

Light and Dark Elements in the Well below the Green Mushroom

By S Shane Thomas

Light a candle and take your meditation pose. Imagine or look at the hyphosigil for the Green Mushroom while you relax into your pose. Breathe in through your nose, allowing your back to straighten. Exhale through your mouth and relax every muscle in your body. Continue to take deep slow breaths for a moment and identify any points of tension or discomfort. Let your attention move to the tense spots and simply breathe there until they dissipate. The tension is a thin mist evaporating in the morning sun of this imaginal space. Take time and allow yourself to lose track of your physical body while you breathe.

(pause for thirty seconds)

The hyphosigil of the Green Mushroom is in this imaginal space, just out of sight. It calls for you. There is something different about the pull than you've felt in your other treks into the shared space. Somehow you know that you have work to confront today. You rise from your physical body and begin walking down a forested path. The smell of fresh rain rejuvenates you and looking through the canopy to see sunlight dappling the undergrowth brings a smile to your face. Out of the corner of your eye, you think you see small luminescent beings, but then look directly and there's nothing there. You wonder if your eyes are playing tricks on you. Ferns gently brush against your shins as you make your way down the path.

You look straight ahead once again and gasp. The hyphosigil is on the door right in front of you, no more than a stone's throw away. You have entered a clearing and the Green Mushroom shades you from the midday shine. The stalk alone is the size of a home and the cap above creates an eave that feels like a wraparound porch. Your smile breaks wider into a grin. You have returned, ready to discover what it is that has called you back here today.

As you approach, the door adorned with the hyphosigil, opens inward. You cross the threshold. The presence of the guardian fills the vestibule. Nothing harboring hostility would get past. You feel the momentary scrutiny as your intention is judged. Then, you feel welcome. The feeling is a signal from the guardian and it is so strong you seem to glide past the Mushroom's protector right into the tavern.

A room this comfortable begs for mingling. You sense a few familiar presences unwinding at the tables. Someone smiles from the end of the bar. You scan the room thinking to find a seat, but a glint of light from the altar tucked off to one side of the room beckons.

A few pleasantries are exchanged while crossing the space. Standing before the altar, you see that the object is a hand mirror. Then you are holding it and gazing at your reflection before you were even aware of picking it up. It shows your best, most cheerful self. There are no imperfections, or signs of fatigue. Even the room behind you is brighter, the décor is more playful and lighter.

A knowing, from deep within you bubbles to your awareness. You must also face what is on the back. First you try to deny the urge, to gaze upon your ideal self a bit longer, but that part of you that knows to rotate the mirror also knows that what you will see is the very work you must face today while on this journey. As if of its own accord, your other hand grasps and rotates the mirror's handle.

You hear yourself gasp even as you begin to process how your image has changed. Your eyes have sunken in dark sockets, as if sleep hasn't come easy for uncounted days. Instead of pity or shock, the face reflects a look of tense resentment. It seems to sneer at the more refreshed and relaxed version of itself, holding the mirror. The drab room behind that face has been neglected and looks filthy.

You break your gaze and shake off the eerie feeling with a sigh. Perhaps the bartender will lighten your mood. You approach your usual stool, hoping for cheer, but then he looks at what is in your hand and shakes his head, then jerks a thumb over to the lift.

With a shrug of your shoulders, you accept that there will be no break at the watering hole before facing tonight's part of your Great Work. You approach the lift that you normally ride up to your private chamber and the shared ritual space at the center of the dome, but then notice a tunnel entry tucked into the wall on the far side. The mirror feels like it's pulling you. "Of course, I'm bound for the tunnels," you mumble as you begin to crawl in.

It's a small space. The living walls of the Green Mushroom's mycorrhizal network press into you from either side. The entry and some parts of the passage are large enough for you to crawl on hands and knees. Claustrophobia isn't a problem here, even if the fear arose, contact with the soft, fleshy walls strips negative energy from you like a sponge. Any rough encounters you recently had, errant lingering anxiety from life in the modern world, all your doubts, and any fear sloughs off.

You press down on your belly and slither through the narrowest portion. Then your head and hands breach through, into the cavern down in the depths below the mushroom, in the very heart of the mycorrhizal network. You feel renewed, refreshed, and optimistic. You are a serpent whose molted skin was every harm it carried within its body.

Reborn. You stand and stretch, enjoying the open space. The fecund smell of fresh soil fills the cavern. You are standing at the edge of a well, which bubbles from a spring deeper within the womb of the earth. The stone walls reflect light from an unknown source. Is it coming from within the well itself? You peer in.

Within the well, you see the ritual space from the dome of the Mushroom.

