

The Labours of Hercules Humanity's Initiation Journey

The following writings are excerpts from the 2019 edition of Brian Keats' Antipodean Astro Calendar.

Summaries of Herakles' 12 labours have been told over a 12 month journey at the rate of one labour per month. It is well worth reading full accounts of his labours. At the end of each labour an interpretation is offered – many other interpretations have been offered for these stories. This particular layout is designed for the stories to be read in 2019 and you will find that the night sky comments, at the end of each month, correspond to events that can be witnessed at that time.

January

Becoming human is a lifetimes journey. Becoming human you might question – are we not already human? It has taken long ages to get to the point where we are today, to be self conscious and questioning our existence and divinity. We gain a snapshot of these long ages by looking at our own biography from conception to adulthood. Have we not changed, especially our consciousness? More importantly perhaps is the question “Do we have more development to come or have we already attained what it is to be human?”

The Greek sages more than 2000 years ago created wisdom imbued stories that still meet the needs of our times. They describe our challenges and the metamorphoses we need to undergo on the journey to becoming human. “The Labours of Herakles (Hercules)” is such a story. Herakles undergoes 12 rites of passage, he represents each one of us on our initiations towards human-hood. A synopsis and a possible interpretation of these labours will be described over the next 12 months.

The first labour the young and skilled warrior Herakles is required to do is to slay the lion which had been causing death and destruction in the province of Nemea. He manages to corner the lion in its lair but finds that his weapons are of no use as the lion has an impenetrable hide. Eventually he changes tack and with his immense strength crushes the lion. When he comes to skin the lion he is unable to pierce the hide. However, on the advice of the goddess Athena, he uses the claws of the lion to flay the hide which becomes his cloak and armour.

In these sagas there are many layers of meaning. We could read into it that it is a trial about coming to terms with our physicality, finding courage and using it in an intelligent way. We are still very naive in our early development and in carrying out our will it can be self centred and destructive. Athena was born out of Zeus' head – an image of creative thought. Once we have understood and mastered the vehicle of our physical body we are armoured to take another step in our development.

The lion constellation Leo is a very distinctive constellation and will rise in the east 2 hours after sunset. Venus and Jupiter visibility increases as the month progresses.

February

Herakles' second labour takes him into battle against Hydra, a dragon like water monster at the sacred site of the swamp at Lerna. Iolaus, Herakles nephew, accompanied him on this journey. Hydra had poisonous breath and blood causing devastation to all around. Herakles took his bow and shot fiery arrows into the trees in the swamp to drive the monster from its cover. He was then able to do battle with it at close quarters. Taking his sword he severed one of the Hydra heads but from that neck two more heads would grow! The battle intensified and to make the situation worse Hera, ever the enemy of Herakles, sent a giant crab into the fray which clawed his foot which had become entwined in Hydra's tail. Herakles had to change tactics and he ordered Iolaus to cauterize the necks

of any heads that he decapitated. This prevented any more heads growing and he was also able to free his foot and stomped on the crab to kill it. Herakles, with the aid of Iolaus removed the eight mortal heads of Hydra and, when the ninth head, an immortal one, was severed, Herakles placed it in the earth under a large boulder. Herakles then dipped his arrow heads into the poisonous gall blood of the Hydra. If a mortal so much as received a scratch from one of these arrows they would die. At the end of each labour Herakles has to report back to Eurystheus the king who has set these labours and under whom Herakles has to serve for 12 years. Eurystheus does not accept this particular labour as valid because Herakles was aided by his nephew Iolaus. Eurystheus hopes that each labour will see the demise of Herakles. When Herakles is successful in a trial, Eurystheus endeavours to set him a more difficult one.

Herakles journey applies to all of us. What we see, hear, touch, taste and smell pulls our attention this way and that. For the most part we not consciously will where we direct our attention, our monster stimulus-response senses do most of the directing. When we gain mastery over our sensory impressions, through the fire of the spirit in each of us, we will destroy the many heads that crop up but keep the immortal potential of our sense impressions at bay under the rock of our physical brain.

