

God in Three Persons: A Spiritual Odyssey

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“Then also shall a child of the great
Come, clothed in Flesh, to men, and fashioned like
To mortals in the earth; and he doth hear
Four vowels, and two consonants in him
Are twice announced; the whole sum I will name:
For eight ones, and as many tens on these,
And yet eight hundred will reveal the name.”
[The Sibylline Oracles, Book I, lines 394-399
Translated from the Greek into English Blank Verse,
By Milton S. Terry, 1899]

Apollo looked out of the small oval window of the airplane. Down below, in the midst of the Aegean Sea, he noticed a cluster of islands, the Dodecanese. The northernmost of the twelve (“dodeca”) islands looked like a tiny dot in the ocean of space.

Sophia leaned her head on Apollo's shoulder and reflected on their journey up and down the Nile River, which took them five months to complete. Apollo had convinced Simon that the mysteries of Egypt, which Pythagoras, Plato, and Apollonius had mastered, could only be understood by personally following in the footsteps of Apollonius. Sophia felt the entire time like she was the Egyptian Isis on a pilgrimage to recover the fourteen scattered pieces of her consort Osiris as they stopped at each of the sacred sites.

Simon sat behind Apollo and wondered if he would have enough money from the church coffers to pay for the rest of the trip. He regretted having agreed to Apollo's plan to investigate the mysteries of Egypt; to Apollo the sacred sites resonated with the vibrations of ancient voices, but to Simon the sites were just empty ruins. The only reason Simon agreed to go along for the ride was because Apollo and Sophia had promised to pay for their share of the expenses.

Apollo looked over his notes on the sojourn through Egypt, and his eye caught sight of an encapsulating quote about Apollonius that resembled his personal experience throughout the present trek he was on: “In several places they took boats across the river in order to visit every site on it; for there was not a city, fane (temple) or sacred site in Egypt, that they passed by without discussion. For at each they either learned or taught

some holy story, so that any ship on which Apollonius embarked resembled the sacred galley of a religious legation.” (Life of Apollonius, Book V, Chapter XLIII)

The airport south of Izmir (ancient Smyrna), Turkey, was thirty-seven miles from their destination: ancient Ephesus. Sophia had found a suitable hotel on the world-wide-web (www), and Simon had called to make arrangements for a ride from the airport to the hotel. Nazar, the chauffer, was waiting for them at the airport when they arrived.

“Welcome to Turkey, Crossroads of Civilizations,” said Nazar, who shook his guests’ hands and then placed the baggage in the trunk of his small European 4-door sedan. The three guests squeezed into the economy-sized ocean-blue Fiat. Nazar shifted the manual transmission into first gear and drove south to Selcuk, the city built around the ruins of the ancient city of Ephesus.

“So what brings you wise seekers to the land of ancient civilizations?” asked Nazar after he had guided the car past the traffic of the airport and onto the highway. “Are you studying the Ottoman Turk, the Seljuk, Byzantine, Roman, Greek, Persian, or Phrygian civilization?”

“Actually, we are more interested in a person, a Greek philosopher who lived during the first century, a Cappadocian named Apollonius of Tyana,” stated Apollos succinctly.

“I’m sorry,” apologized Nazar. “I am not familiar with that person.”

“He was a disciple of Pythagoras of Samos,” added Sophia.

“Ah, Pythagoras, the sage of Samos,” declared Nazar with a note of familiarity. “Everyone in this part of the world has heard of that man, the philosopher who raised the teaching of the sacred numbers to an elevated height, so that now we think of him as a theologian of the One, whose perfect symbol is the circle.”

“This man is no ordinary chauffer,” commented Simon, breaking his cautious silence. “He sounds like a philosopher, himself.”

“In this country we are all philosophers who think we know truth,” affirmed Nazar, glancing at Simon, who sat beside him. “Some of us even reason that we are also theologians, because we talk about the Deity, of one god or another, all the time. But enough of this serious talk. Let me ask you a question: Do you want me to book a ferry to Samos for you?”

Apollos and Sophia looked at each other with an affirmative glint in their eyes. “Yes!” they said simultaneously.

“This is the season of the Celestial Lamb,” informed Nazar, “and in our calendar the month Nisan is rainy at times. However, if you’d like, I can drive you around the island. I can even show you the famous cave where Pythagoras meditated and was inspired to reveal great truths to his fellow man. I will be your guide, like the mythical Charon, the ferryman, guiding you to the other side.”

“That sounds too ghastly for me,” remarked Simon in a tone of disapproval. “I’d rather you be Jason who leads us to the Golden Fleece.”

“That settles it,” announced Sophia. “You’ll be our hired driver for the duration of our stay here.”

“I’ll take that to mean that Your Majesty has decreed the matter at hand,” affirmed Apollos jovially.

“So let it be done,” reaffirmed Simon, joining in the mirth.

One hour later Nazar drove the Fiat into Selcuk. He parked the car outside the hotel entrance and called for assistance with the baggage.

“So this is Hotel Nazar,” said Simon as he looked at the modest-looking building. “We’ll definitely be saving money here at this family-run business.”

“I chose this place because of the Turkish hospitality that they advertised on their web site,” explained Sophia. “And for the ride from the airport.”

“Are you sure it wasn’t because of the name?” asked Apollos, who associated the name Nazar with the biblical Nazirites, like Samson, who were consecrated by a special vow to avoid cutting the hair, eating meat, and drinking alcohol. It was identical to the Pythagorean way that Apollonius followed his entire life.

“That was a bonus feature,” explained Sophia with a pixie smile on her face.

“Nazar Hotel could just as well have been named Nazarene Hotel,” stated Simon. “Both names mean set apart or dedicated to service of a divine nature.”

“Nazar basically referred to a class of initiates of the sacred mysteries,” pronounced Apollos authoritatively. “The story of Paul being initiated at Cencrea, the eastern port of Corinth, where Apollonius is said to have stopped at the Temple of Apollo to pay homage to the Sun of Truth, curiously connects in a circular path to Ephesus. If you think about the circuitous biblical account, Paul leaves Corinth after taking his initiation vow and comes to Ephesus, where he reasons with the people in their temple, and then he leaves; immediately afterwards, Apollos (a.k.a. Apollonius) arrives in Ephesus and teaches his Pythagorean philosophy, called the baptism of John, in the Temple of Artemis. Then Apollos leaves Ephesus and comes to Corinth, whereas Paul returns to Ephesus. What we have is a curious movement of Paul from Corinth in the west to Ephesus in the east, and a movement from Ephesus in the east to Corinth in the west on the part of Apollos or Apollonius. The Temple of Apollo, the sun-god, stands in the west, whereas the Temple of Artemis, the moon-goddess, stands in the east.”

“So are you saying that Paul travels from the sun to the moon, and that Apollonius travels from the moon to the sun?” asked Simon in his wry manner.

“I think what he’s trying to say in his roundabout way is that the ancient mysteries revolved around the revolutions of the sun and the moon in the sky and in the inner being of man,” explained Sophia in defense of Apollos’ attempt to correlate the puzzling stories.

“What are you discussing so intently?” interrupted Nazar, who brought a family member to help him carry the baggage to the guests’ rooms.

“We were discussing the meaning of your name, Nazar,” offered Simon.

“We aim to serve, and we aim to please,” said Nazar with a smile, which shone as brightly as his nearly bald head. “Follow me, and I’ll show you to your rooms.”

After registering his guests, Nazar took them to the roof-terrace restaurant, where they were treated to traditional Turkish home cooking and to a spectacular view. Directly west, about 200 meters from the hotel, a vista of the expansive and well-preserved ruins of the sixth-century A.D. St. John’s Basilica unfolded to the eye of the beholder. Above the immense cross-like skeletal framework of the ancient monument rose an imposing medieval fortress on top of a thousand-foot hill.

“That’s an impressive castle, isn’t it?” asked Nazar as he watched his guests stare at the majestic sight just north of the basilica. “The walls of Ayasuluk Castle go one-and-a-half kilometers around the top of Ayasuluk Hill, and it has fifteen towers. Some people

say the name Ayasuluk comes from the Byzantine Hagios Theologos and means Holy Breath or Holy Divine, but I think it refers to the holy theologian.”

“Which one, John the Apostle or Pythagoras the philosopher?” asked Simon, whose quick wit thought of Nazar’s earlier statement about Pythagoras.

“You take your pick,” answered Nazar diplomatically. “There are many Christian legends about St. John in Ephesus, but there are many more legends about Greek gods, goddesses, and philosophers that attract pilgrims from all over the world to this ancient site. And who knows if maybe those legends have been retold and reworked by a skillful writer to mold an archetypal figure in a new form with new attributes, and even a new name. We’ve seen many civilizations pass through this land, and each civilization molded the images and stories of the gods and the personalities in their own style, to their own liking. Take for example the Greek moon-goddess or Celestial Mother Artemis, who was called Cybele by the Phrygians, Astarte by the Assyrians, Ishtar by the Babylonians, and Diana by the Romans.”

“And Isis by the Egyptians,” added Sophia.

“And Mary by the Roman Catholics,” added Simon.

“The goddess of a thousand names,” concluded Apollos. “And I call her Mother Nature, She Who has Many Faces.”

“Finish your lunch, and, if you’d like, I can take you to the Temple of Artemis, which is a short distance from our hotel,” proposed Nazar, who was aiming to please and accommodate his guests during their stay in his hotel. The idea was acceptable to the three guests, who finished their meal of lentil soup and the notable dolma dishes of grape leaf wraps stuffed with rice. Apollos savored the small baklava pastry, which was his favorite Turkish sweet, as he got up from the table and followed Nazar to their first excursion in the land known as Asia (or Asia Minor) during the first century.

When Sophia heard Nazar say that the ruins of the temple were only a little over 800 meters southwest of the hotel, she suggested that they walk there. Within minutes they were walking south down the main boulevard, Ataturk (“Father of the Turks”) Caddesi (Boulevard), which gave them a chance to see the active city. A Turkish flag with a crescent moon and a five-pointed star on a red background waved in the slight spring breeze over a government building; the crescent seemed to be composed of two circles, one overlapping the other. At the ring-road, which was in the center of the city, they headed west along Sahabettin Dede Caddesi past the museum and toward the Temple of Artemis (Artemision in Greek).

The Artemision was nowhere to be seen with the human eyes; only some stacked remnants of blocks stood in the open space of a flat field. One half-restored column of misfit sections stood in the midst of the scattered stones as a forlorn sentinel of an invisible past. What once had been one of the seven wonders of the ancient world was now only a sad reminder of the impermanence of physical labor, echoing the philosophical maxim: “This too shall pass away.”

“We’ve come this far just to see this?” asked Simon sardonically. “There’s nothing here but a bunch of old useless stone blocks.”

