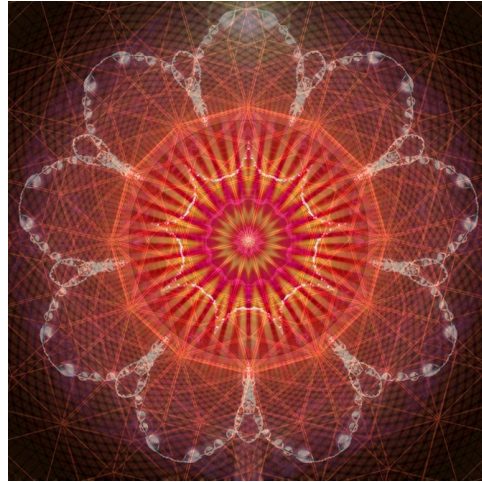


Summer 2019, Volume 15, Number 1



# *The Esoteric Quarterly*

*An independent publication dedicated to the trans-disciplinary investigation of the esoteric spiritual tradition.*

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**Esoteric philosophy and its applications  
to individual and group service and  
the expansion of human consciousness.**



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# *The Esoteric Quarterly*

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The mission of the *Esoteric Quarterly* is to provide a forum for the exploration of esoteric philosophy and its applications. Full-length articles and student papers are solicited pertaining to both eastern and western esoteric traditions. We also encourage feedback from readers. Comments of general interest will be published as Letters to the Editor. All communications should be sent to: [editor@esotericquarterly.com](mailto:editor@esotericquarterly.com).

## The Science of Symbols

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A symbol, as the Tibetan Master Djwhal Khul informs us, “is a form of some kind,” such as a word form, a formulated sentence, or a pictorial representation, “which veils or hides a thought, an idea or a truth.” He goes on to say that “every form of every kind is a symbol, or the objective veil of a thought.” Symbols are invested with meanings that normally transcend human consciousness; thus their correct interpretation involves a deeper level of insight or intuition. Symbols are synthetic; hence, they serve as a bridge between different levels of reality. In effect, symbols facilitate a relationship between humans and the archetypal and spiritual dimensions, thereby raising one to a higher order of truth and reason. The articles featured in this issue, all of which offer interpretations of mythic, iconographic, occult and/or biblical symbolism, have been contributed in an effort to facilitate just such a relationship.

Our first full-length feature, from Maureen Richmond, is part of a series on the Esoteric Astrology of the Tibetan Master Djwhal Khul via Alice A. Bailey, his amanuensis. In this article, Richmond provides an in-depth examination of the Pleiades or Seven Sisters, one of the star clusters of special spiritual significance for our planet. The mythological symbolism surrounding the Pleiades cluster is discussed along with its role as a major chakra in the body of greater logos and the dispenser of Active Intelligent Purpose. Among the numerous other functions of “the glittering Pleiades” explored by Richmond is its magnetic relationship with the Great Bear, the Seven Rishis, and Sirius, as well as its singular role in providing “the material basis for the divine creative process,” and “the power from which all the grades of matter in manifest creation are derived.”

Irina Kuzminsky contributes an article on *Kālī, the Dark Mother*. The article explores the ancient origins of this mysterious Goddess as well as the evolution and metamorphosis of the

complex and conflicting narratives that make up her wrathful and dangerous aspect along with her protective and liberating side. The archetypal potency of Kālī’s name is analyzed along with the symbolism of her ferocious and erotic iconography, all of which would seem to be at odds with traditional notions of the divine. Kuzminsky discusses Kālī within the context of the Puranas, Tantra and Shaktism to show how key texts and practices stress the centrality of the Goddess, the wildness of nature and the cosmos, as well as the enigma of life. Since Kālī can’t be fully understood with the rational mind, Kuzminsky intersperses her article with several poems to help us “come closer to comprehending what Kālī represents.”

Our next offering—*The First Ray Cause of Inharmony and Disease*—is from Zachary Lansdowne. This article, which is the sixth in the series, elucidates the symbolic and abstruse first-ray stanza by drawing upon associated quotations from the writings of Alice A. Bailey and others, including psychologist Margaret Paul. The author’s primary focus is on the quality of hardness or crystallization, one of the first-ray’s primary distortions, which results in ossification or rigid fixity of the personality, personality disorders, relationship issues, atrophication of the form, and premature ageing. In addition to his analysis of the first-ray liabilities, the author explains how to work through and undo the internal process of crystallization to begin the process of rebuilding the personality so that it can respond to and align with the Soul.

The final full-length feature in this issue is from Jeffrey Gold, who provides an inspired reinterpretation of the *Akedah Yitzchak* or The Binding of Isaac, one of the best-known and most disquieting scriptural stories in the Bible. In contrast to the simplistic, literal approach of interpreting the story of Abraham and Isaac as a test of faith in God’s providence, the author adopts a symbolic approach based on the

Jewish Kabbalah and the astrological symbolism inherent in the story. In Gold's rendering, the *Akedah* is not a story of filicide, but a story about abandoning the fruits of our labor and the discovery of egolessness. The article is a reprint from the Summer 2005 edition.

The two poems in this issue, *Mother of God Similar to Fire* and *The Holy Protection of the Mother God*, are from Mirabai Star, whose work brings the timeless wisdom and love of Mary to new life. As a poet, and critically acclaimed writer of fiction, creative non-fiction and contemporary translations of sacred literature, Mirabai is a leading force in the interspiritual movement. She taught Philosophy and World Religions at the University of Taos in New Mexico for over 20 years, and is now an international teacher and speaker on contemplative practice and interspiritual dialog. Mirabai is also a certified bereavement counselor who helps mourners harness the transformative power of loss. The poems featured here are from a collection of poems and illuminations titled *Mother of God Similar to Fire* in collaboration with priest-inconographer William Hart-McNichols. The book is available at: [www.orbisbooks.com](http://www.orbisbooks.com).

Our *Picture of the Quarter*—"Gene Keys Light in Shadow"—is from the self-taught artist Daniel B. Holeman, whose art is dedicated to the Sacred, the Divine and the Universal. His work has appeared on TV and videos, book and CD covers, magazines, prints, posters, cards and the Internet. At a young age Daniel experienced a profound spiritual awakening regarding the nature of pure consciousness which forms the ground of the phenomenal world. Since then his life has been about deepening that awareness and sharing it with others through art, lifestyle and conversation. His inspired offerings include spiritual guidance, writings, and live presentations (talks with multi-media art and music). Daniel is also a "Gene Keys Ambassador" or creative catalyst whose role is to host the wisdom of the Gene Keys transmission. For additional information on Daniel's art and other activities, visit: [www.AwakenVisions.com](http://www.AwakenVisions.com).

This issue includes a book review for *Conversations with Mary: Messages of Love, Healing, Hope, and Unity for Everyone*, by Anna Raimondi. The book is recommended "to all esoteric students interested in the nature and role of Mary and to traditional Christians eager to expand their horizons beyond the customary bounds of Marian doctrine and devotion."

Donna M. Brown  
Editor-in-Chief

### **Publication Policies**

Articles are selected for publication in the *Esoteric Quarterly* because we believe they represent a sincere search for truth, support the service mission to which we aspire, and/or contribute to the expansion of human consciousness.

Publication of an article does not necessarily imply that the Editorial Board agrees with the views expressed. Nor do we have the means to verify all facts stated in published articles.

We encourage critical thinking and analysis from a wide range of perspectives and traditions. We discourage dogmatism or any view that characterizes any tradition as having greater truth than a competing system.

Neither will we allow our journal to be used as a platform for attacks on individuals, groups, institutions, or nations. This policy applies to articles and features as well as to letters to the editor. In turn, we understand that the author of an article may not necessarily agree with the views, attitudes, or values expressed by a referenced source. Indeed, serious scholarship sometimes requires reference to work that an author finds abhorrent. We will not reject an article for publication simply on the grounds that it contains a reference to an objectionable source.

An issue of concern in all online journals is potential volatility of content. Conceivably, articles could be modified after the publication date because authors changed their minds about what had been written. Accordingly, we wish to make our policy clear: We reserve the right to correct minor typographical errors, but we will not make any substantive alteration to an article after it "goes to press."

## Poems of the Quarter

---

From *Mother of God Similar to Fire* | by Mirabai Star

*Mother of God Similar to Fire*

Mother of God  
similar to fire,  
ignite my heart in prayer.  
Where once I stood on familiar ground,  
selecting my spiritual experiences  
like choice morsels from a well-tended larder,  
now my garden has gone up in flames  
and I thirst only for the Living God.  
Let me find him, Mother,  
as you do,  
deep inside my own ripened being.  
Let me swallow the Sacred  
and burn with that Presence,  
Lit from within,  
let my blazing heart become a sanctuary  
for the weary traveler,  
until this long night lifts  
and dawn unfolds her new radiance.

*The Holy Protection of the Mother of God*

Mother of Mercy,  
if I stay awake all night,  
vigilant and grateful,  
will you drop your protective veil  
over my vulnerable heart?  
I cannot control the world around me;  
I can only be faithful to my own deepest truth.  
Wrap me in your pure white cloak of devotion, Mary,  
so that I can remember my sole task  
is to praise the God of Love.  
Cover me in your burial shroud  
as I die to my false self,  
to be reborn  
as a living example of peace on earth.  
Infuse me with the tincture of your tears,  
so that I may face every challenge  
with a tender and courageous spirit.



## Picture of the Quarter

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Gene Key Light in Shadow | Daniel B. Holeman | <http://www.AwakenVisions.com>  
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## Quotes of the Quarter

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Security is a false God. Begin to make sacrifices to it and you are lost.

Paul Bowles, *Their Heads are Green, And Their Hands are Blue* (New York: Random House Publishers, 1963), 73.

As long as we believe that there is something that will permanently satisfy our hunger for security, suffering is inevitable.

Pema Chödrön, *Comfortable with Uncertainty: 108 Teachings on Cultivating Fearlessness and Compassion* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2003), 184.

Make a radical change in your lifestyle and begin to boldly do things which you may previously never have thought of doing, or been too hesitant to attempt. So many people live within unhappy circumstances and yet will not take the initiative to change their situation because they are conditioned to a life of security, conformity, and conservation, all of which may appear to give one peace of mind, but in reality nothing is more damaging to the adventurous spirit within a man than a secure future.

Jon Krakauer, *Into the Wild* (New York: Anchor Books, 1997), 56-57.

The good we secure for ourselves is precarious and uncertain until it is secured for all of us and incorporated into our common life.

Jane Addams, *The Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements*, 1892,  
[www.infed.org/archives/e-texts/addams6.htm](http://www.infed.org/archives/e-texts/addams6.htm).

To become aware of what is constant in the flux of nature and life is the first step in abstract thinking.... Change is not something absolute, chaotic and kaleidoscopic; its manifestation is a relative one, something connected with fixed points and given order.... In the early strata of the *Book of Changes* this

concept of constancy in change is evoked by... *polarity*. The two antithetical points set the fixed limits for the cycles of change.

Hellmut Wilhelm, as quoted from Mayananda's *Tarot for Today* (London: Zeus Press, 1963), 116.

All things change, is one idea. All things are in flux is another. If things changing are also in flux, then the condition is totally fluid. The change is changing. Opposites are only momentarily in tension; they next become identical, as one thing becomes another before either can be identified as one thing or another. My joy contains sorrow even before its sweetness can be fully savored.

Richard Geldard, *Remembering Heraclitus* (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Books, 2000), 52.

The Grecian God Hades (meaning "the unseen") became the god of the underworld, "the realm of the dead." Another name for Hades was Polydegmon, "which means receiver of many guests."

Jef Bartow, *God, Man and the Dancing Universe* (Bayfield, CO: New Paradigm Publishing, 2005), 451.

As in Egyptian mythology, the Greeks associated the underworld with the west, with the place where the sun sets. Neither the Greeks nor the Romans, however, ever thought of Hades as an evil force like Satan in Christianity.... In order to avoid any reference to the nature of the underworld it was usual to call Hades by the title of Pluto ("the giver of wealth").

Arthur Cotterell, *The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Mythology* (London: Anness Publishing LTD, 2003), 47.

Pluto is a deity with the attributes of the serpent. He is a healer, a giver of health, spiritual and physical and of enlightenment.



Helena Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. II (Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press, 1974), 26.

All things are present in God, and conversely God is present in all things and explains and explicates them... Each thing is an individual concentration of the cosmos, a unit which, reflects the universe. This is especially true of man, each man reflects the world in a different way and men are true microcosms.

Nicholas of Cusa, as quoted in *The History of Philosophy* by Julian Marias (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1967), 199.

Destroy the theories that the earth is the center of the universe!... Open the door through which we can look out into the limitless, unified firmament composed of similar elements and show us that the other worlds float in an ethereal ocean like our own! Make it plain to us that the motions of all the worlds proceed from inner forces and teach us in the light of such attitudes to go forward with surer tread in the investigation and discovery of nature! Take comfort, the time will come when all men will see as I do.

Giodorno Bruno, as quote from *The Discovery of Nature* (1965), by Albert W. Bettex (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), 123.

It is one of the most beautiful features of Masonic Institution that it teaches, not only the necessity, but the nobility, of labor. Among the earliest of its implements in whose emblematic use it instructs its neophytes is the Tressel Board, the acknowledged symbol of the Divine Law, in accordance with whose decree, labor was originally instituted as the common lot of all; and therefore the important lesson that is closely connected with this symbol is, that to labor well and truly, to labor honestly and persistently is the object and chief aim of humanity.

Albert G. Mackey, *The Symbolism of Freemasonry* (Create Space Independent Publishing, 2001), 95.

Labour is a more beneficent ministration than man's ignorance comprehends, or his complainings will admit. Even when its end is hidden from him, it is not mere blind drudgery. It is all a training, a discipline, a development of energies, a nurse of virtues, a school of improvement.... Labour is man's great function, his peculiar distinction and his privilege. From being an animal, that eats and drinks and sleeps only, to become a worker, and with the hand of ingenuity to pour his own thoughts into the moulds of Nature, fashioning them into forms of grace and fabrics of convenience and converting them into purposes of improvement and happiness, is the greatest possible step in privilege.

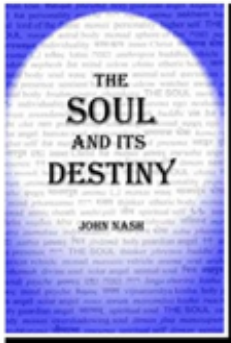
Albert Pike, "Knight of the Royal Axe, Or Prince of Libanus Degree," abstracted from *Magnum Opus or the Great Work* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2010), 7-8.

The stark division between the physical and the spiritual, between religion and science is one of the primary causes of the misunderstanding of ancient esoteric teachings. It has caused some people, for example, to speculate whether... alchemy... was a spiritual or physical practice. Manly P. Hall... as well as other modern writers... have stated that the methodology of physical alchemy was a blind, an allegorical veil for instructions on spiritual alchemy. And while this may be true, the reverse is also true that in the process of soul transformation lies hidden the secret of physical transformation.

Dorje Jinpa, *A Synthesis of Alchemy* (Pentabarba Publications, 2016), 7.

All personal experiences are expressions of the one great Law manifesting according to mathematical principles, demonstrating that the unfoldment of the godlike possibilities inherent in each soul follows step by step, the same order of events that is followed in the evolution of the cosmos. These steps are symbolized by the first twenty-two numbers.

From the second commentary of *The Book of Hermes*, by an anonymous brother of the Order of Christian Mystics.



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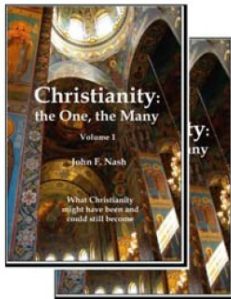
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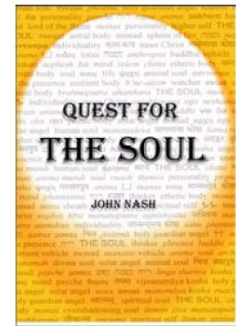
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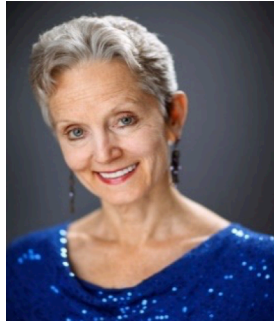
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# The Pleiades

Maureen Temple Richmond

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## Abstract

This article, written for enthusiasts of the esoteric astrology of Alice A. Bailey, examines the effects of the constellation of the Pleiades, one of several constellations not located in the zodiacal belt but specified by the Tibetan Master as significant spiritual sources for evolution in our solar system. In order to understand the emanations of this particular constellation, the author examines two different views of the Pleiades: the mythological and the esoteric. Following up on the dictum articulated by the Tibetan Master that there is more real occultism contained in exoteric constellational myth than has previously been thought, the text looks at Indigenous North American, Ancient Mediterranean, and Classical Vedic images of the Pleiades as a representative selection of the ways this constellation has been conceptualized. The esoteric view of the Pleiades follows, including the position of this constellation in greater orders of being and its role as a disseminator of the Third Divine Aspect, equivalent to Fire by Friction, vitalizing electrical substance, and manas. The study concludes with an explanation of the astrological intermediaries by which and through which the energies of the Pleiades reach Humanity. Readers interested in interpreting the many statements on the nature of the Pleiades made by the Tibetan throughout the Alice Bailey books will find this article a useful contribution to study.

## Introduction

Popularly conceptualized as seven scantily clad dancing maidens, the Pleiades are an attractive if not downright seductive star cluster located close to the ecliptic in the sidereal constellation of Taurus.<sup>1</sup> Tradition has always held there are seven such stars, though in modern times only six are visible to the unaided eye. The actual number of stars in the Pleiades cluster, however, far exceeds the exotic spec-

tacle of the seven traditional dancers. Modern telescoping has revealed that the Pleiades star grouping is in fact comprised of some 300 to 500 individual stars,<sup>2</sup> the collective light which produces a luminous cloud appearing to contain bright sparkles trapped in filmy veils of transparent mists.

How this cluster came to be called the Pleiades is of interest. It appears that the most likely origin resides in the maternal lineage of the seven maidens classically associated with this constellation in Greek mythology. According to myth, the seven maidens represented by the seven stars of the Pleiades are the daughters of Atlas and his wife, Pleione. Since the seven came forth from the mother Pleione, her offspring were thus collectively known by a slight adaptation of her name.<sup>3</sup>

There is another possibility for the origin of the name, the Pleiades. One of the many versions of the story associated with this star grouping maintains that the seven Pleiades are in fact the seven doves who carried ambrosia to the infant Zeus, or even seven mortal women transformed into doves, the Greek word for dove being "peleiade."<sup>4</sup> Some have held that as these seven doves flew up to the heavens, one was lost, and this is why only six stars are now readily visible to the unaided eye in this grouping.

---

## About the Author

**Maureen Temple Richmond** is a lifelong astrologer and esotericist known for her scholarly study titled *Sirius*, a comprehensive examination of the teaching on that great star as revealed in the works of Alice Bailey. Author of numerous essays, poetry, and fiction, Richmond holds a M.A. in English and Creative Writing from SNHU, and is currently working on a Ph.D. program in Heritage Studies at Arkansas State University where she now makes her home. A counseling astrologer, Richmond advises Anglophone clients around the world. She can be reached at: starsong1208@gmail.com.



Whether doves or dancing maidens, the Pleiades seem often to be enveloped in an aura of appealingly delicate femininity. As will be demonstrated, this linkage of the Pleiades with the feminine pole of existence is significant, and may very well prove to be yet another instance substantiating the Tibetan's claim that the names and imagery traditionally associated with the constellations conceal more information of real occult value than has been previously thought.

## **The Pleiades Around the World**

Just as the classical Mediterranean mind saw the Pleiades as a group of closely related individuals, so also has the world around seen this constellation as emblematic of groups of people, herds of animals, flocks of birds, and the like. For example, one of the North American Indian tribes saw what is now called the Pleiades as a group of children who had become lost while wandering among the stars, now huddled together for warmth and reassurance.<sup>5</sup> Other star watchers echoed the maternal theme and saw this star grouping as a hen with her chickens.<sup>6</sup> Some perceived this constellation as a group of sisters, brothers, or animals, the number being as few as six and as many as sixteen.<sup>7</sup> Central to all these notions is the idea of a family or intimate assemblage, with the implied need for attention to the welfare of its members.

The business of taking care of the family and of attending to domestic needs in general emerges as a theme related to the Pleiades in yet another way. The risings and settings of the Pleiades together with or opposite to the Sun have been used the world over as time signals indicating the right point at which to undertake critical agricultural tasks at both the beginning and the end of the growing season. These seasonal indicators were of utmost importance to the peoples who relied upon them for accurate guidance in matters of physical survival. Hence, the Pleiades became emblematic of the seasonal rituals that kept communities alive and insured the continuity of human life.

For example, when the Sun joined the Pleiades in the sidereal constellation Taurus, it was time

for the early springtime reaping of overwintered crops in ancient Greece. Conversely, when the Sun had moved to opposition of the Pleiades, it was time for the autumnal sowing of seed that would germinate and set roots during the wet wintry months.<sup>8</sup> In time, the Pleiades came to be intimately associated with the ancient Greek festival of Plenteria,<sup>9</sup> a widely practiced harvest observance in which propitiation for bountiful food supply was made to the gods.<sup>10</sup> Hence, the Pleiades were to some an emblem of abundant material supply, an extension of their agricultural connotations.

Given the importance of rainfall and moisture to agriculture, it is not surprising that the Pleiades were sometimes associated with rain, and even with floods.<sup>11</sup> This linkage no doubt arose because the conjunctions and oppositions of the Sun with the Pleiades largely indicate the time of spring and fall rains, respectively (in the northern hemisphere). Thus, whenever the Pleiades were accented by virtue of the Sun's direct interaction with them, rains were much more plentiful. Because of this and the general linkage of this star grouping with seasons of growing and harvesting, the Pleiades and their influence became associated with the reproductive cycles of crop plants and vegetation in general. Consequently, the Pleiades were at one time called the Virgins of Spring in the northern hemisphere,<sup>12</sup> a title perhaps suggestive of the earliest stages of the reproductive cycle in both humans and plants.

Yet another feminine association with the Pleiades hails from ancient Egypt, the priests of which land used certain positions of the Pleiades to indicate the time for the Festival of Isis,<sup>13</sup> the key mother goddess of the Egyptian pantheon, comforter of souls and guide of the deceased into celestial realms of transcendence.

However, not all groups and cultures have associated the Pleiades with roles feminine, reproductive, and essentially benefic. Certain rites of the archaic English Druids, questionable for their possible inclusion of human sacrifice, were timed by various positions of the Pleiades,<sup>14</sup> and the positively bloodthirsty Incan religion drew its equally questionable jus-

tification for human sacrifice from its myth connecting positions of the Pleiades with a so-called impending destruction of the world.<sup>15</sup> So, as can be seen, in not all contexts have the Pleiades been associated with maternal forces suggestive of spiritual and physical comfort.

Even ancient India weighed in on this question, taking somewhat of a middle position. The Hindu system of astronomy calls this star grouping Krittika, the seven nurses of Karttikiya, the Hindu God of War.<sup>16</sup> An obvious correlate to Mars, the classically masculine western god of war, Karttikiya connotes all that Mars does as well—assertion, force, anger, aggression, weaponry, blades, and injuries. And all this, it is held, was nursed into existence by the seven female figures of the Krittika.

Far afield from the dove-like Virgins of Spring, this! Though we do find here the maternal instinct frequently associated with the Pleiades, the maternal instinct in this case has been devoted not to nurturance alone, but also to the raising of a mighty warrior figure. Thus, in India were both the classically feminine and masculine roles associated with this star grouping.

### **Traditional Astrological Characterizations of the Pleiades**

**O**ddly enough, the fact is that the Pleiades have been associated with violence, strife, and impending doom as well as with life sustaining agricultural rhythms, reproductive cycles in nature, and maternal spiritual guidance. The tension between the supposedly threatening nature of this constellation on one hand, versus its earthy and pragmatic nature on the other, is certainly reflected in the difference between the ways the Pleiades have traditionally been characterized by astrology on one hand and more recently by the esoteric occult philosophy on the other.

This fact is easy to discern. Even a quick glance at mainstream astrological descriptions of the influence of the Pleiades reveals an emphasis upon strife, danger, and injury. For example, standard astrological references on the

fixed stars and constellations report that the influence of the Pleiades results in strong passions, immorality, disgrace, imprisonment, injuries to the eyes, blindness, and violent death.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Esoteric Significance of the Pleiades**

**B**y contrast, the esoteric occult philosophy presents the Pleiades as an entity of a spiritual stature far beyond the failings of human character. In fact, it is to the Pleiades in concert with the sun Sirius that is attributed the hidden facts of our cosmic evolution, and of our particular solar system.<sup>18</sup> Suggestive of a great mystery, this statement is backed up by Blavatsky, who intimated that the Pleiades conceal an important occult mystery.<sup>19</sup> In keeping with this greater estimation of the Pleiades, a statement of the Tibetan's assigns the Pleiades an exalted role in the process of evolution. The Tibetan Master stated that the seven stars traditionally attributed to this constellation function as the spiritual goal for the seven ray types,<sup>20</sup> certainly an indication that the Pleiades embody highly evolved spiritual ideals.

The dichotomy was never so clear: mainstream astrology suspects the worst of the thinly clad Pleiades, as though they constituted an irresistible invitation to moral devolution, while the esoteric occult philosophy sees a different view when it turns its gaze in the direction of these seven starry sisters. Perhaps a sweep of the Pleiades star group as seen through the telescopic lens of the Ageless Wisdom will explain why the esoteric doctrine perceives as it does.

### **The Pleiades as a Center in a Greater Logos**

**T**o begin with, the esoteric occult doctrine assigns the Pleiades a place of great importance in the overall scheme of cosmic space, enumerating this constellation as one of the centers of a Logos far greater than our Solar Logos. The evidence that this is so can be found scattered throughout the information given by the Tibetan through Alice Bailey. All

considered, it strongly suggests that the Pleiades constitute the equivalent of a throat center in the body of the Cosmic Logos, if not that of the Super Cosmic Logos.<sup>21</sup>

Why this is so hinges essentially upon material revealed by the Tibetan in regard to the Seven Ways or Paths of Higher Evolution. These Seven Paths are the avenues along which the Masters pass to greater service following the Fifth and Sixth Initiations,<sup>22</sup> levels of evolution advanced even beyond that of the Master Jesus at the time of his Palestinian ministry.

The critical hint which the Tibetan divulged in this regard is that each of these Paths leads to one of the seven centers in the body of the One About Whom Naught May Be Said,<sup>23</sup> which One is either the Cosmic Logos or the Super-Cosmic Logos. Whichever it may be, this information, together with the fact that the Tibetan gave the astronomical identities for four of the destinations of these Paths and dropped hints for those of the other three,<sup>24</sup> makes it possible to speculate about the identity of these centers with reasonable confidence.

The four centers identified by the Tibetan in the discussion of the Cosmic Paths are these:

- 1) the polar constellation of the Dragon, or Draco;<sup>25</sup>
- 2) Betelgeuse,<sup>26</sup> one of the stars of Orion;
- 3) Sirius;<sup>27</sup> and
- 4) the Pole Star, or Polaris.<sup>28</sup>

The remaining three destinations are described as simply unknown or unspecified. Of immediate relevance, however, is the Tibetan's statement that the Pleiades, together with our solar system and one of the stars in the Great Bear form three centers in the Cosmic Logos.<sup>29</sup> This would seem to suggest that the Pleiades are indeed one or in one of the centers of the Cosmic Logos. Further support for this notion comes from the role played by the Pleiades in the Prototypical Triangle, the other two members of which (the Great Bear and Sirius) are most assuredly important centers in the Greater Logos. It would stand to reason that if the Pleiades are to function parallel to these two, this constellation must hold a similar status.

But to continue the process of identification through elimination, the remaining unspecified centers should be examined. Of these, our solar system must be one, since it is certain that our solar system is either one or included in one of the seven centers making up The One About Whom Naught May Be Said, or the Cosmic Logos.<sup>30</sup> The other unspecified source is undoubtedly alluded to in the Tibetan's statement that the seven stars of the Great Bear are the correspondences to the seven head centers in the body of the Cosmic Logos.<sup>31</sup> Since the centers in the Cosmic Logos and the sources or destinations for the Cosmic Paths are one and the same, it would appear that indeed the Great Bear is one of the hitherto unspecified termini for the Cosmic Paths.

Thus, the three unspecified sources must be:

- 1) The Great Bear
- 2) The Pleiades
- 3) our solar system.

But which centers in the body of the Cosmic Logos do these represent?

Fortunately, the Tibetan has left for us a good number of indications which can help answer that question. The first of these useful indications is his unequivocal assertion that the Great Bear holds the position of the head center of the Cosmic Logos.<sup>32</sup> The second decisive statement of assistance in settling this matter concerns the place of our own solar system. The Tibetan stated without qualification that our Solar Logos is associated with the heart center of the One About Whom Naught May Be Said,<sup>33</sup> thus neatly accounting for the location of that particular item. A third helpful hint results from the Tibetan's clear statement that the Path leading to Betelgeuse (and possibly by implication, Orion) is connected to the cosmic solar plexus.<sup>34</sup> Yet another conclusive statement concerns the constellation Draco, said by the Tibetan to function as the base of spine center for the Cosmic Logos.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, accounted for are the identities of the head, heart, solar plexus, and base of spine centers of the Cosmic Logos. This leaves

Sirius, Polaris, and the Pleiades for which to be accounted.<sup>36</sup>

The Pleiades are described by the Tibetan as distributors of Ray Three energy,<sup>37</sup> and hence are a natural correlate to the throat center, which is a distributor of Ray Three in the microcosm,<sup>38</sup> and by analogy in any greater unit as well.<sup>39</sup> In fact, the Tibetan associated the influence of the Pleiades with the human throat center in particular,<sup>40</sup> positively confirming the role of this constellation in the greater environment on the basis of the Law of Correspondence, which the Tibetan said is ever the key to comprehension.<sup>41</sup>

As the equivalent of the throat center of the Greater Logos, the Pleiades must therefore also function as the source and destination of one of the Seven Cosmic Paths, or Ways of Higher Evolution. It is certain that this is so, for the Tibetan plainly stated that one of the seven paths leads to the Pleiades,<sup>42</sup> though precisely which one he did not reveal. However, it can not be doubted that in their position as the destination for one of the seven paths, the Pleiades represent a redoubtable point of fusion on the Path of Return.

### **The Pleiades as a Member of the Prototypical Triangle**

That the Pleiades function as a point for the emergence and re-assimilation of foundational spiritual energies is echoed in the role played by this non-zodiacal constellation in the Prototypical Triangle, of which it is a member, together with the Great Bear and Sirius. According to the Tibetan, the energies radiated by this triangle correspond to the Three Aspects of Deity,<sup>43</sup> and as such stand behind, condition, and even control the entirety of manifested existence in our solar system<sup>44</sup> from high causative levels.<sup>45</sup> Within the Prototypical Triangle, the Great Bear represents the First Aspect, Sirius the Second, and the Pleiades the Third.<sup>46</sup> Thus, each of these stellar agencies emits one of the Aspects of Deity in the divine creative process, as well as gathering back into itself the same energies in the evolutionary path of return to center. Just as this is true of the Great Bear and Sirius, so also is it the case with

the Pleiades, an unquestionably important factor in the various processes of manifestation.

As the reader may remember from the general principles contained in Alice Bailey studies, the esoteric occult doctrine holds that manifestation can only occur with the involvement of triangular relationships linking one positive, one negative, and one neutral entity. The Prototypical Triangle, of which the Pleiades are a member, works in the same fashion. The Great Bear is the masculine, positive and outgoing factor, the Pleiades the feminine, negative and receptive factor, and Sirius the linking neutral factor. This is so because the Great Bear represents Spirit or the First Aspect, Sirius the Second or Consciousness aspect, and the Pleiades the Form or Third Aspect.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, the Pleiades play a very important role in the work of the Prototypical Triangle as representatives of the Third Aspect. According to the Tibetan, the Third Aspect (or Logos) expresses itself through material form or matter.<sup>48</sup> This is in contradistinction to the ways in which the other two Aspects operate. Thus, whereas the Third Aspect is defined by the Tibetan as energized matter resulting from “fire by friction,” the Second Aspect works through consciousness or “solar fire,” and the First Aspect through spirit or “electric fire.”<sup>49</sup>

### **The Third Aspect and the Pleiades**

What decisively distinguishes the frictional Third Aspect from its electrical and solar siblings is the fact that it and it alone provides the material basis for the divine creative process, and that it and it alone wields the power from which all the grades of matter in manifest creation are derived.<sup>50</sup> As such, the Third Aspect was referred to in various ways by the Tibetan, such as “appearance,”<sup>51</sup> “the aggregate of building forces destined to implement the great cosmic plan,”<sup>52</sup> and of course, the familiar “Active Intelligent Purpose.”<sup>53</sup>

Yet this is not the limit of the imagery under which the Third Aspect is known in the literature of esoteric occultism. No, it has one more association of great importance, for this

one links the esoteric significance of the Pleiades with certain traditional folk views of this star grouping.

This view of the Pleiades results from its function within the Prototypical Triangle, in which, according to the Tibetan, the Great Bear acts as Father, Sirius as Son, and the Pleiades as Mother.<sup>54</sup> Here the Tibetan used the language of conventional Christian theology to convey his meaning, but the implication goes far beyond a simple nod to traditional religious liturgy. To call the Pleiades by the term of “Mother” opens up another fruitful sequence of reflections revealing the deeper nature of the Pleiades. It demonstrates that Mother-Matter and the Third Aspect, both of which are associated by the Tibetan with the Pleiades, characterize the nature of this constellation. Hence, the Pleiades, as an embodiment of the form and matter-creating Third Aspect, must also be considered as equivalent to the female function of Mother-Matter.

That which generates form has been conceptualized as female in polarity by various esoteric traditions, including the Hermetic. This fact was pointed out before Bailey by Blavatsky.<sup>55</sup> More recently in regard to the metaphysics of Gnosticism, the linkage of the feminine pole with matter in general has been articulated.<sup>56</sup> Further, the label “Mother” has been equated in esoteric literature with the Holy Spirit<sup>57</sup> as another name for Third Aspect, just as implied by the Tibetan’s formula of Father, Son, and Mother (instead of the usual “Holy Ghost”). According to the Tibetan, the “Mother Aspect” is equivalent to the negative or feminine pole of existence, embodied in deva substance,<sup>58</sup> which substance forms all the grades of matter constituting all the planes of manifestation and the forms to be found thereon. Therefore, it is apparent that Mother, Holy Ghost, Holy Spirit, feminine pole of existence, and deva substance are all parallel and interchangeable terms. And these are all linked with the seven star-sisters of the Pleiades.

### **The Pleiades and the Creation of Form**

**G**iven that seven maidens were associated with the Pleiades star grouping by

antiquity, it is clear that the ancient view of this star grouping was not much removed from the characteristics attributed to this constellation by the esoteric occult doctrine. Under the guise of symbolic imagery, the olden view of this star grouping in fact depicted the very same idea, but in the shape of maidens who might be impregnated, gestate with child, and give birth to new forms. Here indeed, is restated the esoteric significance of the Pleiades in code and under cover, though plainly enough unveiled for those with a will to see.

