

The Hymn of the Bride

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Summary

The *Hymn of the Bride*, which is part of the *Acts of Thomas*, contains a sequence of laudatory descriptions of a spiritual bride. Due to the symbolic nature of this composition, modern scholars substantially disagree about its interpretation. We give a theosophical interpretation, based primarily on the works of Alice A. Bailey, and show that this bride is an allegory of the human personality when it is illumined by the inner divinity.

Background

St. Judas Thomas was one of the twelve Apostles of Jesus. The *Acts of Thomas*, thought to be written during the second or third century CE, recounts the adventures of Thomas during his ministry. The mainstream Christian tradition, however, rejected the *Acts of Thomas* as apocryphal, and the Roman Catholic Church declared this work to be heretical at the Council of Trent during the sixteenth century. On the other hand, the Manichaean Church adopted the *Acts of Thomas* as a canonical text during the third or fourth century.

Early in the *Acts*, Thomas sings and chants a hymn about a spiritual bride while he is attending a wedding feast for a king's daughter. The *Acts* does not give a name to this hymn, and so it is generally known by the names given to it by modern scholars, including the *Wedding Hymn*, *Song of the Bride*, *Hymn of the Bride of Light*, and especially *Hymn of the Bride*.

Thomas's hymn describes a spiritual or heavenly marriage that is contrasted with the fleshly or earthly marriage taking place in the *Acts*.

Miroslav Marcovich, a professor of classics, writes, "The puzzling and elusive Wedding Hymn of the Acts of Thomas 6-7—first published in 1823—has not yet found a satisfying

interpretation and assessment."¹ The *Hymn* contains a sequence of laudatory descriptions of a spiritual bride, but modern scholars substantially disagree about what she represents. For example, Kathleen E. McVey, a professor of early church history, writes, "it has been proposed, in effect, that she represents the Manichaean elect, the gnostic Sophia, the personified Wisdom of Hellenistic Judaism with echoes of female deities of the broader Semitic environment, the Shekinah, or, most persuasively, the community of the apostle."²

Surviving manuscripts of the *Acts of Thomas* are available in both Greek and Syriac languages. The extant Syriac version of the *Hymn of the Bride* is corrupted, however, due to what appears to have been a systematic effort to remove unorthodoxy from it. For example, "the maiden" in the Greek version is replaced with "the church" in the Syriac version, and the "blessed Aeons" in the Greek version is replaced with "life" in the Syriac version. Marcovich concludes, "In brief, the Syriac version must be used with extreme caution."³

Even though the meaning of the *Hymn of the Bride* is obscure, some scholars believe that this hymn plays an important role. For example, David G. Hunter, a professor of historical theology, says, "the Acts of Thomas presents ... an understanding of salvation whose key is found in the famous *Hymn of the Bride*."⁴ The *Acts of Thomas* contains a second famous hymn, often called the *Hymn of the Pearl*, for

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which we give our commentary in a companion article. These two hymns are closely related and may have been composed by the same author.

In what follows, we use Hunter's English translation of the Greek version of the *Hymn of the Bride*,⁵ and give a theosophical commentary based primarily on the works of Alice A. Bailey, showing that the bride is an allegory of the human personality when it is illumined by the inner divinity. Our commentary provides each English verse of the *Hymn*, with center justification, followed by our interpretation of that verse, appearing in italic, and then followed by a detailed analysis of the symbols in that verse.

The Bride

The maiden is the daughter of light,
Upon her stands and in
her rests the proud
glory of kings.

The personality, when receptive to the inner divinity and free of illusions, is filled with light, because the illumination of souls passes down through the crown chakra and into the lower chakras.

In theosophy, the term "personality" is used to denote the lower self of a human being, and it consists of the mental, emotional, and physical bodies. This commentary takes the "maiden" to be a symbol of the personality, because, as we shall show, such an approach yields a coherent treatment of this and subsequent verses. Bailey gives the following description: "the student should bear in mind the interesting significance of the fact that he, on the physical plane, is a functioning personality, with known and realised characteristics, and yet withal, that he is a subjective Life, who uses that personality as a medium of expression, and who—through the agency of

the physical, emotional, and mental bodies which comprise the threefold lower man—makes his contacts with the physical plane and thus develops."⁶

The feminine form is a symbol of receptivity. *Isaiah 54:5* states, "For thy Maker is thine husband," which indicates that the personality ought to have a feminine, or receptive, relationship to the divine.⁷ The feminine depiction in the above verse shows that the personality in this case does have the desired receptivity.

The same Greek word (*partheonos*) can be translated as either maiden or virgin. The

Apostle Paul, in *II Corinthians 11:2-3*, gives a special meaning to this word when he writes: "I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." Bailey speaks of "the serpent of illusion,"⁸ and so virgin, or maiden, denotes the personality when it is free of illusions. Meister Eckhart, a medieval

German philosopher, gives a similar meaning: "A virgin... is a person who is free of irrelevant ideas, as free as he was before he existed."⁹

Bailey uses the following terms as synonyms: soul, super-conscious self, inner divinity, inner divine voice, voice of the inner God, and Voice of the Silence.¹⁰ Our commentary primarily uses the term "soul." The concept of soul is curious because it can be associated with any level of aggregation, so that we can refer to the soul of a personality, of a country, or of the world. Bailey says that "all souls ...

