

The Coming Storm, Part Three: A Call for Hermetic Renewal – The New Renaissance

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“There will be a completely new set of values – moral, religious, personal, and national – but the most important aspect is likely to be that groups of people will be more in evidence than the individual. **The Aquarian Age will be democratic in principle but autocratic in actuality, and will probable involve a highly sophisticated form of police state** [bold added] in which groups of guardians keep a watchful eye on different parts of the Universe.” *My Life in Astrology* by Sybil Leek¹

In this, the final installment of *The Coming Storm, Part Three: A Call for Hermetic Renewal – The New Renaissance*, we will examine the impact of Peak Oil and energy issues on contemporary spirituality and esotericism; the need to build community resources as a means of weathering the storm; demonstrating that Hermeticism is truly a living and vital philosophy; and a look ahead at the meaning of Saturn and Uranus as planets of restriction and freedom, responsibility and privilege in the Age of Aquarius.

The following editorial is a long and unpleasant read. While specific actions will be suggested, in the end, it is up to each of us, and this included YOU dear reader, to undertake as many of the suggested actions as possible to ensure a bright future for Hermeticism. However, bear in mind, this will require that actions be undertaken, and as in the words of the statue of Apollo to Rilke, “You must change your life” for it to work. The nature of the material you about to read is so pointed and directed at some of the sacred cows so many hold dear, that there was some discussion as to whether it should be posted or not. However, if honest self-reflection cannot be undertaken, no matter how unnerving, then true knowledge is impossible. By addressing these issues Western estotericism will be in a better position, regardless of Peak Oil or not.

The traditions of Western esotericism stand a crossroad. The decisions that are made will decide whether they demonstrate their ability to be living vibrant exponents of wisdom, or are simply decaying relics of a bygone age. Possibly even worse, they stand to be swept into the dustbin of history, existing only as an academic anomaly, or subculture of social malcontents and misfits. We must ask ourselves several important questions:

- How did we get here?
- Where are we going?
- Do we have any reason for being anymore?
- What is the kind of future we want to build?

How Did We Get Here?

The history of religious and political oppression is well known to students of history, and even better understood by those who have participated in the West's esoteric milieu. Even today there are areas where public disclosure of one's interest in esotericism is met with skepticism and even outright intolerance. While many will immediately think of the America's 'Religious Right' and those areas where the Roman Catholic Church still holds some dominance, much of the intolerance is coming from the 'irreligious Left' - those die-hard remnants of failed ideologies that find their basis in materialism and atheism. Oddly, their reasons are not that they are always against spirituality, but simply against Western spirituality. They are against anything Western or that might hint of a Christian origin or even cultural framework.

Multi-culturalism is a nice idea, but has yet to prove itself in practice. All cultures have dominant themes, languages, spiritual philosophies, religions and forms of expression. To pretend otherwise is to actively invite Babel. The question for those who are awake enough to recognize the trend is simple: what will be the dominant themes for the culture being created, and in some instances, engineered?

Buddhism is among the fastest growing religions in America and Europe, as is Islam, but the growth of the latter is more by immigration than conversion. Chinese medicine, herbalism, and *Aryurveda* make inroads into the shopping carts of consumers while *spagyric* medicine remains even less well known than it was a century or two ago. While there is some Jewish renewal in qabala and with it a surge of non-Jewish participants on a level not previously seen, it pales in comparison to the number of Jews leaving Judaism altogether and converting to Buddhism. Many have even attempted to amalgamate the two giving rise to the phrase *JewBu* for "Jewish-Buddhist."

Christians as well are flocking *en masse* to non-Christian sources for inspiration and insight, and ecumenical dialogue between the faiths is prevalent, but at a cost. Christianity and Judaism have strongly established mystical traditions, however they simply fail to encourage their laity to engage in them. As such, few even know of their existence or how to practice them. The Christian churches have no one to blame but themselves for their losses. However, Western esotericism which grew out of this desire to continue pre-Christian, as well as some genuinely Gnostic and occult Christian practices outside of orthodox approval, have also failed to make themselves well known, accessible, or practical.

When they have, they have often been given the hypocritical scorn of their contemporaries who in their human frailties of jealousy and pride condemn those who would take the Light to the mountaintop so that others could see, or into the Valley so that they might be warmed. It is always the most impure that cry out for 'purity of tradition' and the need to 'protect the tradition' as if it were a fragile

and feeble thing. If nearly 1,500 years of state sponsored Christian dominance, and nearly 500 years of very active persecution, including the Nazi and Communist empires could not crush the 'tradition' it is clear that public access and acknowledgement is not the enemy, but something deeper, something more insidious.

