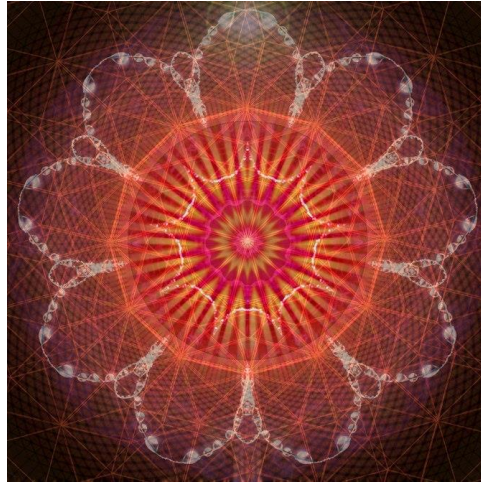


Winter 2014, Volume 9, Number 4



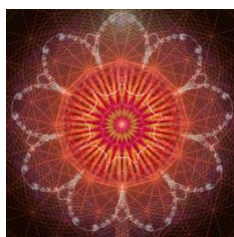
The Esoteric Quarterly

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

**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 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.

A Confluence of East and West

Since its inception, the *Esoteric Quarterly* has been devoted to examining the confluence of Oriental and Occidental teachings. Our focus is on honoring and illuminating the timeless inner essence in a wide range of spiritual and religious teachings. The articles we publish are intended to inspire and provide practical guidance for those on a spiritual path. In addition, we place a strong emphasis on works that engender an interreligious perspective and greater unity or synthesis among diverse spiritual traditions. Our aim is to show that Eastern and Western teachings do not represent conflicting principles, but a series of diverse notes or currents stemming from and leading toward a single source or “Fusion Point.” One might envisage this process as the confluence or convergence of distinct mystical notes that will eventually come together to form a global harmonic chord and a new surge of consciousness. It is our hope that the articles in this issue contribute to this process in some way.

This issue begins with an article on the little-known explorer and Tibetologist, Alexandra David-Neel, the first western woman to cross the Trans-Himalayas into Tibet’s forbidden capital of Lhasa and be received by the Dalai Lama. Contributed by Iván Kovács, the article touches on David-Neel’s early life, her involvement with the London Theosophical Society, her experiences and Sanskrit studies in India and her remarkable adventures in Tibet. Kovács also discusses two of her most important books. The first provides an account of Tibetan and Bon religious practices. The second presents an explanation of the secret oral teachings of Tibet’s Buddhist sects. In Kovács’ article, we learn why Alexandra David-Neel has been called “one of the most astonishing women of her time,” and why her works are still considered “the most accurate, extensive source on the arcane Buddhist practices of a nearly vanished world.”

Our next article is from Zachary Lansdowne who continues his thought-provoking exploration of Alice A. Bailey’s *Formulas of Initiation*. The first article, which appeared in the Fall 2013 issue, examined Formulas One and Two. In this article, Lansdowne provides an interpretative analysis for Formulas Three through Five as they pertain to the implementation of the Plan, individual and Planetary purification, the Antahkarana, and the idea of ascension. These highly symbolic presentations or revealing patterns are said to have been used through the ages by all disciples and initiates of the Great White Lodge as pre-requisites for the six major initiations. Lansdowne’s articles are thought to be the first published works attempting to decipher some of the possible significances and meanings of these mysterious patterns.

The third article in this issue is part of series offered by James Moffatt on the enduring mysteries of consciousness. As his previous articles have shown, science has not come very far in solving the riddle of consciousness. Throughout this series, Moffatt has exposed the limits of materialist and reductionist methods, while presenting a strikingly coherent body of evidence and credible theoretical explanations drawn from eastern and western mystical and esoteric sources. In this article, Moffatt examines the visionary and transcendent experience alongside the Near Death Experience and their importance in challenging the current scientific orthodoxy concerning the nature of consciousness. The article adds to Moffatt’s far-reaching theory of consciousness and provides further support for an eternal or immortal consciousness or a “consciousness beyond life.”

Our final offering from Ralph Ellis, examines the theme of precessional Astrology in the Bible. The article begins with the premise that middle-eastern astrology was once a central component in the Christian and Jewish faiths, but that it has been “obscured by subsequent

transcriptions, translations and deliberate obfuscation.” After explaining the axial system of astrology, which adjusts for the precession of the equinoxes and the cycles of the “Great Year,” the author re-examines the timeline, the place, and in some instances, the names in several biblical and Egyptian historical accounts. In his focus on the Old Testament, Ellis proposes new interpretations of Exodus, the Shepherd Kings and the Hyksos, based upon the constellational change from Taurus to Aries. Also analyzed are New Testament narratives and archeological evidence reflecting the constellational change from Aries to Pisces.

In addition to the featured articles in the issue, we have included a book review that explores three different books on Death and the Near Death Experience.

Our “Poem of the Quarter,” is from *Anamnesis: The Remembering of Soul*, by the poet, psychotherapist and healer, Jay Ramsay. Ramsay has fashioned “a unique synthesis between poetry and personal development.” As an “artist-healer,” Ramsay’s belief is “that the requirements of our time take us beyond mere aestheticism on the one hand, and clinical prosaic clichés on the other.” For him, “poetry, psychology and healing are all part of *one Work*.” Copies of *Anamnesis*—the complete sequence (1-16) both in printed form as an art book with charcoal drawings by Genie Poretzky-Lee, and recorded on high-quality CD with Genie Portetsky-Lee on Tibetan bowls, are available from:

www.lotusfoundation.org.uk.

Our “Pictures of the Quarter” are by the late Sohan Qadri, yogic practitioner, poet and acclaimed Vajrayan Tantric artist. The *Sundaram Tagore Gallery* in New York, has graciously allowed us to offer a sample of Qadri’s deceptively powerful yantras, which were designed to control and concentrate the mind. Qadri’s “Tantric” paintings, as Robert Thurman explains, “seem to channel something of the continuum of clear light mind.” Others, such as Betty Seid, note how “the absorption of fluid color” in Qadri’s paintings, “is analogous to the absorption of the individual into the Absolute.” Sundaram

Tagore adds to this idea in saying that Qadri “creates a total visual experience in an environment that is in essence formless.” In conjunction with Qadri’s paintings, we have included a “Biographical Sketch of the Artist,” which provides background on his exceptional life and East/West aesthetics.

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.”

Poem of the Quarter

From *Anamnesis*, The Remembering of Soul: One through Three by Jay Ramsay

Traveller: stop a moment.
It is time to stop time, to step inside.
Come into this house of quiet
and let it take your mind. Can you?
The hardest thing. To stop thinking.
So you can start really seeing
and enter the silent mind
that waits in the stillness, and your breathing.

Can you sit still ? Can you let
everything be around you?
Then you will find new eyes
and the rose in your heart will open.
Then you will know what is true
infinitely made for you, in each moment;
this dew drop, this day's pearl
this grit irritating deep in your being
where everything is reflected to you.

Traveller, who are you? Under your name
your occupation and your clothes
you are formless consciousness living in time
with a strange disposition to love.
Dear naked soul, come home.

There is a beauty we live for
that never leaves us
however we may abandon it
in careless indifference
faithless, ignorant

and in the shield that encases our hearts
cynical, street-and-worldly wordy wise

But it breaks in: we long for it
in its eros of images - and it streams out
in that wailing saxophone, in a violin
rising exquisitely pained...

and it is all there is
in your face, freed to itself
with its glow like gold
to bring us back to what we know

inside our skin
where the beauty within
echoes to its own
being the only true healing

here, and as far as the stars reach
into the other worlds.

What is the gift of your life?

Beyond naming, an utterance
in your throat's depth, your soul's
intention to live—

Can you recall it?
You sit in meditation, surrounded by stars.

What are you living for?
There is an answer so personal
so passionate, beyond all conceiving
in your innermost coding -
that your secret may die with you,
but not before you've had the chance
to witness its luminous traces.

And she, he is your answer
that other one nearest of all within
who shines in you like an icon, a sun.

What else is there ? The spiral climb
hearing your name called through the mist,
ever-stretched towards your blue potential
true self's surrender, that is the only way home.



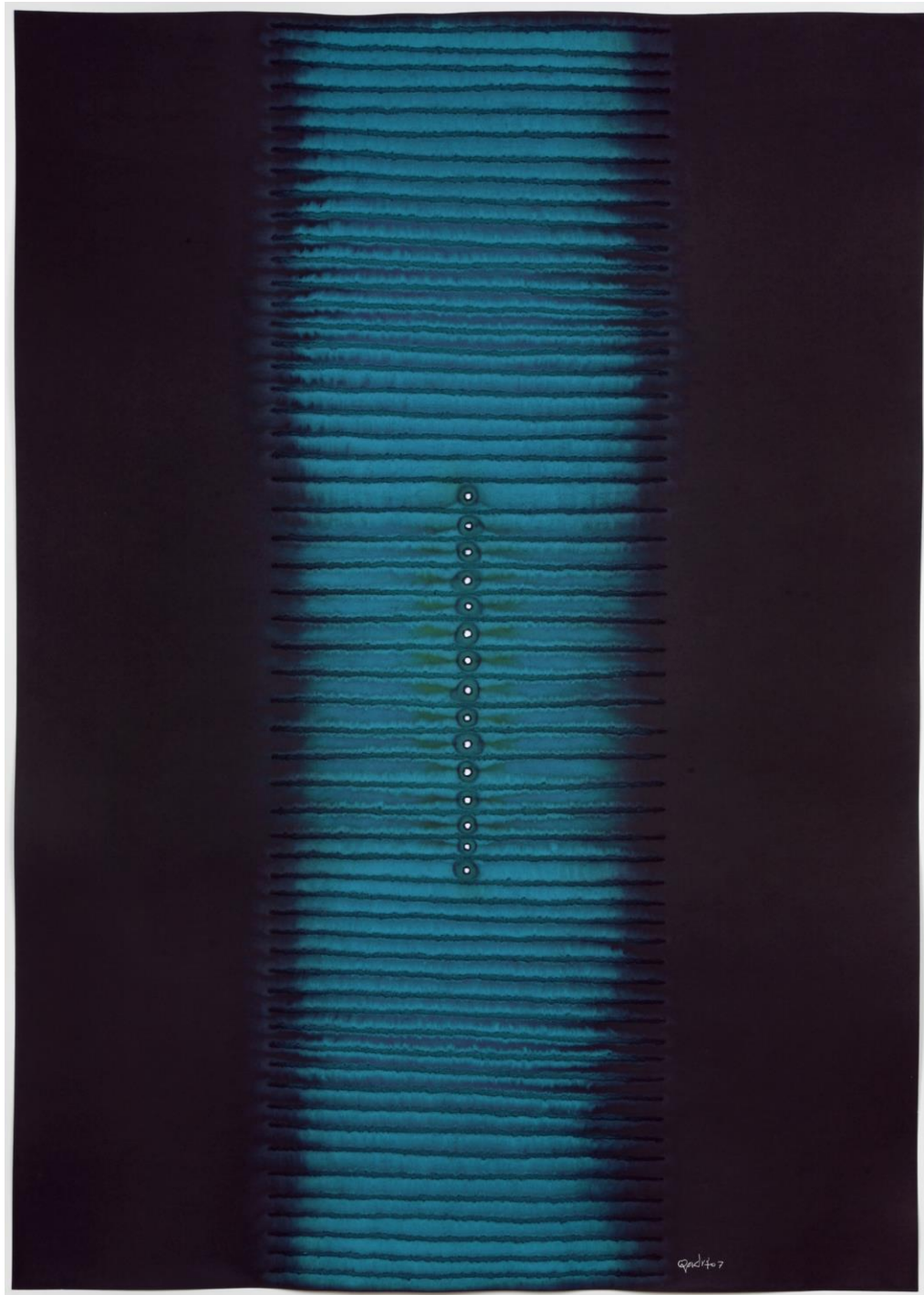
Copies of Anamnesis—the complete sequence (1-16) both in printed form as an art book with charcoal drawings by Genie Poretzky-Lee, and recorded on high quality CD with Genie Portetsky-Lee on Tibetan bowls, are available from www.lotusfoundation.org.uk, or by post: “Lynwood,” 16 Lancaster Grove, London NW3 4PB: sterling cheque for £12 to Genie Poretzky-Lee.

Pictures of the Quarter by Sohan Qadri



Ananda XI

Courtesy of the Sudaram Tagore Gallery New York
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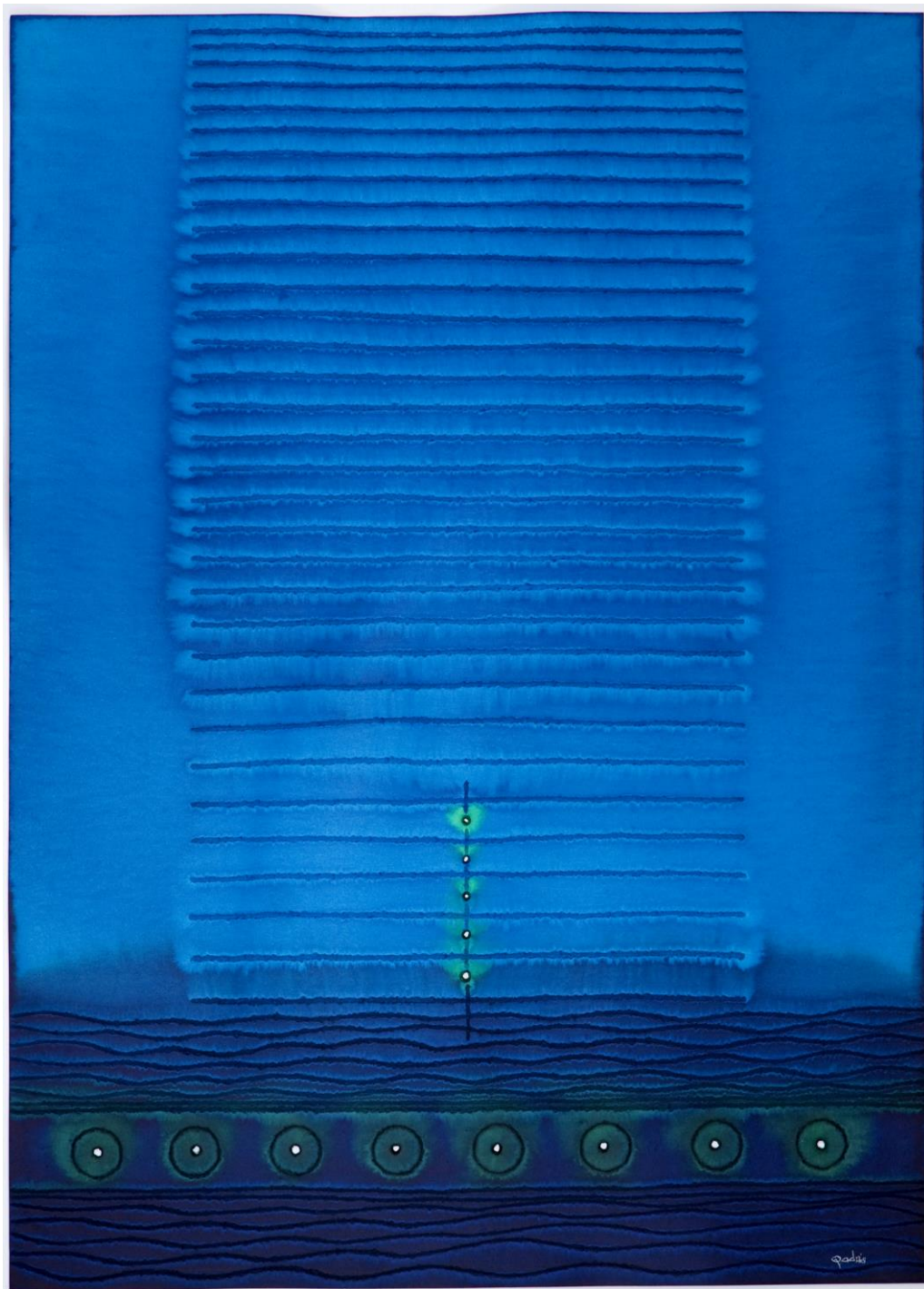


Ashwini II

By Sohan Qadri

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Sriti V

By Sohan Qadri

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Quotes of the Quarter

For occultists, symbols have a real meaning. A symbol that is merely a symbol, merely a copy or image, has no meaning; there is only significance in what can become a reality, in what can become a living force. If a symbol acts upon the spirit of humanity in such a way that intuitive forces are set free, then we are dealing with a true symbol.

Rudolf Steiner, *The Temple Legend: Freemasonry and Related Occult Movements*, 1904, No 93.

The fact is that astrological lore demonstrated in several surviving cathedrals and monasteries ... points to a knowledge of astrology, and an awareness of the esoteric potential within astrological symbolism, which is not adequately charted or paralleled in contemporaneous literature. We might also say that the true books of esoteric astrology of the mediaeval era are not to be found in manuscripts, but in the stone and marble of the mediaeval cathedrals and churches. This dual stream of astrological symbolism might arise from the somewhat uneasy relationship which appears to have existed between the body politic of the twelfth-century theological hierarchies and the creative impulses of the cathedral builders, who were clearly excited about the potential to regenerate, redeem and re-instate certain Christian truths by way of a newly re-discovered astrological symbolism.

The relationship between mediaeval astrology and theology has never been adequately charted by scholars: this means that it is now difficult, if not actually impossible for the historian to draw parallels between the surviving literary tradition of mediaeval astrology, symbolism and sigillic esotericism and the symbolic astrological forms used contemporaneously in the cathedrals and churches. ... Yet ... astrology did flourish in literature, theology and art, so that by the beginning of the thirteenth century astrology was probably the most important single

philosophical idea permeating ecclesiastical thought and esotericism.

Fred Gettings, *The Secret Zodiac: The Hidden Art in Mediaeval Astrology* (London, Penguin Group: 1997), 67-68.

Nirvana and samsara, we are told, are not two different things, but one and the same thing seen from two different points of view by onlookers whose degree of sharpness of mental vision differs widely....

The greatest saint, even if he has sacrificed a thousand times all that he held most dear, even his life itself, for love of others, for that of a God or for a noble ideal, remains a prisoner of samsara if he has not understood that all that is a childish game, empty of reality, a useless phantasmagoria of shadows which his own mind projects on the infinite screen of the Void.

Alexandra David-Neel, *The Secret Oral Teachings of Tibetan Buddhist Sects* (Columbus, OH: City Lights Bookstore, 1967), 120-121.

The man with a common mind—with an infantile mind as the Tibetan's say—cannot understand the co-existence of the two worlds: that of the Absolute and the Void and that of relativity in which he, the pilgrim makes his life's journey.

In contradiction to current opinion, The Masters of the Secret Teachings do not hesitate to declare to those disciples who are capable of understanding this revelation: "The Gradual Way, the preserving cultivation of virtues, of holiness, do not lead to liberation." The greatest saint, even if he has sacrificed a thousand times all that he held most dear, even life itself, for love of others, for that of God or for a noble ideal, remains a prisoner of samsara if he has not understood that all that is a childish game, empty of reality, a useless

phantasmagoria of shadows which his own mind projects on the infinite screen of the Void.

Alexandra David-Neel, *The Secret Oral Teachings in Tibetan Buddhist Sects* ((Columbus, OH: City Lights Bookstore, 1967), 97.

Mass is a phenomenon of connecting light rays which go back and forth, sort of freezing them into a pattern. So matter, as it were, is condensed or frozen light. ... Therefore all matter is a condensation of light into patterns moving back and forth at average speeds which are less than the speed of light. ... when we come to light we are coming to the fundamental activity in which existence has its ground, or at least; coming close to it. ... Light is what unfolds all the universe ... Light in its generalized sense (not just ordinary light) is the means by which the entire universe unfolds itself. ... It's energy and it's also information—content, form and structure. It's the potential for everything. ... Light transcends the present structure of time and space and we will never understand it properly in that present structure. ... Light is the background which is all one but its information content has the capacity for immense diversity. Light can carry information about the entire universe. The other point is that light, by interaction of rays, (as field theory in physics is investigating today), can produce particles in all the diverse structures of matter.

David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (London: Routledge & Keegan, Paul, 1980), 45-48.

