

THE SPHINX IN US



Perhaps the first sphinx, Queen Hetepheres II from the fourth dynasty (Cairo Museum)

The sphinx is best known as a statue, a representative image of ancient Egyptian culture. Sphinxes can be found all over the Nile delta and in Upper Egypt. They usually stand as guardians at the entrance of a temple or pyramid.

When one has a closer look, one can distinguish three animals represented in the statue: the wings which represent a bird; the chest has the arms and claws of a lion; and the abdomen has the legs and hooves of a cow (bull). The head (face) is human. Thus, the sphinx is a “human” union of elements representing the bird (eagle), the lion and the cow (or bull or cattle).



*Assyrian Lamassu Institute Museum, University of Chicago
(dated 721 BC).*

The bird represents the nerve-sense system. Why is this so? Steiner stated: "It certainly cannot escape us that the birds which live in the air, creating the conditions of their existence out of the air, are formed differently from the animals which live either on the actual surface of the earth, or below it. When one considers the kingdom of the birds, one shall naturally find, in accordance with the generally accepted views, that in their case, as with other animals, one must speak of head, metabolic- and limb system, and so on. But this is a thoroughly inartistic, intellectual way of looking at things".



La Granja, Spain, mid-18th century

If one looks at the legs of a bird, one can say that the front legs have metamorphosized into a pair of wings. The legs, which the birds uses when it touches the surface of the earth, are stunted compared to the legs of a camel or lion, for instance, or of man for that matter. The legs are very thin and underdeveloped and the skin looks almost as if it belongs to a reptile. Current scientific thinking considers the bird as originating from the dinosaur, a prehistoric reptile. The eagle is often regarded as the prototype of the bird as a species. The eagle can fly the highest of all birds and be in flight for many hours before it touches down on the surface of the earth. The shaft of its feathers and several bones of its skeleton are filled with air. The bird lives in the element air and is filled with air. The eagle has extremely good vision and smell. The eagle is a metaphor for superb sensory perception, and thinking, which can lift man up >from the earth and make him reflect, self-conscious and free.

In several cultures, the eagle (bird) represents the nerve-sense system in the quality of thinking. In the Native American tradition and in other Indian traditions in Central and South-America, feathers were used not only for decoration, but were worn on or around the head or stuck into the hair to express the connection, which was experienced or seen between the bird and the nerve-sense system. Also, wearing feathers was reserved for those elderly, who had

obtained a certain status as "wise men", individuals with a lot of knowledge and life experiences. Therefore, the **eagle** represents the **nerve-sense system**.



Ancient Greek sphinx from Delphi (circa 800 BC)

The lion represents the rhythmical system. Why is this so?

Rudolf Steiner writes:

"When one observes a lion one can really only understand the lion when one develops a feeling for the joy, the inner satisfaction the lion has in living together with its surroundings. There is indeed no animal, unless it is related

to the lion (like the cat), which has such wonderful, mysterious breathing. In all creatures of the animal world the rhythms of breathing must harmonize with the rhythms of circulation; but whereas the rhythms of blood circulation become heavy through the digestive processes which are dependent on them, the rhythms of breathing become light because they strive to rise up to the lightness of the formation of the brain, In the case of the bird, what lives in its breathing actually lives simultaneously in its head. The bird is all head, and it presents its head outwardly, as it were, towards the world, its thoughts are the forms of its plumage. To one, who is appreciative of the beauty of nature, there is hardly anything more moving than to feel the inner connection between man's thought when it is really concrete, inwardly teeming with life (imaginative consciousness)- and the plumage of a bird. Anybody who has inwardly practiced such things knows quite exactly when he is thinking like a peacock, when he is thinking like an eagle, or when he is thinking like a sparrow. And so it may be said that the bird's life in breathing preponderates to such a degree that the other processes, blood circulation and so on, are almost negligible. All heaviness of digestion, yes, even the heaviness of blood circulation, is removed with the bird's feeling of itself; it is not there.”

In the lion, a kind of balance exists between breathing and blood circulation. Certainly in the case of the lion, the blood circulation is weighed down, but not as much, as in the case of the camel or the ox (cattle). There the digestion burdens the blood circulation to a remarkable degree. In the lion, whose digestive tract apparatus is comparatively short and is so formed that the digestive processes are completed as rapidly as possible, digestion does not burden the circulation to any marked degree.

On the other hand, it is also the case that, in the lion's head, the development of the head-nature is such that the breathing is held in balance with the rhythm of circulation. The lion, more than any other animal, possesses an inner rhythm of breathing and rhythm of the heart beat which are inwardly maintained in balance, which are inwardly harmonized.

