

## Air Communion

### Opening Words:

"Without music there can't be any dreams, and without dreams there can't be any fairy tales, and without fairy tales there can't be any courage, and without courage no one would be able to bear any sorrows." - Fredrick Bachman, from 'My Grandmother asked Me'

### Reading for meditation:

"As the wind, which is one on entering creation,  
Conforms its own form to the form of each being,  
So also the One, the *atman* within all beings,  
Assumes all forms, yet exists outside. - Katha Upanishad 2.2.10

### Homily:

Once I agreed to do this service, I wrestled for a long time, with how on earth I was going to come up with an Air Communion. Something as naked and ephemeral as Air is not easily captured. Yes, we could simply breathe together. I could talk about the benefits of a meditative breathing practice, but the worship committee asked me, knowing that I am a Pagan and not a Buddhist. So I'm not going to talk about meditative breathing, because that's not my path. I am going to talk about the mind, the uses of imagination, astrology, and scholarship, all of which are ruled by Air in the east. The thread of Eros, ruled by Water in the west, will balance us. My guide in this will be the renaissance scholar Marsilio Ficino, who was the subject of my Master's thesis. Ficino was not a Pagan, he was nominally a Catholic priest, however he had Pagan tendencies.

There are so many ways to think about air. There is our atmosphere, the invisible layer of gases that surrounds and protects life on our home planet. Air can be regarded not only as necessary for breathing, but also as reinvigorating – as in, the doctor told me to get some fresh air. We 'air a room' as a way of clearing and enlivening it. It can be an impression of a quality or manner given by someone or something such as a relaxed air, or a confident air. Crowds and events can have this quality as well – such as the parade had such a festive air.

Possibly someone may put on airs, which is usually seen as a bad thing as they tend to behave in an annoyingly affected or condescending manner. Or someone may air an opinion or air a grievance publicly. It can also be a jump off the ground on a snowboard in which fancy tricks are done, known as "big air."

"Air", in the sense of the space between, is one of the things that gives shape to our world. Without this space, everything would be all squished together. I like to think of the big bang as the perhaps first breath of the universe – allowing space between things and hence expansion.

In the ancient Greco-Roman world (and indeed, right through to the Renaissance), Air was one of the four classical elements along with Earth, Fire and Water that made up the physical world. The notion of a vacuum was thought to be a contraction in terms. If there was space, there must be something filling it – and that was Air. This continued to be so in the worldview of the alchemists, philosophers, and magicians who followed. The words spirit, inspire, expire, and aspire, all derive from the Latin *spirare* ("to breathe") and Air is associated with all of these. Air was seen as both element and symbol signifying reason, the intellect, the breath of life, intuition, inspiration, and most importantly for our purposes today the soul or psyche and the imagination.

Our guide, Marsilio Ficino was a physician, translator, musician, magician, priest, astrologer, and philosopher in 15<sup>th</sup> century Florence. He is deservedly called one of the most learned and influential thinkers of his age. He revived Platonic and later Neoplatonic philosophy and ritual by translating the entire known works of Plato, Iamblichus, Porphyry, Proclus, Plotinus, and Synesius among others into Latin from the original Greek. In 1489 he published his magnum opus, The Three Books on Life. It is the third of these books that I will primarily be talking about, which is called "On Obtaining Life From the Heavens." (Which is also the realm of Air.) It was a bold blending of philosophy, astrology, magic, and psychology, dealing with everything from diet and medical remedies to meditation and mood-altering techniques. It focused on astrology, planetary influences, ritual, medicine and the soul; it is a "rich and complex exploration of scholarly melancholy, holistic medicine and psychiatry", and prescribed a practice for living a good life in harmony with the heavens (Allen).

I want to talk for a moment about a good life and love, or Eros. Eros is the yearning we have within us to form connections to both the material and the transcendent, even when they seem opposed to each other. This yearning was later termed by both Freud and Jung as 'libido'. Freud viewed it as a purely sexual force and Jung viewed it as 'vitality' or 'life energy' and saw it as driving us to find meaning in the world, the universe, and our lives. The ability to find meaning is perhaps the most important aspect of living a good life.

For Plato and Ficino, a good life demands that the excellence of the cosmos be assimilated into oneself. "One must integrate the beautiful proportions of the character of the physical universe into one's own moral character, and then, and only then, will one see oneself in relation to all else – and all others – in the right perspective. This is not a dispassionate process. Plato always stressed how much love is involved in the process" (Goldstein). Both Plato and Ficino thought what was required to live well was a careful examination of one's assumptions, points of view, ideas and ideologies, which are a function of air, especially those we most cherish, through the compassionate lens of Water. One of Ficino's goals was to teach people how to love, nourish, and educate the imagination to nourish the soul's depth and richness.