Much of the *Hymn* is concerned with the chakras. The phrase "upon her stands" indicates that the illumination enters the personality via the crown, or head, chakra. The phrase "in her rests" indicates that the illumination passes down into the lower chakras. Bailey describes this process: "Illumination... functions via a man's soul, utilising the head centre, and eventually flooding with light or energy all the centres."

constitute—in their entirety—the One Soul,”¹¹ and provides this explanation: “it is nevertheless one Soul that is functioning, acting through vehicles of varying capacities, of differentiated refinements and of greater and lesser limitations, in just the same sense as a man is one identity, working sometimes through a physical body and sometimes through a feeling body or a mental body.”¹²

A king is a ruler. In the above verse, “king” symbolizes soul, because the latter is the inner ruler of the personality. Bailey refers to the soul in this manner, saying that we should “seek to come ever more and more under control of the inner ruler.”¹³ Bailey also speaks of “the soul, who is light itself illuminating the manifestation of the three-fold personality.”¹⁴ Accordingly, “the proud glory of kings” symbolizes the illumination of souls. The plurality of kings suggests that the personality can receive illumination from more than one soul, perhaps through healings or blessings offered by others.

The physical body has both dense and subtle portions. The dense physical body contains the muscles and bones, and it is generally what we think of when we use the term “physical body.” The subtle physical body is called the vital or etheric body in theosophy, biofield in alternative western medicine, and meridians in Chinese medicine, and it contains the seven chakras, or energy centers, of yoga philosophy.

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Delightful is the sight of her,
She shines with radiant beauty.

The illumined personality is attractive in appearance, being a transparency that permits the inner divinity to shine forth.

Bailey describes how the personality can shine: “one by one those bodies which veil the Self are brought to a point where they are simply transparencies, permitting the full shining forth of the divine nature.”¹⁶ Here, “those bodies” refer to the bodies that constitute the personality, and the “Self” to God Immanent.

Her garments are like the flowers of spring,
And from them flows a sweet fragrance.

The mental, emotional, and vital bodies of the illumined personality are like the flowers of spring, because they emit healing radiations.

Bailey indicates that the mental, emotional, and vital bodies surround the dense physical body: “picture the mental body as an ovoid, surrounding the physical body and extending much beyond it”;¹⁷ “the astral body of a man is larger than his physical body”;¹⁸ “This [etheric] form underlies every part of the physical body and can be seen extending for a certain distance outside of the recognisable form.”¹⁹ Here, “astral” is synonymous with emotional, and “etheric” is synonymous with vital. Garments are clothes that surround the dense physical body. The “garments” of the maiden, in the above verse, are taken as the mental, emotional, and vital bodies, because they also surround the dense physical body.

The “sweet fragrance” that flows from these garments symbolizes healing radiation. Bailey explains how a healer might use such radiation for a patient: “the radiation of his mind will illumine the other mind and polarise the will of the patient; the radiation of his astral body, controlled and selfless, will impose a rhythm upon the agitation of the patient’s astral body, and so enable the patient to take right action, whilst the radiation of the vital body, working through the splenic centre, will aid in organising the patient’s force-body and so facilitate the work of healing.”²⁰

On the crown of her head the king is seated,
And he feeds with his ambrosia those who
are seated around him.

The soul acts through the crown chakra of the illumined personality, and can stimulate to activity the souls of other personalities.

The king symbolizes the soul, so the king seated “on the crown of her head” depicts the soul acting through the crown chakra. “Those who are seated around him” are the souls of surrounding personalities. The phrase “he feeds with his ambrosia” indicates that the soul that is acting through the illumined personality can affect the souls of surrounding personalities. Bailey describes this interaction: “The healer must understand also how to radiate, for the radiation of the soul will stimulate to activate the soul of the one to be healed and the healing process will be set in motion.”²¹

Truth is established upon her head,
And with her feet she radiates joy.

The illumined personality has intuitive knowledge established in the crown chakra, and is pervaded with joy.

Bailey makes a similar statement: “Joy is the quality of soul life and that quality can be imposed upon the personality, thereby superseding happiness and imparting the gift of truth.”²²

Her mouth is open and it well becomes her,
Thirty and two are the number who sing her praises.

The illumined personality communicates freely and openly, thereby gaining generous and joyful affections, and applies all 32 group laws that produce right relationships.

The Apostle Paul, in *II Corinthians* 6:11, writes: “O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged.” Here, “our mouth is open” signifies speech that is free and open, and “our heart is enlarged” signifies generous and joyful affections. Charles Hodge, 19th-century American professor of theology, gives the corresponding interpretation: “The Apostle had poured out his heart to the Corinthians. He has spoken with the utmost freedom and openness and in doing so his heart was expanded towards them.”²³ A similar interpretation can be made for the first part of the above verse.

