

TEMPERANCE DECODED

In this paper I will attempt to show the connections between the Waite-Smith (WS) Temperance card and the Waite-Trinick (WT) Great Symbol of Temperance. Though they look quite different, they are very similar in many ways, and the WT symbol holds the keys to understanding the WS image. The most important point will be to demonstrate that the septenary symbol on the angel's breast is a symbol for Yesod and the transformation of the natural mind. I will be quoting from Waite's Fellowship of the Rosy Cross (FRC) initiation rituals and his *Pictorial Key to the Tarot* (PKT).



Figure 1

Here are the two images side-by-side; the familiar WS Temperance and the WT Temperance. One of the first major differences one notices is the WT angel is female. She is described by Waite in the rituals as Shekinah. In The PKT he describes the angel as neither male nor female. I don't think this difference creates a major obstacle as it doesn't change the fundamental message of the images.

The WT Temperance isn't pouring the liquid from vessel to vessel, but pouring the contents of both vessels downward where they meet in Yesod and become one stream. Waite describes this in the FRC Philosopus ritual:

“It represents Shekinah as the Lady of Reconciliation and Lady of the Pillar of Benignity [central pillar], intermingling and reconciling the influences of Chesed and Geburah, regarded as cleansing water and saving fire. They are poured forth from two Chalices, which have a meeting point at Yesod and descend thence as a river of life in Malkuth.” (Quote 1)

In both images there is path leading from the pool of water off into the distance where it disappears between two mountain ranges. In the WS image the path is dry but in the WT image the path is a stream. We know from Waite's description the lower part of the image is Malkuth. But there's also a color version of the same image that leaves no room for doubt, “Malkuth” is plainly labeled. (See Figure 2)