Ignorance. Pride. Fear. The human failings since the time of Adam and beyond – these are the real threat.

Esotericism – Little More Than A Publishing Industry

It is somewhat unfair to tag modern spirituality as little more than a publishing industry – a broad based retail market is more like it - with the U.S Market for Religious Publishing and Products estimated at having a value of \$6.8 billion (<http://www.marketresearch.com/map/prod/977888.html>). This includes everything from multi-market/use products such as specialty candle, essential oils, and jewelry too Bibles sales, yoga mats and weekends at the Zen center. But publishers are the main source of information, and rightly or wrongly take the hit, so it is appropriate to look at what it is publishers do and don't do.

Publishers print books that people will buy, so the publishing company can make a profit. That is what they do. It would be nice if every book were filled with wisdom, and contained the keys to inner peace, but most do not, and that is not a publisher's concern. No matter how good a book is, if it doesn't sell, it can't be kept in print. End of story.

What is available is based upon the desires and purchasing habits of the consumer. This free-market approach to spirituality recently got the attention of *BeliefNet* when they ran an article entitled: *Is Wicca Under a Spell? Are Wicca and Paganism Overrun With Spell Book?* The subtitle to the article asks, "As publishers produce more books about spell casting, is the spiritual message of witchcraft getting lost?" If we have to ask the question then the answer is obvious.

http://www.beliefnet.com/story/160/story_16005_1.html

However, the unpalatable truth is that the number of people in the magical community who will buy serious, nonbeginner-level books on magic is too small to pay for the commercial publication of such books. The number of serious magicians in the US is probably under 5,000 people, total. The other half million or so might as well be at a Renaissance Faire.

The question we can easily ask ourselves then is, what is the motivation in publishing so many books that are simply redundant and of questionable value? Only the authors and publishers know, but it is something that those involved in Western Esotericism, and Hermeticism in particular, must begin to address. As a result of emphasis on personal feel good activities (spell book stuff), individual

transpersonal experiences (escapist in some respects) or historical revisionism (as a personal extension of political views) **there has been little emphasis on coherent and systematic teaching until very recently and little of it is applicable to daily life.**

Books, Books, and More Books...

The sacred symbol of the book, be it Thoth's tablet, Hermes open book, the *Book of Life* in Revelations, or *Liber M* in the Vault of Christian Rosenkreutz, has become commonplace. With near universal literacy (at least on a Sixth Grade level) in most industrialized countries and modern printing methods books are inexpensive and easily available. The Internet has only made it even that much easier.

This has also meant that books have increasingly less value on a personal level, as more of them can be easily obtained. The days, even as recent as a few decades ago, when one undertook the scrupulous study of a single text to decipher its meaning or to apply its methods, alone or under the tutelage of master are gone. The core problems facing modern spirituality and the various schools of Western esotericism in particular are:

1. People do not seek wisdom, but information. Information accumulation has taken place of practice, and given rise to confusion between the two. The average person is a customer, a consumer, not a student. Theodore Roszak's book *The Cult of Information* is worth reading in this context; he argues that the confusion between information and knowledge is a pervasive and damaging modern problem.
2. There is the incessant belief that information should be free and without cost, either in terms of material support or personal effort. People want a form of 'Welfare spirituality'. As a result there are few substantial facilities and genuine community resources or centers that we can point to as landmarks of the traditions, and thereby forcing people who otherwise would participate in group activities to go it alone.
3. Spirituality is confused with psychology.
4. There is an underlying belief that spirituality is supposed to be fun and entertaining, and when it is not, we can simply move on to something else, or a new version –anything to avoid actually having to really work at the Great Work.
5. It is no surprise that in a time when divorce rates are at fifty percent and blended families are the norm that self-stylized false eclecticism is common. The inability of individuals to commit to each other, resolve problems in a mature manner, and to make discriminating decisions on

what is to be a life long relationship, has created a disposable society. People, children, communities, anything that might require mutual support, sacrifice, and concessions is negated. Given this as the model of human interaction it is understandable why people are unable to commit to a life-long practice that requires discipline and relinquishing of their preconceived notions, habits, and patterns. Instead, ideas are simply strung together like bad decorations on a Christmas Tree rather than digested and internalized. From this perspective the contemporary use of the word eclecticism is an extension of the social and personal pathologies of not being disciplined and emotionally mature enough to commit and follow through on one's choices, or discriminating enough prior to making them. The personal path is simply another form of egotism.

