

Audacity and the Esoteric Disposition

By Seth Miller

Although there are numerous esoteric societies, and even more numerous practitioners who follow the associated esoteric paths, the overall number of people involved with what may be called the esoteric is very slim when considered with the whole mass of humanity. What is the cause of this? What keeps the majority of people from engaging with the esoteric? If we bring to mind all that is normally associated with the words “esoteric”, many different ideas may suggest themselves to us, such as secretive, forbidden, hidden, elite, removed, arcane, or impenetrable. The American Heritage Dictionary¹ tells us the word means “of or relating to that which is known by a restricted number of people”, or “not publicly disclosed; confidential”.

Aha! This would, on the face of it, already provide us with the answer we seek: the average person is not involved with esotericism because those who *are* involved actively keep their knowledge from being released to the public. However, to accept this resolution is to succumb to the most common mistake made by those who are *not* esotericists. In order to fully elaborate this dilemma, let us begin from The Beginning: with Eve, for by examining her situation we may be able to lead ourselves towards understanding.

When Eve is tempted by the snake, a wise and wily being, she experiences an unusual moment that is, if we take the story at face value, so far unique to humankind: true introspectivity.

“The serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise...”²

¹ The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition, Copyright © 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company

² Genesis, Chapter 3, Revised Standard Version, Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library

Although the snake tells her that if she eats the fruit she will be like God, knowing good and evil, Eve undergoes a real inner process of reflection, whereby she values the fruit for three qualities: it is good for food, it is a delight to the eyes, and it confers wisdom. Therefore we can assume that Eve's disposition includes a value for something akin to practicality, beauty, and wisdom. The important aspect is that she is told by the snake only that it would confer *knowledge* – Eve must discern the value of the other qualities *herself*, which can only happen through introspection.

Given that Eve has demonstrated the capacity for introspection, she clearly did not take the fruit blindly, but did so because she made a judgment concerning the value of the fruit in full consciousness of God's damning words which she had just repeated to the snake moments before. Eve knew what she was after, and perhaps knew she would have to sacrifice obedience to the externally given order of things in order to follow something else: an inner directive. It is in this sense then, that Eve, in this one audacious act (of defiance for some, of inwardly directed purpose for others), became the first esotericist – for it is in fact exactly this disposition that exemplifies those who take up the esoteric.

The root of the word esoteric is actually from the Greek meaning “within”, and has nothing explicitly to do with secretiveness or exclusivity. To be an esotericist is to not only find the strength to look within, but also includes the activation of one's will in accordance with what is found there, sometimes to the dismay of those individuals and institutions who lay out their own directives in a way that the esotericist at first experiences as *arbitrary*. Because of this, it is part of the strange nature of the esoteric path that it is at once open to all while simultaneously being innately selective; but in the sense that it is *self*-selective. In order to ‘join’, you are required to ‘apply’, but in this case the applying itself constitutes the joining!

Hence we see that the esotericist is one who is truly audacious: one who is intrepid, one who is “heedless of restraints, as of those imposed by prudence, propriety, or convention”³ – or God. For when we hear the inner call, we must either ignore it - or lend the rest of our lives to the search.

This audacity is an audacity of creation. Those who undertake an esoteric path seek to become creators. Of what? Of themselves! Here Eve’s story reminds us that when she eats of the forbidden fruit (...an *esoteric* fruit?), she will become like God, knowing good and evil. Creation without reflection is random and purposeless – it is only with the ability to distinguish between what is good and what is evil that a creation can have meaning beyond that of any automata. Thus Eve, and luckily her husband as well, have gained the godlike gift of making meaningful creations, and the first (and last) creation is that of themselves. To undertake one’s own evolution, with all the impossibilities and dangers that accompany such a mad endeavor, is the essence of the esoteric path. Had Eve not taken of the fruit, someone *else* would have had to take her place, lest all subsequent humanity remain under the yoke of the external.

It takes a certain kind of person to select themselves into accepting such a task, and perhaps herein lies the answer to our original question, because this task is, of course, profoundly difficult. The method is at times uncertain, the results not guaranteed, the potential for either good or evil results balanced on the edge of a knife – and the responsibility for the outcome is intimately bound up with the continuing choice to persevere. Who is such a person?

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