

The Khabs is in the Khu

An essay examining the nature of the individual and his place in the universe as propounded in *The Book of the Law*, together with its model for spiritual attainment and the nature of the obstacles involved.

by

Erwin Hesse

September 11th, 2007 *e.v.*

Sun in 18° Virgo, Anno IVxv

Copyright © 2007 Erwin Hesse

All rights reserved. No part of this book, in part or in whole, may be reproduced, transmitted, or utilised, in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher, except for brief quotations in critical articles, books and reviews.

First edition 2007

Privately published

For more by the author, visit <http://www.erwinhessle.com/>

The Khabs is in the Khu

AL I, 8 is the first verse of many we come to in *The Book of the Law* that frankly looks odd. “Every man and every woman is a star”¹ we can grasp. “Be thou Hadit, my secret centre, my heart & my tongue!”² is obscure, but parses without much difficulty. But “The Khabs is in the Khu, not the Khu in the Khabs”?³ What on earth does that mean?

The answer is not complex, but is subtle, and can be difficult to grasp. But its position as verse 8 of 220 should give some clue as to its importance, and indeed in these twelve words is summed up the key message of Chapter I.

According to Budge, “Khabs” literally means “star,” whilst “Khu” literally means “spirit”. Another translation is “starry sky” and “spirit-soul,” respectively, which is close to the same thing. In Crowley’s “new comment”⁴ he says:

Khabs is the secret Light or L.V.X.; the Khu is the magical entity of a man ... Khabs means star ... This “star” or “inmost light” is the original, individual, eternal essence. The Khu is the magical garment which it weaves for itself, a “form” for its being beyond form, by use of which it can experience through self-consciousness.

Here, “Khabs” is referred to the “individual, eternal essence” which is described in AL I, 3: “Every man and every woman is a star.” “Khu” is referred to the “magical entity of a man,” his being, his consciousness, his sense of identity and separateness, “by use of which it can experience through self-consciousness.” This sense of identity is

¹AL I, 3

²AL I, 6

³AL I, 8

⁴Published as *An Extenuation of The Book of the Law* in 1926, and posthumously as *The Law is for All*.

precisely what is normally meant by “spirit” or “soul”. Note that this is, however, the exact opposite of the normal placement of the soul, which is assumed to be the “inner core”. *The Book of the Law*, on the other hand, suggests that it is in fact the *soul* which is the shell, and that there is some other individual essence — the Khabs — *inside* that.

It is necessary to dig a little deeper in order to understand this. Crowley talked at length in various places about his “ $0 = 2$ ” equation, which illustrates in simple terms the basic Thelemic cosmogony. This rather idiosyncratic use of algebra is more easily understood when written $0 = (-1) + (+1)$, the two terms on the right hand side of the equation cancelling each other out to equal the zero on the left hand side. Entire essays have been written devoted to this concept alone, and more detailed discussion will have to be deferred. We will settle here for remarking that it explains (in metaphysical terms, at least) how something can come from nothing, and how that same something can go back to nothing.

The Book of the Law describes these processes in AL I, 29–30:

For I am divided for love’s sake, for the chance of union.

This is the creation of the world, that the pain of division is as nothing, and the joy of dissolution all.

The “division” refers to the division of zero into $(+1)$ and (-1) , the symmetrical extension from a point, whilst “dissolution” refers to the reverse process, the combination of $(+1)$ and (-1) and their absorption back into zero. These are the two boundaries of the life-cycle of all manifest things, creation and destruction, birth and death. The infinite variety of manifest things is explained by the observation that $(+438, 112, 329) + (-438, 112, 329)$, for instance, equals zero just as much as $(+1) + (-1)$ does.

The equation also illustrates how — according to this theory, at least — nothing can ever be added to or removed from the universe, since the sum total of all existing things will always be zero, whether there is nothing in the universe, or whether it is teeming with life. And this observation gets us closer to not only the *how* of creation according to *The Book of the Law*, but also to the *why*.

According to AL I, 29–30, then, the “purpose” of creation — of division — is “for the chance of union,” for the chance of dissolution, in order that those created things may be absorbed, or destroyed again. This seems like an odd concept, but is critical to understand if we are to grasp the meaning of AL I, 8.

As we have said, the $0 = 2$ equation implies that nothing can ever be added to or removed from the universe. Nuit, “the circumference [who] is nowhere found,”⁵ is the personification of the totality of potential, representative of everything that does exist, has existed, or may exist. This personification presents us with an immediate problem; if Nuit is the totality of potential, and nothing can ever be added to or removed from the universe, then Nuit is, on the face of it, wholly incapable of creating anything *separate to herself*. That being the case, it is on the face of it incredibly difficult to conceive of a reason why Nuit would ever *do* anything, ever *create* anything.

This is not a new problem, and has been recognised in all theories of deity. If the Abrahamic God, for instance, is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, why would he ever create people? If he really is all-powerful, he would merely be creating an army of drones, possessing no life or will of their own beyond what he provides for them. Playing by oneself with one’s own toys get very old very quickly. This is usually explained away by the idea that this god creates people with “free will,” but if this is the case then he can hardly be omnipotent or omniscient; if he already knows what their free will is going to lead to, then it can hardly be described as “free”.