6. The myth of the Solo Practitioner is another form of egotism that is rampant and enmeshed with the notion of false eclecticism. Besides the obvious need of others to produce, distribute, and market the materials used, there is also the nagging fact that it required generations of people to bring much of the ideas and methods in use up to the present age. Given the historical and technical issues of information delivery, how can anyone truly be solo in their work? There is also the second and more critical point: if each of us could fix ourselves when we were sick we would not need a doctor, or a mechanic when our car is broken. While dogmatic and slavish adherence to authority is anathema to the spiritual path, there is a time and a place when we must sit, listen, learn, and put our ill formed, self-serving, and childish opinions aside if we are to grow. If we are not engaged in some level of regular group activity where the normal frictions of human behavior arise how can this normal and healthy leveling off process occur? If we are never challenged how can we know if our position is correct, logical, rooted in tradition, self-revelation, or simply a possible delusion? Given the level of dysfunction in so many esoteric groups the reasons for being a Solo-Practitioner are clear: it is safe and easy to cut your loses should your new found guide on the Path to Enlightenment be a mini-Stalin in disguise. **Unfortunately, the specific form of the solitary path popular today is a myth**, and a pathological one, but the concept of a solitary path is very old and by no means inherently flawed – consider its presence in Taoism, as one of many examples. The difference? The older vision isn't a matter of picking and choosing a bit here and a bit there, but an option for those who want to throw themselves utterly into a spiritual path, and can't find a community option intense enough to meet their needs.
7. For better or worse, most teachers look poorly upon their students as lacking the necessary skill sets to really make the commitment to esotericism as a practice, and to advance therein.

8. Publishing and personalities dominate over traditions and lineages. And where lineages exist, they seem rooted in inflexible rules and dogma. This has given rise to the need to claim ownership of teachings and symbols. Copyrights have become the rule of the day; and the need to keep perpetual students the norm as traditions fail to generate teachers, and genuine spiritual masters, who can stand the heat of public pressure to demonstrate the power of the teachings.
9. Popularity is no measure for or against a teaching, but signifies a resonance in the popular psyche. The fact that it took novels such as *Harry Potter*, and the *DaVinci Code* to spur interest in anything resembling western esotericism or to spur people on to banding together to form active schools of magical instruction is a testimony to the weakness of the times rather than the strength of the novels mentioned. Spirituality should stir the imagination, and with it, the courage to create. Too often we hear of the power of positive thinking in one breath, and the reasons why *it* (whatever *it* happens to be) cannot be done in another.

Where Are We Going?

The traditions of western esotericism are heading in several directions. However, none have successfully demonstrated the same appeal on a mass level as has say one of the world's most exclusive and esoteric practices, that of Tibetan Buddhism. Once the exclusive knowledge of a small group of elite monks and lay practitioners, it is now possible to purchase complete and detailed instructions on almost every aspect of Tibetan spiritual life: *Dogzchen*, the *Six Yogas of Naropa*, the foundation of the four main schools including Inner Fire, and Dream Yoga; Vajrayana Practices that were once reserved for about ten percent of monastic population, or one percent of the total population, are now available in seminars, workshops, and in printed form for less than the cost of an evening meal at a good restaurant. While one will argue that there has been much distortion, it can also be said that there has been considerable advances as well, with the writings of Lama Yeshe, and Sogyal Rinpoche being prime examples. The 'fifth' school of Tibetan Buddhism, *Bonpo* is also becoming increasingly popular through the efforts of various authors and their programs of study.

The very word processing program this document is written on recognizes the proper spelling of such words as karma, bodhisattva, yoga, swami, guru, and lama. It does not recognize spagyrics, qabala, or a host of other commonly used words in the various western traditions.

The Past is the Future

If you want to understand the Age of Aquarius, you need only look to Ronald Reagan, 40th President of the United States. He is a perfect modern example of Aquarian leadership and ideals in their best and worst expressions.

Reagan was at the center of massive accomplishments; world-changing policies despite entrenched opposition from those who sought more a realistic (read: less optimistic) approach; personable but unemotional and aloof even to his closest friends and family; deeply underestimated by his opposition; considered extremist and fixed in his opinions, yet imaginative, progressive, independent, and despite public opinion – intellectual and logical. He was big picture oriented and understood things from the view of a collective social perspective that was broad and all encompassing, and not concerned with individuals. The fundamental premise of the Reagan administration was that if you create conditions that help individuals, then the community and society will also benefit. By helping those most capable of having the largest impact, the effect of one person is larger – this is the key to understanding the role of the individual in the Aquarian worldview.