“Tomorrow I’ll take you to the ruins of Ephesus, three kilometers south of here,” conceded Nazar, realizing that the unattractive emptiness of the site was not pleasing to the eyes. “There’s so much more to see there.”

“From what I recall,” interjected Apollos, trying to salvage the moment from being ruined by Simon’s pessimism, “the biblical Paul spent three months here in the temple disputing and persuading through his reasoning power the existence of the superphysical universe, the kingdom of God. Apollonius came to Ephesus after his journey to India and gave discourses here from the platform of the temple, urging the idle citizens to devote themselves to the pursuit of higher wisdom by studying philosophy. Both set up a school of learning, Paul disputing or debating in the curious school of Tyrannus, which sounds peculiarly reminiscent of Tyana, the hometown of the philosopher, and Apollonius teaching philosophy by means of lectures.”

Sophia, whose back was turned to the men, who were listening to Apollos’ discourse, faced the solitary upright pillar and sensed an unusual flow of energy emanating from it. The pillar shimmered with a bluish-green energy field, which seemed to correspond to the background of the green in nature and the blue in the sky. Behind the pillar, the ruins of the basilica on the lower southern portion of Ayasuluk Hill and the castle on the higher northern portion seemed to fade into the distance. Sophia felt a surge of energy, like a bolt of lightning from the hand of Jupiter, descend from the crown of her head to the base of her spinal column. As the energy began its ascent through the seven centers of the cerebro-spinal system, Sophia saw each center light up like a golden star on top of a candlestick. A solar current coincided with a lunar current in her head and a beam of light projected from her mind’s single eye, materializing the archetype of the original seventh wonder of the world: the Artemision, in its pure unspoiled form.

“Sophia! Where are you?” cried out Apollos as the sky suddenly turned dark, like during a solar eclipse.

“What in the world!?” called out Simon as he turned to face the materialized temple.

“Oh my God!” exclaimed Nazar in sheer amazement.

The three men couldn’t believe their eyes as they approached the towering edifice. They were mesmerized by the white marble Ionic columns, which seemed to reach into the heavens. They walked dream-like closer to the façade of the building, looking up to see the image of the yellow-colored many-breasted goddess Cybele at the center of the tympanum, with images of brown horses, golden lions, and a huntress with a bow to the sides. They walked up thirteen steps to the platform on which the rectangular monument stood.

“One hundred and twenty-seven columns,” said Nazar, looking up at the scroll-like tops of the columns which upheld the blue-colored firmament of the ceiling.

“The sacred twelve of the zodiac and the sacred seven of the ancient planetary spirits,” said Apollos, who felt a magnetic attraction drawing him past the 18 meter tall columns toward the central cella (or house) of the goddess.

“This temple appears to be four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens,” said Simon, who walked through the forest-like double row of columns on all four sides of the dipteral temple.

As the three men arrived at the massive doors of the enclosed chamber within the open space at the center of the temple, a stream of yellow light broke through a crack between the doors and slowly pushed them open. A gravitational pull drew the men inside the dwelling place of the goddess. The interior of the chamber appeared to be a vast universe that emanated from a formless central light, and in the center of the light

appeared an ivory statue-like form of the Great Mother Cybele in her multi-breasted, nourisher-of-all-life aspect. A triple tower-like tiara – symbolizing her dominion of the causal, astral, and physical worlds – adorned her royal head. Lions of solar energy and bulls of generative powers adorned her body; bees, symbols of Ephesus and devotees of the queen (nectar of life), adorned her sides. The crescent moon was marked in her forehead, and her head seemed to rise from a solar garland around her neck. The symbols of Mother Nature flourished as manifestations of her manifold being.

Suddenly the statue-like form transformed herself into a lovely maiden whose hair was the rain-bearing clouds in the sky, her skin the soft covering of soil, her eyes the soul of every creature, her spirit the life of every living thing. Her hands were extended in benevolent care for every form of life that she gave birth to as she transformed herself into a mother. The seasons of spring, summer, autumn, and winter emerged from her being and dissolved back into her being.

A drama of countless worlds and beings circulated with cyclical precision within her cosmic substance. A subtle reproductive energy flowed through the entire scheme of things, keeping the process of life reoccurring in cycles of birth, growth, and death. Behind the veil of her material physical aspect resided a vast creative intelligence guiding the growth and evolution of all life forms. Her cosmic mind and body pervaded every part of the fabric of the universe. She was matter in her visible and invisible aspect. She was the Queen of the Heavens and the Mother of all Life. She was the One giving birth to the Many.

At that moment the vision of the Great Mother dissolved like astral particles in a dream, and the three men beholding the inner goddess within the sanctuary of the Artemision beheld only Sophia standing with eyes wide open in front of the ancient pillar.

“Wisdom has made her house of seven pillars,” announced Sophia in a cryptic manner as the three men stood speechless before her, like statues. “The causal principles sustain the known universe like seven mighty pillars.” She was referring simultaneously to the planetary spirits of the macrocosm, and to their correspondences in the seven centers of the microcosmic human universe.

Sophia walked away from the pillar and headed back towards the city. The men were too dumbfounded to ask where she was going, and they were still too awe-struck to ask questions about what they had witnessed. They just followed Sophia in contemplative silence.

She came to the Selcuk Museum and stopped. There was something inside that compelled her to convince the men to see. After they entered the museum, they saw what Sophia wanted to show them: the statue of the Great Mother Cybele, which in the biblical account was called “the great goddess Diana, the image which fell down from Jupiter.” (Acts 19:35)

“Holy Mary, Mother of God,” said Simon reverently, recognizing the universal mother image in the majestic sculpture.

“This is a splendid artistic representation of the celestial archetype that we saw in the sanctuary of the goddess,” said Apollos, recalling the image that was imprinted in his consciousness.

“I can understand why certain religions would prohibit the forms of gods and goddesses created by human hands,” said Nazar, who lived in a land of conflicting beliefs

from various traditions. “Personally, the stone image in no way, shape, or form comes close to the beauty of the heavenly vision of the Great Mother goddess that was granted us by divine favor.”

“The visible form is only a feeble attempt at representing the invisible archetypal form,” said Sophia, whose mind’s single eye flashed the archetypal image to her conscious mind. “The creative mind of man, nevertheless, always tries to reproduce on the concrete physical level that which he visualizes on the spiritual or abstract level. Thus we have man building grand temples and making material images of universal principles. The Seven Wonders of the World, of which you saw the principle of the generative moon or Mother embodied in the Temple of Artemis, were erected to symbolize the mysteries of life. The greatest mystery was the mystery of the sun, whose life-giving rays bring light to every man and woman that comes into the world; the symbolic representation of that universal solar principle was embodied in the Colossus of Rhodes, an island in the Great Sea. The mystery of Jupiter, who was enthroned as the chief or ruling principle of the twelve gods and goddesses, was embodied in the statue of Zeus in Olympia, Greece, the place of the holy Mount Olympus. The mystery of Saturn, who was the father of the gods, was embodied in the Pharos, or lighthouse, of Alexandria, where the illumination of the human race and the light of learning as a guiding principle was established. The mystery of Mars, the principle of the courageous hero who sacrifices his life for a cause, was enshrined in the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus. The mystery of Venus, the principle of love and beauty, was embodied in the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, where the goddess Ishtar (or Aphrodite) arose each morning in the form of the five-pointed star of the East. The mystery of Mercury, the grandest and most sublime of all, was embodied as the principle of the wisdom of the ages within the initiatory chambers of the Great Pyramid of Giza in Egypt.”

The three men listened with utmost attention as Sophia expounded on the mysteries of life. Their inner beings seemed to open up, step by step, like flowers opening up to the light, as each mystery was unsealed. Each mystery was like a sacred receptacle or temple of truth. And each mystery was esoterically enshrined in the seven centers of the cerebro-spinal system of man.

The following day, Nazar drove his guests to the ancient ruins of Ephesus. The spring showers of April fell lightly on their heads as they strolled up the Arcadian Way (or Harbor Street) towards the large semi-circular theater at the western foot of Mt. Koressos. Nazar related the geographical and historical facts of the area:

“Two thousand years ago, the waves of the Aegean Sea came close to Ephesus, and there was a harbor at the end of this street. If you look west down this street, you will see where it ends and the green weeds and brush take over. From the top of the theater, you’ll be able to see how the silt deposits from the Kucuk Menderes River, which runs just north of Selcuk, filled in the entire area of what used to be the seaport of Ephesus. Kusadasi, the port city where we’ll board the ferry to Samos tomorrow, is eight kilometers from here. So you can imagine how much the coast has receded in two thousand years. Now, as we walk this wide street eastward to where it ends at the theater, you have to use your imagination – try to see a marble walkway, with towering columns on both sides of the walkway; there are some columns left, so you have an idea of what the colonnaded street must have looked like; and try to imagine oil-fueled lamps lighting the way from the harbor to the city. Ephesus, along with Rome and Antioch, was what

we call a city of light. It was even once known as the light of Asia, meaning the gateway to Asia Minor. This was also one of the places where the Silk Road led merchants and their caravans to the fabled East.”

Nazar stopped talking when they reached the theater, which was set into the side of a steep hill. Simon’s first impulse was to climb up the large blocks of stone which served as rows of seats. Instead, he used the steps that led to the top of the Great Theater, which was layered into three tiers of seats and divided into wedge-like sections.

“There are 58 staircases and 55 sections in this Greco-Roman theater,” explained Nazar to Apollos and Sophia, who wanted to hear what Nazar had to say about the theater. “As you can see from this view from the stage area, there are three tiers of seats, which originally had 22 rows in each tier, making a total of 66 rows. There are two walkways between the tiers, and the cavea or seating area had room for about 25,000 spectators. The theater looks like a semi-circle from a distance, but when you get closer, it is about 40 degrees larger than a semi-circle. As you might notice, some parts, especially the upper cavea, were destroyed by earthquakes in the first millennium and were never repaired. But the theater is in good enough shape to be used as a cultural site and for dramatic presentations.”

“Apollonius attended a play here,” interjected Apollos, “a play called Ino by Euripides, where the son of a queen is separated at birth from the mother and is reunited with her in the end after Artemis arrives to verify his semi-divine identity. Ino, like the Greek heroes, was the son of Apollo.”

“Sounds like an interesting play,” said Nazar. “Was your hero Apollonius a son of Apollo, also?”

“Actually, the story of Apollonius begins with Proteus, the god with the ability to appear in many forms, telling the mother of Apollonius that the child would be Protean in character, just like the wise Proteus, who had the ability of knowing both the past and the future,” explained Apollos in a lengthy manner. “And even though Apollonius had the same name as his wealthy human father, my guess is that the oracle of Apollo spoke through Apollonius because his words were wise and good.”