Your hand stretches out in front of you and then you gently release your grip on the mirror. Had it been in your hand this whole time? The mirror disappears below the water's surface and within the well, you see the mushroom mandala that is the floor of the shared ritual space.

Then you are looking at your own reflection, not the ideal or the tense, exhausted version; but the regular you. You, in your imaginal body, stand in the cavern below while the reflection is standing in the shared ritual space above.

"It's magic..." Your reflection gives you a wink. "We can be anywhere at once."

You nod in affirmation, trying to wrap your head around the notion.

"Let's talk about the Great Work you are going to do right now." Your reflection walks to the altar in the East, it is adorned with a yellow cloth and a sword. "This is the threshold for the power of thought, among other things." Your reflection walks clockwise and gestures at the altar in the South. A wand rests upon a red tablecloth. "This is the threshold for the power of passion." Then your reflection is

passing the West altar, adorned with a blue cloth and a chalice. "This is the threshold for the power of intuition." Your reflection walks to the North altar, adorned with an olive green cloth and a large silver coin. "This is the threshold for the power of sensation."

Your reflection moves to the center of the ritual space and holds their hands flat, palms up. Four orbs are in each hand. The orbs glow with the colors of the four directional powers. "Humans are a bridge for these powers. Not a part of you, but forces that pass through you to enter the physical world. Your role is to choose whether the power will be a benefit or detriment to the world. You choose with your actions as the powers pass through. It is time for you to reflect upon the powers you have already bridged into the world. This Great Work of reflection will enable you to make conscious choices of how that power manifests the next time it moves through you."

"You will work at each altar to take a good and a bad memory and form them into a totem. The totem can be a little statue, a trinket, a small animal, or anything you wish, so long as it reminds you of the memory it's attached to."

"How will I work the altars from the cavern?" You ask your reflection.

Your reflection claps, causing you to blink. You open your eyes and you are in the altar space. You are looking up through the translucent green ceiling and you see your reflection smirking at you from the cavern, then giving you a wink. Then your reflection disappears completely as a gentle breeze pushes clouds that glow yellow with the light of the moon.

Movement in front of you catches your eye. Someone is standing before you, adorned in yellow. They flash a smile. They are familiar to you, even if you don't recognize their outward appearance, they are your inner contact from the east. Something deep within knows that. There are open scrolls and books piled up in a corner where your contact is writing. You look and see a sigil on an otherwise blank page.

"I know you'll create something beautiful," your contact tells you. It isn't a spoken word, you simply hear their thought in your mind.

You raise an eyebrow and look at the empty half of the altar.

"You need only concern yourself with one creation at a time. I will tell you four human traits. You must relate a personal experience of their energy as it flowed through your life. Then embody it in a totem."

You nod. A little mascot from a list of feelings. Easy enough.

"Cheerful, diligent, hardworking, independent."

(Pause thirty seconds) To take the time you need to create this totem, just pause the recording.

Your east contact gestures to the center of the ritual chamber, at a disc, suspended waist high and glowing with white light. You walk to the center of the room, the cross section of the four altars. You set the totem upon it and the disc sinks to knee height. You notice another disc, steeped in shadow, as it rises to your eyeline. Then an opaque outline of a scale balancing the two discs becomes visible, just for a moment.

Darkness falls over the entire ritual chamber. You look up to see heavy clouds, as dark as coal smothering the night sky outside the translucent dome. Still looking up, you stumble away from the

discs... the scale. The atmosphere around you feels heavier, thicker. Then you bump into something behind you.

Your eastern contact scoffs loudly and papers rustle. You turn and they scowl at you, then brush the altar clear and gaze off into the distance with a cool expression. You notice their robe is now embroidered with intricate symbols in deep purple. Their arms are crossed over their chest and their chin is stuck out. There is a quick nod of the head toward the altar.

“Dishonest, boastful, easily offended, superficial.”

You feel a pit form in your stomach as the image of this totem forms and you set about your task.

(Pause thirty seconds) To take the time you need to create this totem, just pause the recording.

You set this totem on the dark disc and the scale balances. Both totems emit a faint yellow glow. You feel the same energy pulsing in them.

The ritual space grows brighter and you look up. The clouds are retreating to reveal aurorae in beautiful waves of red across the sky.

“Aurora Australis,” the thought appears in your mind.

You look south and a vibrant contact’s enthusiastic greeting makes you grin. It’s a feeling akin to de ja vu to look upon your inner contact for fire. They gesture to the altar between you both. They are shaping something in the flame of a small pyre.

“Courage, determination, creativity, passion.”

You feel the urge to create something bold even as the recollection begins to replay in your mind.

(Pause thirty seconds) To take the time you need to create this totem, just pause the recording.

