

The Temple of Saturn

In times of yore such as in ancient Rome or further back in Greece, nature was too mysterious and diverse for men to feel at ease with its unknown powers or safely interact with its beauty. And so temples were built to celebrate its holy mysteries.

If you wanted to draw near to the sea with its flowing, giving, renewing hope, and endless adaptability, then you might enter the temple of Neptune. If a priest or priestess was worth anything, if you engage in a ritual or festive celebration, you would leave the temple feeling at least for a while that the sea and you had become friends. That vast blue green expanse from horizon to horizon would be alive within you. You would feel your nature is love and that we are in the end all one.

If you wanted to worship the sun with its dazzling light and endless power to imbue the earth with life, then you would enter the temple of Apollo. And there you would be initiated into a great mystery—that in mastering our limitations we shall attain to divine, immortal being while still in human form. Our innermost and true essence is always close to us—within our hearts if we look for it.

Or if you have some great conflict requiring your total will, if you seek self-mastery, or if you are about to go to war, then you enter the temple of Mars. Place a small vial of your blood on the altar. Then pray and meditate. And finally take back the vial and anoint yourself with this blood which now, through the force of your faith and meditation, mixes with the life force of the god. No matter whatever desires and needs may bind you to life, at least for a while you are now ready to give your entire being without distraction to the task or mission to which you are committed.

Mars is like that. It inspires you so you feel the power of the universe is flowing through you. For the sake of your cause, you may end up sacrificing yourself, but your exuberance and inner sense of fulfillment outweigh the needs of your mortal self.

And certainly everyone will at some point wish to visit the temple of Venus. Julius Caesar himself declared his blood line descended from this

goddess. War will bring you prestige, honor, and glory. But if you wish to rule an empire or truly lead men so that you capture their imagination and loyalty, Venus will give you an edge. Charisma and personal magnetism are basic foundations of leadership.

All the same, if you enter the temple of Venus, expect the air to be filled with enchantment. Many seek love for its pleasures and bliss. And indeed if you wish to overcome the barriers separating one from another bliss and pleasure are often required in no small measure.

Nonetheless, Venus is the mistress who has mastered ecstasy—to reach beyond the self and become one with another or something greater than you. In love, you transcend life's limitations while simultaneously uniting with its deepest purposes. When you walk out of a temple of Venus after being initiated into its mysteries, you will finally experience body, soul, and mind for the first time in true harmony.

Ancient Rome. Walk down the street and you can feel the city's heartbeat. There is order and also brutality. There are men of great power and also always conspiracies. There is hard work, industry, and productivity and also smoldering passions in individuals and raw emotions ready to erupt in the masses.

There is excitement in the air—foreign wars, expanding territories, and also people from many cultures. And there is hopelessness, misery, oppression, and despair.

Then there is the Temple of Saturn. 23 BC in Rome under Imperator Gaius Julius Caesar Augustus--you could walk over to the foot of Capitoline hill in the western end of the Forum Romanum in Rome.

If you are sensitive, even before you reach the staircase, you can sense the aura of the temple before you. It is not the enticement and festivity of the Temple of Venus. No, this is as if you are out in nature. It is overcast. There is no wind and it is silent. It is as if time has stopped. Suddenly your memories are more alive than events in the outer world.

You climb the steps toward the columns and the entrance. And you remember your mythology. You think of Orpheus descending into and returning again from Hades, Psyche crossing the River Styx separating life and death, or Odysseus speaking with the shade of his mother who is among the dead.

But the Underworld is not your destination. You are entering a temple. Nonetheless, you are beginning to view your life from a great distance as if you have suddenly had to let go of everything you know and stepped into the unknown.

If you come here nearly any day in the late afternoon, you might see on these steps a woman sitting unmoving or a man holding his head in his hands. Though you may sense anguish, strangely they are not depressed. Rather, they feel a sense of relief. As they climbed the steps whatever distress or sorrow held them has suddenly let go. Here strong emotions wane and detachment takes control.

As you approach the entrance, the air is slightly cooler. You smell the incense from within, perhaps Myrrh, Poppy, or Cypress. The scent carries a mixture of feelings—something dangerous, formidable, and yet also like a trustworthy mentor, like a general who has had a bad day and yet is happy to meet with his advisor.

We pass through the entrance. You may feel your stomach slightly tighten and a blood pulse in your head. You take a step forward.

And then again it hits you. To enter the Temple of Saturn is like entering the gates of a graveyard—not as one who comes to mourn but as one who is now among the dead.

