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## QUAREIA—THE INITIATE

Module IV—Birth, Death, and the  
Underworld, Part II

Lesson 5: The Steps of the Ladder

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# WELCOME

*Welcome to this lesson of the Quareia curriculum.*

*The Quareia takes a magical apprentice from the beginning of magic to the level of adeptship and beyond. The course has no superfluous text; there is no dressing, no padding—everything is in its place and everything within the course has a good reason to be there.*

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*So remember—in order for this course to work, it is wise to work with the lessons in sequence. If you don't, it won't work.*

*Yours,*

*Josephine McCarthy*



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## QUAREIA—THE INITIATE

### Module IV—Birth, Death, and the Underworld, Part II

#### Lesson 5: The Steps of the Ladder

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In a previous lesson you looked briefly at the Ladder, an inner construct that moves dead souls from one realm to another. It is not the image of a ladder that is important; rather it is the concept of overcoming certain obstacles while ‘climbing up.’

This visionary dynamic has versions all over the world, from climbing a ladder, stairs, large hands,<sup>1</sup> or a mountain. It is an aspect of mystery religions and paths in virtually every culture, and appears as a person reaching upwards in ascent. We see it this way in dreams and visions because this is how it presents to us: *up* is future, rebirth, the Divine realm, the Garden, and so forth, whereas *down* is retirement from the cycle, sleep, and needful transformation.

The Ladder<sup>2</sup> is an angelic structure heavily involved in humanity’s evolution, and probably that of other species. It appears not only in death, but also in life for a variety of reasons. And not only is it a structure, but it is also an energetic dynamic that can play out in the life of a mystic or magician.

It is important to recognise both the structure and the dynamic when they appear in your life: as a magician it gives you a sense of your own

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<sup>1</sup>Angelic ones.

<sup>2</sup>I will use this term just for clarity and ease.

evolution and also signals that you are stepping deeper into mystical magical realms.

For clarity I will look at the two expressions of the Ladder separately. Then we will move on to examples and research to give you a good grasp of what is going on when this structure appears. This subject has its own lesson because of its importance to the magician not only for their own inner evolution but also for ritual and visionary work.

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### *The Ladder of the inner worlds*

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This is something that sometimes appears spontaneously during certain visionary work, usually at the edge of the Abyss. The magician or visionary mystic is presented with a large angelic hand to step onto, a ladder, or a stairway; or they are transported upwards by angelic beings.

It cannot be forced or triggered by the magician; it is always presented while the magician is doing something else. It signals a time when the magician is presented with the opportunity to evolve at a deep level, and is an episode as potentially life-changing as crossing the Abyss.

It does not mean that the magician has become something that they were not before—you do not get a grade, a fancy hat, and a badge—rather it means the magician’s deeper self is unfolding in spiritual evolution and the spontaneous vision seats it in the magician’s consciousness. The unfolding effects of such a milestone do not often become apparent until years later: it signals the start of a new, tougher, and more demanding life path for the magician.

It indicates that the magician is slowly stepping out of the cycle of destruction in life, and beginning to bridge into the cycle of *inner regeneration*. This does not mean an easier life; it means that a deeper profundity within the person’s eternal spirit is finally finding a way to bridge itself into the magician’s conscious life. Over the years from that point onwards the magician will be tested, challenged, and expected to walk a more careful and considered pathway through the Mysteries.

As the path narrows—“walking the sword edge”—so the life lessons come stronger, faster, and bring more insight. It gets harder to hide from

yourself and your own deeds, and should you misstep the results will come hard and fast. You really begin to gain an understanding of what the Egyptians called “the Rule of Ma’at.” The experience of the Inner Ladder in vision brings the powers of Ma’at into sharp focus.

No amount of rituals or visions can force this event: it flows naturally within the cycle of your own fate web and the evolution of your soul. That does not mean that a magician who does not have this spontaneous experience is not evolved: it has to time in with events in your life so you can build upon the experience in your daily life. If your fate path has a good intersection where you can build upon the inner experience in daily life, it will time in with that, however long that takes.

You can, however, observe the process as a bystander in some instances, which we will look at later in the initiate section. But first you need to understand the outer processes that lead up to it and also trigger it.