In the 1980's (and even 1990's) the general policy was that natural resources did not matter, that ideas, not control of actual assets, would drive things. This is an Aquarian pathology - to ignore the reality on the ground with the utmost conviction. In the conflict between ideas (Briah) and reality (Assiah) Aquarius sides with Briah until it is too late. Only after getting severely beaten up over the issue, does Aquarius realize that archetypes are one thing, incarnating them is a whole other story.

This is also the critical error of idealists, do-gooders, and dictators of all stripes – that regardless of differences between people, cultures, religions, and geographies, that a single overriding ideal is good for all of them – and that they share it within themselves – and that to oppose it is intrinsically evil. Be it Hitler, Stalin, the Director of Human Resources, or the fresh faced, graduate of an Ivy League school that actually believes in the holy writ of Political Correctness, dictators are all the same – and Aquarius has the potential to be the worst of them. Open your eyes and see the obvious - the opening days of the Age of Aquarius are a brutal battle for the control of the human mind propagated by the myth of the individual and the tribe as larger individual – it is ego in its most insidious form. Peak Oil will drive home the myth of 'rugged individualism' in a manner two generations reared on MTV and cell phones are woefully unprepared to deal with. Their recourse will be to fear, contraction, isolation, authority, and dominance – simply put – dictatorship.

Technomages and Spiritual Consumption in the Age of Peak Oil

So, what does this have to do with Peak Oil? Well, how many astrologers do you know that can erect a chart without using a computer? How many can do it by looking at the position of the stars in the night sky? How many herbalists can *safely* identify herbs in the wild? How many aromatherapists know how to steam or cold press manufacture essential oils? Simple things we take for granted that will not be so simply, or easily (read inexpensively) available in an

environment in which energy is increasingly expensive and what is available is directed to more urgent and pressing needs.

The triple irony of purchasing resin cast statues of Tibetan deities made in Chinese factories is lost on the price conscious consumer of spiritual-based products. Now for those who don't get it, let's look at the inherent set of contradictions here: It was the Chinese government that destroyed 95% of Tibetan culture and created a massive refugee problem for neighboring states; the statues themselves are created out of petrochemicals, thereby making them very inexpensive to produce, but sold at very high margins, mainly to Westerners, (Americans) who in turn will complain about the de-spiritualizing of their culture of consumption while adopting the gods, philosophies, and practices of a land that has no historical, linguistic, or cultural ties to them; and prior to the invasion of their neighbor, actually evicted Westerners from visiting the country. In short, the wonderful contributions of Tibetan Buddhism to the Western world is directly a result of the Chinese invasion, and one-hundred years of propaganda by Theosophy and its offshoots, rather than because of anything inherent to Buddhism itself.

The greatest injustice is the naïve assumption that be it Buddhism, Yoga, Taoism, Peruvian Shamanism, Voodoo, Native American practices, or any of the systems that are the flavor of the season, is that they are somehow devoid of cultural baggage. *The Myth of Shangri-La: Tibet, Travel Writing and the Western Creation of Sacred Landscape* by Peter Bishop details American and European projections of idyllic perfection and spiritual superiority for the last one-hundred and twenty-five years onto the Himalayan plateau. Rooted in Victorian romanticism and unconscious projection, unfulfilled drives, wishes, and spiritual aspirations are projected onto one of the last mysterious and culturally holistic landscapes in the world. The outer form and expression of cultures are adopted wholesale without any real understanding of their foundation or deeper issues. Just as we have seen in many Western esoteric lodges and Wiccan circles, the school of instruction be it an ashram or dharma center, becomes a place of escape rather than enlightenment.

Sandalwood incense, brass burners, statues and tapestries from India, myrrh and Frankincense from Ethiopia, brass, Brazilian amethyst, and a host of other crystals all requiring modern mining techniques to retrieve, polish, ship, and package. Indian and Chinese herbal supplements, many essential oils used in aromatherapy, cheap ritual tools, altar cloths, and even many printed items will cease to be available at current prices as petroleum becomes increasingly scarce and expensive. **This is significant in itself as in the majority of instances the New Age Bookstore is the focal point of our collective activities, not the temple, lodge, or (tradition specific) learning center as these latter entities often do not exist or are at best semi-secret entities.**

In an expensive energy period, New Age stores who are involved in their community, and not just the typical social causes, but actually involved in the business, social, and corporate life of the community – through organizations such as Rotary, Kiwanis, women’s business associations, 4-H, or scouting, will have a greater chance of survival, as well as opportunity to demonstrate the value of their ideas in day to day life when the crunch is at hand.

