

The Sacred Nature of Wine

“There is a devil in every berry of grape.” The Koran

Let us begin with a story to prepare the ground for planting.
Besides everyone loves a story.

The Door

There once was a city in some country at some time which was surrounded by a wall, The Wall, as it was referred to by the inhabitants of the city. The Wall had a door, The Door, to the inhabitants.

Our city of humans was fairly self-satisfied. There was relatively enough for everyone. No one was really starving or homeless, except if by choice. Because of this self-sufficiency most didn't care about The Door, or where it went. As a matter of fact, life was good enough for most of the inhabitants that going through the Door to the Outside was scary compared to the snug comfortable feeling inside the Wall.

In spite of the 'good life' inside the Wall, some had gone through the Door outside the Wall. Some had returned with tales of strange, nearly unbelievable visions, while others never returned. Many of those who stayed Outside the Wall for a longer time seemed changed, 'not necessarily for the better', according to long term residents of the City. Even those who went Outside for even a short time seemed a little more dazed and confused upon their return - unable to really communicate clearly what had happened Outside the Wall. Those who had been Outside longest spoke in seemingly meaningless phrases based in paradox. Further because their values and goals seemed to have changed because of the time they spent Outside, they were sometimes called Outsiders. In many ways the Outsiders were distinctly different from the Insiders, those who had never been outside the Wall. Most residents of the City were Insiders.

The City was big enough that some of the Insiders didn't even know that the Wall with its Door to the Outside even existed. Of those Insiders who knew of the Door, most were afraid of it. Most mothers warned their children to stay away from the Door. Thus the Door was mostly ignored or feared by the bulk of the population.

However there were always a few off beat types hanging around the Door waiting for it to open. Maybe it wasn't mentioned, but the Door didn't just open with a twist of the wrist. It seemed to open spontaneously, unpredictably, unusually for the strangest people. In fact those Doors - for there was more than one Door in the huge Wall surrounding the City - almost seemed to draw people through them. Then after a time the Door would also spit people right back into the City again. From external observation it was hard to tell if there was any way to really even 'try' to get in or out the Doors.

However some Outsiders said they had the Key to the Door. Some of these called themselves Masters; others called themselves Friends.

Some Masters: "I have the only Key to the only true Door."

Other Masters: "Any of the Doors lead to the same Outside."

Some of the Masters for the Insiders: "The Outside doesn't even exist. The Doors lead nowhere. The only reality is inside the Wall."

Other Insider Masters preached: "The Devil lives Outside the Wall. No 'good' person would even want to go outside the Wall."

In fact some of these proclaimed: "It is a sin to go outside the Wall."

The more extreme said: "It is a sin to even want to go outside the Wall."

Regardless of this or that, most Insiders said: "I want to have nothing to do with the Door to the Outside."

However there were always a few, for whatever reason, who were attracted to the Door. Many, who were attracted to the Door: "We are unhappy inside the Wall and are searching for a way out."

Others: "We are left unsatisfied by the smug complacency of City life inside the Wall, and want more."

One group: "We are looking for happiness outside the Wall.

The other: "We are looking for a deeper dimension to Life."

Anyway, as is human, each Master gathered his own group of Disciples about him in front of the 'true' Door with the 'true' Key. Some of these Masters had been outside the Wall while others had merely dreamed they had been outside the Wall, creating an Outside from their own preconceptions. Because of the ambiguity of perception it was hard to tell these Masters apart. Those who had dreamed it, sometimes even said that their Dream was the True Reality and that the Outside was only a Dream.

Some groups had been founded by Masters who had really been outside the Wall and had the Key. These Masters remained Inside to show their Disciples how to use the Key. After some time, however, the Masters returned Outside permanently. Some say they died - others that they lived on. Some called it Heaven; others called it Hell. Many said that they were reborn into a new Life; a final group said that they had escaped at last.

Unfortunately the Disciples frequently forgot how to use the Key after the Master left. Perhaps they had never been able to use the Key properly in the first place. Many had never been outside the Wall, even with the assistance of the Master. Lacking Direct Experience these groups gradually formed myths and legends surrounding their original Master and what it was like Outside the Wall. As is the nature of legends they contained some elements of truth, covered over by multiple veils of illusion. With many groups the Outside was only a legend that had been passed down, not a reality that anyone had really experienced.

Because not everyone could easily go beyond the Door to the Outside, many said: "We don't even believe that the Outside exists."

Others believed: "The Outside should be resisted."

Some who had been Outside for just a short time: "I couldn't tell if I was really there or merely in the midst of a dream."

Over the centuries a certain consensus grew about certain Doors and what lay outside. Of course there were as many Keys as there were Doors. The perplexing part was that certain Keys seemed to work for some and not for others. Further some thought that they had opened the Door - when it didn't appear they had, while others seemed to have gone beyond the Wall - but weren't sure that they had. There were many misconceptions about the Outside. Needless to say there was a great ambiguity concerning the Door, the Outside, whether it was good or bad, the Keys and the Masters. Because of this external ambiguity some Masters told their students: "Look inside for the Key."