Bailey writes, “we have basic group relations, fundamental group laws which produce group inter-relations, and bring about an essential union between all the forms of life... 1. The three atomic relations. 2. The seven laws of

group work. 3. The twenty-two methods of interplay. These thirty-two phases and ideas must be applied in degree to all atoms.”²⁴ Here, the term “atom” denotes a unit of consciousness and could refer to a subhuman, human, or superhuman form of life. Appreciation from others may be expected whenever someone applies any of these group laws. If the number in the above verse refers to the number of appreciator categories, with each category consisting of those units of consciousness who appreciate the application of the same group law, then this verse indicates that the illumined personality applies all 32 of these laws.

Her tongue is like the curtain on the door,
Which waves to those who enter.

The illumined personality speaks in an attractive and friendly manner, encouraging the participation of others.

Bailey says that this kind of speech is preparation for initiation: “He who guards his words, and who only speaks with altruistic purpose, in order to carry the energy of Love through the medium of the tongue, is one who is mastering rapidly the initial steps to be taken in preparation for initiation.”²⁵

Her neck lies like the steps that the first craftsman constructed,
And her two hands make signs and signals.

The bridge between the illumined personality and soul has been completed, just as it had been for Jesus, and the two hands are used in healing, blessing, and prayer.

Bailey defines the “Antahkarana” as “the path, or bridge, between higher and lower mind, serving as a medium of communication between the two.”²⁶ In the above verse, “her neck” symbolizes the Antahkarana, as Bailey explains: “Of this connecting ‘bridge,’ the neck itself is the symbol, as it relates the head—alone and isolated—to the dual torso, consisting of that which lies above the diaphragm and that which lies below—the symbol of the soul and the personality united, fused and blended into one.”²⁷ Jesus is the “first craftsman” for the Christian community, “leaving us an example, that ye should follow his

steps" (*I Peter* 2:21). Jesus is quoted as saying, "I go to my Father" (*John* 16:10), showing that he had constructed the steps in his own Antahkarana. The bridge between the illumined personality and the soul has also been completed, because "Her neck lies like the steps that the first craftsman constructed."

The "signs and signals" of the hands has several meanings, as explained by Bailey: "Occultly understood, the 'use of the hands' is the utilisation of the chakras (or centres) in the palms of the hands in:—a. Healing bodily ills. b. Blessing, and thus curing emotional ills. c. Raised in prayer, or the use of the centres of the hands during meditation in the manipulation of mental matter and currents."²⁸

They announce the dance of the blessed
Aeons,
And her fingers reveal the gates of the city.

The hands of the illumined personality can transmit the active involvement of the Hierarchy, and the fingers can reveal the condition of the chakras belonging to another personality.

Aeon is the Greek word that often means age or lifetime. In Gnosticism, Aeons are similar to Judaeo-Christian angels, including their role as servants of God, and their existence as beings of light. The theosophical notion of the Hierarchy, or spiritual kingdom, is comparable, because the members of the Hierarchy are also said to be servants of God and beings of light. Consequently, the "blessed Aeons" are taken as the Hierarchy. The phrase "They announce the dance of the blessed Aeons" means that the hands of the illumined personality can transmit the active involvement of the Hierarchy. Bailey gives this explanation: "The true healing force can only flow through those who in some degree either directly (by right of initiation or of advanced discipleship) or indirectly, as being used on the inner side by some adept or advanced healer, are linked with the hierarchy."²⁹

A city is a community with many inhabitants. In the above verse, "city" stands for personality, because a personality is also inhabited by many thoughts, feelings, and motives. City in *Revelation* 3:12 or 11:2 can also be interpreted as personality.³⁰ The "gates of the city" repre-

sent the chakras, because the latter are centers for energies gathered from different parts of the personality. H. P. Blavatsky, co-founder of the Theosophical Society, also uses gates as a metaphor for chakras.³¹ Thus, "her fingers reveal the gates of the city" means that the fingers of the illumined personality can reveal the condition of the chakras belonging to another personality.

Bailey makes a related prediction: "this whole matter is ... so complex that it will only be truly understood when human beings regain the lost power to 'see the light' of the etheric body and of its seven major centres and, through a developed sense of touch in the hands and fingers, to ascertain the rate of vibration in the various centres. When these two means of knowledge are available, the entire subject of the etheric body will take on a new importance and be correctly understood."³² The fulfillment of this prediction would establish the truth of the last part of the above verse.

The Bridal Chamber

Her chamber is full of light.
It breathes forth the fragrance of balsam and
of every spice.

The chamber between the crown and brow chakras is where the light of the soul merges with the raised energies of the personality.