This very form-creating nature of the Pleiades was celebrated by a South American Indian tribe, which held that the star grouping now called the Pleiades was Woman Shaman, embodied in these particular stars but also generally in the whole sky, and thought to be the creator of the world. Seasonal rains and weather changes were understood by this tribe to be the evidence of Woman Shaman’s reproductive cycle, which sustained all things.<sup>59</sup> The obvious correlation of this exoteric characterization with the esoteric characterization of the Pleiades speaks eloquently for itself.

Thus, as is abundantly clear, the esoteric doctrine posits that the Pleiades give rise to and directly influence the form side of manifestation.<sup>60</sup> This is precisely to what the Tibetan referred when he stated that two stars in this grouping (along with Sirius and another small constellation) acted to create the dense physical body of our Solar Logos.<sup>61</sup> According to the Tibetan, this consortium of stellar influences still provides manasic forces (a reflection of Active Intelligence or Ray Three) to our entire solar system.<sup>62</sup>

In this, it is obvious that the Pleiades are involved in the basic processes of creation that allow for the objective existence of the solar system. Without key forces supplied by the lovely ladies of the Pleiades, our grand Solar Logos would be nothing but a swirling subjective vortex of good intentions. If He is to realize His purpose, He must call on the magic worked by the seven stellar sisters, who represent the feminine pole of the Third Aspect.<sup>63</sup> And the magic of the seven sisters is of a particularly significant kind. According to



Blavatsky, who cited the Hindu esoteric philosophy as her source, the Pleiades are linked with the power of sound.<sup>64</sup>

Sound is, as all occult students know, held in the highest estimation by the esoteric doctrine, which teaches that a great sounding of vibratory tone initiates and sustains all creation.<sup>65</sup> Though sound was sometimes exclusively associated with the First Aspect in the Tibetan's teachings,<sup>66</sup> it also has a threefold nature constituted of elements representing each of the aspects of Deity. AUM, the Great Sacred Word or Sound, according to the Tibetan, contains spirit, matter, and intelligence,<sup>67</sup> spirit being the First Aspect, Matter the Third, and intelligence the Second (intelligence in this context being roughly equivalent to consciousness). Thus, like all things, the great initiating creative sound is threefold, and the Pleiades send forth one of the three faces of the great creative sound, that of Matter or the Third Aspect.

In the process of providing the forces which lead to the manifestation of material forms, the Pleiades act on their surroundings and our solar system in a particular way. This they do through what the Tibetan called "electrical energy." "The Pleiades," he said, "are to the solar system the source of electrical energy...."<sup>68</sup>

This electrical force is the embodiment of the Third Aspect in action. It is the "fire by friction" and "energized matter" itself of which the Tibetan so frequently spoke.

Alice Bailey alluded to this aspect of existence in one of her writings undertaken independently of the Tibetan's telepathic impression. There, Bailey speculated that the Pleiades are the source of what she called "...the atomic life of our Logos."<sup>69</sup> The phrase "atomic life" refers to the grades of matter existing on the highest subplanes of each of the seven planes of the solar system, so in this passage, Bailey was simply restating the notion that the Pleiades impart archetypal matter for the robe of the Solar Logos. Apparently that archetypal matter is composed of the particles making up the electrical current known as fire by friction, or the Third Aspect in expression.

In this picture of the Third Aspect, the idea of a vitalized and vibrant type of archetypal matter

emerges. And this is just what flows forth from the Pleiades, according to the Tibetan. The Pleiades, he stated, "...though they are regarded as embodying the matter aspect in manifestation — are in reality and literally the expression of the Principle of Life which we call vitality, prana in its various stages or degrees, ether or substance."<sup>70</sup> Thus, it is an enlivened type of radiant material which comes forth from the Pleiades, the third member in the Prototypical Triangle and the embodiment of the Third or Mother-Matter Aspect. It is in part the conscious reception of this contribution from the Pleiades which renders a planet sacred.<sup>71</sup>

### The Seven Sisters Paired with the Seven Rishis of the Great Bear

As a source of radiant living matter and as a representative of the Third or Mother-Matter Aspect in general, the Pleiades constitute a natural opposite polarity for the First or Spirit Aspect as embodied in the stars of the Great Bear. This fact leads to an important esoteric linkage between these two oppositely charged yet closely related star groupings, a linkage which may have been hinted at by exoteric tradition, which has referred to both groups by the same name — "The Seven Stars," and has even likened the shape of the Pleiades to the chariot or wagon associated with the Great Bear.<sup>72</sup>

Obliquely suggestive of a hidden affinity between these two star groupings, this traditional connection between the Pleiades and the Great Bear is even further dramatized in the ancient Greek myth that the lost seventh Pleiad actually fled to the Great Bear and became a member of that constellation, a belief shared by groups in Siberia, Mongolia, and the northern Caucasian Mountain areas as well.<sup>73</sup> The link between the Pleiades and the Great Bear is likewise affirmed in the literature of exoteric Hindu myth and religion, particularly the *Mahabharata*<sup>74</sup> and the *Satapatha Brahmana*.<sup>75</sup>

The bond between the Pleiades and the Great Bear is portrayed in the Bailey teachings as an intimate one, indeed, for the seven starry sisters, according to the esoteric occult doctrine, are the

very wives of the seven Rishis of the Great Bear.<sup>76</sup> This imagery suggests a fundamentally complementary relationship between these two great constellations, just as might be expected from their opposite and complementary functions within the Prototypical Triangle. In their resultant conjugal connection, these two constellations act as supernal parent figures for the entirety of human evolution, according to the esoteric doctrine, which holds that it is force from the Great Bear combined with that from the Pleiades which, commingled, accounts for the gradual growth and development of a human being.<sup>77</sup>

This stellar stimulation to human evolution originates in the Great Bear, passes through our Solar Logos to our Planetary Logos, from thence proceeds to the human Monad (itself part and parcel of the Planetary Logos), and finally makes its impact on the human level through the various subdivisions of the monadic ray, which diversifies itself on the way to the concrete levels of manifestation. It is at this juncture that the Pleiades, acting through the mental plane, exert their influence upon the process,<sup>78</sup> providing the material and tangible component necessary for all the multifarious grades of experience required for evolutionary progress. Thus, it might be said that the seven sisters of the Pleiades and the seven rishis of the Great Bear constitute seven heavenly couples, much like the tantric presentation of divine powers in yab-yum (or male and female) form, their progeny being the entire evolutionary process. It is this relationship between the Pleiades and the Great Bear, so obviously central to the divine creative process, which constitutes the subject matter of concern to advanced initiates following the Second Cosmic Path.<sup>79</sup>

### **The Pleiades, The Great Bear, and the Planetary Logoi**

The magnetic relationship between the Pleiades and the Great Bear forms the

*According to the esoteric doctrine, the Pleiades form a major chakra or energy vortex in the body of a greater logos, fulfilling a critical role in the dissemination of necessary energies throughout the body of space.*

foundation for an important celestial dynamic at work in the evolution of not just humans, but of Planetary Logoi as well. This function of the Pleiades was alluded to early in *Esoteric Astrology*,<sup>80</sup> but like much else in that volume,

this topic was not elaborated upon in that context, but rather in the earlier dictated *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*. There the Tibetan referred quite pointedly to the existence of a triangular relationship constituted of the seven stars of the Great Bear, the seven Planetary Logoi of our solar system, and the seven stars of the Pleiades, saying that the

exact nature of this triangular relationship remains highly privileged initiatory knowledge.<sup>81</sup> This may be why he only obliquely referred to a certain series of triangles connected with the Pleiades at one point,<sup>82</sup> and elsewhere just hinted vaguely at the link of the Pleiades with the Planetary Logoi.<sup>83</sup>

At any rate, the Tibetan did elaborate sufficiently upon the internal workings of this triangular relationship for a general grasp of the topic to be obtained. According to the material he provided, the Pleiades operate within this triangle in such a way as to not only constitute the negative or receptive pole,<sup>84</sup> but also to provide manasic energies to the seven planetary logoi of our solar system, the Pleiades star group in general having produced the first flicker of manasic consciousness in the seven planetary logoi at the dawn of creation in our system, and one particular star of the Pleiades having been instrumental in the initiation of our Planetary Logos at the individualization crisis eighteen and a half million years ago.<sup>85</sup>

This one star of the Pleiades still maintains a close connection with our Planetary Logos, it is said, functioning in a triangular relationship completed by one star of the Great Bear.<sup>86</sup> A specific instance of the general triangular configuration uniting the seven stars of the Great Bear, the seven Planetary Logoi of our solar system, and the seven stars of the Pleiades, this particular triangle functions to vivify atomic

matter in the higher subplanes of our seven systemic planes, the end result being the activation of the spirillae of the permanent atoms which make up certain centers of the human individual.<sup>87</sup>

Thus, it could be said that the Pleiades materially affect the individual person on Earth through a triangle constituted of one star in the Great Bear, one star of the Pleiades, and our Planetary Logos, providing a stimulus to heightened vibrational activity in the vehicular sheaths. All vehicular sheaths, being the material component of an entity, are expressions of the Third or Mother-Matter Aspect, and this is why the influence of the Pleiades comes to rest at this level.

Interestingly enough, the manasic energies which the Tibetan attributed to the Pleiades are also Third Aspect phenomena, if the First and Second Aspects are considered to be equivalent of atma and buddhi, respectively. In the Prototypical Triangle, the Great Bear represents atma (or spiritual will), Sirius represents buddhi (cosmic or universal love-wisdom), and the Pleiades represent manas, the third component of the atma-buddhi-manas triad, itself a reiteration of the Divine Triad —Will, Wisdom, and Intelligence. The Pleiades represent the manasic or intelligence component of the Divine Triad, and this is why the Pleiades can provide mind or manasic energies for the Planetary Logoi, a very key function indeed.

However, this is not the only high spiritual energy emanated from the Pleiades and channeled in the direction of the Planetary Logoi of our system. Again according to the Tibetan, the Pleiades are also a source of buddhic force for the Planetary Logoi of our system. This high spiritual power originates on the cosmic buddhic plane,<sup>88</sup> passes through the polar constellation Draco, then to and through the starry sisters, from thence to make its way to the various Planetary Logoi of our system.<sup>89</sup>

Thus, like other profoundly exalted stellar beings, the Pleiades emanate a mixture of energies, each with its own role to play in the divine process. The Pleiades are complex not only in this regard, but also in the fact that they play a dual role in the triangular configuration

they form with the Great Bear and the seven Planetary Logoi of our solar system. Here the Pleiades both send out and take in force, for not only do they transmit manas and buddhi to the seven Planetary Logoi, but also do they act as the negative and receptive pole for the seven Heavenly Men of the solar system. As the Tibetan stated it, the Pleiades are “negatively polarized” to the seven schemes of our solar system.<sup>90</sup> It is this polarity arrangement which stands behind the fact that “...our Heavenly Men are the transmitters, via their seven schemes, to the seven stars of the Pleiades.”<sup>91</sup> Exactly what is transmitted from the seven Planetary Logoi of our solar system to the seven sisters was left unspecified by the Tibetan, but it might be speculated that since the Pleiades are said to be the goal for the seven ray types, that which the seven Ray Lords of the schemes send their way must be ray energies intensified as a result of circulation within the evolutionary domain of each scheme.

The polarity relationship of the Pleiades with the schemes was said by the Tibetan in general to hide within its dynamics a clue to the all-important mystery concerning the identity of that starry entity who functions as the polar opposite to our Solar Logos. Specifically, it is the relationship of the Pleiades to our very planet which was singled out by the Tibetan as precisely indicative of the identity of our Solar Logoi complement, but more than that he did not reveal, saying only that the fullness of this matter would not be divulged until “a further precession of the equinoxes.”<sup>92</sup> In absence of further specifics, the most that can safely be concluded in this matter is that the lovely ladies of the Pleiades are indeed pregnant with occult mystery, and are certainly pivotal to a complete understanding of esoteric cosmology.

## The Pleiades as a Cosmological Orbit Point

Esoteric occult tradition has long held that the Pleiades in fact hold a place of supreme importance in the cosmology of space. It was Blavatsky who first made this part of the esoteric teaching public. She wrote that the Pleiades formed the central point around which certain stars orbit.<sup>93</sup> Exactly which stars in this regard

she had in mind it is hard to say, as she simply stated that “our universe of fixed stars” orbits the Pleiades, which statement leaves entirely open the precise identity of “our universe” and “fixed stars.” Of course, it is now known that the point around which all the stars in our galaxy orbit is not the Pleiades, but rather a point in deep space found in an entirely different region of the celestial field. However, this fact does not necessarily invalidate Blavatsky’s claim, for it is still possible that some subset of the galactic star horde responds to the Pleiades (as well as the general galactic center), following a motion yet undetected by science.

Blavatsky drew particular attention to one specific star in the Pleiades which she described as the precise universal pivot point. She identified the star Alcyone (which is Eta Tauri, the seventh brightest star in the constellation Taurus) as the actual central point around which orbits some group of stars.<sup>94</sup> This notion was restated in *Esoteric Astrology*,<sup>95</sup> and in *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*,<sup>96</sup> in both instances as a reference to an edition of *The Secret Doctrine* now long out of print. However, the information in one of these references is quite specific as to which stars orbit the Pleiades. It states quite simply that our solar system orbits the Pleiades.<sup>97</sup> In what fashion this orbital motion is accomplished, and what other solar systems may be involved, the text does not say, nor is this motion elucidated by present day mainstream astronomy. Thus, the entire matter of stellar orbit around a Pleiadean pivot point remains shrouded in a veil of mystery, the translucent robe of protection drawn around this question perhaps having been borrowed from the filmy dress of the seven maidens themselves.

Even so, the belief that the Pleiades constitute the central point of the universe can be found in exoteric myth. Certain Middle Eastern and Asian groups have held the Pleiades to be the center of the universe and a seat of immortality.<sup>98</sup> Here again may be proof of the Tibetan’s contention that there is more real occultism hidden in the popular conceptions of the stars than has previously been thought.

## **The Pleiades and the Computation of Long Time Cycles**

According to the Tibetan, the Pleiades are one of the several constellations which are used by the Hierarchy as factors in the calculation of very long time cycles affecting our solar system.<sup>99</sup> Such very long time cycles are those governing the life cycles of the seven planetary schemes as well as the life cycle of the entire solar system, considered as a whole.<sup>100</sup> The exact manner in which the Pleiades are used to determine the lengths of various cycles was not specified by the Tibetan, who only indicated that knowledge of this type arises as a result of the development of the intuition and that it is evoked by the processes of initiation.<sup>101</sup>

That the Pleiades are in some way involved with the calculation of cycles affecting the solar system was affirmed by Blavatsky, who stated that a great truth is masked by western mythology concerning the Pleiades. Perhaps here she had in mind the Central American preoccupation with the Pleiades as an indicator of drastic celestial and earthly events. At any rate, Blavatsky did reveal that the Pleiades are indeed implicated in some way as part of the several celestial signs which will signal the onset of systemic pralaya,<sup>102</sup> a fact she said is confirmed in Hindu sacred literature, but exactly where she did not say.

Since systemic pralaya brings all processes of outward manifestation to a conclusion, the linkage of the Pleiades with an ultimate destruction appears to have some basis. However, this linkage pertains only to immensely long time cycles and not to the relatively short ones discussed earlier in regard to certain Central American cyclic computations. Consequently, the influence of the Pleiades is nothing to dread or fear on a daily basis during the more than three trillion years of Solar Logoic manifestation.

Even so, the sometimes moody Pleiades can be said to have their moments of high drama. Again according to Blavatsky, this star grouping

together with other celestial influences does figure into momentous developments right here on this globe, such as the uplift and submergence of continents and landmasses at the appearance and disappearances of the Root Races. In this regard, it is the Pleiades together with the star Aldebaran (which is Alpha Tauri, or the brightest star in the constellation of Taurus), the Hyades (six stars also part of the constellation of Taurus), and either the signs or constellations (or perhaps both) of Leo, Virgo, and Aquarius, altogether, which in some way signal the time for periodical renovation of the Earth's continents.<sup>103</sup>

Now, in exactly what astrologically or astronomically technical manner such disruptions are figured Blavatsky did not say, so until more information is available, today's astrologers should refrain from expecting the worst when, as a result of the Earth's daily rotation, the Pleiades pass near the horizons and meridians at the eastern, southern, western, and northern points!

All the same, it is hard to ignore in the above description of factors connected with earthly cataclysms the prominence of the constellation Taurus, in which are found both the Pleiades and the Hyades. Mainstream astrologers have long looked askance at this area of the heavens, suspecting the star Aldebaran in particular and the Pleiades in general of causing all manner of mischief and mayhem. Their misgivings may not be so far afield, though according to the esoteric astrological doctrine, the truly devastating influences of these celestial factors come into play only very rarely.

In regard to the other celestial factors mentioned by Blavatsky as potential indicators of major tectonic activity on our planet, it should be pointed out that two of these (the constellations and signs of Leo and Aquarius) may well be related to developments in connection with the emerging Age of Aquarius, while the remaining

item (Virgo) likely concerns timing relative to the Age of Pisces, which constellation and sign constitute its polar opposite. Opposite signs always act in tandem one with another, for any celestial arrangement involving our planet, and which highlights one constellation or sign, can

not but highlight the opposite of that sign as well, for the constellations and signs are all arranged as six pairs of axes radiating outward from the Earth as the center of perspective. Of course, the Sun remains the center of the solar system, but as regards the perspective on space from our globe, our point of view

appears to be the center. Hence, when one sign is highlighted, so also is its opposite by virtue of the axis of alignment thus created. Thus, the Virgo-Pisces and Leo-Aquarius axes, along with Aldebaran, the Hyades, and the Pleiades may all well be important indicators of time-sensitive developments to take place during the Ages of Pisces and Aquarius, as Blavatsky's statement suggests.

There is no question that Blavatsky associated dramatic developments with the Pleiades, which star grouping she may have thought linked in some way with the famous Chaldean time period called the Naros Cycle.<sup>104</sup> Again, exactly how the Pleiades might be linked with the Naros, Blavatsky did not say. The Naros Cycle is a complex affair derived from the computation of multiple planetary pair cycles within our solar system.<sup>105</sup> It is not readily apparent how that type of phenomena might technically relate to a fixed star grouping, which is an influence of an entirely different nature. However, the possibility of a subjective link between the Pleiades and the planets remains. After all, it is the Pleiades who lent the necessary frictional fires to create the physical bodies of the Planetary Logoi. It only stands to reason that the Pleiades may thus retain certain maternal rights and thus exert some degree of influence upon

*The Pleiades emanate a mixture of energies, each with its own role to play in the divine process. The Pleiades are complex not only in this regard, but also in the fact that they play a dual role in the triangular configuration they form with Great Bear and the seven Planetary Logoi of our solar system.*



the comings and goings of their celestial offspring. Such would be within the purview of the Third Aspect, that facet of Deity which deals with material arrangements in space and time.

Much speculation amongst the astrological community concerning the influence of the Pleiades is inevitable. One reason for the abiding interest in this star grouping springs from the fact that long ago in the Age of Taurus,<sup>106</sup> the Sun at the vernal equinox was seen near the stars of the Pleiades. Because the zodiacal year began at that point back then, the astrologers and astronomers of the time took that starting point also as the beginning point for the nearly 26,000-year period during which the vernal equinox point slowly migrates around the entire zodiac, calling this long cycle “The Great Year of the Pleiades.”<sup>107</sup>

Actually, the point at which such a cycle may be said to begin is entirely arbitrary, as the slow migration of the vernal equinox point goes on all the time. Thus, any Great Year is simply the period of almost 26,000 years required for the vernal equinox point to migrate around the entire circle of the ecliptic. However, many have thought, as a result of the name (Great Year of the Pleiades) that there was something peculiar about the 26,000-year period following from that epoch (of about two thousand years’ duration itself) when the Sun conjoined the vernal equinox near the Pleiades. This has given rise to the unwarranted speculation by some that the Pleiades govern the entire precessional cycle, which is the name for the approximately 26,000 year time period during which the equinox point traverses the entire circle of the ecliptic.

Though there may eventually prove to be an esoteric connection between the Pleiades and the orbital cycles of the globes making up the various schemes (as just mentioned above), it is a mistake to assume from the ancient reference to the one-time starting point of the annual zodiacal cycle that the Pleiades exert any greater influence over the precessional cycle than does any other star grouping lying along the ecliptic. All the same, there is much yet to be learned from the Pleiades about the computation of very

long time cycles, as the oblique comments bequeathed by Blavatsky and the Tibetan suggest.

## **The Astrological Intermediaries of the Pleiades**

As has been shown, the glittering Pleiades fulfill a number of functions in the ongoing life of space, for this constellation finds place in the Greater Logos as a key higher center, from there interacts with the Great Bear and Sirius to channel all the basic energies of creation into our portion of the manifested universe, and then contributes the substance for the processes of material manifestation. From its position as a representative of the feminine pole of existence, the Pleiades not only pair with the stars of the Great Bear to provide the hidden dynamic behind all evolution in form, but also endow the seven Planetary Logoi of our solar system with the manasic and material sheaths to be used during their periods of manifestation. Clearly, the lovely lady Pleiades are a busy and maternal lot, pivotal in determining vital bodily processes in the life of space, and likely control some of the specific rhythms by which that body of space exists.

The comprehensive influences emitted by the Pleiades ultimately reach our planet, its kingdoms, and the individual human person through astrological intermediaries. These astrological intermediaries act to focus and narrow the otherwise wide-ranging and cosmic concerns of the Pleiades into concentrated beams of knowledge about process in time and space.

According to the esoteric astrological doctrine, the astrological intermediaries which distribute Pleiadean influence in this way are constituted of six constellations with their representative signs, plus two individual planets. Of these, the constellations and signs first condense the Pleiadean energy into knowable qualities and powers, while the planets further concentrate and narrow the original Pleiadean impulse, that it may apply specifically to life on the lower planes of manifestation.

## Constellations and Signs Distributing the Influence of the Pleiades

According to the Tibetan, the six constellations and their representative signs which receive and distribute Pleiadean influence are the following:

1. Taurus<sup>108</sup>
2. Gemini<sup>109</sup>
3. Cancer<sup>110</sup>
4. Libra<sup>111</sup>
5. Sagittarius<sup>112</sup>
6. Capricorn<sup>113</sup>

Of these, three are said by the esoteric astrological teaching to distribute the Third Ray, these being Cancer, Libra, and Capricorn, so the fact that they function as distributors for the essentially Third Ray influence of the Pleiades is no great surprise. However, Taurus, Gemini and Sagittarius are said to distribute other rays, and so their inclusion in this list adds new material to what might otherwise have been assumed, a fact which might suggest that these three signs may harbor more ray influences than have been so far overtly stated.

In any case, exactly how Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Libra, Sagittarius, and Capricorn qualify and shape the non-zodiacal influence of the Pleiades is of significance. Speculations to that effect can be offered here.

Taurus is, according to the Tibetan, fundamentally related to the Pleiades star grouping to be found within its confines. Through one of the stars of the Pleiades, the Tibetan Master has said, the Ray One Will energy emanating from the Great Bear is stepped down and ultimately transmitted to the entire constellation and sign of Taurus, which then passes it right into tangible and material manifestations within the Human Kingdom. This manifests as a severe divergence of motivations within the psychology of the Human Kingdom: on the one hand, a pronounced intention to advance exclusive personal interests, while on the other, a

determined intention to serve those of the Greater Whole.<sup>114</sup> This clash of motivations is to be seen underlying the furious fight on our planet concerning the right uses of money and natural resources, both of which are ruled in part by the earth sign, Taurus. Thus, Taurus becomes an agent of Pleiadean force in this way, passing along certain Will energies originating in the Great Bear, and thus bringing up questions about right use of form and materiality.

That part of the Pleiadean energy stream which concerns the manifestation of matter and the time cycles governing the creation and destruction of form likely is picked up and amplified by Cancer and Capricorn, both distributors of Mother-Matter Ray Three and linked in all astrological traditions with embodiment in form and the measurement of time. The manasic component of Pleiadean influence, however, most probably finds its way through Libra, also a distributor of actively intelligent Ray Three and one of the mentally-oriented air signs. The buddhic component of Pleiadean influence very likely streams through Gemini and Sagittarius, distributors of Rays Two and Four respectively, which rays resonate to the even numbered buddhic principle.

In this fashion, the rich stream of Pleiadean influence fans out, like light passing through a prism, into the varied and diverse beams of quality and tendency that contribute to the adventure of consciousness in our sector of manifested creation. These many divisions of the Pleiadean influence ultimately reach the individual through some specific astrological influence, which in the end teaches the individual about the creation and management of form, cycles of manifestation, and some of the meaning to be intuited behind it all.

The two astrological factors which make this message of the Pleiades even more specific are, according to the esoteric astrological doctrine:

1. Mercury<sup>115</sup>
2. Venus<sup>116</sup>

Of these two, it is likely that the buddhic component of Pleiadean influence is focused and relayed by Mercury, distributor of Ray Four and hence of the same nature as buddhi, the fourth

principle. Similarly, it is probable that the manasic portion of Pleiadean influence finds its way through Venus, distributor of Ray Five and hence of the same nature as manas, the fifth principle. In combination, these two planets thus attune Humanity and the individual to the all-important levels of intuition and mind, which in part have their origin in the emanations of the seven starry sisters.

The connection of Venusian influence with the Pleiades is of especial note, for here again is to be found a definite correlation between the esoteric astrological doctrine and exoteric astronomical myth. According to the Tibetan, the influence of the Pleiades is linked in this solar system to the Sun and Venus,<sup>117</sup> the natures of Venus and the Pleiades being depicted as strongly similar.<sup>118</sup> This similarity may well have been the hidden basis for the Greek myth which held that it was the goddess Venus who, seeing the plight of seven girls frightened by the unwanted advances of the hunter Orion, transformed the group into seven doves who then flew away to heaven in the direction of the Pleiades.<sup>119</sup> These seven doves are undoubtedly the same seven doves said by yet another version of the myth to have been originally seven mortal women transformed by Zeus to help them escape from lusty Orion, and sent for safe keeping to their residence in the sky as the Pleiades.<sup>120</sup>

Whether it was Venus or Zeus who saved the endangered females by changing them into doves, one thing is certain: gentle doves are a symbol of the demure and charming Venus. About this there can be no doubt, as doves themselves are held by the astrological tradition to be ruled by the planet Venus.<sup>121</sup> Thus, the Greek myth conjoins a symbol for Venus (the doves) with the constellation of the Pleiades, plainly proclaiming the very same link between these two celestial factors (Venus and the Pleiades) posited by the esoteric teaching.

Not to be outdone, the messenger planet Mercury can also claim a mythological ancestry connecting him exoterically with the Pleiades, for according to Greek myth, Hermes (the Greek name for Mercury) was borne of Maia, the senior lady of the Pleiades, his father being the

ubiquitous Zeus.<sup>122</sup> Thus, according to exoteric myth, Mercury came forth from one of the Pleiades, while according to esoteric teaching, Mercury represents and speaks for the same star grouping. The common theme is plain to see, this and the Venus-Pleiades connection serving to illustrate once again the accuracy of the Tibetan's contention that there is more real occultism in the legends concerning the stars than previously thought.

Though the connection of both Mercury and Venus with the Pleiades is unquestioned, it is also true that neither of these planets was primarily described as a distributor of the Third Ray (so predominantly linked with the Pleiades) in the installment of the Ageless Wisdom teaching dictated by the Tibetan to Alice Bailey. However, since the Third Ray in general and the Pleiades in particular condition all material bodies, any tangible planetary body could be said to express that ray. Hence, there may be a great deal more Ray Three influence contained in all planetary influence than is normally considered. In fact, this is undoubtedly the case, as all the matter in our solar system was impressed with the ability to respond intelligently under the Third Ray influence of the previous solar system, from which all our present-day matter has been inherited.

In any case, it is clear that Mercury and Venus, together with Gemini, Cancer, Libra, Sagittarius, and Capricorn, all have been charged with the responsibility of conducting into our solar system the many and important processes and rhythms emanating from the Pleiades. The knowledge thus conducted into our systemic dimension makes its way directly to Humanity,<sup>123</sup> the planetary throat center, from thence to the disciple's ajna center, and finally to the disciple's throat center.

Even so, it is not likely that any particular individual can perceive the energy of the Pleiades in any conscious way until he or she nears the Third Initiation,<sup>124</sup> which fact suggests that the Pleiades remain for Humanity a general and collective impression concerning vast generalities with which it rarely connects. Not so our mighty Solar Logos, who though perhaps not as advanced as some solar logoi might be, nonethe-

less does a fine job of registering the song of the seven illustrious ladies dancing in their distant starry home, the glittering and potent Pleiades.<sup>125</sup> So the esoteric teaching states.

## Conclusion

As this study has demonstrated, the constellation of the Pleiades holds an important position in the esoteric astrological teaching. Emblematic of the feminine polarity in nature and the concomitant power to generate form, the Pleiades have been characterized by ancient mythology and esoteric astrology alike, in that both angles of approach to celestial understanding have placed this constellation in the role of “She Who Gives Birth to Form.” In particular, the classical myths of Greece, Egypt, and North America have associated this star cluster with the feminine themes of physical reproduction and agricultural fertility, emphasizing the linkage of the Pleiades with proper planting and harvesting times, together with the rainfall which nurtures the plant kingdom and makes vegetable growth possible. By contrast, the classical imagery of India, the Druids, and South American Incans have associated the Pleiades with aggression and destruction, a theme which finds striking resonance with the characterization of the Pleiades in popular or exoteric astrology, which has linked the Pleiades with cataclysms, misfortune, and conflict.

Even so, the esoteric teaching on the Pleiades points to a much more august role for this beloved and familiar star cluster located in the sidereal constellation of Taurus. According to the esoteric doctrine, the Pleiades form a major chakra or energy vortex in the body of a greater logos, fulfilling a critical role in the dissemination of necessary energies throughout the body of space. Further, the Pleiades function as a member of the Prototypical Triangle, completing Will and Love with Intelligent Activity. Esoteric occultism also holds that the Pleiades operate as a source of electrical energy for our entire solar system, emanating deva substance, which substance forms all the grades of matter constituting all the planes of manifestation and the forms to be found thereon. As such, the Seven Sisters of the Pleiades are held occultly to function as the wives, consorts, and complementary opposites

to the Seven Kings or Rishis of the Great Bear, thus establishing a unit of cosmic magnetism. The teaching also speculates that the Pleiades in some way function as a cosmological orbit point and play into the calculation of long evolutionary cycles, though the exact method in which these two functions are fulfilled may not be outlined in the present version of the teaching. Finally, the esoteric astrological doctrine posits that the powerful energies of the Pleiades reach Humanity through constellations and signs which function as astrological intermediaries, distributing the energies of the Pleiades to active life on planet Earth.

This study has thus provided a grand sightseeing tour of the Pleiades, capturing unique views of its many faces as seen through the lenses of both myth and esotericism. Throughout, it has pointed out the correlation between exoteric astronomical myth and esoteric astrological doctrine. Going forward, the themes and conclusions presented here may serve to alert all students to the notion that, just as the correlation of myth and esotericism has demonstrated here, so also have the Tibetan’s teachings been borne out time and again. In that fact lies quiet assurance and confidence, for along with the technical indications regarding esoteric astrology and cosmology, the Tibetan Master has likewise provided ample wisdom for balanced and sane daily living and world service. Like the regular and predictable daily and nightly rising and setting of the stars, that’s something to be trusted.

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<sup>1</sup> E.C. Krupp, *Beyond the Blue Horizon: Myths and Legends of the Sun, Moon, Stars, and Planets* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 241, 250.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 242, 243.

<sup>3</sup> R.H. Allen, *Star Names, Their Lore and Meaning* (New York: Dover Publications, 2000 reprint of 1899 original edition), 395. The Pleiades have also been called by a name reminiscent of Atlas, their father. Blavatsky used such a name when she referred to the Pleiades as the Atlantides in *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. II, 772. Actually, the name Atlantides refers to the Pleiades together with the nearby star grouping, the Hyades, according to astronomer J.D. Stahl, in his *New Patterns in the Sky*, 76. Even so, this linkage of the Plei-

- ades with a word form suggestive of the name for the old Atlantean race and continent is likely rich with implication.
- 4 E.C. Krupp, *Beyond*, 250.
- 5 Julius D. Staahl, *The New Patterns in the Sky: Myths and Legends of the Stars* (Newark, OH: McDonald and Woodward Publishing Company, 1996), 75.
- 6 Allen, *Star Names*, 399 – 400.
- 7 Krupp, *Beyond*, 245 – 246.
- 8 Staahl, *The New Patterns*, 75.
- 9 Allen, *Star Names*, 400.
- 10 Jane Ellen Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (1903 reprint; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 77 – 119.
- 11 Allen, *Star Names*, 398.
- 12 Albert Pike, *Morals and Dogma* (Charleston: Supreme Council of the Thirty Third Degree for the Southern Jurisdiction of the United States, reprint of unknown date of the 1871 original edition), 453.
- 13 Allen, *Star Names*, 400.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 400, 401.
- 15 Krupp, *Beyond*, 295 – 296.
- 16 H.P. Blavatsky, *The Theosophical Glossary* (1892 reprint; Adhyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1952), 181.
- 17 Vivian Robson, *Fixed Stars and Constellations* (publisher unknown, 1923), 182 – 184; Allen, *Star Names*, 402.
- 18 Alice A. Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar* (1929 reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1977), 188.
- 19 H.P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine* Vol. II (1888 reprint; Wheaton: Theosophical University Press, reprint of 1974), 618.
- 20 Bailey, *Initiation*, 188.
- 21 For the full details of the argument, see M. Temple Richmond, *Sirius* (Raleigh, NC: Manasadeva Press, 2000), 287 – 308.
- 22 Alice A. Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire* (1925 reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1973), 1241; Alice A. Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations* (New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1960), 410.
- 23 Bailey, *Cosmic Fire*, 1242; Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology* (New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1951), 108.
- 24 Bailey, *Cosmic Fire*, 1244 – 1266; *Rays and Initiations*, 426 – 427.
- 25 Bailey, *Cosmic Fire*, 1245, 1247.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 1255, 1257.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 1259, 1260.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 1262, 1264.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 182.
- 30 Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology* Vol. I (New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1962), 150, 332; *Cosmic Fire*, 182, 554, 1242; *Esoteric Astrology*, 29, 33, 50, 467.
- 31 Bailey, *Cosmic Fire*, 182.
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 Bailey, *Ray and Initiation*, 99; *Cosmic Fire*, 156, 511, 520.
- 34 Bailey, *Cosmic Fire*, 1253.
- 35 Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, 46.
- 36 Polaris and its home constellation Ursa Minor are likely equivalent to the ajna center of this Greater Logos. Sirius, together with our Sun, is likely the heart center of the same entity, as discussed fully in M. Temple Richmond, *Sirius*, 287- 308.
- 37 Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, 416.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 517.
- 39 “The microcosm, when known, holds ever the clue to the Macrocosm.” Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, 415.
- 40 Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, 421.
- 41 Bailey, *Cosmic Fire*, 628.
- 42 Bailey, *Rays and Initiations*, 422.
- 43 Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, 416.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 415, 595.
- 45 Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology*, Vol. I, 49.
- 46 Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, 416.
- 47 *Ibid.*
- 48 Bailey, *Cosmic Fire*, 888.
- 49 *Ibid.*, 228.
- 50 *Ibid.*, Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, 244, 246.
- 51 Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, 420, 630.
- 52 Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology*, Vol. I, 159.
- 53 Bailey, *Cosmic Fire*, 317.
- 54 Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, 430.
- 55 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine*, Vol.I, 72, 74, 75.
- 56 Dan Merkur, *Gnosis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 122.
- 57 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine*, Vol.I, 74, 75.
- 58 Bailey, *Cosmic Fire*, 650.
- 59 Krupp, *Beyond*, 253 – 254.
- 60 Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, 416.
- 61 Bailey, *Cosmic Fire*, 699.
- 62 *Ibid.*
- 63 *Ibid.*, 156.
- 64 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine*, Vol. I, 648. It is likely this is the assertion to which Bailey referred when she wrote in *Consciousness of the Atom*, 156, that “Oriental Scriptures” say the connection of the Pleiades to our system lies in and through sound or vibration.