The self-luminous being, the Self, is the light of the intellect, and allows for awareness of the contents of the mind and the senses. Mystics relate the Self to the sun and the mind to the moon. The moon has no light of its own but simply reflects the light of the Sun. Similarly, the mind has no consciousness or light of its own but reflects the light originating from the self-luminous element within the lotus of the heart.

Mystical teachings associate consciousness with a very substantive light—both supernal (metaphysical) light and natural light. Unfortunately, as semi-conscious, sleep-walking human beings, we do not typically appreciate the nature of light, especially the light within. Instead, humans live in darkness and in ignorance of their true nature. The consciousness of the Self is pure light, but this is obscured by our typical attachments, desires, fantasies, suffering and conditioning. To realize the divine and spiritual Light within ourselves, we must enlighten ourselves by knowing Self and achieving union with the true Light. The Light of Self is beyond thought, beyond the mind/body complex, beyond the patterns of conditioning and attachment to material nature. Mystical self-knowledge, like spiritual teachings, brings Light into humans' hearts and minds. Both ancient and contemporary mystical teachings reflect these themes.

Christopher P. Holmes, *The Heart Doctrine Mystical Views of the Origin and Nature of Human Consciousness* (Ontario: Zero Point Publications, 2010), 135.

The wind in which consciousness is mounted, like a rider of a swift horse, is a physical entity that supports consciousness. Although consciousness can separate from the physical body, as it does when we pass from one lifetime to another, consciousness can never separate from the subtlest level of the mind.

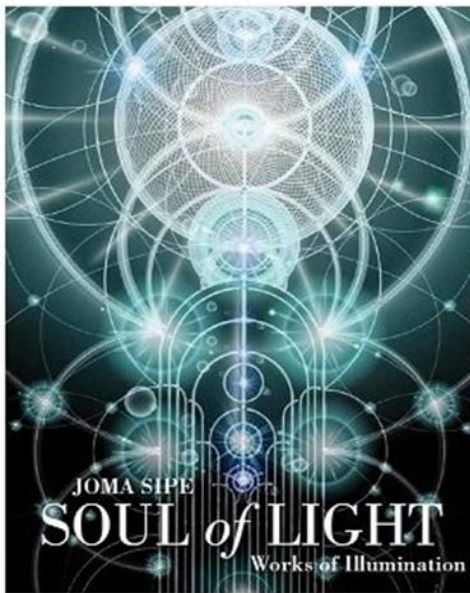
The Dalai Lama, *Dialogues with Scientist and Sages: The Search for Unity*, ed. Renee Weber, 132. (New York, NY: Routledge and Kegan, 1986)

You are an explorer, and you represent our species, and the greatest good you can do is to bring back a new idea, because our world is endangered by the absence of good ideas. Our world is in crisis because of the absence of consciousness.

Terence McKenna, *The Purpose of Psychedelics*, 2012

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You are not separate from the flowing reality; you are that flowing reality. --Vernon Howard



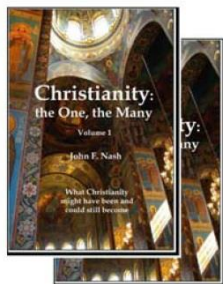
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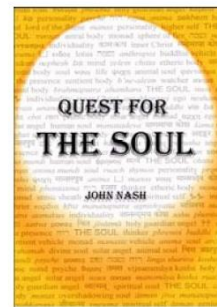
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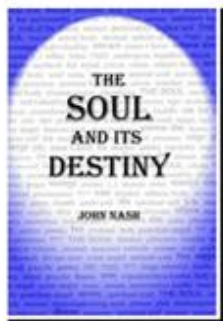
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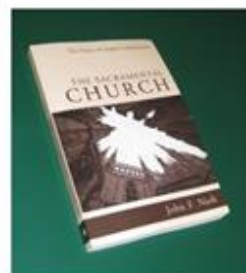
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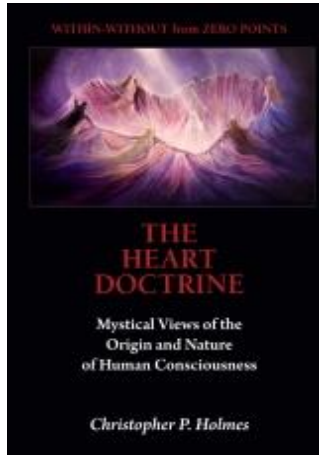
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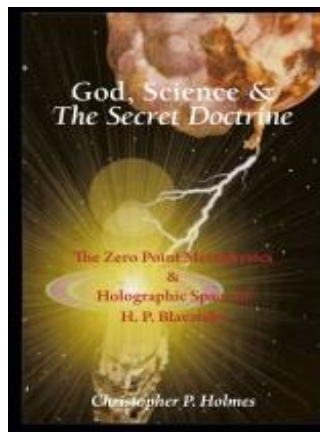
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Alexandra David-Néel: The Life and Work of an Early Romancer of Tibet

Iván Kovács



*I belong to a new breed. We are few in number but we will accomplish our mission.
I am doing what I must.*¹

Alexandra David-Néel

*I have seen the world, and more than the world:
I have studied the heart of man,
And now I consort with Immortals. The fruit of my tree of knowledge is plucked,
And it is this, 'ADVENTURES ARE TO THE ADVENTUROUS.'*²

Benjamin Disraeli: *Ixion in Heaven, II. ii.*

Abstract

This Article deals with the explorer and Tibetologist, Alexandra David-Néel. The introduction gives a brief overview of earlier attempts by Europeans to enter and explore Tibet and includes a section on the Hungarian Orientalist, Sándor Csoma de Kőrös, who is considered to be the founder of Tibetology. Next Alexandra David-Néel is treated, first from a biographical point of view, then in her capacity as a writer. Two of her books are discussed in some detail, firstly, *Magic & Mystery in Tibet*, then *The Secret Oral Teachings in Tibetan Buddhist Sects*.

Introduction

Before proceeding with the main subject of this article, namely the life and work of Alexandra David-Néel, it is appropriate to

write a few words about earlier attempts by Europeans to enter and explore Tibet.

The first documented claim by a European to have visited Tibet came from a Franciscan called Odoric of Pordenone, who supposedly traveled through Tibet in about 1325.³ It would take another three hundred years for two Portuguese Jesuit missionaries, António de Andrade and Manuel Marques, to arrive in

About the Author

Iván Kovács is qualified as a fine artist. As a writer, he has published art criticism, short stories and poems, and more recently, articles of an esoteric nature. He is a reader of the classics and modern classics, a lover of world cinema, as well as classical and contemporary music. His lifelong interest in Esotericism was rounded off with several years of intensive study with the Arcane School.

Tibet. The result of their efforts was the establishment of two missions, one in Tsaparang in 1625, the other in Shigatse in 1628. Due, however, to the fact that the two missions became embroiled in the rivalry between the Red Hat or Nyingma Sect and the Yellow Hat or Gelugpa Sect (two different branches of Tibetan Buddhism); both missions were evacuated in 1635.⁴

Twenty-five years later, in 1661, two Jesuits, Johannes Grueber and Albert Dorville set out from Peking, and traveled through Tibet by way of Lhasa to Agra, India. The success of this achievement was largely due to the fact that they were traveling on an Imperial Passport.⁵

In the 18th century, there were several Jesuits and Capuchins from Europe that entered Tibet, and the most important of these was Ippolito Desideri, an Italian Jesuit. He left Rome with the sanction of Pope Clement XI and arrived in Lhasa in 1716. Desideri undertook various journeys between 1716 and 1721 that encompassed a circuit of the Tibetan borders with Nepal, and what is now known as modern-day Kashmir and Pakistan. During the next twenty-five years, the Capuchins became the sole missionaries in Tibet, but they met increased opposition from the Tibetan lamas, and were finally expelled from Tibet in 1745.⁶

Another enterprising traveler to Tibet was Sándor Csoma de Kőrös (27 March 1784 – 11 April 1842), a Hungarian philologist and Orientalist. He was born in Kőrös, Transylvania, Kingdom of Hungary, into the Hungarian ethnic group of Széklers, who traced their origins to Attila's Huns who had settled in Transylvania in the 5th century. It is this claim of the Széklers that motivated Csoma to investigate and attempt to trace the place of origin of his ancestors. In 1820, he set off to Asia, where he achieved his life's task by studying the Tibetan language and Buddhist philosophy. Being the author of three important books about the Tibetan language entitled *Essays Towards a Dictionary, Tibetan and English; Grammar of the Tibetan Language*, and *Sanskrit-Tibetan-English Vocabulary: Being an Edition and Translation of the Mahavyutpatti*, Csoma is considered the founder of Tibetology. Alt-

hough his travels in Tibet took him no further than Zanskar in the west, he had the privilege of studying under a lama for an initial sixteen-month period. This made him the first European to master the Tibetan language. Once his dictionary and grammar were complete, Csoma went to Calcutta in India to oversee its publication. To do justice to his character and achievements it needs to be mentioned that Csoma not only gained the respect of the Tibetans, but also that of the British, who unanimously elected him as an honorary member of the Asiatic Society in 1833. Furthermore, on February 22, 1933, Csoma was declared as a Bodhisattva (canonized as a Buddhist saint) by the Japanese.⁷

In the 19th century, Tibet was caught up in the power struggle between the British and the Russian Empires. On the one hand, the British were encroaching from northern India into the Himalayas and Afghanistan, on the other, tsarist Russia was expanding south into Central Asia. Both powers became suspicious of the other's intent in Tibet, a country which neither knew anything about. Tibet, which was equally ignorant about Britain and Russia, however, had a longstanding relationship with China. China claimed Tibet as a protectorate, and Tibet in its turn was easily persuaded by this neighbor to believe that foreigners who entered Tibet threatened its gold fields as well as its established religious faith of Buddhism. Consequently, by 1850, all foreigners were banned from the country, and borders were shut to all except nationals of neighboring countries.⁸

In 1904, the Anglo-Russian conflict over Tibet came to a head when a military expedition led by Colonel Francis Younghusband forcefully entered Tibet and advanced to Lhasa, killing hundreds of Tibetan soldiers in the process. The British imposed a treaty on the Tibetans which stipulated that Tibet remain closed to all foreigners except themselves. They left a political representative, Sir Charles Bell, behind who developed an interest in Tibetology and also became an advisor and intimate friend of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama.⁹

Despite the above prohibitions, Tibet kept on attracting other explorers and adventurers, both male and female. One of the most daring and

enterprising women to illegally enter Tibet, and then to achieve the exclusive feat of becoming the first European woman ever to enter Lhasa, was Alexandra David-Néel.¹⁰ It is to her that this article pays tribute.

Alexandra David-Néel: Her Life A Turbulent Childhood and a Horizon of Dreams

Even before taking up the narrative of Alexandra David-Néel, the somewhat unrealistic expectations of her parents before she was born need to be mentioned. Louis David, who was to become her father, didn't want children at all, while her mother, Alexandrine, longed to bear a son who would one day miraculously rise through the ranks of her beloved Catholic Church and attain the office of at least a bishop. Thus, the birth of a daughter in the Belgian-French David family in Saint-Mandé, France on 24 October 1868¹¹ did not bring about the happy result that the birth of a son would have done. Yet the fact had to be accepted and three days later she was baptized Louise Eugénie Alexandrine Marie David. Her father was a publisher, and a friend of the novelist Victor Hugo. The well-known Neoclassical artist Jacques-Louis David was a distant relation of hers.¹²

Already as a young child she was strong-willed and longed for a life of freedom and adventure. A first indication of this was when she ran away from home at the age of five. After a lengthy search, she was found by a gendarme, who marched her off to a police station, and whom she had scratched for his trouble.¹³

Unlike other young girls of her age, who at most might have been reading innocent romances and suitable selections of poetry, David-Néel preferred the excitement and high adventure of Jules Verne's science-fiction novels. It was the heroes of these books whom she admired and who became her role models, and it was her ambition that one day she would not only imitate them, but actually outdo them.¹⁴

By the age of fifteen, her taste in books had taken a new turn and also included the occult.

This was partly due to an English journal produced by the Society of the Supreme Gnosis, which was situated in London, and the person responsible for forwarding her this type of reading matter was the English occultist, Elisabeth Morgan. The journal treated a variety of cryptic subjects, such as zymology (the chemistry of fermentation and enzymes), and ancient languages, including fragments of Sanskrit, which both perplexed and fascinated David-Néel.¹⁵

While the David's were vacationing at the seaside city of Ostend in Belgium, David-Néel decided to seek answers to her questions in person. She hiked into Holland and then crossed the English Channel. Arriving in London, she sought out Elisabeth Morgan, but the older woman insisted that David-Néel return to her parents in Belgium. She was to repeat such daring and solitary undertakings. On her next adventure, she traveled by train to Switzerland and then hiked alone through the Alps via the St. Gotthard Pass into Italy and the North Italian lake country. Soon running out of money, she swallowed her pride and wired home for help, giving her mother no choice but to go and fetch her.¹⁶

Soon after the above incident David-Néel ran off once more, this time to Spain on a bicycle. After she had satisfied her unique craving, she managed to return to Brussels without any injury to herself. Around this time, in April 1886, she entered the Royal Conservatory and took up music, more specifically, the cultivation of her soprano voice. In 1888, she received a letter from Elisabeth Morgan who offered her a chance to take up the study of mysticism with the Society of the Supreme Gnosis. The society also offered cheap boarding, and David-Néel jumped at the opportunity, setting off for London.¹⁷

At last, David-Néel found herself among people with similar interests. She improved her English and studied arcane subjects of her own choosing. In a well-equipped library, she could pick and choose among subjects such as metaphysics, philosophy, astrology, and alchemy. During David-Néel's stay in London,

Elisabeth Morgan introduced her to some prominent members of the burgeoning occult society. This is how she came to meet Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, cofounder of the Theosophical Society in New York in 1875. While frequenting the Theosophical Society in London, David-Néel became friends with Annie Besant, who would later, after the death of Madame Blavatsky in 1891, become President of the Theosophical Society. By that time, David-Néel herself would become someone to be reckoned with, gaining the status of an explorer of Tibet who would make known its mystical and magical practices.¹⁸

In 1889, David-Néel felt that her stay in London had taught her enough, and decided that it was time to move on. She told her friend, Annie, that she intended to resume her studies of comparative religions in Paris, and Annie arranged for her to get accommodations at the Paris branch of the Theosophical Society. Thus, David-Néel returned to the continent and enrolled at the Collège de France, studying Sanskrit, and attending classes in Oriental languages at the Sorbonne. While in London, she had often frequented the British Museum, now in Paris, she became a regular visitor of the Musée Guimet, a museum that featured Far Eastern art and religious artifacts.¹⁹

One evening a curious incident took place at the Musée Guimet when David-Néel was engrossed in translations of sacred texts in the library. In a niche overlooking her place of study there was a huge Japanese statue of the Buddha that she had grown very fond of. Induced by its presence, and believing herself to be alone, she joined her hands in supplication and bowed to the image. The next moment a woman's voice responded from the shadows:

"May the blessings of the Buddha be with you, mademoiselle."

This friendly but amused voice was that of the Comtesse de Bréant, a well-known student of Oriental philosophy who also spent long hours at the museum.

"This very beautiful Japanese statue made me think of the great sage it is intended to resem-

ble," David-Néel responded, "and I salute the doctrine it represents."²⁰

After this initial exchange, the two women struck up a conversation which led to an instant friendship. And so it happened that just as Elisabeth Morgan had introduced David-Néel to the occult scene in London, her newfound friend now introduced her to the Parisian occult scene. This was how David-Néel came to know the Pythagorean Society, a cultural foundation where she met numerous leading occultists and Orientalists who were living in Paris.²¹

To avoid a lopsided development in her studies, David-Néel also investigated the ideas of Plato and the teachings of the Koran. Before she embraced Buddhism as her preferred philosophy, she also acquainted herself with a variety of religious alternatives, including Hinduism. During this last phase of her formative years, David-Néel was particularly fond of listening to the Comtesse de Bréant, who would vividly describe her travels in Asia. All the while, she was filled with longing to visit places like India, so that she could gain firsthand experience of the wonders of the East, like a true explorer and adventurer.²²

A Dream Becomes Reality

In 1891, when she was twenty-three, David-Néel had an unexpected, but most timely windfall. Her English friend, Elisabeth Morgan, suddenly died. David-Néel had long ago honored Morgan by unofficially referring to her as her godmother, although fairy-godmother would have been even more appropriate, because she had left David-Néel a small inheritance. This inheritance was the magic key that would open the door to her yet unrealized ambitions. The amount proved to be enough to allow David-Néel to travel for more than a year through Ceylon and India.²³

On this first of her major trips to Asia, David-Néel was reunited with Annie Besant, who was now the President of the Theosophical Society, with its headquarters in Adyar, near Madras, in India. During her stay there she studied Sanskrit with them, and then moved on to the holy

city of Benares on the Ganges. Here she studied yoga with the famous guru, Swami Bhaskarananda of Varanasi, who lived in a rose garden. It was also in India where she first heard Tibetan music, which fascinated her. She was however, compelled to return to Brussels when her money ran out.²⁴

Now followed a period when David-Néel tried her hand at a career. From 1894 to 1900, she attempted to work as an actress and singer, but by 1900, her career was going nowhere, and she was forced to accept a job with the municipal opera in Tunis. It was here that she met Philip Néel, a thirty-nine-year-old bachelor who had a successful career as a railway engineer. David-Néel became one of his mistresses, and four years later, on 4th August 1904, they

were married, and went to live in a villa at La Goulette next to the Mediterranean Sea. David-Néel's restless nature was, however, not suited to the life of a housewife, and she managed to persuade her husband to allow her to travel again.²⁵

1911 was the year when David-Néel visited India for the second time, and it was also the momentous year that would initiate a 14-year journey. In this year, she also re-visited Ceylon, and paid her respects at the Buddhist pilgrimage site where the "Bo Tree" in Anuradhapura is believed to have been grown from the original fig tree under which the Buddha received his enlightenment in the 5th century BCE. Other major stops of this journey included Mandurai, Pondicherry and Madras. In Mandurai, she visited the fabled Menakshi

Temple and secretly watched highly erotic Tantric rites.²⁶

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David-Néel had moved on to Calcutta and Benares, and her Sanskrit studies had advanced to such a stage that the College of Sanskrit in Benares awarded her an honorary doctorate of philosophy, a first for a European woman. It was in the same year that she arrived in the small Himalayan state of Sikkim. There she enriched her knowledge of Buddhism by visiting all the important monasteries. She also met Prince Sidkeong of Sikkim, and became the first European woman to meet the Dalai Lama, who was there in exile at the time.

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Hat and Yellow Hat branches of Tibetan Buddhism. She took quickly to the Tibetan culture and its customs.²⁹

David-Néel's audience with the Thirteenth Dalai Lama took place on 15 April, 1912, and he advised her to learn Tibetan.³⁰ She also met another important personage at this time, namely the Gomchen (great hermit) of the monastery of Lachen, and became his disciple. He was an impressive figure who wore a five-sided crown, a rosary necklace made of 108 pieces of human skull, an apron carved of human bone, and a magic dagger. During the next two years, she learned the art of telepathy from him, as well as "tumo breathing," a Tibetan technique of generating body heat to enable one to keep warm in freezing conditions.³¹

Another person that came into David-Néel's life at this time was a boy of fifteen named Aphur Yongden, who was regarded as a minor *tulku*.³² In Tibetan Buddhism, "tulku" is an honorary title given to a recognized reincarnate lama.³³ She and Aphur Yongden developed a friendship that was to last a lifetime, and eventually David-Néel adopted him as her son.³⁴

In 1916 David-Néel entered Tibet illegally at the invitation of the Panchen Lama, who is the highest-ranking lama after the Dalai Lama, and visited him at his monastery in Shigatse. The British would not tolerate this and expelled her from Sikkim. She and Yongden then left together for Japan.³⁵ From Japan, they travelled to Korea, and then undertook a very difficult journey across the entire width of China, and also journeyed through the Gobi desert and Mongolia. At one stage, before they reached the monastery of Kumbum in Tibet, they were attacked by bandits.³⁶ At Kumbum, David-Néel spent two-and-a-half years, and translated rare manuscripts into French and English. She also observed the magical and psychic exploits of Tibetan adepts.³⁷

In February 1921, David-Néel and Yongden made preparations to penetrate deeper into Tibet and preferably reach the holy city of Lhasa. This ambitious objective, however, took them a full three years to accomplish. As the crow flies, this route was approximately 3,900 miles, but due to unexpected difficulties, which included avoiding interception by officials, much of the journey had to be re-routed. This caused detours that took them as far back as the Gobi desert, from where they returned via Kanchow and Lanchow, south through China, and westwards into southern Tibet. In total the distance they covered was around 8000 miles.³⁸

David-Néel and Yongden finally arrived in Lhasa in February 1924, but David-Néel was somewhat disappointed. Her beggar's disguise didn't allow her to access the intellectual and educational opportunities available; therefore, by April, she and Yongden left Lhasa as unobtrusively as they had arrived. By 1925, the two of them returned to Paris, where they enjoyed huge popularity and success. She started lecturing and also began the systematic procedure

of writing down her experiences both in articles and books.

