

# NewAcropolis

## Mass Migration and Refugees

Spiritual Exercises in the Western  
Philosophical Tradition

Introduction to the World of  
Feng Shui (Part 2)

Hydrogen – Energy of the future?

PHILOSOPHY  
CULTURE  
SOCIETY  
ESOTERICA  
ART  
AND MORE





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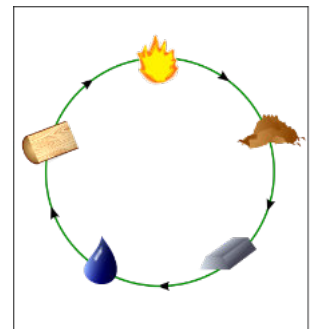


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## Editorial

### What can we do to decrease polarization?

The recent atrocities in the Middle East and the subsequent actions, reactions, comments, discussions, and demonstrations around the world have highlighted again how quickly we can become polarized in our opinions today. It is like a chain reaction: the moment one person starts to take sides for who is more deserving of sympathy and support, others feel that they have to do the same; each fact and/or argument on the one side has to be countered by a fact/argument on the other side (if only for 'balance') and, before we know it, we feel separated from each other and negative feelings start building up within.

If a conflict, that was originally only between two parties, amasses more and more partisans on either side, it will not only get bigger and bigger but also become like a vortex that drags many things down with it. This can lead to deeply polarized communities as well as world wars.

The fact that polarization is detrimental to our societies and democracies has been well researched and documented. The greater the polarization, the more difficult it is to create consensus. Without consensus, necessary reforms are impossible. Polarization also destabilizes our institutions and undermines democracy because their legitimacy depends on broad public consensus. In society, polarization generates an 'us and them' mentality and can poison everyday interactions and relationships. To give one example: apparently, in Turkey, almost eight out of ten people would not want their daughter to marry someone who votes for the party they most dislike. And nearly three-quarters would not even want to do business with such a person.

Of course, it is crucial for a healthy democracy to have a wide range of views and robust debates. But there is an important difference between a healthy spread of divergent views and outright hostility between antagonistic groups, which paves the way for violence, radicalization and extremism. Once a society has become deeply divided, it is very difficult to heal.

So, what can we do to avoid polarization? Is it better not to take sides? Is the only alternative to be morally neutral, indifferent, 'lukewarm', passive, a cowardly 'fence-sitter'? Do we have

to abandon our moral intuitions to avoid conflict at all costs?

Perhaps it would be beneficial to shift our focus more on how to achieve true and lasting peace, rather than on the 'winning' of that side we feel we need to support. Peace with justice is only possible if deep-seated mindsets, beliefs, and behaviours change. In general, no one changes if pushed into a corner. Imagine a broken-down marriage with a lot of resentment and hurt on both sides. Experience shows that taking sides does not help to change behaviour. In general, the person on the other side won't feel understood, will only get more entrenched in their defensive position, and feel discriminated against. That is why a mediator must be neutral.

But neutrality is not an end in itself; it is a means to the end of being able to work with both sides and bring about change. However, one thing is professionally required neutrality, and another is our own moral intuition. Dag Hammarskjöld, the second Secretary-General of the United Nations (1953 – 1961) said in a seminal lecture in Oxford in 1961: "It may be true that in a very deep, human sense there is no neutral individual, because... everyone... has to have ... ideas and ideals – things which are dear to him... But what I do claim is that even a man who is in that sense not neutral can very well undertake and carry through neutral [impartial] actions, because that is an act of integrity."

Maybe this would be a way to counteract polarization. Not to abandon our inner sense of justice but yet be able to act with integrity and impartiality, in the name of what Dag Hammarskjöld called an 'exclusively international' spirit. To transcend our own opinions and to be able to empathise with the suffering on both sides, to honour the victims of violence on both sides, to see and acknowledge the underlying reasons for the escalating actions on both sides, without condoning violence on either side.

The potential for destructive polarization exists in all of us, individually and collectively. Prudence and empathy dictate that we should prevent escalations and the growth of hatred in our hearts that would linger for generations to come. Although most of us can't do much at the moment to lessen the terrible conflicts that are going on in the world, we can all have a real impact when it comes to increasing or decreasing the growing polarizations and animosities in our own communities.

*Sabine Leitner*

# Spiritual Exercises in the Western Philosophical Tradition

Although modern philosophy is mainly an intellectual pursuit, it has had an immense impact on the shaping of our world. The philosophy of Francis Bacon (1561 – 1626) was largely responsible for the current scientific worldview and the explosion of technology; Auguste Comte (1798 – 1857) schematized the foundations of a theory of linear progress in history that has dominated the Western worldview since the 19<sup>th</sup> century to this day; and the philosophies of Hobbes (1588 – 1679) and Hume (1711 – 1776) promoted the idea of a lack of free will in human beings, whom they saw as being at the mercy of their passions, an idea which also continues to be prevalent nowadays. But modern philosophy has not been seen as a method for the transformation of the human being; in other

words, it cannot save us from our unruly passions and convert us into serene sages at one with ourselves and the universe. In the world of ancient Greece and Rome, however, this was precisely the goal of philosophy: not only the transformation of our vision of the world, but also the metamorphosis of our personality, as Pierre Hadot<sup>1</sup> expressed it. As such a transformation is no easy matter, all the Greco-Roman philosophical schools had a series of what Hadot calls “spiritual exercises” to achieve this aim.

