

# MARTINIST LESSONS

*Julian Johnson, SI*

*Julian Johnson has served the Traditional Martinist Order in many capacities. He currently serves as the Board Treasurer of the English Grand Lodge for the Americas. In this article, he elucidates some of the most valuable and inspiring lessons of the Martinist teachings.*



The Martinist studies, drawn from the spiritual insights of Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin, offer a unique window into the nature of humankind, the Cosmos, and the Divine as well as their interrelationship. The unintelligible, becomes intelligible, the obscure becomes clear. We also begin to glimpse the meaning of the references to the creative powers that humankind possessed in its so-called First Estate, powers and capacities that become available to the mystical aspirant. The road to returning to this First Estate is lengthy, but offers rewards at every point along the way. Martinism provides innumerable insights and tools to aid the mystical student in making this journey. From this profound source, each student draws his or her own Martinist Lessons according to her or his needs on the mystical path. The intent of this article is to reflect on a few Martinist Lessons gleaned by the author, exploring their embedded wisdom and, hopefully, stimulating further personal realization on the part of the author and the reader.

One of the profound ideas conveyed in the Martinist teachings is the principle of the Equilibration of Opposites. This takes us back to the Biblical story of the Garden of Eden, where humankind is introduced to the Pillars of Opposition. After eating the proverbial forbidden fruit, humankind comes to know Good and Evil, the most fundamental of the multitudinous pairs of opposites that our perceptions give rise to. From “walking” and being one with

the Divine in the Garden, humankind is seemingly separated from the Divine and enters the world of perceived duality, experiencing the duality of Divinity and Self.

Martinism teaches invaluable lessons about the world of duality. One of the first is the relativity of the pairs of opposites. In the words of the Kabbalists, the “pillars dance.” There are no absolute qualities, only the perceived value of a quality in relation to its imagined opposite. This same idea is presented to us in our Rosicrucian studies, with the illustration of a flashlight. In a darkened room, the light of a flashlight appears as positive in comparison to the otherwise darkness. However, the same light taken outside into the noonday sun becomes almost imperceptible in comparison to the brilliance of the Sun. It now represents relative darkness in comparison to the Sun. The pillars dance.

Of course, we see essentially the same truth in the reports of travelers from higher income countries to the lowest income countries. Even the most disadvantaged individual traveling from the United States to rural areas of underdeveloped countries recognizes his or her relative affluence in comparison to the many people who lack access to clean water and even the most basic shelter. Poverty becomes wealth in another setting. The scientific wisdom of one era is ignorance in another. What is waste to one creature is food to another. The Martinist teachings encourage us to reflect on the many pairs of opposites that our minds identify and their relativity, helping

us to realize that the qualities we perceive have no absolute values in themselves, but are assigned them by our minds based on time, place, and personal experience.

### Equilibration

However, Martinism goes even further, by offering insight into the Kabbalistic concept of the Middle Pillar and how we may apply it to our personal work of reintegration. Going beyond the pairs of opposites that we perceive, Martinism reminds us that our goal is to discover the equilibrating third or middle pillar which restores the duality back to Unity. This state, which resolves the two pillars back to their original unity, is a unique condition that transports us beyond the subjective and ever-changing experience of duality, opening the window to simply perceive What Is, without judgment, like the immediate experience of a new food on one's palate.

Unlike the instruction that one receives through religious education, our Martinist teachings advise us to cling to neither pillar, but instead to equilibrate this pair of opposites in our consciousness. This does not mean teetering on an imagined midpoint between opposites. This can be seen through the pair of opposites, pride and humility. The objective of the mystical student is not to eschew pride for its opposite, humility, but instead to move beyond the concern of how he or she is seen by others, whether as important or unimportant. When this is achieved, the mystical student simply goes about her or his activities without concern for the estimation of herself or himself in the eyes of others. The duality is restored to unity and no longer manifests in our consciousness.

In line with its unique view of the Pillars of Opposition, Martinism also transforms our thinking about the nature of good and evil. These are not static characteristics to the Martinist, but indicators of



harmony or inharmony. According to the dictionary, harmony is the orderly arrangement of things, in other words, everything in its place. What is good or harmonious for one creature may be bad or inharmonious for another. The carbon dioxide we exhale is a waste product of human respiration and potentially toxic to humans, but carbon dioxide at the same time serves as an important nutrient for plant life.

Yet, the Martinist understanding of this pair of opposites goes further. Like Rosicrucianism, Martinism embraces the foundational concept that all of Creation, and notably humankind, is in a state of continuing evolution. Citing the words of Martinès de Pasqually, “In the end, all will return to the Beginning.” So for the Martinist, humankind is evolving on a path of return to the Divinity referred to as Reintegration. On her or his path of evolution, the seeming perpetual movement or dance of good and evil serves as a source of guidance for the Martinist.