The Power of Persistence in a Centenarian's Life

In 1928, David-Néel bought a small villa on the outskirts of Digne in southern France and named it "Samten Dzong," which means the "Fortress of Meditation." There, she and Yongden were kept busy with their manuscripts.³⁹ However, in less than a decade, David-Néel became restless, and in 1937, at the age of 70, she and Yongden set off for China via the Trans-Siberian railway, and arrived there to find that China and Japan were at war with each other. Despite these difficulties, they managed to penetrate Tibet again and eventually ended up in Tachienlu, where David-Néel resumed her investigations of Tibetan sacred texts.⁴⁰

The two of them returned to France in 1946. By now, David-Néel was 78 years old. Nine years later Yongden died at the age of 56. David-Néel continued writing and studying until her death in 1969, when she was almost 101 years old. As requested in her last will and testament, her ashes and those of Yongden were mixed together and dispersed in the Ganges in 1973 at Varanasi, by her friend and secretary, Marie-Madeleine Peyronnet.⁴¹ Of all the praise and acknowledgement that she has received from countless quarters, perhaps the most apt is that which came from the novelist and poet Lawrence Durrell, who, after interviewing her in 1965, when David-Néel was 96 years old, stated that she was: "The most astonishing French woman of our time."⁴²

Alexandra David-Néel: Her Books

Magic & Mystery in Tibet

Alexandra David-Néel's most popular and widely read book is undoubtedly *Magic & Mystery in Tibet* which, in its original French version, was first published in 1929, and was soon followed by the first English translation, which was published in England in 1931. About this English publication, Aaron Sussman, editor, and author of the introduction

to the Souvenir Press edition, writes the following: "It was treated politely, but after a yawning interval, it was packed off to limbo. I say this because it did not sell well in England, and I have never seen any references to it, under its British title, (*With Magicians and Mystics in Tibet*), in other books or articles on Tibet."

In America, the book's popularity was an entirely different matter, and Sussman goes on to say: "(It) . . . sold very well indeed, and it has been quoted, or referred to, repeatedly since its publication in 1932."⁴³ A well-earned, and from a publicity point of view, useful windfall came from Margaret Mead, the well-known American anthropologist. Margaret Mead recognized the book's significance as it impacted her own field, and in 1953 reprinted three sections from the book, namely "Running Lamas," "Displacing the Soul" and "Bringing a Corpse to Life," in the anthropological anthology entitled *Primitive Heritage*, which she co-edited with Nicolas Calas.⁴⁴

Before taking a closer look at the actual text of *Magic & Mystery in Tibet*, it is worthwhile quoting the concluding paragraph of Sussman's introduction regarding the extraordinary and revolutionary nature of this truly magical book:

Keep in mind that this book was first published in 1932, five years before J. B. Rhine and the Duke University experiments in extra-sensory perception, 10 years before Edgar Cayce's startling story was told in *There is a River*, and 24 years before the uproar began over *The Search for Bridey Murphy*. It seems to me that our modern world has a long way still to go before it catches up with Lama David-Neel and her friends, mystics and magicians of Tibet.⁴⁵

Just as to some classical music lovers, the composer Anton Bruckner's symphonies can evoke the majesty and purity of the Austrian Alps, likewise, the prose of David-Néel will always be associated with the mysterious, secretive and magical aspects of a bygone and, at the time, as yet only partially explored Tibet. Whether the prospective reader of David-Néel

is interested in adventure, anthropology, foreign religions or esoteric truths, her books have the ability to satisfy on all these aspects equally. The reader who is set on style will also be happy to know that David-Néel's skills in this respect are equally versatile: she writes with a directness which is easily accessible, yet colorful and vividly descriptive, and at times surprisingly beautiful, poetic and lyrical, especially when describing landscapes that form the backdrop of her narrative. To illustrate:

Shrouded in the moving fogs, a fantastic army of trees, draped in livid green moss, seems to keep watch along the narrow tracks, warning or threatening the traveler with enigmatic gestures. From the low valleys buried under the exuberant jungle to the mountain summits covered with eternal snow, the whole country is bathed in occult influences.

In such scenery it is fitting that sorcery should hold sway. The so-called Buddhist population is practically shamanist and a large number of mediums: Bönpos, Pawos, Bunting and Yabas of both sexes, even in the smallest hamlets, transmit the messages of gods, demons and the dead.⁴⁶

In the very first chapter entitled *Tibet and the Lamas*, David-Néel treats a variety of topics. Prominent among these are the people from the local community who act as her servants or interpreters, and also higher dignitaries with whom she interacts on a socially more elevated basis. Among the latter are learned lamas and princes such as His Highness, Sidkeong Namgyal, hereditary prince of Sikkim;⁴⁷ the doctor of philosophy from the famous University of Trashilhumpo, Kushog Chösdzed;⁴⁸ and the highest authority of them all, the Dalai Lama himself.⁴⁹ These people are described in all their pomp, dignity, intellectual capacities, and eccentricities, which not only make for interesting portrayals but also touches of humor and irony.

The second part of the first chapter deals with death and the beyond, a topic about which Tibetan religion seems to know a lot, and which even among the ordinary people has generated

a peculiar array of superstitions and myths. This topic is also the subject matter of the famous *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, which was first translated at the instruction of Walter Evans-Wentz into English by Dawasandup, and is the first translated sacred text from the Tibetan language ever to appear in English. Dawasandup was a high school headmaster in Gangtok who not only acted as translator for Walter Evans-Wentz, but was also in the employ of David-Néel, who describes him in humorous, and somewhat less venerated terms than Evans-Wentz.

Concerning the issues of life, death and reincarnation, David-Néel writes that there are numerous subtle theories upon the subject, and that the Tibetan mystics appear to have gained a deeper insight into the question than most other Buddhists. She insists, however, that in Tibet, as elsewhere, the views of the philosophers are understood only by the élite. According to her, the ideas of the Lamaists concerning the condition of a human being immediately after death differs from those held by Buddhists of southern countries such as Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand.

The Lamaists affirm that a certain time elapses between a person's death and his or her rebirth among one or other of the six recognized sentient beings.⁵⁰ The most obvious view held by the majority is that "the class of beings in which one is reborn and the more or less happy conditions in which one is placed among them depends upon the good and evil actions one has accomplished during one's previous existence."⁵¹ However, David-Néel mentions an interesting view held by the lamas, which is at variance with this popular view and about which she writes as follows:

"He who knows how to go about it could live comfortably even in hell" is a very popular saying in Tibet. This explains more clearly than any definition or description all that the lamas mean by thabs, i.e. "method."

Thus, while most of their co-religionists believe that the fate of the dead is mathematically fixed in accordance with their moral

character, the Lamaists declare that he who knows the proper "method" is capable of

modifying for the better his post-mortem fate. They say "as agreeable as possible" because in spite of cleverness, the weight of past actions has considerable force.⁵²

In Lamaism the role of "method" is, in fact, all-important. Lamaists think that after having learned the art of living well, one must also learn the art of dying well, and of "doing well" in other worlds. Initiates who are acquainted with the mystic lore of dying are supposed to know what to expect when they die, and contemplative lamas "have foreseen and experienced, in this life, the sensations that accompany death," thus they have neither fear nor unexpected surprises when they actually die and their personality disintegrates. That which survives by entering conscious into the next world will already know how to orientate itself with that world's roads and bypaths and the places to which they lead.⁵³

"That which survives after death," and what most other esoteric traditions generally accept to be the reincarnating "Ego" or "soul," David-Néel identifies as "consciousness" or "the will to live." According to Tibetans, a mystic initiate is able to enter the after-death state with lucidity and full consciousness. This, however, does not hold true for ordinary mortals, which includes anyone who has not mastered the "science of death," and thus needs the expert help of someone who knows.⁵⁴

The after-death state in Tibetan is known as the *Bardo*, and the *Bardo Thodol* is the Tibetan name for *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. It is a funerary text that is intended to be read to a dead or dying person so that he or she will hear how to find liberation in the intermediate state between death and rebirth, or if that is not possible, to find an auspicious place to reincarnate in, preferably in a land that is characterized by purity.⁵⁵ Although David-Néel does not refer to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* directly, it is obvious from her writing that lamas assisting the dying are using the same methods that are described in this book.

It is interesting to compare what *Magic and Mystery in Tibet* and *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* have to say about the first *bardo*, or the stage in the intermediate state which is entered immediately after the dead person becomes disincarnate. The former says the following:

Certain Lamaists assert that, immediately after the spirit has been disincarnated, it has an intuition, fugitive as a streak of lightning, of the Supreme Reality. If it can seize this light, it is definitely set free from the 'round' of successive births and deaths. It has reached the state of nirvana.⁵⁶

Donald S. Lopez, Jr., in his foreword to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, puts the same point in the following way:

The text describes the process of death and rebirth in terms of three intermediate states or "bardos" (*bar do*, a Tibetan term that literally means "between two"). The first, and briefest, is the *bardo* of the moment of death ('*chi kha'i bar do*) when, at the end of a process of sensory dissolution that presages physical death, a profound state of consciousness, called the clear light, dawns. If one is able to recognize the clear light as reality, one immediately achieves liberation from *samsāra*, the cycle of rebirth. If the clear light is not recognized at that time, the consciousness of the deceased person moves into the second *bardo* . . .⁵⁷

The *Bardo Thodol* goes on to describe what happens to the dead person if he or she is unable to gain nirvana, or liberation:

(T)he consciousness . . . moves into the second *bardo* (which appears to be a Tibetan innovation), called the *bardo* of reality (*chos nyid bar do*). The disintegration of the personality brought on by death again re-

veals reality, but in this case, not as the clear light, but in the multicoloured forms of a mandala of forty-two peaceful deities and a mandala of fifty-eight wrathful deities . . . If reality is not recognized in this second *bardo*, then the third *bardo*, the *bardo* of mundane existence (*srid pa'l bar do*), dawns, during which one must again take rebirth in one of the six realms of gods, demi-gods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, or in hell; consciousness is blown to the appropriate place of rebirth by the winds of past karma.⁵⁸

Although David-Néel makes no direct references to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, she provides interesting information about Ti-

betan funerals and their characteristic culture of death. She even mentions cases where living persons, albeit during states of lethargy or trance, allegedly traveled not only in countries inhabited by men, but paradises, purgatories or in the *Bardo*, and once returned, were able to describe such places. Such people are called *delogs*, a name designating someone who has returned from the beyond.⁵⁹ (Such incidents could be compared to what people have reported after experiencing a near-death experience, as reported by people who were pronounced clinically dead, but then managed to be resuscitated.) There are also strange incidents among the general populace where the spirit of a dead person allegedly gets abducted by a demon, and when people will then employ a *Bön* sorcerer (*Bön* is the ancient shamanistic religion which pre-dated Buddhism in Tibet) to negotiate with the demon, so that the captive can regain his or her liberty. The ransom in such cases is usually the sacrifice of a pig or cow.⁶⁰

Once David-Néel asked the lama of Enche what would be the post-mortem subjective visions of a materialist who had looked upon death as total annihilation. The lama replied that perhaps such a man would see apparitions corresponding to the religious beliefs he held as a child, or to those familiar to him that was held by the people among whom he had lived. Then, according to his degree of understanding and his after-death consciousness, he would, perhaps, pay attention to these visions and remember the reasons which, during his lifetime, made him reject the reality of that which now appears to him. A less intelligent man might, perhaps, see no visions at all, but this will not prevent the workings of the law of karma, or cause and effect, from following its course and resulting in new phenomena. In other words, it will not stop the process of rebirth for the materialist.⁶¹

Before leaving the discussion of *Magic & Mystery in Tibet*, which is highly recommended, it would be worthwhile to quote once more from Aaron Sussman's introduction:

There are many ways to read a book. One can read it as a story, pure and simple, not bothering to figure out its meaning, its purpose, or its warning. One can read it as a record of facts, noting without emotion or involvement the things that were seen, done, felt or thought. But one can also read a book in awe and wonder; wonder at the marvels or insights it reveals, and awe at the way in which it is told. There are not many books which can be read this way.

When I first read the galleys of *Magic and Mystery in Tibet*, I began to feel that same sense of wonder. Here, in our cynical modern age, was a book about the miracles of ancient wisdom.⁶²

The Secret Oral Teachings in Tibetan Buddhist Sects

David-Néel's *The Secret Oral Teachings in Tibetan Buddhist Sects* was co-authored by, and dedicated to, her adoptive son Lama Yongden, and, unlike *Magic & Mystery in Tibet*, is a purely religious and philosophical work. This work only goes to prove how multi-talented and exceptionally intelligent David-

Néel actually was. Her involvement with the depth of philosophical concepts in Tibetan Buddhism is not only that of a curious intellectual, but that of a trained thinker and meditator who has made her own a whole system of thinking that had originally been foreign to her.

The book starts off with a passage where David-Néel relates how she told a learned Tibetan about her intention to write this book, and his less than encouraging response:

"Waste of time. The great majority of readers and hearers are the same all over the world. I have no doubt that the people of your country are like those I have met in China and India, and these latter were just like Tibetans. If you speak to them of profound Truths they yawn, and, if they dare, they leave you, but if you tell them absurd fables they are all eyes and ears. They wish the doctrines preached to them, whether religious, philosophic, or social, to be agreeable, to be consistent with their conceptions, to satisfy their inclinations, in fact that they find themselves in them, and that they feel themselves approved by them."⁶³

Sadly, the above words are true and universally applicable. Fortunately, David-Néel did not follow this friend's advice, because those people who *do* want to confront philosophical truths and realities would have been all the poorer for it.

The essence of the introductory chapter touches on the method of teaching which takes place between a master and his disciple and is summed up by David-Néel as follows:

The attainment of transcendent insight is the real object of the training advocated in the traditional Oral Teachings, which do not consist, as so many imagine, in teaching certain things to the pupil, in revealing to him certain secrets, but rather in showing him the means to learn them and discover them for himself.⁶⁴

The above method is backed up by the primary recommendation that a Master gives to neophytes, which is *doubt*.⁶⁵ This "doubt" needs to be understood in the same way in which the

Master Djwhal Khul encourages a healthy attitude of skepticism in disciples when they are confronted with occult matters.

The issue of doubt or skepticism is emphasized because our very senses, which are the prime sources of arriving at information when confronting reality, are not to be trusted, and should be considered as minimal and elementary tools whereby we gather information about our surrounding environment. To demonstrate this point, David-Néel uses the example of what might happen when one is in a vast, bare plain, and in the distance, becomes aware of a fleck of green standing out on the yellow sand. Although the fleck of green is ever so tiny, the conclusion one is apt to draw is that one has seen a tree. She says that drawing such a conclusion consists of many elements such as habit, memory, the fact that in similar conditions other green spots have led to the finding of a tree at the end of the plain. Such instances were remembered, and in a general sense one also knows that distance gives a diminutive image of objects seen, and this too has been remembered. Yet all these are *ratiocinations* and not the fact of having *seen* a tree. That one might well find a tree at the end of the plain is quite *probable*, but it is not *certain*.⁶⁶

The whole point of philosophical enquiry is to arrive at some certainties, and thereby come nearer to what is called reality. On the other hand, the above example, when summarized by David-Néel, yields nothing more than the following:

In short, what kind of information has been given us by the fact of having seen a green spot? – It has simply made us conscious of having felt a sensation. A sensation, nothing more, all the rest is interpretation. In the same way, all our perceptions, those to which we give names and assign form, colour, or no matter what attributes, are nothing but interpretations of a fugitive contact by one of our senses with a stimulus.⁶⁷

The conditions of our perceived reality become even more involved and complex when we learn that according to the Masters “*the tangi-*

ble world is movement . . . not a collection of moving objects, but movement itself. There are no objects ‘in movement,’ it is the movement which constitutes the objects which appear to us: they are nothing but movement.”⁶⁸

Expanding on the nature of this movement David-Néel writes that there are two theories, and both consider the world as movement. One states that the course of this movement which creates phenomena is continuous, and can be compared to the flow of a quiet river. The other declares that the movement is intermittent and advances by separate flashes of energy which follow each other at such small intervals that these intervals are almost non-existent.⁶⁹

A practical illustration of the latter theory would be a movie show which by means of light, celluloid, and the rotating movement of the movie projector manages to create the illusion of smooth and continued movement, although we all know that, in reality, we are dealing with numerous separate images which are shown in rapid succession, and by these means successfully manage to create the deception.

Just as our eyes can be subject to deception, all our other organs of perception can be equally deceived. From this one can conclude that any knowledge that has been gained by means of the senses can only be partial and relative, and thus totally inadequate to allow us to form any idea of an Absolute Reality.⁷⁰ Very aptly, at this point, David-Néel asks:

But is there a Reality, a unique Reality in the absolute sense? – What can we know of it and what meaning would it have for us who do not belong to the world of the Absolute but to that of the relative?⁷¹

After this momentous question, she cautions that each type of being, whether it be a mosquito, a plant, a human being, a god or a demon, perceives the world in its own way, and thus the extent, the gradation, the strength, and the nature of the sensations and the perceptions differ according to the constitution of the organ of contact of different beings. We need to understand that our ideas and judgments are based on our human mentality, on our human senses and of relating and gauging according

to our measure that which exists in the infinity of space.⁷²

Once again, the above sampling of this philosophical work only treats a fraction of the whole, as the intention of this discussion is to encourage the reader to do all further investigation for him or herself. In conclusion to this introductory discussion of *The Secret Oral Teachings in Tibetan Buddhist Sects* it is best to quote David-Néel's own words as she elaborates on the method of presentation of the Oral Teachings:

One can very well apply to the Oral Teachings what has been said above concerning the discontinuity of the movement which is the world. This teaching is not expressed in a consequent and methodically arranged manner, as we might be tempted to wish. The subjects explained are interlaced, repeated, and seen from various points of view. It is rare that a graduated "course" is given to a particular student. The teaching is composed rather of separate interviews often taking place at very long intervals. My observations consist in assembling the summaries of conversations I have heard. Each of my readers must connect together those of these summaries which are most interesting to him.⁷³

Conclusion

Whether one looks at Alexandra David-Néel the adventurer and explorer, the anthropologist, the scholar or the writer, her life is a testimony of an exceptional and highly gifted individual who stopped at nothing to achieve her aims, and in the process left behind a legacy of books, both entertaining and scholarly, that many successive generations will be able to study and enjoy. Although she was not known to have been officially affiliated with any specific occult group in the West, any esoteric school that cares to investigate or research her books as regards the world of the occult could only benefit thereby. Working as a free and independent agent David-Néel's personality was of such a dynamic and charismatic nature that she befriended people of all types and standing, from the lowliest who acted as her helpers and servants, to high-ranking lamas,

princes, to the Dalai Lama himself. Typical of her adventurous spirit, one can but smile at the fact that when she was a hundred years old, she took definite steps to acquire a new and valid passport. Such spirits can only be hailed with a hearty "*Bon voyage.*"

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Alice A. Bailey's Formulas for Initiation: Formulas Three through Six

Zachary F. Lansdowne

Abstract

Alice Bailey presented “six ancient formulas or symbolic forms which are to be found in the archives for disciples,” and said that “they concern the six fundamental prerequisites for initiation.” She did not, however, explain the meaning of these formulas but instead acknowledged their “mysterious presentations” and “their extreme difficulty of interpretation.” An earlier article clarified Formulas One and Two. The present article demonstrates the following. Formula Three describes steps for implementing the divine plan by workers with varied levels of attainment. Formula Four provides steps for both individual and planetary purification. Formula Five depicts stages for ascending in consciousness via the antahkarana, which is the inner bridge between one's lower and higher selves, and Formula Six depicts activities that are brought about by this ascension.

