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The Seven Degrees of Prophecy



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Prophecy is not only a revelatory ground of great traditions, but also a modality of the sacred human opening to deep intuitions leading to new visions and creative life. In a more modest context, prophecy and revelation are fundamental to life lived with respect, kindness, and joy, as a mode of honoring "all our relations." As we grow into maturity and wisdom, guided by Sophia and held within the living field of the generative soul, we deepen the flow of shared knowledge. This sharing is a communion within sacred ground. As knowledge flows increasingly through the heart-mentality of each being, there is enrichment and expansion, in stages, as we grow toward Light. Each grows in his or her own way; each finds the necessary guidance based on the pattern that unfolds uniquely, not in lineal degrees, but spontaneously according to inner dispositions and desires of the soul. These desires and dispositions change as we grow or contract, as we integrate the varying degrees of prophecy into our understanding in the everyday context. There is no correct or fixed order other than the actual pattern that represents the soul's desire for the "mirror of beauty" reflected in the purified heart. The degrees of prophecy outlined below are suggestive, not prescriptive. I will give only a brief description for each, but much more could be said.

The First Degree: Clairvoyance

This degree begins in conjunction with pre-prophetic empathy and intuition which act in concert to open the heart-mind to deeper seeing. Clairvoyance is the first gift of prophecy; it reveals in a moment of clarity events unfolding without preconception. A sudden knowing, seeing a person, an event, an image that carries with it knowledge of what is and what is about to be. Higher sensory awareness becomes activated in moments of lucidity, linking us with others, however distant or near. This requires calm, alertness, a sensitive awareness of "soft" perception—a sorting through mental and emotional perceptions that leads to a clear, concise impression of what is coming forth. Anomalous perception is a key—what appears unsought, spontaneous or unusual. In receiving impressions, attentiveness must lead to action, not simply reflection or thought. Acting on these perceptions reinforces their coherency and strengthens their frequency; information surrounds us, but we must be attentive and responsive to the subtle and sudden, in order to create a continuous flow of such insight.

The Second Degree: Conscious Dreaming

The dream is a multilayered expression of psychic potential, and the prophetic aspect involves what is emerging, forthcoming, being born—first psychically, then actually. Dreaming carries prophetic potential insofar as the dreamer comprehends the psychic value of the dream encounter, and catches the "thread" that is a link to another person or emerging situation. However layered the dream, the content embeds many psychic connections to a vast network of psychically linked beings. Conscious dreaming implies attentiveness to each thread, an ability to follow the thread to its source, beyond the dreamer, into the network of actual psychic relations.

In this realm, “desire becomes action,” that is, what the soul seeks or fears or hesitates over, manifests, creating a set of relations to a multitude of others. The language of metaphor maps sacred perceptions to real beings and situations IF we are conscious enough to cut through the surface narrative to the heart of our mutual connectedness. Astral travel, out-of-body experience, telepathy, transformation in dreaming all break the collective amnesia and reawaken the soul potential of the dreamer.

The Third Degree: Spiritual Agency

This degree refers to the state of the “waking dream,” that is, to the visionary capacity to open one's spiritual eyes and to behold through the dream the causal agents inherent in the process. While the psyche tends to shelter in the elemental structures of known and trusted idea-beliefs, the courageous soul breaks through the elemental inhibition and opens to a vaster field of beings, agents, spirits, and entities capable of directing desire into action. Here there are varying “degrees of separation” between the visionary and the vision agents; some are very close to us, our own subconscious influences, some more distant, taking a variety of angelic-deva forms, some even more removed, unfamiliar or challenging. Archetypal beings can manifest the collective potential, and visionary encounters with them can suggest a pathway whose foundation is prophetic. This is the Imaginal Realm, the Alam al-Mithal, the creative ground where imagination and prophetic potential combine through inner visions to reveal new insights. Here we also find a multitude of post-mortem domains, communion with the deceased occurs, information from the spirit world flows, shaped by the intent and love of the perceiver.

The Veil of Longing

Here there is a veil, an inner longing, as deep desire arises wishing to know, not to believe or to think, but to know, the sacred ground. This longing can come from contraction, a feeling of constriction in a way of life too narrow, too confining; it can come through a sense of isolation, of being cut off from authentic truth and being. It can come through loss of faith or from impotence in the face of vaster realities. At the base, there is a desire for a realization of the sacred ground, a soulful longing after beauty, a restless agitation that finds satisfaction only in the presence of the Beloved. Here the soul longs deeply for true presence, for the kiss of Spirit, for the touch that illumines.

The Fourth Degree: Sacred Affirmation

If we pass through the veil of inner longing, we come to a primary affirmation—an encounter that offers us the First Degree of Revelation. Here the truth or reality of the sacred is no longer a belief, a story or an idea, no longer an aspiration, but an actual immersion. This confirmation of spiritual beingness often takes the form of love as a welling up of deep connection, soul-permeated immersion, unity in the God Light. This is the opening to the sacred human, to

seeing that we are each, every one of us, a holy being tasked with the potential of divine action. Here the sense of partnership expands, revealing an inherent sacredness to all relations, however diverse in form, whatever the differences, seeking to fulfill this human potential. This is non-exclusive space, an expanding pool of perception, ever incorporating while ever differentiating. This is a personal revelatory moment, awakening to Spirit in the direct, immediate sense. It is here that the Prophetic Self is born, the as yet unrealized self that seeks to mediate and fulfill the deepest potentials within the sacred human. Here is the continually shaping and drawing forth of self into new modalities of realization, expression and relation. The Prophetic Self expands into the holy ground of beingness, calling undeveloped aspects to surrender imperfections, to give up poor habits and idle speculations, to drop fears, anger, hatred, anxiety, addiction and indifference. It is a call to embrace latent but purified desires, to transform them into creative manifestations, working in harmony with others.

