

The Tome of Basic Religious Instruction: A Cultural Base for the Development of Elementary Enlightenment

Welcome, I see you have finally found time to glean some insight into understanding the Gods, whilst gaining philosophical knowledge of our place in the world. My name is Pressill Worthington, senior consultant to the Cultural Committee on behalf of the Vaes Astrologicus and the wider Churches of Enlightenment.

I have been commissioned by the Crown to compile a compressed compendium on Religious Lore to serve as a handy quick reference for those who lack the prior education yet seek to undertake Crown work of a religious nature. Where there are contrasting opinions I have sought to include that fact, so not to leave you in the dark. The College has its own particular defined way of thinking but that does not mean that it is rigid. There is an annual meeting (Logic Annulus) between the senior College Vaes to debate new findings and whether they have enough support for consideration. Whilst change is a rare happening, only once a generation, new religious doctrine can find its way into the accepted norm.

It is my opinion that sometimes there is a right and wrong answer, and sometimes there is room for questions and alternative routes in which to find logic -although perhaps that is the water mage within me talking. Air mages are considerably more traditional in His approach. It is common knowledge that they tend to be the conservative voices at the Logic Annulus.

Origins of the World

The current agreed tenets set down by the College of Enlightenment dictate that the five Gods of Enlightenment, and Thalaë, are all beings of great power. Born on this world, from a time before documentation exists, they were powerful entities which roamed the surface of the earth. Their natural affinity towards the elements of this world strongly suggests some form of unique link between them and this world. Modern primitive deity worshippers feed into this, arguing that additional minor Gods reflect other elements of existence.

There are many alternative views on exactly how the world was formed and how the Gods are interlinked. Some researchers and philosophers have proposed a variety of theories and I would be remiss to detail this within my briefing notes. I shall not detail all of them but it makes sense for me to write some of these theories, which include: that the Gods are wandering beings of epic proportions who are lost; the Gods are not physically embodied but more like universal threads of energies which can be channelled; it was the Gods who created the world as a home to live out their lives; or that the spark of the Gods creation cascaded into the origin of the world. Certain groups within the main College of Enlightenment have since adopted some facets of these theories, branching into independence from the central school of thought. Usually the College tolerates this as long as the principles do not directly cause the college harm, or if they try to promote opposition to the findings of the Logic Annulus.

Ancient sketching from caves display a time when the Gods walked hand in hand with humans, and it is suggested that they had a heavy hand in human's evolution from cave dweller into the modern advanced state of culture. All of what society has achieved can be linked to the Gods - connected to their own ways. It is only through asking their favour that great miracles can be performed. Why do they not walk openly amongst us today? Once again it is a matter which has numerous potential answers and some even suggest that the Gods do still journey upon us – involving themselves in issues when needed. However, the College points to the Enlightenment Wars as a reason for the change in the depth of involvement.

The Enlightenment Wars

Thalae had always been the quietest of all the old beings of power. She was the governess of death, making an appearance at the end of life. The Goddess of Darkness enjoyed the fear She caused to the primitive human creatures, basking in their simple nature. When the Gods of Enlightenment began to take an active role in the development of mankind, Thalae distanced Herself from their efforts. She had no time to spend on helping such creatures. It was not Her duty, and neither did She feel it was the duty of any of the others to invest their time and energy on such a feat.

As man evolved, they gained understanding of the world; their minds were opened up and lightened from the darkness. The darkness was Thalae's domain. Through the other Gods tampering Her power had diminished. Pushing their evolution also brought about the possibility that the human race would become stronger and potentially gain their own powers. The fact they were so many could eventually bring a force that would rival Her own. Trying to negotiate with the other Gods seemed fruitless; they had already begun their mission against Her will. Her only alternative was to engage the other Gods, counter their work and wage a war upon the humans with pestilence and death. Crops were destroyed, whole cities set alight, and waves of diseases wiping out families.

Shanyith led Terrena, Histevon, and Axandia against Thalae in order to protect mankind. They had invested great time and energy to help fuel the evolution. All of their efforts still failed to stop the growing tide of darkness. The vast increase of loss and pain to human society dramatically increased the powers of Thalae. Eventually Gaianna joined the war, bringing with Her great strength drawn from nature. For many decades the battle raged – diminishing all sides of their power. The Gods of Enlightenment, under the direction of Shanyith, channelled much remaining power into the ongoing human evolution. Similar to Thalae's own fears, He felt that man's own power could be used to battle Thalae.