- 65 Bailey, *Cosmic Fire*, 192, 216, 217.
- 66 See, for example, Alice A. Bailey, *The Destiny of the Nations* (New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1949), 17.
- 67 Bailey, *Cosmic Fire*, 318.
- 68 Ibid., 156.
- 69 Alice A. Bailey, *The Consciousness of the Atom* (1922 reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1972), 156.
- 70 Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, 504.
- 71 Ibid.
- 72 Allen, *Star Names*, 396 – 397.
- 73 Krupp, *Beyond*, 247, 248.
- 74 Ibid., 248.
- 75 Subash Kak, *The Astronomical Code of the Rig Veda* (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 1994), 64.
- 76 Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, 269.
- 77 Bailey, *Cosmic Fire*, 1157.
- 78 Ibid.
- 79 Bailey, *Rays and Initiations*, 405.
- 80 Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, 31.
- 81 Bailey, *Cosmic Fire*, 349, 801.
- 82 Bailey, *Cosmic Fire* generally.
- 83 Bailey, *Cosmic Fire*, 656, 657, 1053.
- 84 Ibid., 377, 378.
- 85 Ibid., 347, 349.
- 86 Ibid., 657.
- 87 Ibid., 657 – 658.
- 88 Ibid., 109, 904.
- 89 Ibid., 1162.
- 90 Ibid., 377.
- 91 Ibid., 378.
- 92 Ibid., 236 – 237. However, the Tibetan did reveal that the concept that the planets in our system express a polarity opposite to that of the Pleiades was earlier expressed in *The Secret Doctrine* and that our system is considered “masculine” to the “feminine” Pleiades. See *Cosmic Fire* 250. Whether or not such a statement decisively settles the question is a matter for contemplation.
- 93 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine*, V. II, 551.
- 94 Ibid.
- 95 Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, 657
- 96 Bailey, *Cosmic Fire*, 1154.
- 97 Ibid.
- 98 Allen, *Star Names*, 400.
- 99 Bailey, *Cosmic Fire*, 795, 796.
- 100 Ibid., 792 – 795.
- 101 Ibid., 795 – 796.
- 102 *H.P. Blavatsky Collected Works*, compiled by Boris de Zirkoff, (Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 1980), Vol. V, 162 – 163.
- 103 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine*, Vol. II, 785.
- 104 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine*, Vol. II, 619.
- 105 Charles Jayne, “Naros Cycle,” in Nicholas de Vore, *Encyclopedia of Astrology* (Totowa, NJ: Littlefield, Adams, 1976), 79 – 81.
- 106 Astrological ages are so named for the periods of time, close to 2000 years each, when the vernal equinox point passes in front of the stars of a particular constellation (or actual star grouping) as seen from Earth.
- 107 Allen, *Star Names*, 392, 393.
- 108 Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, 376.
- 109 Ibid., 50, 465.
- 110 Ibid., 416.
- 111 Ibid., 349.
- 112 Ibid., 50, 465.
- 113 Ibid., 421.
- 114 Ibid., 376 – 377.
- 115 Ibid., 421.
- 116 Ibid., 416.
- 117 Bailey, *Cosmic Fire*, 146.
- 118 Ibid., 375, 377.
- 119 Staahl, *New Patterns*, 75.
- 120 Krupp, *Beyond*, 250.
- 121 Rex E. Bills, *The Rulership Book* (Richmond: Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply Company, 1971), 39.
- 122 E.C. Krupp, “Beyond the Pale,” in *Sky and Telescope*, March 1998, 89.
- 123 Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, 416.
- 124 Ibid., 29.
- 125 Bailey, *Consciousness*, 155, 156.



# Kālī the Dark Mother

Irina Kuzminsky

## Abstract

**K**ālī—the most powerful and most misunderstood of Indian goddesses, she is an Image of Divinity whose roots extend well into the ancient Goddess worship of prehistory to reemerge in the Purāṇas and the Tantras. Under her name of Kālī, the Black Goddess rapidly ascended to the status of Alpha and Omega, the Ultimate Source itself in the Śākta stream of Indian religion. This article traces some of the history of her evolution, examines the legacy of the Tantras and of Śaktism, and touches on her current renaissance among certain segments worldwide. It suggests that Kālī could be morphing into an image of the Divine more in tune with our current search for the feminine face of God in our religious traditions, as well as embodying a cosmic image of divinity more in accord with the demands of ecospirituality, with its acknowledgement of a spiritual connection between human beings and the environment, and the most recent discoveries of the new physics. In the final reckoning, Kālī is seen to be an image of the Divine which cannot be disregarded or dismissed lightly.

## Introduction

**K**ālī—a word that raises such a broad spectrum of images and feelings, encompassing revulsion, fear, awe, grudging admiration, surrender—and the veneration and passionate devotion of such a one as Sri Ramakrishna. No other Indian deity has been so misunderstood, no other Indian goddess is so powerful or has come closer to representing the Dark Goddess in all her mystery, glory and power. The Black Goddess, the Supreme, the Void, a manifestation of the Divine Mother, Kālī is depicted black and naked, hair unbound and streaming, large red tongue extended. She is girdled with a skirt of human arms, wears a garland of male human heads or human skulls, and carries a sword or a sickle in one of her arms, a severed human head in another, while a third hand ex-

tends, dispelling fear, and the fourth is raised in blessing, bestowing liberation. Kālī stands, or dances, on the prone inert body of the great god Śiva, her consort, who submits himself willingly to her.

It is a terrifying image and one that carries a powerful charge even today. A *mūrti* or idol of Kālī is not what most Indians would choose to place in the centre of their homes, preferring by far the gentle boon-giving Lakṣmī, a form of the Divine Mother associated with wealth, beauty and life's bounty.

In the esoteric community too, Kālī is scarcely the form of choice of the Divine. Indeed, she is sometimes associated erroneously with Kaliyuga, the darkest and most degenerate of the cycle of four yugas, the “winter of consciousness” when people are at their furthest from God.

The reigning deity of Kaliyuga is indeed Kali, the demon Kali (with both vowels short), whose meaning is “discord,” “quarrel” or “strife.” Kālī the Goddess is actually spelt with both vowels long (ā and ī), a distinction which easily escapes the non-Sanskrit speaker. Kālī's own association with destruction as cleansing can only add to the confusion between the two, as it is she who is most likely to come at the end of Kaliyuga to cleanse the world in a cataclysmic fiery act of destruction, a role

## About the Author

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frequently attributed to her. One of her Names is *Kālarātri*—the Great Cosmic Night of Dissolution. In her cleansing role she is addressed in the “Song of the Hundred Names of Ādyā Kālī” as *Kalikalmaṣanāśini* (She Who Is the Destructress of Evil in the Dark Age of Kali), as *Kalidarpaḡhnī* (She Who Destroys Pride during the Kaliyuga), and as *Kālānalasamadyutiḥ* (She Who Is as Radiant as the Fires that Consume the Universe).<sup>1</sup>

Kālī absorbs all things and beings and the universe itself into herself at the end of the great cycles of time, only to create the next great cycle of existence.

Paramahansa Yogananda, who often spoke of the Divine Mother as Kālī, writes of this aspect of Kālī in the course of “Thou Mother of Flames,” his long hymn addressed to her:

Then the dark night approached,  
And Thou didst wear the grim, dark veil of mourning,  
To put Creation through the terrible but purifying ordeal of destruction's fire.  
The sun burst and belched fire;  
The Cosmic earthquake broke the vase of the sky, dropping embers of stars;  
And all Creation was a furnace of flames.<sup>2</sup>

— only to be reborn from the ashes “*with its body of pure flames*,” the flames Kālī herself is also associated with in her iconography.

### On the Search for Kālī

So who or what is Kālī? In her essential being, She is a representation of a universal principle or force that can, and has, had other names. As the poets and mystics know, to approach the mysterious Source at the heart of Being, the Primal Cause of What Is, is to risk getting burnt, is to risk total annihilation. The unfathomable and raw power that Kālī represents allows of only one response in the final reckoning, which is surrender. Fully cognizant of this, Kālī's devotees (such as the Bengali saint Ramakrishna Paramahansa or the poet Rāmprasād)<sup>3</sup> call to her as Ma, preferring to cast themselves in the role of an infant totally dependent on its mother, as they come

face to face with the fearsome and unfathomable Unknown.

“Kālī” in her ultimate form is a Name, a covering, a tracing for SomeThing that is, in essence, Unnameable. But we are human, and in order to approach the Unapproachable we seek to give it a more human dimension, even one as terrifying in its aspect as Kālī. Our need is to perceive it as a Thou, however tenuously. We need to Name It—even as we realize that the Ineffable and Limitless is beyond the limitations of any name.

#### Names of G-d

Some call You the Unknowable  
Some speak of You as Dark  
While others dance in drunkenness  
Seek You in grapes, in pressing and in Wine  
Still others sense your mysteries in the Way  
Or speak of Wisdom and unfathomable Space  
The One from Whom all Buddhas know their birth  
While prophets speak of the supreme I AM  
And mystics probe into Your darkness  
But sweetest to my heart  
Most piercing is Your Name of Kālī  
Your Naked IS-ness scarcely covered by this Name  
— Thus do I simply call You  
— Mother.<sup>4</sup>

And even if we know that the Ineffable—the Is-ness—is barely covered by this Name, yet we need it, for as long as there is an I and a Thou, for as long as we are separate from the great I AM.

### What's in a Name?

As a name, “Kālī” has constellated a lot of raw power and mystery around itself. It is potent with an archetypal pulsing energy that carries a constellation of fears and longings and a reaching of man to God. Given that names, and words, are symbols that can be imbued with tremendous power, we would do

well to listen to them and to seize their potency. The Word as energy, as Consciousness made manifest, is said to be the basis of Creation. (It is worth pointing out that the Word or *logos* in the Western Christian tradition is understood not as a literal “word” but as the Word or Cosmic Vibration at the origin of Creation, and is thus akin to the Indian conception of the Aum.) The Word brings into being, the Word vibrates and creates, and it is this power of the Word as Aum that Kālī herself has become associated with. Paramahansa Yogananda writes of Kālī as the representation of Aum, the Cosmic Vibration in whom the invisible Spirit takes a visible form as the Divine Mother: “The Spirit was invisible and took the shape of a visible / Mother Divine;”<sup>5</sup> while David Frawley, a prominent Western Vedic scholar, writes of her: “Kali is the beginning and the end of everything. She has the first and the last word, as she is the Divine word in its primal essence before and beyond any particular expression.”<sup>6</sup> Abhinav Gupta affirms in his *Tantrasāra* (a condensed version of his magnum opus, the *Tantrāloka*) that all vowels are an emanation of the power of Kālī and capable of creating all things, another way of acknowledging her power as the creative Word.<sup>7</sup>

In the strand of Hinduism known as Śaktism, which gives primacy to the Feminine face of the Divine, it is Kālī herself who is the Supreme Being, both *nirguna* (without form) and *saguna* (with form), both Brahman—ultimate truth and reality, genderless and bodiless—and creator, preserver and destroyer of form. The Goddess as Mahākālī (“mahā” meaning “great”) thus takes on the attributes assigned to the male trinity (the Trimūrti) of Brahmā (creator), Viṣṇu (preserver) and Śiva (destroyer), roles that they traditionally share with their respective Śaktis, Saraswatī, Lakṣmī and Kālī. Sri Ramakrishna affirms:

He who is Brahman is also Shakti. When thought of as inactive, He is called Brahman, and when thought of as Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer, he is called the Primordial Energy, Kali.<sup>8</sup>

But in Śaktism there is scarcely space for even this tenuous separation of roles as the “He” morphs into a “She.” There She is Alpha and Omega, the Absolute and the dynamic potential of the Divine, both the Divine Word as the Aum and the very Ground of Being, the unnameable Source Itself.

The name Kālī derives from *kalam*, meaning black or dark in color, giving rise to another of her names, Kālikā, or “the black one.” The etymological meaning of Kālī is “the dark or the blue-black one” and the word is said in some sources to derive from a Dravidian language,<sup>9</sup> pointing to Kālī’s ancient roots. However, “Kālī” is also the feminine form of the masculine noun *kāla*, derived from the Sanskrit root *kal* which has several meanings, including “time,” and also “fate” or “death.” *Kal* also means to “set in motion,” to “apportion,” to “harmonize,” or “to set and hold in motion all harmony,”<sup>10</sup> and Kālī is closely associated with the apportioning of time which moves and measures change, particularly as time the devourer who brings all things to completion and in which all things change, ourselves and the cosmos itself, coming into and out of being. “Kāla” is also a name of Śiva, who is likewise associated with the cycles of time as Destroyer, pointing to Kālī’s close connection to him. Mahākālī, however, is said to destroy Mahākāla himself as the *Mahānirvāṇa Tantra* (IV. 30-34) affirms:

At the dissolution of things it is Kala (Time) who will devour all and by reason of this He is called Mahakala and since Thou devourest Mahakala Himself it is Thou who art called the Supreme Primordial Kalika. Because Thou devourest Kala, Thou art called Kali and because Thou art the origin of and devourest all things Thou art called the Adya Kali. Resuming after Dissolution Thine own nature dark and formless, Thou alone remainest as One, Ineffable, and Inconceivable. Though appearing in form Thou art yet formless; though Thyself without beginning, multiform by the Power of Maya, Thou art the beginning of all, Creatrix, Protectress and Destructress that Thou art.<sup>11</sup>

Sir John Woodroffe, the author of this translation of the *Mahānirvāṇa Tantra* and a scholar whose contribution to Tantric studies can scarcely be overstated, reiterates in his seminal work, the *Garland of Letters*: “Kali is the Deity in that aspect in which It withdraws all things which it had created into Itself. Kali is so called because She devours Kala (Time) and then resumes Her own dark formlessness.”<sup>12</sup> There is an interesting correlation between this description of the Dark Goddess devouring time and the definition in physics of a black hole the mass of which slows down time so much that at its border (or “horizon”) time stands still, effectively ceasing to exist.<sup>13</sup>

For Ramakrishna and her other devotees however, this awe-inspiring goddess is not only the beginning and end of all power, but also the compassionate Mother who imparts wisdom, power and grace, all traditionally seen as attributes of the Feminine Divine. Indeed, Kālī as the feminine face of the Divine incites a powerful erotic longing for holy union in her devotees who long to be consumed and transformed by her and, perhaps surprisingly, features prominently in the devotional *bhaktī* tradition.

Let us begin by tracing the history of this powerful word, “Kālī,” insofar as it is known.

## A Brief History

How did this equation of Kālī with the Supreme Being come about? We do not really know, but we do know some of the history around it. The first written mentions of Kālī are scarcely on the same level as she is depicted in the great subsequent outpouring of Śaktism, although the name may well be based on much earlier ancient sources not known to us at present. Śaktism flourished from around the 6th century CE well into the 1700s and installed the Divine Feminine squarely at the centre of its cosmogony as creator, origin and supreme unchanging Reality itself (Brahman). Kālī is seen in this tradition as the primal, universal cosmic energy, and as the formless dark void from which this energy arises. The gods themselves, Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva, are said in the *Mahānirvāṇa Tantra* to arise from her as

bubbles arising from the sea, while she herself is the great ocean.

The first mention of Kālī in Indian Sanskrit sources is in the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 1:2:4, an early Upaniṣad embedded in the *Atharva Veda*, where she is one of the seven tongues of Agni (the god of fire), hence a flame, or an aspect of the god or principle of Fire. Kālī is listed first among the flames, the deepest blue flame of fire, but is still just an aspect of fire. That said, she has retained a strong association with fire iconography, sometimes being portrayed with flames for hair. Taking the imagery to a deeper level, she is seen to be the one who burns away all negativity and karma if we submit ourselves to her cleansing flames. She is also associated with the indwelling *kuṇḍalinī śakti* who purifies the bodily sheaths in her fiery ascent, as well as being the One who presides over the conflagration of the universes at the end of the cycles of time.

By the time of the Puranic literature, the worship of a single Supreme Being had come to be favored, be it Viṣṇu, or Śiva, or Devī. The Purāṇas are often given a divine origin, emanating from the breath of the Great Being. At the same time Vyāsa, the narrator of the *Mahābhārata*, is credited as the compiler of the original text into 18 Purāṇas. It is hard to give exact dates for what most likely started out as an oral tradition that may go back to the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE or earlier. The Purāṇas were collected a second time during the reign of the Gupta kings (4<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> centuries CE) but the editing and expansion of the texts continued in the post Gupta era, so that the texts continued to grow over the following several hundred years. In either case, post-Buddhist Puranic Hinduism stressed *bhaktī* or devotion to God, and Śaktism, the worship of Devī, the Feminine Divine principle, as Creator and Source, was one of the powerful religious currents to emerge (or reemerge) from it.

In Puranic literature Kālī first appears around 300 CE (in written sources at least) as being born from the locks of Śiva alongside her brother, Vīrabhadra, and fulfills her appointed task of destroying Dakṣa’s yajña or fire sacrifice after Dakṣa snubs his daughter Satī for

marrying the ascetic Śiva, and Satī immolates herself in the sacrificial fire. Bhadrakālī is dark-hued and dreadful, the dire aspect of the Devī Ādi Parāśakti, of whom Satī herself is a luminous or benign incarnation. (Prior to this, Satī manifests her fearsome Kālī form to Śiva when he dares to forbid her to go to the yajña without him, having forgotten who his sweet wife really is.) Together with Vīrabhadra, Bhadrakālī wreaks destruction on all present at the yajña including Dakṣa himself.<sup>14</sup>

In the *Mahābhārata*, “Kālarātri” or “Kālī” as the “black one,” carries away the spirits of dead warriors and animals, like a latter day Vulture or the Irish Morrigan. Her most dramatic and celebrated appearance though, her “birth,” as it were, in her current aspect, occurs in the *Devī Māhātmya*, the great Hindu epic of the fifth or sixth century CE in which the Great Goddess arises in a form commonly interpreted as Durgā in answer to the gods’ entreaties to do battle with the evil that threatens to overpower them.<sup>15</sup>

Kālī emerges from Durgā’s brow, one could say her third eye, and this occurs whenever the Goddess is moved to anger and blackens her countenance:

Thereupon Ambikā became terribly angry with those foes, and in her anger her countenance then became dark as ink.

Out from the surface of her forehead, fierce with frown, issued suddenly Kālī of terrible countenance, armed with a sword and noose. (*Devī Māhātmya* 7:5-6)

Kālī comes in her terrifying aspect—gaunt, emaciated, clad in a tiger skin, and wearing her garland of human heads. She makes short shrift of the army of the Asuras, slaying Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa, and thus allowing Durgā to kill the demons Śumbha and Niśumbha. In a further encounter, when Durgā is invoked to do battle with the demon Raktabīja, it is Kālī who again appears to defeat him. Raktabīja had been given a boon by Brahmā that whenever he is struck every spilled drop of his blood would sprout into a replica of himself when it fell to earth. Kālī deals with this problem by using her tongue as a weapon and drinking every

drop of Raktabīja’s blood before it falls to the ground so that Durgā is able to slay him.

But who is Kālī really in the *Devī Māhātmya*? Is she a separate entity or is she essentially a particularly fierce warrior aspect of Durgā, summoned forth to deal with the most intractable asuras or demons? And, for that matter, who is Durgā? Most commentators, such as Ajit Mookerjee in his classic *Kali - the Feminine Force*,<sup>16</sup> start from the premise that Kālī is one of the names of the Great Feminine, and also thus one of her manifestations as a “separate” goddess. In his article *The Word “Kali” in the Devī Mahatmya: A new look at an old book*,<sup>17</sup> Colin Robinson approaches this question from a subtly but significantly different angle. Robinson points out that Sanskrit does not have capital letters and that the distinction between names and descriptions is therefore not clear-cut. Hence the word “Kālī” in the text (in chapters 7, 8, 9) can mean “dark lady,” “dark female,” “lady of time” or Kālī, a proper name. The same applies to the words “kālīkā” (see chapter 5:87-88) —“the black one,” “bhadrakālī” (11:26) —“she who is gracious and dark,” “cāmuṇḍā” —“she who slays the demons caṇḍa and muṇḍa,” or “durgā” — “inaccessible.” Durgā is usually seen as the primary goddess of the *Devī Māhātmya* who slays the buffalo demon Mahiṣa, but she is only called by that name a few times in the text (see 4:11, 5: 2, 9:31, 10:1, 11:24, 11:50). In the last of these (11:50) the Goddess promises to return to slay yet another demon named Durgama, in honor of which feat she will be called Durgādevī in this future embodiment. In 4:11, the first mention of the word “Durgā” in the text, she is designated as the “boat for crossing the perilous ocean of being,” while in 5:12 she is again the one who “takes one across in difficulties” and who is “blue-black” or “smoke-like” in complexion, pointing to her continuity with Kālī:

Salutation always to Durgā who takes one across in difficulties, who is essence, who is the author of everything; who is knowledge of discrimination; and who is blue-black as also smoke-like in complexion. (5:12)



In fact, the Goddess is far more often referred to in the *Devī Māhātmya* as Ambikā, Caṇḍikā, Kātyāyanī or Mahādevī than she is as Durgā. In Chapter 5 of the *Devī Māhātmya* the gods again praise the Great Goddess, “mahādevī,” in a hymn and entreat her aid in their war against the demons. Pārvaṭī hears them and emanates two beings—the beautiful golden Ambikā also called Kauśikī who is Pārvaṭī's outer layer or sheath, and the dark Kālikā who remains:

Because that Ambikā came out of Pārvaṭī's physical sheath (Kośa), she is glorified as Kauśikī in all the worlds.

After she had issued forth, Pārvaṭī became dark and was called Kālikā and stationed on mount Himalaya.” (5:87-88)

The beautiful Ambikā or Kauśikī is the lion-riding goddess whose beauty first seduces the demons and who goes on to kill Śumbha, Niśumbha and Mahiṣa. Her anger and her frown give birth to “kālī karālavadanā.” “Durgā” is thus above all an epithet of “kauśikī” who emerges from “pārvaṭī,” “lady of the mountain,” as the “fighting lady.” Kālikā is equally Pārvaṭī and issues forth from the golden fighting goddess as Kālī to take on the demons in her most frightening aspect. As Robinson skillfully demonstrates, there is a deep continuity in the text between “bhadrakālī,” who is also “durgā,” and “kālī karālavadanā”—and, ultimately, “pārvaṭī” or “Mahādevī.”

Alongside these manifestations in the *Devī Māhātmya* the Great Goddess, who is later named Mahākālī (12:38), is first present invisibly at the beginning as the “yoganidrā” or mystical sleep of Viṣṇu as he lies on the back of the serpent floating in the cosmic ocean. She appears, withdrawing herself from Viṣṇu's body into a visible form, in answer to the entreaty of Brahmā, who prays to the goddess to awaken Viṣṇu and help him fight the two demons, Madhu and Kaiṭabha. In answer to his prayer, she transforms into Mahāmāyā, named also “tamasī” or “dark Goddess.” As Mahāmāyā she is the Enchantress wielding the power of illusion and delusion to enchant the

demons, making it possible for Viṣṇu to kill them. In the course of his prayer to her, Brahmā describes the various attributes of the Great Goddess and depicts her carrying every conceivable weapon—sword, spear, club, discus, conch, bow, arrows, slings, and mace (1:80-81). This “tamasī,” or dark Goddess, is demonstrably the “great dark lady” herself or Mahākālī.

Mahākālī is praised again in the *Devī Māhātmya* in 12:38-39 where she is seen to pervade the whole universe:

By her, the Mahākālī, who takes the form of the great destroyer at the end of time, all this cosmic sphere is pervaded.

She indeed takes the form of the great destroyer at the (proper) time. She, the unborn, indeed becomes this creation (at the time proper for re-creation), She herself, the eternal Being, sustains the beings at (another) time.

This is the Great Goddess in all her glory, creator, preserver and destroyer, beside whom the Hindu trinity of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva are mere drops in the ocean, as Brahmā affirms in his opening prayer to her:

By you, even he who creates, sustains and devours the world, is put to sleep. Who is here capable of extolling you? Who is capable of praising you, who have made all of us—Viṣṇu, myself and Śiva—take our embodied forms? (1:84-86)

This is the Goddess we encounter in the Tantras and in Śākta religion as Kālī.

Kālī's emergence as an independent Goddess appears to have been complete by around 1,000 CE. In the eyes of many Śāktas she became the purest and most perfect representation of Devī in her primal form. She is often called Mahākālī or also Ādyā Kālī to distinguish her from “other” Kālīs, such as the Kālī who is one of the ten Mahāvīdyās or feminine Great Wisdoms (the others being Tārā, Tripura Sundarī, Bhuvaneśvarī, Bhairavī, Chinnamastā, Dhūmāvatī, Bagalāmukhī, Mātāṅgī, and Kamalā, each of whom embodies a different aspect of Wisdom teachings), or the Kālī

linked to Śiva in a more traditional union as his consort and Śakti in Śaivism.

Stories of Kālī abound, particularly in Bengali literature. In some she is so intoxicated by her bloodletting dance of destruction upon conquering the demons that the gods fear the annihilation of the cosmos itself and of all life. Śiva stops her violence by lying on his back in her path. So transfixed is she by his beauty that she stops, wanting to make love to him straightaway. Thus the balance of the world is restored. In other versions of the story, Śiva transforms himself into a crying infant whom Kālī hears and immediately takes to her breast to comfort.

In line with this story, in Śākta literature Kālī always dominates Śiva or Bhairava. Hers is the dominant stance standing with one foot or both feet on a prone Śiva, or sitting on top of him in the act of copulation. He is her husband whom she awakens making him God, turning the lifeless inert corpse, Śava, into the “auspicious one” Śiva, through the addition of her feminine “i.”<sup>18</sup> She is power, both outside of culture and encompassing culture. In Śaivite literature the order of dominance is reversed, and it is Śiva who is given the upper hand, for instance in the dance competition between the two which Kālī is said to lose because she is too modest to raise her leg as high as Śiva. But this reads like a poor attempt at bringing the story into line with a patriarchal culture in which women must be seen to be subservient to their husbands. It is difficult to imagine the ferociously untamed Kālī, primal as Nature itself, primal as the beginnings of the cosmos, to be much bothered by modesty.

Another instance of trying to “tame” and domesticate the image of Kālī occurs in the popular interpretation of her iconography, particularly her stance on top of Śiva and her long protruding red tongue. In the story it takes Śiva throwing himself underfoot to calm Kālī’s frenzied bloodletting dance. To put her at least partially in line with the ideal of the husband-worshipping wife in Bengal, Kālī is said to be so ashamed of finding that she has stepped on her husband’s chest that she sticks her tongue out, thereby exhibiting the emotion of shame

or *lajjā*, which reads like a tenuous interpretation at best. However, this is the version still most widely known and accepted in Northern India.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, going to a different extreme, Western psychoanalysts have sought to interpret the long lolling tongue as a phallic symbol. In yet another interpretation, some Tantrics on the Kaula path see the tongue as signifying the moment Kālī takes her pleasure with Śiva and, taken by surprise, thereby discovers her capacity for absolute love.<sup>20</sup> The fact that her tongue points towards her heart seems to inspire this similarly rather forced interpretation. The more likely explanation is a reference to the tongue Kālī manifests in the *Devī Māhātmya* to drink up all of the drops of blood of the self-propagating demon Raktabīja before they fall to earth and create more versions of himself, thus enabling Durgā (or Ambikā) to kill him. The *Mahānirvāṇa Tantra* asserts, however, that Kālī’s red lolling tongue represents the passion and creativity of nature, and that when she stands on the pale lifeless corpse of Śiva it is to awaken him in her capacity as giver and destroyer of life.

## Iconography

The iconography of Kālī is rich in symbolism, which encompasses everything from an ancient gory warrior goddess of blood, war and destruction to the Image of the Ineffable Absolute Itself. Amongst Indians there has been a strong tendency to contain the explicit violence of her imagery and downplay her socially and culturally transgressive or antinomian (against the law) aspect, a move however which risks negating the absolute freedom of the Divine from human constructions and norms that Kālī represents. In its way, her mūrti is fully as confronting and off-putting an Image of the Divine as that of Christ suffering a horrific death on the cross. Yet, as the Episcopalian priest James Hughes Reho points out, both images can and do bypass the rational intellect and become doorways for their devotees into “boundless love, attraction, and devotion.”<sup>21</sup>

Many of the more popular symbolic interpretations of Kālī’s iconography (one of the best known being that of Paramahansa Yoganan-

da),<sup>22</sup> are so keen to sanitize and rationalize her—no, we do not worship some murderous savage deity!—that her raw archetypal power can become muted. That said, her imagery takes a lot to tame: the garland of skulls, the skirt of severed arms, dead infant embryos for earrings, a protruding bloodied tongue, a severed head, a cup made out of a human skull, not to forget the male weapons of power Kālī wields—sword, sickle, trident.

Naked and blue-black, she dances on a prone Śiva, her breasts covered in blood. The red hibiscus flowers associated with her worship are themselves a cipher for menstrual blood, signs of fertility and death and woman's power, and seen by Tantrics as a divine nectar. Her long unbound hair signals her freedom from social norms. She is often accompanied by jackals, crows and snakes, betraying an affinity with the Greek Hecate, and is said to favor crossroads, again like Hecate, and cremation grounds, where dedicated Tantrics go to practice ultimate detachment from the ego. In the presence of corpses and death they seek to experience dissolution back into the elements that make up our bodies and face the forces of time and death head on.

All of the images making up her iconography possess, or have accrued, further meanings, beyond the raw power of the battle goddess swooping on her prey, or the death goddess of time and change none can avoid. Skyclad, her nudity is a sign that she is space itself, ultimately without form and beyond all names, devoid of *māyā* as a covering, or indeed of any illusion as to what constitutes the Real. Kālī literally takes the life energy out of delusions, able to do so because it is she who has imbued them with life energy in the first place as Mahāmāyā. When she drinks Raktabīja's blood she is again symbolically seen to take the life force (blood) out of the self-

***[Kālī] is ... the one who burns away all negativity and karma if we submit ourselves to her cleansing flames. She is also associated with the indwelling kundalinī śakti who purifies the bodily sheaths in her fiery aspect, as well as being the One who presides over the conflagration of the universes at the end of the cycles of time.***

propagating demon and destroy the desires, or copies of himself, he continually creates.

She is black or blue black because she is unknowable, the “Not This Not That” of the mystics, and her blackness is also a sign that all names and forms and colors disappear in her, as does duality itself, just as all colors mixed together resolve into black. But if you approach her you discover both her luminosity, as did Ramakrishna, and her transparency, for being without form she is also ultimately without color.<sup>23</sup>

She is wild and “dark as storm clouds” because she is Great Nature the Creator, as it says in the *Chudamani*

*Tantra*: “I am Great Nature, Consciousness, happiness, the quintessential.”<sup>24</sup>

The severed heads of her necklace are said to signify the “Garland of Letters,” that is, Sanskrit letters symbolizing the creation of language, hence, the root sounds and forms of thought and creation of names and forms. Because she gave birth to these she can also free us from them by removing their life force and leaving them as “skulls.”<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, the heads can also signify the severing of the ego from bondage and ignorance, and the single decapitated head Kālī holds likewise symbolizes this freeing from the delusions of the ego.

When Kālī decapitates the ego with her sickle or sword, she allows silence to replace mental chatter and Wisdom to arise. Forms, attitudes, beliefs with their limiting structures are all cut through and shown to be the constructs that they are. Once dualism and all limits are cut through we are radically freed—free to experience union with the Infinite Consciousness just as Kālī unites with her consort Śiva. The snakes encircling her limbs are ancient symbols of wisdom and the indwelling energy of the divine as *kuṇḍalinī*. With one of her right

hands she dispels fear, with the other, offers blessing.

The severed arms of her skirt symbolize the cutting of the connection to karma allowing for spontaneous and truly free action as part of the cosmic dance.

The best-known image of Kālī is probably Dākṣiṇa Kālī, literally Kālī who comes from the South, the South being the land of Yama, the god of death (note that it is Yama who is the god of death, not Kālī). This is the image favored by most householders. There is another, Śmaśāna Kālī, worshipped by certain Tantrics on the left-handed path and considered the far more frightening image. In the former image, Kālī (also known as Bhadrakālī) steps on Śiva with her right foot, signifying preservation, while as Śmaśāna Kālī she steps on him with her left foot, signifying destruction. Śmaśāna Kālī is the Kālī of the cremation grounds and to witness her is considered a truly heroic act in which one risks total annihilation. This is Kālī as the Baba Yaga of Russian folk tales who consumes the unworthy hero, eats him and spits out his bones, but grants boons to the worthy one who passes her tests.

The whole imagery of Kālī points to confronting the Real, Isis Unveiled to use a different Image, to see who is to die. Kālī invites us to experience this death while still physically alive in the body in a heroic act of courage which she rewards with her extreme compassion and mercy once we make that leap.

### The Purāṇas and the Bhaktī of the Poet-Saints

The Purāṇas contain key Śākta texts such as the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, and the *Devī-Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (also known as the *Devī Purāṇa* and the *Śrīmad Devī Bhāgavatam*). All of these texts stress the centrality of the Goddess as the origin of all and address the problem of how the featureless, formless, changeless Brahman can become the changing universe, or how the One can become Many, through envisaging Śakti/Kālī as the kinetic aspect of Brahman, not different from the Absolute but issuing forth from that Absolute in manifestation.

Some scholars trace this back to Southern Indian traditions in which the feminine Prakṛti represents the active principle, while the masculine is the passive witness.<sup>26</sup> The *Devī Purāṇa* accordingly portrays Śakti as the first and foremost of deities, creating Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva and allocating out their roles.