In Martinist terms, evil is that which is opposed to our spiritual evolution. How-



ever, the Martinist student comes to realize that no static list of that which is evil can be composed. At each point in her or his journey, the Martinist aspirant must examine his or her desires, thoughts, and actions to evaluate whether they continue to aid or instead impede his or her spiritual progress. When they aid the student's spiritual advancement, they are good; when they impede, they have become opposed to the student's spiritual progress and evil. This can also be illustrated through the simple analogy of a pair of shoes. A pair of shoes purchased for a child of ten will shield the child's feet from injury and cold and provide physical support. In this way, the shoes are good. However, if five years later the child's feet were forced into the same pair of shoes, they would eventually harm the child's feet, leading to injury and deformity. The shoes would now be evil in relation to that child's development.

Using a mystical example, we can see this same realization through another pair of opposites, idolatry and putrefaction. Idolatry refers to building up the value of something in our mind; putrefaction refers to something in the process of breaking down. When we first embark on the Path, we usually have brought along with us an anthropomorphic concept of the Divine that we have built up, heavily influenced by our childhood experiences and religious upbringing. Similar concepts are shared by much of humanity. In the extreme form, the Divine takes on the full range of human characteristics, ranging from love to anger. Such concepts are usually accompanied by a Divine-sanctioned code of conduct that helps regulate the behavior of individuals toward others, which is of obvious value to society. In creating our concept or image of the Divine, we have taken something unknowable and ineffable and given it form in our minds as a way to more personally relate to it. We have created an image of the Divine, and while

it is not made of metal or stone, it qualifies as a form of idolatry. For much of our lives, our concept or image of the Divine may have helped to personalize the Divine and to foster our awareness of the presence of the Divine in our everyday existence. Up until that point it aided our spiritual growth, and by a Martinist understanding, was good.

However, in our development as mystical students, we must be prepared to allow the concept and image of the Divine which we have created to be broken down and destroyed; otherwise it will ultimately limit our development. If we steadfastly hold onto the image or concept of the Divine that we have created, it will interfere with our ability to come to a greater realization of the actual nature of the Divine or the First Cause. The formerly good will become evil in that it limits our spiritual progress. For reference, the Buddhist aspirant is admonished that he or she must first empty his or her cup in order for it to be filled. Similarly, the Master Jesus advised that one cannot put new wine into old wine cloth without tearing it apart. New wine requires new wine cloth. Jesus's parable of the vine and the branches embodies this same principle when it refers to the pruning of the branch that brings forth fruit, so that it may bring forth more fruit.

### **The Alchemy of Illumined Thought**

One of the most profound ideas that Martinism emphasizes can be summarized in the phrase, the Alchemy of Illumined Thought. This phrase points to the creative power of the Divine Mind that we are part of. Most of us are first introduced to this idea as Rosicrucians, when we learn the practice of visualization, an introductory step into the creative power of the Divine Mind resident within us. We may sense a more profound meaning when we are told that a Rosicrucian temple is made sacred by our thought and conduct. Nonethe-



less, these just hint at the power of Mind or consciousness at the core of our Being. But what is Illuminated Thought? One way of describing it is: Thought that is energized by awareness of one's spiritual nature and connection to the Divine. Such thought moves us above mere awareness of the physical and emotional worlds of our consciousness, attuning us with the world that lies behind ordinarily perceived reality.

Well-prepared officers, in performing our Martinist and Rosicrucian rituals and initiations, attune with the higher aspect of their Being in order to create the conditions that will be most beneficial to themselves and those participating in the rituals and initiations. For the observers, the design and content of the rituals are aimed at bringing their consciousness into awareness of the higher aspects of their Be-

ing. In addition to providing a temporary upliftment of our consciousness, over time such experiences yield their transformative effects, helping us to progressively transform our consciousness into a fuller awareness of our true nature.

Many of the techniques that we learn in our Martinist and Rosicrucian studies serve as tools to remind us or bring us back to awareness of the higher aspects of our Being. In a time of distress, when we consciously make the Rosicrucian sign or mentally enfold ourselves in the Martinist cloak, we are attuning our consciousness with the higher aspect of our Being. This shift opens a channel for the higher organizing and constructive principles of the Divine Consciousness to manifest immediately in our material reality, bringing order and harmony.



## Universal Force Diffused Invisibly Throughout the Whole

The next Martinist Lesson we will reflect on is related to the preceding and inspired by our teachings' reference to the "universal force diffused invisibly throughout the whole." From every vantage point, we live in a sea of energy. The scientist will note that the environment we live in is filled with electromagnetic energy from a host of sources. At the most fundamental level, the universe is filled by a field of background energy, speculated as arising from the Big Bang that brought the material universe that we know into existence. In addition, the space we occupy is also filled by electromagnetic radio waves at a multitude of frequencies from countless sources emanating from our planet and beyond. Up to 65 billion particles, known as neutrinos, pass through every square centimeter of our bodies every second at certain times of the day.