The Hydra's head becomes visible in the east 2 hours after sunset south of Cancer and Leo stretching across to Corvus the crow – it is the longest constellation and will take 5 hours to rise completely. The brightest star in this constellation is Alaphard which represents the heart of Hydra.

Mars strides out in the evening skies whilst in the pre dawn skies we see Venus , Saturn and Jupiter. Look out for Venus next to the old crescent Moon on the 1st, it then retreats away from Jupiter towards Saturn to be overtaking by Saturn on the 18th. The new Moon overtakes Mars in the twilight of the 10th.

March

Herakles' third task set by Eurystheus was to capture the Golden Hind. This female deer with gold antlers and hooves was sacred to Artemis the goddess of the hunt and sister to Apollo. This was no mean feat as the hind could outrun an arrow fired from a bow and to kill it would likely bring on the hunter's death through the wrath of Artemis. Herakles set out in pursuit of this hind but he was not as fleet of foot as the deer so he had to endeavour to wear it down to exhaustion. After relentlessly chasing the hind for one year it fell down exhausted and Herakles was then able to put it across his shoulders to report back to Eurystheus. On the return journey he came across a very angry Artemis but managed to persuade her that it was a task he had been ordered to do. He would also see to it that no harm would come to the deer and that it would be returned to freedom. When Eurystheus saw the wonderful hind he wanted to keep it and ordered Herakles to relinquish the deer to him. Herakles agreed on the proviso that he could put it on the ground first. This he duly did and by now the deer had recovered from exhaustion and shot off like an arrow back to Artemis' sacred groves. It was far too quick for Eurystheus to catch!

The journey of self development takes courage and a great deal of perseverance. It is a long journey and we need to stick closely to it. There are many beasts to overcome but there is also gentleness and innocence to be recognized in the manner in which we use our will. Developing our golden antlers, can we sense the subtle higher truths that are waiting to be beheld behind the veneer of Natura's offerings?

Who sets Herakles tasks? Eurystheus, Herakles' cousin, was the goddess Hera's candidate to be a king; Heracles was Zeus'. Zeus' will was thwarted by Hera, Eurystheus became king, however Herakles could still become a hero even though subservient to his cousin. A hero was more than human but less than a god. The Greek heroes had a divine father and mortal mother. Hera represents that force which yearns to keep a strong household to preserve traditions already in

place. Zeus represents that force that brings the new into existence. To bring something new for humanity you also need to develop the strength to overcome any resistances. Hera also represents destiny challenging tasks from the spiritual world-strengthening our gifts really!

There is no deer in the classical constellations but perhaps we could look to something beautiful and golden – Berenice’s golden hair. Coma Berenices lies to the north of Leo and Virgo and Queen Berenice II of Egypt was wife to Ptolemy III and offered her hair in sacrifice to Aphrodite if her husband returned safely from warfare.

April

Herakles’ new task was to go to Mount Erymanthus and capture the giant boar ravaging the district. This task would have been easy enough if he was just to shoot it, but no, his task was to capture it alive. En route to the mountain he paid a visit to Pholus, one of his centaur friends. Pholus in his hospitality poured a drink from his wine-skin but the aroma of the drink sent neighbouring bestial and brutal centaurs into a frenzy and a battle ensued. Herakles unleashed his arrows at them killing a few and forcing the rest to flee. However during the battle a mishap had occurred – Herakles arrows were usually shot with unerring accuracy but strangely one arrow had gone astray and Chiron, the great and wise immortal king of the centaurs was wounded. He could not die, this great friend and teacher of Herakles, but suffered great pain. Furthermore, after the mayhem Pholus was inspecting these deadly Hydra bloodied arrows of Herakles when he accidentally dropped an arrow on his foot and not being immortal was killed.

In distress Herakles had to continue on to capture the Eurymanthian boar. When he eventually found it in some thickets, he gave chase and eventually drove it into a snow bank where the boar sunk in under its own weight and was stuck. Herakles was then able to place a very strong net over it and haul it back to Eurystheus’ palace. Eurystheus was so terrified of the sight of this boar that he climbed into a large urn and hid until Herakles carried it away and released the boar in an uninhabited region.