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* states: "the term *mystical marriage* is employed by St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross to designate that mystical union with God which is the most exalted condition attainable...in this life. It is also called a 'transforming union,' 'consummate union,' and 'deification.'"³³ This term is also used by Bailey: "the spiritually newborn... will be those who have brought together, consciously and within themselves, the two aspects of soul and body, and thus have consummated the 'mystical marriage.'"³⁴ Bailey actually uses this term to denote the union of soul and personality, because she refers to "the great final drama of the mystical union between God and man, and between the soul and the personality."³⁵

The term "mystical marriage" suggests that the natural intimacy between a man and a woman

in a physical marriage is comparable to the intimacy of a mystical relationship. These two kinds of marriage are related in other ways. *Isaiah 62:5* compares the delight that occurs in them: “as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.” As shown in what follows, the *Hymn of the Bride* uses the characteristics of a physical marriage as symbols to portray related characteristics of a mystical marriage.

For a physical marriage, the bridal chamber is where the marriage is consummated through sexual union. For a mystical marriage, the corresponding chamber lies in the head within the space between the crown and brow chakras. In the above verse, “light” symbolizes the soul’s energy that pours into the crown, or head, chakra; “balsam and... every spice” symbolize the various energies of the personality; and the “fragrance of balsam and of every spice” symbolizes the rising of the personality’s energies into the brow chakra. Hence, the verse indicates that these two types of energies merge in the space between the crown and brow chakras.

Bailey describes the mystical bridal chamber in more detail: “This head centre is the symbol of the spirit or positive masculine aspect, just as the centre between the eyebrows is the symbol of matter, of the negative feminine aspect. Connected with these force vortices are two physical plane organs, the pituitary body and the pineal gland... As the soul becomes increasingly potent in the mental and emotional life of the aspirant, it pours in with greater power into the head centre. As the man works with his personality, purifying it and bending it to the service of the spiritual will, he automatically raises the energies of the centres in the body up to the centre between the eyebrows. Eventually the influence of each of the two centres increases and becomes wider and wider, until they make a contact with each other’s vibratory or magnetic field, and instantly the light flashes out.”³⁶

It gives out the sweet scent of myrrh and leaves.

Within are strewn branches of myrtle and all kinds of sweet-smelling flowers.

This chamber gives out beneficent energies through the brow chakra. Within it are perceptions of the divine beauty behind external forms.

The “sweet scent of myrrh and leaves” symbolizes radiated energies, because myrrh is a constituent of perfumes and incense. After the energies of the soul and personality are gathered in the mystical bridal chamber, the brow chakra, which forms part of the chamber, can then be used to give out those energies. Bailey also says that “the agent for the distribution of the energies received via the head, the heart and the throat centres is the ajna centre between the eyebrows,”³⁷ where ajna is the Sanskrit name for the brow chakra.

Myrtle, mentioned in the above verse, is a sign or symbol of Aphrodite, who is the goddess of beauty in Greek mythology. For example, Aesop’s *Fables* state, “The Gods, according to an ancient legend, made choice of certain trees to be under their special protection. Jupiter [Zeus] chose the oak, Venus [Aphrodite] the myrtle, Apollo [Apollon] the laurel.”³⁸ Mythologist Fred Hageneder writes, “In Greece, the myrtle was sacred to Aphrodite and was believed to possess the power that she had of being able to create and perpetuate love.”³⁹

Just as the birth of children is the natural result of a physical marriage, the birth of the third eye is the natural result of a mystical marriage. The third eye, which manifests within the mystical bridal chamber, can have perceptions of the divine beauty behind external forms. These perceptions are symbolized by the “strewn branches of myrtle,” because myrtle is a symbol of Aphrodite, who is the goddess of beauty.

Bailey describes the third eye in this way: “The third eye manifests as a result of the vibratory interaction between the forces of the soul, working through the pineal gland, and the forces of the personality, working through the pituitary body... *It is the eye of vision.* By its means, the spiritual man sees behind the forms of all aspects of divine expression. He becomes aware of the light of the world, and contacts the soul within all forms.”⁴⁰ Moreover, Bailey associates seeing “the soul in all things”

with seeing “the inward beauty of all created forms.”⁴¹

The Attendants

Surrounding her are the groomsmen, whose number is seven.

She herself has chosen them.

The illumined personality has applied definite methods of awakening and charging to the seven major chakras.

Bailey describes the locations of the seven major chakras: “Of the seven centres, two are in the head and five in the spinal column.”⁴² “It must always be remembered that the seven centres are *not* within the dense physical body. They exist *only* in etheric matter and in the etheric so-called aura, outside the physical body.”⁴³ In particular, the five spinal chakras are outside and behind the dense physical spine, the brow chakra is just in front of the eyes and forehead, and the crown, or head, chakra, is just above the top of the head. We could say that the seven major chakras are “surrounding” the dense physical body, because they are behind, in front of, and above that body. The above verse says that the groomsmen are “surrounding” the maiden, and so we take the seven groomsmen as symbolizing the seven major chakras.

Bailey speaks of “the stage wherein the centres... can now become the subject (under

proper direction by a teacher) of definite methods of awakening and of charging.”⁴⁴ The phrase “She herself has chosen them” indicates that the illumined personality has reached the stage of subjecting the chakras to definite methods of awakening and charging.

There are eight bridesmaids,
Who form a chorus before her.

There are eight key organs in the dense physical body that indicate how well the illumined personality has applied the methods of awakening and charging to the chakras.

