, that which takes on anything and everything, like the satellite dish of a television antennae. Water conducts positive and negative energies and takes it all indiscriminately, much as the mystic receives a host of influences through open-armed love.

This is why an individual with a predominance of water in the natal chart tends to be extremely sensitive to all stimuli and needs to retreat to "recharge his batteries." Keywords for Cancer are "I feel." Watery signs are sensitive to the moods and impressionable to the thought forms of others. Watery signs, especially Cancer, are receptive emotionally. Sacrificial, Neptunian Pisces, when weak or afflicted, takes on the anger and sorrows of others and either becomes mad or turns to alcohol and becomes intoxicated, or seeks a spiritual transformative life and, with great effort and by the grace of God, transmutes its negative thought-forms by loving, self-forgetting service.

Now that we have examined two of the seven practices of the mystic and the occultist, let us consider the Old Testament book which describes the four creatures, a wheel, and refers to the bow in the

cloud—the book of Ezekiel. I am actually timid about reading from this book. When you enter Ezekiel on the world-wide web you find new-age interpretations of every variety. It would be sad to simply add to this nonsensical proliferation. Nevertheless, Chapter 1, verses 4-14:

And I looked, and behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire. Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance; they had the likeness of a man. And every one had four faces and every one had four wings. And their feet were straight feet and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot: and they sparkled like the color of burnished brass. And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings. Their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went everyone straight forward. As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side; and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle. Thus were their faces: and their wings were stretched upward; two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies. And they went every one straight forward: whither the spirit was to go, they went; and they turned not when they went. As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, and like the appearance of lamps: it went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning.

Ezekiel's four living creatures with "the hands of a man" symbolize the four fixed signs of the zodiac: Taurus the Bull, Scorpio the Eagle, Aquarius the Man, and Leo the Lion. They are God's ministers, also known as the Lords of Destiny or the Four Recording Angels of Christian esotericism.



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The Cherub of Ezekiel

The encampment of the twelve tribes of Israel around the Tabernacle in the Wilderness was symbolic of the order and composition of the universe. At the four corners were positioned the banners of Ephraim (the Bull), Dan (the Eagle), Judah (the Lion), and Reuben (the Man). Even so from the common center and Ark of the four Gospels speaks the creative Word of God.

The vision of Ezekiel reveals that they are a collective entity; they work as a unit. In addition to its own special quality, each Being possesses the qualities of the other three. Their intelligence permeates the entire universe: "Whither the spirit was to go, they went; and they turned not when they went."

The vision is a supersensible form created by spirit. Now, verses 15 and 16:

Now as I beheld the living creatures, behold one wheel upon the earth by the living creatures, with its four faces. The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto the color of a beryl: and they four had one likeness: and

their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel.

Beryl is a bluish-green gemstone, its mineral, occurring in hexagonal prisms, resembles the earth, the Star of David, and its triplicities. The composite of the four creatures symbolizes our fixed cross of the four Gospels. The wheel upon the blue-green earth represents the houses of our geocentric zodiac. The wheel in the middle of a wheel diagrams, from a geocentric perspective, the ecliptic of the circling constellations.

Super-sensible knowledge is received very differently than is knowledge entering through the senses. When an embodied teacher speaks, his words are heard objectively from vibrations entering the listener's ear. "But in inner-plane schools where Teachers speak through living, creative imagination, their words spring up alive in the mind and soul of a disciple and become part of the latter's very being." (Corinne Heline)

When we spoke about the fixed cross of the Zodiac we talked about the will and the ability to fix an image. In order to do the work of a spiritual Teacher, this will principle, the root of which, in the physical body, lies at the base of the nose in the frontal sinus, becomes the source of power for the human personality. It is the Silent Watcher, the power which moves, but is itself not moved. Ezekiel is told:

Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads. As an adamant, harder than flint, have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house.—Ezekiel 3:8-9

"Hypnotists in the flesh and among disembodied spirits who seek to obsess a living person exert their power upon this seat of the human will. Psychological pressure on this area should be instantly resisted by a neophyte. Therein the Divine Spirit (the Will principle) has its stronghold, and there it should be all-powerful. No evil spirit, in the flesh or out of it, can ever obsess a neophyte who makes his forehead 'harder than flint' against such encroachment."

This story began as we opened the dictionary to find out about the word "meandering." It traveled through ancient geography, mythology, a trip to Wisconsin, and, finally to an Ezekiel vision. Is there a moral to this story of the Phrygian cap, the liberty cap? Always, we can look to Max Heindel for answers. He said:

In many women, in whom the vital body is positive, and in advanced people of either sex where the vital body has been sensitized by a pure and holy life, by prayer and concentration, this superconscious memory inherent in the Life Spirit does not always need to incur the danger of being subjected to and perhaps overruled by a process of reasoning. Sometimes, in the form of intuition, or teaching from within, it impresses itself directly upon the reflecting ether of the vital body. The more readily we learn to recognize it and follow its dictates, the more often it will speak, to our eternal welfare.

All who are upon the Path, whether the path of occultism or of mysticism, are weaving the "golden wedding garment" by this work from within and from without. In some the gold is exceedingly pale, and in others it is deeply red. But eventually when the process of Transfiguration has been completed, or rather when it is nearing completion, the extremes will blend, and the transfigured bodies will become balanced in color, for the occultist must learn the lesson of deep devotion, and the Christian Mystic must learn how to acquire knowledge by his own efforts without drawing upon the universal source of all wisdom.

In this life or the next, should we find ourselves sons or daughters of Kings, and if we have the good fortune to choose the winner in the musical contest of Apollo (the Sun God) and Pan (the God of nature, the earth, and himself a non-discriminative receptacle), remember to choose Apollo (!) that we should not have to hide our donkey-ears under our Phrygian caps, causing stress to our barbers who try to keep secrets that can never really be hidden. □

—Elizabeth Ray