The boar was captured but a friend killed on the journey. Our will, a very spiritual part of our being that holds many secrets to our destiny, has animal qualities and we can easily behave in a bestial fashion. How often do we get taken hold of by our will to carry out an unmindful action with the consequence that another person’s feeling is killed? At this stage of our development we are the centaurs, our mostly unconscious lower nature needs to be transformed, it is still animal, it is only our upper thinking and feeling that is human.

Not only do we need to bring more thinking into will, capturing or taming rather than killing, but we are also required to sacrifice instinctive wisdom that come with the animal forces. The wise centaur Chiron was wounded. Our Chiron nature has a further part to play in later trials. In artistic depiction of centaurs there are two types. There are those that have the body of a horse and the torso and head of a man. Then there are those like Chiron and Pholus, they are less animal and only have the hind end of a horse i.e. the front legs are human.

We have two Centaurs depicted in the sky through Sagittarius and the largest constellation of Centaurus which covers the Southern Cross. Crux (Southern Cross) with its 2 pointers (Alpha and Beta Centauri) rise higher as the evening progresses and Sagittarius is currently rising after midnight. I picture Centaurus as Chiron with Crux creating a wound in his thigh.

Good viewing before sunrise around the 12th with Mercury below the brighter Venus.

May

Herakles' fifth labour was to clean King Augeus's stables. This was no mean task as he had thousands of animal stock of all kinds. Herakles bargained with King Augeus to undertake the task and they settled on a fee of 10% of the livestock to Herakles if he was successful. "This mammoth undertaking would take ages for Herakles to complete", so thought the king. Herakles then set about diverting two rivers towards the stables, opening the upstream entrance to the stables for the waters to flow in, and opening the downstream end of the stables for waters to wash the muck out! The Augean stables were cleaned in a day but Augeus did not want to honour the agreement. The dispute had to be taken to court and King Augeus' son had born witness to the agreement and testified for Herakles. The king had to pay up. However Eurystheus decreed that this labour was to be invalidated because Herakles had been paid to do it.

Greater powers of thinking are brought into play and elemental powers are used to do the cleaning. A purification by water took place, a baptismal preparation. Material worth has no value in the spiritual world and the labour is not validated in the story. However, whether it be for material or spiritual worth the deed is judged by the truth of the spoken word. The king could mirror the reflection of how we behave in dealings with other people, or situations in our life. The king's son could be the self development talent of reflecting on all of our actions of each day. Our maturing conscience dwelling in the depths of our heart can be the judge, it is still very young in its development stage.

When we look to Herakles' earlier biography we see that his father is Zeus (shine / sky/ space), a divine being. His mother was Alcmene (strength of the Moon), a mortal woman, and Hera (possibly derived from heros - warrior) was the wife of Zeus. Zeus falls in love with many mortal women and comes across as a philanderer when we use our ordinary intellect. In myth language it can be seen that human souls are perceived as feminine and each of us, male or female, are impregnated with the same divinity. The mortal part of us is earthly and there is also an immortal part, a spiritual component that goes beyond death. As to Zeus' biography we see that his father was Chronos (time) - Time preceded Space in this Ancient Greek cosmology.

In the early morning skies we can look low to the north for the distinctive great square of Pegasus which is part of the constellation of Pegasus the winged horse of creative thought.

June

There was an enormous flock of birds at Stymphalos that needed to be moved away due to the destruction they were causing, for the sixth labour. These were no ordinary birds for they had strong armour -piercing bronze beaks; brass feathers that could be shot out in a porcupine like manner and , for good measure, poisonous dung. On arrival at Stymphalos a problem presented itself to Herakles – the birds were hidden amongst the treetops. Now this is when the goddess Athena presented herself as she often did to help heroes solve problems. She advised Herakles to make a very loud noise with bronze castanet-like cymbals to scare the birds into the air. It would then be a matter of course for Herakles to shoot at the birds. This he duly did killing a few which encouraged the remainder to move away to safer quarters.