Bailey provides the chart shown in Table 1.⁴⁵ The third column lists the major chakras, which are seven in number, but each of the other columns has eight entries. In our view, the “eight bridesmaids” represent the eight organs in the fourth, or rightmost, column. Each of those organs is associated with a specific major chakra, except for the spleen, which is associated with the entire system of seven chakras as a whole.

Bailey writes, “Each of the seven major chakras governs or conditions ... the area of the physical body in which it is found.”⁴⁶ Thus, the condition of the eight organs in the fourth column reflects the condition of the seven major chakras, which in turn are affected by the methods of awakening and charging mentioned earlier. In a classical Greek play, a Greek chorus is a company of actors who comment on

Table 1. Organs and Chakras

1. Cell life	Blood stream	Heart centre	Thymus gland
2. Sensory life	Sympathetic nervous system	Solar plexus centre	Pancreas
3. Mental life	Cerebro-spinal system	Ajna centre	Pituitary body
4. Vital life	Seven centres		Spleen
5. Self-conscious	Upper brain	Head centre	Pineal gland
6. Self-expression	Lower brain	Throat centre	Thyroid
7. Self-perpetuation	Sex organs	Sacral centre	Reproductive organs
8. Self-assertion	Entire man	Centre at base of spine	Adrenals

the action. The eight organs are like a Greek chorus, because their condition on the dense physical level indicates how well the methods of awakening and charging have been applied to the chakras on the subtle physical level.

Most of the organs listed in the fourth column are glands, for which Bailey makes the following prediction: "Owing to the fact that disciples have a greater development of mental power than the average man, ... they will be the first to cooperate with the medical profession and to demonstrate the relation of the centres to the glands, and therefore to the body as a whole. Through concentration and right meditation, carried on in the head centre, and directed towards some one or other of the centres, disciples will demonstrate such definite changes in the ductless glands that the medical profession will be convinced of the importance and the factual existence of the centres and of their power, and also of the possibility of controlling the physical organism through the power of thought."⁴⁷ The fulfillment of this prediction would provide an empirical demonstration of the above verse's truth.

Twelve is the number of those who serve her,
Who are her followers.

The causal body, pictured as a twelve-petalled lotus, serves as the organ of abstract thought for the illumined personality, and its content expands as the personality learns lessons from experiences.

A human being is a subjective life who operates through both a causal body and a personality. Bailey says, "the causal body is ... seen as the twelve-petalled Lotus,"⁴⁸ and theosophical writer I. K. Taimni says, "The first function of the Causal body is that it serves as the organ of abstract thought."⁴⁹ Abstract thought includes realizations and expressions of ideas. The twelve servers, in the above verse, are taken as the causal body, because the latter is depicted with twelve petals and serves the personality.

Bailey writes, "The content of the causal body is the accumulation by slow and gradual process of the good in each life."⁵⁰ Here, "the good" refers to the lessons, or principles, that

are learned, because she also writes, "I am today what many, many lives of experience and bitter lessons have made me."⁵¹ The causal body can be spoken of as following the personality, because its expansion occurs as the personality learns lessons in the school of life.

They gaze upon the Bridegroom,
So that through this vision they may be enlightened.

The causal body is oriented to the soul, so that through this orientation it may obtain new intuitions.

The "Bridegroom" symbolizes the soul, because the latter is the personality's partner in a mystical marriage. The causal body, however, is the intermediary between the soul and personality. When the causal body is oriented to the soul, intuitions from the soul may pour down into the personality, via the causal body.

Taimni makes a similar point: "the Causal body is like a mirror which can reflect the truths present in the Universal Mind into the lower mind and he whose Causal body is sufficiently developed and in communication with the lower mental body has the means at his disposal of contacting the Universal Mind to some extent."⁵² The term "Universal Mind," according to Bailey, is a synonym for "world soul."⁵³

The Wedding Feast

Forever they will be with him in that eternal joy,
And they will be present at that wedding feast,
Where the great ones will gather,
And where the eternal ones will be counted worthy to rejoice forever.

The causal body will persist throughout the long cycle of incarnations as the spiritual body of the soul and its joy. The causal body will be present at the ceremony for the third initiation, where great Masters will gather as participants, and where advanced disciples will be recognized as worthy to take that initiation because their personalities are illumined.

In the above verse, "they" refers to the twelve-petalled causal body and "him" to

the soul. Bailey speaks of the causal body as “the spiritual body of the soul,”⁵⁴ and says that “It is relatively permanent and lasts throughout the long cycle of incarnations.”⁵⁵ A human being acquires a new personality with each successive incarnation, but stores the lessons learned from each incarnation within the same causal body. Bailey also says, “joy is of the nature of the soul.”⁵⁶ Accordingly, the first part of the above verse means that the causal body will persist as the spiritual body of the soul and its joy.