The reality is, those involved have power, and right now, more than ever before, has it been possible for an individual to wield more influence on an organizational and community level. As pointed out in his national bestseller, *Bowling Alone – The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Robert D. Putnam states that two-thirds of Americans were involved in community (i.e., group) activities in 1973, and by 1994, this number had become inverted, with most not being involved in any community activity. At the same time, the level of perceived trust among Americans also fell. This is critical on several levels, the least not being the most obvious:

“A society characterized by generalized reciprocity [of trust] is more efficient than a distrustful society, for the same reason that money is more efficient than barter. If we don’t have to balance every exchange instantly, we can get a lot more accomplished. Trustworthiness lubricates social life.” (p.21)

Participation also reduces the opportunity for corruption and abuse of power, be it in the bridge club, city council, or the financial administration of a grand lodge. Communities that have the lowest level of group participation in civic, business, and religious areas have the highest level of abuse of power, corruption, and malfeasance.

The United States is unique in that it not only is the most religiously robust nation on earth it is also the most religiously diverse. Almost half of all giving in the United States is religiously related. Religiousness, for lack of a better term, is the single most powerful indicator for determining an individual’s disposition towards volunteerism and philanthropy. The key being that religion embodies altruism – thinking and feeling beyond one’s own self. This single most important key is lacking in the majority of contemporary esoteric teachings, movements, and publications. As a result, it is no wonder that modern esotericism is an I-centered movement with little to show for itself in preparation for the long term.

Contemporary esotericism is not distinguishable from the world or mainstream Christian religions around it, in that its members believe in a doctrine, teaching, or Supreme Being, but do not worship with others; general trends are away from connectedness and towards secularism under the guise of spirituality. This form of insular ‘I-ness’ fosters greater egotism and tendency towards dogmatism. It is no surprise that Putnam points out that today’s

generation, despite its mass education and claims of liberal superiority, is actually less tolerant than their grandparents:

“The late X’ers are no more tolerant than the early boomers. So the biggest generational gains in tolerance are already behind us. By contrast, something happened in America in the *second* half of the twentieth century to make people less civically engaged. The late X’ers are a lot less engaged than the early boomer. As a result, the biggest generational losses in engagement still lies ahead.

Virtually no cohort in America is more engaged *or* more tolerant than those born around 1940-45. They are the liberal communitarians par excellence. Their parents were engaged, but less tolerant. Their children are as tolerant, but less engaged....It was from this liberal communitarian cultural mix that the civil rights movement emerged. But that cultural matrix has already begun to fade, leaving a nation as we enter the new century that is increasingly disengaged, but no longer increasingly tolerant. Closely examined...there is no reason to assume that community engagement must necessarily have illiberal consequences. Indeed, looking across the variegated states and communities in this diverse land, precisely the opposite appear true: social capital and tolerance have a symbiotic relationship.” (p. 357)

You Get What You Pay For

Amazon has stated the goal of putting 5,000 independent bookstores out of business as part of its business plan. While big box stores such as Borders, and Barnes and Nobles have impacted the small book business, in many areas they at least have an upswing acting as cultural centers, and bringing in selections and volume that otherwise would be unknown in all subject areas, and not just spiritual and esoteric. Secondly, they pay local taxes and hire local people, even if they are part of the greater issues of encouraging and maintaining a car culture.

What does Amazon do for my community? It is not evil, just a matter of fact. What does it add? It is great for the homebound, the isolated, and those who depend on deliveries for their contact with the world. For the rest of society what does it give?

Those who are constantly looking for the best price don’t necessarily get the best service or product. In the end, you get what you pay for. Support your local New Age or spiritually oriented store even if it means exercising some patience in having to wait a week for delivery of a special order, or sacrificing a cheap lunch to pay full price for something, but knowing that in doing so you are keeping a needed community service in business.

What Kind of Future Do You Want To Build?

In a previous editorial in VOXHERMES, you were asked to imagine the kind of future you envisioned for esotericism in general and Hermeticism in particular. <http://www.hermeticinstitute.org/docs/can-you-imagine.pdf>.