Seeing the world using only intellectual thinking dictated by the use of our physical senses makes our soul life cold, hard and sharp. We need to drive these brassy birds away. Not being reliant on outer sense impressions opens us to be more receptive to the powers of the divine nature of our thinking forces.

We can notice that a tool of brass is used to chase away brassy things. It is often the case that something in a challenge can become a resource to overcome the challenge and turn it into a strength.

The first six labours took place on the Peloponnesian peninsula of Greece. Herakles was born in Thebes in a different region farther north in Greece. We have to move out of our comfort zones to go on a journey of self transformation, then we become more able to get to know and address the various beasts that lie within all of us.

There are many birds depicted in the constellations but no destructive ones, let alone brassy. Corvus is there in the evening to the south of Virgo. When the Cross is at its highest so is the distinctive constellation Corvus the Crow and so also is Virgo. Rising later in the evening for me is one of my favourites is Aquila the Eagle lying in the northern part of the Milky Way.

July

So far Herakles' labours have been in the Peloponnesian peninsula of Greece, the red region of the map. Now he has to venture farther in the Mediterranean and Black Sea region away from Greece. The seventh labour takes him south to the island of Crete to capture, and return with, the famous Cretan bull. This bull appeared out of the ocean as a gift by Poseidon, the undersea god, to Minos the king of Crete for sacrifice. Minos deemed the bull too beautiful and took it into his own herd. He then substituted it for another bull for the sacrifice. Poseidon, then angered by this broken promise, caused Poseidon's wife to fall in love with the bull and, through their union, the head of a bull and human body Minotaur came into being. The bull had been made mad by Poseidon and was a problem for Minos with its ravaging across his island and he agreed that Herakles could take it. Herakles grasped the bull by the horns and wrestled it to the ground and rode upon it. The bull was subsequently delivered to the terrified urn hiding Eurystheus.



Herakles first 6 labours on Peloponnesian Peninsula

- 1 Nemean Lion
- 2 Lernean Hydra
- 3 Golden Hind
- 4 Erymanthian Boar
- 5 Augean Stables
- 6 Stymphalian Birds

The last six labours involved the transformation of our more physical nature which is more closer to home, as it were, and thereby more accessible. Now we move towards addressing our soul nature and we have to move further afield away from Greece, seas journeys into the unconscious. The three primary forces at work in our soul life are thinking, feeling and willing. Herakles moves south where we have to address the immensely powerful bull nature forces. Its base is in our metabolic undersea fluid region. We delude ourselves in our various addictions and offer substitutes as sacrifice but deep down in our subconscious Poseidon is angered and will vent fury as a consequence somewhere in our soul life. Herakles took hold of this soul force and, riding on its back, steered it in the direction it needed to go.

We have to witness the early pre-dawn sky to see the magnificent spectacle of Taurus in the north east. Aldebaran, its strong red star, is the eye of the bull and its horns point challengingly towards Orion. The star cluster Pleiades is also in this constellation.

August

In the previous labour Herakles headed south beyond Greece and now he has to head north to the land of Thrace for his eighth labour. Here he is to capture the four human flesh eating mares of Diomedes. The unnatural diet made the horses maddeningly wild. Herakles had some companions with him in this adventure. During the night Herakles easily overcame the stable guards and with his strength was able to tether and take the horses back to his awaiting companions. However when they were reunited Herakles turned and saw that Diomedes and his men were pursuing them. Herakles gave the reins of the mares to Abduras to hold while he went to fight off the pursuers. Herakles was too strong for the pursuers but so were the mares for Abduras who was killed and eaten by the horses. In turn Diomedes was killed and fed to his own horses who then became pacified. The horses were delivered to Eurystheus, the labour complete.

In mythographic language horses, when they are being ridden, represent thinking. We can take the reins and ride our thinking and, by the same token, unbridled thinking will eat up our development potential (Abduras). North is the domain of the soul force of thinking, it can be a friend as well as an enemy. Clues can be found in horses names. They are Podargos (the swift), Lampon (the shining), Xanthos (the yellow) and Deinos (the terrible). For me 'the terrible' thought is doubt, 'the yellow' when my thinking is superficial and drawn to outer appearances. 'Shining' is when it becomes illusory and far too often I draw reactive conclusions way too 'the swift'. When I bring a conscious thought that is willed, I take the reins of this extraordinary capacity that can be turned upon itself to look at itself. When I think about thinking, or about something that is not perceptible to my ordinary outer senses, then I am using a higher eternal thinking faculty, going beyond my transient physical brain. Can these four horses become 'light', 'spiritual', 'golden' and 'powerful'?

