

Book Reviews

The Book of Abramelin: a New Translation, compiled and edited by Geog Dehn; translated by Steven Guth. Ibis Press, 2006. Hardback, 272 pages. \$US45.00.

Long before Helena Blavatsky used the term “Solar Angel,” which subsequently passed into the works of Alice Bailey, the equivalent concept was known in the western esoteric tradition. Guardian spirits, or guardian angels (not to be confused with their modern, trivial counterparts), were discussed by individuals ranging from the Neoplatonist Plotinus, to St. Thomas Aquinas, to the 17th-century Czech education reformer Comenius. However the most complete description was by a 14-15th-century German rabbi known as Abraham of Worms, or Abraham the Jew. Abraham referred to the entity as the Holy Guardian Angel, and from his time onward that has been the favored term in western esotericism. The Solar Angel, or Holy Guardian Angel, serves as our long-term mentor—our “angelic soul”—urging us forward on our evolutionary journey. Modern esoteric teachings speak of the first conscious contact with the Angel as a major milestone on the path of initiation.

Rabbi Abraham wrote a four-volume work that most of us knew from a translation of a French manuscript by S. L. “MacGregor” Mathers, cofounder and spiritual head of the Society of the Golden Dawn. Mathers’ called the work *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abra-Melin*, 1458. The subject of this review is a new translation, not of the French version, but of several German manuscripts which are much closer to the original work. The new version, *The Book of Abramelin*, is more complete and significantly more accurate. It also provides a wealth of information about the author (Abraham was probably a pseudonym); the mysterious Egyptian initiate Abramelin from whom the esoteric knowledge was received; Lamech, the equally mysterious son to whom the book

is addressed; and the circumstances in which the book came to be written. This information represents years of meticulous research by the German antiquarian Geog Dehn and the Australian esotericist Steven Guth.

Abraham clearly was an occultist in the spirit of his time, and *The Book of Abramelin* provides details of a variety of invocations and spells. For example, one is “For Friendship, Marriage, and Love Affairs,” another is “Protecting Houses and Buildings from Earthquake and Thunder,” and yet another is “To Make Oneself Invisible to One’s Enemies.” There is nothing remarkable about these spells; medieval literature was replete with magical *grimoires*. What is remarkable is that Abraham dismissed the conventional reliance on magical paraphernalia, elaborate gestures, and long invocations to be learned by rote. Instead, he insisted that the spells can only be used safely and effectively after a long period of inner purification and transformation. The aspiring magus must embrace a life of asceticism, fasting and prayer, akin to the spiritual practices of the mystics—and indeed akin to modern esoteric disciplines.

The culmination of this long period of preparation—variously described as a minimum of 18 or 30 months—was the ability to invoke the Holy Guardian Angel. Abraham provided a detailed ritual procedure for doing so. This step-by-step ritual attracted the attention of members of the Golden Dawn, and Aleister Crowley and others attempted to replicate it.

The ritual is performed during the feast of Tabernacles and extends over a period of days. It begins with a supreme invocation of the Holy Guardian Angel, who then guides the magus through the rest of the ritual. Numerous “unredeemed spirits” appear and must be subjugated. Only after the magician has “faced his demons” can he receive the Angel and enter into sublime and ecstatic union, a “mystic marriage.” In response the magician is urged:

Plead and beg that in future—and for the rest of your life—he will not remove his guardianship from you. Ask that he will guide and control you on all the roads and byways of Adonai [German: *Herr*]. Ask him especially to stand by you in this work of sacred wisdom and magic... [p. 107]

Interestingly the Angel is referred to in masculine terms, although some authorities have suggested that a man's Holy Guardian Angel manifests in female form, and a woman's in male form.

The Book of Abramelin is a “must-read” for all who are interested in the Holy Guardian Angel, or Solar Angel—whether or not there is a desire to contact the Angel through ritual, and a corresponding willingness to commit to the ascetic preparation required. The book is also highly recommended for all who are fascinated by medieval esoteric literature and the religious, political and social environment of the times. For example, Dehn explains that Abraham's parents were among the few Jews to survive the Black Death and the ensuing pogroms in which Jews were blamed for the plague: “[I]n the three towns in which this story unfolds—Speyer, Worms and Mainz—the entire Jewish population was driven away and only allowed to return in 1356.” [p. xxii] We also learn that Abraham himself became an adviser to Pope Martin V and Antipope John XXIII. And in 1423 he wrote to the Emperor John II prophesying the collapse of the Byzantine Empire [pp. 325-6]; the empire fell to the Ottoman Turks 30 years later.

Editorial staff

Raising Lazarus: Integral Healing in Orthodox Christianity, edited by Stephen Muse. Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2004. Paperback, 261 pages. \$US19.95.

R*aising Lazarus* is an essential reading for anybody interested in spiritual healing—or interested in modern developments in Eastern Orthodoxy. The book is a collection of papers presented at a 2002 meeting of the Orthodox Christian Association of Medicine, Psychology

and Religion. The contributors came from North America and the United Kingdom.

