

THE
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IN ENGLISH

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TEXTUAL SIGNS

Small strokes above the line indicate line divisions. Every fifth line a small number is inserted in place of the stroke; the frequency of these numbers, however, may vary in tractates which are quite fragmentary. A new page is indicated with a number in bold type. When the beginning of a new line or page coincides with the opening of a paragraph, the line divider or number is placed at the end of the previous paragraph.

- [] Square brackets indicate a lacuna in the manuscript. When the text cannot be reconstructed, three dots are placed within the brackets, regardless of the size of the lacuna; a fourth dot, if appropriate, may function as a period. An exception to this rule is the occasional use of a different number of dots to estimate the extent of the missing portion of a proper noun. In a few instances the dots are used without brackets to indicate a series of Coptic letters which do not constitute a translatable sense unit. A bracket is not allowed to divide a word, except for a hyphenated word or a proper noun. Other words are placed entirely inside or outside the brackets, depending on the certainty of the Coptic word and the number of Coptic letters visible.
- < > Pointed brackets indicate a correction of a scribal omission or error. The translator has either inserted letters unintentionally omitted by the scribe, or replaced letters erroneously inserted with what the scribe presumably intended to write.
- { } Braces indicate superfluous letters or words added by the scribe.
- () Parentheses indicate material supplied by the editor or translator. Although this material may not directly reflect the text being translated, it provides useful information for the reader.

INTRODUCTION

by

JAMES M. ROBINSON

1. *The Stance of the Texts*

The Nag Hammadi library is a collection of religious texts that vary widely from each other as to when, where, and by whom they were written. Even the points of view diverge to such an extent that the texts are not to be thought of as coming from one group or movement. Yet these diversified materials must have had something in common which caused them to be chosen by those who collected them. The collectors no doubt contributed to this unity by finding in the texts hidden meanings not fully intended by the original authors. After all, one of them, the *Gospel of Thomas*, begins with a word to the wise: "Whoever finds the interpretation of these sayings will not experience death." Thus the texts can be read at two levels: what the original author may have intended to communicate and what the texts may subsequently have been taken to communicate.

The focus that brought the collection together is an estrangement from the mass of humanity, an affinity to an ideal order that completely transcends life as we know it, and a life-style radically other than common practice. This life-style involved giving up all the goods that people usually desire and longing for an ultimate liberation. It is not an aggressive revolution that is intended, but rather a withdrawal from involvement in the contamination that destroys clarity of vision.

As such, the focus of this library has much in common with primitive Christianity, with eastern religions, and with holy men of all times, as well as with the more secular equivalents of today, such as the counter-culture movements coming from the 1960's. Disinterest in the goods of a consumer society, withdrawal into communes of the like-minded away from the bustle and clutter of big-city distraction, non-involvement in the compromises of the political process, sharing an in-group's knowledge both of the disaster-course of the culture and of an ideal, radical alternative not commonly known—all this in modern garb is the real challenge rooted in such materials as the Nag Hammadi library.

THE DISCOURSE ON THE EIGHTH AND NINTH (VI, 6)

Introduced and translated by

JAMES BRASHLER, PETER A. DIRKSE, and DOUGLAS M. PARROTT

Although the title for this Hermetic tractate has not been preserved in the manuscript, the *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* is so named on account of its contents. The reference to the eighth and the ninth indicates the eighth and ninth spheres surrounding the earth. In ancient times it was thought that the first seven spheres were the realms of the sun, moon, and planets, the lower powers whose control over human life was not necessarily benevolent. The eighth and ninth spheres thus designate the beginning of the divine realm, the levels beyond the control of the lower powers. At death the soul would journey through the seven spheres, and after successful passage it would reach the eighth and the ninth, the levels at which the soul could experience true bliss. Furthermore, the eighth and the ninth spheres can also indicate advanced stages of spiritual development. The tractate possibly assumes yet another sphere, a higher, tenth sphere, where God himself dwells, though this is not entirely clear.