Background

Alice Bailey (1880 – 1949), a modern theosophical writer, introduced six symbolic formulas for initiation in *Discipleship in the New Age*, volume II:

There are six ancient formulas or symbolic forms which are to be found in the archives for disciples. They concern the six fundamental prerequisites for initiation. They are used prior to all the major initiations, and have therefore five significances or meanings which will become apparent only as each of these initiations is undergone. They are in the form sometimes of symbols and sometimes of words, and are amongst the oldest formulas in the world. They have

been used down the ages by all disciples and initiates of the Great White Lodge.¹

She did not explain the meaning of these formulas but instead acknowledged their puzzling nature: “To grasp the meaning of these mysterious presentations, the creative imagination must be brought into play”;² “These formulas and their implications have caused some of you concern because of their extreme difficulty of interpretation.”³

Our interpretative approach is to assign meanings to the formulas' symbols based on clues found in Bailey's published writings. The resulting meanings should not be viewed as authoritative or complete. Although our meanings may not be those originally intended, our justification for them can be intellectually understood and be traced back to Bailey's own material. Our earlier article addressed Formulas One and Two,⁴ so the present article elucidates the remaining four formulas: Formulas Three through Six.

Formula Three

To the initiate who uses this formula, creating the necessary sounds and enunciating the ancient words in due place (and these I may not give you), the

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following six thoughts are emphasised in his consciousness; these six thoughts will give you the intent of the formula as clearly as is possible.

1. God *IS*. The Lord for aye stands firm. Being exists alone. Naught else is.
2. Time *IS*. Being descends to manifest. Creation is. Time then and form agree. Being and time do not agree.
3. Unity *IS*. The One between comes forth and knows both time and God. But time destroys that middle One and only Being *IS*.
4. Space *IS*. Time and space reverberate and veil the One who stands behind. Pure Being *IS*—unknown and unafraid, untouched, for aye unchanged.
5. God *IS*. Time, space, the middle One (with form and process) go, and yet for aye remain. Pure reason then suffices.
6. Being cries forth and says: ... (untranslatable). Death crumbles all. Existence disappears, yet all for aye remains—untouched, immutably the same. God *IS*.⁵

Before interpreting these six statements, called “thoughts” in the formula, let us consider their distinguishing feature: each statement is a series of brief puzzling sentences. For example, the first statement begins by declaring, “God *IS*. The Lord for aye stands firm,” the meaning of which is not clear from just these isolated words. The first step in our interpretative approach is to regard each brief puzzling sentence as a symbol of a longer intelligible sentence that can be inferred from its words and context; the second step is to look for this intelligible sentence elsewhere in Bailey’s writings. Thus our explanation of each statement in Formula Three takes the form of an expanded statement that is obtained by replacing the original brief sentences with longer quotations from Bailey.

Based on this interpretative approach, the six statements are expanded as follows:

1. “*God is intelligent loving Will.*”⁶ “This Lord of the World is the sole repository of the will and purpose of the One of Whom He is an expression.”⁷ “The Being Who is

the life of our planet, the One in Whom we live and move and have our being ... is sometimes called the planetary Logos, sometimes the Ancient of Days, sometimes God, and sometimes the One Life.”⁸ “From the standpoint of our planetary evolution, there is naught but love, naught but goodwill and the will-to-good.”⁹

2. “*Time is the sequence of events and of states of consciousness as registered by the physical brain.*”¹⁰ “It is Sanat Kumara Whose task it is to impress the Lives Who meet periodically in the Council Chamber with the next phase of unfolding Purpose. This Purpose is later ‘occultly reduced’ or stepped down until it emerges as the hierarchical Plan.”¹¹ “The task of the Masters is to project into the world those thoughts and those formulated divine ideas, those concepts and significances which embody—at any one time—the immediate Plan for humanity.”¹² “Ideas, when intuitively contacted by the disciple or initiate, via the antahkarana, must be brought consciously down to abstract levels of thinking where (expressing it symbolically) they form the blueprints, prior to the institution of the creative process which will give them phenomenal existence and being.”¹³ “He [the disciple] needs to discover how far human planning conforms to that [abstract] pattern. He must sense where nonconformity originates and what steps—as far as his particular point in evolution permits—the Ashram should take to offset the distortion of the Plan.”¹⁴

3. “*Unity might be regarded as the conscious adaptation of the initiated disciple to the greater whole.*”¹⁵ “First of all it should be realised that the disciple, under the Law, has to master the technique of spiritual compromise.”¹⁶ “It might be said that the spiritual compromise of the disciple (working with the Plan) transforms the basic idea (through mental modification) into an acceptable ideal.”¹⁷ “Disciples who are not so advanced, and who are therefore closer to human thinking at the particular moment in history, undertake to supervise the precipitation of the Plan. Their work is necessarily

far more exoteric, but is most responsible, because it is when the Plan has reached the stage of human implementation that error is apt to arise and mistakes can occur.”¹⁸

“Then later, the ideal, ‘*duly modified and qualified*’ is presented to the world of men upon the physical plane, is there *adapted* to the differing fields of thought, to the diverse types of consciousness, and to the nations and groups with which the New Group of World Servers is working.”¹⁹

4. “*Space is the field in and through which the energies from the many originating Sources play.*”²⁰ “The planning, having reached this final stage [of precipitation], then proceeds under its own momentum.”²¹

“Owing to failure rightly to apprehend and interpret it [the new ideal] or to apply it usefully—it has developed into an illusion and enters upon a career of deception, of crystallisation and of misinformation.”²²

“*The occultist ... creates upon the physical plane that which he desires, and that which he desires is the pattern of things and the design laid down upon the trestle board of the spiritual consciousness by the great divine Architect. Yet he identifies himself not with the pattern or with the forces which he employs. He moves in the world of maya, free from all illusion, unhindered by glamour and uncontrolled by the mayavic forces. He is rapidly arriving, as far as his own little world is concerned, at the same ‘divine indifference’ which characterises Sanat Kumara, the Lord of the World.*”²³

5. “*God is creative activity.*”²⁴ “The initiate, on his tiny scale, likewise has to learn to work behind the scenes, unknown and unrecognised and unacclaimed; he must sacrifice his identity in the identity of the Ashram and its workers, and later in the identity of his working disciples out in the world of daily life.”²⁵ “The disciple learns to use energies—located and found by him in space—within a set time and then to direct them accurately (via the ajna centre) into the work and into the group which is under hierarchical influence, through his own immediate efforts.”²⁶ “Pure reason, which is

the supreme characteristic of the Members of the Hierarchy, will ever express itself in right action and right human relations, and that will manifest—when present—what love in reality is.”²⁷

6. “*The initiate knows because he works.*”²⁸

By working according to the preceding statements, the initiated disciple gains the following realizations. “With the death or destruction of phases of the divine Plan, engineered by the Hierarchy in conformity with the divine Purpose, there is an overlapping between the building process and the destroying process. Dying civilisations are present in their final forms whilst new civilisations are emerging; cycles come and go and in the going overlap.”²⁹ “The withdrawing life of a great expression of the hierarchical plan absorbs the qualities and returns with them, as endowments, later in time and space and manifests anew through the medium of more adequate forms of expression.”³⁰ “God is here, present among us and in all forms of expression; He includes, pervades and remains beyond. He is greater than all appearance. He reveals Himself progressively and cyclically as man gets ready for further knowledge.”³¹

These expanded statements describe steps for implementing the divine plan by workers with varied levels of attainment, but some of these statements may be unclear due to their unusual terminology. Let us clarify this terminology, because it is also used throughout the rest of the article.

The first statement mentions “the Lord of the World,” and the second statement mentions “Sanat Kumara,” but the fourth statement indicates that these two names denote the same being. Sanat Kumara, a Sanskrit name that means “Eternal Youth,” is also mentioned in both the *Mahabharata* and *Chandogya Upanishad* of Hinduism.³² In the first statement, “the One of Whom He is an expression” is an indirect way of denoting the planetary Logos, because Bailey speaks of “the manifested form of the planetary Logos in the Person of Sanat Kumara.”³³ In the first, fifth, and sixth statements, “God” is interpreted as the planetary

Logos, because that association is made in the first statement.

The second statement mentions two groups of advanced beings: “Ashram” and “Council Chamber.” Bailey makes this distinction: “In the Ashram, the life of the Spiritual Triad gradually supersedes the life of the soul-controlled personality. In the Council Chamber at Shamballa, the life of the Monad supersedes all other expressions of the essential Reality.”³⁴ There are said to be many Ashrams, but only one Council Chamber. The fifth and sixth statements mention the “Hierarchy,” which is the synthesis of the many Ashrams.³⁵

The second and third statements distinguish between “ideas” and “ideals.” According to this usage, the disciple receives an intuitive idea, which is nebulous and faint, and then formulates it as an explicit ideal, which is a mental model of something to be imitated. Bailey gives a similar account: “disciples—with their intuitional capacity developing slowly but steadily—begin themselves to intuit these ideas, to present them as ideals to the masses, and thus precipitate the needed aspects of the Plan on to the physical plane.”³⁶

The third statement mentions the “New Group of World Servers,” of which Bailey gives this explanation: “The new group of world servers is not a new organisation which is forming in the world. It is simply a loose linking together of all men of constructive peace aims and goodwill who lay the emphasis upon the prior need of establishing right human relations before any lasting peace is possible. This group in no way interferes with the allegiance and loyalties of any man. It is a banding together of all who seek to express *the spirit of Christ* and who are free from the spirit of hatred and revenge.”³⁷

The fourth statement distinguishes between three forms of error: “illusion,” “glamour,” and “maya.” An *illusion* is a distortion of the truth.³⁸ Bailey writes, “*The Problem of Glamour* is found when the mental illusion is intensified by desire,”³⁹ and “*Maya* is vital in character and is a quality of force. It is essentially the energy of the human being as it swings into activity through the subjective influence of the

mental illusion or astral glamour or of both in combination.”⁴⁰ Here, “astral” is a synonym for emotional.⁴¹

The fifth statement mentions the “ajna centre,” the explanation of which requires a series of definitions. The physical body of a human being is said to have both dense and subtle portions. The dense physical body, which contains the muscles, organs, and bones, is energized and stimulated by the subtle physical body, which is called the etheric body in Theosophy. The Sanskrit word *chakra* literally means wheel. The Hindu tradition describes seven wheels of energy, called chakras, which belong to the etheric body.⁴² The “ajna centre” is one of these chakras and is located, in Bailey’s words, “just in front of the eyes and forehead.”⁴³

Formula Four

This formula is presented in the form of a symbol—one which is in such constant movement that it is most difficult to describe or to make it live before you.

There lies before the investigator a square or oblong, composed of a kaleidoscopic mass of inchoate colours, moving, pulsating and in constant indescribable confusion. Superimposed upon this square is a radiant sun with a penumbra composed of the seven prismatic colours; these radiate from the sun in regular rhythmic bands and produce a marvellous blaze of colour. The background of the square appears to have its confusion of colours shown of a heavy, brilliant kind and quality; the scheme of beauty emerging (even if it appears as superimposed) is translucent and delicate and radiantly living in hue. The heavier background can be distinctly seen through the translucence.⁴⁴

Two interpretations are given for this formula, because of Bailey’s clue:

This formula differs according to the polarisation of the one who visions it and who studies it. If he is focussed in the personality, and is therefore conditioned by his personality ray, one type of energy will impinge upon his consciousness; if he is soul

conscious and soul focussed, another type of energy will have its effect. Thus two different pictures will emerge. Both will be correct, but the interpreting agent will be different.⁴⁵

The two interpretations of Formula Four are obtained by assigning two different meanings to each of its symbols. Our commentary on each interpretation has the following format: given first is a brief interpretation of the formula, with the original symbolic statement indicated by parentheses; given next is a lengthy justification of this interpretation, based upon a detailed analysis of the formula's symbols.

Individual Purification

The first interpretation of Formula Four is the following:

The disciple has reached the stage of a detached observer ("There lies before the investigator") and sees that his or her fourfold personality ("a square or oblong") contains a rapidly changing mass of unsettled opinions ("composed of a kaleidoscopic mass of inchoate colours"), producing glamour, maya, and constant indescribable confusion ("moving, pulsating and in constant indescribable confusion"). The disciple invokes, or solicits, illumination from the soul by visualizing it as a radiant sun that is superimposed upon the personality ("Superimposed upon this square is a radiant sun"), discovers the soul's quality, or ray ("with a penumbra"), and finds that this quality expresses itself through seven basic differentiations, or subrays ("composed of the seven prismatic colours"). The disciple evokes, or brings forth, intuitive ideas that are colored by the soul's quality and that radiate from the soul in sequential phases, with each phase consisting of the rhythmic, recurrent impression of a single idea ("these radiate from the sun in regular rhythmic bands"). He or she contacts the idea that is currently being impressed and formulates it as an explicit ideal ("and produces a marvellous blaze of colour"). The disciple sees the associated personality error, which had

been a relatively inconspicuous part of the inner confusion, as troublingly conspicuous ("The background of the square appears to have its confusion of colours shown of a heavy, brilliant kind and quality"). He or she forces the lower nature to conform to the ideal rather than the error ("the scheme of beauty emerging (even if it appears as superimposed)"), which causes more of virtue, wisdom, and the soul's quality to emerge ("is translucent and delicate and radiantly living in hue"). The disciple distinctly sees a subtler error after purifying the last one ("The heavier background can be distinctly seen through the translucence"), and repeats the foregoing process.

The foregoing interpretation renders each sentence of the formula as a stage in individual purification, and the rest of this subsection justifies that explanation. Each sentence of the formula is repeated in *italic* and then is followed by a detailed analysis of its symbols.

There lies before the investigator a square or oblong composed of a kaleidoscopic mass of inchoate colours, moving, pulsating and in constant indescribable confusion. The initial phrase of the first sentence, "There lies before the investigator a square or oblong," depicts detached observation, because the investigator is detached from the object being observed. Moreover, Bailey speaks of "the investigator advanced enough to have reached the stage of a detached observer,"⁴⁶ so "the investigator" in the first sentence is assumed to have reached that stage. She also explains what is being investigated: "the task of the disciple is to become consciously aware—like a detached on-looking Observer—of these energies and their expressing qualities as they function within himself."⁴⁷ Bailey sometimes uses "square" to signify the fourfold personality, which consists of the mental, emotional, etheric, and dense physical bodies.⁴⁸ In the initial phrase, "square" signifies the investigator's own personality, because that is his or her field of work.

In the remainder of the first sentence, "colours" symbolize thoughts, because Bailey speaks of "thoughts, not so pure or so wise but

necessarily colored by the individuality of the thinker.”⁴⁹ The word *inchoate* means imperfectly developed, so “inchoate colours” could represent what Bailey calls “unsettled opinions,”⁵⁰ which are opinions that have not yet been verified, or they could represent illusions, which are distortions of the truth. Bailey uses the term “soul” to denote “the inner divine voice,”⁵¹ and says, “Only the soul stands clear from illusion, and only the soul sees things as they are,”⁵² implying that the soul’s illumination is generally needed to recognize illusions. The formula depicts the soul’s illumination as occurring in the second sentence, indicating that it is not yet available for the first sentence. Thus “inchoate colours” are taken as unsettled opinions, because detached observers can see—without the illumination of the soul—that they have unsettled opinions. “A kaleidoscopic mass” is taken as a rapidly changing mass, because the adjective *kaleidoscopic* could mean rapidly changing, and detached observers can see that their mass of unsettled opinions does rapidly change.

Bailey speaks of the “‘downward moving’ tendency of desire,”⁵³ so “moving” colors depict thoughts that are intensified by desire moving downward—or, equivalently, by desire turned toward the material plane. Such desire produces glamour, as Bailey also explains: “Human desire has been turned outward to the material plane, thus producing the world of glamour in which we all habitually struggle.”⁵⁴ “Pulsating” colors depict maya, which is glamour that has been intensified by vital energy, because Bailey associates “pulsating rhythmic activity” with the vital energy of the etheric body.⁵⁵ In Bailey’s words, “the forces ... under the term maya are those uncontrolled energies, those undirected impulses which ... sweep a man into wrong activity and surround him with a whirlpool of effects and of conditions in which he is entirely helpless.”⁵⁶ Detached observers can see that they are controlled by both glamour and maya, even though they may not be familiar with those particular terms, because they can observe their outward-turned desires and their irrational impulses. Finally, detached observers can see that they are, using the words of the formula, “in constant indescribable confusion.”

Superimposed upon this square is a radiant sun with a penumbra composed of the seven prismatic colours. The second sentence pertains to what Bailey calls “The Science of Invocation and Evocation,”⁵⁷ of which she gives the following detailed explanation:

The lesser aspect is ever the invoking factor, and this constitutes an unalterable law lying behind the entire evolutionary process. It is necessarily a reciprocal process, but in time and space it might be broadly said that the lesser ever invokes the higher, and higher factors are then evoked and respond according to the measure of understanding and the dynamic tension displayed by the invoking element. This many fail to realise. You do not work at the evocative process. That word simply connotes the response of that which has been reached. The task of the lesser aspect or group is invocative, and the success of the invocative rite is called evocation.⁵⁸

The initial phrase, “Superimposed upon this square is a radiant sun,” depicts the disciple’s invocation. The “radiant sun” symbolizes the soul, because Bailey advises, “See the soul as a radiant sun within you.”⁵⁹ Thus the initial phrase has this meaning: the disciple invokes, or solicits, illumination from the soul by visualizing it as a radiant sun that is superimposed upon the personality. As Bailey explains,

In the early stages of his invocative work, the instrument used is the creative imagination. This enables him at the very beginning to act *as if* he were capable of thus creating; then, when the *as if* imaginative consciousness is no longer useful, he becomes consciously aware of that which he has—with hope and spiritual expectancy—sought to create.⁶⁰

In other words, the disciple’s invocative work develops progressively: initially the disciple acts *as if* the soul exists but may not trust that it actually does exist; later he or she becomes increasingly more convinced that the soul exists by experiencing its successive effects. The rest of the second sentence depicts those effects.

The second sentence alludes to the seven rays, so let us review some of Bailey's teachings on that topic:

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. This is a true definition of a ray.⁶¹

The soul is a unit of energy, vibrating in unison with one of the seven ray Lives, and coloured by a particular ray light.⁶²

Each of these rays has its seven subrays which relate it to all the other rays.⁶³

Accordingly, the phrase, "with a penumbra composed of the seven prismatic colours," has this meaning: the disciple discovers the soul's quality, or ray, and finds that this quality expresses itself through seven basic differentiations, or subrays. Bailey makes a similar comment:

He discovers his own soul, the product of the union of his Father in heaven with the Mother or the material nature. This last is the personality. He then, having discovered the personality, discovers the quality of his own soul life, and the purpose for which he has "appeared." He finds that this quality expresses itself through seven aspects or basic differentiations.⁶⁴

These radiate from the sun in regular rhythmic bands and produce a marvellous blaze of colour. The final clause of the second sentence depicts the evocation that is brought forth by the disciple's invocation. Bailey mentions "the intuitions which are sent to you from your soul,"⁶⁵ and says that "the truth has come to him via his own soul and is consequently coloured by his ray."⁶⁶ Thus the phrase, "these radiate from the sun," has this meaning: the disciple evokes, or brings forth, intuitive ideas that are colored by the soul's quality and that radiate from the soul. Bailey also speaks of "impression [that] is rhythmic, recurrent and therefore cumulative in its intended effects."⁶⁷ Accordingly, the phrase, "in regular rhythmic bands," has this meaning: the ideas appear in sequential phases, with each phase consisting

of the rhythmic, recurrent impression of a single idea. As explained earlier, an ideal is a mental formulation of an intuitive idea, so the phrase, "and produce a marvellous blaze of colour," has this meaning: the disciple contacts the idea that is currently being impressed and formulates it as an explicit ideal.

The background of the square appears to have its confusion of colours shown of a heavy, brilliant kind and quality. In the third sentence, the noun *background* could denote a position or area of relative inconspicuousness, and *square* has already been interpreted as the personality, so the phrase "the background of the square" is taken as the area of relative inconspicuousness within the personality. Bailey refers to such an area when she speaks of "a background of personal ambition and love of power, even if only partially recognised or not recognised at all."⁶⁸ One's area of relative inconspicuousness, however, refers only to one's awareness about oneself; another observer might clearly see aspects of one's personality that one does not see.