Inner life and outer life are never separate. If the two are not compatible, there is less chance of this dynamic triggering in your life. For a magician, that means recognising the various life events, powers, and intersections that happen in your outer life that signal you are either walking towards the Ladder or climbing it.

Outer manifestations that signal interactions with the ladder have been deliberately woven into some magical graded systems, and some of the “initiation rituals” simply reflect on the process psychologically. The really dumb magical systems think that doing a grade ritual is all there is to it, which is just silly.

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### *The Ladder in life*

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Ancient and old texts abound with references to the Ladder in terms of the steps of magical evolution and initiatory experiences. It is folly to think that these steps are simply mechanised levels of magical and mystical achievement; rather they are deep and lasting life experiences that affect how the inner spirit approaches and accesses the Inner Ladder that takes us to the threshold of Divinity: this is the dynamic of the *Merkaba*. In later lessons in the initiate section we will look more deeply into various aspects of the Ladder and the *Merkaba*, but for now let’s concentrate on the foundation, which is life and how you operate within it.

When you step onto a magical or mystical path, your fate web changes, springs to life, and becomes more concentrated and more immediate. From then on, everything you do in life and everything that confronts you, for both good and bad, is not only directly connected to the Ladder, but it will also affect how the Ladder's steps of ascent will manifest in your inner and outer life. You step away from the mundane and step into the mystical union of man, nature, and the Divine. In this path you always have a choice: a choice to act or not, a choice to forge forward or give in, and a choice on how—or not—you balance your scales.

In a way it is a bit like growing up from being a self-centred toddler and moving towards adulthood.

For a toddler, life is about wants and needs. The child necessarily views the world from a very self-centred perspective: this is simply nature's survival programming.

As the child grows up, they have to learn the painful lessons of having to go to school when they don't want to, having to eat things they do not want to eat, and having to learn that the money mum or dad takes out of the ATM machine is not an endless source of wealth to be spent on toys, but hard-earned cash that provides for life's essentials.

When a magician steps onto the magical path, an octave of this evolving and maturing springs to life. Through living a magical life the magician learns the hard but beautiful realities of life, nature, Divinity, and the inner worlds; and how all these things directly influence your life and vice versa. You step out of being a mundane 'toddler' and step into the fast lane of mystical awareness.

How you approach these steps on the Ladder defines how you mature and progress as a magician: to hold and wield power needs a mature hand. No one hands the power of a multinational company to a fresh-faced sixteen-year-old. Nor do the inner worlds hand power to an immature, weak, power-hungry magician.

The steps on the Ladder that manifest in life forge and strengthen the Ladder's rungs for your inner visionary ascent: what you do in life can directly affect how accessible—or not—this structure of ascent becomes for you. Some make the mistake of thinking that simply living a pure and moral life will forge the rungs of the ascent; but as you will now know, life is not that cut and dried, and what is moral in one culture is not in another.

Cultural morality has no place in this structure; it is the direct, individual balance that is unique to you that forges each step for you to stand upon. You are never pitted against sections of humanity; rather you are constantly standing in front of a mirror so that your own personal successes and failures, your own creative and destructive actions, become your teachers.

It all comes back to *knowing oneself*, the maxim of the temple which one constantly strives for in the quiet of ones own spirit. Your own personal relationship with the outer world, with nature, with the inner powers, and with the Divine brings you to a better understanding of yourself and everything around you.

As each understanding dawns, a rung of the ladder forms. If you live by that understanding, the rung strengthens to carry your weight. The less imbalance you carry, the less inner weight you have to carry, and the lighter you become when it comes to treading upon this vehicle of ascent.

Everyone evolves in their own time and at their own speed. How you treat everything around you, and how you understand your deep connection to everything around you, defines to you, in your own way, how to forge your path through life. We learn just as much from our failures and mistakes as we do from our successes; and the more the ladder is forged in life, the more you begin to see the true interconnect-edness of everything. This in turn challenges us to mature and to be mindful of how we as magicians affect everything around us, all the time.

You should know enough by now to understand what this means for you personally, and how to translate that into everyday living. But to what do we ascend upon this ladder?

