

Who Was Hermes Trismegistus?

(Preliminary Background Paper)

Given at Wilkerson College Lodge No. 760

Saturday, August 8, 2009

Clayton L. Wright, PM

First of all, I'd like to thank WB Mark Conner for inviting me to speak today, and WB Grant for hosting this meeting. I'd also like to thank each of you for your support and making the trek here from all over the State.

I grew up just down the road in Kings Mountain and worked in Bessemer City after I got out of the military. I was Raised in Fairview Lodge No. 339 (in Kings Mountain) and used to visit here at Whetstone Lodge No. 515 quite often. I remember one particular night of a Master Masons Degree, during a thunderstorm, when the lights went out as we were carrying the candidate around. Thunder, Lightning, we finished the Degree by Candle Light! I'll never forget it. Oh, and there was WB Hal Lovelace and his difficulty keeping a certain implement from flying apart! And if you haven't already seen it, you should check out the concealed space between the Altar and the West before you go. There are lots of good memories here for me.

What I will present today is some information on Hermes Trismegistus, which will be developed into a research paper on The Influence of Hermes on Science and Religion Throughout the World.

It is said that: "Freemasonry is a beautiful system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols." Freemasonry, while not a religion, has many things in common with religion. We are told that Geometry and Masonry were originally synonymous terms, that it is the foundation of Architecture and the Root of Mathematics. It is from Geometry that all of the other sciences were built. Masonic Concepts are taught by using allegories; we work on building our Inner Temple by exploring what the Ancient Masters have taught. Many of the ideas and symbols we use can be found in the writings of "Hermes."

It is my belief that all religion and or science (including Masonry), emanated from one point. Was that point the Ancient Adept Hermes (who was otherwise known to the Egyptians as Thoth)? No one knows for sure, but that is the idea we will develop today.

In Craft Masonry, there are many allusions to Hermetic Doctrine. (I'm sure you've all heard the terms Hermeticism, Hermetic Doctrine, Hermetic Kabbalah or Hermetic Alchemy?) In recent years, books like "The Secret" by Rhonda Byrne, "The Law of Attraction" by Esther and Jerry Hicks; and teachers like Dr. Joseph Campbell ("The Power of Myth") and Dr. Wayne

Dyer (“The Power of Intention”), have been responsible for renewed public interest in this sacred knowledge. Books on the Kabbalah and Occult Knowledge are in every major (and most of the smaller) bookstores. And of course there is a newfound abundance of information on the Internet.

¹*The term Hermetic is from the Greek word Herm, which refers to a pillar or post used in pre-classical Greece "of square shape, surmounted by a head with a beard. The square, limbless "Hermes" was a step in advance of the unwrought stone." The origin of the word Hermes relates to a stone pillar used to communicate with the deities and the use of the names beginning with Herm in Greece dates from at least 600 BCE.* ²According to Pausanias, in olden times all the Greeks worshipped unwrought stones instead of images, and he describes thirty square stones near a spring sacred to Hermes at Pharae in Greece. In the Fellow Craft Lecture, we are taught that “it is to the Greeks therefore, and not the Romans, that we are indebted for all things which are Great, Judicious and Distinct in Architecture”. This is just one example, but we can see how the “Unwrought Stone” would be of importance to Masons.

In Scottish Rite Masonry (known as the “College of Freemasonry”), we also call on Hermes for instruction. The Knight of the Sun or Prince Adept Degree, in particular is full of the Hermetic Teachings,³ and accounts for more than one-fourth of Pike’s Morals and Dogma.

In York Rite Masonry, we have the Allied Masonic Degrees, and still more avenues to study the mystic teachings.

⁴Hermes Trismegistus (Greek for "Hermes the thrice-greatest" or Mercurius ter Maximus in Latin, is the syncretism of the Greek god Hermes and the Egyptian Thoth. In Hellenistic Egypt, the god Hermes was given as epithet the Greek name of Thoth.

Hermes Trismegistus might also be explained in Euhemerist¹ fashion as a man who was the son of the god, and in the Kabbalistic tradition that was inherited by the Renaissance, it could be imagined that such a person had been contemporary with Moses, communicating to a line of adepts a parallel wisdom. A historian, however, would leave such speculation to the history of alchemy and the nineteenth-century history of occultism.

Both Thoth and Hermes were gods of writing and of magic in their respective cultures. Thus the Greek god of interpretive communication was combined with the Egyptian god of wisdom as a patron of astrology and alchemy. The majority of Greeks, and later Romans, did not accept Hermes Trismegistus in the place of Hermes. The two gods remained distinct from one another.