Part of their infusing of power included creating offspring between God and those special chosen humans advanced enough to contain the energies. The bloodline allowed man to achieve great feats of skill – never seen before. Armed with these children of the Gods of Enlightenment it turned the tides of the war and forced Thalae to sue for peace.

Unfortunately, as the bloodline has filtered down, so has man's attuning to these energies. Many of the heroic deeds mentioned in folklore seem to have been lost.

The Shifting

The Shifting is a perversion of the natural order. It is not tied in with the true ways of the world and has a seeming desire to corrupt the landscape. Because of this the College has declared the Shifted a foreign force – an invading presence from the beyond. It has either been drawn into existence from evil magic, or landed from one of the other celestial locations. Research into it is strictly prohibited with a punishment of death for those who study it without a permit, usually controlled by the Vaes Biologicus. So much of Corvantin has been destroyed by the Shifting - with little sign of remission - that messing with these forces can only corrupt the soul.

Now to the bit you have been waiting for, and I apologise if I have somewhat lost focus and rambled about the basics behind the religion. I just felt it wise to explain that there are differences of thought. Religion can be as much about emotion as it can be about knowledge. I have broken down the information into eight sections; the five Gods of Enlightenment, Thalaë, and Primitive Deities. The latter two are not widespread or common, but there are examples or findings of these groups within Corvantin – therefore they deserve inclusion. These are the current upheld views taught by the College of Enlightenment.

Gods of Enlightenment: Shanyith

Traits: Knowledge, Secrets, Intellect, Science, Speed, Research

Primary Colour: Grey, Secondary Colours: Navy Blue, Lilac

Imagery: Slender man, wizened of face, with long silver hair, frequently depicted holding a scrying dish or abacus

History: Shanyith was the eldest of the Gods of Enlightenment. Upon His birth the knowledge of the world rushed into His open mind; the unexpected shock dying His hair grey. Shanyith rose to His feet - eyes wide open – and spoke of His excitement of existence, and all of its mysteries. From an early age Shanyith tasked himself the duty of understanding the world and watching natural advancement to learn everything new. This was a personal adventure of discovery.

During the early war against Thalaë, Shanyith organised battle tactics for the four Gods of Enlightenment. His strategic mind maximised all available resources but still their combined strength remained insufficient. In attempts to balance He devised a cunning plan to declare His love for Gaianna, therefore uniting Her forces to His. The love was nothing more than a lie. Terrena, Goddess of Earth, uncovered the plot and in Her divine wisdom informed Gaianna of the deception. Foiled and shamed, before His plan had even begun, Shanyith swore to spite Terrena for Her betrayal. He stole Terrena's most prized possession, The Ancient Hammer of Corvan, and irrevocably shattered it into a thousand pieces. From that point on He pledged to spite Her by gladly destroying any of Her beautiful craftwork.

With His well-tuned ability at scrying, the other Gods questioned whether Shanyith knew of Thalaë's plans to destroy The Rattling Forest but had chosen not to intervene. The Air God vehemently denied the accusation, placing blame on the Goddess of Despairs own skill when moving in the shadows. It sets a powerful precedent which filters into many of the Schools today, one of slight mistrust towards the Air mages for what they know, and what they choose to keep secret.

Religion Today: The Church of Shanyith is the most powerful in regards of numbers and following. A path of religious enlightenment is one of the key studies for those who have an affinity for Air. Many of the schools and libraries throughout Corvantin are funded by the Knowledge and Science Conclave (KASC), a committee assembled of the most senior priests of Shanyith. They ensure that the Tenants are strictly followed, frowning on those who would deviate from the established truth. In their opinion they do things the correct way, and have a tendency to ridicule those who do things differently. Their knowledge network is quite frenzied, with priests reporting back weekly on events which have occurred in their territory. Because of this fact they are often the first to locate problems, usually approaching dominions or other colleges to inform them of issues they were probably unaware of.

