

Book Reviews

Meditations on Planets in Signs: a handbook for reflection on personal patterns and spiritual possibilities, by James Davis. Oasis Books, 2000.

As a layperson in the field of astrology, I have developed a degree of belief that there is a verifiable science behind it, and I have been able to derive some valid insights into my modus operandi from a periodic professional interpretation of my own chart. Nevertheless, professional interpretations can only go so far. Astrologers have to be quite skilled and practically psychic to unearth the real-life application of a given planetary placement as it specifically relates to each individual. Since each of us is an expert on his or her own situation, it would be ideal if we had a way to compare a professional interpretation to our own inner knowledge and insights about what a specific planetary placement might mean to one's personal current situation.

This book could be a tool to help us achieve that extra depth. It is organized like an encyclopedia, giving thought-provoking material related to the Sun in each of the 12 zodiacal signs, then proceeding to do the same for the Ascendant, the Moon, Mars, Mercury, Venus, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto. Unfortunately, the table of contents in the copy I reviewed was missing some of the entries, but they do all seem to be there.

The sections on each planetary placement include a traditional interpretation, such as information on character, in order to stimulate insights into the personality, but the main emphasis is meant to be on the spiritual, or esoteric, significance and how a particular planetary placement might indicate qualities of consciousness. Also, although both positive and negative aspects are given, the emphasis is on the positive.

In addition to the author's notes on each planetary position, he also gives quotes, biographi-

cal information on natives born under that sign-planet combination, historical events that took place under a particular configuration, symbols, poems and myths—all meant to help stimulate insights by meditating on them and relating them to what we discover within ourselves.

The author believes that we can work consciously toward change by “upgrading the level of our response to astrological energies,” finding “new levels of meaning that will give us fresh perspective.” He suggests that the way to accomplish this is through meditation, thought and service motivated by love.

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The Revelation of Saint John: the Path to Soul Initiation, by Zachary F. Lansdowne. Weiser Books, 2006. Paperback, 236 pages. US\$22.95.

The *Book of Revelation*, the last book of the New Testament, was an enigma in its own time. The text has more in common with Jewish apocryphal and “wisdom” literature than with the gospels and epistles that precede it. Its inclusion in the New Testament was opposed in the third century by Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, but supported by church father Origen who was accused of Gnostic leanings. Selection was finally announced in 367 CE by Athanasius, the controversial patriarch of Alexandria, and confirmed 15 years later by Pope Damasus I.

The *Book of Revelation* is traditionally attributed to “Saint John,” the fisherman brother of James. However, despite the opinions of early church apologists and some modern esoteric teachers—and despite its internal reference to “John”—most scholars today conclude that the author of *Revelation* is unknown. External and internal evidence suggests that it was written neither by John the Apostle nor by the author

of the fourth gospel and the Johannine epistles. *Revelation* remains an enigma, quoted by commentators whose interpretations vary as widely as the religious agendas the text is forced to support.

Zachary Lansdowne's *The Revelation of Saint John: the Path to Soul Initiation* provides a new and refreshing interpretation based on esoteric psychology. With his extensive knowledge of esoteric teachings he helps us penetrate the biblical text's arcane symbolism. Publication of the book this summer is particularly timely since his article, "The Beasts of Revelation: Glamour and Maya," appeared in the Summer 2006 issue of the *Esoteric Quarterly*. We can now put the article, which addressed just one of the book's topics, in the broader context of the author's research findings.

Like *Revelation* itself, the book is divided into 22 chapters, a number not without significance since it equals the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet and the number of Major Arcana in the Tarot. Dr. Lansdowne's main thesis is that *Revelation* is a practical manual providing the basic knowledge required by the disciple and leading him or her through the many challenges confronted on the journey to initiation and enlightenment. For example, Chapter 4 relates to the practice of meditation, while Chapter 16 discusses the seven trials through which the disciple attains purity of the lower self. Chapter 17 discusses the disciple's need to overcome ego.

Lansdowne provides a verse-by-verse interpretation for each verse in *Revelation*. For example, the first verse of Chapter 17, which the King James Bible renders:

And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will show unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters:

is interpreted thus:

One of the seven chohans comes to the aspirant and says, "Raise your consciousness

and I will show you the truth about your ego, which is a controlling, corrupt, and deduced sense of identity supported by your many emotional reactions. (Page 145)

Extensive footnotes are provided explaining particular interpretations and directing the reader to supporting references in the esoteric literature. With respect to the verse just quoted, we are told that the disciple has earned the assistance of the seven chohans, or angels, by having overcome the trials discussed in Chapter 16.

One of the most famous verses in the whole of *Revelation* (21:1), which the author notes is an echo of *Isaiah* 65:17:

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

is interpreted as:

The aspirant realizes that the spiritual and physical worlds are united, for his earlier perceptions of separate worlds have passed away. He realizes that the emotional world does not exist. (Page 185)

We are reminded that, in esoteric teachings, the physical and emotional planes are not considered "principles." At a sufficiently high level of consciousness they will be recognized as illusory.

