The Magic of the Moon

Seven Keys Must Be Turned Before the Symbol of the Moon Will Yield Its Final Secret

John Garrigues

“That which we call the Self is a self-illuminated Sun which reflects itself - if we allow it to do so - in our lower, lunar nature.”
John Garrigues (1868-1944) was one of the main founders of the United Lodge of Theosophists, in Los Angeles, in February 1909. The following article was first published anonymously at “Theosophy” magazine, in May 1936, pp. 309-315. An analysis of its contents and style indicates it was written by Mr. Garrigues. Original title: “Moon-Magic”.

(C. C. A.)

Moon-magic - who has not felt it? Perhaps it first seeped into our consciousness in the silent stretches of the Libyan desert, where the thin sickle of the crescent moon hung like a scimitar against the indigo velvet of the sky. Perhaps it was in the dusk of a scented Persian garden, where the ghosts of Omar’s roses played hide and seek beneath a dreaming moon.

Perhaps it was on a winter’s night in Vermont, where the passionless earth stared unseeing at the colder moon, and where the distant stars glittered like diamonds bought with blood. Perhaps it was in some half-ruined Grecian temple where we loitered, pagan-like, to make obeisance to the bright huntress with her “bow new-bent in heaven”.

Moon-magic - who has not come under its spell as it filtered through the lines of Byron, Shelley and Keats? Who has not been caught in the web of cadenced moonlight so delicately spun by Debussy and Ravel?

The magic of the Moon has been sung by poets of every age. With the exception of Russia, not a single nation has failed to pay respect to the “Queen of Heaven” through the medium of its literature. The myths and folk-lore of every land teem with moon-magic, and the religious records of every race are filled with references to Moon-worship.

Sometimes the Moon appears as a male deity, as in the myths of the Teutons and Rajputs, the stories of the Tartary and Arabia, the tales of the Hindu King Soma and the Babylonian god Sin. Sometimes the Moon is a goddess, worshipped as Diana, Isis, Astarte, Artemis, Proserpine, Venus or Hecate. But, whether masculine or feminine, the Moon still remains the mystery of mysteries, a sexless potency which must be well understood if we would not fall prey to its sorcery.

The influence of the Moon upon the earth and its inhabitants cannot be denied, however difficult the explanation may be. It is observed in the rise and fall of the tides and in the
growth of plant life. It appears in the cyclic changes of many forms of disease, and is particularly marked in the phenomena of human gestation and generation. These facts were well known in the past, and have always been the subject of much speculation. Aristotle discussed the influence of the Moon upon the human body, and Hippocrates recommended that no physician be allowed to treat disease without a knowledge of astronomy. As far back as 1784 Dr. Balfour wrote a book about the Moon’s influence upon fevers, and forty years later Dr. Laycock testified that epilepsy, insanity and asthma were strongly influenced by the lunar phases. It is a matter of record that the pestilence which devastated Noyen in 1636 increased in violence as the moon waxed, and that nearly all who contracted the disease during the full moon failed to recover. It is said that Lord Bacon was peculiarly sensitive to lunar magnetism, always falling into a syncope when the Moon was in eclipse. It is also a well known fact that old people die most frequently on the day of the new or the full moon.

The curious relationship between moonlight and insanity has long been the subject of scientific investigation. In 1791 Dr. Daquin discussed this phenomenon, and in 1852 Guislain recorded that some of his patients became violently insane every twenty-eight days, always on the day of the full moon. The very word *lunatic* - derived from Luna, the Moon - contains a hint of this relationship, one which is recognized by poets as well as by men of science. Shakespeare calls the Moon the “mistress of melancholy”, and we find Othello, after hearing of Rodrigo’s murder, exclaiming:

“It is the very error of the moon.  
She comes more near the earth than she was wont,  
And makes men mad.”

The Moon’s influence upon the earth is usually attributed to the fact that the Moon is the satellite of the earth. While this is undeniably true, the relationship between the two is even closer than this. Instead of being the child of the earth, as is commonly supposed, the Moon is in reality the earth’s mother, and is no more the earth’s subordinate than any earthly mother would be who walks around her child’s cradle, keeping watch over the infant. In one respect the human mother, as well as the Moon, may be considered as the satellite of her child, but there is no doubt that she is older and more experienced than her offspring.