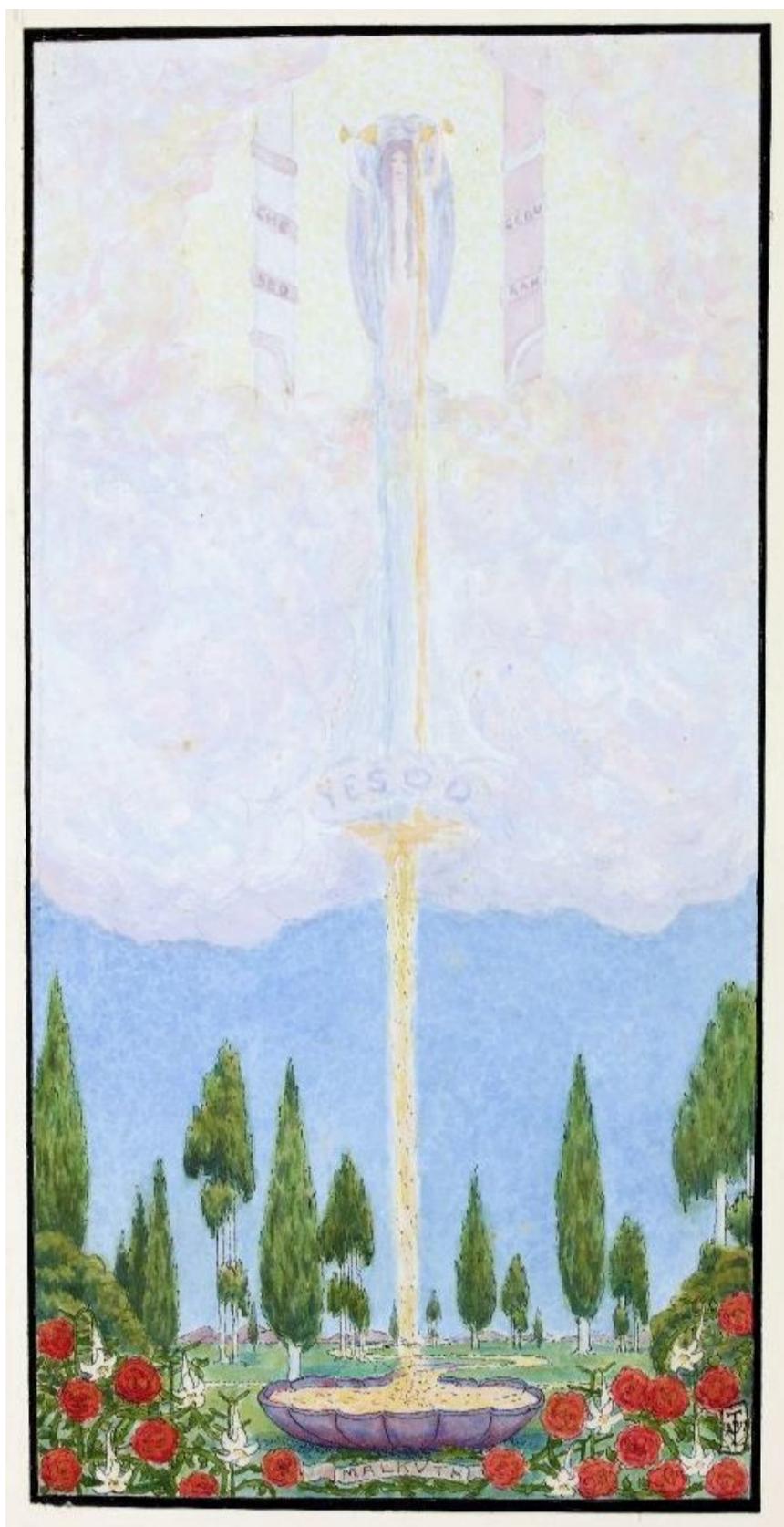


Figure 2

It's hard to miss the abundant roses and lilies similar to the WS Magician. The WS Temperance has iris flowers growing on the bank of the water.

Another thing that's noticeable from comparing the two images in Figure 1 is that in the WT image there is no sun symbol on her forehead. The explanation for this could be that Shekinah represents solar (divine) light in both images, the external manifestation of the Christ; but in the WT image she's illustrated openly while in the WS image not so much. In the FRC Philosophus ritual Waite describes her as the "vesture [clothing] of Messias [Christ]."

"In the descent of the influences from above it signifies the virtues and graces of the Pillars on the right and the left uniting with those that come down from the Middle Pillar, represented by Shekinah, who is herself the vesture of Messias." (Quote 2)

There are many "Shekinah" cards in the WS Tarot. They represent different phases or manifestations of the ineffable. The ones I know of are: the High Priestess, the Empress, Justice, Temperance, the Star, the Moon, and the World. The High Priestess is shown as a white shimmering light; Temperance is solar light—not the light of the earthly sun but the light of the Divine; the Moon is reflected light; the Empress is Shekinah in manifestation, the radiance of creation. The Moon is the natural mind, wandering and changeable; the Sun represents balance and stability.

In the FRC rituals, Waite reveals that not only does the Temperance angel represent Shekinah, but the angel in the Lovers does as well:

"The union of both must be attained in us, and it is this which you see before you, the wedlock of the soul and the Christ natures, under the wings of Shekinah." (Quote 3 [see Figure 3])

So it seems possible that the Temperance angel in the WS *might* represent Shekinah, despite Waite's insistence that it's neither male nor female; but I think even more than that it represents stability. That seems to be the main message of both Temperance angels; the fact that one bears a solar emblem just further illustrates this.