In the Purāṇas the essence of all male gods is seen to be female, but the opposite is not true, affirming the primacy of the feminine and also the primacy of the archetypal connection of the Sacred to the Feminine. Thus Durgā never becomes male yet when the gods release their inner power it is female. Essentially, it is understood that the Goddess can exist without the God but, and this is a big but, She will not be perceived as there will be No One to perceive Her. The God as Śiva is Mind or Consciousness, which is needed to perceive and contain Her play. Thus God and Goddess are interdependent: Kālī bears Śiva but then they switch roles and Śiva becomes the support for her and the witness to her *līlā*, holding her up so she can dance and he can take delight in it.<sup>27</sup> Using more current language and terminology this can be seen to echo the observer/observed interdependence of quantum physics. In Heisenberg's classic experiment, it is the observer, i.e., consciousness, that influences the perception of the observed, and whether waves or particles are seen. Could it be that the archetypes of Kālī and Śiva form an image of the Divine more in tune with the only just intuited revolution in perception coming into being through the discoveries of quantum physics? There is an echo in Kālī's dance of the whole dance of atoms in creation, or quantum grains as they are called now according to the most recent scientific speculations.<sup>28</sup> These grains dance in a field of space forming patterns that ultimately result in life itself. The patterns of the grains are "grounded" by the observer just as Kālī's dance is grounded by Śiva's consciousness containing that dance. Could Kālī in her dance with Śiva be an image of the Source more in tune with the information being revealed through investigation of the quantum world?

As stated previously, the Puranic literature introduces bhaktī as a path of devotion to God, a

path of devotion embraced by Śaktism, and many ecstatic texts have sprung from this tradition in a passionate outpouring of veneration and love for the Goddess. Particularly noteworthy are the great poets such as Kālidāsa, Rāmprasād and Kamalākānta. Kālidāsa, who possibly lived in the fifth century and whose name means “slave of Kālī,” was, according to one legend, introduced to the worship of Kālī by the highly cultured Princess of Benares. Kālī granted him extraordinary poetical power and inspiration and he became one of India’s greatest Sanskrit poets and dramatists, writing of love and longing unbound by the strictures of caste, hierarchy, or other rules.

The great 18th century Bengali poet Rāmprasād Sen was another who dedicated his life to writing impassioned devotional poetry in praise of Kālī. He sings:

The most exalted experience of bliss  
in any realm of being  
is directly knowing the universal Mother,  
the supremely blissful one.  
Ecstatic lovers of Kali the Sublime  
are not pilgrims to sacred shrines,  
for they hear all existence  
singing the glory of the Goddess.<sup>29</sup>

Gaze intently into the blazing heart of joy  
and you will perceive my blissful Mother,  
matrix of all phenomena.

The vision of Kali  
kindles the fire of unitive wisdom,  
burning down conventional barriers,  
pervading minds and worlds with light,  
revealing her exalted beauty  
as universal flower garden  
and universal cremation ground,  
where lovers merge with Mother Reality,  
experiencing the single taste of nonduality.  
...

My sole refuge, O Goddess, is your sacred  
law,  
spoken timelessly by Shiva,  
one teaching that manifests  
through all the scriptures of humanity,  
unveiling our supreme identity.<sup>30</sup>

Indeed there is a whole musical genre of Bengali devotional poetry in praise of Shyama or

Kālī, “the dark one,” called Shyama Sangeet. Here Kālī is the mother who loves and grants wisdom to her children by making them confront terror and fear. Kamalākānta Bhattacharya was another Bengali Śakta poet and yogi (c.1769–1821) who modeled himself on Rāmprasād. “Is my Mother Really Black?” is a fine example of his work:

If She’s black,  
How can She light up the world?  
Sometimes my Mother is white,  
Sometimes yellow, blue, and red.  
I cannot fathom Her.  
My whole life has passed  
trying.  
She is Matter,  
then Spirit,  
then complete Void.  
  
It’s easy to see  
how Kamalākānta  
thinking these things  
went crazy.<sup>31</sup>

The widely revered saint, Ramakrishna, and his disciple Vivekananda, are also part of this devotional bhaktī stream of Kālī worship.

## **Kālī and the Tantras**

The Tantras and Tantrism have become quite controversial topics in the West, embraced by some who see them as a road to spiritual enlightenment through sexual liberation, denounced by others who see them as a road to licentiousness. Of course, to equate Tantrism with sex, and sex only, is fundamentally to misunderstand this whole philosophy. As James Hughes Reho writes, “In the West, Tantra often conjures up pictures of arcane mystical practices or acrobatic sexual escapades. In reality, Tantra is a philosophy of life, love and being ... grounded in practice.”<sup>32</sup> At the core of Tantrism lies the acceptance of all manifestations of life through the senses as a means of encountering the divine. Nothing is omitted, nothing is to remain untransformed, nor is life there to be fled from in isolated retreats in caves and on mountains. Matthew Fox emphat-

ically states: “We do not have to flee this world to experience the Divine; rather we have to travel deeper into our deepest Selves, the “cave in the heart” where God and human interact.”<sup>33</sup> Soul is seen to be embodied in matter and therefore dualism can and must be truly and radically transcended. The root of the word “tantra” is the “weaving loom” and Tantra is above all a recognition of the interconnectedness of the fabric of reality. As Reho writes, “According to Tantra, the Divine not only resides inside us but is about the transformation and divinization of every part of us: the physical, the emotional, the intellectual, the sexual and the spiritual.”<sup>34</sup>

The *Visvasara Tantra* puts the core of this philosophy simply and succinctly:

“What is here is elsewhere. What is not here is nowhere.”<sup>35</sup> And yet another catch phrase of Tantra could well be: God is in all and all is in God.

The primary difference between Tantra and Advaita Vedānta is the absolute non-hierarchy existing in Tantra between Satcitānanda, Śiva and Śakti, all parts of the One with no dichotomies and no separation (akin to the Christian Trinity). *Māyā* in Tantric thought is illusion only in the sense that it creates a veil of separation within the one dynamic reality. Advaita Vedānta, on the other hand, tends towards seeing *māyā* as the illusion of the world which must be overcome, and giving primacy to spirit over matter. In Tantra the world is perceived as both real and good, and spirit and body (matter) are not separate. The body is not synonymous with pollution but is a holy vehicle for the light and energy of the Divine. And Eros or Desire is the foundation of realization.

Tantra is essentially a Goddess-centered theology and philosophy, one that emphasizes the immanence of the divine alongside its unknowable transcendence and recognizes the ultimate identity of both. And the worship of Kālī or Kālī-like goddesses is central to it. However, among many Indians too, it is perceived as a marginal religious stream. In its famous five rituals, Pañcamakāra or the five M’s, Tantrism sets out to transgress against the codes and tenets of Brahmanical Hinduism,

codes of vegetarianism, abstinence, and strict caste divisions. True Tantrism will have none of that. That said, if the codes were not in place and did not carry a powerful charge there would be no transgression, so Tantrism’s transgressive nature is dependent on the existence and enforcement of Brahmanical strictures of diet, purity and caste.<sup>36</sup>

The “left-handed” Tantric path, or “*vāmācāra*,” is particularly famous, or infamous, in this regard for its antinomian character, and comes in for the severest criticism from the conservative and orthodox minded. It is worth remembering that “*vāmā*,” which means “left,” also means “woman” (when spelled with two long “a” vowels as it is in “*vāmācāra*”).<sup>37</sup> Thus though *vāmācāra* is usually translated the “left-handed path” it is also really the “path of woman,” or the “Śakti path.” Given its emphasis on women as teachers and as carriers of Śakti or divine energy and creative power, it is perhaps not surprising that it has in many cases been denigrated and censored, both in itself and as a path to spiritual attainment. And yet it remains possible to unpick something of what appears to be the remnants of a very ancient Goddess-centered tradition in this path, also known as the Kaula Path, or Kālīkula. *Vāmācāra* honors women, and the body, and nature, as paths to spiritual attainment, and imposes no caste or dietary restrictions. It also insists on the primacy of the Feminine Divine principle and on respect for and even worship of women as representations of the Goddess. It is therefore markedly egalitarian by comparison with other Indian religious traditions. All of this would immediately favor its suppression in a strongly patriarchal hierarchical culture in which women are praised mostly for being loyal and subservient to their husbands. In stark contrast to this, the *Yoni Tantra* states: “Women are divine, women are life, women are real jewels.”<sup>38</sup> And the *Śaktisaṅgama Tantra* affirms:

Woman is the foundation of the world ...  
 Whatever form she takes,  
 Whether the form of a man or a woman  
 Is the superior form ...  
 There is no jewel rarer than a woman,

No condition superior to that of a woman.  
There is not, nor has been, nor will be  
Any destiny to equal that of a woman”  
(II.52)<sup>39</sup>

Not surprisingly, women embraced Tantrism wholeheartedly during the early Tantric period in India. Miranda Shaw writes in *Passionate Enlightenment*, “the women pioneered this new embodied spirituality. Their goal was to be inwardly disciplined and outwardly untamable; to be erotically alive and totally free.”<sup>40</sup>

It is hard to give an exact date for the origin of the Tantras. The fact is that while Westerners try to date such texts to the earliest extant manuscripts discovered, the yogis and yoginis who are part of the living tradition of Tantric lineages consider oral transmission to be the purest way to retain and pass down this knowledge. The Tantric initiate Aditi Devī confirms this view, writing: “The oral traditions have precedence, and then the Tantric liturgies are brought into play to support the oral traditions and practices.”<sup>41</sup> Scribes can make mistakes, insert their own additions, alter passages (as has most certainly happened in the New Testament tradition for instance),<sup>42</sup> whereas the transmission from master to disciple in a lineage is considered the most reliable way to pass down a sacred text. According to this view, texts can predate their earliest written recorded versions by several centuries. This, and the fact that most Tantras are anonymous, leads André Padoux to comment, “The history of Tantrism is impossible to write.”<sup>43</sup> The consensus though is that most Tantras were written down between the sixth and tenth centuries CE in Kashmir and Nepal, though some are as recent as the 18th century.<sup>44</sup>

What is sure, though, is that in many of the Tantras Kālī figures prominently as the supreme deity. Among these are the *Mahānirvāṇa Tantra* (which includes the hymn, *The Hundred Names of Kālī*), the *Kāmadā Tantra*, *Picchilā Tantra*, *Nigama Kalpa Tantra*, *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra*, *Kāmākhya Tantra*, *Yoginī Tantra*, *Kulārṇava* (Ocean of Kula) *Tantra*, *Kālī-Kula Tantra*, and the *Nirrutara Tantra* (which is considered by some Tantric

practitioners to contain the oldest and most superior version of the Kālī ritual).

The Tantras are often structured in the form of dialogues between Śiva and Śakti (Pārvatī), and cover topics such as ritual worship, mantras, dharma and theology. One of the best known in the West would be the *Mahānirvāṇa Tantra*, written down in the late 18th century and stemming from Bengal. It is best known in a translation by Sir John Woodroffe (Arthur Avalon) from 1913.<sup>45</sup> In chapter 7 of the *Mahānirvāṇa Tantra* Kālī is addressed as “the supreme yogini who at the end of time devours Śiva himself, the devourer of time.” Śiva then recites a hymn of praise to her, the Hundred Names of Kālī, *Ādyā-Kālī-Svarūpa*, in which every name begins with the letter “Ka.” In chapters 12 and 13 Śiva goes on to tell Pārvatī that all beings have qualities of Kālī, another way of reinforcing her divine immanence in her creation.

## The Kaula Path

One of the better-known transmitters of the Kaula Path in the West is Daniel Odier, who was himself initiated into it by a yogini master. *Tantric Quest* tells the story of his initiation.<sup>46</sup> A Western female initiate to write with a lot of depth and insight about it is Aditi Devī whose perspective as a woman gives a different angle missing in much of the literature. Aditi Devī recounts her own journey into Kālī and gives a translation of the Hundred Names of Kālī, with added meditations on each of the Names.<sup>47</sup> For an Indian woman’s perspective the relatively recent book, *Yogic Secrets of the Dark Goddess*, by Shambhavi L. Chopra, is an experiential guide to devotion to Kālī.<sup>48</sup> The Kaula Path is essentially a pure Śākta path of allegiance to the feminine principle. It is also, as already stated, a path that deliberately sets out to break the taboos of its social context in its embrace of non-vegetarianism, alcohol, sexual union outside of marriage and, perhaps even more scandalously, outside of the rules of caste. The famous (or infamous) five M’s of tantric ritual—*madya*, *māṃsa*, *matsya*, *mudrā*, *maithuna* (wine, meat, fish, parched grain, sexual intercourse)—are a way of ritualizing the transgression. The body



is explicitly made sacred in the rite of sexual union, which is either accomplished mentally, or physically, or both. Music, dance, poetry, wine, the senses and the life of the senses are not puritanically prohibited and contained. On the contrary they are celebrated and found good (which does not equate to hedonistically indulged in!).

Everything is stood on its head in terms of traditional social structures, no system is respected as such, customary distinctions of pure/impure, good/bad, ignorance/knowledge are not made in a radical rejection of duality, but nor are other practices condemned. There is nothing to defend or justify in the state this path aspires to realize, as Odier says.<sup>49</sup> Shambhavi L. Chopra concurs: “Tantra has no techniques, dogmas or beliefs. It is an expression of divinity, which unites each being to the reality within.”<sup>50</sup> She elaborates, “A tantrika evolves her consciousness through the deeper symbolism of the union between Shiva and Bhairavi, searching the limitless, timeless totality of the Divine self.”<sup>51</sup> The *Kaula Upaniṣad* states, amongst other similar principles:

Do not condemn other practices.

Take no vow.

Impose no restriction on yourself.

Limiting yourself does not lead to freedom.

Practice innerly.

This is freedom.<sup>52</sup>

Freedom and personal responsibility are the subtext of Tantra, as they are perhaps of the spirituality coming to the fore in our own time. However, the Tantric path is anything but permissive, as all must be done while maintaining full consciousness, humility and purity of heart. Freedom is understood to imply and require responsibility and discipline, and indeed cannot truly exist without these, as the powerful practices of Tantra can open the door to the slavery of compulsive behavior and ego inflation.

Odier gives a good succinct outline of the Kaula path teachings.<sup>53</sup> To paraphrase him, the path involves: freedom from all rules and rituals (this includes the Brahmanical Hindu prac-

tice of finding auspicious times for certain rituals or events);<sup>54</sup> freedom from the physical enactment of rites, such as chanting, mantras, ritual cleansing and other ceremonies, which can all be performed mentally; freedom from classifying things into pure or impure (a great transgression in Hindu cultural and religious terms as well as a radical affirmation of non-dualism); this also applies to food—thus abstinence from alcohol, vegetarianism or other dietary restrictions are no better or worse than eating meat or drinking wine (in the words of Jesus, a great Tantric Himself, it is not what comes into you that makes you impure, it is what comes out of you in the form of negative thoughts, bad words, hatred, envy, pride that renders you such). And, importantly, women are to be respected and worshipped as representations and even as incarnations of the Goddess—no small ask in a society which prizes women for their subservience, humility, obedience, loyalty and general repression.

In addition, a path such as the Kālī-Kula Tantra explicitly involves confronting one’s deepest fears in order to become *vira*, the hero, and *rasa-siddha*, the alchemist. Needless to say, this is all written from the point of view of the man. However, it pays to remember that in this tradition, women are not only worshipped and respected but are also often the initiators and the teachers.

As said, the Tantric rites as transgression only make sense within the context of Orthodox Brahmanical Hindu culture which is being transgressed against. If the Tantrics break taboos, there must be taboos to break in the first place, against female sexuality and power, for example. The breaking of the caste taboo in attributing power to lower caste women in particular further reinforces this specific transgression. But the broader point which the rites require is the final understanding of Tantra that the Divine, while being Beyond all, is also immanent and present in everything—the mind, all elements, all actions, and the body itself, which is capable of awakening to its own vibration or *spanda* as part of the Om of Creation. Thus the body and the senses do not need to be rejected to attain realization – they themselves can become the direct path to reali-

zation once one becomes aware of their true nature. As Reho maintains, Tantra is the “path in which nothing is left behind. All serves the unfolding of the Divine in our consciousness and in our world.”<sup>55</sup>

Furthermore, according to this philosophy, where Kālī is to be found, Śiva is never far away, for the two belong together. When they are at one, are One, melded into each other as Brahman, all is at rest. When they are separate, they long for each other with such passion that they initiate the dance of creation and dissolution (the *tāṇḍava*), which brings them to ecstasy.

In Śākta (as opposed to Śaivite) literature both Śiva and Kālī (Śakti) perform the great ecstatic *tāṇḍava* dance of creation and dissolution, but it is Kālī who vanquishes Śiva at the end, Mahākālī devouring even Mahākāla, the Devourer of Time himself.

Together those two are one, one being, one body, one self; separate, their dance of intimacy and desire is enough to create and destroy worlds. This ecstasy is sought by Tantrics who experience it as the rising of the serpent power, kuṇḍalinī, which seeks to unite with Śiva in the lotus chakra of the head—the sahasrāra, or, according to other traditions, in the Great Heart which is the ultimate abode of Kālī herself. With the help of kuṇḍalinī śakti, the body can become aware of its innate divinity and awaken more of the potential locked inside it.

Esoterically Kālī is said to reside in the central heart chakra, as well as in the physical heart on the left, and the spiritual heart on the right sides of the body respectively. Together these form the Great Heart or “holy of holies” where divine union takes place.<sup>56</sup>

Using Western terminology, one might speak in this context of the sublimation process as understood by Freud, who attributed creativity and the arts to a sublimation of sexual or erotic power, its potency rising from the base to the head. And in some understandings of Tantra too, the semen is said to rise into the head giving the practitioner siddhis or supernatural powers. But that would constitute a limiting and potentially dangerous misreading of the

true teaching of Tantra which goes far beyond that.<sup>57</sup> The literature stresses that kuṇḍalinī only rises safely insofar as the psychic/physical centers of the body are sufficiently purified to offer it a “safe” container and passage, as this is literally the energy of the immanent Divinity awakening in the physical vehicle and flooding consciousness. Without such rigorous purification (physical, mental, supramental, spiritual), this powerful energy, if prematurely and forcibly awakened, can wreak havoc with the vehicle of the body and the personality and literally destroy them. The genius succumbing to madness, individuals subject to grandiose ego inflation, or those suffering from drug abuse are examples of how the process can go wrong.

### Śakti as Holy Spirit

In a certain way, Śakti is akin to the Holy Spirit of Christianity which blows where it will and acts as a vehicle for the immanence of God in Creation. Kuṇḍalinī śakti purifies and blesses and empowers, imparting its energy through the human body, physical and subtle, and through objects such as mūrtis, icons, statues, flowers, holy oil, holy water—all may be imbued with the presence of the Holy Spirit or of Śakti, all may become manifestations of it, as may we ourselves.

Unlike the Holy Spirit though (apart from some interpretations of the Holy Spirit as Sophia), Śakti is definitely conceived as feminine and personified as such: either as Śakti/ Devī who is the ultimate creator Goddess; the Ādyā Kālī who is also Brahman; or as the divine consort of a god whom she animates and empowers through her divine energy. And, like a prism, She can manifest through a multitude of refractions or goddesses, each one embodying a part of the spectrum of energy as it were—Saraswatī, Lakṣmī, Mariamman, Kālī, Durgā, Pārvaṭī and many others can all be seen as such refractions.

The greatest power of this conception of the Feminine, of the Goddess, of whom Ādyā Kālī or Mahākālī is perhaps the most striking example, lies in her ability to reconcile paradox and move beyond duality. Thus, She is at the same time the source of illusion or *māyā*, and

the *jñāna* or knowledge which liberates us from illusion. If She is immanent in all, if She creates all and consumes all, how can there be, ultimately, pure and impure, good and evil, life and death, order and chaos—and this is what Tantra, at its deepest, acknowledges and attempts to live and to embody.<sup>58</sup>

### Kālī and Black Wisdom

For the Jungians Marion Woodman and Elinor Dickson,<sup>59</sup> Kālī's blackness equates her with Wisdom, producing equivalence around "black" and "wise," as in the "black arts" signifying originally the "wise arts." Black is the color that all other colors are part of. Hence everything is included in her blackness, all colors and all things. For Woodman and many others who personally encounter the Dark Goddess, Kālī means the acceptance of death out of which comes the acceptance of perpetual becoming. Kālī creates and destroys in a ceaselessly renewing dance. Woodman and Dickson write in deeply poetic imagery:

She is black, dark as the matrix, dark as the vortex, from which all creation comes and to which it returns. To her devotees, she is like a black sapphire; radiance shines through her blackness. She dances and laughs with abandon, intoxicated with the mystery she is.<sup>60, 61</sup>

The following poem attempts to give voice to an encounter with Kālī's all-embracing black radiance:

#### DarkTalk grown Darker

Darker than soot  
 than raven's wings  
 than bowels of earth  
 Black holes in sky  
 mean nothing here  
 Black vortex spinning  
 its substance swirled  
 sensuous black  
 A danger a threat  
 A wild wild dark joy  
 at palpitant warmth  
 a luminous dark

so dark that dark glowed  
 so black that all else was unseen  
 black presence moved  
 brushed past in dance  
 gasps . raced . intense .  
 reckless . blood laughs .  
 Mother .  
 Space laughs at such words.<sup>62</sup>

In true keeping with the Wisdom tradition, Kālī is said to embody the principle that without darkness nothing comes to birth or to light, without darkness there can be no roots, and without sacrifice there can be no enlightenment. Kālī helps us to understand the true nature of reality itself—the dance of destruction and creation, of the negative and positive polarities—this dance which is at the heart of evolution and transformation.

### Kālī Today in the West and the East

In Sanskrit texts there are no capital letters. Is Durgā in the *Devī Māhātmya* a distinct individual Goddess or is she, rather, "durgā," a particular quality or manifestation of the Divine? This lack of proper nouns in Sanskrit allows us to depersonalize these beings, and perceive them as forces, as principles. In the West, we have often emphasized gender and its biases in approaching goddesses such as Kālī. This is understandable as it is difficult not to see gender as the primary motivating force behind the numerous stories of the goddesses and gods. Yet the Goddess is perhaps best understood outside the limits of gender.<sup>63</sup> Kālī after all is also the genderless Brahman, All That Is, the indivisible which is complete and whole, and if the complete and whole is taken out of the complete and whole it still remains complete and whole. (This statement, paraphrasing an ancient Sanskrit prayer, *Om pūrṇamadah*, can be understood in a holographic way as well if we wish to adopt more current scientific language.) The Western way of viewing these perennial images and stories often distorts their meaning, slanting them towards an oppositional war of the sexes. Not that this does not exist within Indian culture

itself with its ongoing deeply patriarchal biases. Yet the archetypal stories of the goddesses and gods are more than that, and they provide us with different interpretative models of reality. We see two principles, two forces, not at war, but existing in deep non-hierarchical complementarity and acknowledgement, one of the other. Is not that the interpretation we should choose to explore in moving forward and in our own Western attempt to understand an Eastern culture?

Kālī is no feminist figure for the average Indian worshipper, nor an emblem of women's sexual liberation, but more of an embodiment of a universal force of creation and destruction, and of Nature itself. In the West though, she has become for many a symbol of women's autonomy and completeness, as one who does not heed the male gaze.<sup>64</sup> This feminist Kālī embodies women's freedom and unfettered female energy and sexuality. She has also come to represent for many women the unleashing of feminine fierceness and rage. She becomes, in this context, a kind of conduit of the pain and anger of the wounded and suppressed feminine and of women themselves throughout history. This is, in many ways, the direct opposite of the Indian attempt to interpret her in such a way that she can be made part of the fold of goddesses who conform to Brahmanical norms of female behavior. And yet, there have been stirrings of revolt in India too, as witnessed by the recent "Smash Brahminical Patriarchy" campaign on Twitter with its calling out of the caste distinctions and gender inequality at the heart of the Brahmanical social order, and Indians' embrace of the #MeToo campaign which is surely more needed there where violence and abuse of women are still endemic in the culture in parts of the subcontinent. Yet again, in Sri Lanka Kālī has become a powerful symbol of resistance for the Tamil population and her worship has

*She is black, dark as the matrix,  
dark as the vortex, from which  
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it returns. To her devotees, she is  
like a black sapphire; radiance  
shines through her blackness.  
She dances and laughs with  
abandon, intoxicated with the  
mystery she is.*

flourished in this context.<sup>65</sup> She has also become for some in the West an emblem of Nature, exploited and abused for too long, and ready to take revenge in violent eruptions. And yet she is limited to none of these roles, but, in true non-dualist fashion, can encompass all of these and more.

On the whole though, apart from in her domesticated version, Kālī does not figure prominently as a role model for Indian women, nor are they encouraged to find out much about her. Śaktism is a minority religion even though there is a popular saying which goes something

like: "One behaves like a Vaiṣṇavite in public, a Śaivite at home, and a Śākta in secret (or in one's true heart)."<sup>66</sup> Goddesses such as Kālī or Durgā, powerful, and potentially disruptive and dangerous, are seen as an aspect of the feminine archetype best kept under control and outside of the boundaries of civilized society and acceptable social behavior. However, there are glimmers of change. In a recent book addressed specifically to Indian women, *Awaken the Durga Within*, Usha Narayanan<sup>67</sup> calls on women to free themselves of the submissive roles and behavior imposed on them by the patriarchy, taking the figures and stories of the Indian goddesses for their role models and inspiration. By her own admission, these stories of powerful goddesses, though widely present in the Indian scriptures or Purāṇas, are not widely known or disseminated, giving a false idea of the religion itself and of the relationships between goddesses and gods. Although Narayanan does not go as far as advising women to emulate Kālī and her free, wild and dominant behavior, she does call Kālī the "embodiment of true feminine power."<sup>68</sup> She also points out that Sītā, worshipped as the perfect self-sacrificing wife of Indian mythology, has another face, that of Bhadrakālī. Indeed, Bhadrakālī (or Parameśvarī) is her true inner self and her secret form, even though she

only reveals it when Rāma has been killed by the great 1,000 headed demon Sahasranana Ravana, and he and the gods need rescuing—yet again. At other times Sītā is happy for Rāma to play his heroic role while restraining and concealing her own powers, but faced with the death of her beloved and the rout of his army of gods and men, she chooses to show her true power and nature. Like Kālī following her victory on the battlefield, Sītā as Bhadrakālī has to be placated by the gods so that her rage will not destroy the worlds. Faced with his wife’s true omnipotence and glory the resurrected Rāma recites the *Kālī Sahasranama* (The Thousand Names of Kālī) in her honor. This is the story as related in the supposedly full *Rāmayāna* of Vālmīki, the *Adbhut Rāmayāna*, which Narayanan retells in her book.<sup>69</sup>

Interestingly, Vālmīki foreshadows some famous lines from the *Bhagavad Gītā* in the *Adbhut Rāmayāna* with a significant amendment—whenever dhārma declines, it is Prakṛti (not Kṛṣṇa (Krishna) as in the *Gītā*) who appears on earth to destroy adharmā.<sup>70</sup>

### A Little More History

In truth, however, Kālī is an ancient goddess, more ancient than her current forms, with roots that extend into pre-Vedic times. As Narayanan affirms, “folk traditions and rural India have a rich tradition of goddess-worship, which precedes the worship of male gods. The deities worshipped were called Amman, Amba or Mata” and they had both destructive and protective powers.<sup>71</sup> Vestiges of these deities survive in Kālī’s retinue of Matrīkās and Yoginīs. Kālī clearly has links to the *grama-devas* or village deities of prehistory and their rural shamanic cults, as she does to the Harappan Indus Valley civilization with its veneration of the Great Goddess. There are terracotta statues of the Goddess dating back to 4,500 to 5,500 BCE. Looking even further back, there is evidence of Goddess worship in the Indian subcontinent in Upper Paleolithic times more than 20,000 years ago where she is represented as a rounded rock or stones marked by triangles (a possible precursor of the yantras used in Tantric Goddess worship such as the Śrī Vidyā).

The earliest Goddess figurine unearthed in the Indian subcontinent also dates back to that era (c.20,000 - 23,000 BCE).<sup>72</sup> N. N. Bhattacharya is another scholar who sees the worship of the Great Feminine as a major element in the Dravidian civilizations of South India, seeing the Dravidian concept of Śakti as the dynamic active principle eventually associated with Pārvatī, Durgā and Kālī of the Puranic tradition.<sup>73</sup> Vedic times saw a partial eclipse of Goddess worship with goddesses made subordinate to male gods, but it reemerges in subsequent periods in texts such as the *Lalitā Sahasranāma*, *Devī Māhātmya*, the *Saundaryalahari* of Shankara, the *Devī Gītā* (part of the *Devī-Bhāgavata Purāna*), and, of course, the *Tantras*.

Taking a different route into prehistory, Great Kālī also possibly harkens back to ancient Neolithic symbolism linked to Goddess worship in the Middle East, such as that found at Çatal Hüyük in Turkey with its images of vultures and decapitated torsos. Heads were apparently removed from the bodies of corpses and the skulls kept separately, while the bodies were offered to the vultures for “sky burial” or decarnation. The mythology behind this practice appears to hint at the belief that the spirit is free to leave the body once the head has been removed. It is then able to fly up on its homeward journey into the stars, guided by the vulture, who now acts a kind of psychopomp and liberator. The skull meanwhile would become part of a cult of ancestor worship. Thus, the skulls adorning Kālī’s necklace could well be yet another possible link into an ancient prehistoric past which this goddess’s imagery has carried into our present across the millennia.

Arising from such atavistic ancestral memories, Great Kālī is the Great Mother who destroys and saves, Devourer and Liberator at once.

Of necessity, this is all speculation, but there are many instances in history of images and symbols being retained across millennia though transformed in meaning, mutating subtly and not so subtly from positive to negative, the paradisaical Garden with its Trees of Knowledge and of Life and its Serpent (chang-

ing from symbol of Wisdom and power to symbol of deceit and temptation) being one such well known instance.

Kālī is an archetypal force and as such holds deep links to other powerful goddess and shamaness figures from prehistory. Apart from those already mentioned, such as Hecate and Lilith, there is another figure she has a deep kinship with—the Slav foremother Yaga, or Baba Yaga, the witch of countless Russian fairy tales. Baba Yaga is most often portrayed as supremely ugly and supremely terrifying, echoing the portrayal of Kālī as ugly, emaciated and terrifying. Her anarchic hut never stands still but dances its way on chicken legs through the deep forest which is her natural abode. The forest is wild and untamed and therefore dangerous to human social order and civilization. It is outside the village or settlement and marginal to it. In a similar way Kālī dwells on the margins of society and order, in cremation grounds, on crossroads, and in the realms of wild untameable nature. Skulls and bones are the sacred symbols of Baba Yaga—the fence to her dwelling is often constructed of human bones, while human skulls adorn its posts and double as flaming torches lit from within. Similarly, skulls adorn Kālī in the shape of the necklace she wears. Quite apart from the later symbolic association of these skulls with the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet, in the dawn of history skulls carried an extra and more powerful charge. It was not just in the Middle East that the skulls of the ancestors (and later in history, of powerful enemies) were imbued with a powerful numinosity. Through the medium of these skulls the priestess or shamaness could initiate a direct link to the spirits of the ancestors and their wisdom. The word “witch” is directly linked to the knowing of “Wicca” and to Dark/Black Wisdom. Similarly, the Russian word for witch, *ved'ma*, has a strong association with the verb *vedat'* —“to know,” also to know in a deep prophetic sense. Add to this the suffix “ma” = “ma” and you have the “mother of knowing,” knowingness, the mother of Wisdom herself.

Both Baba Yaga and Kālī could feasibly be said to derive from the figure of the frightening masked shamaness who performs powerful

initiatory rituals involving the spilling of blood. Young initiates would have been subjected to an encounter with the terror of Death in a sacred enclosure, an encounter which was most likely intended to free them of that terror for life. Young males were also often required to spill blood in order to enter the bloodline of their spouse and her kin. Not surprisingly, such a female figure would have constellated a high degree of male anxiety and fear around herself, an anxiety that has survived in the fear surrounding powerful female archetypes such as Baba Yaga or Kālī.

Finally though, Kālī, or all She has come to represent, both encompasses and transcends our history as well as pointing us towards our future. Who better than one of the foremost Western scholars of Tantra, David Frawley, to sum up? Frawley writes:

Kali is not some mere folk deity, some ancient Goddess, or a strange object for intellectual curiosity or cultural image. She is the Supreme Power of the magical, awesome, cataclysmic universe in which we live, of which we are all but brief expressions, and to which we must all bow down in reverence in the end.<sup>74</sup>

### **Kālī and the Raj and Since**

**K**ālī worship and Tantra were most prevalent in Northern India in Odisha, Bengal and Assam. That is not to say she is not a powerful presence in the South of India in Tamil Nadu and Kerala as well. Quite the contrary. Kālī worship is strong in South India, particularly so among women and tribals.<sup>75</sup> Mata Amritanandamayi from Kerala, revered by many as a living saint, is said by many of her devotees to be an incarnation of Kālī, and, having experienced her transformative powerful energy and ruthless compassion at close hand, I would agree. That is not to say that Kālī worship is not marginalized and regarded with some suspicion still in India, despite all the domestication her image has undergone. She carries in a very real way male anxiety in front of female sexuality and power. Hence, the numerous attempts at toning down her image. Hence, also, a deep-seated ambivalence towards her and her worshippers, which still sur-

vives and which the British made full use of during the colonial era.

An example of how certain customs came to be distorted under the British Raj can be furnished by the caste of female temple dancers in Puri, Odisha, highly cultured women who performed in the temples and had a measure of independence, being attached to no man. The incoming British perceived them as prostitutes, and the designation stuck, their status rapidly dropping amongst Indians as well. Similar things happened with Tantric rituals and with the figure of Kālī herself, who was particularly shocking to the British of the Raj—an unfettered, worse still, sexually unfettered wild woman demanding blood. Kālī became for the Europeans the epitome of the uncivilized native, terrifying, savage, demanding human sacrifice. The upper class Indians, educated in a Western context, recognized that image as not so far removed from their own prejudices and sought to distance themselves from it, or explain Kālī away in highly metaphorical terms.<sup>76</sup> The fact that Tantric rituals were largely esoteric and occult, therefore secret, played into the detractors' hands. These rituals were seen as forbidden and forbidding, and all sorts of fantasies accrued to them, partly in the interests of giving the British more ammunition in justifying their civilizing mission. In this way, for instance, the Thuggee legend came into being. The Thuggees (or Thugs) were said to be a group of highway robbers in Northern India who sacrificed their victims to Kālī. A Captain William Henry Sleeman wrote a highly influential anonymous letter and reports on Kālī worship and the Thuggees based on very little factual evidence, and what there was was grossly distorted.<sup>77</sup> The legend, however, gained much traction and persisted well into its more recent manifestations such as the popular film *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*. However, according to recent research it is highly doubtful that the Thuggees ever existed. In fact, their existence has never been proven. What is more likely is that bands of thieves worshipped Kālī like everyone else did in that region. But this sensationalized image was a useful one for Imperialist purposes and it stuck. Sleeman, in particular, had used the

Thugs as justification for the imposition of British law and order which he considered an “imperious duty.”<sup>78</sup>

## Conclusion

Kālī as the Great Goddess spans human history, connecting us to the wildness of nature and to the very cosmos itself. She is there at the beginning of human history and she is there now, still connecting us to our own nature and the world we are part of and from which we come, wherever we may go next. In all her forms, throughout human history, Kālī has been and remains a call and challenge to the soul.