I have already mentioned the centaur constellations of Sagittarius and Centaurus in April writings but I would like to take a look at Centaurus/ Chiron again. In some depictions of the constellations Centaurus is holding a lance in front of him. Towards the end of the lance is the constellation Lupus the Wolf. In front of Lupus, lying in the Milky Way, is Ara the altar. In this sky story I see the picture of Chiron sacrificing his beastly nature at the heavenly altar. This region from Scorpius to the Cross with the Galactic Centre in its midst is a very rich and mysterious region holding many archetypal ritual symbols for the Wardamin peoples of northern Australia, and probably for many other indigenous cultures too.

September

In a way the horsey themes build with Herakles' ninth task to obtain Hippolyta's, Queen of the Amazons, magic girdle – hippo meaning horse in Greek. Hippolyta had a special piece of armour. It was a leather belt that had been given to her by Ares, her father and the war god, because she was the best warrior of all the Amazons. She wore this belt across her chest and used it to carry her sword and spear. It granted her the title of queen and gave her magical powers.

This journey, which was at the request of Admete, the daughter of Eurystheus, takes him to the east, to Scythia. On arrival by ship, crewed with friends, Hippolyta welcomed him and, after hearing Herakles' story, it seemed that she would gift him the girdle. However Hera in the guise of an Amazon and ever a challenge for Herakles, spread rumours amongst the Amazon women implying that Herakles planned to kill their queen. They rose up in arms against Herakles. Hippolyta was killed in the fray along with many of the Amazons. He took off the Queen's girdle and fighting off attackers, Herakles and crew sailed away.

This labour is at the request of Admete (unwedded), the daughter of Eurystheus, and not by the king himself who ordered all the other labours. Hippolyta is the focus of the story. Two females. Our soul is feminine, whether we be male or female in the body. Our feeling life can reign queen of the soul. Looking at the roots of the word Hippolyte , we have hippo (horse) lyte (combined???) or loosened???) and for Amazon we have a (without) mazon (one breast). On a superficial level, that of cold logic, the Amazonians had their right breast removed so that these skilled riders of horses (reined thinking) and archers (directed will) would not have a breast in the way when shooting their arrows. What could another level of meaning be? Could it be that we need to find the magic girdle power potential to combine, in a weaving way, our thinking into our feeling life as well as our right handed willing into this feeling life? Most of our feeling life is unconscious at present and susceptible to rumours. Can we make feeling the sovereign of the soul in order to bring heartfelt thoughts and deeds into the world? East is also where the Sun King rises. We prepare our soul Queen for a future marriage with the Spirit King.

Horse depictions in the sky include centaurs and a winged horse but what about a horse associated with magic? There is Monoceros (one horn), a unicorn, a small fainter constellation to the east of Orion and visible in the early morning sky. I like to point out the distinctive sting end of the constellation of Scorpius. Take a good look at the tail of Scorpius. Does it not look like the head of a horse? Take a closer look just above the muzzle and into the Milky Way - can you see a star there indicating the single horn? The unicorn is associated with magical powers and transformation- and it is not a monster!

October

For the 10th labour Herakles sets off to the west, where the sun sets. It is the last of the 4 soul directions a synthesis of the previous three. He has to obtain the red cattle of Geryon, the powerful 3 bodied giant monster with four wings who lived beyond Oceanus, the threshold beyond the known world. The cattle were guarded by a herdsman with his 2 headed hound, a brother to Cerberus. En route Herakles had to battle many monsters and split a mountain creating the Pillars of Hercules, the Strait of Gibraltar now opened up the Mediterranean sea. He also shot an arrow at Helios the Sun god when he overheated whilst crossing the Libyan desert. Helios, in admiration for the hero's courage, responded by loaning him his chariot which he used to cross from west to east each night. On arrival at Erythia, Geryon's island, Herakles overcame the herdsman and his hound with his club to steal the cattle but then found himself pursued by Geryon. Using his arrows Herakles killed Geryon. However the task was by no means over and he underwent many challenges in getting the cattle back to Greece where they were sacrificed to the goddess Hera.