What is the meaning of spiritual exercises? The term probably originates in the *exercitia spiritualia*

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1. French historian of ancient philosophy, author of *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, Blackwell 1995.



of St Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuit religious order in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. But Ignatius himself developed these exercises on the basis of early Christian philosophy, which in turn derived from the exercises already existing in the philosophical schools of antiquity, where they were referred to under the general term *askesis*, from which we have the word “asceticism”. The Greek and Roman spiritual exercises were not exclusively “ascetic” in the modern sense, however, as we shall see. This modern meaning of the word ‘asceticism’ arose from a Christian, mainly monastic application of the concept.



So what were the spiritual exercises of the ancient philosophical schools, and would they still be useful for a spiritual seeker of today?

For the ancients, the chief cause of suffering and disorder in man and the world were the passions (anger, greed, lust, etc.). Consequently, philosophy was seen as a therapy for the passions and its aim was to bring about a state of calm in the human soul. As a result, one of the main spiritual exercises was to cultivate this inner calm. How did they propose to achieve it? First of all, by transforming

the way we see the world. Ordinarily, we give great importance to the acquisition of wealth and fame. Our society today is still based on such criteria. But as Socrates says in *The Apology* (Plato’s account of the trial and death of Socrates): “Are you not ashamed that you give your attention to acquiring as much money as possible, and similarly with reputation and honour, and give no attention or thought to truth or thought, or the perfection of your soul?”

To counteract this tendency in the human being, Plato proposed philosophy as a “training for death”. In other words, in the knowledge that we will all die some day, we should prepare ourselves to live without a body, and this would mean dedicating ourselves to the intangible things of the soul.

One of the main exercises in all philosophical schools was therefore to practise “disidentifying” (to use a modern term) from our senses and freeing ourselves from what they called the “slavery of the desires”, which force us to act in ways we don’t actually want to. The Platonic exercise par excellence consisted in “separating the soul as much as possible from the body and accustoming itself to... concentrate itself until it is completely independent.”<sup>2</sup> (Socrates himself was an excellent example of such detachment, showing an ability to withstand heat and cold, pleasure and pain, while he pursued his philosophical investigations within himself, as we find described in Plato’s *Symposium*).

A further fruit of this training is that it enables the philosopher to free himself from his subjective points of view (which result from his subjection to his personal likes and dislikes, fears and desires) and rise to a more objective and universal perspective. This also helps us to see things in proportion: if you realise that as individuals and even as humanity, we are only a tiny and fairly insignificant part of reality, then we will not be so fazed by all the joys, sorrows and vicissitudes of human existence.

This attitude results from another type of spiritual exercise, which is the meditation on the nature of

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2. Plato’s *Phaedo* 67c

reality and one's own place in it. Unlike many of the modern philosophers, the ancients did not think of such meditation as a purely intellectual exercise, since it must also be practised in everyday situations in order to be validated. These philosophers were not "armchair thinkers": Socrates, for example, was tried in court and sentenced to death. He remained calm, cheerful and even humorous, both in court and as he awaited death in his prison cell. And Plato was once sold into slavery (but subsequently ransomed by a friend). None of them had an easy life, and philosophy was often compared to the training that athletes had to undergo in order to compete in the Olympic games. Indeed, in ancient Greece, philosophy was actually taught in the gymnasium.

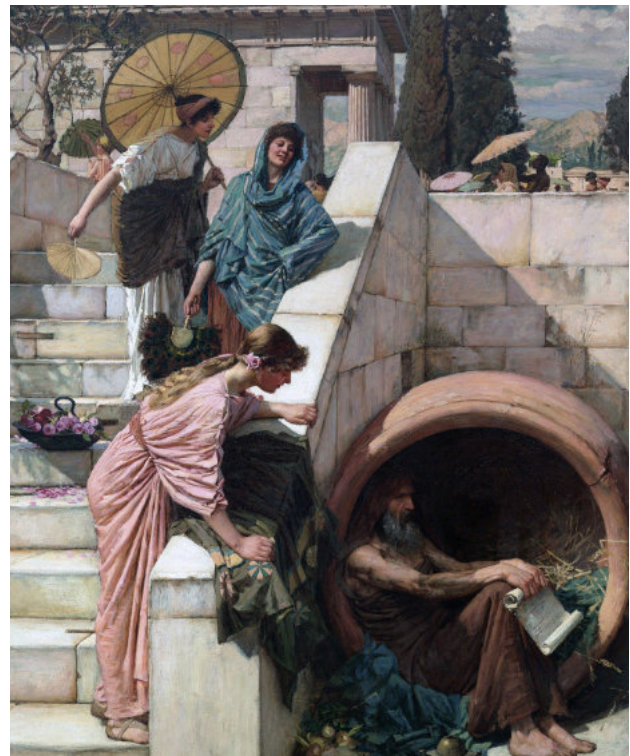
Philo of Alexandria, a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, made a list of different spiritual exercises used in the philosophical schools of his time. These included: thorough investigation, reading, meditations, listening, attention, self-mastery, indifference to indifferent things, therapies of the passions, remembrance of good things and accomplishment of duties.