The adjective *heavy* has the psychological meaning of being weighted down, such as with troubles, and *brilliant* indicates conspicuousness. Thus the clause, "The background of the square appears to have its confusion of colours shown of a heavy, brilliant kind and quality," is taken to mean: the disciple sees the associated personality error, which had been a relatively inconspicuous part of the inner confusion, as troublingly conspicuous. This phenomenon is illustrated by Bailey's remark to a student: "Five years ago you evidenced much spiritual pride; you had a strong sense of separateness, and a highly developed critical mind. Today these demonstrate far less than formerly, and you are now quick to see any emerging wrong tendencies, and equally quick to repudiate them."⁶⁹

The scheme of beauty emerging (even if it appears as superimposed) is translucent and delicate and radiantly living in hue. "Superimposed" indicates that the disciple forces the lower nature to conform to the ideal rather than the error, as Bailey explains: "He creates a pattern in his mind which hews as true as he can

make it to the prototype, and which serves to model the lower man and force conformity to the ideal.”⁷⁰ “Translucent” means allowing the passage of light, so it indicates the emergence of virtue, because Bailey says, “Virtue is the manifestation in man of the spirit of cooperation with his brothers, necessitating unselfishness, understanding and complete self-forgetfulness.”⁷¹ “Delicate,” or subtle, indicates the emergence of wisdom, which is subtler than concrete thought. Bailey says, “Wisdom concerns the one Self,”⁷² and “Learn the meaning of illusion, and in its midst locate the golden thread of truth.”⁷³ The principle of wisdom, or “golden thread of truth,” learned from the error is a truth about the one Self that is denied by the illusion on which the error is based. “Radiantly living in hue” indicates the emergence of the soul’s ray, which is its quality. In Bailey’s words, “This personality or form ray then becomes simply the medium of expression through which the quality of the soul can make its presence felt in full power.”⁷⁴

The heavier background can be distinctly seen through the translucence. In the final sentence, “the heavier background” is interpreted as a remaining subtler error, and “translucence” as the purified error. Thus the final sentence has this meaning: the disciple distinctly sees a subtler error after purifying the last one. This phenomenon is illustrated by Bailey’s remark: “I would suggest that no aspirant attempt to tackle the problem of glamour as a whole or seek to dissipate all the glammers to which he is susceptible ... He should choose the glamour that is the most apparent and the most hindering at any given time (and there is always one) and for its dissipation he should work conscientiously.”⁷⁵

... the objective of trained observers “is to see clearly through all events, through space and time by means of the cultivation and use of the intuition.” Thus “inchoate colours,” which are taken as unsettled opinions in the first interpretation of Formula Four, are construed as illusions in this second interpretation, because trained observers have reached the stage in which they can recognize the illusions of humanity.

This first interpretation of Formula Four illustrates Bailey’s five stages of individual purification: “*Alignment, Crisis, Light, Revelation, Integration.*”⁷⁶ The initial phrase of the first sentence depicts the stage of *alignment*: the disciple is a detached observer of his or her personality. The remainder of the first sentence depicts the stage of *crisis*: the disciple perceives faults in his or her personality that must be intelligently corrected. The initial clause of the second sentence depicts the stage of *light*: the disciple understands the need for a change in direction, method, and attitude, and so visualizes the soul as superimposed upon the personality. The final clause of the second sentence depicts the stage of *revelation*: the disciple

evokes a sequence of intuitive ideas from the soul and converts them into ideals. The third and fourth sentences depict the stage of *integration*: the disciple integrates the successive ideals into his or her personality, resulting in the emergence of virtue, wisdom, and the soul’s quality.

An *archetype* is an original pattern or type after which other similar things are modeled. Carl Jung (1875 – 1961), an eminent psychiatrist, applied archetypes to psychology, explaining that “the archetype is the introspectively recognizable form of a *priori* psychic orderedness.”⁷⁷ Later writers developed the concept of an *archetypal path*, which is a sequential pattern that can guide the mind. For example, Richard Tarnas, a cultural historian, states, “the human mind is following the numinous archetypal path that is unfolding from within it.”⁷⁸ In the first interpretation of Formula Four, the successive intuitive ideas, which are colored by the soul’s quality, are impressed upon the mind from within it and

then unfold as ideals, so this succession fits the definition of an archetypal path. According to the teachings on the seven rays, there are seven qualities, or rays, implying that there are seven archetypal paths, one for each ray. Given elsewhere are symbolic descriptions of these seven archetypal paths⁷⁹ as well as detailed explanations of them.⁸⁰

Planetary Purification

The second interpretation of Formula Four is the following:

The disciple has reached the stage of a trained observer ("There lies before the investigator") and sees that humanity ("a square or oblong") contains a varied mass of illusions, producing world glamour, world maya, and pervasive unspeakable conflict ("composed of a kaleidoscopic mass of inchoate colours, moving, pulsating and in constant indescribable confusion"). He or she investigates the validity and usefulness of the following working hypotheses: humanity is influenced by the solar Logos through the second ray of Love-Wisdom ("Superimposed upon this square is a radiant sun with a penumbra"); that ray is composed of the seven rays ("composed of the seven prismatic colours"), each of which expresses an aspect of the solar Logos during its regular rhythmic periods of manifestation ("these radiate from the sun in regular rhythmic bands"); the rays in manifestation determine the kinds of world glamour to which humanity easily succumbs, and the kinds that humanity most easily creates ("produce a marvellous blaze of colour"). To investigate these hypotheses, the disciple explains the occurrence of a human conflict on the physical plane by identifying the strength, prominence, kind, and ray of its principal world glamour on the emotional plane ("The background of the square appears to have its confusion of colours shown of a heavy, brilliant kind and quality"). To bring harmony out of the observed conflict, the disciple superimposes a threefold vision upon the glamourised people that invokes, or solicits, their inner reality ("the scheme of beauty emerging (even if it

appears as superimposed)"). He or she sees them as united with all humanity, which denies their glamour's denial of that unity; sees their inner strength, which denies their fearful incentive for holding on to their glamour; and sees the radiated impressions of the first and second visions as going to them ("is translucent and delicate and radiantly living in hue"). The disciple may not know whether this work is effective, because the identified glamour is so widespread and general that it can still be seen to exist in spite of the transmitted illumination ("The heavier background can be distinctly seen through the translucence").

The foregoing interpretation renders each sentence of the formula as a step in planetary purification. The remainder of this subsection justifies that explanation by construing each symbol as having a meaning that is different from that used in the first interpretation. Each sentence of the formula is repeated in *italic* and then is followed by a detailed analysis of its symbols.

There lies before the investigator a square or oblong, composed of a kaleidoscopic mass of inchoate colours, moving, pulsating and in constant indescribable confusion. "The investigator" in the first sentence is assumed to be what Bailey calls a trained observer:

Another group is that of the *Trained Observers*. Their objective is to see clearly through all events, through space and time by means of the cultivation and use of the intuition. They work very largely on the astral plane at the dissipation of glamour, thus bringing in illumination to mankind.⁸¹

A trained observer, in Bailey's words, "learns the method of handling the planetary correspondence of that which he has individually overcome,"⁸² so he or she is more advanced than a detached observer, who is the subject of the first interpretation of Formula Four. The field of work for a trained observer is, in Bailey's words, "the square representing humanity, the fourth kingdom in nature."⁸³ The first,

second, and third kingdoms are said to be the mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms, re-

spectively.⁸⁴ Thus, in the first sentence, “square” signifies humanity.

As noted previously, the objective of trained observers “is to see clearly through all events, through space and time by means of the cultivation and use of the intuition.” Thus “inchoate colours,” which are taken as unsettled opinions in the first interpretation of Formula Four, are construed as illusions in this second interpretation, because trained observers have reached the stage in which they can recognize the illusions of humanity. “A kaleidoscopic mass” is construed as a varied mass, because the adjective *kaleidoscopic* could have the meaning of varied, and trained observers can recognize the variety of illusions, such as conflicting ideals and ideologies, that exist in humanity. The terms *world glamour* and *world maya* are the planetary correspondences for glamour and maya on the individual scale.⁸⁵ *Pervasive unspeakable conflict* is used as the planetary correspondence for constant indescribable confusion on the individual scale, because the former is produced through the aggregation of the latter.

Superimposed upon this square is a radiant sun with a penumbra composed of the seven prismatic colours. The second sentence contains references to the seven rays. The first interpretation of Formula Four construes these references in a microcosmic way: “radiant sun,” “penumbra,” and “seven prismatic colours” are taken as the soul, soul’s ray, and seven subrays of the soul’s ray, respectively. The second interpretation, however, construes the same references in a macrocosmic way: namely, as the solar Logos, second ray of Love-Wisdom, and seven rays, respectively, as Bailey explains:

We are told that seven great rays exist in the cosmos. In our solar system only one of these seven great rays is in operation. The seven sub-divisions constitute the “seven rays” which, wielded by our solar Logos, form the basis of endless variations in His system of worlds.⁸⁶

These seven ray energies are the seven forces which unitedly compose the primary Ray of Love-Wisdom. This is the second

ray of our solar system and the dominating ray in every planetary expression within the solar system. The seven rays are, all of them, subsidiary rays of this great cosmic ray.⁸⁷

These radiate from the sun in regular rhythmic bands and produce a marvellous blaze of colour. The seven rays are divided into three major rays of aspect and four minor rays of attribute. Bailey says, “The three major rays are the expression (during manifestation) of the egoic aspect of the solar Logos, whilst the four rays of attribute embody His personality aspect.”⁸⁸ Thus the formula’s phrase, “These radiate from the sun,” means that each ray expresses an aspect of the solar Logos. She describes the rays as cyclically passing in and out of manifestation with differing cycle lengths: “The rays of aspect have longer cycles than the rays of attribute, and their measure is occultly slow, cumulative in effect, and—as the ages pass away—their momentum steadily increases. The rays of attribute have briefer cycles, and produce a steady heart-beat and a regular rhythm in the solar system.”⁸⁹ Thus the phrase, “in regular rhythmic bands,” denotes the rays’ regular rhythmic periods of manifestation.

Bailey says, “The ray in manifestation will affect potently the three bodies which constitute the personality of man, and the influence of the ray will produce changes in the mind content and the emotional nature of the man and determine the calibre of the physical body.”⁹⁰ She also says that “the ray quality determines the type of glamour or illusion to which a man will easily succumb, and that kind of glamour which he will the most easily create.”⁹¹ Given elsewhere is a list of characteristic glammers for each ray.⁹² Thus the phrase, “produce a marvellous blaze of colour,” is taken as depicting the rays’ effects on world glamour.

Consequently, the second sentence’s references to the seven rays have either a microcosmic or macrocosmic significance. The first interpretation of Formula Four assigns the microcosmic significance to the ray references and treats them as *experiential discoveries*: the detached observer discovers the soul’s quality,

finds that this quality expresses itself through seven basic differentiations, evokes a sequence of intuitive ideas colored by the soul's quality, and converts each idea into an ideal. Bailey, however, suggests a different treatment for the macrocosmic significance: "The average reader would be wise to take the position that for him, at least, the information hitherto given, and that which concerns the racial, national and cyclic rays, provide an interesting hypothesis which can be intelligently accepted until disproven."⁹³ She also writes, "This teaching anent the seven rays remains a profitless speculation unless it is susceptible of investigation, of eventual proof and of general as well as particular usefulness."⁹⁴ Accordingly, the second interpretation assigns the macrocosmic significance to the ray references and treats them as *working hypotheses*: the trained observer investigates the validity of these hypotheses and their usefulness.

The background of the square appears to have its confusion of colours shown of a heavy, brilliant kind and quality. The initial clause of the third sentence portrays the disciple as investigating the working hypotheses on the seven rays. The noun *background* could denote the circumstances that led up to or help to explain something, and *square* has already been interpreted as humanity, so the phrase "the background of the square" is construed as the circumstances that explain something about humanity. The phrase, "its confusion of colours shown of a heavy, brilliant kind and quality," is taken as this insight: an outer human conflict indicates the inner presence of world glamour. For example, Bailey speaks of "the unhappy and glamourised exponents of this evil,"⁹⁵ referring to the instigators of a particular conflict. Thus the clause, "The background of the square appears to have its confusion of colours shown of a heavy, brilliant kind and quality," is taken to mean: the disciple explains the occurrence of a human conflict on the physical plane by identifying the strength, prominence, kind, and ray of its principal world glamour on the emotional plane. Bailey describes a similar step in her instructions to a group of people concerned with dissipating world glamour:

The leader names the glamour with which the group is to be occupied. There will be no dissension anent the glamour at the time of the group meeting because the group members—outside the meetings and for a month prior to undertaking the task of dissipating the glamour will have made a study of it, its implications, its historicity and effects—psychological, individual, group and national, and also its widespread influence over humanity as a whole.⁹⁶

The scheme of beauty emerging (even if it appears as superimposed) is translucent and delicate and radiantly living in hue. The final clause of the third sentence portrays the disciple as applying the Science of Invocation and Evocation. "The scheme of beauty emerging" depicts his or her goal: bringing harmony out of the observed conflict. Put differently, in Bailey's words, "he needs to see in all world conflict the needed steps towards an eventual harmony—a harmony based upon a true mental perception and a sound idealism."⁹⁷ "Superimposed" depicts the use of invocation: the disciple superimposes a vision upon the glamourised people that invokes, or solicits, their inner reality. The phrase, "translucent and delicate and radiantly living in hue," indicates that this invocative vision has three parts, because it characterizes the evocation, or response, brought forth by each invocative part.

The adjective "translucent" characterizes the first evocation and indicates that a recipient is, in Bailey's words, "acting like a clear sheet of glass through which all may see the reality of Oneness as it demonstrates in practicing operation."⁹⁸ An invocative vision can be inferred from its evocation. Thus the first vision, as inferred from the first evocation, sees the glamourised people as united with all humanity, which denies their glamour's denial of that unity.

The adjective "delicate" characterizes the second evocation and indicates that a recipient becomes calm but with delicate, or frail, emotional stability. As Bailey explains, "The healer will have much to do to aid the patient to preserve a constancy of emotional reaction and to become calm and quiescent."⁹⁹ Thus the

second vision, as inferred from the second evocation, sees the inner strength of the glamourised people, which denies their fearful incentive for holding on to their glamour.

The phrase “radiantly living in hue” characterizes the third evocation and indicates that illumination is transmitted to the glamourised people. Thus the third vision, as inferred from the third evocation, sees the radiated impressions of the first and second visions as going to those people. The first vision’s radiated impressions can affect another’s heart center, which is one of the seven chakras mentioned in the commentary for Formula Three, as Bailey explains: “At this stage the man is recognised as one who can speak occultly ‘heart to heart.’ He becomes a stimulator of the heart centre in his brother, and one who arouses men into activity for others.”¹⁰⁰ The second vision’s radiated impressions can affect another’s emotional, or astral, body, as Bailey also explains: “the radiation of his [the healer’s] astral body, controlled and selfless, will impose a rhythm upon the agitation of the patient’s astral body, and so enable the patient to take right action.”¹⁰¹ The third vision’s purpose is to direct both kinds of radiated impressions to the intended recipients, in accordance with Bailey’s principle, “Energy follows thought and the eye directs the energy.”¹⁰²

The heavier background can be distinctly seen through the translucence. In the final sentence, “the heavier background” is interpreted as the identified glamour, and “translucence” as the transmitted illumination. Thus the final sentence has this meaning: the glamour can still be seen in spite of the transmitted illumination, so the effectiveness of the foregoing effort is difficult to discern. Bailey gives this explanation:

They [trained observers] need to realise that they can never know whether they are successful or not, because the glammers they are attempting to dissipate are so widespread and general that effects cannot be grasped by their individual minds. They are too close to the picture; their perspective has necessarily to be that of the immediate foreground.¹⁰³

This second interpretation of Formula Four illustrates Bailey’s distinctions between the words *effect*, *meaning*, and *cause*:

Today, the door which is opening will admit man into a world of meaning—a world which is the antechamber to the world of causes. Effect; Meaning; Cause. In these three words you have the key to the growth of man’s consciousness. Most men live today in the world of effects, and have no idea that they are effects. Some few are now beginning to live in the world of meaning, whilst disciples and those functioning in the world of the Hierarchy are aware, or are steadily becoming aware, of the causes which produce the effects which meaning reveals.¹⁰⁴

Bailey speaks of “the outer world of effects,”¹⁰⁵ which implies that the world of effects is the physical world, and she describes the futility of trying to transform this world by acting directly on it:

The effort has been expended in dealing with effects, and the underlying causes have not been touched, even when realised by a few. The attempt has been made to right wrongs, to expose evils and evil personalities, and to attack organisations, groups, parties, religions and national experiments. This has led to what appears to be a futile expenditure of time, strength, energy and money.¹⁰⁶

Bailey defines the “world of meaning” as “the why and the wherefore of circumstances and happenings—both individual and universal,”¹⁰⁷ so one enters this world by endeavoring to discover the underlying reason *why* an outer event has occurred. In the initial clause of the third sentence, the disciple shifts from the world of effects to the world of meaning. In particular, he or she explains the occurrence of a human conflict on the physical plane by identifying the strength, prominence, kind, and ray of its principal world glamour on the emotional plane. Glamour has made and conditioned the world of effects, so the recognition of its role is part of the world of meaning, yet glamour is not part of the world of causes. Why not? The world of causes is sometimes called “the world

of reality,”¹⁰⁸ but Bailey says that “glamours embody the unreal.”¹⁰⁹ Put differently, glamour is not a true cause because it is based on illusion, which lacks intrinsic power and substance, so the only power that glamour seems to have is the power given to it by those who believe in it.

In the final clause of the third sentence, the disciple shifts from the world of meaning to the world of causes, or reality. Bailey speaks of “your intuitional grasp of reality,”¹¹⁰ so the disciple uses the faculty of spiritual, or intuitional, perception to grasp the reality of the people submerged in the identified glamour, thereby yielding the first and second visions mentioned in the foregoing interpretation. Bailey also says, “Force flows through the focused third eye,”¹¹¹ so the disciple uses the third eye to direct this illumination to them, which is done by means of the third vision. As indicated by Formula One, both the faculty of spiritual perception and the third eye require the downward projection of the monadic will, implying that the second interpretation of Formula Four entails the use of the antahkarana.

Formula Five

The formula with which I present you today consists of three closely related words, and the theme with which the student must concern himself is the nature of the relationship which is indicated—not by the words but by the very nature of that which relates them. This is not an obvious relation but the esoteric and subtle meaning which the intuition will reveal and that the outer words hide.