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### *An ascent to what?*

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The Mysteries of the Merkaba are old indeed and not specific to Jewish mysticism alone. Once you understand this aspect of the Mysteries you will spot versions of it in various cultures with mystical or magical aspects in their religious/spiritual practice. It is something inherent to humanity, and is the part of the magical or mystical path where the path itself starts to really narrow and become a path of Hercules.

In visionary terms the ascent can take a human through various layers of the inner powers of creation. There is a layer of the Garden, the inner

template for nature itself, where it is always balanced; there is the layer of the creative powers which are experienced as vast beings; and finally there is the layer of the Divine realm where the eternal spirit experiences the Divine presence, or as nearly as it is possible for a living human to experience it without dying. The Divine presence is not a man in a white robe and a long beard, but the pure, eternal, conscious power that is constantly seeking expression.

The experience of ascent is not to pull you away from your living humanity; it is to reconnect with the Divine within you—and all substance. Just as we reach down into the depths of the Underworld to reach the patterns of physical manifestation in the depths of the planetary vessel, so we can also reach up to reconnect with the powers of creation of which we are an expression.

To reach only one way is unbalanced; to reach both ways is to reconnect with Perfect Balance, with the Fulcrum. Then we come to an understanding that our human life is about being the fulcrum while in physical manifestation.

It is far easier for us to reach ‘down,’ as we are substance seeking the pattern of substance. To reach up, beyond and before substance, is to reach out of ourselves in our present form—which is what makes it so hard and difficult. And yet through that process we bring all the impulses of creation and destruction together: *we mend the shattered vessel.*

These various layers of the ladder change us deeply as magicians, and form the major impulse behind ceasing to ‘do’ magic and literally ‘becoming’ magic: everything a balanced adept does affects change around them simply by their presence or conscious projection. All very highbrow! But that process began for you when you started your magical training, and in the initiate phase of your training you will begin to forge and strengthen the rungs of the Ladder; or in different imagery *build your vehicle.*

As you study an aspect of magic it will externalise and present around you in everyday life for you to engage with and learn from. How you act and approach such presentations, how you stand up to the challenges, and what choices you make from gnosis, define how you develop as a magician.



## *About the practical work*

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Working with the Ladder in vision is very much an adept area of work, but to prepare for that, the best work you can do is research to give you an idea of how such things were documented by past mystics and magicians. The research will also help you should you spontaneously come across the Ladder in vision, which can happen at any point in a magical life.

When you do this research, look for and read the original texts, not someone's interpretation of them. A lot of these texts and the images that went with them were drawn from deep visionary and mystical experiences. Often when scholars, priests, and historians try to make sense of them, they devolve down into psychology, religious dogma, or, in more modern times, flights of fancy—aliens and the like.

Your job is not to interpret the following visions and writings, but merely to read and absorb them: let them do their own work in your consciousness. This will let you slowly make inner connections and allow the revelations of the text to speak to you directly over time. This will often come in the form of dreams, unexpected imagery in visionary work, and the 'ahha!' moment that comes to you out of the blue.

Some of this research consists of Christian religious texts<sup>3</sup> where the more ancient texts had been absorbed and then retranslated into moral codes. This is where it can get complicated. The mystical element of the Ladder in life does have a bearing on how you live your life, but not in a dogmatic, rule-laden way. It is really important to understand this in order to avoid getting stuck in the dead end of moral purity.

A lot of the Ladder's aspects in life are about how you live your life. But they are not about being a moral person; they are about being a *balanced* person so that you can delve deep into the inner, Divine aspects of humanity without tearing yourself or everything around you to pieces.

For example, in the Christian Mysteries of the Ladder, there is an aspect of the ladder called *subduing the stomach*. This is translated by Christian writers into "avoiding gluttony," or taking up fasting in order to purify the soul. This in turn teaches that it is "bad in Gods eyes" to enjoy something and 'good' to abstain. It is immediately turned into a

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<sup>3</sup>Such as John Climacus.

battle of good and evil: gluttony is a Christian sin. This traps the mystic in the dead end of religious virtue as way to ascend the Ladder, which fails miserably.