Kālī gives us a glimpse into ancient history and prehistory, that is to say pre-Aryan and pre-Brahmanical history, pre-Sanskritic history with its ancient tribal goddesses and clan mothers. She has an affinity with ancient goddesses such as Lilith, the Morrigan, Hekate, Baba Yaga and the Morrigan-like tribal Indian goddess Kottavai. Because the ambivalence with which she is regarded and her marginalization are part and parcel of the marginalization of lower caste Dalits (Untouchables), tribals, aborigines and women, who all figure prominently in her worship, the current Western fascination with her also serves to bring the issues of marginalized groups into the open. On another tangent, it is the balance of the powerful Feminine that is needed now to bring balance to the Earth and to our attitude towards exploiting the resources of Nature available to us, and Kālī certainly fulfills that role. And finally, in an age marked by the discoveries of quantum physics maybe we need an archetypal divine image such as Kālī, personal and impersonal at once, horrifying and exhilarating, a figure who contains the swirling atoms and cosmoses and invites us to delve into her mystery, a figure who holds paradox and transcends dualism.

Kālī is essentially unknowable and unfathomable, like the God of Job. She does not correspond to any of our human intimations of how the divine should comport itself. Who are you to question God's ways and God's work, the long suffering Job challenges his friends, remaining true to his faith even through what



appear to be the unfairest trials and tribulations he undergoes. Like Job who chooses radical surrender, that is the only sensible path open to those who encounter Kālī, the mysterious impersonal force which causes the universe to be, and yet is capable of a mother's love for each one of her creation, just as God cares for Job, even while allowing (and abetting?) his trials.

In truth, it is not through the rational mind that we will come to know Kālī. Poetry and mystic thought can bring us closer to comprehending some of what she represents. She challenges us somehow to get up the courage to plunge into her mystery, plunging through our deepest fears, as well as all the places where we want to hold on to certainty and changelessness, in order to dissolve in her radiant blackness. Hers is the irresistible black portal which calls out to us if we are to reach the highest wisdom. And hers is the teaching that no transformation is possible without the sequence of life – death – and rebirth.

Kālī is considered by many (not least by Sri Aurobindo) to be the most direct and uncompromising manifestation of the Divine Feminine. According to her devotees one of her most dominant characteristics is her lightning fast and ruthless mercy. She both demands sacrifice and transforms that sacrifice. If you want something to happen rapidly and are prepared to have your personal ego uprooted (or be-headed!), turn to Kālī and her direct power. On the other hand, not many are prepared to risk such direct divine intervention in their lives, or handle such raw power.

With Kālī there are no easy answers, no easy solutions to the enigma of life. But there is a promise of liberation—if we but have the courage to seize it and want it more than anything else while submitting ourselves to her liberating sword.

For most, Kālī's archetypal image is as the goddess of destruction, garlanded with skulls, clothed with severed limbs, drinking her enemies' blood, her destructive dance only cut short when she encounters Śiva, who lays himself prone across her path. Faced with his all-encompassing still consciousness she stops, for him she cannot and will not trample and the

universe catches its breath and lives another day.

And this image is key to all—to our evolution, to our survival even. Faced with consciousness and surrender the universe breathes out love.

***Black Thou***

A black hole  
Your Body  
I long  
to be consumed  
Compress  
And eat me whole  
I shall not care  
What time or space  
You will expel me into  
If this black moment  
of your Presence  
Is the narrow gate  
To lead me through.

Unfold your limbs  
And decongest your atoms  
That I might pierce  
an opening inside  
Which you've prepared for me  
since the commencement  
of your Centres.

Reflect no longer  
Choose now to absorb me  
And I'll dissolve and freeze  
Freeze and dissolve  
And arch  
All strings and strands of my cells' memories  
Into the dizzy magnet  
Of your dancing body.

And only then –  
Full conscious of your matter and abyss  
Will I breathe essences  
of you  
– all-self-transcending.<sup>79</sup>

- <sup>1</sup> As translated in Aditi Devi, *In Praise of Ādyā Kālī* (Chino Valley, AZ: Hohm Press, 2014), Names 27, 6 and 10.
- <sup>2</sup> Paramahansa Yogananda, “Thou Mother of Flames,” <https://thecosmicmother.org/home/kali/thou-mother-of-flames/> (Last accessed February 4, 2019).
- <sup>3</sup> Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Bengali saint and mystic famous for his worship of the Divine Mother as Kālī (1836–1886). Rāmprasād Sen, Bengali Śākta poet and saint, famous for his poetry addressed to Kālī (C.1718/1723 – c.1775).
- <sup>4</sup> “Names of G-d,” Irina Kuzminsky, unpublished manuscript.
- <sup>5</sup> “Thou Mother of Flames,” <https://thecosmicmother.org/home/kali/thou-mother-of-flames/> (Last accessed February 4, 2019).
- <sup>6</sup> David Frawley, “Foreword” to Shambhavi L. Chopra, *Yogic Secrets of the Dark Goddess* (New Delhi: Wisdom Tree, 2007), xiii-xiv.
- <sup>7</sup> Abhinavgupta, *Tantrasāra*, as cited by Lokesh Chandra, in “Introduction” to Shambhavi L. Chopra, *Yogic Secrets of the Dark Goddess*, xxiv. Abhinavgupta (c.950-1016) was a Kashmiri polymath, philosopher and mystic, and master of Kashmiri Śaivism whose writings influenced the Śaivite and Śākta schools for centuries.
- <sup>8</sup> Sri Ramakrishna quoted in James Hughes Reho, *Tantric Jesus: The Erotic Heart of Early Christianity* (Rochester, Vermont: Destiny Books, 2017), 44.
- <sup>9</sup> This is according to the entry for Kālī in: [https://www.etymonline.com/word/Kali#etymonline\\_v\\_1770](https://www.etymonline.com/word/Kali#etymonline_v_1770), an online etymology dictionary (Last accessed May16, 2019).
- <sup>10</sup> Shambhavi L. Chopra, *Yogic Secrets of the Dark Goddess*, 118.
- <sup>11</sup> The *Mahānirvāṇa Tantra* (IV, 30-34) as translated by Sir John Woodroffe (Arthur Avalon), *The Garland of Letters*, (1922), 220-221. <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.274061/page/n229> (Last accessed April 3, 2019). Sir John Woodroffe (1835-1936) (better known under his pen name of Arthur Avalon) is an author whose importance as one of the foremost Western scholars of Tantra can scarcely be overstated. His translations and understanding of ancient Tantric texts have furnished the most important source and foundation for subsequent Western interest in Tantric yoga and Śaktism. His translation of the *Mahanirvana Tantra* was first published in 1913. Other important texts include *Serpent Power, Śakti and Śākta, Hymn to Kali and Garland of Letters*.
- <sup>12</sup> Woodroffe, *The Garland of Letters*, 220.
- <sup>13</sup> Carlo Rovelli, *The Order of Time* (trans; Erica Segre and Simon Carnell; Allen Lane, Penguin Books, 2018), 49.
- <sup>14</sup> One of the best retellings of this story I have come across is that of Usha Narayanan in Usha Narayanan, *Awaken the Durga Within* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2018), 35-39.
- <sup>15</sup> I primarily refer to the text of the *Devī Māhātmyam* as translated by Svāmī Jagadīśvarānanda who based his work on the translations of Manmathanath Dutta and F. K. Pargiter and who aimed to be as literal as possible: *Devī Māhātmyam* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1953). The *Devī Māhātmyam* (or *Glory of the Divine Mother*) is found in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* LXXXI-XCIII. There are other versions of the killing of Mahiṣasura by the Goddess in the *Devībhagavata Purāṇa* and the *Oriya Chandi Purāṇa*.
- <sup>16</sup> Ajit Mookerjee, *Kali – the Feminine Force* (New York: Destiny Books, 1988).
- <sup>17</sup> Colin Robinson, “The Word “Kali” in the *Devī Mahatmya: A new look at an old book*,” <https://thecosmicmother.org/home/kali/2007>, revised for web 2010 (Last accessed April 7, 2019).
- <sup>18</sup> The vowel “i/ ī” is often the feminine ending in Sanskrit nouns, as in Kālī, Pārvaṭī, Saṭī.
- <sup>19</sup> Paramahansa Yogananda resorts to this explanation in his discussion of Kālī’s iconography, see <http://thecosmicmother.org>. “Dominating Kālī” by Usha Menon and Richard A. Shweder is an interesting and well-researched account of how the image of Kālī has been domesticated in traditional Hindu culture. See Usha Menon and Richard A. Shweder, “Dominating Kālī: Hindu Family Values and Tantric Power,” in: Rachel Fell McDermott and Jeffrey J. Kripal (eds), *Encountering Kālī: In the Margins, at the Center, in the West* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 80-99.
- <sup>20</sup> Daniel Odier, *Tantric Kali: Secret Practices and Rituals* (trans; Jack Cain; Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2016), 9.
- <sup>21</sup> Reho, *Tantric Jesus*, 50. Woodroffe, in the *Garland of Letters*, 219-220, made a similar argument very early on in reference to the

- Catholic imagery of the “Slain Lamb” and the “Sacred Heart.”
- 22 See Paramahansa Yogananda on Kālī’s iconography in: <https://thecosmicmother.org/home/kali/>. There is a broad consensus though around interpretations of Kālī’s iconography. Most draw to some extent on the *Mahānirvāṇa Tantra*, with a few variations (such as Kālī’s red tongue). The article by Sanjukta Gupta, “The Domestication of a Goddess: *Carāṇa-tirtha* Kālīghāt, the *Mahāpīṭha* of Kālī” in McDermott and Kripal, *Encountering Kālī*, 60-79, is a good study of the domesticating impact of Vaiṣṇava religion on Kālī and the Kālīghāt Temple in Calcutta.
- 23 Ramakrishna, in Swami Nikhilananda, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (New York: Rāmakrishna-VivekanandaCenter, 1977), 271.
- 24 As quoted by Odier in *Tantric Kali*, 10.
- 25 Woodroffe draws attention to this symbolism in the *Garland of Letters*, 222-223: “She wears the letters which She as Creatrix bore. She wears the Letters which, She, as the Dissolving Power, takes to Herself again.”
- 26 See, for instance, Ramachandra V. R. Dikshitar, *The Lalita Cult* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 1999), 90.
- 27 Aditi Devi, *In Praise of Ādyā Kālī*, 55.
- 28 I would recommend Carlo Rovelli for his lucid, engaging and succinct explanations of the latest discoveries in quantum physics. See Carlo Rovelli, *Reality is Not What It Seems: The Journey to Quantum Gravity* (trans; Simon Carnell and Erica Segre; New York: Riverhead Books, 2017). (Also Rovelli’s international bestseller, *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics*.)
- 29 Rāmprasād Sen in: <https://www.poetseers.org/themes/poems-spirituality/poems-about-kali/> (Last accessed April 8, 2019). There are wonderful versions of Rāmprasād’s poems in Lex Hixon, *Mother of the Universe: Visions of the Goddess and Tantric Hymns of Enlightenment* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 1994) (the poem quoted here is to be found on p.141), and Leonard Nathan and Clinton Seely (trans.), *Grace and Mercy in her Wild Hair: Selected Poems to the Mother Goddess by Rāmprasād Sen* (Prescott, AZ: Hohm Press, 1999). Another good source for devotional poetry to Kālī is Rachel Fell McDermott, *Singing to the Goddess: Poems to Kālī and Umā from Bengal* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).
- 30 As translated by Lex Hixon in *Mother of the Universe*, 83, 95.
- 31 Kamalākānta, “Is my black Mother Shyama really black?” trans. Rachel Fell McDermott, in McDermott and Kripal, *Encountering Kālī*, frontispiece; also in McDermott (trans.), *Mother of my Heart, Daughter of My Dreams: Kālī in the Devotional Poetry of Bengal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 84.
- 32 Reho, *Tantric Jesus*, 10.
- 33 Matthew Fox, in “Foreword” to Reho, *Tantric Jesus*, xiii.
- 34 Reho, *Tantric Jesus*, 79.
- 35 As quoted by Shambhavi L. Chopra in *Yogic Secrets of the Dark Goddess*, 5.
- 36 At the same time it should also be acknowledged that many of the Tantras contain vestiges of goddess cults from deep antiquity with an emphasis on nature, sex and violence, and the worship of Kālī-like figures who harken back to wild folk deities. The Matr̥kās, the Yoginīs, the Mahāvidyās themselves (such as Tārā, Chinnamastā, Cāmuṇḍā) are all related to these atavistic divinities.
- 37 See the Wikipedia entry for *Vāmācāra* at: <http://en.m.wikipedia.org/vāmācāra> under “Nomenclature and Etymology.”
- 38 Mike Magee, *The Yoni Tantra*, Vol.2 (Harrow, UK: Worldwide Tantra Project, 1995), quoted by Daniel Odier, in Odier, *Tantric Kali*, 12.
- 39 *Śaktisaṅgama Tantra* (dated between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries CE), as quoted in Aditi Devi, *In Praise of Ādyā Kālī*, 42.
- 40 Miranda Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 148.
- 41 Aditi Devi, *In Praise of Ādyā Kālī*, p. 60. Daniel Odier, another Tantric initiate, expresses a similar view, see Odier, *Tantric Kali*, 21.
- 42 For a detailed scholarly discussion of scribal transmission errors and alterations in New Testament texts, see Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York: HarperOne, 2005).
- 43 André Padoux, French Indologist, as quoted in Odier, *Tantric Kali*, 98.
- 44 It is important to realize that there are different schools of Tantra—Śākta, Śaivite and

- Buddhist (Vajrayāna). Linking them all though is the fundamental principle of weaving all dualities into non-duality or union. The emphasis on the Feminine Divine principle is another common factor. This article refers primarily to the Śākta school as Kālī figures most prominently in the Śākta lineages.
- 45 Sir John Woodroffe (Arthur Avalon), *Mahānirvāna Tantra of the Great Liberation* (Whitefish: Kestinger Publishing, 1913).
- 46 Daniel Odier, *Tantric Quest: An Encounter with Absolute Love* (trans; Jody Gladding; Sydney, London et al: Bantam, 1997). Other books by Daniel Odier on Tantra and the Tantras include *Desire: The Tantric Path to Awakening* (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2001), and *Yoga Spandakarika: The Sacred Texts at the Origins of Tantra* (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2005).
- 47 Aditi Devi, *In Praise of Ādyā Kālī*.
- 48 Shambhavi L. Chopra, *Yogic Secrets of the Dark Goddess*.
- 49 Odier, *Tantric Kali*, 23.
- 50 Chopra, *Yogic Secrets of the Dark Goddess*, xx.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 *Kaula Upanishad*, as quoted in Odier, *Tantric Kali*, 22.
- 53 Odier, *Tantric Kali*, 20.
- 54 This has not precluded some Tantric practitioners from creating their own rules: for example, worship on a black moon or on a Tuesday night is supposedly more auspicious than at other times. It seems like human beings just cannot take too much freedom!
- 55 Reho, *Tantric Jesus*, 26.
- 56 David Frawley, *Tantric Yoga and the Wisdom Goddesses* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1999), 71.
- 57 Georg Feuerstein coined the term ‘superlimation’ in this context to try to distinguish between Freud’s theory of sublimation and the psychospiritual processes of kuṇḍalinī. See Georg Feuerstein, *Tantra: The Path of Ecstasy* (Boston: Shambhala, 1998), 228, quoted in Reho, *Tantric Jesus*, 111.
- 58 Already in the *Devī Māhātmya* Mahākālī is seen to embody all the gunas and qualities and all the powers of good and evil. See DM, 1:78-81.
- 59 Marion Woodman and Elinor Dickson, *Dancing in the Flames: The Dark Goddess and the New Mythology* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1996).
- 60 Woodman and Dickson, *Dancing in the Flames*, 14.
- 61 There is a strong similarity between this description of Kālī and Eben Alexander’s experience of the Source, whom he named Om, during his near death experience, as unfathomably dark, inner, yet loving and luminous at the same time. See Eben Alexander, *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon’s Journey into the Afterlife* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 2012).
- 62 “DarkTalk grown Darker”, Irina Kuzminsky, in Irina Kuzminsky, *Dancing with Dark Goddesses* (Bath: Awen, 2009), 59.
- 63 Devdutt Pattanaik makes a compelling argument for transcending gender in discussions of Indian goddesses and gods in Devdutt Pattanaik, *7 Secrets of the Goddess* (Chennai: Westland Publications, 2014); see particularly Chapter 7.
- 64 See Rachel Fell McDermott, “Kālī’s New Frontiers: A Hindu Goddess on the Internet,” in McDermott and Kripal (eds), *Encountering Kālī*, 273-295, for a discussion of Western feminist and New Age depictions of Kālī, comparing and contrasting these with Indian perspectives.
- 65 See Patricia Lawrence, “Kālī in a Context of Terror: The Tasks of a Goddess in Sri Lanka’s Civil War,” in McDermott and Kripal (eds), *Encountering Kālī*, 100-123.
- 66 As given by Aditi Devi in *In Praise of Ādyā Kālī*, 39.
- 67 Narayanan, *Awaken the Durga Within*.
- 68 Ibid., 145.
- 69 See Narayanan, *Awaken the Durga Within*, 141-145.
- 70 As cited by Narayanan in *Awaken the Durga Within*, 143.
- 71 Ibid., 10.
- 72 See the Wikipedia entry on Shaktism (Last accessed April 9, 2019).
- 73 Narendra Nath Bhattacharya, *The Indian Mother Goddesses* (New Delhi: South Asia Books, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1977), 26.
- 74 Frawley, in “Foreword” to Chopra, *Yogic Secrets of the Dark Goddess*, xiii.
- 75 See Sarah Caldwell, “Margins at the Center: Tracing Kālī through Time, Space, and Culture,” in McDermott and Kripal (eds), *Encountering Kālī*, 249-272, in which Caldwell argues that Kālī is central to the marginalized, particularly women and tribals, in Brahmanical Hindu society, and that to see her as the

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peripheral deity of “outsiders” is to endorse the dominant Sanskrit Brahmanical culture.

<sup>76</sup> See the articles by Humes and Urban in *Encountering Kālī* for a discussion of the distortion of Kālī’s image by the British and the Indian response to it. Cynthia Ann Humes, “Wrestling with Kālī: South Asian and British Constructions of the Dark Goddess,” in McDermott and Kripal (eds), *Encountering Kālī*, 145-168; Hugh B. Urban, “‘India’s Darkest Heart:’ Kālī In the Colonial Imagina-

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tion,” in McDermott and Kripal (eds), *Encountering Kālī*, 169-195.

<sup>77</sup> For a detailed account of the creation of the Thuggee (Thug) legend, see Humes, “Wrestling with Kālī” in McDermott and Kripal (eds), *Encountering Kālī*.

<sup>78</sup> Sleeman, as quoted by Humes in “Wrestling with Kālī,” *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>79</sup> “Black Thou,” Irina Kuzminsky, in Irina Kuzminsky and Jan Delaney, *light muses* (Melbourne: Naditu Press, 2011), 23.

# The First-Ray Cause of Inharmony and Disease

Zachary F. Lansdowne

## Abstract

The seven rays denote seven primary differentiations of energy, and doctrines on the seven rays have been expounded by various theosophical writers. Alice Bailey, in her book *Esoteric Healing*, presents seven symbolic stanzas that portray “The Seven Ray Causes of Inharmony and Disease,” but with very little explanation. She acknowledges that these stanzas are “abstruse and difficult,” but says that their comprehension leads to “the isolation of the seven psychological causes of disease, inherent in the substance of all forms in this world cycle.” This series of articles elucidates the practical significance of these seven stanzas. The present article, which is the sixth in the series, clarifies the first-ray stanza by assembling related quotations from the writings of Bailey and others, including psychologist Margaret Paul. As shown in this article, the first-ray cause of inharmony appears as the power to crystallize or harden. Moreover, this article illustrates that power by depicting the resulting stages in the crystallization of the personality, outer effects of such crystallization, and stages in the process of rebuilding the personality.

## The Seven Rays

The *seven rays* are mentioned in both the ancient Hindu *Rig Veda* and modern Theosophy,<sup>1</sup> and the following definition is often used: “A ray is but a name for a particular force or type of energy, with the emphasis upon the quality which that force exhibits and not upon the form aspect which it creates.”<sup>2</sup> Alice Bailey (1880 – 1949), a writer in the theosophical tradition, says, “Every unit of the human race is on some one of the seven rays,”<sup>3</sup> so the seven rays provide a way of characterizing human beings according to the qualities that they exhibit. She also says, “We must bear in mind that the ... synthetic characteristic of

each of the rays is denoted by the ray name,”<sup>4</sup> and gives the following ray names:

Ray I—Will or Power

Ray II—Love-Wisdom

Ray III—Active Intelligence or Adaptability

Ray IV—Harmony, Beauty, Art

Ray V—Concrete Knowledge or Science

Ray VI—Devotion or Idealism

Ray VII—Ceremonial Order or Magic.<sup>5</sup>

Bailey provides this definition, “When we speak of ray energy we are in reality considering the quality and the will-purpose aspect of a certain great Life to Whom we give the name ‘Lord of a Ray.’”<sup>6</sup> She considers the Lords of the Seven Rays to be “the seven Spirits who are before His throne,” as rendered in Revelation 1:4,<sup>7</sup> and gives this analysis:

The seven Spirits, we are told in the Scriptures of the world, are “before the Throne of God”; this signifies that They are not yet in a position to mount the Throne, symbolically speaking, owing to the fact that They have not yet achieved complete divine expression.<sup>8</sup>

Bailey concludes that the Lords of the Seven Rays must be imperfect Gods, so the seven rays, which are their emanations, must also be imperfect:

## About the Author

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It will be apparent to you that these streams of force, emanating from the Lords of the Seven Rays, are coloured, therefore, and “tainted”—if I may use such a word—by the limitations of these same great Beings; They are Gods, from our point of view, but in reality, Gods in the making, even though much nearer solar divinity than the most advanced human being is near to planetary divinity. They are the “imperfect Gods” spoken of in *The Secret Doctrine* and are the planetary Logoi of the sacred and non-sacred planets.<sup>9</sup>

Helena Blavatsky (1831 – 1891), a founder of the Theosophical Society, expresses a similar notion:

The millions upon millions of imperfect works found in Nature testify loudly that they are the products of finite, conditioned beings—though the latter were and are Dhyani-Chohans, Archangels, or whatever else they may be named. In short, these imperfect works are the unfinished production of evolution, under the guidance of the imperfect Gods.<sup>10</sup>

Blavatsky also writes, “There are seven chief groups of such Dhyani Chohans, which groups will be found and recognised in every religion, for they are the primeval SEVEN Rays,”<sup>11</sup> so her preceding quotation has this implication: the millions of imperfect works found in nature testify loudly to the imperfection of the seven rays.

According to these accounts from Bailey and Blavatsky, the Lords of the Seven Rays are imperfect Gods, and every human being shares in their imperfection by being on some one of the seven rays. Is it possible to identify specific human imperfections that reflect the imperfection of each Lord of a Ray?

## The Seven Stanzas

Bailey’s book *Esoteric Healing* addresses the various ways that the topic of healing is related to the seven rays. In its chapter on karmic liabilities, this book gives seven symbolic stanzas, one for each ray, that portray “The Seven Ray Causes of Inharmony and

Disease.”<sup>12</sup> Bailey introduces these stanzas with the following comment:

If the great informing Lives of the planets within our solar system are imperfect, the effect of this imperfection must inevitably affect Their planetary creations, Their bodies of manifestation, and thus introduce a karmic condition over which the individual human being has absolutely no control, but within which he moves and which he shares. It is obviously impossible for me to elucidate this theme. All I can do or am permitted to do is to give you seven stanzas from one of the most ancient volumes in the world; it deals with the seven ray causes of imperfections in our planetary manifestations.<sup>13</sup>

She also describes the comprehension that students might obtain from studying these stanzas:

The comprehension of the seven stanzas which I now propose to give you will lead eventually to the isolation of the seven psychological causes of disease, inherent in the substance of all forms in this world cycle, because all forms are infused with the life energy of the “imperfect Gods.”<sup>14</sup>

The purpose of this series of articles is to explain these stanzas. Even though *Esoteric Healing* was first published in 1953, and even though its seven stanzas are said to embody revelatory information, no publicized effort seems to have been made, prior to this series of articles, to explain any of these stanzas. A reason for this absence is that each stanza consists of very enigmatic sentences. Bailey herself acknowledges, “These are abstruse and difficult concepts, but they should be pondered upon, and deep reflection will lead to understanding.”<sup>15</sup> The five preceding articles in this series provide explanations of the third-ray,<sup>16</sup> sixth-ray,<sup>17</sup> second-ray,<sup>18</sup> fourth-ray,<sup>19</sup> and seventh-ray stanzas.<sup>20</sup>

The present article considers the first-ray stanza, which consists of ten symbolic sentences:

The Great One set Himself to follow by Himself alone His chosen path. He brooked



no interference. He hardened in His courses. From plane to plane, this hardening proceeded; it grew and stiffened. His will was set, and crystal-like, brilliant, brittle and hard. The power to crystallise was His. He brought not will-to-live but will-to-die. Death was His gift to life. Infusion and diffusion pleased Him not. He loved and sought abstraction.<sup>21</sup>

Bailey's entire commentary on the first-ray stanza is as follows:

As far as we can understand the significance of this stanza in relation to our theme of disease, the imperfection of this divine energy produces a peculiar attitude which expresses itself in the power to crystallise, to harden, to bring about attrition and cause the great abstracting process which we call death. Other results are the many crystallising processes going on in the physical form, all atrophying processes, and old age.<sup>22</sup>

Let us note that Bailey's commentary appears as brief and enigmatic as the stanza that it purports to explain, so there is a need for a more clarifying explanation.

### The First-Ray Stanza

The purpose of this article is to clarify the practical significance of the first-ray stanza by assembling related quotations from the writings of Bailey and others. Each sentence in the stanza is considered separately and is repeated in bold print.

#### **1. The Great One set Himself to follow by Himself alone His chosen path.**

In the first-ray stanza's first sentence, what does "the Great One" denote? The Lords of the Seven Rays are sometimes called "the seven great Lords,"<sup>23</sup> so the straightforward meaning of "the Great One" is that it denotes the Lord of the First Ray. With this meaning, however, the first sentence would depict events in the macrocosmic world that seem to have little practical significance for the mundane world of human beings. Bailey relates these two worlds by regarding the Lords of the Seven Rays as "the Prototypes of man."<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, the alternative meaning of "the Great One"

is that it denotes the people who are on the first ray, because such people reflect their prototype, namely, the great Lord of that ray.

This alternative meaning may seem unusual, but it is consistent with two biblical themes: one's name indicates one's nature,<sup>25</sup> and one is influenced by one's line of descent.<sup>26</sup> For example, in Genesis 32:28, the change in the patriarch's name from Jacob to Israel indicates the change in his nature: "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed." Israel is also the name of Jacob's descendants (Joshua 3:17, 7:25). James Hastings, in *A Dictionary of the Bible*, is impressed by the remarkable way in which Jacob is the prototype of his descendants:

The patriarchs are ... idealized in another direction, in common with many of the other patriarchal figures in Genesis, by being invested with the characteristics which afterwards marked the tribes descended, or reputed to be descended, from them ... But, however that may be, it is impossible not to be impressed by the remarkable manner in which Jacob, both in the brighter and in the darker aspects of his character, is the prototype of his descendants.<sup>27</sup>

Consequently, as narrated in the Bible, Israel denotes the people who descend from and thereby reflect the patriarch known as Israel. Similarly, with the alternative meaning, "the Great One" denotes the people who are on the first ray and thereby reflect the Great One known as the Lord of the first ray. In either case, the progenitor is the prototype of the ensuing people, and a designation used for the progenitor is also used for the people themselves. Thus, even though the alternative meaning of "the Great One" may seem unusual, it resembles what can be found in biblical accounts. In what follows, we employ this alternative meaning, because our commentary shows that it yields practical significances that are consistent across all sentences of the stanza.

Who are the people on the first ray? Bailey says, "Many great world rulers are found on this ray, such as Julius Caesar,"<sup>28</sup> and,

This has been spoken of as the ray of power, and is correctly so called, but if it were power alone, without wisdom and love, a destructive and disintegrating force would result. When however the three characteristics are united, it becomes a creative and governing ray. Those on this ray have strong will power, for either good or evil, for the former when the will is directed by wisdom and made selfless by love.<sup>29</sup>

Before considering the rest of the stanza's first sentence, it is helpful to introduce some terminology. The *line of least resistance* denotes "the easiest way."<sup>30</sup> Bailey comments, "the lines of least resistance are seldom the lines to be followed."<sup>31</sup> Put differently, if we take the line of least resistance in a situation, we do what is easiest even though it may not be the best thing to do. Bailey also says, "It is ever easier for a first ray worker to proceed alone upon the way of his decision."<sup>32</sup> Accordingly, for first-ray people, the line of least resistance is to proceed alone upon their chosen path.

Consequently, the entire first sentence, "The Great One set Himself to follow by Himself alone His chosen path," depicts first-ray people as setting themselves to follow their line of least resistance. In other words, they are determined to proceed alone upon their chosen path without any deviation. Given that taking the line of least resistance may not be the best thing to do, such unwise determination typically occurs only at an early stage of development, so the first sentence has this meaning: *At an early stage in their development, first-ray people are determined to follow their line of least resistance, which is to proceed alone upon their chosen path.*

In contrast, Bailey instructs a first-ray student to deviate from the line of least resistance:

You, my brother, are afraid of your equals. You want to be the one alone as your first ray powerful personality ... would normally incline you. It is not easy for you to be one among the many—all equal, all working as one, all engrossed with the one work. This you must learn to do, or else you hinder the group.<sup>33</sup>

As indicated by this instruction, first-ray people need to learn when their group obligations are more important than their individual inclinations.

## 2. *He brooked no interference.*

In the second sentence, the verb *brook* is an uncommon word, so its synonym, "tolerate,"<sup>34</sup> is used in what follows. The sentence declares that the portrayed people do not tolerate any "interference," a type of which is discipline from others. As Bailey indicates, when first-ray people follow their line of least resistance, they do not tolerate any discipline from others:

The man who stands alone, and who has determined that condition of isolation *for himself* has a harder problem, in some ways, and certainly a different problem, than the man who is disciplined by the constant, ceaseless impact of others upon his consciousness.<sup>35</sup>

Apparently, the portrayed people have shifted from simply being determined to follow their line of least resistance, which was their decision in the first sentence, to truly following their line of least resistance, which yields their intolerance in the second sentence. Thus, the preliminary meaning of the second sentence can be expressed in this way: by following their line of least resistance, the portrayed people do not tolerate any discipline from other people.

Nevertheless, "interference" in the second sentence is taken as also including inner interference, so the portrayed people are depicted as not tolerating even self-discipline. Bailey considers the obstacle to self-discipline to be *laziness*,<sup>36</sup> and says, "This refers not so much to mental inertia (for it may accompany acute mental perception) as to that slothfulness of the entire lower man which prevents him from measuring up to the intellectual recognition and the inner aspiration."<sup>37</sup> Accordingly, the second sentence depicts the portrayed people as succumbing to their own laziness. Bailey tells a first-ray student, "You could have exerted a constructive influence during the last few years, but you were too lazy to do so,"<sup>38</sup> so laziness may be a common first-ray failing.

Based on the preceding remarks, the second sentence, “He brooked no interference,” is given this overall meaning: *By following their line of least resistance, they do not tolerate any discipline from other people; and by succumbing to their own laziness, they do not tolerate any self-discipline.*

In contrast, Bailey exhorts a first-ray student to impose self-discipline:

You function through a first ray personality ... There is no one to control you through your responsibility for them or to interfere with you, and hence the difficulty of your problem. You have to make your own way, then, of learning and of cultivating self-forgetfulness ... You stand very much alone. It has been your own wish, and the right way for you. But you must offset its unavoidable difficulties through a self-imposed discipline. I leave it to you to find the way. You will, I know, comprehend that whereof I speak.<sup>39</sup>

This exhortation illustrates the preceding definition of *laziness*: the student does not have mental inertia—as shown by the sentence “You will, I know, comprehend that whereof I speak”—but instead is prevented by slothfulness from measuring up to his or her intellectual recognition of what must be done. Moreover, this exhortation is predicated on the assumption that the student could overcome slothfulness if he or she felt it was important to do so.

### 3. *He hardened in His courses.*

The third sentence states: “He hardened in His courses.” Here, *courses* could be a synonym for “patterns,”<sup>40</sup> and to *harden* could mean this common definition: “To make fixed, settled, or less subject to change.”<sup>41</sup> Adam Eason, in *Psychology Today*, uses the term *psychological rigidity* to signify being set in fixed, or settled, patterns of thinking:

We get set in patterns of thinking and do not like to step out of those patterns. Sometimes those patterns of thinking are simply biases or heuristics that we are not even aware of, that forge and run our reality. From a contextual behavioural science per-

spective, this is called psychological rigidity and the opposite is psychological flexibility.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, the third sentence could mean: the first-ray people become psychologically rigid. As a corroboration, Bailey says that a characteristic first-ray vice is “obstinacy,”<sup>43</sup> which can be defined as “the quality of being unreasonably determined, especially to act in a particular way and not to change at all, despite what anyone else says.”<sup>44</sup> According to this definition, “obstinacy” denotes a high degree of psychological rigidity.