THE SUN . . . BLACK . . . ANTAHKA-RANA

These words constitute, and when placed in their correct order create, a most potent magical and mantric formula.¹¹²

THE SUN and BLACK are intriguing symbols because of their opposing connotations. THE SUN could represent the Spiritual Triad, because Bailey speaks of “the light of the Spiritual Triad which veils and hides the Central Spiritual Sun.”¹¹³ BLACK could represent the

Monad, because Bailey says, “darkness is pure spirit,”¹¹⁴ and speaks of “The Monad, or pure Spirit.”¹¹⁵

Formula Five’s intention might be to depict the way of ascension, because THE SUN and BLACK could represent the two main phases for this way, as Bailey describes them:

This Way [into new fields of spiritual experience] is revealed only when the antahkarana is built and completed and the man becomes focussed in the Triad as consciously as he is now focussed in the threefold lower nature.¹¹⁶

“Seek the way of Ascension”—ascension out of even triadal life into that of pure Being and of monadic existence.¹¹⁷

Bailey characterizes someone on the way of ascension: “He passes from one sense of unity to a sense of duality, and from thence again into a higher unity.”¹¹⁸ First, the disciple starts by identifying with the personality and its physical perception. Next, the disciple passes into a sense of duality: he or she builds the antahkarana from the personality to the Spiritual Triad, as depicted in Formula One, and intermittently uses it to penetrate to the Spiritual Triad. Bailey says, “As the individual disciple builds the rainbow bridge, the antahkarana, and as a group of disciples build the group antahkarana, they make possible the ‘Triadal perception.’”¹¹⁹ Here, “rainbow bridge” is frequently used as a name for the antahkarana, because it is said to be constituted of all the colors of the seven rays.¹²⁰ Triadal perception is equivalent to what our commentary on Formula Four calls “spiritual perception,” and it enables the disciple to perceive other people as sons of God, in the sense of having a divine nature that was bestowed by the planetary Logos. Finally, the disciple passes into a higher unity by becoming polarized in the Spiritual Triad, thereby habitually perceiving other people as sons of God. Thus ascension to the Spiritual Triad could be regarded in this way: “the habitual subordination of the fleshly to the spiritual point of view,” according to Bailey’s quotation of a statement from the Jesuit philosopher Joseph Marechal.¹²¹

This process is eventually repeated. First, the disciple starts by identifying with the Spiritual Triad and its spiritual perception. Next, the disciple passes into a sense of duality: he or she extends the antahkarana from the Spiritual Triad to the Monad and intermittently uses it to penetrate to the Monad. Bailey describes this step: "He has *penetrated* to the centre by passing along the antahkarana which He has Himself constructed,"¹²² the context of which shows that this "centre" is the Monad. As a result, in Bailey's words, "Another light is then perceived, the clear cold light which is not light but darkness in its purest purity—the LIGHT of God Himself."¹²³

This symbolism of light and darkness is paradoxical: What does it mean for light to be dark? Formula Five is comparable to Rule Nine in Bailey's fourteen "Rules for Disciples and Initiates." As part of her commentary on that rule, Bailey describes these effects of the dark light: "An individual or a group knows actually and not simply theoretically that 'there are no other selves'";¹²⁴ "This recognition, realisation, apprehensive, comprehensive (call it what you will) is so overwhelming and all-embracing that distinctions and differences disappear."¹²⁵ Thus the LIGHT of God Himself, sometimes called "the Light universal,"¹²⁶ is dark in this sense: it reveals that there are no selves different from the perceiver's self and that there are no forms of life separate from the perceiver's life. Put differently, when immersed in this light, the disciple looks upon all things as though they were enveloped in darkness, because he or she is unable to discern any separating distinctions or differences.

What does it mean for light to be dark? Formula Five is comparable to Rule Nine in Bailey's fourteen "Rules for Disciples and Initiates." As part of her commentary on that rule, Bailey describes these effects of the dark light: "An individual or a group knows actually and not simply theoretically that 'there are no other selves'"; "This recognition, realisation, apprehensive, comprehensive (call it what you will) is so overwhelming and all-embracing that distinctions and differences disappear."

Finally, the disciple passes into a higher unity by becoming polarized in the Monad. Bailey

describes this last step: "There He *polarises* Himself and takes His stand."¹²⁷ As a result, in Bailey's words, "He can now express himself fully upon the monadic plane, the plane of universal life; the great heresy of separateness has slipped away from him and he knows nothing but love, unity, spiritual identification and a universal awareness."¹²⁸

In her comments given above, Bailey says, "These words constitute, and when placed in their correct

order create, a most potent magical and mantric formula." She says elsewhere, "Mantric forms are collections of phrases, words, and sounds which by virtue of rhythmic effect achieve results that would not be possible apart from them."¹²⁹ Apparently, THE SUN and BLACK are intended to be used in the following manner: when one is ready to pass into a higher unity, one uses the appropriate phrase as a mantra to remind oneself repeatedly of the new habit that is to be established.

Let us consider how these phrases could be employed as mantras. To become polarized in the Spiritual Triad, one must habitually subordinate physical to spiritual perception. Bailey says, "The Sun is the symbol of the Son of God,"¹³⁰ so THE SUN is a symbolic reminder of the intrinsic glory that resides in everyone. Whenever one observes oneself as perceiving any person in an entirely physical way, if one were to superimpose THE SUN—as both the visualized image of the sun and mental sound of the phrase—over that person, then one might remember to perceive him or her as a son of God.

A Course in Miracles, a modern system of spiritual psychology, states that “perception involves partial awareness.”¹³¹ To become polarized in the Monad, one must habitually subordinate spiritual perception to the LIGHT of God Himself. Bailey says, “the LIGHT of God Himself ... renders dark all else beside Itself,”¹³² so BLACK is a symbolic reminder of the illusoriness of all else. Whenever one observes oneself as perceiving any difference or form as separate from oneself, if one were to superimpose BLACK—as both the visualized color and mental sound of the word—over that difference or form, then one might remember to, in Bailey’s words, “let darkness take the place of light, hiding all difference, blotting out all form.”¹³³ With either mantra, its use facilitates the passing into the higher unity, because it brings about the habit of being immersed in the associated higher light, which dims the lights already acquired and used.

Consequently, the words of Formula Five can be interpreted in two ways, either of which yields the following for their correct order:

ANTAHKARANA . . . THE SUN . . . ANTAHKARANA . . . BLACK

The first interpretation is static and may be what the above comments call “an obvious relation”: the first ANTAHKARANA represents the antahkarana that goes from the personality to the Spiritual Triad; THE SUN represents the Spiritual Triad; the second ANTAHKARANA represents the antahkarana’s extension that goes from the Spiritual Triad to the Monad; and BLACK represents the Monad. These constituents have an increasing vertical order when assigned to their proper positions within the seven planes.

The second interpretation is dynamic and may be what the above comments call “the esoteric and subtle meaning”: the first ANTAHKARANA represents the stage of penetration to the Spiritual Triad, brought about by building the antahkarana to that point; THE SUN represents the stage of polarization in the Spiritual Triad, brought about by employing this phrase as a mantra; the second ANTAHKARANA represents the stage of penetration to

the Monad, brought about by extending the antahkarana to that point; and BLACK represents the stage of polarization in the Monad, brought about by employing this word as a mantra. These stages have an increasing chronological order when assigned to their proper positions on a timeline.

Formula Six

Bailey does not explicitly state Formula Six but instead says, “All that I have done hitherto in connection with the presented formulas has been to give you five of them and to indicate the nature of the sixth, which is not to be given.”¹³⁴ She does, however, give a clue: “This sixth Formula is a deduction from the other five.”¹³⁵

Formulas One through Five are consistent with the sequence that Bailey calls “*The six steps or methods of building the Antahkarana*”: “1. Intention. 2. Visualisation. 3. Projection. 4. Invocation and Evocation. 5. Stabilisation. 6. Resurrection and Ascension.”¹³⁶ Formula One depicts the steps of Intention, Visualization, Projection, Invocation and Evocation. Formula Two (in the Lines of Techniques), Formula Three (in the second expanded statement), and Formula Four (in Planetary Purification) depict the step of Stabilization, referring to the long, patient, and progressive use of the antahkarana. Formula Five depicts the step of Resurrection and Ascension, which is the use of the antahkarana for raising consciousness into the Spiritual Triad and then into the Monad. Thus if “This sixth Formula is a deduction from the other five,” then Formula Six must depict the disciple’s activities after his or her consciousness has ascended into the Monad.

As part of adjoining remarks for Formula Two, Bailey inserts the statement:

All paths meet at the centre. The many become the seven and the eight. From point to point the lines converge. They stretch from point to point. The outer square, the circle of the One and the point of unity are seen as one, and the Master passes on His way.¹³⁷

This statement is taken to be the elusive Formula Six for two reasons: it has the same puz-

zling, symbolic character that distinguishes the earlier formulas; and it does seem to depict the disciple's activities after his or her consciousness has ascended into the Monad. The presumed formula is interpreted as follows:

The paths of all people eventually meet in the monadic world ("All paths meet at the centre"). After ascending to that world, the disciple is faced with having to choose one of the seven paths of higher evolution ("The many become the seven") and the possibility of being temporarily retained by the Lord of the World ("and the eight"). Before the right choice can be made, however, additional efforts in alignment and service are needed. The disciple builds the higher correspondence to the antahkarana: from the Monad to the planetary Logos and then to the solar Logos, the associated upward and downward projections converge, thereby revealing the nature of divine purpose ("From point to point the lines converge"). The disciple assists, through suggestion and watchful cooperation, people trying to stretch their consciousness from its normal polarization to a higher one ("They stretch from point to point"), and stimulates the light in all humanity by seeing their physical bodies, All-seeing Eye, and planetary Logos as united ("The outer square, the circle of the One and the point of unity are seen as one"). Because of these efforts, the disciple becomes a liberated Master of the Wisdom and chooses to take one of the paths of higher evolution ("and the Master passes on His way").

The remainder of this section justifies the foregoing interpretation. Each sentence of the formula is repeated in italic and then is followed by a detailed analysis of the associated symbols.

All paths meet at the centre. The first sentence alludes to the Pyramid of Humanity, which is the third interpretation of Formula Two. The circle at the center of Formula Two signifies the pyramid's apex, so the first sentence portrays all paths as meeting at the pyramid's apex, which is the monadic world. Bailey describes the paradoxical nature of the realization that an individual gains by ascending into the

monadic world: "In the state of being which we call the monadic ... it is realised that there is no identity apart from universality and no appreciation of the universal apart from the individual realisation."¹³⁸

The many become the seven and the eight. The second sentence alludes to what Bailey calls the "seven Paths of the Higher Evolution":

1. The Path of Earth Service.
2. The Path of Magnetic Work.
3. The Path of Training for Planetary Logoi.
4. The Path to Sirius.
5. The Ray Path.
6. The Path on which our Logos is found.
7. The Path of Absolute Sonship.¹³⁹

The phrase, "The many become the seven," means that everyone who reaches the apex of the Pyramid of Humanity must eventually choose one of these seven paths. The phrase, "and the eight," alludes to the added possibility of being temporarily retained, as Bailey explains:

The Lord of the World ... reserves the right to retain in the service of the Hierarchy, and consequently of Humanity and the subsidiary evolutions, Those Masters Whom He regards at any one time as essential to the work to be done. This He does by asking Them to record Their decision when taking the sixth initiation, but to postpone moving on to one or other of the Paths until He gives the word.¹⁴⁰

The preceding quotation asserts that this choice of path is made at the "sixth initiation." After ascending to the apex of the Pyramid of Humanity, but before attaining the sixth initiation, the disciple needs to make additional efforts in alignment and service, as Bailey also explains:

He knows also that He Himself has still to make progress, to move forward, and that there faces Him a great Initiation of Decision (the sixth) for which He must prepare. He knows that this entails for Him *right choice*, but also that right choice depends

upon right understanding, right perception, right willingness and right vision or revelation.¹⁴¹

From point to point the lines converge. Formula Six is comparable to Rule Thirteen in Bailey's fourteen "Rules for Disciples and Initiates." As part of her commentary on that rule, Bailey mentions the higher correspondence to the antahkarana: "The Master builds that of which the spiritual correspondence is the manasic antahkarana. The antahkarana which is now emerging is a projection from the Ashram of a Master."¹⁴² Formula Six's third sentence is taken as depicting the building of the higher antahkarana, because "from point to point" is construed as the extension of an inner bridge across terminal points, and "the lines converge" as the convergence of upward and downward projections. What are these terminal points and projections?

Bailey describes the recognitions and contacts that are needed by the time of the sixth initiation:

At the sixth initiation, the initiate, functioning consciously as the love-aspect of the Monad, is brought (via his "Father") into a still vaster recognition, and becomes aware of that Star which encloses his planetary star, just as that star has earlier been seen as enclosing his own tiny "Spark." He thus makes his conscious contact with the solar Logos, and realises within himself the Oneness of all life and manifestation.¹⁴³

Here, the "Father" is the planetary Logos, because Bailey speaks of "the Father, the planetary Logos."¹⁴⁴ The "Spark" is the Monad, because Bailey speaks of "the electrical point of fire, which is the Monad."¹⁴⁵ The "planetary star" is the planetary Logos, because Formula One's second paragraph portrays it as enclosing the Monad. The "Star" is the solar Logos, because it encloses the planetary Logos. In other words, just as the disciple projects the focus of sensitivity upwards from the personality to the Spiritual Triad, as depicted in Formula One's first paragraph, he or she projects a corresponding focus upwards from the Monad

to the planetary Logos and then to the solar Logos.

Bailey also writes about "*The light of the Logos* Himself in one or other aspect, this being transmitted consciously via the Monad straight through to the physical plane from the planetary Logos, or even from the solar Logos Himself."¹⁴⁶ In other words, just as the Monad projects its will downwards to affect the personality, as depicted in Formula One's first paragraph, both the planetary Logos and solar Logos project their lights downwards via the Monad.

The following is our interpretation of the third sentence. Just as the disciple builds the original antahkarana through merging upward and downward projections, as depicted in Formula One's first paragraph, he or she builds the higher antahkarana, from the Monad to the planetary Logos and then to the solar Logos, through merging the associated upward and downward projections. As described in the two preceding paragraphs, the disciple projects the focus of sensitivity upwards, and the planetary Logos and solar Logos project their lights downward.

By building the higher antahkarana, the disciple walks in a light, or an illumination, that is even higher than the lights considered in Formula Five. What does the higher light reveal? In Bailey's words, "the light reveals to him his future opportunities once his final choice or decision is made, and ... it also reveals to him the nature of divine purpose as our planetary Logos conceives it under the inspiration of the solar Logos."¹⁴⁷ The first clause of this quotation indicates that the higher light is received by the time of the sixth initiation, and the second clause indicates that it reveals the nature of divine purpose.

They stretch from point to point. The fourth sentence depicts the disciple's field of service. To *stretch* means to extend beyond the normal limits, and *point* symbolizes the position at which a person's consciousness is normally polarized. Thus the disciple assists people who are trying to stretch their consciousness from its normal polarization to a higher one. Bailey

makes a similar remark: “Now your insistence upon making the transition out of the lower into the higher life, and your pledge to your soul that you will recognise no impediment or handicap, has been noted. Assistance, therefore, will be given to you, and I shall be glad, through suggestion and watchful cooperation, to aid you on your way.”¹⁴⁸ When an assisted person makes such a transition, he or she moves along the Upward Way on the Pyramid of Humanity’s slanted surface, which extends over the five planes of human evolution, namely, the physical through spiritual planes.

The outer square, the circle of the One and the point of unity are seen as one. The fifth sentence depicts the disciple as seeing the vision of the Pyramid of Humanity: the physical forms of all people—symbolized by “the outer square” in the above formula and the square in Formula Two—receive life and light from the All-seeing Eye—symbolized by “the circle of the One” in the above formula and the circle in Formula Two—that is directed by the planetary Logos—symbolized by “the point of unity” in the above formula and the vantage point from which the pyramid in Formula Two is viewed.

Thus the faculty of spiritual perception has progressively been developed: in Formula One’s second paragraph, another person is perceived by the disciple as a son of God; in Formula Five, every encountered person is perceived as a son of God; and in the fifth sentence, using Bailey’s words, “The world of lighted forms is now perceived, linked each to each by light.”¹⁴⁹ Put differently, all people everywhere, without exception, are perceived as being in the light and as linked to each other by the light. This vision stimulates the light in them, as Bailey explains:

Work more in the light and see all people as in that light with you. All that any disciple or aspirant has to do in relation to his fellowmen is to stimulate the light that is in them, leaving them free to walk in their own light and way upon the Path.¹⁵⁰

Formula Six also alludes to the Lines of Techniques, which is the first interpretation of Formula Two, because it indicates advanced de-

velopment in each of the four fields of experience: *Earthy Contact*—the disciple contacts people throughout the planet who are trying to stretch their consciousness from its normal polarization to a higher one; *Oceanic Synthesis*—the disciple perceives the ocean of light, which is the world of lighted forms; *Fiery Relations*—the disciple transmits the lights of the planetary Logos and solar Logos, via the Monad, to his or her personality; and *Airy Expansion*—the disciple comprehends divine purpose and works to fulfill that purpose. Moreover these activities form a cross: the vertical life of alignment is building the higher correspondence to the antahkarana; the horizontal life of service is assisting all humanity.

The Master passes on His way. Bailey writes, “Initiation carried to its consummation, as far as humanity is concerned, produces the liberated Master of the Wisdom, free from the limitations of the individual.”¹⁵¹ A less advanced Master is a liberated human being, who has passed beyond the five planes of human evolution, but is still confined to the cosmic physical plane, which consists of our seven planes.¹⁵² A liberated Master, however, has attained the sixth initiation and so can choose to take a path of higher evolution that leads to a higher cosmic plane.¹⁵³ By analogy, a liberated Master passes on the way of ascension, along the higher antahkarana, in a manner similar to what was depicted in Formula Five. The final phrase, “the Master passes on His way,” is construed to mean that the disciple has become a liberated Master of the Wisdom.

Conclusions

The preceding sections display our efforts to employ clues found in Bailey’s published writings and thereby decipher four of her symbolic formulas for initiation: Formulas Three through Six. How accurate are our interpretations? Bailey gives brief summaries of “The Formulas from the angle of Discipleship,” as well as brief summaries of “The Formulas from the universal creative Aspect.”¹⁵⁴ These summaries could be used as standards of validity. Our interpretations do not resemble the summaries “from the angle of Discipleship,” but have some resemblance to those

“from the universal creative Aspect.” Thus our work seems to fall in the latter category.

So that the readers of this article may judge for themselves the validity of our interpretations, here are Bailey’s summaries of Formulas Three through Six “from the universal creative Aspect”:

Formula 3 . . . Transition from death to Immortality. The nature of Life. The creative process and life energy.

Formula 4 . . . Transition from chaos to ordered Beauty. Relation of the world of effects and the world of meaning. Then relation to the world of causes. The nature of karma. Progressive evolutionary creation.

Formula 5 . . . Transition from the individual consciousness to the universal. Evolutionary processes from divine Purpose into plan and then into manifestation. The nature of individual renunciation. The one Life.

Formula 6 . . . Transition from cyclic living into life itself. The Purpose of cycles. Control of time-space consciousness.¹⁵⁵

Let us compare Bailey’s summaries with our interpretations, starting with Formula Three. Three summary phrases are listed for this formula, even though our interpretation consists of six expanded statements. The first summary phrase, “Transition from death to Immortality,” corresponds to the sixth expanded statement, which includes Bailey’s quotation, “The withdrawing life of a great expression of the hierarchical plan absorbs the qualities and returns with them, as endowments, later in time and space and manifests anew through the medium of more adequate forms of expression.”¹⁵⁶ The second summary phrase, “The nature of Life,” corresponds to the first expanded statement, which includes Bailey’s quotation, “From the standpoint of our planetary evolution, there is naught but love, naught but goodwill and the will-to-good.”¹⁵⁷ The third summary phrase, “The creative process and life energy,” corresponds to the second, third, fourth, and fifth expanded statements, which include Bailey’s quotation, “It might be said

that the spiritual compromise of the disciple (working with the Plan) transforms the basic idea (through mental modification) into an acceptable ideal.”¹⁵⁸

Let us consider Formula Four, for which we give two interpretations: Individual Purification and Planetary Purification. The first summary phrase, “Transition from chaos to ordered Beauty,” corresponds to a sentence of Individual Purification: “He or she forces the lower nature to conform to the ideal rather than the error, which causes more of virtue, wisdom, and the soul’s quality to emerge.” The second summary phrase, “Relation of the world of effects and the world of meaning,” corresponds to a sentence of Planetary Purification: “The disciple explains the origin of a human conflict on the physical plane by identifying the strength, prominence, kind, and ray of its principal world glamour on the emotional plane.” The third summary phrase, “Then relation to the world of causes,” corresponds to another sentence of Planetary Purification: “The disciple superimposes a threefold vision upon the people submerged in this glamour.” The fourth summary phrase, “The nature of karma,” corresponds to a sentence of Individual Purification: “The disciple . . . sees that his or her fourfold personality contains a rapidly changing mass of unsettled opinions, creating glamour, maya, and constant indescribable confusion.” The fifth summary phrase, “Progressive evolutionary creation,” corresponds to another sentence of Individual Purification: “The disciple contacts the idea that is currently being impressed and formulates it as an explicit ideal.”

Let us consider Formula Five, which we interpret as depicting the stages of penetration and polarization in the Spiritual Triad and then in the Monad. The first summary phrase, “Transition from the individual consciousness to the universal,” is the result of these four stages. The second summary phrase, “Evolutionary processes from divine Purpose into plan and then into manifestation,” characterizes the process of applying THE SUN or BLACK as a mantra. The third summary phrase, “The nature of individual renunciation,” refers to the

habitual subordination of physical to spiritual perception in the case of achieving polarization in the Spiritual Triad, and to the habitual subordination of spiritual perception to the LIGHT of God Himself in the case of achieving polarization in the Monad. The fourth summary phrase, "The one Life," characterizes the realization yielded by the LIGHT of God Himself: there is no identity apart from universality.