The Revelation of Saint John: the Path to Soul Initiation is an attractive, carefully researched, and well-written book that will please all serious esoteric students. To those with a special interest in the esoteric philosophy and psychology of late Judaism, Neoplatonism, or early Christianity, it will have even greater appeal. However Zachary Lansdowne insists that, even though *Revelation* was included in the Christian New Testament, it speaks to people of all religious persuasions, in all periods of history. His careful analysis helps make the text accessible to this broader readership. We enthusiastically recommend the book.

Editorial Staff

News from the School

A Poem

As part of the coursework in the School for Esoteric Studies, we assign an experiment in the revelation of beauty and joy that is designed to look for evidence of these Soul qualities in the world and subsequently bring more beauty and joy into one's life and the life of others around one. The experiment is a lesson in the objective and subjective recognitions that are needed to lift the focus out of the lower self and into a world of expanding horizons. The key thought behind the experiment is "beauty, service, color, outer relationships and inner linkings." We especially liked what one co-worker, Chuck Heinrichs from California, brought forth from this experiment. Much more than a mere reporting of his experience, he created a work that is a beauty and a joy in itself. Here is Mr. Heinrichs' poem:

Revelation of Beauty and Joy Chuck Heinrichs

Beauty

The cloud-streaked sunset, the flight of a bird,
The tiny green plant breaking through gray concrete.
The swirling artistry of a wall painting in an abandoned lot.
The smile from a passing stranger on the street,
The unselfconscious stare of a baby in a stroller.
A song long forgotten playing on the radio,
the word "freedom."

Color

Sunset rose, purple flowers hanging over a sidewalk,
The vibrant green of the plant kingdom.
The pure whiteness of a fishing egret,
The gray of the waters of the San Francisco Bay.
The skin tones of multi-cultures,
The golden smile of a stranger, the dark eyes

of fear in another.

The vivid reds and greens of African dress,
and 84 channels on color TV.

Drama

A blackbird darting at a hawk, a tern diving for a minnow,
A cat dashing between cars.
A pool of tadpoles struggling against the water-stealing sun.
A sporting match, a theatrical play, a dog barking through a fence.
A man shouting drunkenly in the darkness, a woman screaming back in anger.
The daily news, anything that happens in the halls of Congress.
Life on our Emerald, Earth.

Service

A smile, a smile, a smile.
The word withheld and the word given in proper time.
A hand to a stranger, a dollar for a bite to eat,
A hand wave to an angry youth.
A commitment to the task at hand,
A striving forward in the face of apathy, a constant hopefulness,
And a committed focus on the present in service of a glorious future for all.

An Invitation

The School for Esoteric Studies is issuing an invitation to all readers of *The Esoteric Quarterly* to deepen their group work by participating in one of the advanced programs offered by the School.

In the past, members enrolled in these advanced programs after completing the earlier sequence. This was because there were relatively few advanced esotericists around, and most of those were already connected to the

training programs in which they received their spiritual education.

Times have changed, and now in the twenty-first century there is much more intergroup activity. The level of esoteric education is higher, and there are many more informed readers (and writers) than even a few years ago.

Each of the three advanced programs we offer is remarkable in its own way. It is likely that there are individuals who would benefit from one or more of them out there, if they know about them. Therefore a brief description of each follows.

The Antahkarana Course

This is an extensive “centerpiece” of esoteric training, in which the building of the Antahkarana becomes a conscious process. Exercises for contacting the Spiritual Triad are included, written both by Alice Bailey and the Tibetan Master Djwhal Khul (DK); the six extensive meditations by DK are not part of His published corpus.

The Will Course

DK mentioned that the subject of the Will is gigantic, and this program proves it! The Ti-

betan’s extensive writings on the Will have been organized by topic and difficulty into sequential lessons on mastering the lower will and evoking the higher Will. Roberto Assagioli and the SES staff spent several years refining this unique course.

Approach to Group Initiation

What was DK attempting to do in the mass of advanced material He dictated in what was published as *The Rays and the Initiations and Discipleship in the New Age, Volume 2*? Alice Bailey seemed to be thinking about this topic when she initiated “Applicants at the Portal” shortly before she died. In the early 1960s the SES staff and Roberto Assagioli took a fresh look at this material, and over seven years of constant pondering and experimentation found a synthesis that is actually built into the teachings themselves. The meditations and the dictated information go hand-in-hand to provide a satisfying and challenging method of training in Hierarchical methods of work.

These programs are presented in their usual sequence; however, enrollees are welcome in any program that seems to appeal. Please email us at ses@main.nc.us or call 828-225-4272 if you have any questions.