The Stoic philosophers particularly recommended continuous vigilance and presence of mind, a self-awareness that never sleeps, and concentration on the present moment. They, and other schools before and after them, recommended reflecting at the beginning of the day on what awaited them and how they would respond to it; followed by an examination of conscience at the end of the day in order to pursue a path of continual self-improvement. Some schools also recommended examining one's dreams, and even controlling them, as well as preparing oneself for sleep by calming the passions and awakening the rational faculty with "excellent discourses".

In short, we can see that all these exercises were a natural part of "philosophy as a way of life". They recognize the mind of man and its importance – the need to think things through for ourselves – as well as the need for regular practice and implementation of our moral values and principles,

and the need to see ourselves as part of a greater whole which is governed by a "universal reason" or intelligence.

The Neoplatonist philosopher Plotinus (204/5 – 270 A.D.) described three stages of the philosophical path towards what he called The Good (the highest good that man can conceive): "We are instructed about it by analogies, negations... (the thinking-understanding process). We are led



Diogenes (1882) by John William Waterhouse. Wikimedia.org

towards it by purifications, virtues... (virtue seen as a means of detaching ourselves from the senses) and ascents into the intelligible world" (the mystical states of ecstasy experienced by Plotinus himself).

These spiritual exercises are truly timeless and can definitely be practised with beneficial results today. They allow us to rise up to the "life of the objective spirit", as Pierre Hadot puts it, while keeping our feet on the ground, improving ourselves day by day and maintaining an increasingly strong sense of connection with the rest of nature and the universe, of which we are a part.

*Julian Scott*

# Mass Migration and Refugees

Mass migration is not a contemporary phenomenon, but it has become more frequent in the last decade. It has to be distinguished from personal or individual migration, when just one person decides to leave their homeland or hometown to migrate to another country or area. If a large group of people decides to go to another land, then we can speak of mass migration. There are various reasons behind mass migration, but the most common ones are existential. For instance, if there is an ongoing war, the civilians leave their home to look for a safe place to live. Or, when a region does not offer enough financial stability for its residents, because of the lack of work or the low salaries, they might take the risk to look for better opportunities in another part of the country or abroad.

In history, there have been several big mass migrations. If we go back to an earlier time, around the fall of the Roman Empire in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, there was large-scale migration, and waves of tribes such as Franks, Goths, Huns and Slavs appeared in the region to gain territories and establish settlements. This mass migration period was known as the Barbarian Invasions and lasted hundreds of years until the new tribes managed to set up their states, the bases of the nations of today's Europe. One of the most well-known of these phenomena was the Age of Mass Migration between 1850 and 1913, when nearly 30 million Europeans decided to leave Europe for the United States. The major countries of departure were Italy, Ireland, Norway and Sweden. In that era, almost a quarter of the Swedish population emigrated overseas. The reason





behind this was the years of famine, because in the 1860s a severe famine hit large parts of the country due to the cold weather. Mainly peasants and poor people left the old continent in this period seeking a better life in America. A example from more recent history is the Russian-Ukraine war, when the invasion of Eastern Ukraine resulted in millions of refugees arriving in other European countries, mainly Poland, the Czech Republic and Germany.

According to the latest predictions, a new era of mass migration is on the horizon and it will be driven by the intensifying climate change. According to the International Organization for Migration about 1 billion (!) environmental migrants can be expected in



Europeans immigrants arriving in Argentina. Photo from wikimedia.org

the next 30 years. As global temperature rises, more and more territories will become uninhabitable around the globe and push their residents to seek other places to live. These will include countries that have long coast lines or low-lying coast, which may lose large territories because of the rise in sea levels. Bangladesh is an example of this, where about ten percent of the population (13 million people) live in an endangered area. In Africa, droughts and heatwaves are likely to force millions to leave for another continent. In addition, the fight for water or natural resources may create unprecedented wars that would lead millions to look for safety. However, the target countries, like the wealthy countries of Europe or North America will not be a guarantee for a better future, as climate change will hit those countries as well. In Canada, for instance, large wildfires have destroyed towns and huge areas of

land, while in Europe, wildfires in the south and flash floods in the north will become more frequent.

Dealing with the newcomers in their new home countries will be a key issue as well, including how to integrate them into society. Today, integration is variable: in some countries, governments fund language course for immigrants, provide them with accomodation and help them find work, while in others, the refugees get nothing from governments and are only helped by NGOs to tackle the difficulties they have to face.