¹ Euhemerist: Theory of Historic Origins of Mythology

The Hermetic literature added to the Egyptian concerns with conjuring spirits and animating statues that inform the oldest texts, Hellenistic writings of Greco-Babylonian astrology and the newly developed practice of alchemy. In a parallel tradition, Hermetic philosophy rationalized and systematized religious cult practices and offered the adept a method of personal ascension from the constraints of physical being, which has led to confusion of Hermeticism with Gnosticism, which was developing contemporaneously.⁵

As a divine fountain of writing, Hermes Trismegistus was credited with tens of thousands of writings of high standing, reputed to be of immense antiquity. Plato's Timaeus and Critias state that in the temple of Neith at Sais, there were secret halls containing historical records which had been kept for 9,000 years. Clement of Alexandria was under the impression that the Egyptians had forty-two sacred writings by Hermes, encapsulating all the training of Egyptian priests. Siegfried Morenz has suggested (Egyptian Religion) "The reference to Thoth's authorship... is based on ancient tradition; the figure forty-two probably stems from the number of Egyptian nomes², and thus conveys the notion of completeness."

The so-called "Hermetic literature", the Hermetica, is a category of papyri containing spells and induction procedures. In the dialogue called the Asclepius (after the Greek god of healing) the art of imprisoning the souls of demons or of angels in statues with the help of herbs, gems and odors, is described, such that the statue could speak and prophesy. In other papyri, there are other recipes for constructing such images and animating them, such as when images are to be fashioned hollow so as to enclose a magic name inscribed on gold leaf.

During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus known as Hermetica enjoyed great credit and were popular among alchemists. The "hermetic tradition" therefore refers to alchemy, magic, astrology and related subjects. The texts are usually distinguished in two categories the "**philosophical**" and "**technical**" hermetica. The former deals mainly with issues of philosophy, and the latter with magic, potions and alchemy. Among other things there are spells to magically protect objects, hence the origin of the term "Hermetically sealed".

The classical scholar Casaubon showed, by the character of the Greek, the texts that were traditionally written at the dawn of time, to be more recent: most of the "philosophical" Corpus Hermeticum can be dated to around AD 300. However, flaws in this identification were uncovered by the 17th century Cudworth, who argued that Casaubon's allegation of forgery could only be applied to three of the seventeen treatises contained within the

² "Egyptian Provinces"

Corpus Hermeticum. Moreover, Cudworth noted Casaubon's failure to acknowledge the codification of these treatises as a late formulation of a pre-existing (possibly oral) tradition. According to Cudworth, the text must be viewed as a terminus ad quem (or completed work) and not a quo.

Modern occultists continue to suggest that some of these texts may be of Pharaonic origin, and that "the forty two essential texts" that contained the core work of his religious beliefs and his life philosophy remain hidden away in a secret library.

In some of the readings of Edgar Cayce, Hermes or Thoth was an engineer from the submerging Atlantis and that he built or designed or directed the construction of the Pyramids of Egypt.

Within the occult tradition, Hermes Trismegistus is credited with several wives, and more than one son who took his name, as well as more than one grandson. This repetition of given name and surname throughout the generations may at least partially account for the legend of his longevity, especially as it is believed that many of his children pursued careers as priests in the religion he started.

One of the Hermetic books that I've been studying recently is called "The Kybalion". Here is an excerpt. *⁶The purpose of this work is not the enunciation of any special philosophy or doctrine, but rather is to give to the students a statement of the Truth that will serve to reconcile the many bits of occult knowledge that they may have acquired, but which are apparently opposed to each other and which often serve to discourage and disgust the beginner in the study. Our intent is not to erect a new Temple of Knowledge, but rather to place in the hands of the student a Master-Key with which he may open the many inner doors in the Temple of Mystery through the main portals he has already entered.*

There is no portion of the occult teachings possessed by the world which have been so closely guarded as the fragments of the Hermetic Teachings which have come down to us over the tens of centuries which have elapsed since the lifetime of its great founder, Hermes Trismegistus, the "scribe of the gods," who dwelt in old Egypt in the days when the present race of men was in its infancy. Contemporary with Abraham, and, if the legends be true, an instructor of that venerable sage, Hermes was, and is, the Great Central Sun of Occultism, whose rays have served to illumine the countless teachings which have been promulgated since his time. All the fundamental and basic teachings embedded in the esoteric teachings of every race may be traced back to Hermes. Even the most ancient teachings of India undoubtedly have their roots in the original Hermetic Teachings.