The *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* is a dialogue between a teacher and a pupil. The mystagogue, Hermes Trismegistus (Thrice-greatest Hermes, the "father") instructs an initiate in secret knowledge, and guides him into an ecstatic experience of the eighth and the ninth. The initiate (the "son"), with the mystagogue, presents an earnest prayer and a silent hymn of praise to the divine: he has received divine light, life, and love. The tractate closes with a set of instructions for the preservation of the book; included are oaths for the careful use of these words of Hermes.

In short, the *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* is a document of instruction and drama. Its Hermetic character is emphasized by the name of Hermes and the similarities to other Hermetic documents; in addition the dualistic, Gnostic themes and the mystery elements should not be ignored. Finally, certain affinities with Middle Platonism suggest a date of composition in the second century C.E.

THE DISCOURSE ON THE EIGHTH AND NINTH

VI 52, 1-63, 32

[...]

"[O my father], yesterday you promised me [that you would bring] my mind into [the] eighth and⁵ afterwards you would bring me into the ninth. You said that this is the order of the tradition."

"O my son, indeed this is the order. But the promise was according to¹⁰ human nature. For I told you when I initiated the promise, I said, 'If you hold in mind each one of the steps.' After I had received the spirit through the power,¹⁵ I set forth the action for you. Indeed the understanding dwells in you; in me (it is) as though the power were pregnant. For when I conceived from the fountain²⁰ that flowed to me, I gave birth."

"O my father, you have spoken every word well to me. But I am amazed at this statement that you have just made. For you said, 'The²⁵ power that is in me—.'"

He said, "I gave birth to it (the power), as children are born."

"Then, O my father, I have many brothers, if I am to be numbered among the offspring."³⁰

"Right, O my son! This good thing is numbered by [...].⁵³⁴ And [...] at all times. Therefore, O my son, it is necessary for you to recognize your brothers and to honor them rightly and¹⁰ properly, because they come from the same father. For each generation I have called. I have named it, because they were offspring¹⁵ like these sons."

"Then, O my father, do they have (a) day?"

"O my son, they are spiritual ones. For they exist as forces that grow²⁰ other souls. Therefore I say that they are immortal."

"Your word is true; it has no refutation from now on. O my father, begin the²⁵ discourse on the eighth and the ninth, and include me also with my brothers."

"Let us pray, O my son, to the father of the universe, with your brothers who are my³⁰ sons, that he may give the spirit of eloquence."

"How do they pray, O my father, when joined with the generations? I want to obey, O my father."

"[...] ⁵⁴³ But it is [not ...]. Nor [is it] a law.⁵ But he is satisfied [with] it (fem.). [...] it (masc.). And it is right [for you] to remember the progress that came to you as wisdom in the books. O¹⁰ my son, compare yourself to the early years of life. As children (do), you have posed senseless, unintelligent questions."

"O my father, the progress that has come¹⁵ to me now and the foreknowledge, according to the books, that has come to me, exceeding the deficiency—these things are foremost in me."

"O my son, when you understand the²⁰ truth of your statement, you will find your brothers, who are my sons, praying with you."

"O my father, I understand nothing else except the beauty that²⁵ came to me in the books."

"This is ' what you call the beauty ' of the soul, the edification that ' came to you in stages. ' May the understanding come to you,³⁰ and you will teach."

"I have understood, ' O my father, each one of ' the books. And especially the (fem.) 55 [...] which is in [a . . .]."

"O my son, [...] ⁴ in praises from ' [those who] extol [them]."

"O my father, from you ' I will receive the [power] of the ' discourse [that you will] give. As it was told ' to both (of us), let us pray,¹⁰ O my father."

"O my son, ' what is fitting is to pray ' to God with all our mind ' and all our heart and our ' soul, and to ask ¹⁵ him that the gift of the ' eighth extend to ' us, and that each one ' receive from him what ' is his. Your part, then, is ²⁰ to understand; my own is ' to be able to deliver the discourse ' from the fountain which flows to me."

