

The Symbolism of Birds

T118 The Inner Teachings 19th August 1941 St Mary Abbot's Place, London

Invocation:

Great White Spirit, Father-Mother God, we are conscious of being enfolded in Thy Life, Thy Love, Thy Heart. In the name of the Son, the Light of life, we call to the angels of the heavens to bear us company during this spirit communion. We pray that we may catch the music of their song, the harmony of their spirit and that we may be conscious of the ministrations and companionship of radiant human spirits who now dwell in the land of light.
Amen.

First, although we must not digress from our subject, we would say that some music is a great help to us and that is why we made a special request tonight. We choose particular music because it strikes a hidden chord which we need to awake through listening because then we can play upon that chord, thus opening a consciousness to the heaven world, to the past, to the future—indeed, to all eternity. Some may recall a past incarnation when you dwelt with your brethren in a monastic life. We particularly wish this note to be struck tonight, because we desire to draw to this sanctuary the inspiration and the blessing of the gentle spirit of Francis of Assisi, a brother of an order closely linked to the heavenly and angelic life. I wonder if you understand what we mean? Different life streams manifest in different forms, but all fit into the grand pattern of evolution of life in physical form. It is not unusual for us to touch this angelic life stream in these talks. We do this because at the present time it is what humanity needs—the vibration of the angelic life forces—to restore humanity to its correct balance. The angels work unceasingly to uplift humanity, to prepare humanity for the coming of the Lord of this earth, the King of Kings, the Grand Master of the White Lodge.

Francis of Assisi understood the grand brotherhood of life. Being raised above the human, he lived and expressed life on this angelic vibration. Because of this he attracted to himself the birds, which responded to his command; his spirit was speaking a bird language, akin in lowly degree to an angelic language. The birds understood and delighted to come within the vibration or the aura of this great brother. You have asked for a talk about birds, the meaning of these lovely creatures and the part they have to play in the scheme of life. No doubt you have read the play called 'The Bluebird'. Have you understood the symbolism of the play? Do you recall how the bird escaped from captivity, and how the children who loved the bird passed through many adventures in their search for their bluebird, and how eventually it returned to them of its own free will? They prepared unknowingly for its return, and it returned. In this play one can trace the journey of the soul in search of God. The soul passes through adventures or initiations; it learns lessons from both suffering and happiness. In this play of the bluebird we can read the deepest teachings on reincarnation—life, death and rebirth, and can realize the lesson it teaches—that simple truth of living in the place in which God has placed us, of loving and giving happiness to others.

The Ancient Wisdom frequently made use of birds as symbols to teach certain lessons to the aspirant, to the neophyte. Those familiar with the ancient wisdom and with the teachings of freemasonry know that certain birds are to be found continually in the mysteries, each bird representing a soul quality or qualities which the neophyte is seeking. Birds in ancient days were considered to be messengers of the gods, and to simple-hearted brethren a bird was

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thought a very wonderful creature, because it usually lived in the sacred forests and groves and flew from tree to tree singing melodious, joyous songs, interpreted by the brethren to be voices of the gods speaking to the souls of men*.

*[*For editorial policy around gender, see the introduction.]*

Moreover, bird life was a source of great wonder because birds were free to fly—they possessed the secret of levitation. Birds had overcome the power of gravitation, which is a law of earth—levitation is a law of the spirit. May we explain that at a certain stage in his training the neophyte learns to use his spiritual wings to move about the spirit worlds freely, both when he quits his physical body after death and also when being trained to vacate his physical body during his lifetime and to move about the spiritual worlds freely. He learns to overcome the imaginary law of gravity. If men could comprehend the spiritual law of levitation, they could transport themselves from one side of the world to the other—a fact frequently accomplished by the masters. When the neophyte is being thus trained for flight on the astral plane, he has to learn to overcome fear of falling. He learns to fly in spirit life as do the birds. He was often taken to a great height, from which he had to descend. He has to experience within himself the overcoming of gravitation: to learn that in the astral or soul body he can move about anywhere with ease.

This will explain why the initiates or students of the spiritual mysteries regarded birds with adoration and respect. They were creatures drawn to the central life force of the Father-Mother God, and as such were holy and had a message for men. Each bird in flight demonstrated to the neophyte the desired quality of spiritual attainment.

The eagle was considered by certain schools to be the acme of courage and strength, but confusion has arisen, we think, between the eagle and the phoenix. The phoenix symbolizes a deep spiritual mystery in man, in nations. This mythical bird is supposed to have lived to a great age—five hundred years or so—and then did not really die because it kept reproducing itself. In other words, its old body died and the new body was created, always from the same bird. Through a process of change, disintegration and rebirth, the bird continued its life. This is symbolical of the initiate to the spiritual mysteries. The old Adam must die before the new man can be born. Why, this is what is happening in your world today—the old order is passing; we see change, decay, and death to outworn institutions, to literature and art, even to music. The old order passeth, and like the wise phoenix, from the ashes of its past will emerge the new spirit, the new age.

In the ancient mysteries the neophyte was taught that he must die, he must lose all that was of the lowest self, that the outworn life of materialism must go, must be completely erased. This did not mean that the physical body itself had necessarily to die, but the lower particles of that physical body had to disintegrate before the new spiritual body could be formed. This may be one of the interpretations Jesus had in mind when he said, 'Unless a man be born again he cannot enter the kingdom of Heaven'. The phoenix is a mythical bird which clearly depicts this profound spiritual truth.