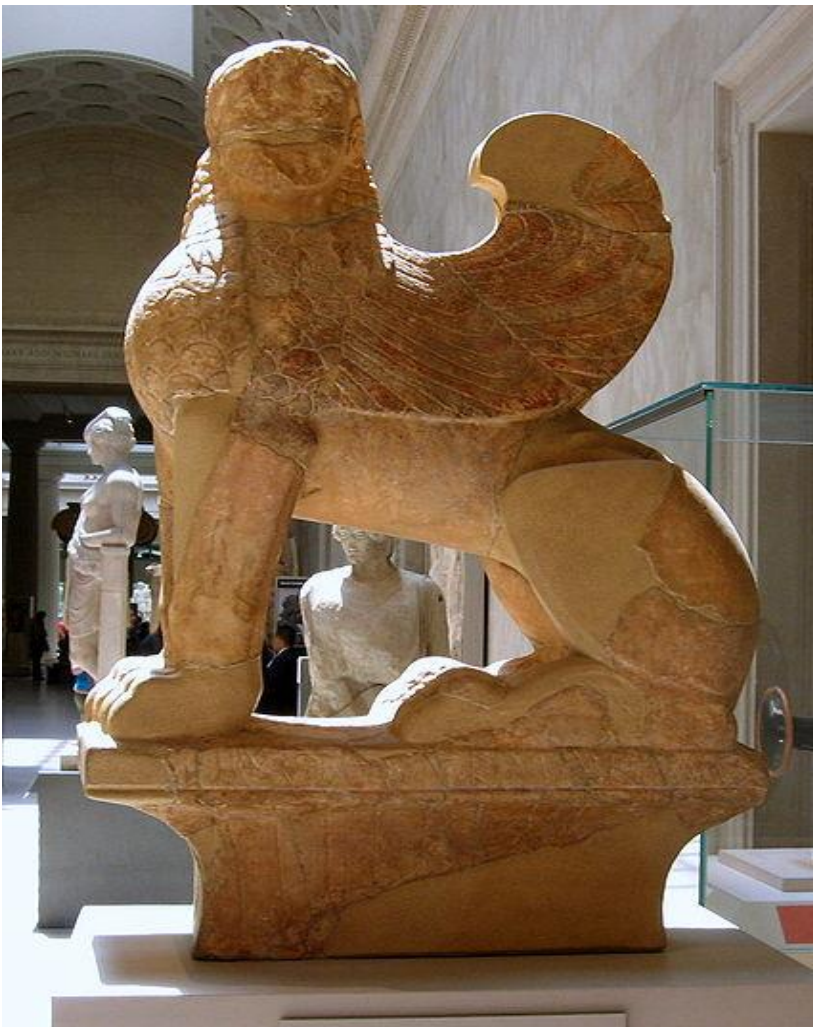


Typical Egyptian sphinx with a human head. (Museo Egizio, Turin)

This is why the lion, when one thinks of what may be called his subjective life, has that particular way of devouring his food with unbridled voracity, why he literally gulps it down. The lion is really only happy when he has swallowed it. He is ravenous for nourishment, because it lies in its nature that hunger causes him much more pain than it causes other animals. He is greedy for his nourishment but he is not concerned with being a fastidious gourmet! Enjoyment of the taste is not what possesses him, for he is an animal which finds its inner satisfaction in the equilibrium between breathing and blood circulation. Only when the lion's food has been assimilated into the blood which regulates the heart beat, and when the heart beat has come into reciprocal action with the breathing -for it is a source of enjoyment to the lion when he draws in the breath stream with deep inner satisfaction- only when he feels in himself the result of his feeding, this inner balance between breathing and blood circulation, does the lion live in his own element. He lives fully as lion when he experiences the deep inner satisfaction of his blood beating upwards, of his breath pulsing downwards. And it is in this reciprocal crossing of two wave pulsations that the lion really lives.

Picture the lion, how he runs, how he leaps, how he holds his head, even how he looks around him, and you will see that all this leads to a continual rhythmic interplay between coming out of balance, and again coming into balance. There is perhaps hardly anything that can touch one so mysteriously as the remarkable gaze of the lion, the mastery of opposing forces. It is this which looks out from the lion's gaze: the absolute and complete mastery of the heart beat through the rhythm of their breath.

The lion is, so to speak, all breast organ. He is the animal par excellence in which the rhythmical system is brought to perfect expression, both in outer form and in way of living. The lion is so organized that this interaction of heart beat and breathing is also brought to expression in the reciprocal relationship of heart and lungs.



Marble sphinx on a cavetto capital, Attic, (ca. 580-575 BC)

In summary, then, when one looks in the human being for what most closely resembles the bird, though naturally metamorphosized, it is the human head; when one looks in the human being for what most closely resembles the lion, it is the region of the human breast, where the rhythms meet each other, the rhythms of circulation and breathing".

Therefore, the **lion** represents the **rhythmic system** in man.