Back to Plato, Ficino, and using our imagination to follow the thread of Eros.

Plato talked about daemons – semi-divine beings and guiding spirits; and Ficino talked about planetary influences, and Jung talked about archetypes. They were all really talking about similar guiding forces in human lives. Psychologist James Hillman refers to Ficino as a "Renaissance Patron of Archetypal Psychology." In Ficino's *Book On Obtaining Life from the Heavens*, he spoke of ordering one's life in accordance with 'the heavens' or with 'planetary influences.' Ficino's was a psychology that, like Jung's encompassed and used the tools of mythology, literature, art, philosophy, magic, and religion. What he also used and what we will now be unpacking in our Airy way – is astrology and music.

We human beings are constantly world building as we interact with others. The world I inhabit is not quite the world you inhabit or the one my partner inhabits. The human imagination is always at work – often below the level of our awareness – making meanings, metaphors, analogies, and allegories. And remember, Imagination is in the realm of Air. The trick is to actively engage our imagination. In Jungian terms, Active Imagination is a way of paying attention to our thinking and that uses the imagination as an organ of understanding. Disciplines of active imagination are found within various philosophical, religious and spiritual traditions. It is perhaps best known in the West today through Jung's emphasis on the therapeutic value of this activity. Active Imagination, in Jungian practice, is not spiritual discipline, artistic creativity, transcendence of the worldly, mystical vision, or magical effect, but is a meditative method for healing the psyche. Its purpose is to know the Self.

For Ficino, it was essential to make connections between everyday experience and the deeper life of the soul by examining how planetary influences were playing out. (See insert and explain) We can love and nourish the soul by paying attention to and reflecting on the archetypal possibilities represented by the planets. Especially if we know the broad categories of their influences and the spheres they 'rule over.' "The planets within each of us are to be imagined as deep archetypal patterns ... of psychological life," (Moore) and use this knowledge, "to provide an imaginative awareness of oneself, one's strengths and one's vulnerabilities, especially (the) restrictive tendencies to a particular mode of awareness limiting expression of other modes." (Moore) Ficino saw the human psyche arranged as a 'round of planets' all simultaneously contributing to the music of the soul. A well-tuned soul is one in which archetypal possibilities represented by the planets are carefully distinguished and all represented each with its own tone.

Thus we come to our approach to Air as music. Music, in our table of correspondences, belongs with Water and Eros, so this is our bringing together of Air and Water. An air is a short tune or short melodious composition, typically a song – an aria. We all know the joy of performing or listening to music, and that the universal experience of music affects us across time and cultures. Anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss once said that music is “the supreme mystery of human knowledge.”

The magic of music is woven deeply throughout our human history. The idea that there is a corresponding similarity in pattern, nature, or structure between human beings and the universe is an old, old one. The concept of microcosm/macrocosm views human beings as a smaller representation of the universe and the universe as having an anthropomorphic existence is found throughout the history of thought from ancient times through the renaissance, and into today.

One of Ficino's most profound insights was that imagination, music, magic, and love were different aspects of a seamless whole, and that the world, and indeed the entire cosmos, is structured musically – that hearing and performing music are the best ways to link one's own soul to the sensual, erotic soul of the cosmos – to God. Music could heal mental and physical ills. Ficino held that the complex mass of vibrating air stirred by voice or instrument could literally come to life. This living song penetrated the listener's spirit, tracing images

that moved both body and soul. And each note could correspond to a specific planetary influence or archetype.

“Music, as Ficino explains in his book 'On Obtaining Life From The Heavens', is itself an airy spirit which directly affects the human spirit – that subtle bond between soul and body – in the same way as the patterns of the stars.” (Voss) Ficino considered music to be the most effective form of ‘imitating’ the heavens, through giving audible images to the ‘secret’ properties of the planets. If we think archetypes for 'planets', we have a tool for psycho-spiritual ritual that can be quite powerful. They do not have to be considered as metaphysical entities, or as determining factors in human life – as in the traditional belief in the inescapable influence of the planets in the sky. Of course, these would not be the terms that Ficino himself would have used, but they get at the truth of what he was advocating using language that a modern ear can understand.

Neuroscientist and musician, Jamshed Bharucha noted that creative domains, like music, allow humans to connect in a synchronized way, helping us develop a group identity and to work together – which was an immensely important advantage for keeping the human species alive. ((PDF) Rhythmic entrainment as a musical affect induction mechanism Jan 2017 NEUROPSYCHOLOGIA).