Once the candidate for initiation has travelled to the south, north and east, strengthening the forces of willing, thinking and feeling, he or she is ready to travel beyond where the sun sets and darkness prevails. Oceanus is a threshold, its stream the border to the world. This side of the Pillars of Hercules we experience ourselves in our ordinary consciousness. Beyond this gateway is the suprasensible world, dark until we develop our subtle senses to the stage we can bring forth our own spiritual light. At this stage of our development we explore the threshold but are not yet ready to cross fully over into it. We can get past the two headed guard dog but not yet the three headed hound, Cerberus. The eternal nature of our spirit travels in its Sun loaned chariot to meet and experience some of the three-fold truths of its reality. It is not yet developed enough to travel on its own self illuminating powers. Nonetheless red cattle soul gifts from the spiritual world can be brought back into our ordinary consciousness after further trials.

When we look at the twelve zodiacal constellations, those of the eighty plus constellations that the Sun, Moon and planets move in front of, we have five of them associated with

light/consciousness and seven with darkness/ sub conscious. Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer and Leo are those associated with light and are in the northern hemisphere. Southern hemisphere's 'underworld' constellations have the two centaurs, Cetus a sea monster, many watery images and birds like Phoenix, Corvus the crow, Grus the crane and Pavo the peacock. We also have many dark regions in the Milky Way including the Galactic Centre. Jason and his crew of Argonaut heroes went in search of the Golden Fleece. This quest for Wisdom took them sailing south in the Argo down the Milky Way Ocean into the mysterious dark world of the unconscious of our bird-soul dark-metabolic regions. I find it fascinating that some Australian indigenous cultures give more importance to the dark regions of the night sky than the bright light stars. They come before the light but harbour the future light in becoming.

November

Coming to the last but one of his 12 labours, Eurystheus, more determined than ever to have Herakles killed in a supposedly impossible to achieve labour, sends him to bring up Cerberus from the underworld kingdom of Hades. The three headed, serpent tailed and snake-furred dog Cerberus guarded these gates of hell. To help Herakles prepare for such a trial he was sent to Eleusis to be initiated into their Mysteries, dealing with death and rebirth. Eleusis lies just north of Athens and, in Hellenic times, held annual secret religious rites for the cult of Demeter and her daughter, Persephone, bride to Hades. All of Herakles' earlier labours were preparation to be acceptable as a candidate for initiation.

With initiation complete Herakles is able to commune more consciously with the spiritual world depths and is guided to the gates of Hades by Hermes and Athena. He passes by Cerberus, its guard, and approaches Hades asking for permission to take Cerberus to the upper world. Hades agrees on the proviso that he has to do battle with Cerberus without the aid of weapons and, on completion of his task, to return Cerberus unharmed to Hades. Herakles dressed in the lion skin from his first labour, bare handedly manages to subdue this terrible monster and deliver him to Eurystheus. Credited for his labour he returns Cerberus to Hades.

The Ancient Greek Mystery Centres were secret and only for those privileged to be invited into them. Those to be initiated were trained and guided by priests. This day and age is not the time for secrets or to give over our ego to another individuality or entity. We need to do our own training guided by the everyday and extraordinary people we come into contact with, selectively learn from the information sources we use, and take conscious heed of our life experiences.

The first six labours were in the physical realm, seventh to tenth take us into the breadths of the soul's domain, and now this eleventh brings us into the spiritual world depths. Our self development needs to have gone through a complete initiation in the trials of life and destiny to enter the nether world. Hermes is the messenger to get us there, once we recognise Hades, this initial darkness to our maturing higher senses, we have to overcome the guardian to this threshold. The guardian allows us to pass once we have the readiness strength to do so. It is no easy accomplishment and all our training, strength and courage are needed and many failed attempts!