We interpret the “wedding feast” as symbolizing an initiation ceremony, because, as we shall show, its attributes are consistent with those that have been described for such ceremonies. Bailey writes, “This ceremony of initiation marks a point of attainment. It does not bring about attainment, as is so often the misconception. It simply marks the recognition by the watching Teachers of the race of a definite point in evolution reached by the pupil.”⁵⁷

Bailey says that human beings eventually discover that they are eternal: “Right through the later periods of the cycle of incarnation wherein the man is juggling with the pairs of opposites, and through discrimination is becoming aware of reality and unreality, there is growing up in his mind a realisation that he himself is an immortal Existence.”⁵⁸ The causal body and personality are both vehicles of expression, neither of which is eternal. Thus, the eternal part of a human being is the subjective life operating through the vehicles of expression. The “eternal ones” in the above verse, which refer to subjective lives, are denoted by the term “disciples” in this commentary, because they must

have applied spiritual disciplines to themselves to be worthy of initiation. The plurality of “ones” suggests that multiple disciples are about to take initiation as part of the same ceremony. Bailey indicates that this circumstance occurs, because she speaks of the effort “To admit to the ceremony of initiation those who are ready in all grades.”⁵⁹

The above verse provides three clues showing that these disciples are about to take the third initiation. First, the causal body “will be present” at the ceremony. Bailey, however, speaks of “the fourth initiation with its destruction of the egoic, causal or soul body.”⁶⁰ Thus,

the presence of the causal body implies that the disciples could not be taking an initiation higher than the third.

Second, “the great ones will gather” at the ceremony. Bailey describes the participants for each initiation: “In the case of the first two initiations, two Masters stand, one on each side of the applicant, within the triangle; at the third, fourth and fifth initiations, the Mahachohan and the Bodhisattva perform the function of sponsor; at the sixth and seventh initiations two great Beings, Who must remain nameless, stand within

the esoteric triangle.”⁶¹ In this quotation, “Masters” are members of the Hierarchy, or spiritual kingdom, and the Mahachohan and Bodhisattva are exalted offices within the Hierarchy. The point is that ordinary Masters serve as sponsors for the first two initiations, but great Masters serve as sponsors for the higher initiations. If the “great ones” in the verse refer to great Masters, the disciples could not be taking an initiation lower than the third.

Third, these disciples “will be counted worthy to rejoice forever.” If we assume that the entire *Hymn* is coherent, then each disciple dem-

If we assume that the entire *Hymn* is coherent, then each disciple demonstrates worthiness by operating through a personality similar to what has been previously described. In particular, each personality is illumined by the soul and is a transparency for the soul... [T]he effects of soul infusion, described in the earlier verses, culminate in the ceremony for the third initiation.

onstrates worthiness by operating through a personality similar to what has been previously described. In particular, each personality is illumined by the soul and is a transparency for the soul. Bailey says, “The thought of soul-infusion must be held in mind—a soul-indwelling which culminates at the third initiation.”⁶² Thus, the effects of soul infusion, described in the earlier verses, culminate in the ceremony for the third initiation, described in the present and subsequent verses.

They shall put on royal robes and wear bright raiment.

In joy and exultation they both shall be,
And they shall glorify the Father of all.

During the initiation ceremony, the disciples enter causal consciousness and share in soul consciousness. Both the causal body and personality of each disciple are in joy and exultation, and the disciples recognize the parts that they will play in the great plan of evolution.

Isaiah 61:10 states: “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness.” Here, “robe of righteousness” refers to a state of consciousness that is higher, or more spiritual, than what had been the usual state. In the above verse, putting on “robes” and “raiment” has a similar meaning.

Causal consciousness is defined as being polarized in the causal body. Bailey says that “the first three initiations... are undergone in the causal vehicle.”⁶³ The preceding verse indicates that the disciples are taking the third initiation, so putting on “royal robes” is interpreted as entering causal consciousness. Bailey also writes, “This ceremony of initiation... gives... an expansion of consciousness that admits the personality into the wisdom attained by the Ego.”⁶⁴ In this quotation, “Ego” is another synonym for soul,⁶⁵ so wearing “bright raiment” is interpreted as sharing in soul consciousness, which is defined as contacting the soul’s attitude and awareness.

Bailey writes, “At the time of the Initiation ceremony... the initiate... knows what he has to do and how he must do it, and peace and joy unutterable fill his heart.”⁶⁶ “Joy and exulta-

tion” in the above verse is equivalent to “peace and joy unutterable” in this quotation.

The *New Testament* often uses God and Father as synonyms, such as in *I Corinthians 8:6*: “But to us *there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him.*” Bailey associates glorification of God with recognition of the plan of God: “Where there is goodwill there must be peace; there must be organised activity and a recognition of the Plan of God, for that Plan is synthesis; that Plan is fusion; that Plan is unity and at-one-ment. Then... God the Father will be glorified.”⁶⁷ Bailey also says that during the initiation ceremony “the initiate... shares consciously in the great plan of evolution.”⁶⁸ Thus, in the above verse, “they shall glorify the Father of all” means that the disciples recognize the parts that they will play in the great plan of evolution.

His proud light they have received,
Those who have been enlightened in the vision of their Master.

The disciples receive a brief period of enlightenment that is transmitted by the soul.