It is somber. There is little room for regret or sorrow. There is finality and closure. You carry nothing from your life with you. No possessions, no honor, and no fame.

Saturn is time experienced as nightmare. Life is short and the end comes quick. You sense horror, tension, anxiety, and fear, but there is

nothing that seems to define these emotions. They are just there like a nearly invisible mist surrounding you that follows you everywhere.

The temple now appears gloomy, dark, forbidding, and haunting. There is a sense of belonging nowhere. There is sadness, despair, feeling alone and abandoned, without support and without a home. You are on your own.

In the pageantry of life with this mood weighing upon you, you feel you have a small part to play and nothing you do makes any difference. No matter your station in life, the five senses offer no real stimulation. The feelings you share with others contain no celebration. For all the freedom you have or do not have, you might as well be living in a jail cell for all the difference it makes.

Ah, Mamercus, a priest I know, comes to greet us. He is from an aristocratic family named Bassianus. For some reason, he is incredibly relaxed. He walks as if he is strolling alongside a stream out in the woods. We enter a small room with an altar and candles. There is a vase in the center filled with water.

We sit down and he begins chanting. The sounds are hypnotic and spellbinding. But it is not a chant as much as a song. It recapitulates our experiences with life from the point of view of Saturn. This Saturn priest is a bard and he is singing a song of what it is to be alive.

Mamercus could be intoning a chorus of a play in a Roman theater except we are on the stage and it is our lives on display. The priest says, “It is not as you think. Time can be a friend. You begin life. You are given gifts. It is how you use what you have been given that counts.

“Saturn only asks that you find in life something of great value to work at or to accomplish. This can be inside yourself or in the outer world. Make something that endures.

“Rome itself is part of this struggle. There are buildings that we build that shall stand for thousands of years. What emperor can enter this city made of stone and leave it filled with marble? What general can set aside

his rank and power and return to his villa leaving behind a tradition of honor that shall guide men for ages in the future?

“Each of us is a part of two worlds—an outer world and inner, spiritual world. We live and operate equally in both even though the outer world seems solid and real and the inner, the spiritual world, feels like a dream.

“You will know when you have entered Saturn’s dreams. There are soul to soul and heart to heart connections. What is within others transforms you and you in turn pass on a flame of inspiration to others.

“And yet there is more. Saturn itself can become your spirit guide. In this case, you are not on a spiritual quest. You are not operating as part of some mythic journey of some great hero.

“No. Saturn sets before you work to accomplish on earth that shall endure through all ages of the world and be of value to all races and people.

“You will know when you have undergone the initiation of Saturn. You perceive all men are your brothers and sisters. You see all nations as one community of humanity. And what you do in each moment would and will be honored as a work of the body, heart, and spirit whether it is witnessed thousands of years ago or thousands of years in the future. The words you speak are truth and illuminate like the sun.

“And yet this is not so far away, is it? Who among us has not shined like the sun and the moon to others in a dark night of their lives? To meet another where they are, to be with them and to comfort them, and then to walk by their side to a place of freedom and light—is this not the greatest and most sacred celebration of life?

“We are here on earth to learn, to grow, to experience new things, and to transform into something more than what we now are.

“And yet Saturn stalks us demanding what even the greatest of world teachers are hard pressed to achieve—

“To demonstrate that we have learned all that can be learned from life in the worlds of form we must show that we are able to create love where love does not exist and that we are able to be clear in our minds and free in our hearts under the worst and most difficult conditions of life.

“The voice of Saturn says to each of us, ‘Learn to be as me—weep not when death and fate take away. Renounce regret, sorrow, and loss. Every ending, separation, farewell, and goodbye is a sacred rite in my eyes. It contains my blessing and my voice.’”

For a little while we sit in silence allowing the words of the priest to echo through our memories and to clarify our choices.

And now our time with Mamercus comes to an end. It is ten o’clock at night. We walk out from among the columns of the Temple of Saturn in ancient Rome. We return to our hovel where the rats occasionally jump up on the table or else perhaps to our villa on the hill where we sit by the fountain out back in the garden where there is running water and statues made from marble.

In both cases we know that the life we now live is but a cloak we have put on. We shall take it off and put it on again many times in many different lands and we shall play roles in many different societies; until at last we master the lessons of the physical world and ascend. And then we shall sit in a circle among divine beings that hold in their hands the powers of creation. At which point, Saturn will have accomplished its mission—to insure we attain absolute freedom.