But in addition to the many known frequencies of energy we live amidst, we even more fundamentally live in a sea of Cosmic Intelligence. While it is invisible to our eyes and imperceptible to our physical senses, our mystical explorations show it to be omnipresent and always available for our engagement. This Cosmic Intelligence, nevertheless, manifests within us and all about us. It is the intelligence that governs the myriad activities of the estimated 37 trillion individual cells that make up our body; it is the consciousness that manifests in every living creature, small or large; it is the force that underlies the laws of the universe; it is the intelligence that regulates what we call karma; it is the consciousness that manifests as and through each of us. Like in our bodies, this Intelligence is not centered in a single location, but is everywhere at once, undiluted throughout the creation. One of the common defining characteristics of the experience of Cosmic Consciousness

is the awareness of the omnipresence of this Immanent Intelligence. It exists apart from time and space and is ever-present and universal. In the words of the Apostle Luke, it is that within which we live, move, and have our being. As said in Psalm 139:

Where can I go from Your Spirit?  
Or where can I flee from Your presence?  
If I ascend into heaven, You are there;  
If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.  
If I take the wings of the morning  
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,  
Even there Your hand shall lead me,  
And Your right hand shall hold me.  
If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me,"  
Even the night shall be light about me;  
Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You,  
But the night shines as the day;  
The darkness and the light are both alike to You.

### Know Thyself

We will close with one last Martinist Lesson, in many ways it is really the first. It is based on the injunction Man [Person], Know Thyself. In our Martinist teachings, it is referred to as the study of the Book of Man or Humankind. Saint-Martin speaks of the importance of directing our attention inward, to study the object most immediate and at hand, our own nature. He contrasts this with the outward approaches of science and philosophy of his time, which is still true today. Consciousness and Being remain almost entirely unexplored domains in the world of science, notwithstanding the phenomenal accomplishments that science has achieved. While humankind continues to extend the frontier of that which can be known, science has largely ignored the study of the Knower, leaving this object of study to the mystic and mystical aspirant. I can find no

better words than those of Saint-Martin to capture the urgency of this inward path.

“At the first glance which one directs upon oneself, one will perceive without difficulty that there must be a science or an evident law for one’s own nature, since there is one for all beings, though it is not universally in all, and since even in the midst of our weakness, our ignorance, and humiliation, we are employed only in the search after truth and light. Albeit, therefore, the efforts which a person makes daily to attain the end of one’s researches are so rarely successful, it must not be considered on this account that the end is imaginary, but only that we are deceived as to the road which leads thereto, and are hence in the greatest of privations, since we do not even know the way in which we should walk. The overwhelming misfortune of humanity is not that we are ignorant of the existence of truth, but that we misconstrue its nature. What errors, and suffering would have been spared us if, far from seeking truth in the phenomena of material nature, we had resolved to descend into ourselves, and had sought to explain material things by humanity, and not humanity by material things; if fortified by courage and patience, we had preserved in the calm of our imagination the discovery of this light which we desire, all of us, with so much ardor.

“The human understanding, by applying itself so exclusively to outward things, of which it cannot even yet give a satisfactory account, knows less of the nature of one’s own being even than of the visible objects around us; yet, the moment we cease to look at the true character of our intimate essence, we become quite blind to the eternal Divine Source from which we descend: for, if Humanity, brought back to our primitive elements, is the only true witness and positive sign by which this supreme Universal Source may be known, that source must necessarily be effaced,

when the only mirror that can represent it to our minds, disappears.

“This is enough to show how carefully we ought to sound the depths of our being, and affirm the sublimity of our essence, that we may thereby demonstrate the Divine Essence, for there is nothing else in the world that can do it directly.

“I repeat, that, to attain this end, every argument taken from this world and nature, is unsatisfactory, unstable. We suppose things for the world, to arrive at a fixed Being, in whom everything is true; we lend to the world abstract and figurative verities, to prove a Being who is altogether real and positive; we take things without intelligence, to prove a Being who is intelligence itself; things without love, to demonstrate the One who is only Love; things circumscribed within limits, to make known the One who is Free; and things that die, to explain the One who is Life.”

### Closing Prayer from Saint-Martin

“Eternal source of all which is, You who send spirits of error and of darkness to the untruthful, which cut them off from Your love, do You send unto one who seeks You a spirit of truth, uniting him forever with You. May the fire of this spirit consume in me all the traces of the old person, and, having consumed them, may it produce from those ashes a new person, on whom Your sacred hand shall not disdain to pour a holy Chrism! Be this the end of penitence and its long toils, and may Your life, which is one everywhere, transform my whole being in the unity of Your image, my heart in the unity of Your love, my activity in the unity of the works of justice, and my thought in the unity of all lights.”