Bailey writes, “This ceremony of initiation... gives... a brief period of enlightenment.”⁶⁹ “Light” in the above verse is interpreted as “a brief period of enlightenment” in this quotation. Bailey also writes, “The one Master is found within; it is the soul, the inner ruler.”⁷⁰ Accordingly, “their Master” in the above verse refers to the soul.

His ambrosial food they have received,
Which will never run out.
They have drunk of his wine,
Which gives them neither thirst nor desire.

The disciples receive divine ideas, which are inexhaustible, and become immersed in divine love, which gives freedom from lack and desire.

This passage describes a spiritual form of the Eucharist, because the disciples receive both ambrosial, or divine, food and divine wine. *Jeremiah 15:16* uses a related metaphor: “Thy words were found, and I did eat them.” Here, divine words are treated as though they were food; eating those words symbolizes thinking

about them. Similarly, in the above passage, “ambrosial food” is a symbol of divine ideas.

Divine ideas are inexhaustible in the sense that there is always a deeper and more profound idea that is given as part of each subsequent initiation ceremony. For example, Bailey describes a graded series of “revelations” that are conveyed to the disciple during the ceremony for each initiation. She begins by saying, “At the first initiation he becomes aware definitely of the part, relatively inconspicuous, that he has to play in his personal life during the period ensuing between the moment of revelation and the taking of the second initiation.” Bailey then describes increasingly profound revelations for the second through sixth initiations, and then says, “At the seventh Initiation his vision penetrates beyond the solar ring-pass-not, and he sees that which he has long realised as a basic theoretical fact, that our solar Logos is involved in the plans and purposes of a still greater Existence, and that the solar system is but one of many centres of force through which a cosmic Entity vastly greater than our own solar Logos is expressing Himself.”⁷¹

In this quotation, the term “solar ring-pass-not” refers to the sun’s periphery of influence.

Psalms 104:15 says, “wine... maketh glad the heart of man.” Here, wine might be a symbol of love, because, as Bailey points out, “The heart centre becomes the agent for spiritual love.”⁷² Bailey associates love with initiation: “Through these initiations... the disciple becomes an agent of the love of God.”⁷³ Accordingly, the divine “wine,” in the above verse, symbolizes divine love.

Love gives freedom from self-centered emotions, as explained by Bailey in her instructions to a particular disciple: “Restlessness and resentment, self-pity and suspicion are your present problems. Substitute love for these and all will be well. You evoke love in many. This means that you have the gift of love. Use that power to love and break your chains in order to serve with freedom.”⁷⁴

And they have glorified and praised, with the living Spirit,
The Father of Truth, and the Mother of Wisdom.

After the initiation ceremony is completed, the disciples, having been given new spiritual gifts, serve in the great plan of evolution and are grateful to the soul.

This verse uses the phrase “the living Spirit.” The related title, “the living God,” appears often in the *Old Testament*; e.g., *Joshua* 3:10. Biblical scholar Robert H. Mounce says, “The title is appropriate wherever God is about to intervene on behalf of his people.”⁷⁵ Accordingly, “the living Spirit” means that the Spirit is about to intervene on behalf of the disciples.

The Apostle Paul, in *I Corinthians* 12:1-10, speaks of spiritual gifts: “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant... For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues.” Thus, one way that the Spirit intervenes is by bestowing spiritual gifts.

In the above verse, the phrase “with the living Spirit” is interpreted to mean that the disciples are with new spiritual gifts. Bailey supports this interpretation by saying that an initiate, after the ceremony, will find that he or she has new spiritual gifts: “The initiate will find, when he returns from the ceremony, and takes up his work in the world, that the stimulation received will bring about in his bodies a period of great activity... He will find that his powers for service are enormously increased, and his nervous energy intensified, so that he can draw upon reserves of force in service hitherto unsuspected. He will find, also, that the response of the physical brain to the voice of the higher Self, and its receptivity to the higher and subtler impressions, is greatly furthered.”⁷⁶

In the above verse, “Mother of Wisdom” represents the soul, because the soul is the source of divine wisdom within a human being, and the Bible speaks of divine wisdom as though it were a feminine deity, such as in *Proverbs* 1:20, 8:1, and 9:1-5. Bailey writes, “gratitude is the hallmark of an enlightened

[individual] and a basic releasing agent from an occult and scientific angle.”⁷⁷ Accordingly, “praise” in the above verse signifies expressing gratitude.

Conclusions

In summary, we have interpreted the key elements of the *Hymn of the Bride* in the following way: the maiden, as the illumined personality; bridegroom, as the soul; blessed Aeons, as the Hierarchy; bridal chamber, as the space between the crown and brow chakras within the head; seven groomsmen, as the major chakras; eight bridesmaids, as the physical organs associated with the major chakras; twelve servers, as the causal body; and wedding feast, as the ceremony for the third initiation.

¹ M. Marcovich, *Studies in Graeco-Roman Religions and Gnosticism* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1988), p. 156.

² K. E. McVey, “Were the Earliest Madrase Songs or Recitations?” in G. J. Reinink and A. C. Klugkist (eds.), *After Bardaisan: Studies on Continuity and Change in Syriac Christianity* (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 1999), p. 194.