Daniel Levitin, also a neuroscientist and musician notes in his book, "The World in Six Songs" that songs are efficient systems for preserving tribal histories, transmitting essential how-to information from generation to generation and communicating spiritual feelings and deep emotions. In his discussion of the music of friendship, he explores the role of synchronous, coordinated song and movement in creating strong bonds between early humans, arguing that these allowed the formation of large groups and, eventually, society as we know it.

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Being in society brings us back to the idea of communion and Air. Music and society.

*Explain toning, the bottles (Lg = Jupiter, Sm = Venus, human voice = Sun) and the communion and do it.*

Air Communion:

I know that care for the soul does not offer the illusion of a problem-free life. *Tone*

I appreciate the mystery of being merely human. *Tone*

I honour the sorrows within my joys. *Tone*

I recognise my joys within my sorrows *Tone*

I honour my masculine/feminine nature *Tone*

Within the labyrinth of my soul resides a beast, true, but also an angel *Tone*

In the star-born cosmic dance of my being, I am whole *Tone*

“Contemplating the strange, I’m comforted by this narcotic thought: I know my soul.” *Tone* (McKay)

Footnotes and Further Reading:

Allen, M.J.B., Rees, V., Davies, M. eds (2002) *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*  
Leiden: Brill

Goldstein, R. (2014) *Plato at the Googleplex: Why Philosophy Won’t Go Away*. United States: Vintage

Levitin, D (2008) *The World in Six Songs*. Penguin

McKay, C (1889-1948) <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/i-know-my-soul>

Moore, T. (1982) *The Planets Within*. Lindisfarne Books

Voss, A. (2006) *Marsilio Ficino (Western Esoteric Masters Series)*. North Atlantic Books

## INSERTS FOR THE ORDER OF SERVICE

Hymn #123 – SPIRIT OF LIFE

*Spirit of Life, come unto me.  
Sing in my heart all the stirrings of compassion.  
Blow in the wind, rise in the sea;  
Move in the hand, giving life the shape of justice.  
Roots hold me close; wings set me free;  
Spirit of Life, come to me, come to me.*

*Spirit of Life, come unto me.  
Stir in my soul all the mystery of Creation.  
Teach me to care, peace let there be;*

*Lead me to truth, showing forth the path of wisdom.  
 Deepen my trust; help me to see;  
 Spirit of Life, come to me, come to me.*

### TABLE OF ELEMENTAL CORRESPONDENCES

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>East</b>	<b>South</b>	<b>West</b>	<b>North</b>
<b>Element</b>	Air	Fire	Water	Earth
<b>Tarot Suit</b>	Swords	Wands	Cups	Disks/Pentacles
<b>Season</b>	Spring	Summer	Fall	Winter
<b>Time</b>	Dawn	Noon	Dusk	Midnight
<b>Power</b>	To Know	To Will	To Dare	To Keep Silent
<b>Geometry</b>	Point	Line	Plane	Sphere
<b>Learning</b>	Study	Desire	Integration	Application
<b>Moon</b>	Waxing	Full	Waning	Dark
<b>Animals</b>	Eagle	Spider	Snake/Whale	Bull/Bear
<b>Offering</b>	Incense	Candle	Water	Salt
<b>Angel</b>	Michael	Ariel	Raphael	Gabriel
<b>Ritual acts</b>	Meditation or Inspiration	Raising Energy Invocations	Chanting or Singing	Invoking or Closing the Circle

## PLANETARY CORRESPONDENCES

Planet	Metal	Day	Colour	Stones	Herbs	Symbols	Rules Over
The Sun	Gold	Sunday	Yellow, orange	Amber, topaz	Sunflower, Marigold, Heliotrope, St. John's Wort, Calendula	Lion, heart	The will, paternity, ambition, creativity, leadership, confidence
The Moon	Iron	Monday	White, blue, silver	Moonstone, pearl		Bow and arrow, crab, cat, sphinx	The subconscious, instincts, imagination, emotion, maternity
Mercury	Aluminium or mercury	Wednesday	Purple	Opal, agate	Fennel, chickweed	Wand, Caduceus	The mind, the link between spirit and matter, intelligence, adaptable, communication
Venus	Copper	Friday	Green, Pink	Turquoise, emerald	Rose, violet, apple, baby's breath	Dove, sparrow, swan	Love, peace, agreements, cooperation, fertility, joy, good fortune
Mars	Iron	Tuesday	Red	Ruby, garnet, bloodstone	Gentian, Ginger, Mustard, Nettles	Sword, horse, bear, wolf	
Jupiter	Tin	Thursday	Blue	Lapis lazuli	Balm of Gilead, garlic, fig, walnut	Eagle, dolphin, stag	Wisdom, optimism, enthusiasm, increase and opportunity
Saturn	Lead	Saturday	Black	Onyx	Aconite, ash, hellebore	Mole, crocodile	Safety, power, success, boundaries, melancholy