Gods of Enlightenment: Terrena

Traits: Time, Stone, Craftsmen, Guardians, History, Wisdom, Patience

Primary Colour: Brown, Secondary Colours: Terracotta, Jade

Imagery: A stocky middle aged female with short hair, dressed in an apron, holding a small hammer or an hourglass

History: Known for cold methodical logic, Terrena epitomises wisdom. For Her, time is another tool to ensure a well-formed outcome, whether for crafting or decision making. She is the Goddess who acts as seer providing advice from a vast wealth of hindsight, although it can take Her considerable time in coming to a final decision.

When Shanyith told Her of His plans to deceive Gaianna, Terrena locked herself away crafting. Deep in thought She pondered the situation and what possible outcomes may occur. She crafted The Quakers, a matching pair of short swords, which were the final two Corvanite blades produced by the Ancient Hammer of Corvan. Upon their completion Terrena visited the Goddess of Wood and offered The Quakers as a sign of respect. She detailed Shanyith's deception, but continued to explain how the Gods of Enlightenment needed Gaianna's assistance. Gaianna accepted the kind gifts, but declined the offer to join the war.

When Shanyith uncovered what had transpired He rushed to Terrena's great workshop and in a fit of childish rage obliterated Her Ancient Hammer. The Goddess of Earth was devastated by the loss of the finest crafting implement in existence. Shanyith fled as a solitary tear escaped Her eye. Since that day the pair has been locked in an endless cycle of creation and destruction. Terrena hopes that one day Shanyith will stop His immature ways.

Religion Today: Major prayers to Terrena can take many days of preparation and worship, slowly formulating a beautiful ritual. Her followers, the Terreth, devote plenty of time to attention to detail in their holy praise, and pilgrimages to temples of Terrena often take years. But for them no masterwork is ever completed in a rush, and it is worth the wait. Earth priests are usually the last to voice their opinion, and the church looks through every fact before making a decision. They are frequently the last to vote on issues relating to the Logic Annulus.

Gods of Enlightenment: Axandia

Traits: Change, Creativity, Vibrancy, Action, Artists, Alchemists

Primary Colour: Orange, Secondary Colours: Black, Red

Image: As goddess of change She is depicted as a variety of ages from child to old lady. However, in all of them She is olive skinned, a warm smile, flaming eyes, and often with wings.

History: During Her early days Axandia gained much joy from changing Her appearance to confuse the world and other Gods. Her creative mind allowed a multitude of opportunity in which She could enjoy herself. There was a clear link between a mischievous mind and a creative one. It was through this abstract way of thought that She evolved into a skilled artist with a keen eye for colour and perspective.

Axandia's interests continued into the domain of alchemy. The mixture of ingredients in a potion was similar to the mixture of paint on a canvas. It was an art of time, patience, and experimentation which fuelled a desire to create something new. Histevon habitually remarked that Her move from art to alchemy was a dire shame – and it was a loss of culture that She had turned to wasting Her time with blending bits of earth and dust. Axandia is flippant to these complaints, for She never takes anything to heart. Her care free attitude is the exact opposite of the deep emotional strain which Her younger brother endures.

Religion Today: Many of those with an affinity for Axandia are identified at a young age due to abilities to change minor details of their appearance such as eye or hair colour. Schools are usually aware of the potential destructive capabilities of those with an affinity for the Fire Goddess; therefore many end up in segregated tuition programs or are transferred to the Xan. Xan institutions employ huge numbers of Water mages skilled at controlling misbehaving children with their ability to absorb magical effects. It is because of this fact that many of those touched by Axandia's abilities (especially younger mages) dislike their watery kin.

Before the Shifted arrived fire mages did not have the ability to change into those 'races' which the shifting brought with it. Only since this time did they find their skills allowed them to force temporary shifting effects. Due to the belief that each element has its unique attachment to the world for a reason – and due to the effects it has upon the physical forms- it fell to the Vaes Biologicus to monitor any research into The Shifting. There are some who directly blame the Vaes Biologicus for strengthening The Shifting and aiding with its expansion. Who knows what the exact cost on the soul when meddling with these magic's. All I do know is that death is the punishment for meddling with them on earth (without a permit).