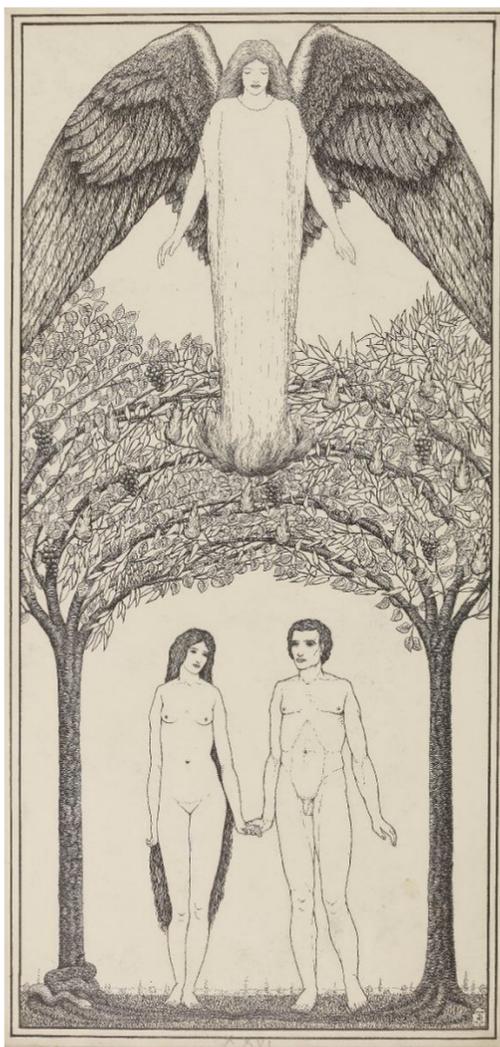


Figure 3

In the WT Temperance, the influences from Chesed and Geburah don't actually meet until they reach Yesod. So what role does Yesod play in this? In Waite's FRC system, Yesod represents the normal intellect, i.e., the natural mind as opposed to higher consciousness. Yesod is the moon. Here are some of Waite's comments from the Theoreticus (Yesod) initiation:

“The Moon is like thought in its inconstancy, a reflected light and a wandering fire. The Sun is like that life of higher consciousness which dwells behind the logical understanding. The Moon is like natural reason, which again is a reflected light. Practise the fixation of this Grade, that you may see through your glass, brightly.” (Quote 4)

Here's another WT image—the Star.

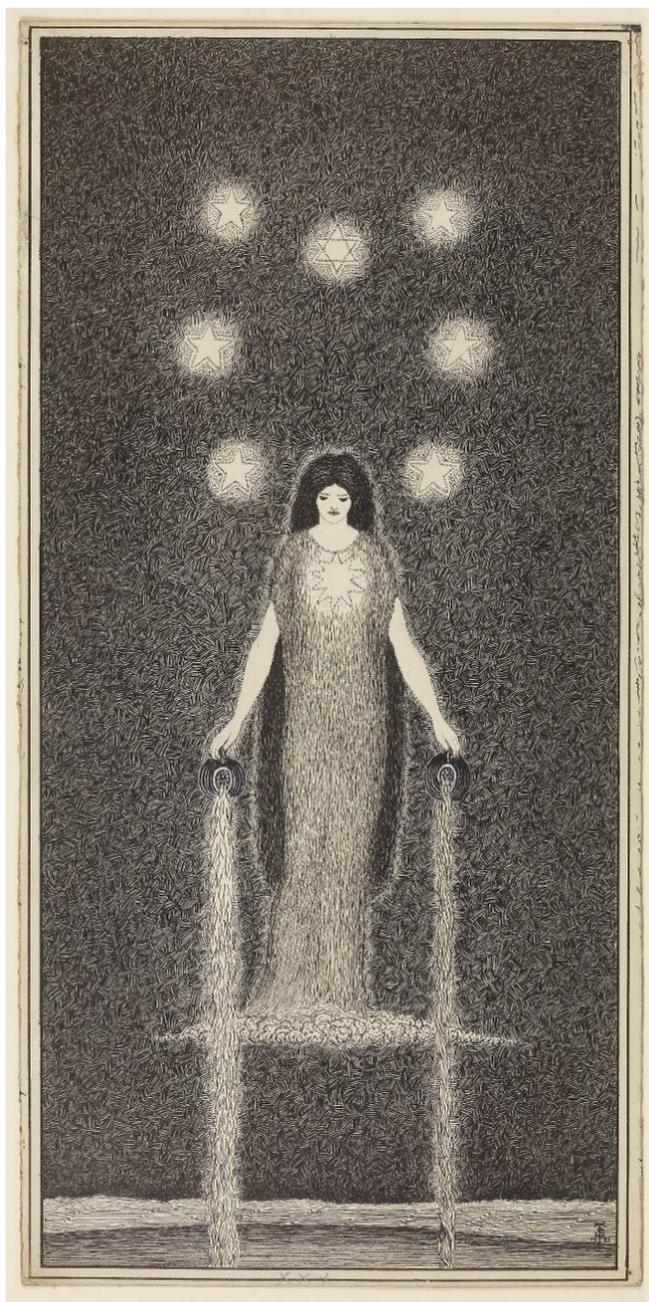


Figure 4

This is Waite's description of this image from the FRC Philosophus ritual:

“The Symbol of the 30th path is an analogue of that which stands first in the present sequence [Temperance]. It is Shekinah again in the act of dispensing the powers and virtues from above. The Pillars of Mercy and Severity are represented by their Sephiroth in the form of stars. Tiphereth is immediately above and appears as a star of six points, by reference to the Christ nature. She herself bears upon her breast the star that corresponds to Yesod, and at her feet is Malkuth, whereon her urns of life are emptied. They are urns of Water and of Fire—the rain of Doctrine, the dew of Divine speech, the great Water of understanding; and the Fire of the Holy Spirit, the tongues of flame, the splendor of Supernal Wisdom.” (Quote 5)