While all of this controversy raged about the Doors to the Outside, the Keys and the Masters, John, intoxicated upon the juice of the Grape, stumbled through the Door to the Outside.

What did he see? What did he experience? More importantly how did he get through the Door?

Unfortunately the Outside is beyond words, but these are a few of the Words that John casually threw at his Experience.

“Our Person is just a metaphor created by the Full Mind to simplify an abundance of Data. Unfortunately we believe in its reality. This is the cause of our suffering. Simplicity in the midst of complexity. Complexity at the depth of simplicity. Outer and inner are one but neither. The World inside the Wall is merely an Illusion created by Mind; the only Reality is Outside the Wall of the Mind. Only the Constructs of Mind prevent us from going Outside.”

Needless to say he was only talking garble as far as the Insiders were concerned.

But how did John get through the Door? Intoxicated.

This was the hardest part for the Disciples to swallow.

Of those who were there, some said: “It wasn’t the Real Door.”

While others said: “John reached a False Outside because he used a False Key.

Most who weren’t there said: “We don’t believe that John made it Outside.”

or “We don’t even care if he made it Outside or not.”

Many, who had spent their lives attempting unsuccessfully to get through the Door, nearly giving up hope: “We are highly skeptical.”

Those who had studied the Door and Key intensely: “We are in disbelief.”

Those who had been preparing in one way or another: “We are trying to not be jealous. He was merely lucky.”

But for those who were really familiar with the Outside: “John did indeed stumble drunkenly through the Door.”

Those who really Knew, understood that John had really gone Outside the Wall, because they knew that Intoxication is one of the Keys that unlocks the Door.

Before we start thinking too much, let me retell a Sufi story.

Grapes?

There was once a Marketplace in some place and time very similar to the one that we are in now. Travelers from all over the world came to this Marketplace, because it was said to have everything. At one point, for some unnamed cosmic reason, four travelers from far off and exotic places entered the marketplace.

The first said: “I am seeking *putao*.” The second said: “I am attempting to find *traube*.” The third: “I have come from far away to obtain *uva*.” The fourth: “I have searched far and wide to acquire *vayntroyb*.”

Because these travelers had come from so far away, none of the merchants could understand their variety of requests. Because of this they brought the travelers to a Wise One who could understand many languages. The travelers repeated their individual requests for *putao*, *traube*, *uva*, and *vayntroyb*.

The Wise One smiled and said that they were all seeking the same thing, which was grapes. Once these travelers had received their grapes, the Wise One said, “Allow me to teach you how to turn your grapes into wine.”

The first story points towards the idea that intoxication can be a Key to the Door, while the second connects wine with a higher truth. Next we will explore the connection between intoxication and wine. Let us start with the connection between Wine, Blood and Life.

To prime the pump, here is a short quote from **The Golden Bough** by Fraser.

“There is a “primitive feeling that the soul is in the blood. ... Plants are considered animate beings, which bleed when cut, the red juice which exudes from some plants being regarded as the blood of the plant. The juice of the grape is therefore naturally conceived as the blood of the vine. And since, as we have just seen, the soul is often believed to be in the blood, the juice of the grape is regarded as the soul, or as containing the soul of the vine. This belief is strengthened by the intoxicating effects of wine. For according to primitive notions all abnormal mental states, such as intoxication or madness, are caused by the entrance of a spirit into a person. Such mental states, in other words, are regarded as forms of possession or inspiration. Wine, therefore, is considered on two distinct grounds as a spirit or containing a spirit; first because, as a red juice, it is identified with the blood of the plant, and second because it intoxicates or inspires. ...

It appears that, on the primitive view, intoxication or the inspiration produced by wine is exactly parallel to the inspiration produced by drinking the blood of animals. The soul or life is in the blood, and wine is the blood of the vine. Hence, whoever drinks wine drinks the blood, and so receives into himself the soul or spirit of the god of the vine.” pp. 183-5

The idea that blood is life is part of the undercurrent of our way of thinking even unto ‘modern’ times. ‘Life’s blood’ and ‘brain dead’ are two idioms which express the connection between life and blood. Nobody says ‘heart dead’ because it seems redundant, while they use the term ‘brain dead’ to indicate that the heart is still pumping. Medically as long as the heart is pumping the body is still alive. A person is not considered legally dead until their heart stops, not their brain.

Only recently have laws been changed to allow doctors to disconnect brain dead people from life support systems. Previously it was considered murder by the doctor not to keep the patient’s heart beating if he could. The connection between blood and life is still deep in the Western psyche despite the prevalent thinking that the brain is the center of consciousness.

The connection between blood and life force is clearly reflected in the story of Dracula. The Count drinks the blood of his victims to absorb their life force - not to quench his thirst. In this way he was able to live for hundreds of years on the borrowed life force of others. The blood is secondary. The Chinese also associate the chi, the life force, with blood, not brain cells.

This blood-life connection is extended to plants. Primitives considered the sap to be the life-blood of the tree and wine to be the life-blood of the vine. The blood red color of wine accentuated the connection. In Andy Warhol’s **Dracula**, the movie, the vampires sip the blood as if it is wine, comparing vintages and flavors.