Sophia was ready to climb up the steps to the top to see the view out to the ancient harbor. Apollos followed her up to the top, where they sat together for a while and savored the moment.

“I can just imagine the day Apollonius brought the people of Ephesus to the theater to purge the city of the plague,” visualized Apollos, as Sophia listened. “He had appeared instantaneously from Smyrna, and he told the people to set up the Averting god, Hercules, on the stage. What a performance that was. There he is – on the great stage of the Great Theater of Ephesus – with the entire populace of the city gathered to witness the event. He tells the people to stone a poor beggar dressed in rags. The people are appalled at the idea of stoning a poor stranger. Apollonius tells the people that the person in rags is in reality an enemy of the gods. So one person after another starts throwing stones at the miserable creature, who suddenly reveals his fiery eyes and demonic nature. When the people realize that they are dealing with a furious demon, they hurl the stones even harder and faster, until the creature is completely buried by the avalanche of stones. After the stones are uncovered, one by one, the dramatic conclusion is displayed in a gruesome scene, for the demon that had brought the plague to the city was a dog the size of a lion, foaming at the mouth like a mad dog. Apollonius tells the people to give credit

to the Averting god, Hercules, for saving the people from the plague. However, the people know that the divine genius (Greek 'daemon') of Apollonius not only foretold the danger of the plague, but it also accurately diagnosed the cause and the treatment."

"That was a masterful performance worthy of a magician," stated Sophia ebulliently. "I was able to see the performance down on that stage just like you described it."

"What are you two watching?" asked Simon, who came over to their vantage point. "I saw both of you making faces and gesticulating as if you were witnessing some kind of performance."

"Apollos was recreating the dramatic exorcism of the city of Ephesus by Apollonius," explained Sophia.

"I've got a good story to tell, also," boasted Simon. "It took place here in Ephesus. Paul had been casting evil spirits out of the afflicted citizens, so these seven vagabond exorcists, who were of the left-hand (the black magic sort), decided to use the magical name that Paul had been using; however, the evil spirit that they were trying to cast out leaped on them and tormented them to the point that they threw off their clothes and ran out of the town naked. Now when the citizens of Ephesus saw what had happened, they decided to get rid of the magical scrolls that the exorcists had sold to them. These scrolls and parchments, or Ephesian letters as they were called, had magical incantations on them to expel diseases and evil spirits. So the people of Ephesus gathered that night, here at the great theater, and burned the magical scrolls and parchments in a huge bonfire, which seemed to make the sky turn red. As the books burned, the magical words pierced the air with strange intonations: askion, kataskion, lix, tetrax, damnameneus, and aisia. A sorcerer standing near the bonfire recited the foreign names in the people's native tongue, calling askion-darkness, kataskion-light, lix-earth, tetrax-year, damnameneus-sun, and aisia-truth. The people were perplexed and confused, for the sorcerer seemed to indicate that the magical words were symbols of the divine order of things: darkness and light, earth and year, sun and truth. What was once a babbling of mysterious incantations and spells became holy and sacred affirmations."

"It sounds like you embellished that story somewhat," said Apollos disapprovingly.

"Aren't all stories embellishments of a simple kernel truth?" debated Simon.

At that moment Nazar finally managed to ascend the three flights of steps to the top of the third tier. "What are you discussing?" asked Nazar, pausing to catch his breath.

"Apollos was giving a dramatic presentation about Apollonius, and Simon just finished a dramatic story about Paul and the Ephesian letters," replied Sophia, informing Nazar of their activities in the theater. "Do you have a story or dramatic presentation to share with us?"

"I once performed in a play here when we were having our annual festival in May," admitted Nazar. "I believe it was called The Great Diana of the Ephesians. Act I began with the goddess Demeter looking for her lost daughter Persephone. Demeter had to descend into the underworld and demand that Hades release her daughter. Hades had captured her and claimed her as his queen. Demeter appealed to Zeus for help, and when Demeter scorched the earth and refused to produce crops, for she was the goddess of the harvest, Zeus told Hades that he needed to release Persephone for at least half of the year.

And that is why half of the year, when Persephone is with Demeter, we have spring and summer, and the other half, when Persephone returns to the underworld, we have autumn and winter. In Act II, the people of Ephesus receive a visitor from another country who wants to change the Eleusinian mysteries of Demeter and Persephone, but the people rebel. A leader named Demetrius, who is a hierophant of the Eleusinian mysteries, appeals to the local patron goddess Artemis for help. She appears in the form of the virgin, chaste Diana, with her bow, and she tells the people that the mysteries will not perish from the earth. She says even if a new way is instituted by a future ruler, the mysteries will return, just like Persephone. So Demetrius honored the goddess by having a silver (the symbol of the moon) shrine authorized for personal use in the home. In Act III, the visitor returned and convinced the residents of Ephesus that gods made with hands have no eyes to see, nor ears to hear prayers. So the people decided to follow the new way of worshipping a formless God, an invisible Being who was everywhere, and thus didn't need a shrine or a temple. However, the hierophant Demetrius, who was committed to preserving the mysteries of Demeter and Persephone, fought back. He gathered the adherents of the Eleusinian mysteries in the theater. He had them shout, 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians.' This started a mob revolt against the followers of the invisible Deity. In Act IV—that's where I come in—I am the mayor of the city of Ephesus, and I appeal to reason and to the wisdom of Mercury, who seemed to speak through me as a messenger of the gods. He said that it was self-evident that the chaste virgin, and her example of chastity, which was a virtue that the Ephesians honored foremost above all other virtues, was an everlasting principle that would never be destroyed. He also said that the archetype of Diana, the chaste virgin, was sent from the celestial Jupiter, himself. The people rejoiced and gave me credit for saving the day, even though I tried to tell them that Mercury, the god of wisdom, deserved the credit."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Sophia when Nazar finished his dramatic presentation. "That was a splendid adaptation of the biblical account, and a profound interpretation of the Eleusinian mysteries, which are hidden in sacred scripture."

"We haven't heard your dramatic presentation, yet," said Apollos, turning to Sophia.

"Wasn't yesterday's performance at the Temple of Artemis sufficient for you?" asked Sophia, looking at each participant individually.

"That was an unforgettable performance, One for the Ages," said Nazar, offering an obeisance with a nod of his head.

"You demonstrated to us why even our Holy Father bows down to the Mother Mary," said Simon, referring to Pope John Paul II.

"I'll grant your wish with your favorite story about Apollonius in Ephesus," said Sophia, looking at Apollos with a loving smile. "However, this story doesn't take place in this theater, but in yonder grove near the northern columns of the Arcadian Way." She pointed to the large green plain near where they had entered, and it appeared as if their minds were transported to the historic day when Apollonius was delivering an address to the people of Ephesus in the peaceful setting of the grove. They saw a long-haired bearded philosopher in a long white linen robe teaching the principles of the immortal soul. They watched in their mind's eye as the philosopher stopped in the middle of his speech and looked inward into his own mind, as if he were witnessing an event in a faraway place at that same moment. They heard him say, "Smite the tyrant, the gods

demand justice,” and then they listened as he explained his mysterious words: “The tyrant Domitian has been slain this day in Rome.” The witnesses of the sage’s strange behavior waited for verification of his pronouncement. The news arrived, and the people realized that the sage was not only wise, but that he had been favored with a true revelation from the gods.

“Thank you,” said Apollos with tears in his eyes. He had finally been granted a vision of Apollonius in the form of the Greek philosopher of the first century. He looked at Simon and Nazar. They also had tears in their eyes. The words “thank you” were barely audible as they expressed their heartfelt gratitude, too.

The rest of the day the foursome meandered from site to site within the large Ephesus complex. Most of the remains of buildings, like the Library of Celsus, were built after the time of Apollonius, so Apollos and Sophia weren’t particularly attentive to the bits of factual information that Nazar tried to impart. However, Sophia was impressed by the statue of her namesake, Sophia—representing wisdom as one of the virtues—at the front of the library. Apollos could only see the figure of Apollonius in his mind as he walked down the Marble Way. At the entrance to the Prytaneion, where the city’s eternal flame was kept, Simon had his biggest amusement: he saw a relief on a marble slab of the nude image of Hermes with his face and private parts chipped and broken off; Simon remarked that the iconoclasts of every age have disfigured and destroyed the things they didn’t understand. By late afternoon, the group could hardly walk anymore. That night, everyone had a good night’s sleep.

“Today I have a surprise for you,” announced Nazar after he woke up his guests. The sun had not broken through the clouds on the eastern horizon, yet. “I not only have a trip to Samos planned for you; I also was able to plan a trip to the island of Patmos for tomorrow.” Of course, the guests were not about to object to Nazar’s wise planning on their behalf.

No sooner had the ferry left the harbor of Kusadasi in the morning than Apollos started relating the life of Apollonius to his spiritual ancestor, Pythagoras: “Apollonius throughout his life considered himself no more and no less than a Pythagorean philosopher. Like Pythagoras, he abstained from all flesh diet, believing that it would benefit him in communing with the wisdom of the gods; he lived life in the spirit of Pythagoras, seeking first the treasures of the mind and the soul, rather than earthly goods; and he traveled in the footsteps of Pythagoras to Egypt, Persia, Greece, India, and other places in order to gather, like a bee, the nectar of wisdom from the ancient mystery schools. Both men had the extraordinary gift of synthesizing the wisdom they had gathered into a philosophical way of life that enabled them to transcend the mortal and ascend into the realm of the Immortals.”

“What amazed me most about the life of Pythagoras,” interrupted Simon, who felt he had something equally important to relate, “was that he was predicted by the Pythian oracle of Delphi to become the wisest of men, surpassing even Solomon in wisdom. That’s why he was named Pythagoras, after the Pythian prophetess of Apollo. He supposedly was the first person to call himself a philosopher, because he did not claim to know ultimate truth like the sage; he was simply attempting to find out, through the love of wisdom, what the mysteries of life were all about.”

“Those mysteries were investigated in every mystery school that existed five centuries before Apollonius arrived to perfect them,” interposed Sophia, who wanted to

expand the theme of the mysteries. “Pythagoras was initiated into the mysteries of Isis and Hermes in Egypt, where he learned the principles of geometry, which were perfected in the pyramid. He was initiated into the mysteries of Adonis, the dying and resurrecting god, in Phoenicia and Syria, where he learned the science of cycles and numbers. He was initiated into the secret lore of the Chaldeans in Babylon, where he mastered the science of astronomy and the language of the stars. He was initiated into the Greater Eleusinian mysteries of Greece, where he learned about the soul’s descent from a spiritual world into the material world, as personified in the story of Persephone’s descent into the underworld. He was initiated into the mysteries of the Brahmins in India, where he was introduced to the complete science of the soul. He was initiated into the Persian and Assyrian mysteries, where he learned about the ages of man as symbolically portrayed by the master Zoroaster and about the great wheel of the zodiac and the universe as symbolically portrayed by the prophet Ezekiel. Finally, he was initiated into the messianic mysteries at the school of the prophets at Mount Carmel, where the Essenes lived.”