Let us consider Formula Six, which we interpret as depicting the stages that occur after polarization in the Monad. The first summary phrase, "Transition from cyclic living into life itself," corresponds to the first sentence of the interpretation: "The paths of all people eventually meet in the monadic world." The second summary phrase, "The Purpose of cycles," corresponds to another sentence: "The disciple builds the higher correspondence to the antahkarana ... thereby revealing the nature of divine purpose." The third summary phrase, "Control of time-space consciousness," refers to another sentence: "The disciple assists, through suggestion and watchful cooperation, people trying to stretch their consciousness from its normal polarization to a higher one, and stimulates the light in all humanity by seeing their physical bodies, All-seeing Eye, and planetary Logos as united."

Consequently, our interpretations of Formulas Three through Six seem to match Bailey's summaries "from the universal creative Aspect." More work on these formulas needs to be done, because our interpretations ignore completely the topics "from the angle of Discipleship." Thus the readers are encouraged to attempt their own expositions, perhaps by drawing on their experiences of the depicted states of consciousness and stages of discipleship.

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- ¹ Alice A. Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, vol. II (1955; reprint: New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1972), 246.
 - ² *Ibid.*, 344.
 - ³ *Ibid.*, 262.
 - ⁴ Zachary F. Lansdowne, "Bailey's Formulas for Initiation: Formulas One and Two," *Esoteric Quarterly*, Autumn 2013.

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- ⁵ Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, vol. II, 284-285.
 - ⁶ Alice A. Bailey, *The Consciousness of the Atom* (1922; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1973), 67.
 - ⁷ Alice A. Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations* (1960; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1976), 367.
 - ⁸ Alice A. Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic* (1934; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1979), 531.
 - ⁹ Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations*, 738.
 - ¹⁰ Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Healing* (1953; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1978), 403-404.
 - ¹¹ Alice A. Bailey, *Telepathy and the Etheric Vehicle* (1950; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1975), 68.
 - ¹² Alice A. Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, vol. I (1944; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1976), 683.
 - ¹³ Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, vol. II, 281.
 - ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 360.
 - ¹⁵ Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations*, 265.
 - ¹⁶ Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, vol. II, 390.
 - ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 392.
 - ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 362.
 - ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 392-393.
 - ²⁰ Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology* (1951; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1979), 9.
 - ²¹ Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, vol. II, 362.
 - ²² Alice A. Bailey, *Glamour: A World Problem* (1950; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1973), 175.
 - ²³ *Ibid.*, 243-244.
 - ²⁴ Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations*, 180.
 - ²⁵ Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, vol. II, 288.
 - ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 397.
 - ²⁷ Bailey, *Telepathy*, 69.
 - ²⁸ Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, vol. II, 388.
 - ²⁹ Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations*, 309.
 - ³⁰ *Ibid.*
 - ³¹ Alice A. Bailey, *The Externalisation of the Hierarchy* (1957; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1976), 289.
 - ³² Roshen Dalal, *Hinduism: An Alphabetical Guide* (New Delhi, India: Penguin India, 2011), 358.

- 33 Bailey, *The Externalisation of the Hierarchy*, 676.
 34 Bailey, *Esoteric Healing*, 687.
 35 Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations*, 379.
 36 Ibid., 712.
 37 Bailey, *The Externalisation of the Hierarchy*, 205.
 38 Bailey, *Glamour*, 131.
 39 Ibid., 21.
 40 Ibid., 26.
 41 Alice A. Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar* (1922; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1974), 31.
 42 Alice A. Bailey, *The Soul and Its Mechanism* (1930; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1976), 111.
 43 Bailey, *Telepathy*, 146.
 44 Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, vol. II, 305.
 45 Ibid.
 46 Ibid., 575.
 47 Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, 414.
 48 Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, vol. II, 133.
 49 Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic*, 131.
 50 Bailey, *Glamour*, 54.
 51 Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology*, vol. II (1942; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1981), 491-492.
 52 Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, vol. I, 463.
 53 Bailey, *Esoteric Healing*, 471.
 54 Alice A. Bailey, *From Bethlehem to Calvary* (1937; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1989), 119.
 55 Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology*, vol. II, 608.
 56 Bailey, *Glamour*, 85.
 57 Bailey, *Telepathy*, 52.
 58 Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations*, 35.
 59 Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, vol. II, 754.
 60 Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations*, 443-444.
 61 Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology*, vol. I (1936; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1979), 316.
 62 Ibid., 42.
 63 Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations*, 150.
 64 Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology*, vol. I, 36-37.
 65 Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, vol. I, 476.
 66 Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic*, 490.
 67 Bailey, *Telepathy*, 44.
 68 Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic*, 623.
- 69 Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, vol. I, 425.
 70 Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic*, 252.
 71 Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology*, vol. I, 284.
 72 Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar*, 12.
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 86 Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology*, vol. I, 163.
 87 Bailey, *Esoteric Healing*, 695.
 88 Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology*, vol. I, 352.
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 90 Ibid., 4.
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 102 Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, vol. II, 369.
 103 Bailey, *Glamour*, 224.
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 109 Bailey, *Glamour*, 198.
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 118 Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic*, 375.
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 120 Ibid., 505.
 121 Alice A. Bailey, *From Intellect to Intuition* (1932; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1960), 98.
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 123 Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations*, 539.
 124 Ibid., 172.
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 141 Ibid., 706-707.
 142 Ibid., 283-284.
 143 Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar*, 118.
 144 Alice A. Bailey, *The Reappearance of the Christ* (1948; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1978), 39.
 145 Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar*, 118.
 146 Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, 760.
 147 Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations*, 729.
 148 Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, vol. I, 551.
 149 Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations*, 538.
 150 Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, vol. I, 417.
 151 Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology*, vol. II, 16.
 152 Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations*, 357.
 153 Ibid., 372, 399.
 154 Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, vol. II, 364-365.
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 156 Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations*, 309.
 157 Ibid., 738.
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Modern Science, Psychology, and the Enduring Mystery of Consciousness: An Esoteric/Mystical Critique, Part V. The Visionary Experience

James Moffatt

Abstract

This article focuses on the visionary/transcendent experience and its significance in challenging the materialist orthodoxy regarding the nature of consciousness. These higher states of consciousness indicate that consciousness is a universal property which manifests on a scale of dimensions which constitutes the traditional concept of the Great Chain of Being. In addition to considering the commentaries of Yogananda, Huxley, and Grof regarding the nature of consciousness and reality as it is experienced in visionary states, an overview of the Near-Death Experience literature is presented. The convergence of research documenting the visionary experience and the NDE provides compelling evidence for esoteric claims that the human brain, rather than producing consciousness, serves to facilitate consciousness by “stepping it down” from its higher-dimensional origins. Transcendent states of consciousness, in life and near-death, reveal that human beings are capable of realizing transformative experiences of higher dimensions, spiritual illumination, and unity with Creation.

Yogananda’s Experience of Cosmic Consciousness

In his classic work, *Autobiography of A Yogi*,¹ Paramahansa Yogananda recounts how, after years of studying with his guru, Sri Yukteswar, he had become frustrated by his failure to experience the transcendent states of consciousness that are reputed to be the incomparable fruits of years of meditative discipline. Laughing in sympathy at his student’s plaintive description of his inability to fulfill his “heart’s desire,” Yogananda’s guru sudden-

ly and unexpectedly reaches out and strikes him on the chest, above his heart, causing an immediate and dramatic expansion of his consciousness.

No longer confined to his physical body, Yogananda describes his soul and mind as being freed of their physical bondage and streaming out “like a fluid piercing light from my every pore.”² Although his flesh appeared to be dead, he states that: “I knew that never before had I been fully alive. My sense of identity was no longer narrowly confined to a body but embraced the circumambient atoms.”³ Yogananda recounts how his normal “frontal vision” was transformed into “a vast spherical sight, simultaneously all-perceptive”⁴ and that, consequently, he was able to see in all directions (even out of the back of his head!) over vast distances, while simultaneously being able to see through the soil into the roots of plants and trees and discern the flow of their sap.

Continuing, Yogananda describes the incredible transformation in his perception and direct apprehension of the material world:

All objects within my panoramic gaze trembled and vibrated like quick motion pictures. My body, Master’s, the pillared

About the Author

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courtyard, the furniture and the floor, the trees and sunshine, occasionally became violently agitated, until all melted into a luminescent sea; even as sugar crystals, thrown into a glass of water, dissolve after being shaken. *The unifying light alternated with materializations of form, the metamorphosis revealing the law of cause and effect in creation.*

An oceanic joy broke upon calm endless shores of my soul. The Spirit of God, I realized, is exhaustless Bliss; His body is *countless tissues of light*. A swelling glory within me began to envelop towns, continents, the earth, solar and stellar systems, tenuous nebulae, and floating universes. The entire cosmos, gently luminous, like a city seen afar at night, glimmered within the infinitude of my being....

The divine dispersion of rays poured from an Eternal Source, blazing into galaxies, transfigured with ineffable auras. Again and again, I saw the creative beams condense into constellations, then resolve into sheets of transparent flame. By rhythmic reversion, sextillion worlds passed into diaphanous luster, then fire became firmament.

I cognized the centre of the empyrean as a point of intuitive perception in my heart. Irradiating splendour issued from my nucleus to every part of the universal structure.⁵ [emphasis added]

Eventually, Yogananda's consciousness returns to "the humiliating cage of a body, not easily accommodative to the Spirit."⁶ His Master explains that: "It is the Spirit of God that actively sustains every form and force in the universe; yet He is transcendental and aloof in the blissful uncreated void beyond the worlds of vibratory phenomenon."⁷

Yogananda's state of cosmic consciousness is noteworthy for a number of reasons and may be considered from numerous angles. In putting forth these considerations, my intention is to prompt the reader to realize that if Yogananda's experience is "real" and his commentaries on its meaning are valid, then modern psychologists' and scientists' understanding of consciousness is based on a set of untenable

metaphysical assumptions about the nature of human beings, the Universe, and reality. First and foremost, I would submit that Yogananda's experience suggests that a yogi's preparation and development allows him to experience a state of mystical union which is particularly comprehensive and meaningful because, as a result of his disciplined self-study, he has already reached a certain level of self-realization—through purification of his body, heart, and mind—and is capable, therefore, of experiencing these heightened states of consciousness. Secondly, his master's level of consciousness is such that he is able to produce this experience, in his disciple, at will. Thirdly, Yogananda is capable, at least to a certain extent, of interpreting and describing elements of his experience in terms of ordinary language because his level of development has made his transcendent experience intelligible to him.

At the same time, we can extrapolate from this account and identify a number of important considerations in weighing the significance of one's state of consciousness in determining the reality which one apprehends and is capable of apprehending. It is noteworthy that, while Yogananda's consciousness expands beyond his physical organism and his perceptual capacities are profoundly enhanced; his sense of self initially remains essentially the same. As his consciousness continues to expand, however, it becomes progressively "higher" in the sense that it is a more comprehensive state of apprehension in which the normal state's limitations and illusions are transparent—even as they are being transcended. Thus, in his higher state, Yogananda recognizes the illusory nature of the material realm insofar as "he" is penetrating it and apprehending that it is being informed by higher, more refined, subtle realms of consciousness and being. As such, Yogananda's knowing is direct and unmediated and, therefore, more objective than the level of apprehension which he experiences in the normal waking state of consciousness. In this higher, more objective state, he knows that his knowledge is more objective because he is in a state of union; the discursive knowing that characterizes the normal egoistic subjective consciousness in which there exists an apparently self-evident separation between subject

and object has been, at once, revealed and transcended. However, this state of union is not complete and continues to progress: becoming deeper and more comprehensive and coherent, insofar as he goes from being able to have direct insight into the subtle dimensions and the processes by which they are interpenetrating the physical realm of his immediate neighborhood to a more global level of apprehension ... to a further level of galactic apprehension ... to an interstellar, cosmic level of apprehension ... and finally to a dissolution of time and space in the realization of union with eternity! As “he sees” galaxies and world orders being created and destroyed, he has clearly overcome the bounds of not only space, but time. Yogananda knows himself, the Universe, and God because he *is at one with everything*.

On reading this account carefully, the question arises: *where is Yogananda when he is in this state of union?* He states his experience lasted only a few minutes—yet he claims to have known the entire Universe. But that is clearly impossible insofar as he would have to be “traveling” faster than the speed of light! But Yogananda maintains that it is not only possible to realize this state of union in which a yogi transcends the limits of time and space, but explains in significant detail how the practice of Kriya Yoga allows for such miraculous experiences. Indeed, Yogananda—and numerous other masters and mystics—explain that, by knowing the higher Self, it is possible to know oneself as *a body of light* and, by doing so, achieve infinite mass, thereby transcending the limitations of the time-space continuum.

Those readers who are familiar with Christopher Holmes’ four-part series of *Esoteric Quarterly* articles—“The Origins And Nature Of Human Consciousness”⁸—may recall that, in citing Yogananda’s experience of cosmic consciousness, I am broaching a subject which Holmes has already addressed in detail. I would refer the reader to Holmes’ articles in order to place his consideration of Yogananda’s startling claims in the context of his arguments regarding the nature of consciousness. Holmes argues that Yogananda’s account substantiates his theoretical position: that the higher Self is rooted into the higher metaphys-

ical dimensions of the heart. While I will address that issue in a subsequent article, I want to focus on the fact that it was some 37 years ago when Holmes and I first read Yogananda’s account of cosmic consciousness. At that time, we were psychology graduate students, who had only recently begun to study esoteric and mystical teachings. As academics, we were certainly aware that Yogananda’s claims were “anecdotal”—as such, his experience did not conform to or satisfy the criteria of a controlled experiment—but, nonetheless, we were convinced that his experience and his explanation of its dynamics were topics worthy of our interest. We recognized that Yogananda’s account could not and should not be accepted uncritically; in itself, his experience may or may not have been legitimate. And even if his experience was essentially true, that would not mean that he was necessarily providing an accurate apprehension or interpretation of the hidden realities of his being or the Universe. In fact, if Yogananda’s claims and descriptions comprised a unique and essentially idiosyncratic account of the nature of cosmic consciousness, we would have been inclined to be much more circumspect in our consideration of them. I suspect that we would have regarded his account as being, perhaps, nothing more than a curious anomaly, but hardly an experience which was relevant to the study of psychology. But the simple fact is that the nature of his experience, the realities that he describes, and the interpretation he provides are all consistent with an extraordinary body of evidence and credible theoretical explanations drawn from mystical and esoteric sources throughout human history. Furthermore, there are numerous instances of otherwise “ordinary” individuals experiencing transcendent states of higher consciousness in which they provide accounts that are remarkably consistent and congruent with aspects of Yogananda’s account and explanations. Consequently, Holmes and I came to regard Yogananda’s experience of cosmic consciousness to be of critical significance in studying the origins and nature of human consciousness.

How then do most modern scientists and psychologists—that is, those who adhere to and promote the dominant materialist theoretical

perspective—explain Yogananda’s experience or any experience of cosmic consciousness? Essentially, they have nothing meaningful to say about such experiences. Either they deny their reality or are tellingly silent about them. In the former case, Yogananda and those of his mystic ilk are dismissed by mainstream consciousness researchers and theorists as suffering from delusions and hallucinations that are the result of brain pathologies and culturally imposed expectations. Tellingly, the self-styled skeptics do so without ever appearing to have carefully examined the mystical and esoteric literature. But if, as Sir Arthur Eddington so elegantly stated, science “is the earnest attempt to put in order the facts of experience,” then

surely, if we wish to be truly “scientific” in our approach to the study of consciousness, we cannot dismiss or ignore these accounts of ‘the facts of experience’—no matter how incredible they might appear to be.

Without intending to sound self-aggrandizing, I would say that—in our own way—Christopher Holmes and I have spent the past 37 years attempting to further our understanding of the significance of Yogananda’s experience of cosmic consciousness and his explanation of it. In and of itself, that task has proven to be a remarkable undertaking; a journey of discovery which, while it has been astonishingly revealing and illuminating, continues to be mysterious and elusive. As in the best of mysteries, we have come to understand that the more we know, the more we recognize how little we know. As we already acquired an inchoate understanding of the esoteric/mystical claim—that *consciousness is light*—when we first read Yogananda’s autobiography, we were particularly intrigued by Yogananda’s

Time after time, people compared the Absolute to a radiant source of light of unimaginable intensity, though they emphasized that it also differed in some significant aspects from any forms of light that we know in the material world. To describe the Absolute as light entirely misses some of its essential characteristics, particularly the fact that it is also an immense and unfathomable field of consciousness endowed with infinite intelligence and creative power.

description of Creation dynamics consisting of an alteration of matter and Light. Similarly, we were fascinated by his declaration that the manifest physical Universe is composed of *tissues of light* which compose God’s body. We did not recognize nor even suspect the im-

portance of what Yogananda meant when he stated that he “cognized the centre of the empyrean as a point of intuitive perception in my heart” and that, as such, he was saying that by knowing himself in the higher dimensions of his own heart, he was at one with the Universe and God. Further, we had no idea that “the point within his heart” might be construed as a zero point and as such, would provide a startling ex-

ample of how man is “a microcosm of the macrocosm.” As our reading of the account preceded any familiarity with the emerging “holographic paradigm”—based on the work of Karl Pribram and David Bohm—we were certainly not aware of the significance of the holographic reality which Yogananda was describing: wherein the entire Universe exists, somehow, within its parts! And we certainly did not grasp the significance of his master’s claim that, while it is God’s spirit which sustains Creation, He “is transcendental and aloof in the blissful uncreated void beyond the worlds of vibratory phenomenon.” And yet, by diligently examining and studying esoteric and mystical doctrines for some 25 years, while attempting to compare them with modern physics, Holmes developed a theoretical model of consciousness in which each of these critical elements of Yogananda’s experience became central to his position.

Despite most academic psychologists’ reluctance to take seriously accounts of experiences

of cosmic consciousness and their staggering implications, there has certainly been no shortage of material which has addressed the importance of transcendent experiences. Recall that, in the first article in this series, I quoted William James' famous observation that our normal waking consciousness is but one but special type of consciousness, while all around it, there exist other forms of consciousness which, with the application of the requisite stimulus, reveal themselves in their entirety. Of course, in his seminal volume, *Cosmic Consciousness*,⁹ Maurice Bucke had undertaken a detailed examination of the transcendent/visionary experience. Nevertheless, during the first half of the twentieth century, academic experimental psychology—particularly, in the United States—was dominated by behaviorism; a school of thought which explicitly denied that consciousness was a legitimate topic of scientific study.

In the second article in this series, I presented an overview of Ken Wilber's account of the collapse of the traditional Great Chain/Nest of Being which led to what he termed "the disaster of modernity": wherein "reality" has been rudely reduced to the flatland of the material realm. As such, all conceptualizations of a hierarchy of consciousness have been dismissed and, in "the disqualified Universe," all interior dimensions of being have been deemed to be irrelevant. In this article, my aim is to suggest that transcendent/visionary states of consciousness are not only real—and as such, provide the evidentiary basis for the reality of the Great Nest—but are of the utmost significance in revealing that humans are multi-dimensional beings existing in a multi-dimensional Universe. The consistent, profound and coherent nature of the higher states of consciousness—which arise as a result of an astonishing variety of circumstances—constitute a body of evidence which, I believe, reveals that the entire assumptive framework of modern materialism is fundamentally incorrect and, consequently, its explanatory power is severely limited. In keeping with Wilber's perspective, I am not suggesting that materialism and the reductionistic methodological approaches, through which it is typically pursued, are wrong, per se; nor am I claiming that knowledge apprehended within that framework is invalid. On the contra-

ry, such knowledge is highly practical and certainly valid—as long as it's explanatory limitations are recognized. I am arguing that the transcendent/visionary experience reveals that the materialists are incorrect in assuming that knowledge which is apprehended through sensory processes (and their extension through instrumentation) is *comprehensive* or that, eventually, it will be. Quite simply, there exists overwhelming evidence documenting the need to go beyond "the reach of the senses" and recognize higher dimensional psychological and cosmological realities in formulating a comprehensive explanatory framework. The material realm is but one level in the Great Nest of Being and establishes both its limits and those of any material explanation. In the next article in this series, I will address these theoretical issues in detail; my purpose in this article is to provide an overview of some of the evidence which I regard as revealing materialism's limits and limitations.