Similarly, if Nuit is all of potential, and nothing can be added or removed, then what would be the point of her creating anything? If the sum total of existence always equals zero, then what is the difference between lots of things existing, and nothing existing? Why go to the trouble of creating things, when one can achieve exactly the same effect by doing nothing?

One example of where *The Book of the Law* succeeds where all other accounts of creation have failed is in providing a coherent and satisfying answer to this problem (although we must never forget that we are talking in metaphors, here — we must be careful not to make the elementary mistake of assuming that Nuit actually is a conscious entity that actually does have a conscious purpose and actually does “do” anything). To illustrate this answer, Crowley writes the following in *The Book of the Great Auk*, which he quotes in both *Magick in Theory and Practice* and *Magick Without Tears*:

All elements must at one time have been separate — that would be the case with great heat. Now when atoms get to the sun, we get that immense extreme heat, and all the elements are themselves again. Imagine that each atom of each element possesses the memory of all his adventures

⁵AL II, 3

in combination. By the way, that atom (fortified with that memory) would not be the same atom; yet it is, because it has gained nothing from anywhere except this memory. Therefore, by the lapse of time, and by virtue of memory, a thing could become something more than itself; thus a real development is possible. One can then see a reason for any element deciding to go through this series of incarnations, because so, and only so, can he go; and he suffers the lapse of memory which he has during these incarnations, because he knows he will come through un-changed.

Here is the important element: “Therefore, by the lapse of time, and by virtue of memory, a thing could become something *more than itself*; thus *a real development is possible*.” Nuit, for all her seeming impotence, has one clever trick up her sleeve: she can create beings that *perceive themselves to be separate from the whole*. If Nuit is the sum totality of potential, she cannot possibly perceive anything separate from herself, which is the same thing as saying she cannot perceive anything at all, since perception requires at least a perceiver and a thing being perceived that are distinct from each other. Yet a conscious subset of that potential which *believes* itself to be separate and distinct *can* perceive something different to itself. Since Nuit herself is incapable of perception, by creating self-aware individuals something new *can* be added to the universe, and that something is *experience*.

And this indeed is the explanation of AL I, 29–30. The “division” is (in part) the creation of self-aware individuals who are able to perceive and experience, and the “joy of dissolution” is the uniting of those individuals with the objects of their perception, the acquisition of experience. Hence, “For I am divided for love’s sake” — self-aware individuals are created in able to allow for the possibility of the acquisition of experience *adding something real* to the potential of Nuit. Only through manifest creation can this occur, and this is the reason why Nuit creates; this is her motivation: “that atom (fortified with that memory) would not be the same atom; yet it is, because it has gained nothing from anywhere except this memory.”

This notion also conveniently solves the “problem of evil,” another niggler which has dogged theology since the dawn of religion. Briefly, this problem asks why a beneficent god would create a world in which evil is allowed to exist. *The Book of the Law* makes mincemeat out of this “problem”. From Nuit’s perspective, nothing is ever added or removed except for experience, so to her there simply is no such thing as “evil”. Furthermore, her being is increased by experience; *any*

experience. The experience of pain, for instance, whilst distressing to the individual, is not distressing to Nuit; every single experience enriches her, no matter how objectionable the individual acquiring that experience may consider it. It is only the illusion of separateness that the individual perceives that causes him to experience “evil,” and this is exactly what we’ve described it as, an *illusion*.

And this brings us back to AL I, 8. The individual, in essence, is not really an individual; he is merely an arbitrary boundary around a particular subset of totality. In order to experience as an individual, he must be given the illusion that that boundary is, in fact, *him*. This illusion is the Khu, the spirit, the soul, “the magical garment which it weaves for itself, a ‘form’ for its being beyond form, by use of which it can experience through self-consciousness.” The actual individual, the boundary between what is perceived as self and what is perceived as not-self, is the Khabs, the star, the unit of existence that is both an integral part of totality, and the central point from which the Khu is able to perceive “everything else”.

It is this sense of identity, of individuality, of self, that is responsible for all “ills,” since as we have explained, without individuality, there can be no perception, and without perception, there can be no “evil”. Nuit, of course, does not care about this, and neither does the Khabs, being unconscious of its individuality. But critically, the Khu *does* care about it, and it is to this care that religion, spirituality and magick are entirely directed.

To state more plainly, the phenomenon of individuality is only beneficial for Nuit, but can appear detrimental to the Khu. The Khu, having self-awareness, also considers itself to have self-interest, and it seeks to remedy the detriment it perceives for this reason. This seeking is the motivation behind religion and spirituality, and success in the matter represents “spiritual attainment”.

The traditional approach has usually been to remedy the sense of separation by reaching out to something outside of us, whether that something is “God,” nature, or anything else. And thus we see the colossal misconception that has plagued all attempts to systematically approach this task, because as AL I, 8, tells us:

The Khabs is in the Khu, not the Khu in the Khabs.