Intoxication = Divine Possession

But more importantly when grape juice is fermented and is turned into wine it produces intoxication. We eat the liquid-like force of eggs, fruits and vegetables, even red meats, but none of these life forces produces any mental intoxication. However fermented grapes produce intoxication.

The primitives felt that altered states of consciousness were the result of possession by demons or gods entering in. Because wine produced intoxication it was thought that the god of the vine had possessed the person, drinking the wine.

The belief in possession by spirits is also a part of our modern psyche. Possession by 'evil' spirits is part of many movies including the **Exorcist**, where the girl is possessed by devils. For the primitives medicine men exorcise the demons which made the person sick. The Salem witch trials were based upon the belief that death would free the individual from possession by the devil. It was not a punishment but instead something which was being done for the good of the individual. People under the influence of drugs or alcohol might even say that they weren't themselves in defense of their actions - the implication being that they were possessed by the effects of the drug or alcohol.

On the positive side of possession, we consider artists, and artists consider themselves, to be 'divinely inspired'. The Greeks personified this state through the Muses. Even today an artist or writer may say "I have lost my Muse." meaning that he is uninspired. Further there are a proliferation of books about channeling for spirits or god. Anyway just as states of sickness, mental inspiration, and insanity were all considered states of supernatural possession so was the intoxication produced by wine considered a type of divine possession.

In review, wine is the life blood of the Vine. We drink the blood of the Vine and absorb its essence. As we drink the blood of the Vine-God, it intoxicates us. In primitive view the Vine-God possesses us temporarily. We act, as if possessed, out of mind. Thus the act of intoxication through Wine is actually a possession by the Vine God. We have drunk his blood and receive his spirit. The Greeks personified this spirit as the god Dionysus, who degenerated into Bacchus in Roman times. In the Christian ritual of communion the wine is turned into the blood of Jesus to absorb his divine essence. (Of course this wine must be blessed by the priest. It is not just ordinary wine.)

Possessed by the Goddess of Vegetation

If we are being possessed by the God of the Vine. What is he or she like? In ancient times the God of the Vine and the God of Trees were intertwined. In many ways the God of the Vine is connected with Vegetation itself. When we become intoxicated we are being possessed by the God or Goddess of Vegetation themselves. Wine is not just connected with grapes, but actually symbolizes vegetation. We become intoxicated through possession by the spirit of vegetation.

Of course vegetation represents the Union of Heaven and Earth, the water of Heaven impregnating the soil of Earth. Grapes, like no other type of vegetation are grown to reflect the soil and climate in which they were raised. This concept is reflected in the French word 'terroire'. Thus Wine is the blood of the Grape, which symbolizes the Union of Heaven and Earth. The intoxication is the possession by the God or Goddess of Vegetation manifesting through the Grape. In the Tarot deck, vegetation is symbolized by The Empress, ruler of the physical Earth.

Now that we understand that the intoxication through wine is a type of divine possession, specifically by the vegetation goddess, let us attempt to understand how this assists us in moving through the Door. Let me quote an excerpt from my story, *The Internal History of Ma Belle*.

“What else is the Fine Dining Experience, if it is not just good food, wine, company and atmosphere? ... The ultimate in Fine Dining is when the Guest reaches the state of At-one-ment. This is an incredibly magical condition. It begins the moment the Guest realizes that they are at the perfect spot with the perfect person doing the perfect thing. ... If the Minds of our Guests are too active with thoughts and judgments, they are denied this magical state. ... Wine, with its naturally occurring alcohol, softens up the Left Brain of the Mind, which simultaneously strengthens the potential for Direct Experience.”

Because it relaxes the Brain’s grip on the Mind, Wine is a very important component of the Fine Dining Experience. This was how John moved through the Door drunkenly. This was how the intoxication by the Goddess of Vegetation allowed him to let go of the illusions of the Future and move Outside. This is why turning grapes into wine is an emergent transcendent phenomenon. The unfermented grapes do not produce intoxication. Thus the raw grapes do not lend themselves to divine possession. It is only after fermentation into wine that the grape allows for the divine possession of intoxication. Similarly the isolated truths of ordinary life do not produce ecstatic states, while the integrated truths fermented by experience and time allow us to move Outside normality into the state of Divine Possession.

Let me end my little talk with a song-poem in the manner of the Chinese classics.

A Poem on Blood and Wine

Blood is Life.

Wine is the Life-Blood of the Vine.

Wine produces Intoxication.

Intoxication is a result of possession by the Spirit of the Vine.

Vines are connected with Trees, which are the symbol of Vegetation.

Hence Wine is the Life-Blood of Vegetation.

Vegetation is the marriage of Heaven and Earth.

As such Intoxication is possession by the Spirit of Vegetation.

What is the Nature of Vegetation?

Vegetation and Animals are polar aspects of Life.

Drinking Wine, with the subsequent possession by the Vegetation Spirit,

Allows us to balance our Animal Nature with our Vegetal Side.

The Vegetal Side is Now based and sedentary.

Vegetal Possession, induced by Wine, allows us to wallow in the Now,

Escaping our ambitious Animal Side,

At least for the Moment.