From the land of the Ganges many advanced occultists wandered to the land of Egypt, and sat at the feet of the Master. From him they obtained the

Master-Key which explained and reconciled their divergent views, and thus the Secret Doctrine was firmly established. From other lands also came the learned ones, all of whom regarded Hermes as the Master of Masters, and his influence was so great that in spite of the many wanderings from the path on the part of the centuries of teachers in these different lands, there may still be found a certain basic resemblance and correspondence which underlies the many and often quite divergent theories entertained and taught by the occultists of these different lands today. The student of Comparative Religions will be able to perceive the influence of the Hermetic Teachings in every religion worthy of the name, now known to man, whether it be a dead religion or one in full vigor in our own times. There is always certain correspondence in spite of the contradictory features, and the Hermetic Teachings act as the Great Reconciler.

The lifework of Hermes seems to have been in the direction of planting the great Seed-Truth which has grown and blossomed in so many strange forms, rather than to establish a school of philosophy which would dominate, the world's thought. But, nevertheless, the original truths taught by him have been kept intact in their original purity by a few men each age, who, refusing great numbers of half-developed students and followers, followed the Hermetic custom and reserved their truth for the few who were ready to comprehend and master it. From lip to ear the truth has been handed down among the few. There have always been a few Initiates in each generation, in the various lands of the earth, who kept alive the sacred flame of the Hermetic Teachings, and such have always been willing to use their lamps to re-light the lesser lamps of the outside world, when the light of truth grew dim, and clouded by reason of neglect, and when the wicks became clogged with foreign matter. There were always a few to tend faithfully the altar of the Truth, upon which was kept alight the Perpetual Lamp of Wisdom. These men devoted their lives to the labor of love, which the poet has so well stated in his lines:

"O, let not the flame die out! Cherished age after age in its dark cavern, in its holy temples cherished. Fed by pure ministers of love, let not the flame die out!"

These men have never sought popular approval, nor numbers of followers. They are indifferent to these things, for they know how few there are in each generation who are ready for the truth, or who would recognize it if it were presented to them. They reserve the "strong meat for men," while others furnish the "milk for babes." They reserve their pearls of wisdom for the few elect, who recognize their value and who wear them in their crowns, instead of casting them before the materialistic vulgar swine, who would trample them in the mud and mix them with their disgusting mental food. But still these men have never forgotten or overlooked the original teachings of Hermes, regarding the passing on of the words of truth to those ready to receive it, which teaching is stated in The Kybalion as follows: "Where fall

the footsteps of the Master, the ears of those ready for his Teaching open wide." And again: "When the ears of the student are ready to hear, then cometh the lips to fill them with wisdom." But their customary attitude has always been strictly in accordance with the other Hermetic aphorism, also in The Kybalion: "The lips of Wisdom are closed, except to the ears of Understanding."

There are those who have criticized this attitude of the Hermetists, and who have claimed that they did not manifest the proper spirit in their policy of seclusion and reticence. But a moment's glance back over the pages of history will show the wisdom of the Masters, who knew the folly of attempting to teach to the world that which it was neither ready or willing to receive. The Hermetists have never sought to be martyrs, and have, instead, sat silently aside with a pitying smile on their closed lips, while the "heathen raged noisily about them" in their customary amusement of putting to death and torture the honest but misguided enthusiasts who imagined that they could force upon a race of barbarians the truth capable of being understood only by the elect who had advanced along The Path.

And the spirit of persecution has not as yet died out in the land. There are certain Hermetic Teachings, which, if publicly promulgated, would bring down upon the teachers a great cry of scorn and revilement from the multitude, who would again raise the cry of "Crucify! Crucify."

In this little work we have endeavored to give you an idea of the fundamental teachings of The Kybalion, striving to give you the working Principles, leaving you to apply them yourselves, rather than attempting to work out the teaching in detail. If you are a true student, you will be able to work out and apply these Principles--if not, then you must develop yourself into one, for otherwise the Hermetic Teachings will be as "words, words, words" to you.

THE SEVEN HERMETIC PRINCIPLES

"The Principles of Truth are Seven; he who knows these, understandingly, possesses the Magic Key before whose touch all the Doors of the Temple fly open."--The Kybalion.