By way of background we recall that, by the high Middle Ages, western Christianity had turned Jesus' extensive healing work from a response of human suffering into a demonstration of his own divinity, terminated the healing ministry of the early church, placed restrictions on care of the sick by the monasteries, and outlawed surgery. However, as an article in this issue of the *Esoteric Quarterly* points out, an active healing ministry survived in Eastern Orthodox Christianity from the time of the apostles and the desert fathers to the present. Although spiritual healing recently made a comeback in western churches, it is to the east that we must turn to find a healing tradition so rich in experience.

The Eastern Orthodox theologians, pastors, physicians, and psychotherapists who contributed to the book have a lot to tell us about this important area of service. They are all firmly rooted in their Orthodox faith and supportive of its liturgical and sacramental traditions. They are also well-acquainted with modern medicine, psychology, and counseling modalities. It is the contributors' profound insights into cross-disciplinary healing modalities that make this book so important. They provide some eye-openers for those of us schooled in western religious or healthcare traditions.

The importance of sacramental healing, in the Orthodox tradition, is based on strong belief in the unity of body and soul. American general surgeon Peter Bistolarides quotes the 14th-century saint, Gregory Palamas: “The word Man is not applied to either soul or body separately, but to both together, since they have been created in the image of God.” [p. 32]. Bistolarides goes on to explain the need for holistic consciousness on the part of the practitioner as well as the patient:

The care of the patient [must] not only address the non-physical manifestations of physical illness, but also to diagnose patients in a complete and accurate manner... Nurturing of the soul is especially important, and requires a life rooted in the Orthodox Christian faith, embodied as full participa-

tion in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church. Experienced spiritual guidance is especially important, as one's life needs to be examined and re-examined on an ongoing basis, in order to continue the journey towards God. [pp. 36-37]

Several of the contributors comfortably discuss issues of spirit possession, a topic that most westerners either scorn or shy away from for lack of competence. It turns out that Eastern Orthodox believers readily embrace the notion of *logismoi*, which can be interpreted as “demons,” in the biblical sense, but—as Harvard psychiatrist Jeff Rediger explains—can alternatively be viewed as elementals or negative thoughtforms. Helping patients rid themselves of the influence of *logismoi* constitutes a major concern in the Orthodox healing ministry.

The longest paper, by British psychotherapist Jamie Moran, addresses the need for asceticism. This may not be what western readers

want to hear. As Moran points out: “Ascetical practices are often hard and pained, go against common sense and our supposedly ‘natural’ inclinations and feelings.” [p. 149] We must go to hell and back in order to convince ourselves that there is a heaven. Ascetic discipline is necessary if we want to reorder our priorities to give the higher nature control over the lower. The signs of success, Moran goes on, “are a growth in strength, compassion, understanding, patience, humility and wisdom.” [p. 163] He emphasizes that most of us are not called to stay with the hermits in the desert but, with the experience gained, to return to the city, ready to serve, to heal, “not to rest until the world is saved.” [p. 205]

Raising Lazarus contains a wealth of thought-provoking information, and we highly recommend it to all our readers.

Editorial staff

News from the School

Subjective Group Conference

In the last issue of *The Esoteric Quarterly* we wrote about the open invitation we are issuing for the 2007 Subjective Group Conference. This annual conference, which has been held each spring on the inner planes since 1962, has until now been for the members of the School for Esoteric Studies only. Now we are opening it up to those in the larger subjective group who might like to participate in this powerful group service. It covers the period of the three Spring Festivals, during which time the group studies and meditates on a common theme.

Following this period (that is, during June) the group members gather the insights they received and send them in to the School office. The staff then compiles a booklet from these

insights and sends it out to all participants, so that they can share in what is essentially a group revelation. The experience of this rhythmic event over these many years has made it clear that the group mind is greatly enhanced and enriched by this experience. We are sure that the radiatory power resulting from this group work contributes substantially to the working out of the Plan.

The Conference will extend from just before the Easter Full Moon to just after the Goodwill Full Moon—March 31 to June 2, 2007. The topic we will all study and meditate on is “Cooperation with the Hierarchy in the Working Out of the Plan.” Those who participate will be sent, by pdf email attachment, a compilation of writings on this topic, mainly from the Tibetan Master Djwhal Khul. This Conference Set will include a meditation format and sug-

gested seed thoughts to be employed during the five days of each Full Moon period. During the remaining days of each month a few moments can be added to our normal daily meditation in order to keep in touch with the group mind. Then, after the Festival period is over, everyone is invited to send in their insights, in as brief or lengthy a form as desired.

We chose this theme in order to strengthen the larger group thoughtform during the coming higher interlude of the year. During this time the Arcane School's keynote for the spring conference is "Let the group reveal the *fact* of the kingdom of God, the planetary Hierarchy." We envision that the activities of all esoteric

groups during the three spring Festivals can be synthesized into one powerful expression—an unstoppable force—as long as there is the consciousness of the intention and the personal commitment and activity to anchor that intention.

There is no charge for receiving the Conference Set and other materials by pdf attachment. A hardcopy is available to those who would like one, in return for a suggested donation of US\$20.00 to cover the time and materials. We invite all who would like more information, or who would like to receive the materials, to email us at ses@main.nc.us.

Dr. John Cobb
President