The vulnerability of refugees is often exploited by human traffickers who promise to get them across borders for large sums of money. But the journey to a better future is often risky and can be fatal. Like in the Mediterranean, where thousands of refugees have drowned as they attempt to get to Europe on crowded boats. It makes the situation even more difficult that the growing numbers of refugees are regarded with suspicion and fear by the residents of the recipient countries. They fear that the newcomers will take their jobs, occupy their cities and become the new majority. But at the same time as the developed countries have an ageing population and there is a growing demand for young workers to take the vacant jobs, in the source countries, especially in poor, underdeveloped regions, the population is young and there is a lack of opportunities and jobs.

Also, it is challenging to solve the issue while not leaving the refugees to fall into the trap of modern slavery. Many of them, especially those who do not speak another language apart from their native one, are abused and made to do hard labour for little money, or – in case of women – are forced into prostitution. Some smugglers sell them as workforce on the way and they may never reach the country they were heading to. According to the International Labor Organization there are 25 million people in debt bondage and 15 million in forced marriages nowadays. For all these reasons, it is important for the developed countries to have common strategies on how to handle the problem of this world-scale phenomenon.

*Istvan Orban*

# On Marsilio Ficino's Magic

Marsilio Ficino was a prominent figure in the Italian Renaissance, making significant contributions to the study and revival of Magic. His magical teachings were an amalgamation of Neoplatonism, Hermeticism, and Christian thought. Before delving into Ficino's magical doctrines, it is essential to explore some of the key themes underlying Renaissance magic.

**Religious and Cultural Syncretism:** during the Renaissance, there was a strong interest in the interconnection between various religious

traditions. Renaissance magic incorporated elements from Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Jewish, and Christian traditions. This cultural syncretism resulted in a unique blend of practices and beliefs.

**Emanationism:** this theme reflects the idea that everything emanates from a divine source or primordial principle. Through knowledge and magical practice, the human being could ascend along this chain of emanations to reach the ultimate source.



Alchemical illustration in the "Basilica Philosophica" section of Opus Medico-Chymicum

Marble relief of Marsilio Ficino.



**Natural Magic:** Renaissance magic believed that there were hidden laws in nature that could be discovered and harnessed for magical purposes. Magic studies the intimate harmony among all parts of the Universe, thus establishing the mutual relationships among natural things.

**Correspondences and Symbolism:** rooted in the Hermetic motto ‘as above so below, as below so above’<sup>1</sup>, Renaissance magic believed in the correspondences between the different planes of existence. These correspondences and analogies were often symbolically represented and could be exploited for magical purposes.

**Studying the Stars:** it was believed that the positions of the heavenly bodies had an influence on individuals and earthly events. Astrologers and magicians could therefore use this knowledge for magical and divinatory purposes.

**Theurgy:** theurgy involved the invocation and interaction with spiritual beings, ultimately seeking connection with one's inner God or Daemon. Through various magical means, purification, and contemplation, individuals could directly experience divinity.

Renaissance magic represented an attempt to reconcile rational thought with the spiritual dimension, seeking to discover and control the

subtle powers of Nature for individual progress and spiritual transformation. For Ficino, magic was not merely about obscure rituals or gaining supernatural powers. It was a discipline that elevated the human soul, connecting it to the divine realm. The goal was to achieve spiritual 'rebirth' through an understanding of the Universe's secrets. The greatest of these 'secrets' being the concept of *Unity*, understood both as the origin of all things, visible and invisible, and as the 'magical thread' that linked everything together. Ficino's thought was based on the ancient concept of *emanation*, where all things flowed forth from the 'One', the highest divine principle. This idea formed the basis for his understanding of the interconnectedness of all existence and ultimately explained how Natural or Sympathetic Magic works.

In the magical and philosophical writings of Marsilio Ficino, two concepts played a significant role, that of “spiritus” and “talisman”. The *spiritus* is like a vital force or breath that permeates the cosmos. This *spiritus* is not limited to the physical realm but extends to the spiritual and celestial spheres. It is the animating force that gives life to all things and connects them to their divine source. It is luminous and subtle and is also associated with light, radiance, and divine illumination. *Spiritus* serves as a mediator between the earthly and celestial realms. It is the link that allows