The Seven Hermetic Principles, upon which the entire Hermetic Philosophy is based, are as follows:

- 1. The Principle of Mentalism.** "THE ALL IS MIND; The Universe is Mental."
- 2. The Principle of Correspondence.** "As above, so below; as below, so above."
- 3. The Principle of Vibration.** "Nothing rests; everything moves; everything vibrates."

4. The Principle of Polarity. "Everything is Dual; everything has poles; everything has its pair of opposites; like and unlike are the same; opposites are identical in nature, but different in degree; extremes meet; all truths are but half-truths; all paradoxes may be reconciled."

5. The Principle of Rhythm. "Everything flows, out and in; everything has its tides; all things rise and fall; the pendulum-swing manifests in everything; the measure of the swing to the right is the measure of the swing to the left; rhythm compensates."

6. The Principle of Cause and Effect. "Every Cause has its Effect; every Effect has its Cause; everything happens according to Law; Chance is but a name for Law not recognized; there are many planes of causation, but nothing escapes the Law."

7. The Principle of Gender. "Gender is in everything; everything has its Masculine and Feminine Principles; Gender manifests on all planes."

And from the "emerald Tablets of Thoth the Atlantean" Doreal writes in his introduction... *⁷The history of the tablets translated in the following pages is strange and beyond the belief of modern scientists. Their antiquity is stupendous, dating back some 36,000 years B.C. The writer is Thoth, an Atlantean Priest-King, who founded a colony in ancient Egypt after the sinking of the mother country.*

He was the builder of the Great Pyramid of Giza, erroneously attributed to Cheops. In it he incorporated his knowledge of the ancient wisdom and also securely secreted records and instruments of ancient Atlantis.

For some 16,000 years, he ruled the ancient race of Egypt, from approximately 52,000 B.C. to 36,000 B.C. At that time, the ancient barbarous race among which he and his followers had settled had been raised to a high degree of civilization.

Thoth was an immortal, that is, he had conquered death, passing only when he willed and even then not through death. His vast wisdom made him ruler over the various Atlantean colonies, including the ones in South and Central America.

When the time came for him to leave Egypt, he erected the Great Pyramid over the entrance to the Great Halls of Amenti, placed in it his records, and appointed guards for his secrets from among the highest of his people.

In later times, the descendants of these guards became the pyramid priests, by which Thoth was deified as the God of Wisdom, The Recorder, by those in the age of darkness, which followed his passing. In legend, the Halls of Amenti became the underworld, the Halls of the gods, where the soul passed after death for judgment.

During later ages, the ego of Thoth passed into the bodies of men in the

manner described in the tablets. As such, he incarnated three times, in his last being known as Hermes, the thrice-born.

In this incarnation, he left the writings known to modern occultists as the Emerald Tablets, a later and far lesser exposition of the ancient mysteries.

The tablets translated in this work are ten, which were left in the Great Pyramid in the custody of the pyramid priests. The ten are divided into thirteen parts for the sake of convenience.

The last two are so great and far-reaching in their import that at present it is forbidden to release them to the world at large. However, in those contained herein are secrets which will prove of inestimable value to the serious student.

They should be read, not once, but a hundred times for only thus can the true meaning be revealed. A casual reading will give glimpses of beauty, but more intensive study will open avenues of wisdom to the seeker.

But now a word as to how these mighty secrets came to be revealed to modern man after being hidden so long...

Some thirteen hundred years B.C., Egypt, the ancient Khem, was in turmoil and many delegations of priests were sent to other parts of the world.

Among these were some of the pyramid priests who carried with them the Emerald Tablets as a talisman by which they could exercise authority over the less advanced priest-craft of races descended from other Atlantean colonies. The tablets were understood from legend to give the bearer authority from Thoth.

The particular group of priests bearing the tablets emigrated to South America where they found a flourishing race, the Mayas who remembered much of the ancient wisdom.

Among these, the priests settled and remained. In the tenth century, the Mayas had thoroughly settled the Yucatan, and the tablets were placed beneath the altar of one of the great temples of the Sun God.

After the conquest of the Mayas by the Spaniards, the cities were abandoned and the treasures of the temples forgotten.

It should be understood that the Great Pyramid of Egypt has been and still is a temple of initiation into the mysteries. Many great teachers are supposed to have been initiated there.

The writer was instructed to recover and return the ancient tablets to the Great Pyramid. This, after adventures that need not be detailed here, was

accomplished. Before returning them, he was given permission to translate and retain a copy of the wisdom engraved on the tablets. This was done in 1925 and only now (in 1939) has permission been given for part to be published. It is expected that many will scoff. Yet the true student will read between the lines and gain wisdom. If the light is in you, the light which is engraved in these tablets will respond.