The soul which seeks outwards for its starry goal is looking precisely in the wrong direction; it should be looking *inwards*. This yearning for “something else” is ultimately an infantile notion of divine parenthood, a plea for something outside to come and rescue one, and there is simply nobody else “out there”.

The actual solution is revealed when we consider that the Khabs, the “true” individual essence, does *not* feel separate to Nuit, and hence suffers no evil. What the Khu needs to do is to realise that *it is not the self*, and that that title properly belongs to the Khabs. Since the Khu is not the self, and it is only the Khu that suffers, then the self does not suffer, and if only the Khu could fully realise this then its troubles would be over. The suffering which “we” experience is in fact perceived only by our experiential vehicles in this particular manifestation. Logically, it is akin to feeling physical pain when our cars break down, which is of course ridiculous. More simply, we feel suffering simply because we mistake our vehicles for our real, eternal selves.

This realisation is, naturally, difficult to achieve, and for good reason. If the illusion of separation was that weak, then it would defeat the very purpose of creating individuals. It is the very fact that the nature of the self is *veiled* from the Khu that allows Nuit to fulfill her purpose. Crowley makes this point, again from his “new comment”:

Our minds and bodies are veils of the Light within. The uninitiate is a “dark star,” and the Great Work for him is to make his veils transparent by “purifying” them. This “purification” is really “simplification”; it is not that the veil is dirty, but that the complexity of its folds make it opaque. The Great Work therefore consists principally in the solution of complexes. Everything in itself is perfect, but when things are muddled they become “evil”.

“Our minds and bodies are veils of the Light within,” veils of the starry light of the Khabs, veils that hamper the Khu from perceiving the true nature of its individuality. The “complexity of [the veil’s] folds” are what constitutes the soul, the personality, the conscious and subconscious nature of the person that provides it with a context against which to frame its experience, and every experience increases this complexity, this opacity. The “Great Work,” which entails realising the true nature of the self, therefore “consists principally in the solution of complexes,” or in the “smoothing of the folds” of the veil to make them “transparent”.

This “Great Work,” then, is to the benefit of the Khu, and at first glance appears to be in direct opposition to the purpose of Nuit, but this is in fact not so. After all, if the sum total of existence is always zero, then to perceive nothing is functionally equivalent to perceiving everything, and what experience could be more satisfactory to Nuit than a union with *everything*?

Thus, the essence of spiritual attainment is for the individual to “become his true self,” to identify with his true nature, rather than with the Khu, with the cloak that he fancifully imagines himself to be. This turns the traditional notion of “attainment” on its head; we do not need to “attain” to something in order to be “saved,” we do not need to live in a particular way, dress in a certain fashion, or adhere to any particular set of dubious “moral standards”. Rather, what we need to do is to unfold the veil around our eternal individual essence, to rid ourselves of all the constructs and preconceptions that prevent us from apprehending who and what we really are. It is almost the reverse of “attainment” — we need to get back to a stage we have previously been at, but this time with *awareness*.

This is, of course, exactly what “discovering the true will” involves, and hence the object of magick is twofold, as Crowley makes clear in *Liber II*: firstly to discover your true will, and secondly, to do it. The “Great Work” can be summed up in a very crude fashion: “Everything is all right to start with; everything that is, is perfect; the Great Work involves nothing other than learning to become conscious of that.” We say “nothing other” whilst recognising that the “folds in the veil” can be very opaque indeed, and that accomplishing this is usually not quite as simple as it sounds. Nevertheless, in conception things are no more complicated than has been stated. “Relief from suffering” is actually nothing to do with avoiding the situations which cause suffering, it involves merely acknowledging and realising that the suffering of our minds and bodies is actually of no concern to our true selves, which experience no suffering. “Attainment” is in fact not a “development” as we usually employ the term, but instead merely a “shaking down” of the murky veils in our mind which hide this fact from us. We have everything we need from birth; we just need to see keenly enough to perceive it. Once we *can* see this keenly, and the Khu is identified with the Khabs, then identification with Nuit will be achieved:

Worship then the Khabs, and behold my light shed over
you! (AL I, 9)

This entire concept is of utmost importance; it underpins absolutely everything else. Success will be extremely unlikely without a crystal clear understanding of this matter, and correct interpretation of that success will be impossible without it. It is the most important idea in all of magical literature, and is absolutely fundamental to understanding the first chapter of *The Book of the Law* and the true nature of Thelema.

Bibliography

- [1] Crowley, A., *The Book of the Law, Liber AL vel Legis sub figurâ CCXX*, Ordo Templi Orientis/London-England, 1st edition, 1938
- [2] Crowley, A., *An Extenuation of the Book of the Law*, Privately printed/Tunis-Tunisia, 1st edition, 1926
- [3] Crowley, A., *Magick in Theory and Practice*, Lecram Press/Paris-France, 1st edition, 1929
- [4] Crowley, A., *Magick Without Tears*, Thelema Publishing Co./Hampton-New Jersey, 1st edition, 1954
- [5] Crowley, A., *Liber II, The Message of the Master Therion* appearing in *The Equinox, Volume III, Number I*, The Universal Publishing Company/Detroit-Michigan, 1st edition, 1919