You admire the totem as you place it upon the light disc. Thunder rumbles even as the light disc begins to sink to knee height. You glance about but the ritual space has suddenly grown dark. You cry out in surprise, then a flash of lightning gives a snapshot of your southern contact glaring at you, upset by your outburst, and then smashing their sculpture of flame into bits that smolder on the surface of the altar.

You approach with hesitation. Knowing that your Great Work entails confrontation.

“Jealousy, impatience, quick temper, hate.”

The cracks of thunder and flashes of lightning continue while you work.

(Pause thirty seconds) To take the time you need to create this totem, just pause the recording.

Your face flushes and you glance away from the token, but you know there is strength in seeing your whole self, and you place it upon the dark disc, to balance the scale. The two tokens you created on the southern altar glow red.

A gentle rain breaks the storm. The light sound and a dim illumination through the drizzle comfort nerves frayed by your last totem.

Your water contact, garbed in several shades of blue steps around the western altar and envelops you in an embrace. The last of your tension fades. You realize your jaw was clenched only as it slackens and you smile. They steal a quick glance at the two totems on the dark disc, but you feel only compassion and forgiveness emanating from them. With an arm wrapped around you, they guide you to the western altar and push aside their own work to give you space.

“Tranquility, humility, contentment, mercy.”

You sigh and a pleasant memory bubbles into recollection.

(Pause thirty seconds) To take the time you need to create this totem, just pause the recording.

There is hesitation in your steps to the scale. You look fondly at the light totem from the west before setting it in place. Then you brace yourself. The pounding sound of a torrential downpour is immediately upon you. You find yourself crouching, afraid the dome above you will buckle under the sudden pressure of so much water.

You hurry back to the west altar, eager to be near a potential source of shelter. Your inner contact for water seems indifferent to the storm, and to your presence, for that matter. You can tell there is an urgent plea in your expression as you ask, “what are the traits?”

After a roll of their eyes, they walk away, disappearing in mists beyond the altar. You faintly hear the thought, “disinterest, arrogance, inconsistency, laziness.”

(Pause thirty seconds) To take the time you need to create this totem, just pause the recording.

You rush the totem into its place, still unsure if the dome can support the deluge. Once again, the scales balance. Both western totems glow a soft blue. The stone walls of the cavern begin to rematerialize. Your breath slows. You unclench your fists. Now the cavern walls feel warm and welcoming. For the first time in this adventure, you notice the trees encircling the ritual space.

“You’re right on time!” A jovial voice calls within your mind. You look to the north and see someone you swear is related to you. Possibly a great grandparent’s sibling you recognize from an old photo in a yellowing album. They must have been waiting for you here a long time, but they look like they will endure forever. They are sculpting something of granite, but place down the chisel, and sweep pebbles off your side of the altar.

“Responsibility, loyalty, punctuality, perseverance.”

(Pause thirty seconds) To take the time you need to create this totem, just pause the recording.

Placing this totem on the scale tips it down a bit further than the others did. The novelty is just enough of a distraction. Rumbling makes you jump a bit, but it isn’t thunder this time. The floor is shaking and the walls crack, spraying rubble across the floor. The south wall has collapsed and presses bare earth toward you.

You stumble back into the north altar. The room has caved in and it feels a bit claustrophobic in the tight space.

Your ancestor lumbers from the darkness beyond the altar and assesses the ritual space and you with a bored expression.

"I guess I should have prevented that..." They give a halfhearted shrug, "Unreliability, inconsistency, being dull, tardiness."

(Pause thirty seconds) To take the time you need to create this totem, just pause the recording.

You clamber over rubble and place the final totem on the dark side of the scale. Both northern totems glow an olive green. The glow of all eight totems ignites into a column of cool flame. It engulfs you in a refreshing burst.

You close your inner eye to bask in its energy and to let your mind settle after achieving today's Great Work.

(pause for thirty seconds)

A voice from the void speaks, "You have seen the power that manifests through your thinking self, your passionate self, your feeling self, and your sensory self. The passions you feel are energy you have channeled into light and into darkness. Use this understanding to bridge the power into what best serves you and the world."

You open your inner eye. The eight totems are in an open satchel at your feet. You are standing in front of the well. In it is your reflection also in the cavern, which smiles at you and says, "Come back as many times as it serves you. There are many more totems you could harvest from the light and dark mirror within."

You cinch the satchel closed and climb up into the tunnel that leads to your own miniature mushroom. Then you carefully arrange each totem around the space, in their proper direction and with its opposing mate.

You take some time to reflect on each one and the way the experience they represent makes you feel. Then, when you are ready, you return to your physical body and blow out the candle.