Now, a word as to the material aspect of the tablets. They consist of twelve tablets of emerald green, formed from a substance created through alchemical transmutation. They are imperishable, resistant to all elements and substances. In effect, the atomic and cellular structure is fixed, no change ever taking place. In this respect, they violate the material law of ionization.

Upon them are engraved characters in the ancient Atlantean language: characters which respond to attuned thought waves, releasing the associated mental vibration in the mind of the reader.

The tablets are fastened together with hoops of golden-colored alloy suspended from a rod of the same material. So much for the material appearance.

The wisdom contained therein is the foundation of the ancient mysteries. And for the one who reads with open eyes and mind, his wisdom shall be increased a hundred-fold.

Read. Believe or not, but read. And the vibration found therein will awaken a response in your soul.

Man's search for understanding of the laws which regulate his life has been unending, yet always just beyond the veil which shields the higher planes from material man's vision the truth has existed, ready to be assimilated by those who enlarge their vision by turning inward, not outward, in their search.

In the silence of material senses lies the key to the unveiling of wisdom. He who talks does not know; he who knows does not talk. The highest knowledge is unutterable, for it exists as an entity in lanes which transcend all material words or symbols. All symbols are but keys to doors leading to truths, and many times the door is not opened because the key seems so great that the things which are beyond it are not visible.

If we can understand that all keys, all material symbols are manifestations, are but extensions of a great law and truth, we will begin to develop the vision which will enable us to penetrate beyond the veil.

All things in all universes move according to law, and the law which regulates the movement of the planets is no more immutable than the law

which regulates the material expressions of man.

One of the greatest of all Cosmic Laws is that which is responsible for the formation of man as a material being.

The great aim of the mystery schools of all ages has been to reveal the workings of the Law which connect man, the material and man, the spiritual.

The connecting link between the material man and the spiritual man is the intellectual man, for the mind partakes of both the material and immaterial qualities.

The aspirant for higher knowledge must develop the intellectual side of his nature and so strengthen his will that is able to concentrate all powers of his being on and in the plane he desires.

The great search for light, life and love only begins on the material plane. Carried to its ultimate, its final goal is complete oneness with the universal consciousness. The foundation in the material is the first step; then comes the higher goal of spiritual attainment. Concealed in the words of Thoth are many meanings that do not appear on the surface. Light of knowledge brought to bear upon the Tablets will open many new fields for thought.

"Read and be wise" but only if the light of your own consciousness awakens the deep-seated understanding which is an inherent quality of the soul.

And finally, from "The Arcane Schools" by John Yarker...

⁸Hermes, the patron of learning, in ancient times, was rightly considered to be a god in whom the whole Priestly Order participated. The One who presides over true knowledge is one and the same, everywhere. Our ancestors dedicated to him their wise discoveries, and named their respective treatises "Books of Hermes." The knowledge of the gods is innate and pertains to the very substance of our being. From the beginning it was one with its own source, and was co-existent with the inherent impulse of the soul to the supreme goodness."

I'd like to thank you again for giving me this opportunity and I hope that you will be inspired to study some of the Ancient Writings, and help plant seeds in those who seek for Knowledge and Truth.

1 From <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hermeticism> (terminology)

2 From Pausanias (VII, 24. 4) The Greek travel writer Pausanias (c. 150 - c. 180) lived and wrote in the middle of the second century. His most famous work is the "Periegesis tes Hellados", or "Description of Greece", a guide to important sites and historic places of ancient Greece. Since Pausanias wrote only about five hundred years after the great flourishing of classical Greek culture, since he was a careful recorder of what he saw, and since he was fascinated with ancient ruins and folk customs, he provided later scholars with an invaluable resource for

understanding Greek life at the height of the Roman empire. "Even today," wrote a contributor to "World Eras", "it is possible to take his work as a useful guide to the archaeological sites in the various parts of Greece."

3 Scottish Rite Monitor and Ritual Guide by Arturo DeHoyos

4 From Ellie Crystal (www.crystalinks.com)

⁵ from "Stages of Ascension in Hermetic Rebirth" by Dan Merkur

6 From "The Kybalion" by The Three Initiates

7 From "The Emerald Tablets of Thoth The Atlantean" - Translated by Doreal

8 From "The Arcane Schools" John Yarker (p. 79)