

# *Exploring the House of Sacrifice:<sup>1</sup>*

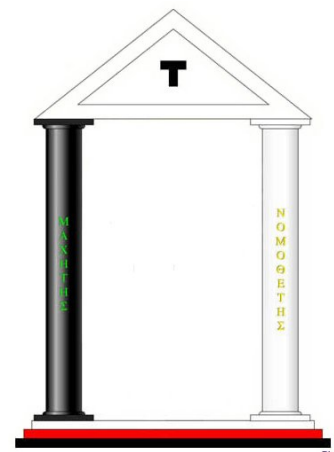
## *Part 2: The Steps of the Foundation*

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IN PART ONE OF “EXPLORING THE HOUSE OF SACRIFICE,”<sup>2</sup> we examined the Five Principles that comprise the structure of the House of Sacrifice. This exploration was done primarily through correspondences to the Qabalistic Tree of Life. Because the vast majority of the Western Mystery Tradition involves Qabalistic study, the symbolism of the Qabalah has become the *lingua franca* of many Western esotericists. Therefore it is not surprising that most magical students view new systems through the lens of the Qabalah they have already learned. But “Exploring the House of Sacrifice” demonstrated an important point: the core of the Ogdoadic system is no mere Qabalistic glyph. Instead, it is an independent, potent system that cannot be apprehended through simple one-to-one correspondences with individual Sephira. Thus Kudos is not merely Kether: aspects of it can also be found in Tiphareth; and Pneuma corresponds not only to the Pillar of Mercy but also to the 11<sup>th</sup> path, as well as to Hod.

While little has been written about the Fivefold Pattern of the House of Sacrifice, even less has been written about the Steps, collectively referred to as the “Foundation” of the House of Sacrifice. You can see them in the diagram here to the right: the first Step is black, the middle red, and the third is white. They lead the Seeker to experience the Mystery that is the House of Sacrifice.

When approaching a new symbol like this, we can begin by looking for basic correspondences. It is a threefold system, so we can look for other sets of symbols containing three. Note, however, that as we progress through the discussion, some of the correspondences appear to contradict each other. In this we shall again see the rich depth of the Ogdoadic symbolism. What becomes apparent is that the Steps are primarily an analogy for progression through the path of the Mysteries to Self-Realisation.



### **Three Degrees of Initiation**

Historically, many esoteric societies have conferred three principle degrees of initiation. Certainly a three-degree structure was found in the medieval guilds with the Apprentice, Journeyman and Master, although the idea may well pre-date that. The Masons drew upon the guilds in creating their own degree structure, and other traditions such as Wicca and many offshoots of the Society of the Inner Light all utilise a system of three degrees as well.

If one analyses these three degrees across different traditions, they are all broadly similar in their overall aims. The First Degree is the beginning of direct work with the Order through initiation (although many groups, the Astrum Sophia included, have some form of Outer Court or Probationer period preceding this). The First Degree is about getting used to the tools of the trade, the basic building blocks of the Order’s symbolism and initial contact with the inner plane forces. It is about learning the key practices and concepts, and the beginning of alchemical work on the personality. Often there is a study of the elements as well.

<sup>1</sup> \*Originally published in [The Ogdoadic Journal of the Western Mysteries, Vol 1](#)

<sup>2</sup> See [The Ogdoadic Journal of the Western Mysteries, Vol. 1 No1, p.34](#)

The Second Degree is where one begins to use all the tools, gaining real skill as a magician. Contact with your Higher Self is begun and you begin to master the specific techniques of ritual magic. You become fluent in the symbolism and practices of the tradition you are operating in. The Third Degree is when you are working in harmony with your Higher Self. It often involves some kind of death and rebirth. The tools of the magician's trade have been mastered and integrated. Completion of the Third Degree is the entrance into the Greater Mysteries.