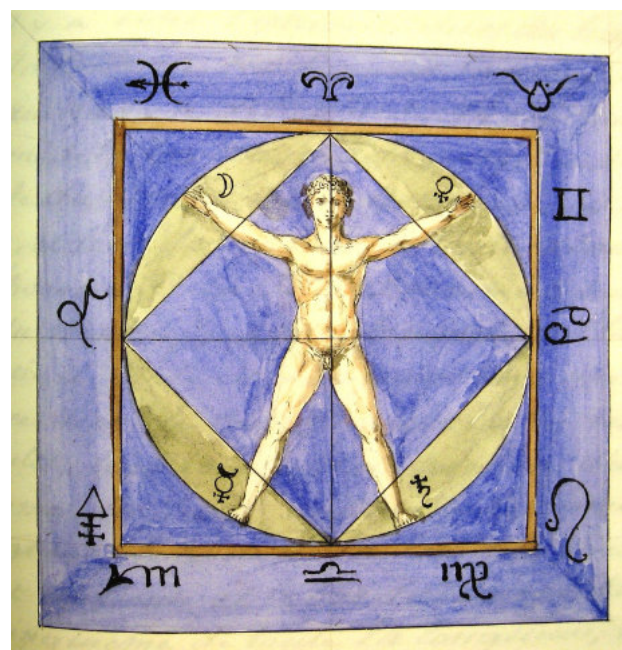


Image from Talismans Cabalistiques Magiques, grands secretes des Planettes (1704)

1. Based on the full verse of the *Emerald Tablet* which reads: “What is below is like what is above, and what is above is like what is below, to accomplish the miracles of the One Thing”.

communication and influence between the material world and the higher spiritual planes. Magicians, according to Ficino, can work with *spiritus* through specific rituals and invocations. By aligning themselves with the harmonious rhythms of the cosmos, they can harness the power of spiritus and achieve their magical goals.

In Ficino's magical worldview, talismans are considered like 'emissaries' of higher spiritual forces. They are often objects which have been consecrated and charged with specific celestial influences. The



creation of talismans is based on the principle of celestial sympathy and sympathetic magic which posits that like attracts like. By crafting talismans at auspicious times and under the right celestial configurations, one could capture and amplify these influences. In other words, each celestial body (symbolising a celestial archetype) had its unique qualities and virtues that could be harnessed through talismans. In this way, certain objects or symbols could influence events or heal the body by their sympathetic connection to celestial or archetypal forces. Talismans could therefore be used for medicinal and therapeutic purposes as well.

Ficino also emphasised the importance of moral and ethical purity when working with talismans. He believed that only individuals of virtuous character should engage in talismanic practices to ensure that the energies invoked were used for the benefit of humanity and in harmony with divine providence. He distinguished between natural magic and demonic magic, emphasising that natural magic uses only those symbolic correspondences found in nature, such as plants, minerals, and astrological influences, to improve, for instance, one's life and health.

Another important aspect of Ficino's view of magic was the idea of the ascent of the soul. He believed that through magical, meditative, and philosophical practices, the soul could ascend towards the 'One', thus achieving a state of union with divinity itself. This process was central to his vision of magic as a path to 'spiritual salvation'. Ficino argued that the ascent of the soul required inner purification, an understanding of one's divine nature, and a connection with celestial influences. Astrology played a pivotal role, as stars and planets carried divine influences. With astrological knowledge, individuals synchronized their souls with celestial harmonies, paving the path to unity with the divine.

Marsilio Ficino's influence on Renaissance magic was profound. His works, especially "De Vita Libri Tres" (*Three Books on Life*), continued to inspire other Renaissance thinkers like Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Giordano Bruno, who further developed Ficino's magical and spiritual ideas. Ficino acted as a bridge between ancient Hermetic traditions and the Renaissance's revival of philosophical and esoteric thought. His view of magic as a means for spiritual ascent and connection with the divine had a lasting impact on the history of Western magic, shaping esoteric and philosophical thought for centuries to come.

*Agostino Dominici*

# A Dangerous Method

## the relationship between Freud and Jung (and others)

**“People could learn from their mistakes, if they weren’t so busy denying them”.**

Carl Gustav Jung

*A Dangerous Method* is a 2011 film that deals with the complicated personal relationships between Carl Jung, founder of analytical psychology, Sigmund Freud, founder of the psychoanalysis, and Sabine Spielrein, initially a patient of Jung and later herself a physician and one of the first female psychoanalysts.

It is a period drama, set in the years before the First World War, beginning in 1904 when Sabine Spielrein is admitted as Jung's patient to the psychiatric hospital in Zurich while suffering a psychotic episode.

The film, directed by David Cronenberg, was filmed between May and July 2010 in Cologne, with locations in Vienna. It stars Michael Fassbender, playing Jung; Viggo Mortensen, in the role of Freud; and Kiera Knightley as Sabine Spielrein.



Anecdotally, Christopher Waltz was apparently the first choice to play Freud, but he couldn't do it due to a scheduling conflict, since he was filming at the time, so Cronenberg turned to Viggo Mortensen for a third collaboration. They had previously made "A History of Violence" and "Eastern Promises" together. Mortensen plays the character as expected, with his efficient and professional style. I must confess that when I found out about this, I was very curious about how Waltz would have done it, but these are comments left to the wayside for film buffs. For the role of Jung, they had thought of Christian Bale, but he had the same problem, so the role went to Michael Fassbender, who played it so well that I simply cannot imagine Bale in the role.



All the performances are very convincing and this historical-psychological drama with such high-quality dialogues far exceeds most things that can be seen today. The film won several awards, most notably for Fassbender and Mortensen.