Several simple ideas were presented that were aimed at bringing esotericism and hermeticism into the mainstream without diluting their content, culture, or integrity, and are ideal for a post-petroleum society, but must be enacted now to be of use in the future.

In astrology Saturn represents the need to confront physical reality, its limitation (and from that manifestation), and forces us to confront our ego, and its eventual dismemberment by the scythe of Fate. Saturn also builds walls around those individuals or groups too weak to directly experience material life – it is the wall, cave, bunker or rigidity in the face of reality. Isabel M. Hickey, author of the classic work on spiritual astrology, *Astrology – A Cosmic Science* writes:

“Saturn in Fixed signs shows the stability of the ego, its power to resist pressure from without. In a Cardinal sign, Saturn shows the power to change through becoming immersed in activity. In a mutable sign Saturn’s power to be adaptable helps but too often there is much indecisiveness and not enough strength to overcome conditions.

Saturn is directly concerned with character building and is one of the greatest angels in the universe. This angel was given the hardest job of all; to test and try man’s soul until he learned to break his self-imposed bonds of selfishness and fear. He who is selfish must know fear. These are the Siamese twins of consciousness; one cannot live without the other. Love, that asks nothing but to give, is the antidote for an afflicted Saturn.”

Uranus

“Uranus is the symbol of the highest energy of all. It symbolizes the Sun behind the Sun...In mythology Uranus was given rulership over heaven while Saturn was given rulership of the earth. Uranus is the planet of destiny and is the **only** planetary energy you cannot control. The only thing you can control is your reaction to it...Most Aquarians are more Saturnian than Uranian and this puzzles you unless you understand the New Age egos will have Uranus, not Aquarius, prominently located. The test of Saturn (discipline and responsibility) must be passed before we know the freedom inherent in Uranus. Otherwise, liberty means license, not freedom.” (p. 35-36)

According to Courtney Roberts, author of *Visions of the Virgin Mary – An Astrological Analysis of Divine Intercession*,ⁱⁱ the significant timeline of immediate concern from an astrological perspective is soon to be upon us:

“Peak Oil is a daunting reality, but there are a number of conflicting opinions out there. While there is no doubt the oil will run out, the question is how long will it take to develop the appropriate replacement technologies? And what will the transition be like? I am concerned and excited about the transit of Pluto through Capricorn, which begins in 2008. On the most basic level, that would seem to indicate that our traditional business, political, and power structures will all undergo long term and radical transformation. By the time Pluto moves into Aquarius, in 2023/4, government and industry will never be the same. Of course, the potential power struggles that could arise as a result of this profound transformation of wealth and resources, and the potential for reactionary, dictatorial control to descend, gives us a lot think about, especially as it all coincides with Peak Oil. There are a few configurations in 2010, just as Pluto moves through the early degrees of Capricorn, that look rather promising. Jupiter will conjunct Uranus at 0 degrees Aries and that could be an indicator of creative breakthroughs and amazing new technologies. However, with all the squares to Pluto in Capricorn during that period, the fight over who will control the emerging resources could be a real issue. By the time Saturn conjuncts Pluto in Capricorn in 2020, which I see as a crucial period, we could be experiencing a real crunch and clampdown, but simultaneously, the more seasoned implementation of our future power and energy sources.”

Social Organizations – It’s All About the Local Level

The social restructuring that Peak Oil will force upon the United States of America, and all of the industrialized nations, will create a return to social participation and community organizations, not out of individual desire, but of necessity. Those organizations – both esoteric and mundane - that have local infrastructure in place will be prepared to assist their members and take in new ones. Those that do not will be fighting an uphill battle and for the most part, will not succeed – the time to plant is when the ground is soft, not when winter’s freeze is upon you.

Organizations are like memory, the more connections they have, be they people or synaptic, the greater their chances of survival and usefulness. It is critical that four points be kept in mind: (1) Organizations are composed of people, (2) who come together for a common purpose, (3) around a common theme or set of themes, and (4) see this activity as a life enhancing activity.

The theme, or idea, is often seen as the most important part, but it is not. Making it meaningful to the member's life is the most critical, as that is what keeps them coming back, talking to others about it, and enhancing the overall health of the organization. Some people are better at this than others, and can be seen as falling into three categories: (1) mavens (2) connectors (3) salesmen.

In his work, *Tipping Point – How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* the controversial and best selling author Malcolm Gladwell, points out three significant areas for turning ideas into movements, and human capital based organizations into successful entities by knowing the tipping points for success, and failure.

