

CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT THE FIGURE OF THE SNAKE

During the ceremony of my reception in this Order, I received the jewel of the degree: a circle and a snake pendant to a green ribbon, this jewel representing three things: consciousness, life and form.

But as explained in the ritual, consciousness is symbolised by the head of the serpent or snake and life by its body.

This importance of the snake inspired me a lot of reflexions and the idea of this little work.

The snake, or serpent, is certainly one of the oldest and most widespread mythological symbol in the world and associated with some of the oldest rituals known to humankind.

From Ancient Egypt and Mideast to Black Africa, from India and Far East to the native peoples of America and even in the seas as Sea serpent, from Minoan Tradition to Nordic, Australian, or Basque, from Old Testament to Christianity ..., everywhere the snake is present.

But present with a symbolism also protean: from life, fertility, rebirth or consciousness to vengefulness, vindictiveness and death! The list is impressive!

Rest assured, I will not to study and to explain all this symbolism in these various traditions. I will only to tell you, from the animal itself and from its symbolism of some own reflexions I feel linked, hopefully with accordance to the purposes of our Order.

First to mention the name “snake” itself.

In Hebrew, the snake is named “Nahach” which name is composed of the three same letters as the word “Nahoch” meaning “to guess” or “to predict”. In searching further, the same letters in a different order give “hochèn” which is the breast-plate or square as mentioned in the Bible (Exodus ch.28 v.15-16) as the outer of the eight vestments of the High Priest.

And the office of the High Priest effectively consisted to predict with the help of this “magic” square.

And ever further, so far is our Order concerned with cabalistic numerology (Gematria) it is both interesting and impressive to observe that the numeric value of these words “Nahach” and “Nahoch” give 358, corresponding to the very similar value of the word “Machiah” meaning “Messiah”!

And how shouldn’t we notice within this word “Nahach” the common root, in Sanskrit and Pâli, with the word “naga”?

This “naga” drives us to a second and a third reflexion.

In Hinduism and Buddhism, the naga primarily represents rebirth, death and mortality, due to its casting of its skin and being symbolically “reborn”. Brahmins associated Naga with Shiva and Vishnu who rested on a 100 headed naga coiled around Shiva’s neck.

It is also a symbol of energy, and especially of the spinal column, as best represented through the Kundalini in Yoga.

In Hindu mythology, the snake represented also freedom because it cannot be tamed.

In our Judeo-Christianity tradition, the snake also appears as a symbol of freedom, in its peculiar aspect of a rebel to God’s Will. Whatever is aim or evil determination, it expresses the capacity of freedom.

As for the snake, its freedom conducts him to condemnation: to stay eternally in the above seen cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth. It is his doom as rebel.

But in Oriental traditions, in Buddhism for example, the aim of Man is to break out the cycle of the ever renewal of successive lives (Samsara).

Furthermore, in wondering ourselves, what are we doing and what are we looking for in Masonry in general and in this Order in particular? Isn’t to make our way to finally escape the same cycle of life and death?

Those considerations conduct us to a fourth reflexion.

The method we use to find this way is a gnostic method. But what is the symbol of the Gnosis: it is again the snake. Gnostics saw it as a symbol of wisdom.

Above, we have already seen the snake as a symbol of energy.

But, our gnostic method is a long way and costs us a lot of energy from its arduous and narrow path! A long way to upheave ourselves and hopefully to raise our mind.

We are a little as the snake, which, as animal, cannot rise himself vertically only if it wraps around something ... and to do that, it needs an enormous energy!

But there is a difference between the snake and us.

Even with a right method, the snake is eternally condemned because its aim is to rise itself against God.

We also have the choice with regard freedom: looking for God or to rise us against Him; the method of the snake, with wisdom and energy can us help to guess, to find the way and, as the High Priest, to predict the will of God. And we shall be on the right way, to get out of the cycle.

But, beware, the same method can conduct us to an overweening pride. And we shall be on the wrong way and condemned to the same fate as the snake.

With deeper view, the only difference between these methods is Faith. Faith in God with the first occurrence, and faith in ourselves with the second.

Remember the Serpent of brass of Moses in Exodus: “And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived” and St John’s Gospel ch.3 v.14-15: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life”. The very importance of Faith lies in here.

A stunning illustration of the whole of it may be found a well-known picture of the Roman Catholic Tradition. That of the Blessed Virgin, in her Assumption, which shows her standing up the feet upon the snake. The common interpretation of this picture is a victory against evil. It is certainly true, but the snake behind the feet can also be seen as a kind of support to the blessed Virgin.

An illustration that we must certainly not suspect contained into the figure of the snake but if we see the serpent, and if we behold it, shall we believe and live.

And, from this picture, don’t forget that Ave Maria can be written AVM, also the old monogram of the Logos: AUM.

Such are the outlines accessible only to a humble one bearing the jewel of the Apprentice ...