Subduing of the stomach is more about teaching the mystic or magician how to eat to feed their body with what it needs to keep it strong—and therefore able to withstand the physical effects of deep visionary work. If you eat things that are bad or damaging for you, it weakens your body. This makes deep visionary work more likely to impact your health severely, which in turn will block you from deep inner communion. Subduing the stomach becomes discipline of giving the body what it needs and when it needs it, and not eating for the sake of it. Sometimes the stomach needs a rest, so we fast a little. This not only helps the digestion, at a deeper level it puts you back in the driving seat of your body, and not the other way around. But this is done from necessity, and is not about battling the body.

If you are heavily overweight from overeating, are diabetic from eating too much sugar, have heart disease because of a bad diet, drink too much alcohol, etc., your vessel is damaged. The damage will limit how deeply you can step into the inner mysteries; hence if you wish to reach as far as humanly possible into that inner experience, how you tend your body is very important. It is always about *finding and maintaining balance*.

Can you see how necessary actions become transformed into a good versus evil dogma when approached by someone who has not actually done the work themselves? Keep all this in mind as you read through the various texts you will find. Hence my warning not to read the commentaries, just to read the text. And where the text has been written from a place of ignorance, spot the mysteries hidden within the dogmatic text.

Remember, ascent is about reaching deep into the inner consciousness of creation and connecting with the deep, Divine roots of our existence. It is about working in vision to consciously reconnect with the powers of creation and destruction.

Often the people who read these texts and copied them or commented on them were not adepts of the Mysteries, and the visionary aspects hidden within the texts was either not understood or overlooked entirely. Some of the Greek philosophers recognized this and commented on it, but in general, always remember: the Mysteries hide in plain sight. If you don't understand them, you do not see them. This is why you are given a lot of research and reading to do, so that in stages you will slowly learn to spot the keys—and later you will learn to work with them.

You may find yourself going back to earlier reading from your apprentice training as more layers unfold themselves to you: you will find yourself gaining a deeper layer of understanding as you progress in your development.

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## *Task: Research*

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### **Ladder of Divine Ascent**

Look up and read *Ladder of Divine Ascent* by John Climacus (seventh century). There are English translations available on the internet. Dodge the dogma!

### **Poetics of Ascent**

Get and read *Poetics of Ascent* by Naomi Janowitz. This book is the first English translation of *Maaseh Merkabah*, an aspect of early Jewish mystical texts known as *Hekhalot* or *Merkabah texts*.

Don't read the commentary and explanations, just read the actual translated texts. You are looking for the visionary aspects of the texts. Don't try to decipher them, just read them, and a particular part may jump out at you. Read that part to yourself a few times, then read them out loud, in nature if you can. Learn to absorb, do, and just be: let things cook within you rather than trying to make it an intellectual test.

### **Traversing stars in death and vision**

Research what you can on traversing the stars in death and vision in different ancient religions. You may be drawn to a particular version or culture; just let your curiosity lead you. Stay away from modern interpretations, popular internet theories, and the like: stay with the images and the texts themselves. Let them speak to you.

### **Genesis 28**

Read *Genesis 28* (again), the dream of Jacob. Note the connection between the Ladder and the earth, the sacredness of the land, and the stone pillow.

Think about what you know of stones, focused land power areas, and of something that reaches from the land to the stars that enables the human to ascend and descend.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Persian Mysteriess of Mithras**

Look up the Persian Mysteries of Mithras, and the Ladder. It will be hard to find something that is not Masonic or reconstructionist, but look anyway, just in case.

### **The Four Rabbis**

Look up *Pardes*. Read the story of the *Four Rabbis* (there are a few different versions).

### **Ezekiel 1–3**

Read *Ezekiel* 1–3. Pay close attention to the mention of the *Chayot*.<sup>5</sup> Ponder on the presentation of ox/bull, raptor, lion, and man. Think about some of the deity presentations in ancient religions. In some cultures they are angels or guardians; in others they are deities. It doesn't matter, those are just titles we give beings. Think about how, why, and where these presentations appear in various texts.

### **The Apis Bull**

Read up on the Apis Bull in ancient Egypt, looking for the early images and beliefs as opposed to the much later versions.

There are no writing tasks for this research. Just take your own notes so that you can refer back to them in the future. By reading, looking, thinking, dreaming, and then moving on, you will allow these various strands of the Mysteries to weave their way into your deeper self.

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<sup>4</sup>And remember Plato's *Republic*, *The Vision of Ayr*.

<sup>5</sup>Look that word up if you do not understand it.

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