By introducing a rather seedy character called Otto Gross, the characters' attitudes to sex are brought to the fore, while also highlighting some ethical issues of psychoanalysis, which partly contributed to the breakdown of the relationship between Freud and Jung. However, there were other differences of opinion between them, which became increasingly divisive over time, such as Jung and Freud's divergent attitudes towards mysticism (an important part of Jung's outlook, but totally neglected by Freud) and Freud's

desire (according to Jung) to be seen as an infallible father figure.

The figure of Sabine Spielrein is a volcanic spark between the two men, who enlivens the film with her dialogues with both of them, as well as with Jung's long-suffering wife, Emma.

There is an amusing incident at the beginning of the film when Jung and Freud first meet at Freud's house for lunch. Once they are seated at the table, Jung becomes so engrossed in the topic they are talking about that he does not stop helping himself to food until Freud says something like "help yourself freely" and only then does he realize that the whole family is watching him with great attention and curiosity. The conversation continues in a social club for coffee and dessert, where they carry on discussing psychoanalysis. They then return to Freud's house and study, where they continue talking about all these topics until Freud asks him if he has realized that they have been talking for 13 hours straight.

All in all, this is a great film for learning more about Freud and Jung, the differences between them, and the mystical aspects of Jung's life and work. Add to this that it is brilliantly acted and directed, and it becomes the perfect recipe for enjoyment and learning combined.

#### **Some final information about the main characters:**

- Otto Gross, due to his bad life, lost everything and it is said that he was left to starve to death in 1919. He was found dead on the street.
- Sigmund Freud fled Vienna already very ill with his family after the arrival of the Nazis and died in London in 1939.
- Sabine Spielrein returned to Russia and not only practiced but trained many prominent psychoanalysts. She returned to her hometown of Rostov on the Don. In 1941, already widowed, she was taken to a synagogue, with many other Jews, and shot by the Nazis along with her daughters and everybody else.
- Carl Gustav Jung suffered a deep depression during World War I, from which he eventually recovered to become the world's most eminent psychologist. He survived his wife Emma and his lover Toni Wolff and died peacefully in 1961.

*Alfredo Aguilar*

# Introduction to the World of Feng Shui

## (Part 2)

In this second article I hope to further our understanding of the fundamentals of Feng Shui, exploring the Principles of the Five Phases and the movement of Qi.

### The Five Phases - Wuxing

The etymological origin of the characters Wu (五): Five, and Xing (行): Phase / Agent, implies movement and a state of flow. It is a fivefold concept found throughout Chinese thought and used in a variety of disciplines such as philosophy,

how Qi (energy) moves in a cycle of yin and yang and how it manifests itself within the five phases. Each phase is connected and represented in different parts of our environment and the natural world. Different disciplines such as medicine and astronomy will associate the phases with different subject matters. Within Feng Shui we are interested in the seasons, direction, climate, colour, number and shapes connected with the five phases. The table below shows their connections.

Five Phase Association of each Element.						
Element	Season	Direction	Climate	Colour	Number	Shape
Fire	Summer	South	Hot	Red, Purple, Dark Orange, Pink	9	Triangle
Earth	Late summer	Centre, (Northeast, Southwest)	Wet	Brown, Yellow	2, 5, 8	Square
Metal	Autumn	West, (Northwest)	Dry	White, Silver, Gold	6, 7	Round
Water	Winter	North	Cold	Black, Blue	1	Wave
Wood	Spring	East, (Southeast)	Wind	Green	3, 4	Tall

astronomy, martial arts, medicine and music. These are observable phases in Nature in which the ancients monitored and compared.

In the West they are more popularly known as the five elements. This would imply that they are fixed and solid. But in reality the phases are fluid in movement and change. In Feng Shui we look at

### Creation Cycle (Fig.1)

This cycle shows a forward chain where one phase progresses to the next phase. Each phase gives birth to the next phase. This is known as the mother and son relationship. It illustrates a cycle of creation, order and balance.



Fig [1]

- Fire creates earth through the burning of wood to produce ashes.
- Earth creates metal through the earth qi. It compacts and contracts the earth and ashes inward to produce metal.
- Metal creates water. From the metal qi contracting force, water qi condenses and produces water.
- Water creates wood. Water qi nourishes trees and sustains and supports growth.
- Wood creates fire. Burning Wood qi produces fire qi.

### Controlling Cycle (Fig. 2)

This cycle is also known as the cycle of imbalance as each phase controls and subdues its opposite counterpart. This arises when there is an excess or a shortage in either of the phases.

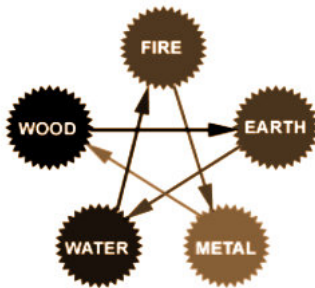


Fig [2]

- Fire melts metal.
- Earth blocks water.
- Metal chops down wood.
- Water weakens and puts out fire.
- Wood burdens earth.

