

Transitioning with Hermes

through times of change

Hermes is always nearby.

When writing and journaling he is certainly close by, especially when reflecting on times of transitions. In the last few pieces of writing he has been in the background, and now it's time to bring him out of the shadows (though I think it fair to say that Hermes does like the shadows) to honour Hermes, our guide through transition. When writing of Pan, we met Hermes as his proud father. Like father, like son: both are multifarious and mischievous. When reflecting on Hestia, Hermes was there too. They are paired together in *The Homeric Hymn to Hestia* – Hermes is the outer traveller; Hestia, the inner voyager, complementing and supporting one another. Hestia waits at home for the pilgrims that Hermes brings to her door. And when considering Kairos, Hermes is also present as he is the guardian who opens the gate, whether that is to Hestia's home place or into the moment of Opportunity.

Mostly familiar with Hermes as a youthful god and a second-generation Olympian, his mythic personality is much older dating back another millennium to the Mycenaean period where he was often worshipped as a chthonic god of fertility and boundary. He has numerous epithets and images - his endless appellations range from being swift-footed to long-winded, from wayfarer to gate-turner.¹ Having numerous forms, Hermes carries so many of our projections, especially now, in his guises as *alexikakos*, the evil averter, and *pompos*, as our guide through these critical times.

Hermes is present when there is an exchange with others, whether that is on public transportation or in a transit lounge, in the marketplace or on the stock market floor, in the CBD or on the outskirts of town. Let's not forget Hermes in currency exchange, as the mercantile god, profiteer, retailer and giver of good things. As a god of the business sphere, trade and stock market, I doubt He wants obliteration of his economic world; but I am sure He would want to see genuine reform and clever courses of action that stimulate financial systems. Behind the closed doors of the lockdown Hermes is available for consultation; all we need are the right questions.

A god with many faces and countless disguises, he is a handy companion and benefic god to have on your side in times of transition. Particularly pertinent roles that Hermes has at the moment are as guide, messenger, teacher and leader. His appearances and disappearances lead us into and out of our soul's essential experiences needed at this time. With our shops, businesses, entertainments centres, places of congregation and assembly closed, Hermes is not as visible in the outer world. It is as if he has taken us to the doorsill of Hestia and we are gathered at her hearth. So when the marketplaces and shopping centres are closed, where do we find Hermes?

As Hermes is a god with many appearances we will encounter him in many ways, but not as usual in the outer world as that is closed for now. As a god of the in-between, we generally will find him where there are borders or thresholds, when things are shape-shifting or rapidly changing, in transition and uncertainty. As a god of words, language and conversion, he can be paradoxical and inconsistent. His voice is in the new language of Covid-19: 'flattening of the curve', 'abundance of caution', 'social distancing'. We are told "to come together by staying apart." We have a bunch of new idioms and lyrics.

Pathos and Humour are entwined. But in Hermes' sleight of hand, clarity arises out of confusion. But first there is confusion. To find the clarity we descend into the confusion.

There is no doubt we are not only in transition collectively, but personally, as being essential parts of the collective, we are touched and changed in some way.

In times of transition there is suspension, since the ways of the past no longer are available or appropriate or viable. A threshold has been crossed and we can't turn back, yet we cannot move forward either, as we cannot see the way for that to happen. We are suspended, in limbo or what we often refer to as *liminal* – on the brink of something we cannot yet know. We are drifting without the security of the past to anchor us, nor the harbour of the future to contain us. This is the landscape that Hermes inhabits and he will be there when you find yourself in the interlude, when the pause button is on. He found Priam and Odysseys and Orestes and Persephone; I am sure he will find us –

Hermes appears in many ways:

- Δ to the philosophical he is a book, a thought, an innovative idea, a resolution or a teaching that is reconnecting us to what we genuinely value;
- Δ to the pragmatic, Hermes appears as a scientific breakthrough, an economic reversal or a functional timetable that can be used more efficiently and sustainably;
- Δ to the logical he is a considered plan, a statistical survey, a detailed summary or a well-thought through agenda that can provide more consciousness and perspective;
- Δ to the sensitive He appears as an inspiration, a feeling, a reconnection with the past, a memory that stirs the soul and inspires more compassion and patience.

But for everyone his appearance is as if by happenstance, by chance, often fleeting or by accident, always memorable and soulful. Hermes appears at the station to guide us to the next one when the time is right.

Another epithet for Hermes was *psychopompos*, the guide of the souls, generally into the Underworld. However, he was also a guide out of the Underworld as Semele and Persephone experienced. Mostly the descent into the underworld terrain was to recover or reunite with something lost, which was intrinsically valuable and authentic. With Hermes off the streets we might imagine him occupied as a guide to what needs to be redeemed. Like magic, the outer way of life that we knew vanished. We are in suspension waiting for the hermetic guide to lead the souls out.

His landscape is also the dreamscape. As *oneiros*, He is the god of dreams, and as *oneiopompos*, the guide, fondly referred to as the shepherd of dreams. Here in the land of sleep He appears to us. With less activity in the outer world our inner voice can be better heard. In the din of the secular world Hermes' imaginative and soulful voice is lost in the shallow language and functional rhetoric of the busy marketplace, commercial institutions and worldly affairs. Now in the stillness near Hestia's hearth, Hermes' imagination can reignite the symbols behind the words.

When we are ready to emerge from the transition, to ascend out of the night journey into the day, Hermes will guide us across the threshold. But like any hermetic transition what we return to will not be the same. We have been changed by the immersion into new ways of being. In the time out, new images and ideas and values have emerged. We cannot cross the threshold without bringing back what we have recovered in the times in-between. The ancients knew this as the night sea journey, theology thought of it as the soul's dark night,

classicists and psychoanalysts articulated the heroic journey into and out of the underworld; however we imagine it, something lost, forgotten and/or denied needs to be recovered.

Hermes will be the guide. You'll find the signposts and symbols in your imagination, your reflections and your dreams that will help you recreate the narrative.

written April 22, 2020

Endnotes

¹ See William G. Dory, "Hermes/Heteronymous Appellations" from *Facing the Gods*, edited by James Hillman, Spring Publications, Inc., Irving, TX; 198.