Broadly speaking, each magical system thus conducts the seeker through a series of rites and practices to reach Adepthood. Some of the practices may differ from degree to degree (i.e. one Order may do more psychological work in the second degree than the first) but they all end up in a similar place. As we shall see, the Steps demonstrate that journey for us.

### Initial Correspondences

Now that we have an overall idea of the spiritual journey the initiate takes (often as a three-fold process) lets try to apprehend the Steps by corresponding them to other sets of three. As we have seen, the First Step is the colour black, the Second red and the Third white. This colour scheme



clearly invokes the symbolism of Alchemy, with the Body as black, Soul as red and Spirit as white.<sup>3</sup> As we saw in Part 1 of this article, these same alchemical principles relate to the Qabalistic elements of the Psyche, and we can therefore conclude there is a resonance between the Black Step and the Nephesh, the Red Step and the Ruach, and the White Step and the Neshamah. Qabalists will also be keen to note there is a strong relationship to the Middle Pillar, the Three Steps representing Malkuth, Yesod, and Tiphareth respectively.

We can learn more about the Steps by relating them to the Principles of the House of Sacrifice itself, with the Black Step being Sarx, Pneuma the Red, and the Triune Superstructure the White Step.

Further correspondences to the House of Sacrifice are given in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hall *Rite of Induction*, when the Candidate is brought forward to ascend the Three Steps through a potent magical working. In this rite, the Steps relate to the individual Principles of the Triune Superstructure: when the First Step is ascended, the Magus declares “Thus the Purification, founded in Justice”<sup>4</sup> (Dike); upon the Second Step “Thus the Ensealment, founded in Mercy”<sup>5</sup> (Eleos); and, upon the Third Step, “Thus the Dedication, founded in Glory”<sup>6</sup> (Kudos).

More use of the Three Steps can be found in the Third Hall Rite of Palingenesis, where the Steps are connected to the three Veils of the inner mysteries, which are parted for the ascension of the Candidate.<sup>7</sup> I prefer not to say very much on this point, believing quite strongly that initiation ceremonies should not be studied before one experiences them. Nevertheless, there is a beautiful piece of poetry from the Palingenesis which gives us many clues to the Steps-- without revealing too much of the nature of the initiation itself:

<sup>3</sup> Initiates of the Astrum Sophia are referred to an excellent article in *Messenger VI* (the Order's internal newsletter) which explores the relationship of the Steps to alchemical symbolism.

<sup>4</sup> Phillips, Osborne. *Aurum Solis, Initiation Ceremonies and Inner Magical Techniques*. Leicestershire: Thoht Publications. 2001. p. 90

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p.93

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. 102

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, pp.187-190.

The Body had been concealed, hidden away in the darkness of the tomb.  
 But the Spirit perceived its glorious light and hastened to greet it.  
 For the Body had been divinised, transformed by reason of its correspondence to the noble and radiant Spirit that now united with it.  
 Darkness fled from the Body that had put on the Light of Divinity.  
 Body, Soul and Spirit were one in the Flame of Love.  
 This is the deeper mystery, but in the triple reunion the mystery is accomplished.  
 The House is sealed in silence!  
 The figure of perfected human nature is here established.  
 The Shining One arises! <sup>8</sup>

To conclude, we may also liken the Three Steps to the three degrees offered in the Ogdoadic system, namely the Neophyte, the Servitor and the Adeptus. <sup>9</sup>

We can now build a table of the information we have thus far gathered. Be prepared for some surprises as you read down the columns:

System	Black Step	Red Step	White Step
<i>Alchemy</i>	Body	Soul	Spirit
<i>Qabalah</i>	Malkuth	Yesod	Tiphareth
<i>Psyche</i>	Nephesh	Ruach	Neshamah
<i>House of Sacrifice</i>	Sarx	Pneuma	Triune Superstructure
<i>Superstructure of House of Sacrifice</i>	Dike	Eleos	Kudos
<i>Ogdoadic Degrees</i>	Neophyte (1 <sup>st</sup> Hall)	Servitor (2 <sup>nd</sup> Hall)	Adeptus (3 <sup>rd</sup> Hall)