The Veil of Sorrows

Here is a second veil, the veil that lifts us beyond our own preoccupations, takes us beyond the immediacy of personal transformation into a world-awareness of suffering, imperfection, hate, crime, violence, pain, confusion and denial. This veil reveals our shared agony, the pervasive need for collective renewal and transformation. This station allows us to know and experience the suffering of human beings, of animals, of plant life, of the minerals and elements, of the totality of the world that groans under the illusions of inequality, selfish greed, arrogance, and contracted pain. This is the veil that calls for moral responsibility, where the process of development no longer centers on simple personal realizations, where our work is the formation of healing communities of spirit, where we each take responsibility and reach out to assist in the birth of new understanding, where we give love without seeking rewards.

The Fifth Degree: Acknowledging the World Soul

This degree is beyond sacred affirmation, it moves into the depths and the interface of multiple perspectives, all held in a loving manner, carried within the divine Sophia, the Mother World Soul of Wisdom. This wisdom is not based on correctness, or righteousness, or proper views; this wisdom embraces all, saint and criminal, beggar and baron, murderer and healer. She holds the life path of every being in the fierce embrace of life's vitality, wanting us to each grow beyond ignorance, selfishness, and fearful denial. Her deep wisdom penetrates everywhere and she nurtures the entire world of all beings, all life forms, all spirits, elementals, aspects, degrees and qualities. Blessed is her all-embracing care! Here the virtues are formed through the ethical function in clear relationship to the suffering and needs of others. Here we receive the inspiration for responsible living with others, through committed relationships of love and respect held within the Sophia World Soul. This degree of prophecy is a true seeing of the incarnational mystery—the Second Degree of Revelation where we choose ways to serve

beings with the full gift of the sacred human, graciously received. She is present to the smallest degree, in every atom, subparticle, superstring or macroform. This total field of unfolded orders is held in that wisdom, and to know it, is a prophetic gift. Here the “I Am” sings within the “Thou We Are” and the “Thou All Thou”—here the World Soul shines forth.

The Sixth Degree: Your Sacred Task

Here the soul of the Prophetic Self begins to receive visionary guidance for the specific work that must be carried out by that Self. This is the Third Degree of Revelation. Each seeker finds and refinds that emerging call, the co-creative work that leads to action and embodiment of your calling, your task. What is your sacred task? What is the inspirational work that requires you to reform your life, your relations and your goals in order to bring to full expression the good that is within you? Here deep commitment to transformation is necessary, but in and through partnership with other seekers. Here we are beyond religion yet part of religion; beyond tradition yet within tradition, carrying out the teachings of the past; beyond family or friends yet loving them within the Sophia, finding the work we are each called to do. This can be simple, direct, an ethical beauty of soul, a truly loving heart, a gentle creative expression that moves others through sheer simplicity. However deep or far, it continues for a lifetime and beyond, a spiral that ever incorporates another step, another call from the Prophetic Self. This is the Eros function of prophecy, summarized simply as “what you love most” and what you dedicate yourself to accomplish.

The Seventh Degree: Your Sacred Teaching

It is good to attain the path of the degrees of prophecy, and to follow an inner coherence that can then be shared with others. Not all teachings are verbal or easily seen. But whatever your path, you should seek, in prophetic degrees, to find a way to express your truth. There is a need for truth sharing at the exact place of its realization—not simply in systems or complex schemes, but through a willingness to find the words, forms and other expressions that communicate. This is the Logos function, the Hieros Logos, “sacred teachings” that evolve out of your own visionary experience and crystallize as memorable guidance for other generations. Women must in particular find their voices, share their wisdom and open the doors to new understanding. A simple drawing, a song, a poem, a mathematical formula, any medium might convey it. But let it be infused with the supramental aspects, with the prophetic gifts that have become real and actual; let your teaching mature before speaking, but then speak it from the heart!

~~~~~The Veil of Unseeing~~~~~

We did not cover this or the remaining degrees of prophecy, perhaps next time.

About the Author:

Lee Irwin is Chair of the Religious Studies Department at the College of Charleston. He has studied world religions intensively, with an emphasis on Native American religions, western esotericism, hermeticism, contemporary spirituality, and transpersonal religious experience — particularly around themes connected to dreams and visions. He is also the Vice President of the International Association for the Study of Esotericism, and gives frequent presentations at the SOPHIA INSTITUTE and at the Institute for Dream Studies. He is also an Associate Editor and a contributor to “Elixir: The Journal of Consciousness, Conscience, and Culture”. His books include: *The Dream Seekers*, *Visionary Worlds*, *Awakening to Spirit*, *The Gnostic Tarot*, and *The Alchemy of Soul*.

In his own words: I have had a life-long interest in religion, spirituality, and comparative phenomenology of religious experience. In pursuit of that interest, I have studied the world religions intensively with a strong emphasis on religious experience, such as visions and dreams, and comparative mythology. My area of specialization is comparative religions of Native North American (including Maya and Aztec) and shamanism of Asia and Siberia. I also have a very strong interest in eastern religions (MA thesis on Taoism) and Islamic Sufism. As a comparativist, I am interested in studying religious phenomenology in its typological and morphological structures throughout all world religions. I am also interested in the historical study and teaching of world religions. My most recent research and teaching has been in the area of Western Esotericism and contemporary Gnostic and Hermetic spirituality. I also teach Theory and Method in the history of religious studies as well as other topical courses in phenomenology.

<http://religiousstudies.cofc.edu/about/faculty-staff-listing/irwin-lee.php>

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