Unlike the previous cycle where qi is created, qi is being dominated by each phase creating a cycle of strife and discord. This can lead to the disruption in flow of qi and stagnation in the external surroundings which could have a negative impact on us.

### The Weakening Cycle (Fig.3)

The final cycle to be discussed is the weakening cycle. Its five phases move in the opposite direction of the creation cycle, thus reducing the effects of the controlling cycle and enabling the creation cycle to create balance.

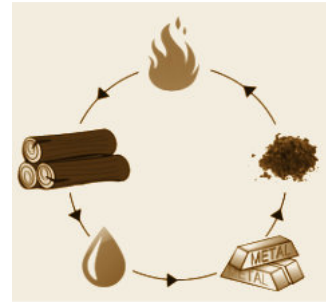


Fig [3]

The qi moves anti-clockwise to the creation cycle.

- Fire burns wood.
- Wood absorbs water.
- Water corrodes metal.
- Metal moves earth.
- Earth reduces fire.

### Shapes and Buildings : Five Phases of Shapes

Buildings with particular functions are also connected with the five different shapes. Fire qi is linked with spiritual centres such as churches and temples in a triangular shape. Homes and dwellings are connected to Earth qi in the shape of squares and rectangles. Sports venues and observatories are associated with metal qi in the shape of a circle, oval or dome. Wavy-shaped roofs are connected with water qi and with our skyscrapers reaching for the heavens. They connect with the wood qi, promoting growth and expansion.

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*Jim Pang*



# Hydrogen

## Energy of the Future?

Hydrogen is the first element, represented by the capital letter H in the periodic table. It is the fuel of the stars, the building block of the universe from which everything is created through nuclear fusion. And even if the universe is more than 13.5 billion years old, hydrogen is estimated to represent 88% of the atoms in it. Despite its abundance, H is hardly ever found in its natural form -  $H_2$  - on Earth. Most of the time it is found combined with other atoms.

Therefore, we need to extract it, using energy, to isolate atoms of hydrogen. The most common method used at the moment is by processing

natural gas, predominantly made up of methane, which contains four atoms of hydrogen per molecule ( $CH_4$ ). The methane is heated up with steam ( $H_2O$ ) under pressure to create carbon dioxide ( $CO_2$ ) and of course hydrogen (H). Today around 95% of H is produced in this way (by steam methane reforming, known as SMR). The rest of the H is extracted using another element which is abundant and contains a decent amount of H, namely water ( $H_2O$ ), through electrolysis, using electricity. Forcing water under an electric current will break it down into oxygen ( $O_2$ ) and hydrogen ( $H_2$ ). Such a process emits



CO<sub>2</sub>, but the amount depends on the type of electricity used. However, three quarters of the energy is wasted through the electrolysis, transport and storage of H. Other ways to extract H, such as through pyrolysis, have been used only in labs and small power plants. A few pockets of natural H have been found but require fracking methods to get it from underneath our feet.

In order to categorise the types of hydrogen extraction, there is a colour code which is

the current need for H in crucial sectors such as the production of fertilizer (NH<sub>3</sub>) or steel.

As we have seen, extracting H is a complex and energy-intensive process, which makes H an extremely volatile substance, a precious commodity. And before we start building hydrogen powerplants everywhere, while dreaming of hydrogen powering everything we use today, such as cars, planes, trucks, home heating or cooking, we have to think about what



Photo by Pixabay

supposed to help the user identify how much CO<sub>2</sub> the hydrogen they use has generated. And I am not going to enter into the question of whether pink hydrogen (derived from nuclear-based electricity using electrolysis) is better than blue hydrogen (from steam methane reforming using carbon capture). Rather, it might be better to ask whether we actually need hydrogen in the first place. Because H is not an energy source, except for nuclear fusion or white hydrogen (naturally found pockets of H), it is an energy vector. Like electricity, H needs to be transformed using energy. And the more ecologically friendly methods for extracting H need a lot of renewable electricity, just to match

is really needed. If we don't, we will quickly hit a technological and physical wall, after a great amount of energy and investment has been wasted.

Our thirst for ever more energy and power creates the illusion that hydrogen can be a new source of abundant green energy, when it is only a vector, using already precious energy and resources, to complexify even more a system which is already interdependent on too many things. When it comes to material life, would it not be better to simplify things? To bring them closer to home and be more conscious of our environment? To be continued...

*Florimond Krins*

# The Hero, Life and the Creation of the Sun

Double headed feathered serpent, British museum. Wikimedia.org



The wisdom tradition and religious thought of the ancient Aztecs is shrouded in mystery. Whilst we cannot completely 'know' how these people encountered life, we can intuitively enter an understanding of how they thought, using symbolic language to decipher what remains perceivable through the shifting sands of time.