“What can I, a humble mortal, say after such wise discourses?” said Nazar, posing a valid rhetorical question. “All I know about Pythagoras is that he taught the sacred science of numbers and that he was a theologian of the sacred One; the One was known as the Monad, which in essence was Everything. This Monad was the supreme mind and intelligence spread out everywhere; and since it was One, its body had to be a circle that included everything within it. And we are all little dots or miniature monads circling within the grand Monad. I love the simplicity of that concept. I also love the symbol of the holy tetractys—the ten dots—the complete number encompassing all numbers; the beauty of having the unity of the 1 and the duality of the 2 combine with the triangular 3 and the square 4 to produce the 10—that is an archetype that is eternal. And last, but not least, to discover the five solids, which correspond to the five basic elements of the universe—that displays a universal mind. Especially, may I add, the discovery of the dodecahedron, the sacred plan of the universe within the twelve of the zodiac—that is simply divine.”

“And don’t forget the twelve convolutions of the human brain,” added Sophia, “which float upon the waters of the ventricles, just like we’re floating on this sea.”

“That was amazing,” said Apollos, who wanted to give an acclamation for Nazar’s prodigious discourse. “I thought I was listening to Maestro Salvatore D’Aura talk about the unity of life. He said that God is Everything. And the nature of God is omnipresence and omniscience. So naturally, that unity must be spread out throughout the universe and include us.”

“And thus we have the unified field theory of the physicists,” contributed Simon, “making the single permanent atom comparable to the concept of the Monad.”

“You’ll have to save the rest of the discourse for a later time,” announced Nazar as the harbor of Samos Town came into view. “We have to go to the car and get ready to disembark.”

Nazar drove his Fiat to the center of the capital city, showing them the sole tribute to the ancient philosopher: Pythagoras Square. In the center of the square was a statue of a marble lion on a pedestal, overlooking the natural harbor.

“Leo the Lion,” interpreted Sophia, “the symbol of the initiate of the ancient solar mysteries.”

“The place where Pythagoras lived is on the other, southern, side of the island, in Pythagorion,” narrated Nazar. “Pythagorion was built on the ruins of the ancient city of Samos. I’ll take you there. It’s only eight miles southwest of here. And I’ll show you the apartment we’ll stay at overnight.”

“We’re staying at an apartment?” asked Simon, with a surprised look on his face.

“I have friends and connections on these islands,” explained Nazar. “We’ll be staying at the most beautiful spot in Pythagorion, overlooking the blue waters of the Aegean Sea. On a clear day like today, you can’t tell the difference between the sky and the sea—everything is blue.”

Less than an hour later, Nazar drove up a hill to the Astra Village Hotel. From the balcony of their roomy maisonette they saw the picturesque port of Pythagorion and the blue view that Nazar promised.

In the afternoon, Nazar took them to the nearby ancient ruins of the Temple of Hera, a World Heritage Site. As they walked along the ancient Sacred Way to the sanctuary, Sophia told the men that Hera (Juno) was the consort of Zeus, which symbolized the soul joined to the higher Self. That sounded too esoteric, so she approached the subject from another level: “Hera was basically the goddess of marriage,” explained Sophia, “which is why young maidens prefer to be June brides, the month named in honor of Juno (Hera). Since she is the protecting spirit of females, Hera watches over the five stages of their life as they grow from a girl to a bride, then develop from a lover to a child-bearing mother, and finally pause from their labors when they become a widow. The Greeks used to identify those stages with the new moon, the first quarter or waxing moon, the full moon, and the last quarter or waning moon; and I would venture to say that the dark moon was when they went through menopause.”

The men laughed at Sophia’s mention of menopause, especially Nazar, who was very familiar with that period in his wife’s life. When they arrived at the ruins, they noticed one solitary column standing among the restored foundations that delineated where the largest temple in Greece, the monument to the birthplace of Hera, once stood.

“I would appreciate it if you men would give me a private moment with the goddess,” appealed Sophia. “This is a woman’s shrine, and the image of Hera is a mystery that only the intuition of a woman may behold.” The men went to wander among the stone foundation walls of the various monuments that once formed the impressive sanctuary of Hera.

Sophia approached the area where the great altar welcomed the women of all ages. She knelt at the altar and closed her eyes. A gentle breeze swept over her face, and a light shower from a round cloud in the sky fell on her head. She visualized a gentle motherly face smiling down on her. The face gave way to a large auric egg that opened up and revealed an emergent bride; the bride was dressed in a white bridal gown, and the face of the bride was the face of a radiant Sophia. The bride slowly was transformed into an expectant mother. The vision culminated with Sophia-the-mother holding a newborn child in her arms.

Sophia stood up and walked up to Apollos. She took his hand in her hand and leaned over to whisper something in his ear. Apollos stopped and embraced her, assuring her that he would be with her through good times and tough times in order to help her realize the fulfillment of her vision. “I’ll be with you through it all,” he whispered back in her ear.

“Are we ready to drive up the mountain to visit the cave of Pythagoras?” asked Nazar. The guests acquiesced without a murmur. “I might as well inform you that we’ll have to climb about 300 meters up a rocky trail to the cave, which is on the eastern slope of Mount Kerkis.”

As they drove through the heart of the island—through vineyards, olive groves, and evergreen forests—to the western side of the island, Nazar narrated a legend about the highest mountain of Samos, which rose 1,440 meters into the sky: “The mariners say that on stormy nights, when they’re coming home from a hard day’s work at sea, and it’s hard to see where the boat is sailing, they look up to Mount Kerkis as a guiding beacon. They say that the top of the mount shines like a lighthouse. Even though a fog or a cloud envelopes the mount, they still see that guiding light shining through. They say that the light on the peak is the spirit of their native son, Pythagoras, the wisest, and thus brightest, man on earth.”

At the end of the road, just outside the picturesque city of Marathokampos at the foot of the mountain, Nazar parked his car and motioned to his guests that they would have to go the rest of the way by foot. They walked up the path past a scenic waterfall that seemed to flow from the crown of the mountain into a deep pool. Apollos tasted the water and declared it to be good to drink. Sophia drank a handful, as did Nazar, but the cautious Simon refrained.

At the cave there was a metal bar set across the width of the entrance to discourage entrance into the depths. “We can go a little way, before it slopes down,” recommended Nazar. They followed him several meters and then sat down in a semi-circle, facing the opening towards the east. The stillness in the cave put their minds into a similar meditative silence. Apollos let his mind contemplate the rewards of being a Pythagorean that Apollonius listed: greatness of soul, knowledge of the gods, quickness of perception, and the realization of immortality. Sophia reflected on the ultimate secret teaching of Pythagoras—that man’s destiny was to function in a body of spiritualized ether that would exist side by side with the physical form. Simon’s mind seemed to geometrize the various principles of Pythagoras, starting with the dot that expanded into a line to form a surface of a solid shape. Nazar recited in his mind the aphorisms of Pythagoras that he had learned as a school-boy: Walk in unfrequented paths, for wisdom awaits you there; it is best to revere silence, for it is golden; adore the sound of harmony in nature, for it will give you a sense of the order in the universe; remember that the human body is sacred to the sun and the moon, so be sure to feed the soul as well as the body.

Within the depths of the four contemplative minds, a mysterious universal mind seemed to make its presence felt. Within that vast mind the golden verses of Pythagoras resounded throughout the ages, and presently those verses echoed in each of the minds that were tuned to the thoughts of Pythagoras: “Let reason, the gift divine, be your highest guide; then you will be able to separate from the body and soar in the spiritual ether; then you will be imperishable, a divinity, no longer a mortal.”

When the four Pythagoreans left the cave, they knew that they had communed with the wisdom of Pythagoras.

The next day, they rode the ferry to the island of Patmos, which Apollos discovered was the northernmost island of the Dodecanese—the chain of twelve islands off the southwest coast of Turkey. He recalled seeing it as a dot in the ocean of space

from the airplane. The ferry landed at Skala, the harbor of the small volcanic island, which was shaped like a seahorse. The edge of the harbor was glistening in the rays of the morning sun with the sparkling-white buildings of the town.

“Skala,” said Simon reflectively. “Sounds like it comes from *scala coeli*, the stairway to heaven.”

“That might very well be the case,” informed Nazar, “for there is a stairway to the central point on this island—the Sacred Grotto.”

Nazar drove south past the white buildings of the harbor town and up the winding pine-covered hill to the edge of the small town of Chora, which surrounded the lower slopes of the majestic fortress-monastery. Nazar told them the maze-like alleys at the base of the monastery were too narrow to drive through, so he parked his car and they walked the rest of the way past the whitewashed houses toward the massive brown walls of the monastery that crowned the lower part of the mountain. A higher peak rose to the highest point on the island further south of the medieval-looking fortification.

“That castle-like structure is visible from almost every part of the island,” said Nazar, slowing down to catch his breath. “The monastery was built on the ruins of the temple of Artemis-Diana. This island, according to the mythology preserved by ancient sources, was given as a gift by Zeus to his daughter Artemis, and it was originally named Litois. Litoida was the original name of Artemis, for she was the daughter of Lito; anyway, the island was named in honor of Artemis. There is also a legend about the island sinking, and then Artemis raised the island from the sea back to the surface with the help of her twin-brother, Apollo.”

The pilgrims to the holy shrine soon reached the Church of the Apocalypse, which was located on a slope below the monastery. Within the depths of the church was the goal of their pilgrimage to the island: the cave, according to tradition, where St. John, the Beloved Disciple of Christ, had an apocalyptic vision. A sign to the left of the entrance acclaimed the traditional site: **HOLY CAVE OF THE APOCALYPSE, “I WAS ON THE ISLAND OF PATMOS.”** (Apoc. Chap. A,9) They descended thirty stairs to the door of the Holy Grotto, above which was painted a scene of St. John looking heavenward while dictating his vision to his disciple-scribe Prohorus.

“Looks like St. John had his amanuensis just like Apollonius had Damis as his scribe,” whispered Apollos to Sophia as the door was opened by a monk dressed in the traditional black robe of the Greek Orthodox church.

“This is the Sacred Grotto where John wrote the Apocalypse or the Book of Revelation,” said the white-bearded monk as he welcomed the pilgrims into the candle-lit interior. The small-sized cave had a depth of four meters and a low overhang. A cleft in the rock stretched from north to south, dividing the rock into three parts. “The fissure in the rock wall you see before you is considered to be the passageway to heaven, through which St. John heard the voice of the Lord revealing the divine mysteries. St. John would hold his head near the crack in the wall to hear what was coming from the other side, the celestial world.”