There is widespread agreement that psychological rigidity is injurious to health. For example, Steven Hayes, Kirk Strosahl, and Kelly Wilson, in *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy*, comment, “it is our claim that psychological rigidity is a root cause of human suffering and maladaptive functioning.”<sup>45</sup> Todd Kashdan and Jonathan Rottenberg, in *Clinical Psychology Review*, state: “Having synthesized various isolated literatures, we are struck by the rich evidence for the value of psychological flexibility.”<sup>46</sup>

In the third sentence, however, to *harden* could mean an alternative definition: “To make unfeeling, unsympathetic, or callous.”<sup>47</sup> How could one become hardened in this sense? Hoyle Leigh, in *Handbook of Consultation-Liaison Psychiatry*, speaks of “self-defeating life patterns of perception,”<sup>48</sup> so “courses” in the third sentence could refer to patterns of perception. Edmund Sherman, in *Meaning in Mid-Life Transitions*, mentions “rigid patterns of perception,”<sup>49</sup> so to harden in one’s courses could signify getting set in rigid patterns of perception, which is a definition of perceptual rigidity. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in *The Primacy of Perception*, describes the relationship between these two notions of rigidity:

Psychologically rigid subjects could be expected to show, in the same way, a sort of perceptual rigidity. It would be hard for them to modify their attitude and to adopt a new account of new aspects of a problem. They would have a tendency to refer any new experience of a different type that

might be presented to them back to already familiar experiences.<sup>50</sup>

David Jones, in *Innovative Therapy*, observes, “Empathy and compassion for others are signs of perceptual flexibility and permit a more lively engagement with the world.”<sup>51</sup> This observation is well-taken, because both empathy and compassion entail the flexibility to perceive the world from the perspectives of other people.<sup>52</sup>

Our conclusion is that, as first-ray people become psychologically rigid, they tend to become perceptually rigid and thereby harden in the sense of becoming unfeeling, unsympathetic, or callous. As a corroboration, Bailey says that a characteristic first-ray vice is “lovelessness.”<sup>53</sup> This vice denotes a high degree of perceptual rigidity, because *lovelessness* is “the state or condition of being loveless,”<sup>54</sup> and the synonyms for *loveless* include “unfeeling,” “unsympathetic,” and “callous.”<sup>55</sup> As a further corroboration, Bailey tells a first-ray student, “Sympathy and compassion ... are almost totally lacking in your equipment.”<sup>56</sup>

As part of her earlier commentary on the first-ray stanza, Bailey states in part, “the imperfection of this divine energy produces a peculiar attitude which expresses itself in the power to crystallise, to harden.” In other words, the first-ray imperfection appears as the power to crystallize or harden. The stanza’s first, second, and third sentences portray first-ray people as succumbing to this imperfection, but with accumulating effects. In the first sentence, they are determined to follow their line of least resistance. In the second sentence, they follow their line of least resistance and succumb to laziness. In the third sentence, their experience can be described in this way: *By neither submitting to discipline from others nor applying it to themselves, they become psychologically rigid, leading to obstinacy, and perceptually rigid, leading to lovelessness.*

Nevertheless, there are ways to avoid these two kinds of rigidity. To assist a first-ray student to avoid psychological rigidity, Bailey prescribes a special kind of meditation:

One of the main things which I have to do for you at this time is to give you the kind of meditation which is needed. It should be one that will break down any tendency to crystallise which may be making its presence felt in your mental body, and so keep you free and plastically ready for use.<sup>57</sup>

To assist another first-ray student to avoid perceptual rigidity, she prescribes the “Review on Indifference,” which includes these questions:

Am I capable of seeing myself with indifference, detached emotionally from any event?

a. Can I see mentally, unbiased by any reaction from the emotional personal self?

b. Do I ever do this?

If it is true that the blind must advance by *touching*, by keeping attached, and by keeping hold; but that those with sight, by *seeing* and by keeping free and unattached; why then, having sight, do I close my eyes and hold on and feel my way instead of seeing it?

Is the mind the organ of vision for the spiritual man? If so,

a. Is my mind an organ of vision?

b. Can I hold my mind “steady in the light” and see life truly and free from any blinding attachments?<sup>58</sup>

As these examples show, first-ray people could avoid both psychological and perceptual rigidity by submitting to discipline from others and then applying it to themselves.

#### ***4. From plane to plane, this hardening proceeded; it grew and stiffened.***

This sentence requires additional terminology. According to Theosophy, the planetary life consists of seven worlds that are often called “planes” and have the following names: 1) lo-gic; 2) monadic; 3) spiritual; 4) intuitional; 5) mental; 6) emotional; and 7) physical.<sup>59</sup> These planes are regarded as being arranged metaphorically in an inner and outer manner. For example, the mental, emotional, and physical

planes, which are spoken of as “the three worlds of human endeavor,”<sup>60</sup> are regarded as the three outermost planes.

The physical body of a human being has both dense and subtle portions. The *dense physical body* contains the muscles, bones, and glands. The *subtle physical body* is called the etheric or vital body in Theosophy;<sup>61</sup> “golden bowl” in the Bible (Ecclesiastes 12:6);<sup>62</sup> and *pranamaya kosha*, a Sanskrit name, in Hinduism.<sup>63</sup>

In the fourth sentence, the first clause states: “From plane to plane, this hardening proceeded.” Here, “this hardening,” which signifies both psychological and perceptual rigidity, occurs on the mental plane and then proceeds to more outward planes. In other words, the hardening of mental patterns manifests as the hardening of emotional patterns and then as the hardening of behavioral patterns. Bailey describes the law of manifestation by which these hardenings proceed:

The thinker on his own plane formulates a thought embodying some purpose or some desire. The mind vibrates in response to this idea and simultaneously produces a corresponding reaction in the kamic, desire or emotional body. The energy body, the etheric sheath vibrates synchronously, and thereby the brain responds and energises the nerve-system throughout the dense physical body, so that the impulse of the thinker works out into physical plane activity.<sup>64</sup>

As indicated by the stanza’s second sentence, the portrayed people neither receive discipline from others nor impose discipline on themselves. Thus, they blindly and ignorantly set the law of manifestation into motion in the following way: ceaselessly and irresponsibly, day after day, their idle, destructive, or negative thoughts work out into emotional and physical objectivity.

As a corroboration, Hayes et al. describe how psychological rigidity manifests on both the emotional and physical levels:

The psychological flexibility model holds that pain is a natural consequence of living but that people suffer unnecessarily when

*As far as we can understand the significance of this stanza in relation to our theme of disease, the imperfection of this divine energy produces a peculiar attitude which expresses itself in the power to crystallise, to harden, to bring about attrition and the great abstracting process which we call death.*

their overall level of psychological rigidity prevents them from adapting to internal or external contexts. Unnecessary suffering occurs when verbal/cognitive processes tend to narrow human repertoires in key areas through cognitive entanglement and experiential avoidance. When people overidentify, or

“fuse,” with unworkable verbal rules, their behavioral repertoire becomes narrow, and they lose effective contact with the direct results of action.<sup>65</sup>

The fourth sentence’s second clause states, “it grew and stiffened.” Here, “it” refers to the hardening of the personality depicted in the first clause. “Grew” suggests the meaning of *harden* in which the personality grows more callous. For example, Bailey says, “an unmodified first ray can produce a man of unrelenting cruelty and hardness of nature.”<sup>66</sup> “Stiffened” suggests the meaning of *harden* in which the personality becomes more fixed. For example, Bailey says, “Many first ray people become static or crystallised.”<sup>67</sup>

In summary, the fourth sentence is given this overall meaning: *By setting in motion the law of manifestation in a blind and ignorant manner, they manifest their psychological and perceptual rigidity as hardened emotional patterns and then as hardened behavioral patterns, thereby becoming more cruel and then more static.*

Nevertheless, these outer manifestations need not occur. For example, Bailey tells a first-ray student to oppose the hardening of emotional patterns:

The first ray type errs in not giving enough thought to the reaction of others to what he says and does; he prides himself on his detached attitude and on his immunity from attachment; he likes to have his strength and isolation appreciated ... It is this inner "isolation," deeply loved by you and fostered by early training and present circumstance which militates against your being telepathically sensitive to other people. Instead of so much "will to love," why not just love more simply? ... In you the head dominates, and you sit on the summit of your tower, whilst all the time the call of the heart sounds throughout your being and in your ears. Yet you fear to descend and walk among your fellowmen in loving identification with them. It is only through walking the dusty street of life with our brothers that we find ourselves passing eventually through the portal of initiation.<sup>68</sup>

She also tells another first-ray student to oppose the hardening of behavioral patterns:

See to it that the tendency of the first ray to withdraw from contact to the isolated aloofness of the first ray does not unduly condition you upon the physical plane. You will know to what tendency I refer.<sup>69</sup>

Thus, through self-discipline based on self-knowledge, first-ray people could resist the extension of hardening to emotional and physical levels.

##### **5. His will was set, and crystal-like, brilliant, brittle and hard.**

Before considering this sentence, it is helpful to introduce additional terminology. Every human being has both a *lower self* and a *higher self*. The lower self is the *personality*, and it consists of the mental, emotional, and physical bodies.<sup>70</sup> The higher self is the *soul*, and its characteristics are described later.<sup>71</sup>

The fifth sentence characterizes the portrayed people's will. Bailey provides a similar description that characterizes the "will of the devoted aspirant":

The steely, brittle, determined, dynamic will of the devoted aspirant must change in-

to the steadfast, powerful, calm purpose of the soul, working through the disciple.<sup>72</sup>

The fifth sentence's first phrase is "His will was set." In this context, to *set* means "to put into a stable or fixed position."<sup>73</sup> The above quotation says, however, that the "will of the devoted aspirant must change," so this will is fixed only as long as its possessor allows it to remain so. Thus, the first phrase is given this meaning: the portrayed people allow their will to remain fixed as devoted aspiration.

Let us consider the adjectives in the second phrase. What does it mean for devoted aspiration to be "crystal-like"? Kait Welch observes, "There are *so* many different variations of quartz, but the image of a clear quartz point is fairly synonymous with the idea of 'crystal' in many people's minds."<sup>74</sup> On the other hand, Bailey says that a characteristic first-ray vice is "Dynamic one-pointedness."<sup>75</sup> Accordingly, "crystal-like," which in many people's minds is synonymous with "a clear quartz point," signifies a motivation that is one-pointed, namely, towards some person or ideal.

What does it mean for devoted aspiration to be "brilliant"? Bailey speaks of "the brilliant fanatical devotion to this, that or the other person or ideal,"<sup>76</sup> so she uses *brilliant* in the sense of "intense." Indeed, one of the synonyms listed for *brilliant* is "intense."<sup>77</sup>

Devoted aspiration is "brittle" in the sense of breakable, because the object of devotion could suddenly change. Bailey gives this explanation:

See therefore how the life of all aspirants, if progressing with the desired rapidity, is one of constant movement, constant changes and differentiations, and continuous building and breaking, planning and seeing those plans disrupted ... Ideals are transcended only to be found to be stations on the road to higher; visions are seen, only to be replaced by others; dreams are dreamt only to be realized and discarded.<sup>78</sup>

Finally, devoted aspiration is "hard" in the sense of callous, because such devotion ignores larger human issues. Bailey gives this explanation:

Ideals, as usually held, feed pride, lead to stubbornness, and engender a separative superiority; they produce impractical attitudes and negative activities. The one who thus holds them frequently serves only in the limited field, conditioned by his chosen work and coloured by his idealism. He excludes the *Whole* and thinks in terms of the past and as he wants to think. There is no real understanding of an opposing idealism and often no real attempt to comprehend its basis. His emphasis upon his own ideals (in his own consciousness even when not imposed on others) prevents understanding, and he is so busy upholding them and defending them (oft again to himself) and being conditioned by them that the larger human issues escape his attention.<sup>79</sup>

In summary, the fifth sentence is given this meaning: *By allowing their will to remain fixed as devoted aspiration, they have a motivation that is one-pointed, intense, breakable, and callous.*

Nevertheless, such a motivation can be changed, as shown by Bailey's instruction to a first-ray student:

It is, for instance, your personality fanaticism and your personality devotions (both to people and to ideas) which need *tempering* if your first ray power is to manifest. Your fanatical devotee *will* must be superseded by the *purpose*, ordered and steadfast, of your first ray soul. In this last sentence is for you the key to your future unfoldment.<sup>80</sup>

Accordingly, first-ray people need to find a way of changing their motivation, because such change is a prerequisite for their future unfoldment.

### **6. The power to crystallise was His.**

The sixth sentence states, "The power to crystallise was His," but what is this power? It is the first-ray imperfection that appears as the power to crystallize or harden. Bailey's earlier commentary on the first-ray stanza describes it in this way:

As far as we can understand the significance of this stanza in relation to our theme of disease, the imperfection of this divine energy produces a peculiar attitude which expresses itself in the power to crystallise, to harden, to bring about attrition and cause the great abstracting process which we call death.

In each preceding sentence, first-ray people partially succumb to this power, resulting in the crystallization of an aspect of their personality. These effects, however, accumulate. The sixth sentence depicts the stage in which first-ray people completely succumb to this power, resulting in the crystallization of their entire personality. Bailey describes the outcome:

As time goes on, crystallisation takes place. A "crystal barrier" is set up between the personality and the soul. The soul is seen but its influence is insulated. But—because there is a vision of the soul still persisting—the disciple is deeply dissatisfied. The crystallisation eventually affects all aspects of the nature. Emotions settle into "grooves of crystal"; the mind becomes set and brittle. The physical body crystallises also and gets old rapidly because there is no free flow of life.<sup>81</sup>

The Mayo Clinic, a top-ranked academic medical center, defines a *personality disorder* as follows:

A personality disorder is a type of mental disorder in which you have a rigid and unhealthy pattern of thinking, functioning and behaving. A person with a personality disorder has trouble perceiving and relating to situations and people. This causes significant problems and limitations in relationships, social activities, work and school. In some cases, you may not realize that you have a personality disorder because your way of thinking and behaving seems natural to you. And you may blame others for the challenges you face.<sup>82</sup>

Accordingly, a personality disorder is defined by "a rigid and unhealthy pattern of thinking,



functioning and behaving,” so the crystallization of the personality necessarily yields a personality disorder. The Mayo Clinic lists several ways that personality disorders cause problems:

Personality disorders can significantly disrupt the lives of both the affected person and those who care about that person. Personality disorders may cause problems with relationships, work or school, and can lead to social isolation or alcohol or drug abuse.<sup>83</sup>

Bailey’s earlier commentary describes other health effects of crystallizing the personality:

Other results are the many crystallising processes going on in the physical form, all atrophying processes, and old age.

Consequently, the sixth sentence is given this meaning: *By proceeding through the preceding stages, they completely succumb to the first-ray imperfection that appears as the power to crystallize or harden, resulting in: the crystallization of their entire personality, personality disorders, problems with relationships, atrophying processes, and premature ageing.*

In contrast, Bailey gives this instruction to a first-ray student:

See to it that you crystallise not. As one gets older in the physical sense (a thought which you ever evade, my brother) there is always the tendency to become set in one’s life rhythms and objectives; the life theme is steady and the danger of rigidity is very real. See to it that you keep flexible and fluid and *learning* all the time.<sup>84</sup>

Accordingly, through self-discipline and knowledge of the danger, first-ray people could avoid crystallizing their personality.

### **7. He brought not will-to-live but will-to-die.**

The sixth sentence depicts the stage in which first-ray people complete the internal crystallization of their personality. The seventh sentence builds upon the sixth sentence, because it represents the stage in which first-ray people use the method of working outwardly through their own crystallized personality. Bailey de-

scribes this stage in the following way: “Many first ray people become static or crystallised, as that is the method whereby the first ray destroyers work—and it is all part of the divine work.”<sup>85</sup>

Bailey says, “The first ray man will always ‘come to the front’ in his own line ... He is the born leader in any and every public career.”<sup>86</sup> Even though first-ray people are said to be born leaders in every public career, would organizations really want them to be their leaders if they were working through their own crystallized personality? Garry McGiboney, in *Leadership Theories and Case Studies*, observes that conventional organizations sometimes do desire rigid leaders:

Some leaders view rigidity and stubbornness as an asset and as a leadership function. Sometimes this type of leadership comes with the encouragement (intentionally or unintentionally) of the organization in which the leader works. It is an extension of the military model of leadership and is reinforced typically at the beginning of a leader’s time at the helm of an organization as a clear message to everyone that “a new sheriff is in town.”<sup>87</sup>

Some employees think a strong, dominating, overbearing, cruel leader is attractive and necessary. Typically, employees who fall into this category are those that had little respect for the previous leader and think a new “ass-kicking” leader will bring back past glory. However, there are employees with so little self-respect and self-confidence that they think they deserve someone that is cruel and insensitive. And, of course, there are employees who think being an insensitive and bullying leader fits their style of management, so they view the totalitarian leader as a role model.<sup>88</sup>

*Extremism* is defined as “any political theory that holds to uncompromising and rigid policies or ideology,”<sup>89</sup> so extremist organizations also provide job opportunities for rigid leaders. As indicated by the fifth sentence, a crystallized personality entails a will that remains fixed as devoted aspiration. Thus, an extremist organization would desire a leader with such a

will if he or she were devoted to the organization's rigid policies or ideology. Dennis Tourish, in *The Dark Side of Transformational Leadership*, speaks of such leaders:

leaders who hold followers in thrall by dint of their rabble-rousing oratorical gifts; who offer an appealing simplicity of purpose in the face of life's complexities; who compel a transformation in follower attitudes, thereby converting apparently "normal" people into devotees of rigid ideologies, totalistic beliefs and violent means; who exploit the devotion and commitment of their followers to further an agenda frequently at odds with its proclaimed emancipatory intent; and leaders who promise to right all wrongs, only to add fresh layers of hurt to an already besmirched human condition.<sup>90</sup>

The seventh sentence states: "He brought not will-to-live but will-to-die." In other words, the portrayed people intend to bring the "will-to-live," or vitality, to the organizations that they lead, but instead they bring the "will-to-die," or deterioration. Why is their leadership so self-defeating?

First, a crystallized personality has difficulty in adapting to change. Hayes et al. make a similar point: "psychologically rigid individuals tend to have difficulty in initiating and maintaining actions that are sensitive to contingencies, thus reducing their ability to adapt to changing circumstances."<sup>91</sup>

Second, a crystallized personality displays the first-ray vice that Bailey calls the "desire to control others."<sup>92</sup> Charis Psaltis and Anna Zapiti, in *Interaction, Communication and Development*, make a similar point: "Rigid behaviour is a symptom of conflict, or refusal to compromise or to make concessions, and of the will to impose one's own point of view at any cost."<sup>93</sup>

Third, a crystallized personality tends to drive away people with differing ideas and methods. Bailey gives this explanation to a first-ray student:

May I, in all love and tenderness, suggest that the ideas, methods, formulas and ways

of living which seem right to you (and *are* right for you) may be entirely undesirable for others and that, if you force them on those others, their *souls* may remove them from your influence in the cause of freedom to expand. In this suggestion lies for you the clue to much that is destructive in your best effort and this should convey to you the method for your and their deliverance.<sup>94</sup>

Consequently, when the portrayed people work as leaders through their own crystallized personality, their characteristics promote the crystallization of their organizations. Such an outcome illustrates the principle affirmed by Charlene Belitz and Meg Lundstrom: "External conditions mirror internal conditions."<sup>95</sup> Bailey states, "When crystallisation has reached a certain degree of density and so-called 'hardness,' it is easily shattered and destroyed."<sup>96</sup> Accordingly, the following sequence occurs: crystallized leaders promote the crystallization of their organizations, which in turn brings deterioration and death to their organizations.

The preceding sequence can be corroborated with empirical data. For example, Charles O'Reilly and Michael Tushman, in *Lead and Disrupt*, report on a number of well-known companies that failed:

Each of these failures is unique in its details but the same in that each represents a failure in leadership. Every company described was at one point a great success and had the resources and capabilities needed to continue to be successful. The failure was that ... the leaders of these companies were rigid in one way or another—unable or unwilling to sense new opportunities and to reconfigure the firm's assets in ways that permitted the company to continue to survive and prosper.<sup>97</sup>

Consequently, the seventh sentence is given this meaning: *By working as leaders through their own crystallized personality, they bring not vitality but deterioration, because they promote the crystallization of their organizations, which in turn brings deterioration and death to their organizations.*

### **8. Death was His gift to life.**

The seventh sentence depicts first-ray leaders as bringing deterioration and death to their organizations, but the eighth sentence, “Death was His gift to life,” indicates that such death is really a gift to life. How can that be? Bailey gives this explanation:

Our ideas about death have been erroneous; we have looked upon it as the great and ultimate terror, whereas in reality it is the great escape, the entrance into a fuller measure of activity, and the release of the life from the crystallised vehicle and an inadequate form.<sup>98</sup>

For example, Bailey describes how today’s religious, political, and educational organizations are outmoded:

Worn-out religious dogmas and the grip of theology and the orthodox churches have no longer sufficed to hold the allegiance of the potent, inner, spiritual life; humanity is deeply spiritual and innately religious but needs today a new form with which to clothe the ancient verities. Old political schools have been deemed inadequate and new ideologies bear witness to the strength of the life which is seeking more adequate expression; the educational systems, having served their purpose, are fast being recognised as inadequate to meet the need of the demanding life of the race.<sup>99</sup>

She concludes that the death of these outmoded organizations would be “beneficent and needed”:

There is everywhere a cry for change and for those new forms in the religious, political, educational and economic life of the race which will allow of freer and better spiritual expression. Such a change is rapidly coming and is regarded by some as death—terrible and to be avoided if possible. It is indeed death but it is beneficent and needed.<sup>100</sup>

Consequently, first-ray leaders make a gift to life by promoting the crystallization and death of outmoded organizations. Such organizations, however, are not necessarily politically conservative. For example, Herbert McClosky and Dennis Chong, in “Similarities and Differ-

ences Between Left-Wing and Right-Wing Radicals,” report:

Evidence from the OVS [Opinion and Values survey] and PAB [Political Affiliation and Belief] survey reveals that both left-wing and right-wing extremists show high levels of intolerance of ambiguity and psychological rigidity. On these dimensions, both the far right and far left are substantially more rigid and intolerant of ambiguity than the moderates ... Both the left and the right, for instance, are much more likely than moderates to believe that in politics, there is no middle ground—people are “either with you or against you” ... They tend to believe that there is only one answer to important social and philosophical issues. And they are less willing to settle for compromises in the political arena, as indicated by their greater tendency to agree to the statement that “in politics you should settle for nothing less than total victory.”<sup>101</sup>

Thus, the surveyed extremist organizations, whether left-wing or right-wing, are crystallizing and dying, as shown by their high levels of psychological rigidity. Their death, however, would bring gifts to today’s world, because it would bring improvements in these areas: mutual understanding, civility, use of reason, and willingness to compromise.

In summary, the eighth sentence is given this meaning: *By promoting the crystallization and death of outmoded organizations, they prepare the way for new modes of life, of religious presentation, of government, and of education.*

### **9. Infusion and diffusion pleased Him not.**

Bailey, in *Esoteric Psychology*, describes how a first-ray person eventually comes to “an inner point of change”:

Power selfishly used exhausts its user and evokes a display of power antagonistic to him; he is thereby destroyed, because he has destroyed. He is separated off from his fellow men because he has been isolated and separative in his nature. He walks alone because he has cried forth to the world: “I will brook no companion; I am the one alone.” This crisis of evocation

brings him to an inner point of change which involves an alteration in his direction, a change of method, and a different attitude.<sup>102</sup>

The first-ray stanza's first through eighth sentences evoke experiences that are like the foregoing description, so those experiences eventually bring first-ray people to an inner point of change. When a first-ray person comes to such a point, what does he or she then do? Bailey, also in *Esoteric Psychology*, gives this answer:

Slowly and laboriously, using every power of his aligned personality and, in his realised desperation, calling in the power of his soul, he proceeds one-pointedly to rebuild that which he has destroyed.<sup>103</sup>

Here, "that which he has destroyed" is the person's own personality, which he or she impaired by proceeding through the stanza's first through sixth sentences. Moreover, the above quotation gives two clues on how a first-ray person carries out the therapeutic task of rebuilding his or her personality: "using every power of his aligned personality"; and "calling in the power of his soul."

The stanza's ninth and tenth sentences depict a self-healing method that is consistent with the above clues and that is like Margaret Paul's Inner Bonding process. Paul's website provides brief accounts of Paul's background and process:

Margaret holds a PhD in psychology and is a relationship expert, noted public speaker, workshop leader, educator, chaplain, consultant and artist. She has appeared on many radio and TV shows, including the Oprah show. She has successfully worked with thousands of individuals, couples and business relationships and taught classes and seminars since 1967.<sup>104</sup>

Inner Bonding empowers you to self-heal the root causes of anxiety, depression, addictions, failed relationships and many other problems that inhibit your personal and spiritual growth and satisfaction. It teaches you how to love yourself rather than continue to abandon yourself, how to move beyond emotional dependency and attain

emotional freedom, how to heal the underlying control issues—stemming from self-abandonment—that destroy relationships, and how to maintain a strong connection with your personal source of spiritual guidance.<sup>105</sup>

Consequently, in what follows, Paul's material is used to illustrate the meaning of the ninth and tenth sentences.

What is the significance of "infusion" in the ninth sentence? Plato (c. 427 BC – c. 347 BC), in *Philebus*, mentions "the excessive infusion of pleasure."<sup>106</sup> More recently, Joseph Forgas, an Australian social psychologist writing in the 1990s, defines the term *affect infusion* as "the process whereby affectively loaded information exerts an influence on and becomes incorporated into the judgmental process, entering into the judge's deliberations and eventually coloring the judgmental outcome,"<sup>107</sup> and says:

Affect infusion occurs when feelings (moods, emotions) exert an invasive and subconscious influence on the way people think, form judgments, and behave in social situations.<sup>108</sup>

Accordingly, in the ninth sentence, "infusion" signifies the infusion of feelings, so "Infusion ... pleased Him not" has this meaning: the portrayed people choose to feel their infused unpleasant feelings—such as anxiety, depression, anger, guilt, shame, and jealousy—rather than ignore, avoid, or suppress them. In a similar manner, Paul describes the first step in the Inner Bonding process:

Choose to be *mindful* of your feelings, *attending* to your feelings with the *willingness* to feel your core pain, learn about and take responsibility for how you are causing your wounded feelings, and take responsibility for creating your peace and joy.<sup>109</sup>

What is the meaning of "diffusion" in the ninth sentence? Just as "infusion" can characterize feelings, "diffusion" can characterize thinking. Nora Rosendahl, an entrepreneur and writer, notes, "Diffused thinking happens when you allow your thoughts to wander freely, making connections at random, letting unstructured

thoughts take shape at the back of your mind.”<sup>110</sup> James Allen, a leader in the self-help movement, similarly notes that diffused thoughts occur when the mind is not disciplined:

The great enemy of concentration—and therefore of all skill and power—is a wavering, wandering, undisciplined mind; and it is in overcoming this that concentration is acquired. A scattered and undisciplined army would be useless. To make it effective in action and swift in victory it must be solidly concentrated and masterfully directed. Scattered and diffused thoughts are weak and worthless.<sup>111</sup>

Mame Freas, a New Thought writer, considers diffused thought to be the source of error: “Diffused thought, thought governed by the carnal mind, will bring us into that chaotic state of consciousness in which humanity is today enveloped.”<sup>112</sup>

In the ninth sentence, the conjunction *and* is used to show chronological order,<sup>113</sup> so the sequence “infusion and diffusion” shows that the discovery of the infused feelings is followed by the discovery of the diffused thoughts. More specifically, the portrayed people trace their infused feelings inwardly to discover the diffused thoughts and beliefs that underlie their feelings. This process of discovery is consistent with Bailey’s statement: “Always in the process of arriving at an understanding of nature, the occultist works inwards from the external form in order to discover the sound which created it, or the aggregate of forces which produced the external shape.”<sup>114</sup> Paul describes the corresponding step in the Inner Bonding process:

Explore what you are telling yourself and how you are treating yourself that is causing the wounded feelings; discover the programmed thoughts and false beliefs from

your wounded self that have led to the self-abandonment that is causing your current shame, fear, anxiety, depression, and other wounded pain.<sup>115</sup>

The ninth sentence also says, “diffusion pleased Him not,” but what does that mean? The portrayed people are not pleased by having discovered the diffused thoughts and beliefs that underlie their unpleasant feelings, because they are still feeling the same unpleasant feelings. Consequently, they realize that they must take the additional step of discovering the truth about those thoughts and beliefs. Paul also describes this realization:

Once you understand which of your thoughts/false beliefs and actions cause you pain, you are ready to learn the truth about those beliefs and discover what new, loving action you need to take on your behalf.<sup>116</sup>

Based on the preceding remarks, the ninth sentence is given this explanation: *In their effort to rebuild their personality, they choose to feel their infused unpleasant feelings—such as anxiety, depression, anger, guilt, shame, and jealousy—rather than ignore, avoid, or suppress them. They trace their unpleasant feelings inwardly to discover the diffused thoughts and beliefs that underlie their feelings, but realize that they must still discover the truth about those thoughts and beliefs.*

#### **10. He loved and sought abstraction.**

Before considering the tenth sentence, let us clarify some terminology. The mental body is the highest part of the personality, and it is that which is usually regarded as the mind, because it is the instrument of analysis and discrimination. Esoteric traditions, however, have the notion of a higher mind that is sometimes called the “causal body.” The Bible refers to this higher mind as the “house not made with

***See to it that you crystallise not. As one gets older in the physical sense ... there is always the tendency to become set in one’s life rhythms and objectives; the life theme is steady and the danger of rigidity is very real. See to it that you keep flexible and fluid and learning all the time.***

hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Corinthians 5:1),<sup>117</sup> and Hinduism calls it by its Sanskrit name, *karana sarira*. Here, *karana* means “cause” and *sarira* means “body.”<sup>118</sup>

Theosophy divides the mental plane into seven levels, or subplanes: four concrete, or lower, levels; and three abstract, or higher, levels.<sup>119</sup> The mental body is said to reside on the concrete levels of the mental plane, and the causal body on the abstract levels of the mental plane.<sup>120</sup> I. K. Taimni, a theosophical writer, refers to the mental body as “the vehicle of concrete thoughts,” and says, “The first function of the Causal body is that it serves as the organ of abstract thought.”<sup>121</sup> Accordingly, “abstraction” in the tenth sentence could denote the causal body, because this body is located on the abstract levels of the mental plane and serves as the organ of abstract thought.

The stanza’s tenth sentence depicts a process of meditation, for which Bailey, in *Letters on Occult Meditation*, provides this instruction:

The student having withdrawn his consciousness on to the mental plane at some point within the brain, let him sound forth the Sacred Word gently three times. Let him picture the breath sent forth as a clarifying, expurgating force that in its progress onward sweeps away the thoughtforms circulating within the mental ovoid. Let him then at the close realise that the mental body is free and clear of thoughtforms.

Let him then raise his vibration as high as may be, and aim next at lifting it clear of the mental body into the causal, and so bring in the direct action of the Ego upon the lower three vehicles. As long as he can keep his consciousness high and as long as he holds a vibration that is that of the Ego on its own plane, the mental body will be held in a state of equilibrium.<sup>122</sup>

Here, “Ego” is synonymous with the term *soul*,<sup>123</sup> which was used earlier, and “the lower three vehicles” are the mental, emotional, and physical bodies.

The first part of the tenth sentence is: “He loved ... abstraction.” Given that “abstraction” denotes the causal body, and to *love* means “to

need or require,”<sup>124</sup> the first part has this meaning: in the words of Bailey’s preceding quotation, “Let him [the student] then raise his vibration as high as may be, and aim next at lifting it clear of the mental body into the causal.”

Paul gives similar instruction for accomplishing this step:

In order to access the higher frequency of the spiritual realm, you must raise your own frequency. There are numerous things you can do to raise your frequency. First, though, you must truly have the intent to learn with your spiritual guidance about loving yourself and others. When you have a true, pure intent to learn, your frequency automatically raises. Your intent to learn is your most powerful tool for raising your frequency. None of the actions we suggest below will raise your frequency without this intent.<sup>125</sup>

Paul suggests the following supplemental actions for raising your frequency: moving into your imagination; keeping your body clear of drugs, alcohol, nicotine, etc.; sincere prayers of gratitude and asking God for help; repetitive prayers, chants, and mantras; rapid repetitive movements and other forms of expressive dancing; spending time in nature; listening to classical or spiritual music; doing creative, artistic activities; and using incense.<sup>126</sup>

Bailey, also in *Letters on Occult Meditation*, describes the result from the earlier raising of the vibration or frequency:

The vibrations of the abstract levels can then begin to be felt. You need to remember that they come via the causal body, the vehicle of the Higher Self, and the average causal body is on the third subplane of the mental plane. This is a point not sufficiently recognised. Ponder on it. Real abstract thought becomes possible only when the Personality has, by vibration reciprocal to that of the Ego, aligned itself sufficiently to form a fairly unimpeded channel. Then at intervals, rare at first but of increasing frequency, will abstract ideas begin to filter down, to be followed in due time by flashes of real illumination or intuition from the

spiritual Triad or the true threefold Ego itself.<sup>127</sup>

Here, “Higher Self,” “Ego,” and “spiritual Triad” are synonymous terms.<sup>128</sup> The word *abstraction* has such synonyms as “idea” and “visionary notion,”<sup>129</sup> so it could denote what the preceding quotation calls “flashes of real illumination or intuition.” Thus, the last part of the tenth sentence, “He ... sought abstraction,” could have this meaning: they seek “flashes of real illumination or intuition” that reveal the truth about their underlying thoughts and beliefs, as well as reveal their best actions to implement.

Paul gives corresponding instruction for the Inner Bonding process:

When you are ready to learn how to take loving care of yourself, then ask your Divine guidance how to do it, and you will be shown the way. Your guidance is just waiting for you to ask ... But because we have free will, Spirit cannot do anything about our intent or our frequency ... The universe is filled with the energy of love and truth. It is filled with all the information there is, and it has the answers to all our questions. Asking your guidance questions about the truth of your beliefs and about what loving behavior you can take for yourself will eventually result in answers ... When you sincerely ask the questions, “What is the truth about this belief?” and “What is the loving action in this situation?” you open the channel for this information to come through you. We have long been told to “ask and you shall receive.” Try it. It really works.<sup>130</sup>

This quotation alludes to Matthew 7:7–8:

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

In summary, the tenth and final sentence is given this meaning: *They raise their vibration as high as may be, aiming at lifting it clear of the mental body into the causal body, and then seek flashes of real illumination or intuition*

*that reveal the truth about their underlying thoughts and beliefs, as well as reveal their best actions to implement.*

Let us revisit Bailey’s earlier clues about what a first-ray person does after coming to the inner point of change:

Slowly and laboriously, using every power of his aligned personality and, in his realised desperation, calling in the power of his soul, he proceeds one-pointedly to rebuild that which he has destroyed.

In the meaning given for the tenth sentence, “lifting it [their vibration] clear of the mental body into the causal body” is equivalent to aligning the personality with the causal body,<sup>131</sup> and to “seek flashes of real illumination or intuition” corresponds to calling in the power of the soul, so this meaning satisfies Bailey’s earlier clues.

## Conclusions

Bailey’s first-ray stanza, which we call the “First-Ray Cause of Inharmony and Disease,” consists of ten symbolic sentences that can be clarified in the following manner:

1. At an early stage in their development, first-ray people are determined to follow their line of least resistance, which is to proceed alone upon their chosen path.
2. By following their line of least resistance, they do not tolerate any discipline from other people; and by succumbing to their own laziness, they do not tolerate any self-discipline.
3. By neither submitting to discipline from others nor applying it to themselves, they become psychologically rigid, leading to obstinacy, and perceptually rigid, leading to lovelessness.
4. By setting in motion the law of manifestation in a blind and ignorant manner, they manifest their psychological and perceptual rigidity as hardened emotional patterns and then as hardened behavioral patterns, thereby becoming more cruel and then more static.

5. By allowing their will to remain fixed as devoted aspiration, they have a motivation that is one-pointed, intense, breakable, and callous.

6. By proceeding through the preceding stages, they completely succumb to the first-ray imperfection that appears as the power to crystallize or harden, resulting in: the crystallization of their entire personality, personality disorders, problems with relationships, atrophying processes, and premature ageing.