Gods of Enlightenment: Histevon

Traits: Emotions, Poets, Oceans, Fate, Empathy, Lies

Primary Colour: Ivory, Secondary Colours: Blue, Turquoise

Imagery: A young male or boy covering His face with a mask, usually with another mask in His hand. He is regularly imagined by a lake, river or wishing well; with a spider or web in the background.

History: Histevon is the youngest of all the Gods, but is also the most compassionate. He was in tune with interpreting emotion from expression and tone. Such a sympathetic nature made it very difficult for him to conceal His own temperament to those around him, and the other Gods would mock His sensitivity. Axandia especially enjoyed playing practical jokes to upset him. Histevon found each day to be an extreme contrast of mental state.

After a while Histevon approached Shanyith for advice on how He could appear stronger, or ways of overcoming His emotional state - which He viewed as a flaw. Shanyith took Histevon to watch each of the other Gods. First they visited Terrena at Her workshop, who happened to be finishing an obsidian shield made from molten earth. With a stern face She raised Her craftwork into the air before placing it onto a shelf to cool. Shanyith asked Histevon what He could feel and Histevon replied "pride and delight". Next they called upon Gaianna, on the edge of a glade, communicating with a herd of deer. Her eyes were closed as Her head rested against the side of a pregnant doe. Shanyith repeated His question and Histevon replied "motherly love and affection".

Finally they located Axandia who was searching through the woodlands for a rare herb; Her frustrations were clearly getting the better of Her. Eventually She located what She sought and wandered back home. Histevon predicted the question and pre-emptively answered "relief and satisfaction". On their return walk Shanyith stopped Histevon and asked him to read how He felt. Histevon looked for a short while before whispering in confusion "I do not understand. You feel anguish and shame". Shanyith explained "I seek knowledge and understanding. I can predict what or how others should feel but I cannot know for sure. You, Histevon, can read through lies and uncover the truth. Your vision gives you something which I could only dream of possessing".

Histevon spent considerable time alone to understand the depth of what Shanyith had shown him. He began to realise that His awareness gave him a clear deep level of insight. He knew that mastering control of His observational skill would not be easy, but tried to focus on fully understanding each emotion in turn. It was during these times that Histevon began to wear a mask to conceal His own face from others.

With fine tuned understanding of others intentions, Histevon found that through heavy focus and personal investment He could counteract the spells of other Gods. He spent a lot of attention on Axandia to stop Her from messing further with people. Her personal jokes frequently upset him.

Religion Today: There are currently two major religious groups which exist in the name of the water God. When authorities require assistance at understanding motivation, or deciphering the truth from expression, then they will seek a Hissoric for they are masters at uncovering the truth. The second group are the reclusive Evanous who focus on predicting the future. Their churches are based around natural water which is channelled into a complex web in the temple floor. Evanous control a devout militaristic unit named The Weavers. Not much is known of their true purpose.

Flagellation and self harm is quite frequent amongst the descendants of Histevon. The world endures so much pain – and so do those who are so deeply attuned to that emotion. The Church is frequently moved by tales or situations of great emotion. They are usually most active in sending relief and assistance to those who are suffering.

Gods of Enlightenment: Gaianna

Traits: Nature, Healing, Animals, Woods, Rebirth, Seasons.

Primary Colour: Yellow, Secondary Colours: Green, Pink

Imagery: A fair skinned pregnant motherly figure surrounded by a variety of woodland animals

Gaianna initially stood apart from the other Gods of Enlightenment; She did not believe the concept of war against Thalae was beneficial. Her focus remained firmly on the denizens of Corvantin, where She viewed the life of all creatures and animals as sacred blessings.

Thalae, in a fit of rage at The College of Enlightenment, created a blanket of darkness over The Rattling Forest. Seven days later the darkness dissipated. All that remained of the largest Forest in The Protectorate of Crayle was death. Gaianna was outraged and pledged Her full support to the Gods of Enlightenment in order to balance against Thalae. She eternally promised all of Her power in any struggle against what She now knew to be death incarnate.

With the coming of The Shifting, Gaianna saw the immediate threat to the natural world. Its power to mutate and corrupt life offended Her. She took a key role in reuniting the Gods of Enlightenment, banishing the new 'God', and continually trying to repair the damage The Shifting had wreaked upon life in Corvantin. Even though there was a new risk to nature She is always remindful of Thalae and Her own destructive tendencies.