“I thought the seer of Patmos beheld the vision while he was in a sleep-like trance,” said Apollos, hoping to elicit a reasonable explanation for the varying traditions. He thought of a twentieth-century seer named Edgar Cayce who gave readings while in a trance-state.

“The Great Visualizer, as we symbolically refer to him,” said the monk, “was told to write what he saw or visualized with his spiritual sight. You can see that we preserve that tradition by having a red book on a white cloth, which rests on an indentation in the wall where St. John recorded his visions.” He showed them the objects on one side of the room-sized cave.

“We used to call him John the Revelator,” said Simon, “because of his revelations of the end of the world.”

“I would call him the Oracle of the ancient mysteries,” said Sophia, who recalled her experience as the oracle of Delphi, channeling the esoteric Key to the Initiated of Apollonius. “The Apocalypse is in reality a brilliant amalgamation of all the ancient mysteries.”

“Which the Great Theologian brought from the ancient religious centers of the known world,” added Nazar, remembering what Sophia had related about the travels of Pythagoras to the countries where the mysteries were enshrined.

“And which was transmitted from the master Pythagoras to the disciple Apollonius,” concluded Sophia.

“According to our tradition,” continued the white-bearded monk, who returned from the venerable objects, “St. John was exiled to the island of Patmos in 95 AD by the emperor Domitian, who thought John was an immortal god.” Apollos wanted to tell the monk that Apollonius disappeared from the court of Domitian in 92 AD to prove his immortality, and the philosopher was thereafter considered to be in exile because he never returned to Rome again.

“Wasn’t there a tradition that John died at Ephesus when his exile ended after the assassination of Domitian?” asked Nazar, who had a flashback of the vision that Sophia projected at the theater in Ephesus.

“There are actually two traditions about St. John’s death,” said the kind and patient monk, who was willing to answer any questions. “One tradition says he is buried under the Basilica of St. John’s at Ephesus, or modern Selcuk; the other tradition says that he disappeared or ascended to heaven.” Apollos wanted to tell him that Apollonius was also said to have died at Ephesus, where he was attended by two maid servants, whereas other reports said that he entered a temple and disappeared.

“Isn’t there a tradition that the Beloved Disciple would remain on earth until Christ’s return?” asked Simon, who was familiar with the scriptural reference and legend in the last chapter of the Gospel of John, which many biblical scholars considered to be an appendage or addition from another source. Simon had read the sacred writings of the Nag Hammadi library, especially the Pistis Sophia, where the Savior had remained with the disciples for eleven years after his spiritual ascension, teaching them all the mysteries in a private setting.

“That is a mystery which I am not able to answer,” admitted the monk as he wrinkled his forehead. Apollos wanted to tell him that Apollonius was the beloved disciple of Pythagoras and was still living on the earth in the sacred Himalayas. “I’ll let you ponder on your own the mysteries of the Sacred Grotto.” The old monk went into a corner of the cave and said his prayers silently in front of an icon of an enthroned Christ, the culmination of the vision of the seer of Patmos.

Apollos sat silently on a small bench beside Sophia. Nazar sat with Simon on another small bench. Each one of them contemplated the mystery of the cave in their

own manner: Apollos saw the cave as the home of the sacred fire at the base of the spinal cord, which was symbolically portrayed as the angel of the church of Ephesus in the Apocalypse, and he visualized the ascend of the red flame to its throne in the Pineal gland in the brain; Sophia saw the cave as a place of exile for the immortal soul, and the goal of the soul was to transcend the mortal Patmos and rise like an eagle into the heights of the immortals, again; Nazar saw the cave as a place of spiritual darkness and ignorance, and he strained his ear to hear the divine voice speaking through the crack in the wall of his mind and to see the illuminating light of reason shining through; Simon saw the cave as the allegorical cave of Plato, where the human mind sees only the shadows of living things on the cave wall, not the true images in the world of light.

When the four pilgrims reached the Monastery of St. John on the crown of the hill later that afternoon, they saw the highest mountain of the island to the south. Mount St. Elias, the Christianized version of the former name Mount Helios, rose to an altitude of 888 feet.

“Elias, or Helios, is the name that stands for the abode of the sun-god Phoebus, or Shining One, Apollo,” said Nazar, pointing to the ancient sacred abode of the sun-god.

“Apollo inherited the sun-god role from Helios,” stated Simon.

“Apollo embodies the ideal that man aspires towards,” said Apollos.

“The mortal man standing in his inner sun of divinity,” added Sophia.

The mountain seemed to bathe in a luminous light as the sun broke through a cloudy sky and beamed its long angular rays on the sides of Apollo’s shrine.

That night, as Apollos tried to fall asleep in the Adonis Hotel in Skala, he kept seeing an image of Diana, the goddess of the moon, and Apollo, the god of the sun, circle in his mind like two spheres, and it seemed like the moon was continually trying to catch up with the sun. All at once, he somehow managed to slow down the motions of the two bodies and he saw the moon merge with the sun. At last he understood the mystery of the twins, Artemis and Apollo, who were in reality the mortal and the immortal aspects of an individual monad.

Simon, who was also trying to fall asleep, kept seeing a dying and a rising god journey through the hemisphere of his mind; he saw the sun die at the time of the winter solstice as the sun set in the western sky, and he saw the sun being born at the time of the spring equinox as the sun rose in the eastern sky. His mind was still perplexed by the question of Apollonius’ death. Apollos insisted that Apollonius didn’t die, but was transported to India to live with the Immortals. Sophia had promised that his perplexing question would be resolved in Ephesus. He had already seen the same projected hypnotic vision of Apollonius as Apollos and Nazar had seen. Nevertheless, he was still skeptical, and he wasn’t convinced of the immortality of the soul, nor of the immortality of Apollonius.

However, as the light of dawn was breaking on the eastern horizon, Simon rushed to the room that Apollos and Sophia shared, and he knocked loudly on the door. “Sophia, you were right!” said Simon when the door was opened to let him in. “Apollos, now I believe you. Apollonius recited wondrous verses about the soul to me.”

“What verses did he recite to you?” asked Apollos.

Simon recited what he had heard verbatim, exactly as another man from the time of Apollonius had recited the oracular words:

“The soul is immortal, and ‘tis no possession of thine own, but of Providence,
And after the body is wasted away, like a swift horse freed from its traces,
It lightly leaps forward and mingles itself with the light air,
Loathing the spell of harsh and painful servitude which it has endured.”
(Life of Apollonius, Book VIII, Ch. XXXI, p. 405)

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Joshua followed Isaac to the Kotel (Western Wall) every day, rain or shine, for the next five months. Isaac had convinced Joshua to stay with him in his two-room apartment in an area one kilometer west of the Old City. When Isaac told him, “I will teach you to read and write Hebrew,” Joshua realized that a lifetime wish was within his grasp. He had always wanted to learn his “mother tongue,” as his mother called it. Joshua agreed to extend his stay in Israel on one condition: Isaac must allow him to pay his share of expenses for room and board.

There was an additional advantage to staying with Isaac: the rabbi was well versed in the hidden wisdom of the unwritten tradition of Judaism known as the Qabbalah (Kabbalah).

“There is a legend that the secret science was written by Abraham, who brought the wisdom of the heavens from his homeland in Mesopotamia and the mysteries of the Egyptians when he went down to Egypt,” taught Isaac. “However, the roots of the secret teachings probably go further back to the time of the antediluvian patriarch, Enoch, who traveled through the seven heavens to obtain the wisdom of the ages. In my humble opinion, I think the rabbi, Akiba, compiled all of the hidden tradition and set it into a written form before the Roman forces advanced to completely destroy the Jewish civilization in the second century.”

Joshua had a difficult time understanding the complex concepts of the new words that he was hearing for the first time: Ain Soph, Sephiroth, Kether, Chochmah, and many others. The Sephiroth was the symbolical Tree of Life with ten symbolical spheres representing the essential nature of man and the universe: Crown (Kether), Wisdom (Chochmah), Understanding, Mercy, Severity, Beauty, Victory, Glory, Foundation, and Kingdom. Then there were the four worlds that seemed to represent four planes of existence: (1) Atziluth, the World of Emanations or causal plane; (2) Briah, the World of Creation or mental plane; (3) Yetzirah, the World of Formation or astral plane; and (4) Assiah, the World of Substance or physical plane.

Isaac tried to simplify the mind-boggling display of abstract ideograms that he wrote on paper by drawing four concentric circles.

“You’ve seen a flat cut cross-section of a tree showing its growth rings, haven’t you?” asked Isaac. Joshua nodded affirmatively. “Now, if you imagine a Tree of Life with forty rings, you can see how each of the rings represents a rate of vibration emanating from the eternal state of being known as Ain Soph, the Eternal One. The

vibrations of the ten outer rings belong to the emanations that come from the intangible realms of the divine names, starting with Eheieh (the first crown, or I AM). These ten outer rings are in essence the roots of a great Tree of Life, and they are also the head and body of Adam Kadmon, the prototypical Grand Man of the Heavens, who stands with one foot on the land of the material universe and with the other foot on the sea of cosmic space.”

“I’ve seen him,” interjected Joshua, who suddenly recalled the image of the archetypal Universal Man, “but I didn’t know his name is Adam Kadmon.”

“Where did you see him?” asked Isaac, whose face displayed an incredulous look.

“In the cave of Elijah at Mount Carmel,” answered Joshua, remembering his first encounter with his angelic guide Binah.

At the fond thought of Binah, a sudden transformation occurred in his mind, and he didn’t hear the next question that Isaac posed: “What did he look like?”

Instead, he saw Binah’s beaming face materialize in his mind’s eye, and he heard her gently say, “You were going to tell me about your dream that you had in the cave of Elias.” He saw himself telling her about the vast being who seemed to stretch from the earth to the heavens.

“What did he look like?” repeated Isaac, whose voice projected a tone of exasperation at Joshua’s sudden lapse into a state of unawareness. He reached his hands out and shook Joshua back into conscious awareness of his surroundings.

“He, I,” stuttered Joshua. “I’m sorry. Can you repeat that question?”

“I asked, what did he look like?” repeated Isaac, who was bewildered by Joshua’s unexpected behavior.

“He had a long white beard and around his waist was a solar system with rings of orbiting planets,” responded Joshua, whose memory of the lucid dream was vivid and clear. “In his hands he held a circular disk that he twirled around his upper body, and the disk had twelve pictures on it, the most prominent being a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle.”

“The Merkabah, the chariot of Yahveh,” muttered Isaac to himself as he recognized the wheel of the zodiac and the circular solar system, the tangible physical manifestations of the intangible spiritual reality.