Mavens are people who collect data and information on an area that attracts them, and become experts in the field, even if it is where to do the best discount shopping. Connectors know people and bring them together. Salesmen are people who know how to spread an idea and to make it popular. Some people are a combination of maven, connector, salesman or all three. Gladwell points out that Paul Revere, a Freemason, was both a maven and a connector, and in this dual role was able to both understand ideas, as well as spread them with authority.

An organization or movement must have all three if it is to be a healthy and successful entity, and not stuck in a single historical model, that may have worked well in 1750, 1850, or even 1950, but here, in 2005, is no longer effective.

Gladwell also points out the size at which an organization will collapse, or break apart. With this knowledge in advance, groups can control their growth, and through judicious planning, know when to hive off certain areas, thereby remaining connected, but still developing a sense of genuine autonomy on the part of each unit.

Spirituality: The Reality is, Non-Profit or Not, It's A Business

Traditional systems of monasteries and temples were supported by a combination of wealthy patrons, local taxes, and commercial enterprises, such as printing, distilling, and agriculture. Even the *Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn* was the source of income for McGregor Mathers, and his 'secret chief' supporter was Annie Horniman. (See: *Women of the Golden Dawn* by Mary K. Greer (Inner Traditions).ⁱⁱⁱ

The morally self-righteous say that spiritual teachings and initiations should be free and open to all without cost, yet inevitably they charge dues, initiation, per capita, or maintenance fees to keep the lights on. The honest call it what it is – an outright purchase or user fee. The end effect is all the same –

money is needed to keep esoteric ideas flowing, often into the mouths of the unworthy.

From the lack of demonstrated value, there is a direct lack of growth, as well as involvement from existing members, both in cash and time. This means that those who are involved feel a greater sense of responsibility, and often superiority, over others – creating a tense situation. Available skill sets are also limited, and volunteers must be accepted – even if they can't perform their duties – because there is no one else to do it.

SIZE MATTERS – Esoteric organizations need to set a specific goal for membership size, and specific criteria for skill needs, as part of the organizational matrix. This is fundamental to success in occult operations, and simply ignored by occultists in the 'mundane' aspects of running a lodge or organization, thereby courting failure.

We Are Role Models, Whether We Acknowledge It Or Not

Some authors have stated that like sports stars and celebrities they do not feel that they are role models.

1. To this it must be stated clearly and emphatically, “The moment you published a book on practical esotericism you said either explicitly or implied ‘do as I say, and become a little more like me’ and became a role model.”
2. If you don't want to be a role model, don't publish “How To Books” and confine yourself to historical, sociological, or other academic topics.
3. For those who publish practical manuals, as soon as your name is put on a book you are saying the stuff works, and your life becomes the example of how that knowledge expresses itself.

This then leads to the bigger picture. How well have those in leadership positions in the esoteric community, demonstrated the effectiveness of their teachings in living healthy, happy, productive lives? What have contemporary spirituality, neo-paganism, and magical philosophies specifically, contributed to modern life?

Building Foundations – The Future is Now

People vote with their wallets and their feet. Given that many people leave magical philosophies behind in their late 20's and early '30s (Saturn Return no doubt), we need to ask why that is, and why our most experienced people drift away? What is it they are not getting? Why is it that magical folks who talk so much about changing one's reality are essentially cheap? It is easier to get them to part with two days of their life volunteering at a Renaissance Faire than make a \$20 contribution to an esoteric organization, event, or foundation. As a well-

known publisher of a major esoteric magazine said, “It is easier to get then [esotericists] to spend \$100 on a book for their personal library than to make a donation to something that advances the cause.”

Another way to look at it is this. Go to *The Foundation Center* (www.foundationcenter.org) and do a search on foundations making contributions to Christian causes. Then search for Jewish causes (they seem to give the most to their own). Then search Buddhist. Then search for neo-pagan, alternative religions, etc. I think you’ll get the point without doing the search.

There are three major publishers of esoteric books in the United States of America in addition there are several large audio publishing groups. On their websites it says nothing about corporate contributions to charitable causes – and here I mean specifically magical, such as a library, foundation, academic program, or even annual conference sponsorship. This does not mean they do not give, only that areas of preferred charitable donations are not listed. However the conspicuous absence of visible support suggests that while there is tremendous pressure on McDonald’s to make donations to support rain forests to prevent overgrazing, similar support for the esoteric community is lacking – mostly because there are no significant organizations, funds, or educational entities to make donations too. The exception to this is *Azure Green*, the largest magical supply house in the US (and maybe the world) who recently added a listing of non-profit magical entities they financially support.

