

# The Nature of the Daimon<sup>1</sup>

## **The Daimon Speaks**

Almost all of us at least once in our lives, during a sleepless night or an illness, have heard a voice which, coming from nowhere, and as it were, speaking silently, gives us advice -- usually very wise advice. It is always when we are in solitude and most often at moments of exaltation that this silent voice speaks to us. Certain men of spiritual genius have heard this voice so plainly and so often as to make them believe that an intelligent being was about them, directing them with inspired counsel. The Greeks called this intelligent being by the name of "daimon."

## **The Daimon of Socrates**

For instance, we know that Socrates possessed a personal daimon. "The favor of the gods," said Socrates, "has given me a marvelous gift, which has never left me since my childhood. It is a voice which, when it makes itself heard, deters me from what I am about to do and never urges me on." He spoke familiarly of this daimon, joked about it and obeyed blindly the indications it gave. Eventually, his friends never took an important step without consulting it. But the daimon had its sympathies, and when it was unfavorable to the questioner it remained absolutely silent; in that event it was quite impossible for Socrates to make it speak.

## **Between God and Man**

Of what order is this daimon, which manifested itself to Socrates in childhood but was also heard by Apollonius of Tyana only after he had begun to put into practice the Hermetic principles? "They are intermediate powers of a divine order. They fashion dreams, inspire soothsayers," says Apuleius. "They are inferior immortals, called gods of the second rank, placed between earth and heaven," says Maximus of Tyre. Plato thinks that a kind of spirit, which is separate from us, receives man at his birth, and follows him in life and after death. He calls it "the daimon which has received us as its portionment." The ancient idea of the daimon seems, therefore, to be analogous to the guardian angel of Christians.

Possibly the daimon is nothing but the higher part of man's spirit, that which is separated from the human element and is capable, through ecstasy, of becoming one with the universal spirit. To an organism that has been purified, therefore, it's daimon would be able in certain conditions to transmit both the vision of past events, the image of which happens to be accessible to it, and that portion of the future the causes of which are already in existence, and the effects of which are consequently foreseeable.

But the fact that the daimon had preferences among Socrates' friends, that it chose between them, seems to show that its intelligence was different from that of Socrates himself. Socrates often said that this inner voice, which many times deterred him from doing one thing, never incited him to do something else. Now, it is a rule among adepts never to give any but negative advice; for he who advises someone to do a thing not only takes upon himself the burden of the consequences but also deprives the man he advises of all merit in the action.

Apollonius believed that between the imperfection of man and the most exalted among the hierarchy of creation there existed intermediaries. One of his intermediaries was the ideal of beauty that we make for ourselves, an ideal that is formless but is nonetheless real on another plane of life. This ideal was the daimon, the reality of which became the greater in proportion as the idea of it became the more powerful in its creator's mind.

## **The Secret Spirit**

Thus a sculptor with intuition who had a knowledge of magic might, in certain conditions, be able to give form to a creature of ideal beauty begotten by his own ideal. In order, then, to steep oneself in the perfection of this creature there would be two methods: either to actualize it on the terrestrial plane by giving it a form; or to enter its ethereal domain by divesting oneself of form through the transformative experience of ecstasy. It may be that certain workers of miracles who possessed an amazing secret used the first method and lived with a divine companion whom they had themselves made visible to their own human eyes. But they kept their secret to themselves. Those of them who spoke of it were regarded as mad and were imprisoned or burned. There were others, too, whose soul was impure and thus created caricatures of the ideal and were haunted by monsters resembling them. The Middle Ages, when methods of ancient magic were still being handed down, are full of stories of men possessed, tormented by their own demons, which, once they were created, never died and attached themselves to their creator.

Without doubt, the alchemistic philosophers, the Hermeticists, and all the mystics of the Neo-Platonic school, used the second method. They entered the ethereal realm by divesting themselves of form and ego. They sought the beauty of the soul, strove to find the radiant inner ego, and thanks to the impetus of their ecstasy, they sometimes attained their aim.

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