"Let us pray, O my father: ' I call upon thee, who ²⁵ rulest over the kingdom ' of power, whose word ' comes as (a) birth of light. ' And his words are immortal. ' They are eternal and ³⁰ unchanging. He is the one whose will ' begets life for the forms in ' every place. His nature gives form ' to substance. By him 56 the souls of [the eighth ' and] the angels are moved [...] ⁴ those that exist. His providence ' extends to everything [...] ' begets everything. He is the one who ' [...] the aeon among spirits. ' He created everything. He who is ' self-contained cares ¹⁰ for everything. He is perfect, the ' invisible God to whom one speaks ' in silence—his ' image is moved when it is directed, ' and it governs—the ¹⁵ one mighty in power, who is exalted ' above majesty, who is better than the ' honored (ones), Zoxathazo a oō ' ee oōō ēēē oōōō ' ēē oōōōō ooooo ²⁰ oōōōōō uuuuu ' oōōōōōōōōōōō'ōōō Zozazoth.

"Lord, ' grant us a wisdom from ' thy power that reaches ²⁵ us, so that we may describe to ourselves the ' vision of the eighth and the ninth. ' We have already advanced to the seventh, ' since we are pious and ' walk in thy law.³⁰ And thy will ' we fulfill ' always. For we have walked in 57 [thy way, and we have] renounced ' [...], so that ' thy [vision] may come. Lord, grant ' us the truth in the image.⁵ Allow us through the spirit to ' see the form of the image ' that has no deficiency, ' and receive the reflection of the pleroma ' from us through our praise.¹⁰

"And acknowledge the spirit ' that is in us. For from ' thee the universe received soul. ' For from thee, the unbegotten one, ' the begotten one came into being.¹⁵ The birth of the self-begotten one ' is through thee, ' the birth of all begotten things ' that exist. Receive ' from us these spiritual sacrifices,²⁰ which we send ' to thee with all our heart ' and our

soul and all ' our strength. Save that which ' is in us, and grant us ²⁵ the immortal wisdom."

"Let us embrace ' each other affectionately, O my son. ' Rejoice over this! For already ' from them the power,³⁰ which is light, is coming to us. ' For I see! I see ' indescribable depths. ' How shall I tell you, 58 O my son? [...] ' from the (fem.) [...] ' the places. How [shall I describe] ' the universe? I [am mind and] ⁵ I see another mind, the one that [moves] the ' soul! I see the one that moves me ' from pure forgetfulness. You give ' me power! I see myself! I want ' to speak! Fear restrains ¹⁰ me. I have found the ' beginning of the power that is above ' all powers, the one that has no ' beginning. I see a fountain bubbling ' with life. I have said, O ¹⁵ my son, that I am Mind. ' I have seen! Language is not able ' to reveal this. For the entire ' eighth, O my son, and ' the souls that are in it, and the ²⁰ angels, sing a hymn in ' silence. And I, Mind, ' understand."

"What is the way to sing ' a hymn through it (the eighth)?"

"Have you become such that ' you cannot be spoken to?"

"I am silent,²⁵ O my father. I want to ' sing a hymn to you while I am silent."

"Then ' sing it, for I am Mind."

"I understand Mind, Hermes, ' who cannot be interpreted,³⁰ because he keeps within himself. ' And I rejoice, O my father, because I see ' thee smiling. And the universe 59 [rejoices]. Therefore there is no ' creature that will lack ' thy life. For thou art the ' lord of the citizens in ⁵ every place. Thy providence protects. ' I call thee father, aeon ' of the aeons, great divine spirit. ' And by a spirit he gives ' rain upon every-one. What ¹⁰ are you saying to me, O my ' father, Hermes?"

"Concerning these things I ' do not say anything, O my son. ' For it is right before God ' that we keep silent about what is hidden."¹⁵

"O Trismegistus, let not ' my soul be deprived of the ' great divine vision. For ' everything is possible for you as master ' of the universe."

"Return to ²⁰ <praising>, O my son, and sing ' while you are silent. Ask what ' you want in silence."