According to the teachings of Theosophy, the Moon played an important part in the formation of the earth and its inhabitants. At one time, it is said, the Moon was as much alive as our own earth is today. At that time it was a complete entity, energized by the soul and mind forces of the beings whose habitation it was. Like all other entities, its life-term was limited, and death eventually ensued. Then those energies which had made the Moon a living body departed to form the nucleus of a new body, the earth. The Moon as we see it today is therefore only a slowly decaying corpse, disintegrating like any other form from which the animating soul-principle has departed. But Life still works destructively among the decomposing particles of this planetary corpse, and the emanations from these particles affect everything they touch. Sometimes these emanations have a beneficent effect. At other times they are maleficent. In the case of many forms of plant-life the Moon’s rays are helpful to growth, while these same rays are poisonous, if not fatal, to some human organisms.
The maternal relationship which the Moon bears to the earth reflects itself in the mother-function of women. The feminine physiological function is governed by the Moon. The “period of visibility” and the period of parturition are likewise determined by lunar calculations. Conception is regulated by the Moon, as every real astrologer knows. The Greeks and Britons advocated the full-moon day for marriages and births, and weaned their male children during the waxing of the moon and their female children when the moon was on the wane. Diana, the Moon-goddess of the Greeks, presided over child-birth and, as the Cretan Diktyyna, wore a wreath made from the magic plant diktamnon. During childbirth the women of Crete were covered with this plant, whose roots were first placed within the precincts of the goddess, if possible under the direct rays of the resplendent daughter of Jupiter.

As the Moon is so closely connected with the processes of physical generation, it is easy to see how it became the symbol of generation on a cosmic scale. As a matter of fact, the whole history of Moon-worship centers around the mystery of lunar phenomena. The rites were based upon a knowledge of physiology, mathematics and astronomy, and were records of observed natural and scientific facts. The ancients were well aware of the fact that life on this planet is generated, preserved and destroyed by lunar magnetism, and this may help to explain the thousand and one images under which the Moon was represented and venerated.

Although the actual beginnings of Moon-worship are difficult to trace, there is no doubt that it is one of the oldest forms of worship in the world. Krishna himself is said to have belonged to the Yadu branch of the Chandravansas, or “Lunar Kings”, a fact which is of deep significance. When these “Lunar Kings” left India, they took with them the worship of their fore-fathers, of Soma and his son Budha. Babylonia happened to be situated on the line of this emigration, and the Babylonians were one of the first peoples to profit thereby. Although comparatively little is known of Chaldean Moon-worship and the Babylonian god Sin, it is not impossible to trace the gradual transformation of this abstract symbol into the Hebrew creative God Jehovah.

When the clay tablets of Hammurabi (2250 B. C. E.) were deciphered, the noted Assyriologist Professor Delitsch translated one inscription: “Yahveh is God”. Professor Chamberlain insisted that the correct reading should be “The Moon is God”. This indicates how closely Jehovah and the Moon were connected in those days. In the Hebrew Scrolls Jehovah is called The Lord of the Moon, while Maimonides speaks of Adam (who in one sense is the same as Jehovah) as the Prophet of the Moon. In the Kabala the Moon is called the Ark, which contains the seeds of material life and is closely associated with Jehovah. This idea appears again in the story of Noah and the Ark.

The Israelites considered child-giving as the chief function of Jehovah, as a well-known scholar points out:

“I had worked it our by original search that the great distinctive function of the god-name Jehovah was designative of the influence of the Moon as the causative of generation, and as of its exact value as a lunar year in the natural measure of days.”

In this connection, it will be remembered that Sarai, Abraham’s wife, could not bear a child until she had come under the Moon’s influence by changing the name to Sarah,
and that both she and her husband came from the city of Ur, which was the great center of Moon-worship. Mount Sinai, the name of which is derived from the Babylonian Sin, means literally The Mountain of the Moon, and contains a reference to the lunar of Metonic cycle of 19 years, as does the name of Hagar, the bondwoman whom Paul identified with Mount Sinai.

The Hebrews based their astronomical calculations upon the Moon, which accounts for the frequency of the number seven in their exoteric religious observances, and their adoption of the seventh day as the one sacred to the God Jehovah. The worship of this Lunar God descended through the Mosaic and Kabalistic Jews to the Christians, although the Christian world may be unaware that the God they inherit from the Jews is but a symbol of the reproductive and generative power in nature. But, if the works of the Church Fathers Clement of Alexandria and Origen be consulted, it will be found that the Moon was still used as a symbol of Jehovah in the early days of the Christian Church.

Must we then conclude that the Jewish concept of Deity was fundamentally materialistic? The answer must be in the negative. For although the exoteric teachings centered around the lunar god Jehovah, the secret and esoteric worship was the same Pantheism that lies at the root of every truly philosophical system of thought. Jehovah was a substitute used for exoteric purposes, and every initiated priest knew that behind that substitute there stood the unknown, incognizable deity, the Kabalistic Ain-Soph, a concept as metaphysical and philosophical as that of the Hindu Parabrahman. The materialization of the Hebrew religion began when the substitute was accepted in place of the Ever-Unknownable, and will end only when the substitute is replaced by the Ever Living Reality.