If you study the above table carefully, within each individual system (reading horizontally) the correspondences are clear. But there are some apparent contradictions if you read vertically down each column. Some fit together well: the First Step, being black, corresponds nicely to idea of the Neophyte, as well as to Malkuth. These are places where we begin our journey; the relationship to each other is fairly obvious. Nevertheless, I suspect many Qabalists would argue the Nephesh is more closely related to Yesod than to Malkuth, and would thus question its position in this table. Other Qabalistic concepts appear equally misplaced.

A further conundrum relates to the symbolism of the House of Sacrifice itself. We have seen earlier in this article that the Black Step is associated with Sarx while the Red Step is associated with Pneuma. And we have seen that Osborne Philips himself says that the Black Step relates to the Neophyte degree and the Red Step to Servitor. However, we would do well to remember that in the Initiation cycle the First Hall corresponds to Pneuma rather than to Sarx. <sup>10</sup> A whole paper could be written on this concept alone; these are topics that bear further meditation to reveal the potency of the ritual formula.

Again we encounter the same concept we encountered in Part 1 of this article, namely that *the House of Sacrifice is a rich, living and potent magical system of its own*. Correspondences will help illuminate the symbolism, but it must be studied as its own system with its own internal logic. We can look for one-to-one correspondences between systems, but this usually reveals only part of the story. More often than not, it oversimplifies immensely complex symbolism.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid* p.190

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p.10

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p. 52 and p.84

To give an example, think of the god Horus. If you were doing a comparative study between the Egyptian Pantheon and the Greek Pantheon, you would try to find a Greek equivalent of Horus. Now, Horus has a Warrior aspect that would certainly make us think of Ares and the planetary energy of Mars. But Horus also has a very strong Solar aspect, and has a role as King and ruler that simply isn't found in Ares. To confuse things further, the Greek role of King is fulfilled more by Jupiter than by the Sun. The discussion quickly becomes muddled. Does that mean that it is wrong to associate Horus with Ares? No, it simply means that particular correspondence doesn't tell the whole story. Each system is different and, while we can use other systems as a comparison, we must see the complexities and nuances which give each their individual character and flavour.

### **A Metaphor for Spiritual Progression**

Returning to the Steps, what can we conclude from the correspondences we have explored? Above all else, *the Steps are an analogy for the path we tread towards enlightenment*. Whether you are an Alchemist and you go from Body to Soul to Spirit, or you are a Qabalist and you go from Malkuth to Yesod to Tiphareth, you are nevertheless advancing onward. Each threefold system we described above sees the path in a slightly different way, but no matter which one you chose to tread, you will reach enlightenment if you persevere. The Steps are the particular analogy utilised within the Ogdoadic Tradition.



What hopefully has become apparent when examining the Steps is that they are something very different to the Fivefold Principles of the House of Sacrifice. The Steps encompass a totality of their own. In the Principles of the House of Sacrifice, we find a concrete magical formula mirroring both the structure of the macrocosm as well as the microcosm of our psyche. The Steps, on the other hand, are a map, a metaphor for our spiritual progress in the Mysteries. As you progress along the path, you work on different aspects of yourself, each Step bringing you closer to your goal of Self-Realisation, which is the House of Sacrifice. One of the definitions for step is “a stage in a progression towards some goal or target,” and this is most appropriate in our discussion of the Steps of the Foundation.

Many students do not like apparent contradictions like the ones presented in our table of correspondences. They want things to be straightforward and linear. But we are discussing the Mysteries, which were taught to me as “something that cannot be entirely explained, only experienced.” This paper set forth an intellectual comparison of systems in order to reach an intellectual understanding of the Foundation of the House of Sacrifice. But it is only deep inner work which will reveal the Mysteries contained therein.