

## The Worker is Hidden in the Workshop

### An article on the role and function of an Initiatory Order

By FP

#### Introduction

It is the contention of this article that the seemingly popular opinion, voiced at those gatherings of Occultists, Pagans and New Age followers I have attended over the last few years, and to be read in many recent publications, that the "old" hierarchical initiatory orders are defunct is a misunderstanding of the highest degree. I have been involved in most shades of occult endeavour for the past ten years, and would like to take an opportunity to dispel some of the myths concerning the role and function of such a group.

#### Initiation

What is initiation and why is it important to the Occultist? The word means "to begin", and can be applied to any creative act, such as initiating a project to carry out a traffic census, or initiating a "bright idea". On application to an individual, it carries the connotation of being "taught" and "welcome" to some system or social status, such as tribal rites of passage. Indeed, Mircea Eliade analyses Shamanic Initiation in three stages, the second of which is when the apprentice is taught the "tradition" - Wicca follows the same construct with its explanation of the working tools in the early Grades.

However, to a Magician, initiation is even more specifically defined, as being the event where what is "begun" is a new life to be lived by a more comprehensive and consistent state of awareness to that which was maintained before the point of initiation. Hence, we are constantly being offered the opportunity for a type of initiation by the environment around and within us. If I see a news item about the atrocities of Sarajevo, I can integrate that knowledge, allow it to remain in consciousness, and it might then change my personality (through thoughts and feelings) to that of a concerned well-wisher, and hence I might act by giving money to the relevant charity. I have been initiated into the group of people that share that concern.

This though may not be initiation as defined, in that the next day I might ignore news about some other atrocity (inconsistent behaviour) or not give money when approached by another charity (non-comprehensive behaviour). Given the many identities that parade through the ego process, it is unlikely that a change of pattern in one will affect any of the others. Magical initiation is just that - a change that affects the essence of identity itself, and therefore filters in a domino effect through all patterns beneath it (computer buffs will recognise an analogy to a tapeworm virus). These initiations become the turning points of one's whole life, and are recognisable as such. In Chaos Magick, this process is modelled by the use of the "Catastrophe Theory" topological model, where interconnected events lead up a slope until a "cusp" or breaking point is reached, and the system folds back into itself in an entirely different direction.

As an example, a close friend's death may cause such a dramatic shock to the individual world view that it will be thrown into question. As this world view is what informs a standard person's life and behaviour (Yesod in the Kabbalistic system), they may find the process of grief reorganises their priorities, causing them to leave their job, propose a marriage, go on holiday, sell the car, never get upset about the aggressive behaviour of others, and so forth. Unfortunately, an "environment calibration" would later inform them that some of these changes were not useful or consistent with each other for their long-term goals, and that is where a system assists.

#### The Initiatory System

The de-facto system for magical initiation is without question the Kabbalah, and aside from mention of other likely systems such as Astrology, Alchemy, Tarot, Chakras, Seven Rays and the like, I do not

intend in this article to delve into the detail of why and how that system should be utilised. An Initiatory system should provide, in the words of Aleister Crowley, "the aims of religion and the method of science". That is, the goal should be towards a better way of living, in whatever terms the individual states it, (ie. being closer to God, attaining power, finding ultimate truth, being nicer, being more effective) and the method should be replicable, demonstrable, verifiable and predictive.

Kabbalah was used to form a model of ten stages of Initiatory Progress, working up the Tree of Life. It should be remembered that this is a useful picture, and not in any sense a "thing". The Sephiroth of the Tree cannot be found anywhere, but the processes they model can be observed, and symbolised by the Paths of the Tree, and hence the Tarot. These ten stages are given relevant titles to the "state of mind" undergone by someone working through that stage of the overall process. Thus, the "Zelator", attributed to one of the first stages, will be one who has just begun the Great Work, and hence their enthusiasm will mark their work accordingly, and provide the keystone of further work, and also the barrier to overcome. The tarot cards that connect with the Sephirah to which the grade is associated will model the lessons that must be learnt and integrated in preparation for the next process. No-one would argue that to make tea, the water must be boiled, and the cup must not be cracked - why should the process of becoming a more effective human being not have similar rules?

## Grades and Hierarchy

The use of the word "grade" has often been taken as a symbol of self-made ego aggrandisement. It is very easy to create a group, put oneself at the top of it, create thirty-odd "grades" set up in such a way that no-one would ever be able to, nor want to, work through them. Also there are cases of grading by accomplishment, or conformity to group beliefs, which have nothing to do with the Initiatory grades. When steel is tempered, it passes through different grades, as do many processes, such as the extraction of gold from the earth. These grades inform us of the likely properties of the material, and what we can or cannot expect of it. A certain grade of paper can be used in a photocopier, but not a fax machine, for example. Likewise, the grade of a Magician is a statement of their stage in the process of Initiatory development, in the simple sense that the word grade is derived from the latin, "gradus", meaning "step". The steps signposted by the ten Sephiroth of the Tree of Life, or the twelve/fifteen stages of Alchemy may be very generalised, but are nonetheless ordered and informative. The difference between the grade of Practicus and Philosophus may be years of work, or a simple decision, dependent on the individual. The Initiatory system prepares the worker to take part in the process that is always already in each of us.