The Christian Trinity is another example of this same materialization of a metaphysical concept. With the philosophical ancients, the Trinity represented the abstract qualities of creation, preservation and destruction. The Christian Trinity, from one point of view, is but a copy of the Egyptian Trinity of Ammon, Mouth and Khonsu, whose common symbol was the Moon. But the average Christian has never considered the symbolical meaning of the Trinity, and has debased it by separating his personal God into three persons.

The worship of the Virgin Mary is another example of an ancient lunar rite. All the lunar goddesses of the ancients were pictured as Virgin Mothers of immaculately begotten Sons. The Virgin Mary, represented as the “Queen of Heaven”, on the crescent moon is but a copy of the Egyptian Isis, or the still earlier Neith. As the great Roman Catholic historian de Mirville has pointed out:

“We (Christians) can understand now why Neith throws radiance on the sun, while remaining the Moon, since the Virgin, who is the Queen of Heaven, as Neith was, clothes herself in her radiance and clothes in his turn the Christ-sun (…) We understand also how it is that the famous inscription as Sais should have stated that ‘none has lifted my veil’, considering that this sentence, literally translated, is the summary of what is sung in the Church on the day of the Immaculate Conception.” (Archeol. de la Vierge)
A definite order of Moon-worship was formed in the fourth century of the Christian era, and the lower classes of the Middle Ages openly worshipped the Moon, identifying her with the Virgin. Even today some of these relics of Moon-worship still appear.

“In Scotland generally, and particularly among Highlanders, it is a custom for the women to make a curtsy to the new moon. English women also have a touch of this, sitting astride a gate or stile on the eve of the new moon and saying: ‘A fine moon! God bless her!’ ” (Antiquarian Repertory)

In the Austrian Tyrol the peasants still consult the moon before commencing their tasks in the field, the stall or the house, and always cut their hair on the wane of the moon so that it will not grow too quickly. In Scotland it is said that some women will not even comb their hair during certain phases of the moon. These relics of the Moon-worship are by no means confined to the ignorant peasant. Every time a person celebrates one of the “Moveable Feasts” he is unconsciously perpetuating a lunar rite. Any one who hesitates to look over his left shoulder at the new moon is tacitly confessing that for him, at least, Moon-worship is not yet extinct.

Many of our well known nursery rhymes contain a wealth of lunar symbolism. The apparently senseless jargon, “Hey diddle diddle, the cat and the fiddle, the cow jumped over the moon”, is one of many examples. The association of the Cat with the Moon dates back to Pasht, Isis and Diana. The Cow was connected with and symbolized by the Moon for the simple reason that the period of parturition in cow and women is the same, both being governed by the Moon. The story of Jack and Jill is only a lunar myth in modern dress. It comes from the Scandinavian story of Hjuki and Bil, Hjuki referring to the waxing of the moon and Bil to its waning. The pail of water which they carried up the hill refers to the rising tide, while their subsequent downfall pictures its ebb.

And so we see how Moon-worship still persists even in this scientific age, and how the ancient lunar myths still continue to be perpetuated from generation to generation. But let us not conclude that the symbol of the Moon is but a fantastic relic of ancient “superstition”. Nothing could be further from the truth. This symbol is of profound significance to the scientist, the anthropologist, the astronomer, the ethnologist, the philosopher, the poet, the artist. Seven keys must be turned before the symbol of the Moon will yield its final secret. The Anthropological or physical key has already been suggested. The astronomical key is hidden within the symbol of the Cat. The astrological key may be discovered by studying the twenty-eight mansions of the Moon as found in the Zodiac of the Copts, Egyptians, Arabs, Persians and Hindus. The racial key is found in the records of the races which preceded our own. There it will be discovered that in the third race the male Moon was worshipped, becoming “male-female” only after the “fall into generation”. When our own race appeared, lunar-solar worship divided the nations into distinct cults, ending in a strife between the Suryavansa or “Solar Beings” and the Chandravansa or “Lunar Beings”.

This strife can be observed in every individual. For, in the final analysis, each one of us is a solar-lunar being. That which we call the Self is a self-illuminated Sun which reflects itself - if we allow it to do so - in our lower, lunar nature.

Whenever we think, act or speak independently of the Solar God within, we become worshippers of the Moon in ourselves. Every time we instigate our actions from within,
we make the Moon in us subservient to the Sun, a true reflection of the solar light of the Self. This is the secret of true spiritual growth.

The above article by John Garrigues (photo) was first published online in February 2013.


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