When he had finished praising he ' shouted, "Father ²⁵ Trismegistus! What shall I say? ' We have received this light. And ' I myself see this same vision ' in you. And ' I see the eighth and the souls ³⁰ that are in it and the angels ' singing a hymn to the ninth and ' its powers. And I see ' him who has the ' power of them all, creating 60 those <that are> in the spirit."

"It is advantageous from [now on] ' that we keep silence in a reverent

posture. ' Do not speak about the vision ' from now on. It is proper to [sing a hymn]⁵ to the father until the day to quit (the) body." '

"What you sing, O my ' father, I too want to sing." '

"I am singing a hymn within myself. ' While you rest yourself, be active in praise.¹⁰ For you have found what you seek." '

"But is it proper, ' O my father, that I praise because I ' am filled in my heart?"

"What is proper ' is your praise that you¹⁵ will sing to God ' so that it might be written in this imperishable book." '

"I will offer up ' the praise in my heart, as I ' pray to the end of the universe and²⁰ the beginning of the beginning, to the object ' of man's quest, the ' immortal discovery, the begetter of ' light and truth, the ' sower of reason, the love of²⁵ immortal life. No ' hidden word will be able to speak about thee, ' Lord. Therefore my mind ' wants to sing a hymn to you ' daily. I am the instrument³⁰ of thy spirit. Mind is thy ' plectrum. And thy counsel ' plucks me. I see 61 myself! I have received power from thee. ' For thy love has reached us." '

"Right, O my son."

"O grace! ' After these things I give thanks⁵ by singing a hymn to thee. For I have ' received life from thee ' when thou madest me wise. I ' praise thee. I call ' thy name that is hidden within me: ¹⁰ a o ee o eēē oōō iii ' oōōō ooooo oōō'ōō uuuuuu oō'ōōōōōōōōō'ōōōōōōōōō¹⁵ōō. Thou art the one who exists ' with the spirit. I sing a hymn ' to thee reverently." '

"O my son, ' write this book for the temple at Diospolis²⁰ in hieroglyphic characters, ' entitling it 'The Eighth ' Reveals the Ninth.'" '

"I will do it, O my <father>, as ' you command²⁵ now."

"O my <son>, ' write the language of the book on steles ' of turquoise. O my son, ' it is proper to write this book ' on steles of turquoise,³⁰ in hieroglyphic characters. ' For Mind himself has ' become overseer 62 of these. Therefore I command ' that this teaching be carved ' on stone, and that you place it in ' my sanctuary. Eight⁵ guardians guard it with [...] ' of the Sun. The males ' on the right are frog-faces, ' and the females ' on the left are cat-faces.¹⁰ And put a square ' milk-stone at the base of the ' turquoise tablets ' and write the name on the ' azure stone tablet¹⁵ in hieroglyphic characters. ' O my son, you will do this ' when I am in Virgo, ' and the sun is in the first half of the ' day, and fifteen degrees have²⁰ passed by me."

"O my father, ' everything that you say I will ' do eagerly."

"And write ' an oath in the book, lest those who ' read the book

bring²⁵ the language into ' abuse, and not (use it) ' to oppose the acts of fate. ' Rather, they should submit ' to the law of God,³⁰ without having transgressed at all, ' but in purity asking ' God for wisdom and ' knowledge. And he who 63 will not be begotten at the start by God ' comes to be by the general ' and guiding discourses. ' He will not be able to read the things written⁵ in this book, although his ' conscience is pure within him, since he ' does not do anything shameful, ' nor does he consent ' to it. Rather, by stages¹⁰ he advances and enters into ' the way of immortality. And ' thus he enters into the ' understanding of the eighth that ' reveals the ninth."

"So¹⁵ shall I do it, O my father."

"This ' is the oath: I make him who will ' read this holy book swear by heaven ' and earth and fire and ' water and seven rulers of substance²⁰ and the creating spirit in them ' and the <unbegotten> God ' and the self-begotten one ' and him who has been begotten, that he ' guard the things that Hermes has said.²⁵ And those who keep the oath, ' God will be reconciled with them ' and everyone whom we have ' named. ' But wrath will come to each one³⁰ of those who violate the oath. ' This is the perfect one who is, ' O my son."