Religion Today: The majority of Gaian organisations are based on a matriarchal system; Females are celebrated as the bringers of life. All Gaian followers uphold the value of existence. Many are pacifists or follow strict guides when it comes to combat. However, luckily for them, Gaianna's divine healing powers directly work against the foul creatures of Thalae - for which they have no mercy. The outspoken militaristic terrorist group 'Fathers for Justice' is not supported by the general church, but they claim to act to protect nature where it cannot protect itself. For them the balance of nature and mankind must be maintained, even if that means killing the latter.

Thalae – Goddess of Despair:

Traits: Darkness, Despair, Sorrow, Death, Poison

Primary Colour: White, Secondary Colours: Black, Purple

Imagery: Generally depicted as a beautiful lady, thin featured, who is crying black tears; more recently She has been interpreted in an all black robe holding a dead griffon in Her hands.

History: Very little is known of Thalae, and even less is spoken of Her, because She is the herald of doom. Those lost to vicious and violent cases of death are said to have 'felt the veil of Thalae'. Children whisper Her name in fear due to the Goddess of Despair's fearful reputation. Due to Thalae being on the opposite side of the Enlightenment War there is limited history or research about Her. However, this fact seems to settle well with Her. She does not appear to want others to know about Her, Her motivations or aims, or what Her message really is.

So, what is known? There was most definitely a large period of war between Thalae and the Gods of Enlightenment, some form of agreement was reached to establish a cease fire, and eventually the Gods seem to have created some harmony. Thalae herself was perceived as evil and seems to be 'neutral' in the war against The Shifted. Any further statements would be simply assumptions made on limited facts.

Religion Today: The disturbing nature ascribed to Thalae has resulted in limited research taking place of Her in the open. Any tome in Her name immediately attracts suspicion and fear. The exception is those who actually follow Her path for they understand that death is a natural end to life and that it ensures the circle is complete. However, those 'cursed' with an affinity for Thalae usually have a horrendous struggle throughout their teenage years. There are few large temples which exist across the whole of Corvantin, and most of Her worshippers are forced into smaller sects.

In the ongoing war against The Shifting little support was forthcoming from the Goddess of Despair's followers. However, there are still those who – while worshipping Thalae – may still use her tools to work the Shifting for the greater good, recognising that an end to everything means an end to suffering as well. Many of these servants can be found in the Vaes Inquisitat, where they use their affinities for violence and terror to police their own.

Primeval Deities:

Many of these exist throughout the land, and they do not necessarily work in opposition to the Gods of Enlightenment. Some are rumoured to have existed before the Gods walked the earth, and others have just come to pass and represent areas in which none of the major Gods claim within their remit. There is also a school of thought – currently finding favour in the Vaes Astrologicus – that some of these deities are the children of the Gods from the War of Enlightenment, ascended due to their bloodlines to positions on a lesser pantheon.

Yithri – Idol of Hearts – This ancient Goddess represents all aspects of love; from desire, lust and passion to sexual envy. She is usually depicting holding a key, Her control of the heart.

Voz – He who Crushes – An ancient God summoned in times of war or revenge. He is portrayed in armour with a variety of weapons (usually a large maul).

Tagran – The Blazing Bulwark – One of the first recorded Gods of War and patron of soldiers. He is oft portrayed as armoured and faceless, in indistinct uniform, shield raised to guard with sword poised to strike.

Pollus – The Watcher – There is no evidence to suggest The Watcher dates back to ancient times and is probably a more modern inception. He is prayed to for protection whilst travelling, or to look over friends and family during difficult times.

Jarrik – The Miser's Misery – Another failure recent addition, Jarrik is the friend to thieves and cut-purses, and is rumoured to have stolen his way into the pantheon by trickery and deception.

Current Important Tenants of Faith – Pocket Guide to the past

- The five Gods of Enlightenment are siblings who each have their own Elemental affinity
- Thalaë, Goddess of Despair, is also somehow related to the Gods of Enlightenment – presumably their sister
- All of the Gods were born on earth in an ancient time
- The Gods fuelled human evolution and development
- The Shifting is the enemy of life, and enemy of everything the Gods have done
- Those who have succumbed to The Shifting and altered have lost their souls, and may not enter paradise.