“Ask him about Metatron,” whispered Binah into Joshua’s inner ear. Joshua was pleased to know that she was still near him.

“What can you tell me about Metatron?” asked Joshua, following the instructions of his inner voice.

“Where did you hear that name?” asked Isaac, whose curiosity was aroused.

“First you tell me about Metatron,” replied Joshua carefully, “then I’ll reveal how I came to hear that name.”

“Metatron is the angel of the Lord, the Prince of the Divine Presence,” stated Isaac, eyeing Joshua suspiciously. “In essence, he is the reflection of the first crown, Eheieh, the I AM. Thus, he is the head or crown of the second world or plane of existence, the world of the ten creative intelligences or archangels, who are reflections of the ten divine names in the first world. Metatron is called the lesser YHVH (Yahveh) because he is the Son who reflects the Father. There is a story in the Hebrew Apocalypse of Enoch about a certain anonymous man, whom Hebrew scholars believe was Elisha ben Abuyah, and this man went into Paradise and saw Metatron sitting on a throne with a

crown on his head and he thought there were two gods in heaven. This man was called a heretic, afterwards.”

“Could Metatron, then, be a reflection of Adam Kadmon, the archetypal Universal Man?” asked Joshua, hoping to prolong the in-depth study of the subject.

“Most definitely,” asserted Isaac, “for the whole process of creation from Spirit to matter goes through four stages, and the archetypal or causal stage, which, by the way, is represented by divine fire, is reflected into the crystal clear water of the creative or mental stage. The combined powers of the causal (fire) and mental (water) worlds are mirrored downward into the airy formative or astral world. Within that astral world is the Merkabah, or the chariot of Yahveh, which is the invisible universe of the wheel of the zodiac and the solar Son of God as the crown or king of that world, making his journey through all the signs of the zodiac. Last, and least in the scale of emanations and vibrations, is the physical world, where the Son of Man makes his journey through the material world.”

“So Adam Kadmon becomes Metatron, who becomes the Son of God, who comes down to earth as the Son of Man,” postulated Joshua, whose head felt like it was splitting open at the crown of his head.

“And if you reverse that process,” said Isaac, initiating a train of thought that would keep them busy for weeks to come, “then you have the story of Enoch, the antediluvian patriarch who ascended into the heavens and became a Metatron.”

“Now it’s my turn to reveal to you my source,” divulged Joshua, noticing Isaac patiently awaiting an answer to his question. “My angel Binah told me to ask you about Metatron.”

“Binah?” asked Isaac, becoming more perplexed by the minute. “The Divine Mother is your personal guide, your angel?”

Joshua couldn’t contain himself any longer. He sat on the floor in a cross-legged position and closed his eyes. He took a deep breath. He turned his attention to the divine eye, through which he saw a chariot of fire ascend through his spine, up to his skull, and out through the crown of his head.

“This is where you’re supposed to say, My Father, My Father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen,” chuckled Binah in her own witty way.

The tension in Joshua’s body dissipated at the sound of Binah’s soothing tone of voice. The pressure in his skull subsided, and he felt totally at ease in the stillness of his meditative mind. The only thing he saw was the chariot in which he was seated with Binah. The four wheels of the chariot were inscribed with four letters (Y, H, V, H), four elements (fire, water, air, earth), and four creatures (lion, eagle, man, ox).

“Where are we going in this chariot?” inquired Joshua, who didn’t feel any movement.

“Nowhere, and everywhere,” replied Binah mysteriously. “Remember, you are the center of your own universe. And the kingdom of all the heavens or dimensions of existence reside in you. With that in mind, you are going to become the seer, the one who sees in all directions at once with the inner spiritual eye.”

“What am I going to see?” asked Joshua impatiently.

“Hold your horses,” laughed Binah, who was having a merry time with Joshua. “You are going to see the lifetime when you were – or should I say, from the perspective of the Eternal Now, your aspect as – Enoch, the seventh patriarch.”

All at once the Merkabah (chariot) seemed to vibrate at a rate where it was able to enter the causal world, where the wheel of life existed in all its infinite potentialities and the foundations of all creations lay in the form of a seed. From Joshua's perspective, he instantaneously saw all worlds – superior and inferior, supernal and infernal – within an infinite field of light. One point of light radiated within Joshua's range of vision and materialized as the antediluvian patriarch Enoch.

Enoch sat in the privacy of his house and wrote about the visions that he had seen of other worlds. People called him the heavenly scribe because he claimed to have spent sixty days in the heavens. Joshua watched over the scribe's shoulder as he wrote about the knowledge and understanding he had received of the other worlds:

“I was raised up to a place that had the appearance of a burning fire. (Joshua felt a burning fiery sensation flow through his spinal cord). I was carried to a mountain whose top reached to heaven. (Joshua visualized the soul ascending to the heights of consciousness in the head). I came to a river that flowed like water from the mountain top to a great sea. (The soul perceived the spinal fluid that descended from the reservoir in the brain and emptied in the sea of the generative organs). I examined the great stone that supported the corners of the earth. (The soul looked within to see the divine eye that was the basis for seeing reality). I watched the paths of angels. (The soul became aware of planetary spirits). I perceived seven stars, like great blazing mountains, within which resided the spirits. (Joshua realized the seer was aware of the seven spiritual chakras and the vast nerve plexuses within the body). I witnessed the angels—Gabriel, Raphael, Michael, and others—co-habiting with the spirits of men. (Joshua saw the divine spirits directing and watching over the life and intelligence of the etheric centers of man). I wondered why the seven stars of heaven were bound in a desolate place of suffering. (The soul is perplexed by the suffering that occurs in the physical body by way of the cerebrospinal system). I arrived at a delightful place where the souls of the dead awaited judgment. (The Elysian Fields or Paradise is perceived as the dimension where the scales of justice determine the future state of the soul). I perceived seven mountains that were surrounded by aromatic trees, and the top mountain had a throne for the everlasting King to sit on. (The seer enjoys the beauty of the inner Garden of Eden within his spine, and he looks up toward the Higher Self who rules for ever).”

Joshua moved into a position to take a closer look at the man they called the heavenly scribe. He noticed that the robed man was totally wrapped up in his work. When Joshua was finally close enough to see his face, he saw the bright countenance of a youth.

“That is you,” whispered Binah, not wanting to disturb the concentration of the young initiate into the secrets of the heavens. “That is when you sought knowledge and understanding of the mysteries of life. You had secluded yourself from the eyes of men for fifty-seven years in order to write your three hundred and sixty-six books about all the knowledge you had acquired from your research into the secrets of the forces of nature and the heavens.”

“Is that all I did throughout my life?” inquired Joshua, who continued to watch the youth with admiration.

In answer to Joshua's question, the scene of Enoch the scribe vanished, and in its place another scene came into view on the screen of Joshua's inner consciousness: Enoch, the Initiator. Joshua watched as an older and wiser Enoch was summoned by the

voice of his inner god to teach the wisdom he had garnered from his years of study. Enoch initiated the sons of men into all the ways of right living in order to be righteous. He showed them all the hidden things of the heavens and the revolutions of all the luminaries in the sky. He taught them to count the 364 days and the four seasons of 91 days each. He revealed to them the mysteries of the zodiac and the twelve gates (signs).

“People began to flock to you from all the lands of the earth in order to hear the wisdom of the Supreme One that was revealed through you,” informed Binah. “One hundred and thirty kings and princes assembled to make you king, and you consented to rule over them with wisdom. Your reign of peace, justice and righteousness lasted for 243 years.”

“And then what happened?” asked Joshua in a voice denoting the suspense that he felt.

“Well, as it happens to all souls who come to earth to fulfill their mission,” replied Binah, “you were called home by your divine Self. All the people gathered to receive blessings from you before you parted from this world. The elders proclaimed that you would be glorified throughout the ages for your wisdom, and they determined that you were the Chosen One, the redeemer of men from the darkness of ignorance to the light of wisdom.”

Joshua watched as the concluding scene of his life as Enoch appeared in his mind’s eye: Enoch stood before the people who came to bid him farewell, and he told them that everything he had learned from the Eternal One was for the benefit of all mankind. From the invisible, the Eternal One made all things visible. Enoch reminded the people that before the world was formed, all the souls of mankind were already prepared for eternity.

Enoch told the people of the final vision he had received from the Eternal One:

“In the stillness of your mind and in the silence of your soul—He is there.

At birth, when you open your eyes and see the light of day—He is there.

When you see the face of your mother and your father—He is there.

In the mountain, valley, forest, and meadow—He is there.

In the rain, snow, lightning and thunder—He is there.

Where you are—He is there.

Through all space and time—The Song of Life,

The Heart of the Infinite, and the Wisdom of the Ages

Will abide in you, with you, and all around you.”

Then the people watched as a horse descended from the ether, and Enoch sat on the horse and rode away. A dark cloud enveloped the horse and its rider, and the people didn’t see Enoch anymore.

Joshua, however, saw with his mind’s eye the ascent of the Initiator’s soul in a chariot of fire. The last image that appeared to Joshua’s inner perception in a flash of illumination was Enoch sitting on the throne of the celestial worlds as Metatron. Within the face of Metatron-Enoch Joshua recognized the immortal Hermes.

“Ascension is followed by exaltation,” remarked Binah. “Enoch came to earth on the sixth day of the month Sivan, and he left on the sixth day of Sivan. That is significant because the Torah was given to mankind on the seventh day of Sivan. Enoch lived 365 years, the number of days in a year, and he ruled as the Solar Logos. He ascended from Mount Moriah, the hill of the temple in Jerusalem, to become the lesser YHVH, the

Prince of the Divine Presence. Now you know the nature of Adam Kadmon, the God in man, the ruler and center of your universe.”

Joshua opened his physical eyes. Isaac was sitting on a chair in front of him.

“Where have you been?” asked Isaac anxiously when he saw Joshua finally open his eyes.

“I went to the time before the flood, and I saw Enoch,” answered Joshua after he stretched his body. “How long was I gone?”

“You were gone seven hours,” replied Isaac.

“It felt like I was gone an eternity, or at least 365 years,” commented Joshua, recalling the number of years Enoch spent on the earth.

“Tell me everything that you saw,” appealed Isaac, who was starting to believe that Joshua was a true visionary.

Joshua told him exactly what he had seen, heard, and experienced with his soul. When he finished relating the entire story of his journey to the antediluvian world of Enoch, he noticed tears in Isaac’s eyes.

“Now I believe that Binah, the Great Mother, has given you understanding, for that is the nature of Binah,” said Isaac through his tears. “As the wise Solomon wrote: ‘Through Wisdom is a house built, and by Understanding it is established.’”