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The eagle has been confused with the phoenix. We suggest that the eagle and the phoenix are really one and the same. There is an interesting story about the Great Seal of the United States of America. It is generally thought that the eagle is the national symbol of America. Those composing the new race are being drawn from various countries both in the East and the West. The central point will be in the new world in the West—America: the Atlantis that was is again to be reborn. The actual continent, will it rise again? Not exactly. We rather mean that the ancient power and wisdom of the Atlanteans will be again established on earth. Realize then the many, many years it takes to bring to birth this new race, this spirit of the reawakened man.

When that Great Seal of America was being designed, behind the statesmen was the Rosicrucian brotherhood, that ancient brotherhood which was in existence at the very beginning of life on earth. By no accident was the eagle chosen [as] one of the symbols of the Great Seal of America. You see the meaning? The bird with wings to enable it to overcome the law of gravitation, materialism—a creature with wings to soar into the heavens and to receive the guidance, even the command, of the Wise Ones who watch over humanity.

There is evidence to prove that a brother, one of the Sages, actually manifested in a physical body at the conference table at the time of the formation of the constitution of the U.S.A. So you will begin to glimpse the wondrous foresight of the Sage, and the length of preparation that ushers in a new spirit, a new age. For many centuries past brethren of the ancient wisdom made preparations in America for this wondrous coming. Birds have a great significance. You can learn from listening to the birds, observing their plumage, their ways of life, their haunts, to translate their song into spiritual harmony and truth. We say, 'I am happy as a bird'. Can you imagine a birdless world? What makes a lonely place so beautiful to the traveller? The birds bring happiness, they release the soul to spiritual realms. You must needs be happy when you hear the song of birds; listening to music or the song of birds, a chord awakens in you which carries you into the spiritual worlds. Do not listen with the mind alone, although you need an intelligent mind to comprehend music; the chords of the heart should be struck and then you are released—you fly; you overcome earthiness; like birds you are able to fly, released to the spiritual worlds, and your heart records happiness. No matter how anxious you are about earth conditions, if you can be carried away by music, you know happiness, you know joy, and at the same time you know the emotion you call sorrow. I would like to suggest that joy and sorrow are the same emotion. Sorrow is sweet. Joy is sweet. True sorrow, genuine sorrow, is sweet, it is even joyous. Have you ever thought of sorrow this way?

Many birds are accepted as symbolizing some quality in man. The dove is the symbol of peace; it is the symbol of the order of love and wisdom, love-wisdom which produces peace. The peacock, as you know, is a symbol of pride. The peacock has beautiful colouring, but the end of the tail is somewhat washed out. We are told that the peacock was so busy admiring itself that it was late getting into the ark and its tail was caught by the waters of the flood and lost its colour. It is important for humanity to realize the foolishness of false pride.

[The question asked at this point was unfortunately not recorded on the original typescript.]

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A. The questioner remarked on the wonder of the ancient bird temples in Brittany and elsewhere. People have yet to appreciate the wonder of those stone monoliths. Some originally were carved birds. Bird symbolism is profound, and a research well worth your while. Pieces of that construction in stone can be found all over this country, a knowledge brought to this country and temples built in this country by the followers and disciples of the Great White Brotherhood of Atlantis and Mu. The western isles and the west coast of Scotland abound with the remnants of these—shall I say—‘stone bird images’, all left there to teach men coming along the path into incarnation at later periods the power of their spirit, the power which is symbolized in the wings of the bird.

Q. It is rather interesting that we have Russia, Germany and America each symbolized by an eagle; is it possible that the eagle symbol refers to a rebirth? Why is it that our country which has such a significant part to play is not symbolized by any bird?

A. The symbol of this country is the lion (Leo). Put wings on the lion and you produce the sphinx. Remember the importance of the lion (Leo) in its connection with the sign of Aquarius, the new age. Therefore the Leo or lion must play an important part in this rebirth. Did we not tell you that when the Sun was in Leo there would come the grip of the Lion's Paw? A conference took place in the month of Leo, between the eagle and the lion—the eagle, the symbol of rebirth, and the lion, the sun, which gives life. The sun, Leo, must give life to the New Age.

Q. Where do Russia and Germany come into the scheme?

A. Russia will play a very vital part in the reconstruction; out of Russia will come a great contribution to the new order, the new age, and even out of Germany also. Unless this is recognized and permitted, the rebirth cannot take place. Do you not see? You can trace the symbolism of the birds throughout your Bible, and all other religious works. The symbolism of the bird has taken a very high place in all ages and ancient teachers.

Q. Can you tell us the symbolic meaning of the swan?

A. The swan was used as a symbol of an initiate in the past. The white swan, to those who understand, means an initiate.

Q. Will you tell us next time about how birds connect up with angels? Will you also explain to us the meaning of ‘The word of God borne on eagle's wings’?

A. We will take that as the text, and embody the answer to the first question relating to bird and angelic life.

Benediction

We await the blessing, and unto the Holy Three be all praise and thanksgiving.

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Amen.

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Flying, nations, national identity, ancient religions