7. By working as leaders through their own crystallized personality, they bring not vitality but deterioration, because they promote the crystallization of their organizations, which in turn brings deterioration and death to their organizations.

8. By promoting the crystallization and death of outmoded organizations, they prepare the way for new modes of life, of religious presentation, of government, and of education.

9. In their effort to rebuild their personality, they choose to feel their infused unpleasant feelings—such as anxiety, depression, anger, guilt, shame, and jealousy—rather than ignore, avoid, or suppress them. They trace their unpleasant feelings inwardly to discover the diffused thoughts and beliefs that underlie their feelings, but realize that they must still discover the truth about those thoughts and beliefs.

10. They raise their vibration as high as may be, aiming at lifting it clear of the mental body into the causal body, and then seek flashes of real illumination or intuition that reveal the truth about their underlying thoughts and beliefs, as well as reveal their best actions to implement.

The first-ray imperfection appears as the power to crystallize or harden. The stanza's first through sixth sentences illustrate that power by depicting the resulting stages in the crystallization of the personality; the seventh and eighth sentences depict the outer effects of such crystallization; and the ninth and tenth sentences

depict the stages in the process of rebuilding the personality.

First-ray people could act contrarily to what each of the first through sixth sentences shows them as doing. In fact, our commentary on each of these sentences includes a quotation from Bailey that instructs a student to act contrarily to the sentence's portrayal. If first-ray students were receptive to such instruction at any of these stages, they could arrest the internal process of crystallization at that point and then begin the process of rebuilding their personality without proceeding through the remaining stages of crystallization. As Bailey explains to a first-ray student,

May I point out to you also that a recognition of those ray problems and liabilities which exist in your own life and in the lives of those around you involves no criticism on my part or any on yours. The facts of nature exist; the wise man faces them, knowing them for what they are and he then endeavours to transcend them.<sup>132</sup>

Similarly, the first-ray stanza is not meant to be a criticism of first-ray people, but is intended to be a source of wisdom for them.

The stanza's ninth and tenth sentences, which represent the stages of rebuilding the personality, depict first-ray people as acting contrarily to what each of preceding sentences shows them as doing:

In the first sentence, first-ray people are determined to follow their line of least resistance. In the tenth sentence, however, they seek flashes of illumination or intuition that reveal their best actions to implement, which may entail deviating from their line of least resistance.

In the second sentence, they do not tolerate self-discipline. In the ninth and tenth sentence, however, they practice a regime of self-discipline.

In the third sentence, they become psychologically and perceptually rigid. In the tenth sentence, however, they seek flashes of illumination or intuition that reveal the truth about their thoughts and beliefs.



In the fourth sentence, they set in motion the law of manifestation in a blind and ignorant manner, and thereby manifest their psychological and perceptual rigidity as hardened emotional patterns. In the ninth sentence, however, they work with this law in a conscious and knowledgeable manner, and thereby trace their unpleasant feelings inwardly to discover the thoughts and beliefs that underlie those feelings.

In the fifth sentence, they allow their will to remain fixed as devoted aspiration. In the tenth sentence, however, they seek to supersede their devoted aspiration with the purpose of the soul.

In the sixth through eighth sentences, they work through their own crystallized personality. In the ninth and tenth sentences, however, they slowly and laboriously work to undo their crystallization.

The stanza's ninth and tenth sentences are like Margaret Paul's Inner Bonding process. Paul emphasizes that this process needs to be repeated frequently:

The key to the process is to learn to stay in tune with your feelings all the time ... This way, you are alerted the moment you feel anything other than peace inside. As soon as you feel anything less than peace and fullness within, do the Inner Bonding process in any form you can.<sup>133</sup>

She also writes, "Turning this practice into a daily way of life is what will protect you from going back into the behaviors and patterns from the past."<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology*, vol. I (1936; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1979), 316.  
<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 126-127.  
<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.  
<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-83.  
<sup>6</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations* (1960; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1976), 568.

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<sup>7</sup> All biblical quotations in this article come from the New American Standard Bible. Philippe Le Moigne, Jean-Daniel Macchi, Étienne Nodet, Pierre-Maurice Bogaert, and Christian Cannuyer, *The Bible: Its Languages and Its Translations* (New London, CT: Bayard, 2014), 64, write: "This New American Standard Bible is considered by nearly all evangelical Christian scholars and translators today to be the most accurate, word-for-word translation of the original Greek and Hebrew scriptures into modern English that has ever been produced. It remains the most popular version among theologians, professors, scholars, and seminary students."  
<sup>8</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Healing* (1953; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1978), 298.  
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<sup>10</sup> Helena P. Blavatsky, *Collected Writings* (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Society in America, 2002), vol. XIV, 217.  
<sup>11</sup> Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, vol.1 (1888; reprint; Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press, 1977), 573.  
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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 293.  
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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 304.  
<sup>16</sup> Zachary F. Lansdowne, "The Third-Ray Cause of Inharmony and Disease," *The Esoteric Quarterly*, Spring 2017.  
<sup>17</sup> Zachary F. Lansdowne, "The Sixth-Ray Cause of Inharmony and Disease," *The Esoteric Quarterly*, Summer 2017.  
<sup>18</sup> Zachary F. Lansdowne, "The Second-Ray Cause of Inharmony and Disease," *The Esoteric Quarterly*, Summer 2018.  
<sup>19</sup> Zachary F. Lansdowne, "The Fourth-Ray Cause of Inharmony and Disease," *The Esoteric Quarterly*, Winter 2019.  
<sup>20</sup> Zachary F. Lansdowne, "The Seventh-Ray Cause of Inharmony and Disease," *The Esoteric Quarterly*, Spring 2019.  
<sup>21</sup> Bailey, *Esoteric Healing*, 298-299.  
<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 299.  
<sup>23</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *The Light of the Soul* (1927; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1978), 268.  
<sup>24</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire* (1925; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1973), 1201.  
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- ter, 1995), 603, writes, “It is a widespread cultural phenomenon that the name is considered to be more than an artificial tag which distinguishes one person from another ... but it is thought to tell something of the kind of person he is.” Timothy F. LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy for Yourself* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2009), 149, observes, “In the Bible, a name reveals the nature of the person.” For example, 1 Samuel 25:25 says: “for as his name is, so is he.” Roswell D. Hitchcock, *An Interpreting Dictionary of Scripture Proper Names* (New York: A. J. Johnson, 1871), gives meanings of nearly all the names of persons and places in the Bible.
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- 50 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 105.

- <sup>51</sup> David Jones, *Innovative Therapy: A Handbook* (Maidenhead, Berkshire, England: Open University Press, 1994), 156.
- <sup>52</sup> Lori Chandler, "The Difference Between Empathy and Compassion Is Everything," *Big Think*, October 26, 2015, <https://bigthink.com/ideafeed/compassion-is-an-action-not-an-emotion> (accessed April 4, 2019), makes this distinction: "We often conflate the words 'compassion' and 'empathy' but they have different meanings for a very important reason ... Empathy is a gateway to compassion. It's understanding how someone feels, and trying to imagine how that might feel for you—it's a mode of relating. Compassion takes it further. It's feeling what that person is feeling, holding it, accepting it, and taking some kind of action."
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# A Mystical Interpretation of the Binding of Issac

Jeffrey Gold

## Abstract

This paper reinterprets the *Akedah* or the binding of Isaac that is found in *Genesis* 22. Standard interpretations of that passage raise serious moral questions about both God and Abraham. This reinterpretation, however, presents neither God nor Abraham as morally culpable. Using the symbols of astrology to interpret the *Akedah*, Isaac represents Abraham's fifth house of children, joy, and creativity. Connections are drawn between an astrological reading of the *Akedah* and the mystical teaching of renouncing the fruits of one's (5th house) creative action. Renouncing the fruits of one's action is then linked with egolessness (slaying Aries the Ram).

## Introduction

One of the most difficult passages in the Torah is the *Akedah* (Hebrew: *עֲקֵדָה*), the binding of Isaac. At *Genesis* 22, God tests Abraham's faith by asking him to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac.<sup>1</sup> Abraham appears to pass this test as he picks up his knife to slay his son. Theologians, rabbis, and lay people have struggled to make sense of this passage. Some feminists display outrage with a Divine parent who requires blind obedience for such a heinous act. For example, Nel Noddings states: "But for the mother, for us, this is horrendous . . . For us, then, Abraham's decision is not only ethically unjustified but it is in basest violation of the supra-ethical—of caring. The one-caring can only describe his act—'You would kill your own son!'—and refuse him forgiveness. . . I suspect no woman could have written *Genesis*."<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Wurtzel calls the *Genesis* story an "act of atrocity alleviated by an eleventh-hour episode of Divine intervention" and "an incident of God-mandated filicide."<sup>3</sup> These are powerful critiques. Is it not morally outrageous for a central religious text to glorify the murder of one's own innocent child?

This essay reinterprets the passage from a Kabbalistic or Jewish mystical perspective. Since my interpretation is symbolic and not literal, it presents neither God nor Abraham as morally reprehensible. By utilizing the astrological symbols present in the story, I will contend that it is not a story of filicide but a story about abandoning the fruits of our labor and egolessness. The Mezritcher Rebbe encourages us to "turn into nothing."<sup>4</sup> The turning into nothing, this turn away from egocentricity, is the astrological message of the binding of Isaac.

## Isaac as Abraham's Fifth House

Although many Kabbalists practice astrology,<sup>5</sup> it is rare to see astrological interpretations of specific passages of Torah. It is commonplace for Kabbalists to draw a connection between the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 signs of the Zodiac,<sup>6</sup> but unusual to see astrology used to interpret various stories in the Torah. I shall, however, propose an astrological interpretation of the *Akedah*, an interpretation that does not require us to see the Divine as a parent with a fragile ego who demands blind obedience in the commission of unconscionable acts.

The Torah opens: "*Bereshit bara Elohim*" (בראשית ברא אלהים). This is usually translated, "In the beginning, God created." For an entire chapter, we witness the creative acts of a Divine Being. For six days, God creates the

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heaven, the earth, the sun, the moon, vegetation, living creatures, and, on the sixth day, human beings. The one thing we know about God from the first chapter of *Genesis* is that God is a creator. On the sixth day (*Genesis* I: 27), “God created man in His own image”. Human beings are made in the image of a Divine creator. It seems reasonable to conclude that humans are also creators. The very first thing that God says to the new humans is (*Genesis* I: 28): “Be fruitful and multiply”. God is blessing these new creatures by encouraging them to create, to produce, to reproduce, and to be prolific.

In astrology, each of the 12 houses rules a specific area or segment of life. For example, the second house rules finances, the sixth house rules work, the seventh house rules marriage, etc. The fifth house rules creativity. When we engage in creative activity, when we produce, this is a manifestation of fifth house energy. The fifth house is linked with the ways in which we are creative (drama, music, art, romance) and the joy associated with those activities.<sup>7</sup> The fifth house is also associated with the products or fruits of creative activity. These fruits may include works of art, symphonies, plays, and most importantly for our purposes, the product of romance and love, namely children. In a natal chart, the fifth house represents one’s children. Hence, Isaac is Abraham’s fifth house. Isaac’s name in Hebrew is *Yitzhak* (יצחק) meaning “laughter.” Laughter is associated with joy and fun, and the fifth house is known as the house of fun or the house of joy because creating is considered joyful. From an astrological perspective, everything in the Biblical narrative points to the fact that *Yitzhak* is Abraham’s fifth house, the house of Abraham’s creative projects and the fruits of those creative projects.

## Renouncing the Fruits of One’s Labor

In *Genesis* 22, God asks Abraham to sacrifice Isaac as a burnt offering. On my astrological interpretation, God is asking Abraham to sacrifice, give up, or renounce the fruits of his creative activity. Renouncing the fruits of one’s labor is a common theme in mystical literature. For example, in the *Bhagavad Gita*,

Krishna tells Arjuna: “You have the right to work, but never to the fruit of work. You should never engage in action for the sake of reward. . . The wise unify their consciousness and abandon attachment to the fruits of action.”<sup>8</sup> The final chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* is very clear. As humans, we must perform actions. Each one of us has duties, responsibilities, or a *dharmic* path. We should not cease to

perform those duties. However, we should give up selfishly clinging to the fruits of those activities. Gandhi was once asked if he thought a particular march would change the British policy towards India. He responded: “That is none of my business.”<sup>9</sup> Despite the fact that Gandhi worked tirelessly for the independence of India, he gave up attachment to how it turned out. He performed his *dharma* by marching, but he renounced attachment to the fruits.

Rabbi Harold Kushner believes that we can find the same message in *Ecclesiastes*. The Book of *Ecclesiastes* repeatedly states that there is nothing better for a human being to do than find enjoyment in their work (their vocation or *dharma*) and to savor the moment.<sup>10</sup> It also recommends that, whatever we do, we do it with all of our might because we don’t know what the future holds.<sup>11</sup> In interpreting these passages, Rabbi Kushner states “If logic tells you that in the long run, nothing makes a dif-

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ference, then *don't live in the long run* . . . learn to savor the moment, even if it does not last forever.”<sup>12</sup> He further explains that the sages of the Talmud say that “‘One hour in this world is better than all of eternity in the World to come’ . . . I take that passage to mean that when we have truly learned how to live, we will not need to look for rewards in some other life . . . We totally misunderstand what it means to be alive when we think of our lives as time we can use in search of rewards.”<sup>13</sup> Kushner concludes that the message of *Ecclesiastes* is that we will be frantic and frustrated if we search throughout our lives looking for rewards or successes.<sup>14</sup> In the best known tractate of the Mishnah, *Pirkei Avos (Ethics of the Fathers)*, it says: “Be not like servants who serve their master for the sake of receiving a reward; instead be like servants who serve their master not for the sake of receiving a reward.”<sup>15</sup> To create or produce in order to receive a reward is essentially future oriented. As long as we think about a reward, as long as we think about the future, we are pulled out of the present moment.

## Mindfulness

Attention to the present moment or mindfulness is not only a central feature in Zen Buddhism, it is essential in Judaism. When God called to Abraham at the beginning of the *Akedah* narrative (*Genesis* 22:1), Abraham responded with a one word answer: “*Heneini*.” When God called to Moses from the burning bush (*Exodus* 3:4), Moses gave the identical one word response. “*Heneini*” (הנני) means “I am here” or “I am fully present.” The two most important figures in the Torah respond to God’s call by saying “I am fully present.” In the Jewish tradition, to do something with “*heneini* consciousness” means to do it with all your heart, all your soul and all your might. Thich Nhat Hanh defines mindfulness as “keeping one’s consciousness alive to the present reality.”<sup>16</sup> This is the Zen parallel of doing something with all your heart, soul and might.

In Judaism, the view that grounds mindfulness is found in *Isaiah* 6:3: “*Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh, Adonai tz’vaot, M’lo chol ha-aretz k’vodo*”:

קְבוֹדוֹ הָאֲרֶזְךָ בְּאוֹת מְלֵא כְּלֵץ דּוֹשׁ הַקְּדוֹשׁ קְ קְדוֹשׁ

Translated, it says: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord; the entire earth is filled with Divine glory.” Divine, radiant glory permeates the whole earth. There is no sacred-profane distinction. The entire earth is filled with Divine energy. When we are in *heneini* consciousness, we are aware of the holiness, the sacredness of the present moment. Martin Buber points out the the central commandment of Hasidic Judaism is the “the hallowing of the everyday.”<sup>17</sup>

The Zen teacher Cheri Huber says: “Please do not do yourself the disservice of assuming there is something to do that is more important than just being right here, right now, present.”<sup>18</sup> This ability to be fully present can only be achieved by abandoning the fruits of one’s labor. One of the slogans of the *lojong* teachings of Tibetan Buddhism is “Abandon any hope of fruition.”<sup>19</sup> This is the symbolic point made in the Biblical narrative when God asks Abraham to sacrifice Isaac (Abraham’s fifth house, the fruit of Abraham and Sarah’s creative activity). The astrological point is that Abraham is being asked to renounce the fruits of his labor. In order to be present to holiness, one must be present. One can’t be present when one clings to the future.

## Killing the Ram Interpreted as Egolessness

The second noble truth of Buddhism is that suffering is caused by clinging of mind or by selfish craving, i.e., wanting things to turn out a certain way (and then being disappointed when they don’t). The third noble truth recommends that we renounce our selfish craving or clinging (to results). Because the world is impermanent and ever changing, clinging will always lead to suffering. Clinging to an ever-changing world is like trying to hold on to a rushing stream. Since we will never make the world exactly as we want it to be, clinging to the world being a certain way inevitably leads to suffering. The only solution is to give up our clinging to results or the fruits of our actions. When we do something, we should do it with every fiber of our being; but it will turn out as it turns out. Clinging to it turning out a specific way is a recipe for disappointment and



frustration. Hence, on the mystical interpretation of the *Akedah*, God is telling Abraham that in order to obtain a more elevated level of consciousness (*heneini* consciousness); he must relinquish the attachments to the fruits of his creative activity.

Write books, sing songs, plant gardens, conceive children, but do not be attached to what is produced. This is symbolized perfectly by asking Abraham to sacrifice the most important symbol of the fifth house. Since Abraham and Sarah longed to have a child, *Yitzchak* is the perfect symbol of the fruits of one's creative action.

Therefore, Abraham goes to the land of Moriah to sacrifice his son. In his limited understanding of God's command, Abraham thinks that sacrificing the fruits of one's labor requires destroying or killing the product. If Abraham had written a book, he would have understood the Divine voice to command him to burn the book. So (*Genesis* 22:10), "Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son." At this point, God intervenes in order to expand Abraham's limited comprehension. God sends a ram (neither the lamb that Isaac expects nor a bull). The ram is, of course, Aries. Aries is the first sign of the Zodiac and represents the first house. The first house is the house of the ego, the house of the self.<sup>20</sup> Abraham must kill the ram that represents the ego or the self. This is the third noble truth, eliminate selfish craving. It is what Krishna tells Arjuna (*Bhagavad Gita* 18:11) when he says "true renunciation is giving up all desire for personal (selfish) reward." In terms of Jewish mysticism, the Hasidic Rabbi, Nachman of Bratzlav, insists, "You must nullify your ego completely, until you are included in God's own unity."<sup>21</sup> In commenting on *Deuteronomy* 5:5, the Hasidic Rabbi Michael of Zlotov said: "What stands between

you and God like a wall is your Ego. This I, this consciousness of a separate existence, is a wall between you and the Divinity."<sup>22</sup> The Buddhists, the Hindus, and the Kabbalists are all saying similar things. Egoism and selfishness are hindrances to achieving more exalted states. The Hindus call the exalted state "*samadhi*," a state in which the selfish agitations of the mind become so still that the meditator, act of meditation and object of meditation all become one.<sup>23</sup> The Buddhists call it "*nirvana*," a state of "no wind" in which selfish desires and egoistic cravings

are stilled. The Kabbalists call this state *yichud* (יחוד), or unification, a state in which there is no more egoistic wall separating a person from the Divine. As long as one clings to the fruits of one's actions, one has a selfish or egoistic desire that places a wall between oneself and the Divine. One must slay the ram, or nullify the ego in order to achieve more refined states of awareness. So, in order to renounce the fruits of his labor, Abraham need not destroy Isaac, he must slay the ram or nullify his ego. As long as we are locked into egocentric conditioning (*i.e.*, the experience of feeling oneself to be separate from life, separate from the present moment, or separate from God), we will experience "loneliness, fear, desperation, disconnection, deprivation, inadequacy, greed, hate and confusion."<sup>24</sup>

## Stillness

The technique taught in Jewish mysticism for destroying the ram or ego is the technique of meditation or quieting the mind.<sup>25</sup> At *Isaiah* 30:15, the prophet proclaims: "In sitting still and rest shall ye be saved. In quietness . . . shall be your strength." There is an emphasis on inner stillness in *Psalms*. For ex-

ample, at *Psalms* 4:5, it says: “Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.” And most dramatically, at *Psalms* 46:11, we find: “Be still and know I am God.” Elevated consciousness is achieved by quieting or calming the mind. This is reminiscent of Patanjali’s classic definition of Yoga (union with the Divine): “*Yogas citti-vritti-nirodha.*” Translated, it says: “Yoga is the calming of the agitations of the mind.”<sup>26</sup>

The connection between stillness and expanded consciousness is evident from the passage describing the ascent of Elijah to the mount of God (*I Kings* 19:11-12). At the top of the mountain, Elijah witnesses a strong wind, and earthquake and a fire. But Elijah discovers that the Lord was not in the wind; the Lord was not in the earthquake; and the Lord was not in the fire. It is only when Elijah hears the *still small voice* that he is in touch with the Divine. It is not through colossal shows of strength and power that we reach the highest state of consciousness but through stillness. Fancy fireworks displays are enjoyable, but to truly expand one’s consciousness, one must quiet down the inner agitations (desires, emotions, and thoughts). The founder of Hasidism, Israel Baal Shem Tov, states: “The world is full of wonders and miracles; but we take our hands, cover our eyes and see nothing.”<sup>27</sup> Radiance is everywhere. But we just don’t see it. The inner agitations of the mind prevent us from being fully present to the wonders that abound. Through meditation or quieting the mind, we become aware of the miraculous nature of life.

## Innocence

This nullification of the ego leads us to genuine innocence. In the Zen Buddhist tradition, Shunryu Suzuki discusses the importance of *shoshin* or beginner’s mind. A beginner’s mind is not a closed mind, but an empty and ready mind. It is the mind of innocence. An empty mind is always ready for anything and open to everything. “In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities; in

the expert’s mind there are few.”<sup>28</sup> He concludes, “When we have no thought of achievement, no thought of self, we are true beginners.”<sup>29</sup> In the Zen tradition, the innocence of a beginner is associated with giving up thoughts of self and relinquishing or renouncing thoughts of achievement and accomplishment.

This Zen concept has its origins in the Taoist idea of the uncarved block. In Chapter 28 of the *Tao-te-Ching*, Lao Tzu urges us to “return to the state of infancy” and to “return to the state of simplicity (uncarved wood).”<sup>30</sup> Lao Tzu urges us to become more simple and childlike. Benjamin Hoff made this the theme of his book, *The Tao of Pooh*. Hoff states:

From the state of the Uncarved Block comes the ability to enjoy the simple and the quiet, the natural and the plain. Along with that comes the ability to do things spontaneously and have them work, odd as that may appear to others at times. As Piglet put it in *Winnie-the-Pooh*, “Pooh hasn’t much Brain, but he never comes to any harm. He does silly things and they turn out right.”<sup>31</sup>

The entire point of Hoff’s book is to say that the innocent, simple-minded Pooh Bear is a perfect example of a Western Taoist. I would like to propose that the Zen concept of beginner’s mind, the Taoist concept of the uncarved block, with their emphasis on simplicity and innocence, has a parallel in the Biblical idea of slaying the ram or the ego.

In the West, both Jewish and Christian sources emphasize the importance of innocence. In *Mark* and *Luke*, we find the same story:

They brought children for Jesus to touch. The disciples rebuked them, but when Jesus saw it he was indignant, and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not try to stop them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you: whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will never enter it.”<sup>32</sup>

In the Hasidic tradition, there is the often-told story of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, who hesitated for a long time before blowing the *shofar* on *Rosh Hashanah*. After the congregation grew impatient, the Rebbe explained that there was an innocent, uneducated Jew standing in the back of the congregation. He was never taught how to pray. His knowledge of Hebrew was limited to the *aleph-bet*. So this innocent said to God: "Oh Great God, I am uneducated and ignorant. I cannot even recite the holy prayers from the book. I only know the 22 letters of the *aleph-bet*. So, I shall recite them for you: *aleph, bet, gimmel, dalet* . . . You, Lord, in your great wisdom and mercy, will weave them together into the words of a beautiful prayer." It was for this man that Levi-Yitzchak waited.<sup>33</sup> This innocent man prayed with more *kavanah*, more heart-felt intensity than the more "enlightened" members of the congregation. The child-like innocence of the man in the story is similar to the innocence of Winnie the Pooh. The lack of a sophisticated ego-structure is praised in Taoism, in Zen, by Jesus, and in the Hasidic tradition. This, I submit, is the true meaning of slaying Aries the Ram.

This is also, on my interpretation, the symbolic meaning of the story of "the (alleged) fall." In the Garden of Eden, there are two trees that are specifically mentioned. There is *Etz Chaim*, (עץ חיים), the Tree of Life; and of course there is *Etz Da-at Tov Va-Ra* ( ), the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The Hebrew word *Da-at* (דַּאֲ, "knowledge"),<sup>34</sup> has the sense of an opinion, a judgment, an outlook, a belief. It is the ability to distinguish.<sup>35</sup> If it is *Da-at Tov Va-ra*, it is the ability to distinguish good from evil, right from wrong. Once we eat from the tree of knowledge of duality, knowledge of opposites, right and wrong, good and bad, us and them, we have already left

Eden, the world of unitary consciousness or *yichud*. Now, it is inevitable, that, as humans, we conceptualize, rationalize, think, compare and contrast, adjudicate, arbitrate, and judge.

But, when we do that, we leave the world of unity and union, and enter the world of duality, the realm of opposites, the world of suffering.

So, how do we get back to *Etz Chaim*, the tree of Life, the world of the sacred? As sung by Joni Mitchell and also by Crosby, Stills and Nash in the song, *Woodstock*, "We've got to get back to the Garden." How do we do it? How do we tune into the divine channel?

By tuning into the world of duality, we cannot possibly get to the divine channel. It's like tuning into MTV<sup>36</sup> and hoping to find the Discovery Channel. In *Isaiah* 51:1, the prophet says: "Hearken to Me, Ye that seek the Lord: Look to the rock from which ye were hewn, the quarry from which you were digged." In other words, look to your roots, your source. Go back to your original state of non-duality or innocence. Go back to the state of the uncarved block or beginner's mind.

## Conclusion

Egocentricity, the view that we are separate and isolated from life, prevents us from seeing the holiness in life. In order to attain *heneini* consciousness, one must begin to dismantle the seductive ego-structure. From an astrological perspective, the binding of Isaac is not a story of the willingness of a faithful man to murder his own son. It is a symbolic tale instructing us that in order to reach God-consciousness (*yichud*), one must sacrifice the fruits of one's labor. Just as the exodus story is understood symbolically as the movement from the land of Egypt (*Metzraim* or limited consciousness) to the Promised Land of Israel (expanded consciousness),<sup>37</sup> the *Akedah* is un-

derstood as the path of the renunciation of the fruits of one's labor. How does one do that? Not by destroying the fruits, but by giving up selfish attachments to the fruits, thereby becoming more selfless and more innocent.

**Note:** The article has been previously published in the Summer 2005 issue of the *Esoteric Quarterly*.

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- <sup>1</sup> The standard interpretation of this passage is: "The purpose of the command was to apply a supreme test to Abraham's faith, thus strengthening his faith by the heroic exercise of it." *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs: Hebrew Text, English Translation and Commentary*, ed. Dr. J.H. Hertz, Late Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, 2nd ed. (London: Soncino Press, 1960), 201.
- <sup>2</sup> Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics & Moral Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 43.
- <sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Wurtzel, *Bitch: In Praise of Difficult Women* (New York: Random House, 1998), 36.
- <sup>4</sup> Jack Kornfield, *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry* (New York: Bantam, 2000), 55.
- <sup>5</sup> See Rabbi Philip Berg, *The Star Connection: The Science of Judaic Astrology* (New York: Research Centre of Kabbalah Press, 1986); Rabbi Joel Dobin, *The Astrological Secrets of the Hebrew Sages* (New York: Inner Traditions, 1977); and Matityahu Glazerson, *Above the Zodiac: Astrology in Jewish Thought* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson Inc., 1997). Dobin, 39-49.
- <sup>7</sup> Debby Kempton-Smith, *Secrets From a Stargazer's Notebook: Making Astrology Work for You* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 18.
- <sup>8</sup> *Bhagavad Gita* 2:47, 51, tr. Eknath Easwaran (Petaluma, California: Nilgiri Press, 1985), 66-67.
- <sup>9</sup> Bo Lozoff, *Bo Lozoff at Twin Rivers Corrections Center*, (Durham: Human Kindness Foundation, 1995), videocassette.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ecclesiastes* 2:24, 3:12, and 3:22.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ecclesiastes* 9:10.
- <sup>12</sup> Harold Kushner, *When All You've Ever Wanted Isn't Enough* (New York: Pocket Books, 1986), 141.
- <sup>13</sup> Kushner, 151-152.
- <sup>14</sup> Kushner, 152.
- <sup>15</sup> *Pirkei Avos* 1:3 (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1989), 9.

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- <sup>16</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness!* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), 11.
- <sup>17</sup> Martin Buber, *Hasidism* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948), 72.
- <sup>18</sup> Cheri Huber, *The Key* (Murphys, CA: Keep It Simple Books, 1984), 1.
- <sup>19</sup> Pema Chodron, *Start Where You Are* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1994), 96.
- <sup>20</sup> Kempton-Smith, 17.
- <sup>21</sup> Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, *The Light Beyond: Adventures in Hassidic Thought* (New York: Maznaim Publishing, 1981), 56.
- <sup>22</sup> Louis Newman, *The Hasidic Anthology* (New York: Schocken Books, 1963), 427.
- <sup>23</sup> I learned this from my teacher Shelley Trimmer. In fact the inspiration for this article came from him.
- <sup>24</sup> Huber, preface.
- <sup>25</sup> Jeffrey Gold, "Spiritual Zionism," *Dialogue & Alliance* 5, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 59.
- <sup>26</sup> Patanjali, *Yoga Sutras* I: 2.
- <sup>27</sup> *Siddur Hadash*, ed. Rabbi Sidney Greenberg and Rabbi Jonathan D. Levine (New York: The Prayer Book Press, 2000), 80.
- <sup>28</sup> Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* (New York: Weatherhill, 1970), 21.
- <sup>29</sup> Shunryu Suzuki, 22.
- <sup>30</sup> Lao Tzu, *Tao-te-Ching*, tr. Wing-tsit Chan (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), 149.
- <sup>31</sup> Benjamin Hoff, *The Tao of Pooh* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1982), 21.
- <sup>32</sup> *Mark* 10:13-16 and *Luke* 18:15-17.
- <sup>33</sup> See Samuel Dresner, *The World of a Hasidic Master: Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev* (New York: Shapolsky Publishers, 1986), 99-100; Jacob Minkin, *The Romance of Hassidism* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1955), 166; and Elie Wiesel, *Souls on Fire* (New York: Summit Books, 1972), 109.
- <sup>34</sup> Interestingly, *Da-at* is the mysterious *sefirah* that is the balance point between *Chochmah* and *Binah*.
- <sup>35</sup> Mattis Kantor, *Ten Keys for Understanding Human Nature* (New York: Zichron Press, 1994), 34-37.
- <sup>36</sup> MTV, Music Television, is a popular cable television channel in the United States.
- <sup>37</sup> For an expanded treatment of the symbolic interpretation of the exodus story, see Jeffrey Gold, 52-65.

## Book Review

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**Anna Raimondi, *Conversations with Mary: Messages of Love, Healing, Hope, and Unity for Everyone***, New York: Atria, 2017. Paperback, 192 pages. List price US\$22.00; typical retail price US\$13.96. Also available in hardcover and digital format.

The market is awash with books claiming to be channeled, dictated, or otherwise communicated by higher beings, and esotericists struggle to discern the few that may be authentic. Supportive criteria include intellectual merit, the promotion of love, and the author/scribe's humility; contraindicators include flattery of the author and exploitation for personal gain. Most of us have a short list of "approved" authors and dismiss others, particularly new arrivals on the scene. Few of us are entirely free from bias.

When a coworker encouraged me to read Anna Raimondi's *Conversations with Mary*, I was suspicious but tried to keep an open mind. After a dozen-or-so pages my suspicions eased, and by the end I was persuaded that the book is probably authentic. Perhaps I also learned to be less rigid in my judgment of other authors.

*Conversations with Mary* claims to have been dictated by Mary, the mother of Jesus. Anna Raimondi describes herself as a "motivational speaker, teacher, intuitive and author," whose "mission is to give others the tools they need to live their lives in joy, while following their souls' mission."<sup>1</sup> Significantly, the author is a lifelong Roman Catholic, well acquainted with traditional Marian devotion and the reported apparitions at Guadalupe, Lourdes, Fátima and elsewhere. She is also familiar with references to Mary in the Christian canonical and extracanonial scriptures and in the Qur'an.

Raimondi believes that the book is not her own: "I knew that the book would be Mary speaking.... Whether she was waking me up in the middle of the night, interrupting my thoughts, or speaking as I sat at my computer, I let whatever she had to say come through. I didn't write this book... Mary did. With utmost

care I typed as she dictated" (p. 189). What does the author feel when taking dictation? "Mary's energy is soft yet strong, and overwhelms me. Often, my heart will begin to race and thoughts start flooding my mind" (p. 190).

The book consists of a brief introduction followed by ten chapters in question-and-answer format, addressing topics like "What is a soul," "Why are we here," and "What happens when we die." Ostensibly the author asks the questions and Mary responds, but the actual process was more complicated: "Before sitting down to write, I pray and meditate. I feel the presence of Mary and begin to write. She sometimes gives me the answers and I have to go back and write the questions. Sometimes, she gives me both" (p. 189). Each chapter is followed by a guided meditation to raise awareness of Mary and, where appropriate, to draw upon ideas from the preceding discussion.

I read *Conversations with Mary* soon after writing of Mary's communications to Theosophist Geoffrey Hodson.<sup>2</sup> Raimondi seems generally familiar with the esoteric literature; but she does not refer to Hodson's work, or to any similar work on Mary, and we do not know whether she was aware of or influenced by it. The topic material does overlap to a degree, permitting useful comparisons. For example, in her introduction, Raimondi speaks—as did Hodson—of Mary as a personification of the Feminine Aspect of Deity, one of several such personifications that include the Buddhist Kuan Yin (p. 11). But Mary's communications to Raimondi are more voluminous than those reported by Hodson and are addressed to a different readership: the general public rather than an esoteric elite.

In the introduction Raimondi recalls a personal apparition when she was five years old: "She [Mary] said, 'Anna, I am here for you always. Always come to me.' A total unconditional love overtook me, there was a feeling that was

and remains so extraordinary and so difficult to describe in words.” Raimondi continues:

I knew without a doubt that this was Mary, although she didn't look like the renderings I had seen of her in books or even in churches. She was dressed in a well-worn brown robe, the fabric appeared rough, but radiated warmth. There was a light brown dress underneath. She had olive skin, wide, soft mahogany-colored eyes and coffee-colored hair that hung to her waist where a hemp belt was tied and held her dress together. She wore a tan-colored covering adorning the top of her head, but no hood. Her face stood out in repose. Her penetrating eyes captured my attention (p. 2).<sup>3</sup>

Mary describes the physical form she assumed in Palestine 2,000 years ago: “[A]s a Middle Eastern woman, my skin was dark, my eyes a deep brown, and I was small in stature.... My dark wavy hair came down to my waist” (p. 17). And that was how she appeared to the five-year-old Raimondi.