One such remaining treasure is the myth of Chicovaneg and the Creation of the Sun. The story describes a time when an original sun had been extinguished by the

forces of darkness, when no blossoms or fruits could be found upon the Earth and when the birds had forgotten how to sing... Human beings drifted in this total darkness, unable to find their way home, they lost all sense of time and meaning. Eventually, a gathering of chieftains was possible and after consulting the sage, Bayelsnael they learnt that the creation of a new sun was indeed possible but by no means easy.

"There is a way to create a new Sun as big and beautiful as the Sun we once enjoyed. But the

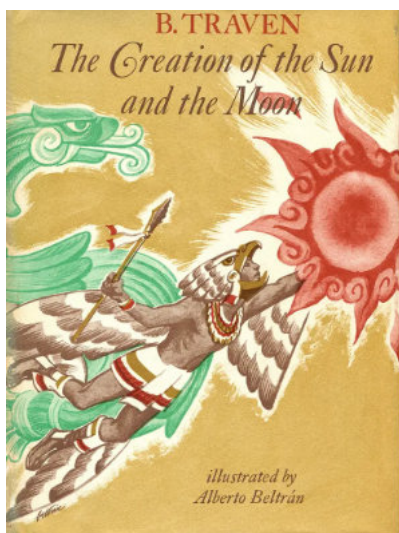
way is difficult and full of danger... For he must fasten each star-piece onto his shield, and he must then climb higher and higher, gathering fragments from the stars, until he reaches the very apex arc of the sky. There, when all the star-pieces are fastened at last on his shield, the shield itself will turn into a great flaming sun." (Traven, 1971 p.10)

Stars can be understood as a symbol of spiritual power that struggles against the forces of darkness, they also mark out the far reaching path that mankind can perceive as pertaining to its destiny... In antiquity stars were connected to the idea of virtues which inevitably require attention and effort to attain, to live by (Cirlot, 1971).

The hero Chicovaneg volunteers himself, realising that by doing so he will lose all he has ever known. He will leave the Earth never to return and, immortal in the heaven, be fated to observe all that he loves grow old and die. This he chooses and his task begins with the creation of certain 'magical weapons' to prepare him for the perilous journey. One day,

whilst searching for the 'Feathered Serpent' at the side of a lake, Chicovaneg sees an injured Quetzal bird fallen into the water and swims out to rescue it. However, the forces of darkness (aware of his quest to create the new sun) send a huge storm to drown them. Agile Chicovaneg places the Quetzal bird upon his head, whose precise-vision steers them both clear of every treacherous wave and safely to the shore.

Connection with animals often represents the conquest of some internal problem or the



The Creation of the Sun and the Moon. Book by B. Traven.

incorporation of certain spiritual powers into one's consciousness. The precise-vision of the Quetzal bird that steers the hero through stormy waters could be understood as the awakening of an inner vision which clarifies the direction, meaning and purpose of one's life.

With the Quetzal bird now helping him, Chicovaneg can find and free the Feathered Serpent. Using Odyssean-like skill he outwits the monster-sorcerer Masqueshab and dissolves the

bewitching chains binding the magnificent creature by singing magical songs of the flowers.

In general, serpents represent forces and energies in life and the feathered plumage suggests a spiritual and solar quality – thus the Feathered Serpent refers to positive forces and energies that oblige us forwards and upwards. To free the Feathered Serpent is to free Life which moves in this ascending direction, to live and express positive spiritual energies, to enter into time, to know the direction of Life.

Now united with Chicovaneg, the Feathered Serpent accompanies him to the closest star. This first star appears tantalisingly within reach, but as Chicovaneg goes to grasp it his nerve fails, it seems further away and he fears falling into the abyss! Despite encouraging words from the Feathered Serpent, the hero is seized by doubt and procrastination. Months pass as Chicovaneg ties and reties his shield-straps and boots, over and over again. When he attempts it once more, the Feathered Serpent notices his nerve wavering again, but this time gives him an almighty whack(!) and with that Chicovaneg attains the first star on his way to the apex arc of the sky (Traven, 1971).

As the journey continues, Chicovaneg and the Feathered Serpent work together and through this dance the hero ascends to each new star, attaching the star-piece to his shield that grows ever brighter in the sky, bringing hope to people on Earth as flowers begin to grow



Quetzalcoatl, as depicted in the Codex Magliabechiano.

and birds begin to sing. At one glorious moment the people of Earth see that a new sun had truly had been created. Despite continuous efforts by the forces of darkness to extinguish the sun, Chicovaneg remains on guard, raising his flaming shield and protecting those on Earth. When he rejoices in triumph he often paints a great arc of beautiful colours in the sky (Traven, 1971)...

There is a sweetness to this myth which speaks of a state of consciousness that is profound and at one with Nature. A state of consciousness that can hear the songs of the flowers and quietly has the courage to sing them and to free Life. To be guided and to leap forwards and upwards.

*Siobhan Farrar*

### **Recommended Reading**

Traven. B. 1971. *The Creation of the Sun and the Moon*. Frederick Muller Ltd. London.

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