Isaac suddenly felt inspired to show Joshua something that he had wanted to show him ever since the first Hebrew lesson. Isaac started writing Hebrew letters (from right to left) with their numerical equivalents:

א(5) ׀(10) ה(5) ׀(1) א(200) ׀(300) ׀(1) א(5) ׀(10) ה(5) ׀(1)
Ahiye Asher Ahiye or [Ehyeh asher ehyeh]

Then he added the numbers of the words: 21 + 501 + 21 = 543.

“That’s the Gematria for the Hebrew expression I AM THAT I AM,” stated Isaac, referring to the study of numeric equivalents of letters in order to find hidden meanings in the words.

He continued writing some more letters: א(5) ׀(300) א(40).

“Moses in Hebrew is spelled with the three letters Mem (40) that means water, Shin (300) that means fire, and Heh (5) that means the breath of life,” explained Isaac. “Moses, the Hebrew deliverer, has a Gematria of 345. Now, Moses (345) is a reflection of I AM THAT I AM (543). Furthermore, if you take the two numbers 345/543 and add them together 345 + 543, you get 888, the number of the Christian Messiah, Yeshua or Joshua.”

Joshua was amazed at the beauty of the letters and numbers as they brought life and meaning to a name. Everything became clearer to him as he realized that he carried a very special name with an important mission to fulfill.

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Paul stood on top of the Mount of Olives and looked down at his destination: Jerusalem, the City of Peace. He thought of the mission that Elijah had given him – to preserve the purity of the Jewish religion and the Law of Moses by driving a theological and political wedge between the two major parties. The Jews of the Temple were fighting for self-preservation by remaining loyal subjects of the ruling Herodian dynasty and the Roman overlords. The Jews of the Kingdom were fighting for independence from the Roman rulers and their puppet government, and for the establishment of a messianic kingdom on earth. The Temple party was for peace by any means; the Kingdom party was for liberty at all costs. Paul knew the Temple party very well, for he had been a zealous agent of their law and political authority, wreaking havoc upon the opposition party. Now he was asked to switch parties and align himself with the zealots who had been trying to overthrow the Roman yoke for thirty years.

As Paul's eyes scanned the vista before him, his mind projected images of his happy youth on the screen of his expansive awareness. He remembered the years of study in the school of the Pharisee sect, devoting his youthful mind to the exploration of the Torah and Jewish laws, teachings, and traditions. He also remembered the joyful moments when he used to come to the mount with his sister Phoebe and play the naming game: Phoebe would point in the direction of a structure, or a place, and give a clue, and Paul would have to name it. He could hear her voice say, "I know you won't guess this one – the sacrifice of Isaac." "O, that's easy – it's Mount Moriah, the Temple Mount," replied Paul confidently. "Alright, let's see if you know this – the bones of the anointed one," quizzed Paul. "Can't you think of something harder?" teased Phoebe. "That's the Tomb of King David."

The temple, the palaces, the Antonia fortress, the monuments, and the gates – all had a special place in Paul's memory. It was at the temple that he had learned the wisdom of the rabbis and where he had watched the ceremonious rituals of the priests. The palace of the High Priest Caiaphas in the upper western section of the city brought to mind his first encounter with the rulers who hired him to be their enforcer and commissioned him to bring to justice suspected messianic insurrectionists. Paul's eyes stopped at the four towers of the notorious Antonia fortress that was located adjacent to the Temple Mount on the northern side; here was the prison where he had brought the captured suspects. Further north, he saw the monument of King Alexander Jannaeus.

Paul's thoughts were interrupted by the sudden arrival of two black-bearded men dressed in long gray robes. Paul turned to face them and cordially said, "Peace be with you."

"Peace be with you, stranger," said the stocky man of medium-height.

"I think we guessed correctly, when we saw you standing here, that you were an Essene," said the taller slim man. He looked at the white robe that Paul was wearing. "That white robe is an obvious sign of an Essene."

"I was initiated into their sect just recently," remarked Paul. "And may I venture to guess by your speech and your mannerisms that you are Galileans?"

"You have a sharp eye and a keen mind," said the stocky man. "You are absolutely right. And what, may I ask, is your name?"

"I am," Paul hesitated for a moment, wondering whether he should divulge his infamous Hebrew name, or not. "My name is Paul of Tarsus."

“That sounds more like a Roman name than a Hebrew name,” roughly commented the slim man in a tone of disdain.

“My Hebrew name is Saul,” admitted Paul, who felt that honesty was the best policy in order to gain their confidence.

“The first king of Israel would be proud that you carry his namesake,” said the burly man. “My name is Simeon bar Judas.” He extended his hand in friendship.

“And I’m his brother, Jacob,” said the slim man, extending his hand, also. “We’re sons of Judas of Galilee.”

Paul’s face betrayed a look of shock at the mention of the name of his nemesis, Judas of Galilee, who had launched the anti-Roman movement known as the Zealots.

“By the look on your face, you must have heard of our father’s revolt against the taxation imposed by the Romans during the census of Quirinius,” remarked Simeon. “Is that true?”

“Yes, that’s true,” confessed Paul. He looked long and hard into the eyes of Simeon and tried to gauge the kind of man he was dealing with. “I am Saul of Tarsus, who three years ago persecuted the messianic sect that was trying to overthrow the Roman government. But after being with the Essenes for three years, I am a changed man. I’ve seen the light.”

“Saul of Tarsus!” screamed Simeon, whose face turned red with rage. “I ought to kill you right here and now!” He grabbed Paul by the throat with both of his strong hands and started choking him.

“Stop, Simeon!” interjected Jacob, pulling his stronger brother away from the struggling body of Paul. “Didn’t you hear him say that he’s a changed man? He’s been gone for three years. He probably doesn’t even know what happened last year during the feast of unleavened bread.”

Simeon released the hold he had on Paul’s throat. Paul stumbled backwards and fell to the ground; he was gasping for air. For a second he thought he was going to faint or go into one of his seizures, which he hadn’t experienced since the time in the wilderness when Elijah rescued him. However, he took several deep breaths, and his mind cleared and became lucid.

“Did you hear what happened a year ago in Jerusalem?” asked Simeon when he saw Paul had regained his senses.

“I have been gone from the world for three years,” said Paul slowly. He felt soreness in his throat, and it was painful for him to talk. He wanted to tell Simeon about his three years living as a recluse with Bannus, but he was sworn to secrecy, and he wasn’t permitted to reveal any of the revelations he had seen or teachings he had learned.

“So you haven’t heard what happened to our oldest brother Ioannes when he tried to lead an insurrection against the temple authorities who were polluting the temple and collaborating with the Romans to enslave our people?” asked Simeon incredulously. He thought the news had spread like wildfire throughout the country.

“I was in an isolated area, away from all distractions of the world, so that I could concentrate on the spiritual life,” revealed Paul, saying only what he thought was proper about his life with the Essenes. “I didn’t hear about your brother Ioannes. What happened to him?”

“The same thing that has happened to thousands of our people who dared to raise their hand or voice against the supreme authority of the masters of our enslaved people –

he was crucified!” bellowed Simeon in anguish. “He had just turned fifty years old. He was in the prime of his life.”

“He was just trying to fulfill his father’s dream of bringing the kingdom of God on earth and of restoring the throne of David in our land,” bemoaned Jacob.

“So he suffered the same fate as his father and wasn’t able to drive out the Romans with an insurrection,” said Paul without expressing any commiseration for the zealots’ loss.

“Except that our father was brutally slain between the altar and the temple, while our brother was crucified outside the city walls,” said Simeon angrily. “And the aftermath of our father’s death resulted in the slaying of thousands of innocent lives.”

“All we have tried to do for our country is righteous and just,” said Jacob, who displayed a calmer tone of voice than his hot-blooded brother. “We have sworn loyalty to our God rather than to the Roman god, who masquerades as a human Caesar. We fight for liberty and freedom from oppression by the cruel taskmasters. We know that God is on our side, and we believe he’ll come to our assistance in time of need. Those who have died for this noble cause of bringing God’s kingdom to earth will receive honor and glory for their dedication and sacrifice.”

Paul sat silently on the stony ground with his hands resting in the folds of his robe; his mind was deep in thought. Jacob sat down on a soft spot of ground nearby, and Simeon found a flat rock several feet away to sit on.

“So, Saul of Tarsus,” said Jacob curiously, after a profound moment of silence, “why are you back here in Jerusalem, instead of staying with the community of Essenes in the wilderness?”

“I was sent here on a mission by my master, Elijahu,” divulged Paul.

“Elijahu!” said Jacob in a tone of recognition. “Now there’s a name I haven’t heard in many years. The mysterious man who comes in the spirit of the prophet Elias, who ascended into the heavens in a chariot of fire. And pray tell us, what mission did he give you?”

“Come down to Jerusalem with me, and you will hear me proclaim a plan of salvation for our Hebrew nation,” professed Paul presumptuously.

“What! Are you going to make a claim to be the new deliverer, the Messiah who will at last set up God’s kingdom on earth?” scoffed Simeon, ending his derision with a loud guffaw.

Paul did not respond to the scorn hurled at him. He calmly stood up, brushed the dust from the back of his robe, and decisively headed down the hill to Jerusalem. The two brothers looked at each other with perplexed faces. After a moment’s hesitation, they also stood to their feet and followed the former archenemy down the hill.

Paul entered the city through the east gate. The city was streaming with pilgrims coming from all parts of the country to celebrate the nation’s greatest pilgrimage festival: Pesach (Passover), the festival of the Exodus and liberation from bondage. Paul weaved his way through the mass of people to the Temple Mount. He walked through the Beautiful Gate at the entrance to the temple enclosure, and he made his way up twelve steps to the doors that opened up to the inner court, where the majestic towering square-shaped temple stood. He stopped at the top of the steps, turned around to face the crowd waiting to enter the temple, and raised his hands high over his head. He called for the pilgrims to listen to the words he had been sent to deliver:

“People of Jerusalem, listen to me. I have been sent to bring a message of deliverance to you. Today we celebrate the deliverance of our forefathers from the land of bondage. The story of our fathers is also our story. The great liberator, Moses, took us out of the land of darkness and led us through the wilderness of life, but it was the conqueror Joshua who took us across the Jordan River and brought us to the Promised Land. Our people triumphed over all the enemies they encountered. We enjoyed a golden age when the kingdom expanded throughout the land, and we suffered exile when the empires of the world took us back into slavery. There was a time, not too long ago, when our valiant leaders led us against the mighty Greek empire, and we were victorious, just like David was victorious over the giant Goliath. Now we face a more formidable foe in the invincible Roman army, which threatens to destroy our stiff-necked people who continue to rebel against her might. Moreover, our nation is presently divided, one party against another. Can a house that is divided continue to stand? You are descendants of one father, Abraham, so why do you continue to fight brother against brother? You must choose this day whether you will follow the stony path of war or the smooth path of peace.”