The apparition was atypical in that respect. More generally, as Hodson also noted, Mary adjusts her appearance to conform to people's expectations. She explains to Raimondi: “I look like what the beholder wants me to look like. If one wants me to be of fair skin and light eyes, so be it. If that brings comfort, so be it.” Mary goes on to say: “I am a being now of love and comfort. I have no skin color and all skin colors. I have no distinguishing features now and yet carry the beauty of all the world as I embrace your energies and raise your vibrations” (p. 17).

Raimondi questions her source about the account in the *Infancy Gospel of James* of Mary's presentation in the temple. Mary confirms the accuracy of the account, explaining: “With heavy hearts, yet ones filled with gratitude for their [her aged parents'] blessings, I was given to the temple at the age of three to be raised by the priests in the ways of my religion and my people.” Mary continues: “It was with great sorrow that they [her mother and father] passed on when I was but a young girl. They passed prior to my betrothal to Joseph well before the birth of my son” (p. 22). That

information conflicts with the visions of eighteenth-century stigmatic Anne Catherine Emmerich who “saw” Anna and Joachim at Mary's and Joseph's wedding.<sup>4</sup> Which version is correct remains an open question.

Mary shares her experience as a young person in Palestine: “When I was a girl, I played, laughed, and cried as girls do. My life as a child was not extraordinary although my faith and love for God was always foremost” (p. 17). Later in life that carefree attitude changed as she saw Jesus grow up and undertake his redemptive mission: “Even as time moved on, and I began to recognize the purpose of my son's life and death, my pain was raw. I accepted his life's journey and my part in it.... It was as difficult as life on earth can ever be. I knew he lived for a bigger purpose and took my solace in that” (p. 16).

Raimondi presses Mary on her sufferings during Jesus' passion and death, and Mary replies candidly and at some length:

I endured great emotional pain during my son's last days and during his persecution. I witnessed the purity of his love as he spread it to all people even as he was rejected. As a mother and a person who loved him and his message, the way people treated him caused me great pain. I didn't understand fully the true reason for the circumstances of my son's suffering for it wasn't revealed to me until later. Yet, my faith in God never wavered. I was angry at those who tortured him and tormented him. I was angry and frustrated that people could not understand that Jesus came to show them how to save themselves. Instead they killed the one who lived for them. People say that Jesus died for the sins of mankind. That is not totally true. He lived for the sins of mankind; to help teach people how to live and not to sin and transgress against God; and yet they couldn't hear his message. They couldn't see that he only wanted to love them and bring them the peace they were looking for. God did not destroy my son's flesh; men did. As his mother, the one who brought him into the world and loved him as only a mother could, the pain my son endured tore



at me and left a piece of me frayed. I grieved for Jesus and longed for him the rest of my days on earth. I went on and lived my life, giving and receiving, smiling and crying, but never forgetting the pain. The pain was housed in my heart, but my life went on. I recognized that life is a gift and must be lived. I lived for my son and my other children and helped spread Jesus' message. At my death, God granted me the release of my feelings of anger and forgiveness. I so loved my son, grieved and missed him. Yet I recognized within days of his passing that his words and the goodness he spoke of would change my people and the entire world if they would only listen. And so it was and so it is (p. 63-64).

Mary confirms what Hodson and other Theosophists said about her status in the Planetary Hierarchy: "I am an Ascended Master,<sup>5</sup> as are many other souls. I was also chosen by God to bring the Truth forward as the mother. I am the blue vibration of truth. I am the Queen of Angels and heaven." She goes on to speak of her mission: "I am here, as the other masters in spirit and the angels, to teach and enlighten my children and lead all to the kingdom. I pray that my messages will be heard and the world find love and peace" (p. 32). "Blue vibration" would seem to place Mary on the Second Ray, and that would be consistent with what we know of her mission.

Throughout their conversations Mary stresses the importance of prayer. For example: "You should pray for the end of suffering" and for healing of humanity and the planet. Yet she cautioned against discouragement when efforts to heal a sick person seem to fail. "Remember," she added, people "pass through life and dwell in the kingdom.... Don't cry for those who pass on; rejoice for they are with God" (p. 172).

Among the many forms of prayer Mary encouraged use of the Rosary: "The Rosary is a powerful weapon against evil. It is not only in the prayers said on the beads, but in the energy it creates in the repetition of the prayers. The prayers become a mantra and raise the vibration in and around all who say it" (p. 134).

Mary has also promoted the Rosary in apparitions from the thirteenth century onward.

Prayer is important, but Mary emphasizes that "prayers must be followed with action: compassion and love for all people must be demonstrated." And lest her comments on the Rosary suggest a disproportionate focus on Roman Catholic prayer, she adds: "I am the Queen of Peace for all people. I don't speak peace for only a select few but for the world" (p. 67).

Inclusiveness is reiterated in Mary's support for religious diversity: "Any religion that focuses on sharing love and peace is good but there is no 'one perfect religion.' ... The chosen people don't fill one church or temple and not another.... A religion should be welcoming of all people, for all people were created by God" (pp. 93-94). Mary also reassured people who claim to be "spiritual rather than religious": "It is not necessary to join a group but proclaim God in your heart and share that Love with others!" (p. 105).

Mary discusses the afterlife, explaining: "Upon entering the Divine realm all must go through a life review.... All must see and feel the love and happiness that they gave and received as well as the hate, anger and pain given to others" (p. 111). Eventually they reincarnate in new bodies. "Earth is indeed a classroom, a place to learn to be closer to and to unite with God. Those souls who have lived in opposition to the Truth must return to earth to learn what they didn't learn." They must "leave the realm of pure Love and return to human form." Similarly, people who strive for perfection but fall short of their goal "choose to come back to the earth to become 'better' and more loving. They also come back to teach others about love and to heal the planet and its people" (p. 113). The author seems to experience little difficulty reconciling the notion of reincarnation with traditional church belief that we have only one lifetime.

On its long journey to perfection the soul passes through five "levels," which Mary compared with infancy, childhood, adolescence, maturity, and old age—this last being the level of the "old soul" (pp. 152-153). These levels

do not correlate with the five major initiations; rather they seem to be stages on the Path of Aspiration and possibly the earliest stages of the Path of Discipleship. After reaching the fifth level, the seeker must still “surrender to God, recognize his great love and truly love and have compassion for yourself and others. You must give up the cravings of the ego, and sit in prayer and meditation to connect with God. You must live your life in accordance with the will of God” (p. 153).

One of the advantages of continuing revelation, as compared with an original deposit of faith like scripture, is the opportunity to receive guidance on contemporary issues. For example Raimondi asks Mary “whether or not it is moral for two women or two men to be married and have a family.” Mary replies: “If there is love between two people and they are in line with what is good in the world, and follow God, then it is right. God does not oppose. They can be a family. If they bring children into the unit, that is also a family.” She adds significantly: “God is not judging the sexual desires of people. If people love each other, so be it.” (p. 96). Again, the author seems open to an understanding of sexuality that may differ from her church’s official policy.

Geoffrey Hodson felt obliged to conceal much of his dedication to Mary from the Theosophists who formed his primary teaching audience—and even from the Liberal Catholic Church, which he served as a priest. No doubt because of the tradition of Roman Catholic devotion to Mary, Anna Raimondi feels no such constraint. She has the opportunity to integrate the growing knowledge of Mary into her larger ministry of teaching and healing—and further Mary’s desire for self-revelation. The frequency of Marian apparitions has accelerated over the last century or two, and she has appeared to or communicated with peasant children, Christians and non-Christians, esotericists, and many more. Mary comments in this book: “The people are ready” (p. 32).

*Conversations with Mary* adds little to the corpus of esoteric knowledge, but neither does it conflict with such knowledge. The book’s primary value lies in its potential to teach basic

esoteric truths to a popular audience, beyond the reach of the mainstream esoteric literature. Raimondi and Mary communicate important truths in language ordinary people can understand, standing aside from both esoteric complexity and religious dogma, but promoting a message of love, goodwill, healing and inclusiveness.<sup>6</sup> The book provides information about Mary’s childhood not found in scripture. And it shares her reflections, from the standpoint of a mother and an initiate, on the life in which she bore, raised, and then witnessed the crucifixion of her son. As Hodson also noted, Mary is entirely “feminine,” while speaking with the authority of World Mother and Queen of the Angels.

Cynics may dismiss the book as a work of pious fiction or a publicity stunt by the author. Others may be persuaded of its authenticity and appreciate the opportunity to witness a dialog with Mary. They may be attracted by the level of detail in her teachings and by the sense of immediacy—even intimacy—the author captures. Readers must make up their own minds. This reviewer believes the book has considerable value and recommends the book to all esoteric students interested in the nature and role of Mary and to traditional Christians eager to expand their horizons beyond the customary bounds of Marian doctrine and devotion.

Contributed by John F. Nash  
Johnson City, Tennessee

<sup>1</sup> Source: <https://www.annaraimondi.com/> (Last accessed May 2, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> John F. Nash, Adept, Queen, Mother, Priestess: Mary in the Writings of Geoffrey Hodson,” *The Esoteric Quarterly* (Winter 2019), 37-65.

<sup>3</sup> In all direct quotes punctuation and capitalization follow usage in the text.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Palairt (ed.), *The Life of the Blessed Virgin Mary from the Visions of Ven. Anne Catherine Emmerich* (Charlotte, NC: Tan Books, 1954/1970), 133.

<sup>5</sup> The term “Ascended Master” is confined mainly to New Age literature. The trans-Himalayan teachings refer to fifth-degree initiates simply as “Masters” or “Adepts.” In the



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western esoteric tradition they are referred to variously as Adepts, Elder Brothers, or Inner Chiefs.

<sup>6</sup> Mary generally stood aloof from doctrinal

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issues in her apparitions, an exception being the one at Lourdes (1858) in which Mary declared “I am the Immaculate Conception.”

## Festival of Easter 2019

## The Way from Suffering to Joy

Kenneth Sørensen

We are once again approaching the spring equinox and the full moon in Aries, also called the Festival of Easter, which marks the beginning of the Three Linked Festivals during which the defining energies of the new year will be invoked, received and distributed to humanity.

We can participate in this blessing by embodying these energies through our own initiatory efforts, which is not an easy task. It entails learning to work through points of crisis, points of tension and points of emergence to mature in our capacity to contribute responsibly to the common good.<sup>1</sup> In some cases our maturation process might imply going through a crisis in which we examine how we engage with the world; it can involve acknowledging life transitions and confronting feelings of loneliness as a challenge to work through and dissipate the illusion of separateness, and then emerge into a New Life affirming the reality of the One Soul. A symbol that is related to the Festival of Easter is the Gethsemane moment narrated in Matthew 26:38. It exemplifies what it takes to bring in New Life and the fact that many of us fail to register the potency of the moment.

The Easter Festival is an opportunity to align ourselves with incoming purpose, the New Life and the resurrecting energies of Aries. We face once again a death and resurrection cycle in which we can let go of the old self in order to be reborn through an act of the will. Our challenge is to face the conflict by choosing between the personal will and the Transpersonal or Monadic Will, a choice between prolonged captivity or freedom.

### ***Taking on the Cross of Responsibility***

The symbolism of the Easter Festival is about surrendering the personal will to the divine source, symbolically aligning each of the three vehicles—the mental, emotional and physical

bodies—with the New Life. In the Gethsemane episode Jesus took three disciples with him, but none of them was able to stay “awake” during the spiritual crisis, they all fell into a deep sleep, which is one of the prominent defense mechanisms of the personality. Not paying attention—allowing oneself to forget one’s responsibilities—is what we all must guard against during this cycle.

The Master Jesus knew what was coming—the descent into hell and resurrection into life more abundant. And with a determined will and loving kindness, *he showed us the way from suffering to joy and the science of redemption.*

We would all benefit from pondering the following questions:

- What is my responsibility for ushering in the New Life?
- How large a load will I be able to carry?
- When will I embrace this New Life? How will I do it?
- What must die in me in order that I might resurrect?
- What fears, resistances and avoidances must I face, see-through and redeem in order that I might embrace this New Life and fulfil my potential?

Master Jesus faced his decision alone, unaided by his close disciples, and it is through this burning ground that we must all pass in order to become like tempered steel.

### ***Vitalization of the Spiritual Warrior***

Aries channels Rays One and Seven, which means that this is a time for decision, action and the reorganization of all our available resources. There is also at this time a tremendous desire and will to realize and manifest the New Life in a physical way, like the buds of spring bursting out of the ground. Aries is a sign that signifies Battle, due to the Sixth Ray

of Mars and the Fourth Ray of Mercury; Aries brings new dynamic ideas, which *insist* on being incarnated; Aries also provides a fighting spirit to help us oppose the energies of transgression in our subconscious and the surrounding culture.

The four key notes in Aries are the will:

1. To express the will to be and to do;
2. To unfold the power to manifest;
3. To enter into battle for the Lord;
4. To arrive at unity through effort. <sup>2</sup>

Drawing upon all of these insights, we can conclude that receiving the energies of Aries is a call to become spiritual warriors—and this will test our courage because there is no renewal without conflict and we better have our motives right during battle.

### ***The Great Redemptive Experiment***

In *Education in the New Age* we read that esotericism is the science of redemption<sup>3</sup>, so let us pause and contemplate what we are here to redeem. We learn that we are descending Solar Lords partaking in a great experiment, which the Tibetan speaks about in this way:

This theme of redemption (which underlies all the initiatory processes) is hidden in the karmic responsibilities of Sanat Kumara; stage by stage, initiation by initiation, disciples arrive at an understanding of redemption. First of all, they learn to bring about the redemption of the threefold personality; then the concept enlarges along parallel lines as they seek the redemption of their fellow human beings; later, they share the redemptive work connected with all true hierarchical endeavor and become an “active part of a redeeming Ashram.” At the later initiations, and after the fifth Initiation of Revelation, they see with a new clarity some of the karmic liabilities that have led the planetary Logos to create this planet of suffering, sorrow, pain and struggle; they realize then (and with joy) that this little planet is essentially unique in its purpose and its techniques, and that on it and within it (if you could but penetrate below the surface) a great redemptive experiment is going forward; its prime implementing

factors and its scientific agents are the “sons of mind who choose to be the sons of men and yet for all eternity remain the Sons of God.” These “sons of mind” were chosen, in that far distant time when the fourth kingdom in nature came into being, to carry forward the science of redemption.<sup>4</sup>

We are here on planet Earth to raise the frequency of energies, to transfigure the planetary consciousness into a living expression of love-wisdom, to transform the “planet of suffering, sorrow, pain and struggle” into a joyful and harmonious interconnected whole. This is why we enter into battle for the Lord! However, we soon discover that the battle is internal, because the warring forces are in our innermost being; we also intuit that the peace and harmony we endeavor to manifest are also inside, located at the center of the heart, where we find joy and the fountain of endless summers.

We are here to redeem our three basic vehicles and through this effort redeem the group body we have chosen to serve and in which we live, move and have our being. We realize that it is through our own self-initiated growth and (partial) enlightenment that we can step into a position to serve. We serve through our radiation to the degree that we can allow our Solar Angel to shine through; we serve through our ability to create new thoughtforms and manifest them in tangible forms that can act as a vessel for the divine life.

We might ask ourselves during this full moon:

- What will I sacrifice (put to death) to be of greater service to the group?
- What types of physical forms have I created that can be used to clothe new ideas?

### ***Finding our Planetary Address through the Seven Rays***

To partake in the redeeming effort of the planetary Logos we must find our “planetary address” in the larger scheme; we must find our unique redemptive function and role in the divine Plan. A crucial key in this respect, according to Alice Bailey, is for each of us to “discover the nature of one’s own qualified energies (and here the nature of the governing rays

enters in) which are expressing themselves through one's three lower vehicles of manifestation, and later through one's integrated personality."<sup>5</sup>

The rays of our Soul and personality, the rays of the three vehicles, the sun sign and the rising sign, all of these will guide us to our planetary address by informing us about the nature of our redeeming purpose. They designate the type of energies we must learn to identify, observe, control and harmonise, and the sorts of groups we must collaborate with.

We can all participate in the inauguration of the new psychology of energies by building a new thoughtform representation:

You can – if you so desire – help construct the thoughtform of the New Age teaching. You do this, above all, by your thought; by your practical application of any truth, which you may have understood, to your personal life at any cost; by your sacrifice and your service to your fellow human beings and by the constant dissemination of any knowledge that you may possess.<sup>6</sup>

So how can we prepare ourselves for the New Life that rushes in with the full moon in Aries?

We can align ourselves with our subjective affiliations and objective groups and with the purpose that lies behind our efforts of service—this is basic.

We can also strengthen our identification with the Observer—that point of pure consciousness and will—so we don't fall asleep.

In a message to the disciple W.O.I., the Tibetan affirms the necessity of reflecting on the Observer and the value of observing the Observer. The Tibetan creates an illuminating review of the attitude of the Observer<sup>7</sup>. Some of his suggestions are particularly relevant when it comes to the theme of redemption, as follows:

21. I am the redeemer of the lower nature. In what way does observation aid in this redemption?

22. Does redeeming force, released through observation, pour through me?

23. In what fashion will the observation of the Observer bring changes in my life, my habits, and my attitudes?

It can be said that we are not just consciousness but also a potent dynamic will, which is emphasized during the month in Aries. The degree of will and its evolutionary stage are reflected in what we do as individuals and as groups. As we increase our ability to shoulder responsibility and take on leadership, we stop being a follower and start being an initiator. So further themes for reflection could be:

- What have I done in the last year to prepare the ground for the New Life?
- How successful and efficient have I been?
- How much time did I spend on my personal needs and how much on my group's needs?
- How can I purify and expand my influence in the world and thereby help to redeem the particular aspect of humanity I am pledged to serve?

Let us all prepare ourselves for our “Gethsemane Moment” and together step into the stream of death and resurrection so that we might build the way for the One who comes.

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<sup>1</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *The Reappearance of the Christ* (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1948), 68.

<sup>2</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology* (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1951), 93.

<sup>3</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *Education in the New Age* (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1954), 65.

<sup>4</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age, Vol. 2*, (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1955), 385.

<sup>5</sup> op.cit., *Education in the New Age*, 66.

<sup>6</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology, Vol. 2* (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1942), 712-713.

<sup>7</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age, Vol. 1*, (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1944), 443.

## Deepening Our Understanding of the Science of Redemption

Dorothy I. Riddle

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As we approach the Wesak Festival this year, we do so in the context of our Subjective Group Conference on the Science of Redemption, or the shift in focus from suffering to joy. We know that Wesak is a time of increased clarity and a time when the “energies of enlightenment”<sup>1</sup> are most abundantly available to us for distribution. Presumably then this is the time of year when we are best able to gain new perspectives and deepen our understanding of our role and purpose.

For centuries, spiritual focus has assumed that redemption occurs through pain and suffering, through paying a price so that we may then be “lifted up.” This traditional perspective has resulted in a definition of redemption as being “the action of saving or being saved from sin, error or evil.” The Tibetan has commented on this influence from Christianity as follows:

The Christian interpretation of the Will of God and of the significance of sacrifice is based, in reality, on human revolt and on human refusal to see anything in the spiritual life but an unintelligent acceptance of the inscrutable divine Will; it posits also the need for pain and the suffering of sacrifice in the sense of complete abnegation of all that might be regarded as good and useful, as desirable and joyful.... This presentation involves the unavoidable imposition of the will of a transcendental Deity, and leads inevitably (though totally inconclusively) to the dreadful and symbolic death of the Christ upon the Cross and to the painful and sacrificial life of the spiritual individual.<sup>2</sup>

In this Wesak Festival talk, I would like to propose that we shift our focus to the alternate definition of redemption as being “the action of regaining possession in exchange for payment.” I suggest that what we are regaining is the memory of who we really are, that “we are

*spiritual* beings having a human experience, not humans having a spiritual experience.”<sup>3</sup> The “payment” that we are to make is our increased responsibility to act with “self-forgetfulness, harmlessness, and right speech” as our awareness or consciousness expands. “The Science of Redemption ... is in reality the applied art of esotericism and of spiritual living,... the art or science of relationship between the One Life and the [individual] lives.”<sup>4</sup> If we are truly part of the One Life, does our essence need “saving”?

To truly live the assertion that “esotericism is the Science of Redemption,”<sup>5</sup> we will need a paradigm shift away from assuming that we begin as entities that need “saving” and toward embracing joy as our base state: “[An important] characteristic of the new server is *joyfulness*. This takes the place of criticism (that dire creator of misery) and is the *silence that sounds*.<sup>6</sup> As the Tibetan has admonished: “The cup of sorrow and the agony of the Cross are well-nigh finished. Joy and strength will take their place.”<sup>7</sup>

### ***Dissolving and Eliminating Negative Energy***

Remembering and strengthening our relationship to the One Life does indeed bring with it joy, “which is a quality of the Soul and is realized in the mind when alignment takes place.”<sup>8</sup> It also brings an awareness of the contrasting harm that has and continues to be perpetrated by humanity. Our responsibility, the “payment” we owe, is to both behave harmlessly and to mitigate harm originating from others. While group initiatives such as the Triangles work play an important role in directing energy towards restructuring and strengthening the etheric field, we also have a responsibility for reversing and eliminating the negative impact of humanity on the communal etheric field:

A gigantic thoughtform hovers over the entire human family, built by individuals everywhere during the ages, energized by the insane desires and evil inclinations of all that is worst in human nature, and kept alive by the promptings of humanity's lower desires. This thoughtform has to be broken up and dissipated by humanity itself. (*A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, 948).

We might be able eliminate recently formed thoughtforms by simply refusing to lend energy to them, but that strategy will do nothing for the firmly established, highly energized, ancient thoughtforms that have been gaining in strength over the centuries. We see such thoughtforms strengthening further as hate speech, autocratic rule, and inhumane practices multiple today.

On an energetic level, our “payment” is to cleanse our environment of the glammers and illusions that have accumulated over time so that they no longer have the power to influence us. Some of you are already aware of, and participate in, the Cleansing Initiative that the School for Esoteric Studies launched in 2016 to remove from the astral and mental planes the glammers and negative thoughtforms that reinforce the great heresy of separativeness and thus support the violence that is so prevalent in our communities. Specific information is available at [www.esotericstudies.net/group-project-cleansing.html](http://www.esotericstudies.net/group-project-cleansing.html). Please consider joining this initiative as part of your practice of redemption if you haven't done so already.

### ***Enacting Energetic Protections***

Removing historic influences is clearly not enough to bring an end to separatism and divisiveness. Through the exercise of free will, all of us are perfectly capable of acting in ways that are “not” in alignment with our “true” selves. In the earlier versions of the Great Invocation, there is the phrase “Construct a great defending wall.”<sup>9</sup> The Tibetan explains that it is meant to express “Thus far and no further. The limit of effectiveness of the evil expression and of the power of the aggressors has been reached if the disciples and the people of goodwill actually now play their proper part.

Symbolically, they can put up an impregnable wall of spiritual light that will utterly confound the enemy of humanity. It will be a wall of energy – vibrating, protective, and at the same time of such power that it can repulse those who seek to pass in their pursuit of evil and wicked objectives.”<sup>10</sup>

Constructing and reinforcing such an energetic wall is an important component of our responsibility, as stated in the Great Invocation currently in use to “seal the door where evil dwells.” Maintaining such energetic protections requires a continuous monitoring of how our focus is directed. One of the common methods used is daily mantras and affirmations. To assist in maintaining a protective and empowering energetic focus, the School has developed a weekly sequence of service mantras or meditations for use – in addition to the Great Invocation, the daily noon recollection, and the daily recitation of the Mantra of the New Group of World Servers – that includes:

Monday Mantra of a Disciple

Tuesday Invocation for the United Nations

Wednesday Affirmation of Goodwill

Thursday Meditation for the Reappearance of the Coming One

Friday Mantra of Unification

Saturday Pledge as a Server

Sunday Meditation on Attracting Money for Spiritual Purposes

The above are only suggestive. We encourage you to develop your own weekly rhythm as the regularity will add potency to your service work. If you are not familiar with any of the above, you can find them at [www.esotericstudies.net/meditation-sequence.html](http://www.esotericstudies.net/meditation-sequence.html). We invite you to join School members in using the sequence given above as part of your practice of redemption.

### ***Inclusive Social Action***

A third component of the “payment” is to take a more explicit and public stand for inclusiveness by calling out or denouncing harm in all of its forms. In general, the spiritual community has more practice in sending loving energy

than in stopping violence that is occurring. However, if we do not act when violence is contemplated or occurring, then we become complicit. Remaining silent is not an option.

The School's most recent initiative, focused on inclusive social action, is intended to address our need to find ways to take public, practical action. What we mean by "inclusive social action" is intentional action to stop specific violence in a manner that does not further divisiveness, grounded in an awareness that we are all interconnected and in this together. To ensure that the action does not exacerbate divisiveness, it must spring from compassion. In essence we are proposing a kind of "tough love" on a societal scale.

There is no one right way to take a stand. It depends on the circumstances and the perceived motivations of the perpetrators of harm. Rather than prescribe what action to take, the School has launched a series of White Papers to begin to articulate the issues. Those White Papers can be found at [www.esotericstudies.net/white-papers.html](http://www.esotericstudies.net/white-papers.html) along with summaries that other groups may use in newsletters to stimulate discussion. We are also posting comments that we have received, which indicate global interest in exploring the issues together. We invite you to join the School in examining how we can best engage in non-divisive redemptive actions that will declare "No more!" and "Enough!" to those who would purposefully engage in harm.

### ***Moving Forward***

The Festival of Wesak provides us with an unparalleled opportunity to engage with the con-

cept of redemption in a new way. We have grown past the period of self-absorption and can now embrace the reality that "joy is the strong basic note of our particular solar system."<sup>11</sup> As we rethink what is meant by redemption, we have the opportunity to expand our sense of responsibility to include ensuring that our shared energetic environment, our participation in the One Life, is joyously affirming and free of harmful energies.

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- <sup>1</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *The Externalisation of the Hierarchy* (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1957), 484.
  - <sup>2</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age, Volume 2* (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1955), 379-380.
  - <sup>3</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.
  - <sup>4</sup> *op.cit*, *Externalisation*, 693-694.
  - <sup>5</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *Education in the New Age* (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1954), 65.
  - <sup>6</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology, Volume 2* (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1942), 133.
  - <sup>7</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations* (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1960), 233-234.
  - <sup>8</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic* (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1934), 369.
  - <sup>9</sup> *op.cit*, *Externalisation*, 249.
  - <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.
  - <sup>11</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology, Volume 1* (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1936), 49.

## Festival of Goodwill 2019

## Goodwill: Accessing Joy

Anna Vicenzino

We are now approaching the third and final highpoint of the Three Linked Festivals, a period when aspirants and disciples, subjectively united, renew their efforts to contact and work with the Spiritual Hierarchy.

*The Redemptive Energies of Gemini*

This year's Subjective Group Conference theme is especially linked to the Festival of Goodwill and the Gemini energies. During this full moon we have the opportunity to further integrate our spiritual nature with our human expression. In Gemini we are summoned to embrace "the force that produces the changes needed for the evolution of the Christ consciousness"<sup>1</sup> and "the resolution of duality into a fluid synthesis."<sup>2</sup>

"Duality" is represented in this constellation by the two cosmic twins, Castor and Pollux. The former symbolizes the mortal aspect, the personality or incarnate human being; the latter symbolizes the immortal Self, the Soul, or discarnate spiritual being. Gemini stands for "the service that the two brothers must render to each other in producing the dissolution ... of the separative relation that exists for so long between them."<sup>3</sup> Therefore, this period of the year is especially appropriate for working on the "task of bringing together the two poles of [our] being and of coordinating, or at-one-ing, Soul and body, so that duality gives place to unity and the pairs of opposites are blended."<sup>4</sup> By observing and working on remembering our true nature, we may deepen our reflective ability and produce fusion. We may find it helpful to reflect on some questions, for example:

- Am I aware of the two poles of my being?
- When does the higher nature find a way to express itself?
- What factors limit that expression?
- What helps to eliminate such obstacles?

Because of the influence of the Fourth Ray of Mercury, the exoteric ruler of Gemini, there are two central experiences related to this constellation: Harmony through Conflict and the Divine Intermediary. The Fourth Ray, the middle point between the first three and the last three rays, reproduces in each of its manifestations the contrast of the poles and the intrinsic capacity to resolve "the sense of duality that is the basic factor in the conflict between desire and spiritual will."<sup>5</sup>

Harmony through Conflict is the keynote of the Fourth Ray and of the fourth kingdom. We know that in the life of any living being, individual or planetary, there are crises and challenges to undergo. This quality of the Fourth Ray promotes the aim of progressively purifying and integrating the three personality vehicles so that they can become clearer channels for divine energy. Awareness of this can help us persevere in the work of redemptive integration, both personal and collective. The certainty of the goal and of our eventual success can be an incentive in the spiritual work that every aspirant and disciple undertakes along the luminous Path.

The intermediary aspect applies both to the individual and to humanity. In the individual it expresses through the mind, the intermediary principle between the Spiritual Triad and the threefold personality; in humanity we serve as the intermediary between the kingdoms on Earth and the kingdom of Souls, the fifth kingdom. The human kingdom—the fourth— is thus intricately connected and expresses the characteristics of the Fourth Ray.

Another fundamental influence during the Gemini full moon festival is that of Venus, Gemini's esoteric ruler. Linked to the Law of Attraction, Venus provides us with an opportunity to work on the synthesis of opposites through the mental principle and the qualities



of the Fifth Ray channeled through Venus. In fact, Gemini is a sign of intellect that influences the fields of knowledge and human relationships where goodwill finds expression.

### ***Drawing Inspiration from Hercules***

The labors of the disciple Hercules can be a source of inspiration for us during this period. Hercules faces twelve tests in order to fully realize his divine nature. During the third labor under Gemini (Gathering the Golden Apples of the Hesperides) he learns various lessons: registering contact with the Soul and recognizing Soul qualities; eliminating astral glamor; freeing himself from illusion; relinquishing self-centeredness. As he gives up the search for self-satisfaction, he learns to work in service to the world. In test after test, Hercules faces his own nature and begins to know himself, first as a personality; then, moving forward on his quest for wisdom, he learns to integrate the three aspects of the lower personal self—the physical body, the desire nature and the mind—with the Higher Self and, finally, he has access to the three aspects of Soul: Intelligence, Love and Will. In this labor the motto of Gemini becomes clear, aiding us to understand the work to be done during this period of the year: “I recognize my other self and in the waning of that self, I grow and glow.”<sup>6</sup> It is the immortal Soul that sounds these words in recognizing the mortal aspect or “the twin” and the need for the progressive integration of the personality through the Science of Redemption.

Thus, the Science of Redemption begins in the individual and continues in the larger context of which we are a part. Here we find our work in the Subjective Group, acting as a link between the microcosm and the macrocosm and reproducing the same redeeming intent; the New Group of World Servers acts as an intermediary between humanity and the Spiritual Hierarchy, and humanity also participates in the redemption of the planetary personality. As was the case for Hercules, we discover that service is not something we do because we feel “forced” to do it, but rather it is the spontaneous outflow of the Soul, of the fact that “we are.” Hercules discovers this as he feels the

inner call to help Atlas. Only then does he find the Golden Apples.

Continuing the reflective work started in Aries and with the clarity of the Festival of Wesak, in this full moon we might consider how we sometimes limit the free and spontaneous flow of the Soul and how we can remember our essence. We could extend this reflection to the whole of humanity and try to understand what our responsibility is, as individuals and as a group, and what concrete contribution we can make to shift the individual and collective attention from suffering to joy, to give voice to *the silence that sounds* and allow its redeeming power.

The task may seem so daunting that we might feel discouraged even before we start. Violence, poverty, ignorance, greed, selfish desire, hatred, separateness, racial and national barriers, low personal ambitions, love for power, cruelty, and indifference are rampant everywhere and could undermine our intentions and our will. The example of Hercules, however, comes to our help again: he learned to cultivate perseverance as he moved forward through achievements and repeated failures. He kept up with the work despite the obstacles, impediments and deviations caused by glamor and illusion, and without feeling conditioned by the long time needed to produce in himself the necessary changes to reach his goal. From his experiences we can draw inspiration to persevere in our intention to evoke goodwill in ourselves and others, knowing that it is a quality of the immortal Soul, thus unconditioned by the passing of time.

As Hercules proves, goodwill naturally expresses through service since service channels divine love, the Second Ray energy that reaches our solar system through Gemini. “The education of the men and women of goodwill will be in relation to the *expression of a practical loving understanding*”<sup>7</sup> and it is indeed the most powerful instrument available to the Spiritual Hierarchy for the distribution of the energy of love. Goodwill is a reflection of the Will-to-Good, which in turn is an emanation of the divine Will: “Therefore, as the purpose of the Will of God ... seeks to influence human will,

it is an expression in hierarchical terms as the Will-to-Good and in human terms as *goodwill, as loving determination or as a fixed intention to bring about right human relations.*<sup>8</sup> Goodwill is the instrument available to humanity to manifest the divine Plan, “to transfigure the planetary consciousness into a living expression of love-wisdom.”<sup>9</sup> While the goodwill of the masses originates in an innate divine drive, the goal of the disciple is the Will-to-Good, “the basic quality of divine purpose,” that originates in the recognition of the Universality of Life and involves “planned activity and a definite goal to be achieved.”<sup>10</sup>

### ***Goodwill and Joy***

The Festival of Goodwill, also known as the Festival of Humanity, is an opportunity for humanity to take responsibility for our role in relation to the Plan and as a part of the Plan. The invocation of the Festival of Goodwill must therefore translate into concrete actions conducive to human spiritual unity. The rhythm of invocation, accumulation and evocation characterizes human creative power and precedes the externalization of any creation. Visualizing the transformation that will take place on Earth when humanity is finally able to fully express goodwill can help us determine what steps we need to take, individually and as a group, to aid in that process. How we approach this task depends on whether we assume that change occurs because of suffering or is fueled by joy.

What is the connection between goodwill and joy? The experience of joy is possible when we recognize that there is but One Soul and when this realization of unification is used in

the service of humanity. Joy comes from the certainty of humanity’s triumph and arises in us by “bringing about those conditions that lead to the better expression of the souls of those we contact.”<sup>11</sup> Joy occurs when the life of the Soul controls the life of the personality.

In working with the Science of Redemption, we have the opportunity to facilitate the transition from the preoccupation with pain, which is evident everywhere today on Earth, to the redeeming power of joy, which naturally flows from the illuminated heart, qualified by the energy of love.

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<sup>1</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology* (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1951), 345.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 347.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 366.

<sup>4</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *The Labours of Hercules* (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1974), 60.

<sup>5</sup> *op.cit.*, *Esoteric Astrology*, 362.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 370.

<sup>7</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology, Vol. 2* (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1942), 645.

<sup>8</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age, Vol. 2* (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1955), 172.

<sup>9</sup> Kenneth Sørensen, *The Way from Suffering to Joy* (School for Esoteric Studies, Easter Talk, 2019), 2.

<sup>10</sup> *op.cit.*, *Discipleship in the New Age, Vol. 2*, 47.

<sup>11</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic* (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1934), 370.