Grades are not badges of any form of "spiritual" ranking, in the way that term has been used by critics of the system. Spiritual progress in the initiatory system is not measured in terms of behaviour, but in awareness and the state of identification and attachment. Differences can therefore be observed and graded, in that there is a marked difference between a young child dominated by their own natural state, and an adolescent suffering the all-consuming pangs of a first love. If to be more "spiritual", a certain mode of behaviour is required, then many will fall into trap of merely emulating the symptoms of a grade, rather than attempting to attain the state likely to engender that behaviour.

I have often heard the glib phrases "well, you can't initiate anyone else anyway" or "the only real initiation is self-initiation" levelled by those who either, in my view, misunderstand initiation completely, or have nothing at all to teach. By my writing and your reading of this article, I am initiating a process of thought and hopefully enquiry within you, as you were initiated into various states by what your mother told you, and what her mother told her, and so on. The magician uses the grade system as a Map to inform him which input he takes into his "inner crucible" to prepare the ground for the completion of the process which he is undergoing. It is true that the only initiation is that which goes on within, but all teaching provides impetus for that change, and hence should be structured accordingly. There are obviously many more aspects of the initiatory system for those who work through it.

That a Practicus may have a more consistent and comprehensive state of awareness than a Zelator does not obviously mean that one would follow the advice of another in the choice of clothes or food, or any other behaviour. The Initiatory system hinges on the law of Thelema, "Do what thou wilt shall

be the whole of the Law", in its truest sense, and does not conflict with the dictum. One might listen more carefully to the way in which a Philosophus makes his decision to choose clothes, and then attempt to learn from it for that, or any other, process of choice, but that is all. It is the "meta-method" which is the essence of initiation, not the processes of personality and action which are merely its outward, and only, observable signs. The Worker is always hidden in the Workshop.

## Occult Orders

Large Occult Orders must be functional and provide something for the initiates within. The largest problem voiced by those who leave occult groups is either that the group had nothing to teach, or that what it had to teach was outgrown quickly, and further questions were frowned upon or side-stepped completely to avoid revealing ignorance or lack of responsibility. Another problem often voiced at current groups is that they are more embroiled in internal and personal politics than the teaching/learning/support function itself. As anyone studying group dynamics will be aware, a group must be organically structured to develop as its size and range of responsibility increases. Communication between the levels of the group must be established, and feedback acted upon, and be seen to be. In the developing science of networking and communications theory, a network at the social level can be defined as groups of activity who may share no common ground aside from their communication. Thus, networks are grown from interacting groups who find communication useful for comparative reasons, and in order that someone may be passed through the net to the "node" most suited to their needs, no matter where they start. A networked Order can also bypass the politics that mar other group types by having no central decision-making aside from an organisation and administrative constitution.

Thus, a "networked" Order composed of differing "nodes", each of which carries a teaching function, and develops in tune with its members needs, is ideal. The hive analogy of the Ma'at Current can be profitably studied in this light. This structure also enables members to develop their own individual work with the resources and support of a larger group, without the needs of conforming to a "party line". Such a group can equally facilitate communication between differing paths in a supportive environment, unlike many specialised gatherings and conferences. A truly networked Order also provides the opportunity for affiliated groups to interact and gain from a wider audience, without losing any autonomy that they seek for themselves. An Order composed of many nodes would hence not require any belief system to support it, aside from a belief that communication can be useful in a structured manner. As the nodes grow, the "Order" becomes an invisible web composed only of the interaction between its membership, and this, I believe, is as near a representation of the Rosicrucian "Invisible College" as you are likely to get.

## Conclusion

It is impossible to discuss the many digressions possible in putting forward a counter-argument to a popular opinion that has grown blindly over the last century. The essence of the new impetus in magick is integration, and we must work with and understand the limitations of previous solutions before rashly creating our own without the substance of prior experience. Each Current at present, be it Pagan, Wiccan, Thelemite, Lovecraftian, Ceremonial, New Age or whatever, has shared the vision of where we are going, even though each has expressed it in different ways. Simply put, we are coming to know constantly that we are all in this together, and we are trying to find a way to work in that context.

I would end by offering one or two questions, firstly; "Do you want to live more effectively, and if so, is what you are doing assisting that goal"? If you do, and it isn't, then the path of the Magician may provide a solution. Secondly; "Do you believe that by communicating with others your own goals will be reached more easily"? If so, a modern occult initiatory order might prove suitable for your work.

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