“What do you suggest?” yelled a voice from the crowd.

“What’s your plan to save us from ourselves and from our enemies?” yelled a loud husky voice from the middle of the crowd. Paul recognized the voice of Simeon, the Zealot.

“My plan for our nation’s salvation will provide a peaceful resolution to our conflict. Those who want peace, you have the Law of Moses and the Temple. Those who want the Kingdom to arrive in the here and now, there is a better way to accomplish that goal than to resort to war. The Lord from heaven showed me through divine revelation that those who are zealous for the Kingdom should separate themselves from the community of the Temple and follow the straight and narrow path of righteousness: First, we will observe the first day of the week as the holy day, for it was on the first day of creation that God said ‘Let there be Light,’ and we will be followers of the Light. Second, during the spring festival, we will celebrate our deliverance from the bondage of the flesh and the darkness of this world by observing the resurrection of the dead from the tomb of matter. Third, instead of the pilgrimage to celebrate the beginning of the harvest and the ripening of the first fruits, we will make a pilgrimage of the spirit and ascend to the Kingdom of heaven and reap the harvest of our faith. Fourth, we will observe circumcision of the heart and mind, instead of concentrating on the flesh.”

“That man is asking us to be apostates!” yelled an angry voice from the crowd.

“He’s telling us we should profane the Sabbath, and he’s advising us not to observe our sacred festivals,” stated a legal-minded old man.

“He’s a messenger from Elijah!” shouted Jacob, who stood together with his brother Simeon in the middle of the crowd.

At that moment, a tall man in a white linen robe appeared through the open doors (leading to the court of the temple) behind Paul. He had heard everything that Paul had said, and he felt that he needed to step in before there was a mob revolt. The people hushed their voices when they saw the respected leader of the Nazarene sect, who was known as a righteous man and was called the Just One. Paul turned to look at the long-haired man with dark brown eyes, and his mind was stunned by what he thought he saw – the face of the Nazarene who had confronted him on the road to Damascus three years

ago. Paul's mind recalled the words the gentle-voiced Nazarene had spoken: "You will be shown the true Light within your own soul."

"Let James tell us whether this messenger is telling us the gospel truth!" called out a reasonable voice.

James stepped alongside Paul and began to speak to the assembled multitude of people:

"Last year at this time, my oldest brother, Ioannes, came to this city as the promised Messiah and King who was going to deliver our people from the stifling occupation of Roman forces and inaugurate a renewal of David's kingdom. A year later, we still see Roman soldiers in our streets, and we still wait for a messianic leader to fulfill our long-held dreams. I have listened to this man, who is dressed as an Essene, speak of bringing peace to our land by changing our laws. Now, I know that the Essenes, together with the Nazarenes – for we have grown like two branches from one tree – are a peace-loving people. I also know that my brothers, the Zealots, are an offshoot from this same tree, except that they love liberty more than they love peace. We can believe that someday we'll have peace and the Romans will leave our land, but I say that faith without works is useless and brings no results. Nevertheless, our three sects – even though we differ in strategies and methods of bringing the messianic Kingdom of God to earth – we share the same goal of working diligently and faithfully to restore that Kingdom in the here and now. But not in the manner that this apostate from the Law of Moses prescribes. And I know that Elijah would not send an apostate, whatever his name is, as a messenger."

"His name is Saul of Tarsus!" loudly proclaimed Simeon in a booming voice, which shocked the populace and sent a shudder of fear through their hearts.

James turned to look at the traitor in their midst. The shockwave that swept through the crowd simultaneously sent a shockwave straight into Paul's brain, and his mind went blank as if he were in a trance. Paul stood petrified and couldn't move; his eyes were glazed and expressionless. A voice within his head said, "Balinas, or rather Saulus, you must run for your life, for these people wish you bodily harm. They are not ready for the Light of Truth." Paul recognized the voice of wisdom, and he listened to that voice.

Just as Paul came to his senses, James was shaking him with both of his hands and saying, "Saul, what's wrong with you?" Paul thought that someone was already causing him bodily harm. Without thinking rationally, Paul instinctively reacted by forcefully pushing the person away from him and yelling, "Get away from me! Leave me alone!" James did not expect the violent reaction from Paul, whose strength was magnified by the fear of bodily harm that raced through his mind like a bolt of lightning. James fell backwards down the solid-rock steps, bruising his ribs and knocking his head into unconsciousness.

Paul was astounded by his violent action against an innocent man. A state of disbelief merged with a resurgence of the instinct of self-preservation, and Paul, believing that he had just unintentionally killed James, ran down the steps. He saw the shocked pilgrims huddle around their fallen leader, who was lying like a lifeless corpse at the bottom of the stone steps. "What have I done? What have I done?" he muttered to himself as he threaded his way through the befuddled throng of people. Tears ran down his cheeks as he pushed with determination against the tide of pilgrims. One thought,

mingled with a burning emotion, controlled his mind – to make it to the exit, and then to leave Jerusalem.

Paul was at the point where he was moving through the gate called Beautiful when he heard a female voice behind him, calling, “Paul, Paul, wait for us.” He thought he recognized the voice, and as he turned around to see who was calling him, he heard the voice again, “Brother, wait.” And then he saw his sister’s face behind a sea of bobbing heads.

The tears of sorrow turned into tears of joy as Paul embraced his sister Phoebe outside the Beautiful Gate. She wiped the tears from his face with her soft fingers and said, “Don’t cry, my dear brother. Everything will be all right, God willing.”

When Phoebe released her hands from her brother, she turned her attention back to the child who was holding onto her light blue robe. Paul had not noticed the child before, and he looked with delight at the curly-haired boy, whose blue eyes looked shyly up into Paul’s face.

“This is my son, Theodas, a gift from God,” proudly said Phoebe, introducing the boy for the first time to his uncle. “And Theodas, this is your uncle, Paul.”

“Hello, Theodas,” said Paul, kneeling down on one knee so he could be at eye-level with the boy. “I am honored to meet you.” Paul gave the young boy, who was going on three years of age, an affectionate hug.

“Say hello, Uncle Paul,” coached Phoebe, giving her child a slight nudge on his shoulder.

“Hello, Uncle Paul,” said Theodas in a soft-spoken voice, with his eyes lowered.

“Come, brother,” said Phoebe suddenly, as she spied a burly man heading in their direction. “You can come to the Essene quarters where I’m presently staying.” She took Theodas by the hand and headed toward the southwestern corner of the city. Paul walked slightly behind her, feeling a sense of urgency in her hurried steps. Paul was not aware of the disguised movements of Simeon, who was following them at a short distance to see where they were staying.

When Phoebe finally led her brother through the entrance of her humble dwelling place in the Essene quarters and shut the door, she breathed a sigh of relief and explained her evasive behavior: “I think we were being followed by someone. I saw a burly-looking man coming toward us back there by the gate. He had a vindictive look on his face; and, after what happened with you and James on the temple steps, I thought that man was coming after you.”

“You saw what happened?” asked Paul, with a look of shame on his face.

“Yes, I saw and I heard everything,” admitted Phoebe. “Although I wasn’t quite sure it was you until I heard that loudmouth yell out your name.”

“That loudmouth was Simeon, the Zealot,” stated Paul, who was acutely aware of his presence in the middle of the crowd.

Suddenly, a loud knock on the wooden door aroused their mutual apprehension.

“Who is knocking at the door?” asked Phoebe firmly.

“This is Simeon,” replied the brusque voice. “I need to speak with Saul.”

Paul opened the door and faced the irate Simeon.

“May I come in?” asked Simeon as he stood at the threshold and waited for Paul and Phoebe to let him in. Theodas was hiding behind Phoebe’s robe, with his face peeking out the side curiously to look at the strange visitor. “I don’t want the neighbors

to hear what I have to say.” Paul looked back to get Phoebe’s approval. “I assure you I’m not here to harm anyone,” Simeon added.

Phoebe nodded her head to signify it was all right if Paul wanted to let the burly man into her humble abode.

“I come to relay a message from my brother James, whom you nearly killed,” said Simeon after he closed the door behind him.

“James is alive?” interrupted Paul incredulously.

“Yes, he regained consciousness after someone threw some water in his face to revive him,” reported Simeon.

“O, thank God he’s alive,” rejoiced Paul, as if a heavy burden of guilt had been swept from his anguished mind.

“When he saw me kneeling over his body,” continued Simeon, “the first thing he told me was: ‘Go tell Saul to flee the city.’ I understood that he meant people would want to kill you after what you did to him. So I came looking for you. That’s when I saw you outside the gate Beautiful.”

“That’s curious,” mused Paul thoughtfully. “That’s the same thing the voice of wisdom told me when I went into a trance on top of the stairs.”

“Is that what happened to you?” asked Simeon in disbelief. “You went into a trance?”

“Yes, that was after I thought I was seeing a spirit of the Nazarene, whom I encountered on the road to Damascus three years ago,” explained Paul. “That thought came to me when I saw James, your brother, who looked just like the Nazarene.”

“So you met my oldest brother, Ioannes,” declared Simeon. “A lot of people say that Ioannes and James look alike.”

“So that explains everything,” said Paul, who felt as if a hidden mystery had been solved. “Tell James that I am truly sorry for what happened. I pushed him away unintentionally. The voice of wisdom warned me that people would wish me bodily harm; and when I came out of my trance and saw James shaking my body, I thought he meant me harm. I was sorely mistaken.”

“I’ll tell him,” promised Simeon. “Where will you go?” Simeon wanted to know where he could find him after he left the city. He wanted to keep an eye on him. He had his suspicions about the former Roman agent, and he didn’t completely trust his alleged conversion and claims to divine revelation.

“I might have to leave the country for a while,” answered Paul, reflecting on his future plans. “I will go into a self-imposed exile for several years.”

“Wherever you go, may God be with you,” stated Simeon. He extended his hand in farewell, and then he opened the door and left.

When Simeon left, Phoebe and Paul decided that they would return to Tarsus in Cilicia, where he could avoid notoriety, rebuild his life, and renew his image. It was while they discussed their plans for the future that Paul found out that Phoebe had lost her husband, Alexander, in the insurrection of the previous year.

That night, Paul tossed and turned in his sleep. His soul was tormented by the realization that he had failed in the mission that Elijah had sent him on. He was now called an apostate by the very people that he wanted to save from destruction. In his feverish state of mind, Paul kept seeing images of the Romans burning the temple and

destroying the city of Jerusalem. He saw the promised Messiah, the star known as Bar Kokhba, fall to the ground like a meteor from the heavens in the Roman year 888 A.U.C.