³ Marcovich, *Studies in Graeco-Roman Religions and Gnosticism*, p. 157.

⁴ D. G. Hunter, “Acts of Thomas: Scene One” in R. Valantasis (ed.), *Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 209.

⁵ From *Marriage in the Early Church* by David G. Hunter, copyright (c) 1992 Fortress Press, pp. 58-59.

⁶ A. A. Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar* (1922; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1974), pp. 135-136.

⁷ All biblical verses are from the King James Version.

⁸ A. A. Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic* (1934; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1979), p. 223.

⁹ M. Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation* (New York: Harper and Row, 1941), p. 207.

¹⁰ A. A. Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology*, vol. II (1942; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1981), pp. 439, 491-492; *Discipleship in the New Age*, vol. I (1944; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1976), p. 14.

¹¹ A. A. Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, vol. II (1955; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1972), p. 660.

¹² A. A. Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology*, vol. I (1936; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1979), pp. 53-54.

¹³ A. A. Bailey, *The Consciousness of the Atom* (1922; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1973), p. 139.

¹⁴ Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic*, p. 73.

¹⁵ Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology*, vol. II, p. 233.

¹⁶ A. A. Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations* (1960; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1976), p. 6.

¹⁷ A. A. Bailey, *Letters on Occult Meditation* (1922; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1974), p. 95.

¹⁸ A. A. Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire* (1925; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1973), p. 1219.

¹⁹ A. A. Bailey, *Telepathy and the Etheric Vehicle* (1950; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1975), p. 151.

²⁰ A. A. Bailey, *Esoteric Healing* (1953; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1978), pp. 7-8.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²² Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, vol. I, p. 557.

²³ C. Hodge, *An Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1862), pp. 164-165.

²⁴ Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, p. 1215.

²⁵ Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar*, p. 74.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

²⁷ Bailey, *Esoteric Healing*, p. 153.

²⁸ Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar*, p. 206.

²⁹ Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic*, p. 578.

³⁰ Z. F. Lansdowne, *The Revelation of St. John* (York Beach, ME: Red Wheel/Weiser, 2006), pp. 33, 92.

³¹ H. P. Blavatsky, *The Voice of the Silence* (1889; reprint; Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1968), p. 96.

³² Bailey, *Esoteric Healing*, p. 88.

³³ *Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. IX (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910).

³⁴ Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology*, vol. I, p. 314.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 290-291.

³⁷ Bailey, *Telepathy*, p. 193.

³⁸ Aesop, “The Trees under the Protection of the Gods,” *Fables* (trans. by G. F. Townsend; London: G. Routledge and Sons, 1867).

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- ³⁹ F. Hageneder, *The Meaning of Trees: Botany, History, Healing, Lore* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2005), p. 130.
- ⁴⁰ Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic*, p. 213.
- ⁴¹ Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, vol. I, p. 461.
- ⁴² A. A. Bailey, *The Soul and Its Mechanism* (1930; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1976), p. 115.
- ⁴³ Bailey, *Telepathy*, p. 146.
- ⁴⁴ Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic*, p. 588.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 284.
- ⁴⁶ Bailey, *Esoteric Healing*, p. 194.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 219-220.
- ⁴⁸ Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, p. 538.
- ⁴⁹ I. K. Taimni, *Self-Culture* (1945; reprint; Adyar, Madras, India: Theosophical Publishing House, 1976), p. 110.
- ⁵⁰ Bailey, *Letters on Occult Meditation*, p. 32.
- ⁵¹ A. A. Bailey, *The Unfinished Autobiography* (1951; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1987), p. 91.
- ⁵² Taimni, *Self-Culture*, p. 130.
- ⁵³ Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, p. 810.
- ⁵⁴ Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic*, p. 247.
- ⁵⁵ Bailey, *Letters on Occult Meditation*, p. 352.
- ⁵⁶ A. A. Bailey, *From Bethlehem to Calvary* (1937; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1989), p. 217.
- ⁵⁷ Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar*, p. 15.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 113.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 107.
- ⁶⁰ Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations*, p. 437.
- ⁶¹ Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar*, p. 111.
- ⁶² Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations*, p. 663.
- ⁶³ Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, p. 696.
- ⁶⁴ Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar*, p. 15.
- ⁶⁵ Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, p. 48.
- ⁶⁶ Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar*, p. 132.
- ⁶⁷ Bailey, *From Bethlehem to Calvary*, p. 71.
- ⁶⁸ Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar*, p. 15.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- ⁷⁰ A. A. Bailey, *The Light of the Soul* (1927; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1978), p. 53.
- ⁷¹ Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar*, pp. 120, 123-124.
- ⁷² Bailey, *Esoteric Healing*, p. 159.
- ⁷³ A. A. Bailey, *The Reappearance of the Christ* (1948; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1978), p. 87.
- ⁷⁴ Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, vol. I, p. 508.
- ⁷⁵ R. H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (revised; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), p. 157.
- ⁷⁶ Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar*, p. 135.
- ⁷⁷ Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, vol. II, p. 676.