<http://www.azuregreen.com/taxexempt.html>

The implications of this is essential – for as it is often seen in Buddhist books and videos, that the publishing is often underwritten by a foundation. Richard Gere’s foundation seems to do a lot of this kind of financial support. Of course Madonna supports Rabbi Berg as well, but that seems to be the visible limit of (both good and bad) of where Western esotericism is heading.

For the author who is writing to address the needs of a specific audience and to support something bigger than themselves - that is a tradition or teaching mechanism -and whose support for this is demonstrated by affiliation with a non-profit entity such as a university or a legitimate educational or religious organization, funding to assist in publishing as well as other activities can be found. (Support for individuals exists but is considerably more limited. See: www.foundationcenter.org for information on support for individuals.)

The reasons for organizing and legitimizing are to demonstrate that contemporary spirituality is a movement that caters to more than the temporary whims of readership, looks towards the future, and not just immediate shock value, and produced mature subject matter that builds the individual while strengthening society.

Activities cost money, but more importantly, they cost the commitment of time and emotional energy of the certitude of the path we have undertaken. Sponsoring activities is an act of selflessness that reaches beyond our life and touches others, as well as the future, for it is the living body of the tradition. When contemporary magical activities reach this level of commitment, they will then be looked upon as a significant cultural and spiritual force rather than a phase or object for academic study. Many of the authors currently used as reference material wrote not for themselves, but to create, support, and expand an organization in some form. However, organizations are like people. They have their life-cycle and need to be either reinvigorated or succeeded. The question contemporary esotericism needs to address is has it succeeded in building upon the efforts of those that went before us, or just picked their bones for footnotes?

Things You Can Do

1. Support your local New Age store, if not, then at least your local bookstore. If you must buy from Amazon do it from an Amazon Associate, so that a small percentage of your purchase goes to help an esoteric entity of some kind.
2. Become involved with, or start, an esoteric study group. The Institute for Hermetic Studies is producing a Special Report entitled: *How to Establish, Maintain, and Run an Esoteric Study Group*, to assist those interested in improving the quality of local activities. In addition, John Michael Greer's *Inside a Magical Lodge* (Llewellyn) is a perfect handbook for starting and running a variety of spiritually oriented study groups. Despite being the best book the author has written and a financial loss, its publisher has kept it available and on the shelves in an effort to prop-up modern esotericism. Buy a copy and send Llewellyn an email at: publicity@llewellyn.com to thank them for their efforts at improving the general esoteric community. (www.llewellyn.com)
3. Be generous, and focus your donations on projects that advance esotericism, rather than mundane issues that are addressed by governmental and non-governmental agencies.
4. Support the establishment and maintenance of learning centers, focal points of esoteric study – this applies mostly to those organizations that are initiatic in nature.
5. If you have a list of incorporated, non-profit, religious, educational, or charitable entities that are exclusively focused on the development and expansion of one or more of the traditions of Western esotericism, please forward so that it can be posted on the website for the Institute for Hermetic Studies.

Conclusion

The above statements are general observations and for each point there will be an exception. However, exceptions are not the means by which we are measured, but by our everyday activities. Contemporary spirituality is too self centered, and as such, creates conditions where the essential idea of 'unity' is undermined through lack of successful collective activities and established teaching mechanisms. This fundamental failure is life threatening to the survival of Western esotericism as a living set of traditions in good times, and unless addressed, fatal as we enter into the period of Peak Oil. In the end, there is only one question we must answer, "Who will act like the Christian monks of 1,500 years ago when the Western Roman Empire fell, and save the collected spiritual wisdom of Western culture as the industrialized nations re-organize themselves in a post-petroleum world?" If the answer is not each of us, working together as mature and spiritually developed individuals in lodges, study groups, and learning centers, then burn your books now, for they are as good as lost.

By the way, crude oil prices just hit the record price of \$63.60 (US) a barrel. It's time to get moving.

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ⁱ *My Life in Astrology* by Sybil Leek, p. 218. Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey. 1972

ⁱⁱ <http://www.llewellynjournal.com/article/600>

ⁱⁱⁱ In the Conclusion to her book, Ms. Greer gives *Twelve Resources for Empowerment*, while aimed at women, are applicable to anyone and the entire spiritual community in particular.