In the evening sky we can look up to the Milky Way and tracking along it go just past the sting of the very distinctive Scorpio. That takes us into Sagittarius and in the dark region there we have the mysterious Galactic centre. Stars of the future are waiting to be born there. Future deeds of our will lie in our inner dark metabolic regions, unconscious to our ordinary thinking .

Jupiter now joins Saturn in Sagittarius on the way to meet next year. Every 20 years they conjunct and we can watch in anticipation of the February event to come. Venus will come up to join them later in the month. Very busy around the Galactic Centre, great viewing!

We have two dogs to view around Orion. There is Canis Major with its brilliant star Sirius, and Canis Minor with Procyon its bright star. We could see the two headed dog in the story as Canis Minor and next month's story has the greater dog, Cerberus, featuring.

December

For his twelfth and final task Herakles is ordered to bring back some of the golden apples from a tree growing in the Garden of Hesperides. These apples gave one immortality when eaten and were a marriage gift from Gaia to Hera when she married Zeus. The garden was tended by the three Hesperides, daughters of Atlas who held the heavens on his shoulders. The apple tree was guarded by a never sleeping hundred headed dragon by the name of Laden. Herakles had to find out where this magic garden was by getting clues of its whereabouts from various challenging beings. Eventually he came across Prometheus chained to the Caucasian mountains and with his liver being daily eaten away by an eagle. The liver regrows during the night and his torture continues again the next day. Herakles shot the eagle with an arrow. The torture ended but Prometheus could not be freed, as was decreed by Zeus, until an immortal changes place with him. Chiron does so and so doing becomes mortal and undergoes death. Prometheus advises that his Titan brother Atlas could fetch the apples for Herakles. Herakles found Atlas and made his request to which Atlas agreed provided that Herakles relieves Atlas of his burden of holding the up the sky on his shoulders while he went off to get the apples. So Herakles took up this burden and Atlas went and harvested some of the apples. The dragon guardian of the apple tree was not a problem as Atlas's daughters were responsible for the garden. On returning to Herakles and having enjoyed not having to carry the sky, Atlas no longer wanted to take up his task again. He offered to deliver the apples to Eurystheus on his behalf while Herakles took on shouldering the sky. Herakles pretended to agree but asked Atlas to hold the sky for a few moments while he had a brief respite to place some cushioning on his shoulders for the burden. Atlas was tricked into doing so and Herakles picked up the apples and returned to Greece to complete all twelve of his labours. The apples were given to Hera and Herakles, 'The Glory of Hera' lives up to his name.

The initiated person is now able to explore the spiritual heights and it too has its many challenges. His/her focus now changes and the initiates energy is directed to helping all of humanity's journey, Prometheus symbolises the collective human. He is bound into a physical body with its physical sense organs addicted to the transitory sense world. Our eagle eyed consciousness directed to the sense world eats away at liver life forces. When they switch off in our sleep the liver has a chance to recharge. When we shoot our eagle we are freed from the limitations of being solely stimulated and driven by the sense world. However we only become human when we overcome our self centeredness, let go of our individual ego-hood, and think, feel and act on behalf of all. Freely choosing to do this sacrificing is the higher loving. Chiron does this, an immortal experiences being human and undergoing the mystery of death, which only mankind can undergo. Herakles always reports back to Eurystheus. We as both divine-spiritual and earthly-mortal beings give a commitment to the Earth. Spiritual apple gifts, not from the Tree of Knowledge, but from Tree of Life are brought back for others. The challenges, set by Eurystheus on behalf of Hera, help Herakles light up his Zeus-divinity within.

Atlas is the connection between the heavens and earth. This connection is often portrayed as the world tree with its trunk bridging the heights and depths. Looking up into the night sky we see the Milky Way canopy of this tree, its trunk world axis stretching from the Galactic centre bulge down into the depths of Gaia. Every 24 hours this world tree rises in the east and falls to the west.

Herakles has his own constellation in the northern sky.

Brian Keats
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