This quote holds several very important clues for the decoding of the WS Temperance image. The context in which he says the above is in a description of three “Shekinah” images, the first being Temperance, then the Moon, and then lastly the Star. Of the Star he says that it is an “analogue” of Temperance, i.e., its symbolism is comparable to that of Temperance. He identifies the star on her breast as Yesod. In the WT Temperance image we see Yesod hanging in midair, now it’s seen as a star on her breast. This should make it very easy to identify the septenary symbol on the breast of the WS Temperance angel—it’s Yesod. Normally, a square indicates the earthly as opposed to the heavenly, so for a long time I thought it must symbolize the earth or the material body; but after finding Waite’s reference to the star as Yesod it got me thinking. Then I found an interesting reference in J. E. Cirlot’s *A Dictionary of Symbols*, “Square,” pg. 307:

“Hence, the ternary symbolism tends to illustrate activity and dynamism (or pure spirit), whereas the quaternary alludes predominantly to things material (or the merely rational intellect).” (Quote 6)

It’s entirely plausible that Waite’s white square represents the rational intellect of Yesod. The white color indicates that it has undergone purification. In his *Manual of Cartomancy*, in the section entitled “The Book of the Secret Word and the Higher Way to Fortune,” Waite gives descriptions for each of the tarot majors in the “three worlds.” It’s pretty revealing to read his comments on Temperance. The description for the World of Human Prudence is pretty mundane and not very interesting, but the other two are very informative. The World of Conformity says, “The mixture of things Divine with things human, for the transmutation of the latter.” And for the World of Attainment, “Immergence of the consciousness; realization of the Divine Immanence.” We see here a mixture of things divine with the mundane. Virtually every meaning that a person can find for the septenary includes something to this effect.

In the PKT Waite comments:

“It is called Temperance, fantastically, because, when the rule of it obtains in our consciousness, it tempers, combines and harmonizes the psychic and material natures. Under that rule we know in our rational part something of whence we came and whither we are going.” (Quote 7)

Compare this with what he said above in Quote 4:

“They are urns of Water and of Fire—the rain of Doctrine, the dew of Divine speech, the great Water of understanding; and the Fire of the Holy Spirit, the tongues of flame, the splendor of Supernal Wisdom.” (Quote 8)

The influences flowing from above have an effect on the rational mind, purifying it and awakening consciousness to its higher purpose. In this state it can hear and understand the “Divine Speech” directly as opposed to theorizing by the reflected light of natural reason. The WS Temperance illustrates this a little better in my opinion because of the crown seen in the distance. It shows “whence we came and whither we are going,” of which we are now becoming aware.

But if the septenary symbolizes the natural mind, why is it on the angel’s breast? A portion from the Theoreticus ritual may partially explain Waite’s reasoning:

“From the Path of Tau, wherein you were consecrated mystically, you have been brought, therefore, into the Sephira Yesod, into the region of the purified mind, and this is the Holy of Holies (the Master indicates Yesod on the Diagram), the Heart of the World, the Place of the Voice, the Place of the Daughter of the Voice, who is Shekinah. There are 22 paths by which the Sephiroth are connected one with another, and they are inscribed on this symbol with the letters of the Hebrew Alphabet. But the Sephiroth are themselves counted as Paths, the number of which is, therefore, 32. That of Yesod corresponds to the 9th Path, and it is called the Purified Intelligence, an understanding in the heart. May that name of grace sink into your own heart. May you be purified in all your ways, as one who is clothed with fine linen, clean and white, which is the righteousness of saints.” (Quote 9)

It seems in Waite’s view the purified mind is different from the natural mind, it is more of an intuitive understanding or knowing “in the heart.”

In Waite’s philosophy, nothing occurring in the unseen world is without effect in the manifested world. Thus the “river of life” (Quote 1) coming down from Chesed and Geburah creates ripples not only in the mind of the initiate but in the material world as well. This is illustrated by the beautiful flowers in Figure 2.

There’s much more to this but it goes beyond the scope of what my intention is here, involving initiation and a lot of intricate (and possibly boring) details. Hopefully I’ve accomplished the purpose for which this paper was written.