The cow or ox represents the metabolic system. Why is this so? Steiner stated: "When one turns one's attention to the cow or ox (cattle), one can be enchanted by contemplating a herd of cattle, replete and satisfied, lying down in a meadow; by observing this process of digestion, which again is expressed in the position of the body, in the expression of the eyes, in every movement. Observe a cow lying in the meadow, when some kind of noise disturbs her. It is really wonderful to see how the cow raises her head, how in this lifting there lies the feeling that it is all heaviness, that it is not easy for a cow to lift the head, as though something very special were within it. When we see a cow in the meadow disturbed in this way, we cannot but say to ourselves: "This cow is astonished that she must lift her head for anything but grazing. Why do I lift my head now? I am not grazing, and there is no point in lifting my head unless it is to graze!". One cannot imagine a lion lifting up his head like a cow does. In a cow the weight of the digestion burdens the blood circulation to such a degree that it overwhelms everything to do with head and breathing".

If one further observes the animal's whole form one might say it is an extended digestive system, with its huge and heavy head, its regurgitation processes the re-chewing of its food, and its bulging abdomen with its four stomachs and very long intestinal tract.

Therefore, the **cow** represents the **metabolic system** in man.

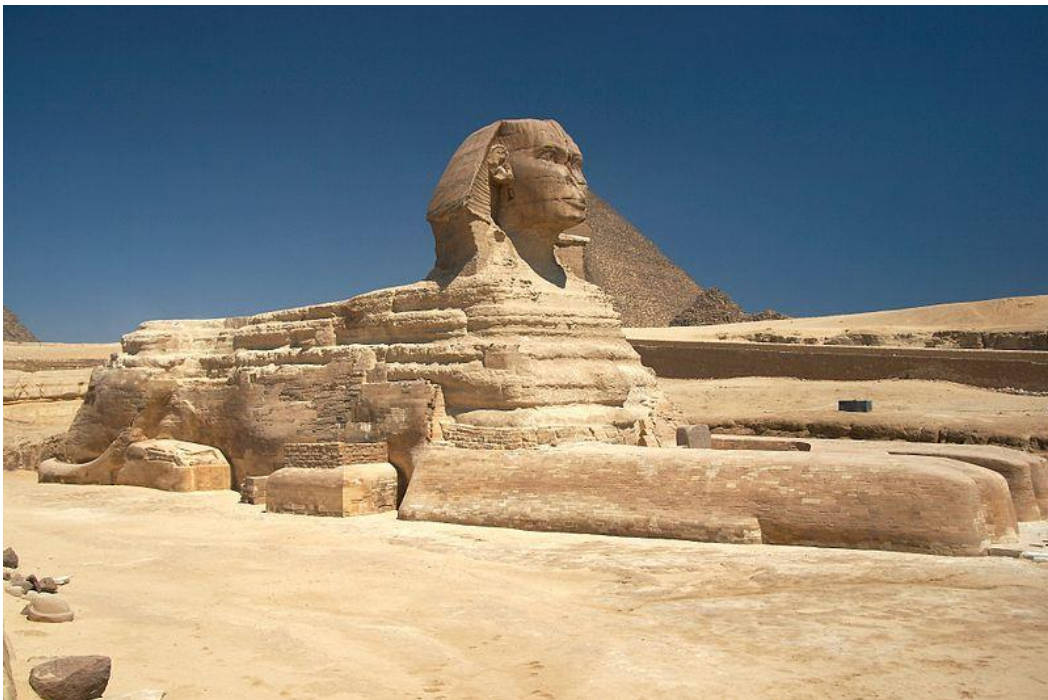
Thus the sphinx, with its human face, symbolizes man with his three systems, represented by these three animals.

In the Christian tradition, the four gospels of the New Testament with their four evangelists, are also pictured by the four signs of the zodiac, which form a cross in the heavens: Aquarius, or Man, with its human face (St Matthew); Leo, the lion (St Mark); Taurus, the cow or ox (St

Luke); and Scorpio, the shadow on earth of the eagle (St John). The symbol of the eagle was replaced by the scorpion in the early Egyptian/ Mesopotamian, or Third Post-Atlantean Cultural Epoch. This replacement comes about as an effect of the progress of the Twilights of the Gods, or *Kali Yuga*.

Thus, if one looks carefully, one finds the sphinx (or three-fold man) in many places.

(Rudolf Steiner: “Man as Symphony of the Creative Word”)



The Great Sphinx of Giza, Egypt (circa 2800 BC)

CONCLUSION

This chapter introduces the student to ancient and pre-Christian knowledge of Threefold Man. The sphinx is given as an example of how in ancient Egypt (Third Post-Atlantean Culture) Three-Foldness was perceived and presented. Also in Christian tradition, the four evangelists are characterized by these four signs of the zodiac, which form a cross within the zodiac: Leo (lion), Aquarius (human face), Taurus (cow or bull) and Scorpio (in ancient times, at the beginning of the “Twilights of the Gods”, or Kali Yuga, the symbol of the Eagle was changed into the zodiac sign of Scorpio: Scorpio as the shadow of the high-flying eagle on earth), and which symbolize and represent the same principles as the sphinx does.