Aldous Huxley on the Visionary Experience

In a speech delivered at the XIV International Congress of Applied Psychology in 1961, Aldous Huxley examined the "Visionary Experience" and provided an extremely interesting commentary on the nature and significance of light in such experiences.¹⁰ Describing light as the "highest common factor" of the visionary experience, Huxley notes that light can be both good and bad, and further divides the former into two types. The first, "undifferentiated light," refers to experiences of everything being flooded with light; the second, "differentiated light," denotes experiences in which objects, people, and landscapes seem to be "impregnated and shining with their own light."

Huxley asserts that the experience of undifferentiated light tends to be that associated with the "fullblown mystical experience." In such states, he says, there is a transcendence of the subject-object relationship: a sense of union with others and with the universe in general. Furthermore, there is also a sense of the ultimate "allrightness of the universe"—that despite all the horror, the pain and suffering of the world, there is a higher level of meaning in which somehow everything is, in some way,

all right. As he points out, it is characteristic of the visionary experience that things which are incomprehensible in the subjectivity of normal waking consciousness—for example, all sorts of tales and aphorisms from scripture—become perfectly comprehensible in the mystical apprehension of higher levels of consciousness. A second feature of this mystical experience of undifferentiated light is described as “gratitude for the privilege of being alive.” This is yet another example, Huxley explains, of the numerous phrases in mystical literature which, while incomprehensible to our normal waking consciousness, are profoundly meaningful in the mystical and visionary state.

Of course, religious literature contains numerous examples of how “seeing the light” is an integral aspect of awakening. Huxley cites St. Paul on the road to Damascus, the explosion of light which awakened Mohammed and was so intense that it made him faint, and the tremendous light which Plotinus experienced several times. However, he notes that these wonderful, transformative experiences are much more common than we suppose—as Raynor Johnson documents in his book, *Watcher on the Hills: A Study of Some Mystical Experiences of Ordinary People*.¹¹ In this vein, Huxley quotes from a letter he had received from a woman, in her sixties, who described an experience she had when she was a schoolgirl:

“I was a girl of 15 or 16, I was in the kitchen toasting bread for tea and suddenly on a dark November afternoon the whole place was flooded with light, and for a minute by clock time I was immersed in this, and I had a sense that in some unutterable way the universe was all right. This has affected me for the rest of my life, I have lost all fear of death, I have a passion for light, but I am in no way afraid of death, because this light experience has been a kind of conviction to me that everything *is* all right in some way.”¹²

There is a great deal in these mystical experiences of undifferentiated light which challenges the orthodoxy of modern psychological and scientific thought. These experiences, in which people are illuminated and transformed, are

simply incomprehensible and inexplicable to the materialist; as such, the materialist typically feels entitled to discard these experiences as being irrelevant to the study of psychology and consciousness. And yet, I would suggest that anyone examining the accounts of these experiences with an open mind must allow that their status as enigmas within the domain of the materialist approach is so troublesome and provocative as to call into question its essential validity.

If, in trying to make sense of these “visionary experiences of undifferentiated light,” a materialist *cum* rationalist/skeptic was able to resist the reflexive urge to describe them as being “nothing but ...,” he or she would most likely settle for “explaining” them as “hallucinations” or “perceptual distortions.” But if this were a valid interpretation, would it not follow logically that the people experiencing these radical, spontaneous alterations of their perceptions and violations of their normal waking state’s parameters would be, at the very least, bewildered, and more likely, terrified that they were in the throes of some mysterious physical or emotional malady? Would their most immediate priority not be to ask, “What is happening to me?” Further, would not their priority be to seek an immediate restoration of their normal state of consciousness and perceptual faculties? Would they not be disturbed and apprehensive that these experiences might recur?

That protocol does describe the reactions of those unfortunate enough to suffer a psychotic episode, but it has nothing to do with the responses of those who experience Huxley’s undifferentiated light. Instead of being alarmed or frightened by what is happening to them, people reporting these visionary experiences react with awe, wonder, and a reverence for what they regard as the unmistakably benign nature of these extraordinary occurrences. To have this mystical experience of “seeing the light” is profoundly moving and meaningful. Those who do so undergo a fundamental transformation in their understanding of themselves, and the meaning of their lives and the Universe. *People lose their fear of death.* Think of that! What is it in this mystical visionary experience

rience of light which effects such a radical and enduring alteration of people's most deeply rooted and seemingly intractable attitudes and beliefs—especially, the essentially instinctual fear of death?

It is tempting to assume that this mystical experience of illumination is, for those who have followed a spiritual or mystical path, the culmination of their attempts to cultivate consciousness. While that would hardly “explain” or otherwise “do away” with the transformative quality of these experiences, it would place them in a context providing some meaningful sense of continuity. One might argue that such people were somehow unconsciously constructing a reality which was fulfilling an expectation. But then how is one to explain or understand the many spontaneous instances of these visionary experiences and their extraordinary influences on people's lives? As Huxley notes, Raynor Johnson's work suggests that this uncultivated mystical experience of light is much more common than is typically supposed. However, insofar as there does not exist any social structure or process, within technologically developed cultures, which might accommodate or encourage reports of such anomalous experiences of altered states of consciousness, a reasonable and rational individual would be wise to exercise extreme caution in discussing such extraordinary events. The extent to which our health and therapeutic agencies are predisposed to judge any experience of an altered state of consciousness or perception of non-consensual reality as indicating dysfunction and disease underlines the extent to which the dominance of scientific materialism has contributed to an ever-more constrained and rigid definition of the parameters of legitimate and meaningful human experience. Having said all that, the question remains: what is the nature of this mysterious experience of light which exerts such extraordinary influence on people's lives?

In attempting to explicate the nature of this light, Huxley makes an important observation about the intriguing relation between the religious and psychological significance of this ineffable light. He notes that while light is the predominant divine symbol in all religions, this

symbol represents a psychological fact. Thus, “the light of the world, the inner light, enlightenment, the clear light of the void ...” are all symbols derived from this “quasi-sensory experience of light.”¹³ This idea, that the universality of light as a religious symbol is predicated upon a psychological fact, is yet another anomaly about which scientific materialism remains mute. And it must remain so. For this “quasi-sensory experience of light” reveals the materialist paradigm's boundaries, and in doing so, challenges its ultimate validity. There is nothing in the assumptive framework or the essential postulates of the materialist approach which allows for this type or degree of manifestation of meaning. Therefore, the materialist is forced to reckon with the disturbing complexity of the visionary experience of light by ignoring its ubiquity and denying its meaning. Moreover, when one connects the significance of light in the experience of mystical revelation with Yogananda's claims—that to acquire self-knowledge is to know oneself as a “body of light,” and thereby to identify with the “structural essence of Creation”—the importance of focusing on the nature of this mysterious light is underscored. Is this recurring identification of light, as being the definitive aspect of exalted visionary states, merely a grand coincidence? Is this “seeing the light” nothing more than a concomitant of these anomalous and enigmatic experiences? Or is the repeated and consistent description of light in the experience of mystical vision and awakening a sign that even blind men might read?

Stanislav Grof's Holotropic States

While the mainstream of modern psychology has remained inured to the significance of the visionary experience, there have been some notable exceptions—such as the work of the humanist psychologist, Abraham Maslow, who addressed the nature and significance of what he termed “the peak experience” in his landmark work, *Religions, Values, and Peak Experiences*.¹⁴ Before they achieved notoriety and dismissal from the faculty of the Harvard Psychology department, Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert (aka Baba Ram Dass) had conducted serious research into the

potential for LSD to engender therapeutic and spiritually transforming visionary experiences.¹⁵ John Lilly, perhaps best known for his research involving dolphins, boldly explored the visionary/transcendent experience by experimenting with psychedelic drugs, as well as sensory diminishment in flotation tanks.¹⁶ The area of transpersonal psychology—which was pioneered by such figures as Charles Tart, Robert Ornstein, Arthur Deikman, and Stanislav Grof—furthered the work initiated by Maslow by attempting to apply scientific rigour to the examination and exploration of a variety of esoteric/mystical methods, disciplines, and practices.

Stanislav Grof, a Czechoslovakian psychiatrist who relocated to the United States in 1967, is one of the most accomplished investigators of visionary/transcendent states of consciousness. In his 1998 book, *The Cosmic Game*,¹⁷ Grof presented an intriguing summary of some 40 years of study of what he termed “*holotropic states of consciousness*.” Grof coined that term because he believed that the expression “non-ordinary states of consciousness” was too broad in identifying the states in which he was interested. Holotropic literally means “moving in the direction of wholeness” or “oriented toward wholeness.” The use of the term, Grof says, is to suggest that, in our ordinary waking state of consciousness, we are not really whole: “we are fragmented and identify with only a small fraction of who we really are.”¹⁸ In holotropic states, Grof states that feelings of unity—with other people, nature, the Universe, and God—are common, as well as sequences of spiritual death and re-birth. These experiences can uncover what may be memories from previous incarnations, lead to encounters with archetypal beings and mythological domains, and open communications with disembodied entities. These states also include out-of-body experiences during which the disembodied consciousness maintains the capacity of seeing accurately not only the immediate environment of the body, but remote locations.

Holotropic states are characterized by perceptual changes in all sensory modalities, intense and unusual emotions, and profound alterations in thought processes. While conscious-

ness is fundamentally altered, it is not pathological or impaired. In such states, Grof states that “we experience intrusions of other dimensions of existence that can be very intense and even overwhelming”¹⁹ The senses are magnified and intensified, often involving visions of various aspects of nature, the cosmos, and even mythological realms. Grof describes the emotional spectrum of holotropic states as ranging from ecstatic rapture and heavenly bliss to abysmal terror, despair, overpowering anger, and other such forms of extreme suffering. Regarding intellectual functioning, he states that, while not impaired, the intellect operates in a fundamentally different fashion from its typical functioning. In holotropic states, people can be flooded with profound information and psychological insights. Grof states that: “By far the most interesting insights that become available in holotropic states revolve around philosophical, metaphysical, and spiritual issues.”²⁰

Grof notes that the sources of these experiences are numerous and that there exist a variety of ancient and aboriginal techniques—that which he terms “technologies of the sacred”—for inducing such experiences. Such methods as drumming, rhythmic dancing, social and sensory isolation, fasting, sleep deprivation, purgation, and the ritual use of psychedelic plants and substances have been employed, in various cultures throughout human history, to induce holotropic states. In addition, he explains that the esoteric traditions have developed such disciplines and methods as yoga, meditation, ascetic practices, conscious prayer, chanting, and dancing as technologies of the sacred. However, Grof stresses that, independently of any of these techniques, holotropic experiences can occur spontaneously—without any identifiable cause and against the will of the individual involved. He and Christina Grof, his wife, argue that these experiences are often psychospiritual crises or spiritual emergencies, and that they should be treated as such, rather than as manifestations of psychiatric illness demanding pharmacological intervention. If recognized as such and supported by experienced facilitators, he argues, “... episodes of this kind can result in psychosomatic healing, spiritual opening, positive personality

transformation, and consciousness evolution.”²¹

Grof stated that he had personally conducted over 4,000 psychedelic sessions (and had access to colleagues’ records of 2,000 sessions) with such substances as LSD, psilocybine, mescaline, dipropyl-tryptamine (DPT), and methylene-diox-amphetamine (MDA)—mostly with psychiatric patients suffering from a variety of emotional and psychosomatic disorders, but also with cancer patients. In addition, Stanislav and Christina Grof have conducted over 30,000 holotropic breathwork sessions: consisting of breathing exercise workshops designed to engender transcendent states of consciousness. Based on his records of his pharmacological and breathing sessions, Grof came to what he regarded as a startling conclusion:

...what emerged from these accounts of holotropic states was a comprehensive and logically consistent alternative to the understanding of human nature and of existence that has been formulated by materialist science and that represents the official ideology of the Western industrial civilization.²²

Those experiencing holotropic states discover what Grof terms “an ensouled cosmos”: a Universe that is “created and permeated by superior cosmic intelligence.”²³ In addition, he argues that they overturn the conventional psychological assumptions and beliefs regarding the potential of the human psyche and our perceptual limits. In order to accommodate the experiences of the holotropic state, he seeks to radically redefine the cartography of the psyche by positing the existence of two significant domains. The first, he terms “the *perinatal*”—due to its association with birth—which he describes as being “a repository of intense physical sensations and emotions linked to the trauma of birth ...”²⁴ The second domain is “the *transpersonal*” which refers to its defining characteristic as being a transcending of “the usual limitations of the body and the ego.”²⁵ Grof explains that transpersonal experiences—which can involve accessing the collective unconscious or experiential identification with various aspects of nature (including people, plants, and animals) and the cosmos—“vastly expand the sense of personal identity by in-

cluding elements of the external world and other dimensions of reality.”²⁶ Records of the perinatal and transpersonal experiences document and reveal, in Grof’s opinion, that the boundaries that separate the human psyche and the cosmos—that which most scientists and psychologists take for granted—are “ultimately arbitrary” and can be transcended. He writes:

When we have experienced to sufficient depth these dimensions that are hidden to our everyday perception, we typically undergo profound changes in our understanding of existence and of the nature of reality. The most fundamental metaphysical insight we obtain is the realization that the universe is not an autonomous system that has evolved as a result of mechanical interplay of material particles. We find it impossible to take seriously the basic assumption of materialistic science, which asserts that the history of the universe is merely the history of evolving matter. We have directly experienced the divine, sacred, or numinous dimensions of existence in a very profound and compelling way.²⁷

Experiences of the Divine

At the risk of doing a disservice to the breadth and depth of the content of *The Cosmic Game*, I wish to focus on some of Grof’s comments regarding his subjects’ experiences of the Divine. In searching reports from those whom he characterizes as having experienced “the ultimate frontiers of the human spirit”²⁸—involving encounters with “the supreme principle” in the Universe—Grof says that people who claimed to have experienced the Absolute provided descriptions that were “highly abstract and strikingly similar.”²⁹ He says that they evidenced a remarkable consistency in describing their experience of the Supreme. They also agreed that the experience transcended “all the limitations of the analytical mind, all rational categories, all the constraints of ordinary logic.”³⁰ Grof explains that:

... Time after time, people compared the Absolute to a *radiant source of light of unimaginable intensity*, though they emphasized that it also differed in some signifi-

cant aspects from any forms of light that we know in the material world. *To describe the Absolute as light entirely misses some of its essential characteristics, particularly the fact that it is also an immense and unfathomable field of consciousness endowed with infinite intelligence and creative power.*³¹ [emphasis added]

Grof's emphasis on differentiating between the light of the electromagnetic spectrum and the supernal Light of the Absolute underlines the importance of understanding the quantum discontinuity between the material realm and the higher-dimensional realities experienced in holotropic states. The Light of the higher dimensions is experienced as being not only of unimaginable intensity (yet, paradoxically, not painful or blinding), but also as an "unfathomable field of consciousness." That is precisely what Yogananda described in his account of cosmic consciousness; he also described the Light as the creative source informing and manifesting in the material realm. Continuing, Grof explains that this Supreme cosmic principle can be experienced in two distinct ways: one in which there is a dissolving of all personal boundaries in the Light—the loss of all sense of a discrete identity—and the second, in which there continues to be a continuing sense of separateness from the Divine. As Grof says, the mystical literature is replete with accounts of both types of experiences of the Divine. In the former case, he cites the Sufi analogy: "Just as a moth flies into the flame and becomes one with it, so do we merge with the Divine."³² By contrast, he points out that both St. Teresa of Avila and Rumi, the great Sufi poet, maintain a sense of separation from God—as evidenced by their references to Him as "the Beloved."

In attempting to describe essentially ineffable experiences, Grof says that those experiencing these transcendent states explain the utter inadequacy of words in attempting to convey their realization of the supreme principle. Even the word, "God," they maintain, has been distorted or trivialized by mainstream religions and cultures. Similarly, such terms as "Absolute Consciousness" and "Universal Mind" seem to be "hopelessly inadequate to convey

the immensity and shattering impact of such an encounter."³³ In the face of the Divine, words and the structure of our language, which are rooted in our normal waking consciousness, are "painfully inappropriate tools to describe its nature and dimensions, particularly to those who have not had it."³⁴

Having stipulated these qualifications, Grof provides the following report from Robert, a thirty-seven year old psychiatrist, who felt that he had experienced the ultimate reality. Robert's experience, which began suddenly and without warning, led to a dramatic loss of contact with the surrounding world and a progressive disconnection from all sense of his identity and the referents of his normal reality:

... my only reality was a mass of swirling energy of immense proportions that seemed to contain all of Existence in an entirely abstract form. *It had the brightness of myriads of suns, yet it was not on the same continuum with any light I knew from everyday life. It seemed to be pure consciousness, intelligence, and creative energy transcending all polarities.* It was infinite and finite, divine and demonic, terrifying and ecstatic, creative and destructive ... all of that and much more. I had no concept, no categories for what I was witnessing. I could not maintain a sense of separate existence in the face of such a force. My ordinary identity was shattered and dissolved; I became one with the Source. Time lost any meaning whatsoever.

In retrospect, I believe I must have experienced the Dharmakaya, the Primary Clear Light, that according to the Tibetan Book of the Dead, the Bardo Thödol, appears at the moment of death.³⁵ [emphasis added]

Further complicating and deepening the mystery of the experience of the Divine are those accounts in which realization of the supreme principle is described as having no specific content. These are experiences of "the Cosmic Emptiness and Nothingness"—that which is referred to, in the mystical literature, as "the Void." Grof explains that:

When we encounter the Void, we feel that it is primordial emptiness of cosmic proportions and relevance. We become pure con-

sciousness aware of this absolute nothingness; however, at the same time, we have a paradoxical sense of essential fullness. This cosmic vacuum is also a plenum, since nothing seems to be missing from it; it seems to comprise all of existence in a potential form. ...

The Void transcends the usual categories of time and space. Some people call it Supracosmic and Metacosmic, indicating that this primordial emptiness and nothingness appears to be the principle that underlies the phenomenal world as we know it and, at the same time, is supraordinated to it. This metaphysical vacuum, pregnant with potential for everything there is, appears to be the cradle of all being, the ultimate source of existence. The creation of all phenomenal worlds is then the realization and concretization of its pre-existing potentialities.³⁶

Grof argues that, after experiencing the spiritual dimensions of reality, the materialist's contentions—that the Universe, life, and consciousness are nothing but the result of material processes without any influence of a superior creative intelligence—appear to be absurd and untenable. Indeed, he argues that the effects of apprehending other realities as a result of a visionary experience are so profound that they transform those who experience them; compelling them to alter dramatically their perspectives on the nature of themselves and the Universe. Thus, Grof makes the following dramatic assertion:

I have not yet met a single individual who has had a deep experience of the transcendental realms and continues to subscribe to the worldview of Western materialistic science. The development is quite independent of the level of intelligence, type and degree of education, and professional credentials of the individuals involved.³⁷ [emphasis added]

Again, Grof's findings are consistent with Huxley's claims regarding the transformative nature of the visionary experience: those who have seen the light experience a radical and permanent alteration of their most basic beliefs about the nature of human existence. If, as the

old saw would have it, "there are no atheists in foxholes," it appears to be equally true that there are no materialists amongst those who have been illuminated.

Life After Life ... And Beyond

Within the last forty years, a significant body of evidence has arisen—inadvertently and from an entirely unlikely source—which is consistent with and, thus, corroborates Huxley's characterization of the visionary experience and Grof's concept of holotropic states of consciousness. The advances in cardiac resuscitation technology and associated medical procedures have resulted in numerous instances and subsequent startling accounts of the Near-Death Experience ("NDE").³⁸ My purpose in discussing the NDE in this article is not to debate whether or not the experience of being conscious, when one has been observed to be clinically dead, is "real." I would submit that anyone examining the NDE research, with an open-mind and a truly skeptical attitude, must conclude that the extraordinary nature of the experience has been reliably, repeatedly, and consistently reported and, therefore, *is* real. Further, I believe that NDE research constitutes compelling evidence, which leads to the heretical, but unavoidable conclusion that human beings are capable of experiencing consciousness separately from their physical bodies and independently of their brain's physiological processes. Finally, these experiences involve the existence of higher states of consciousness in which subtle dimensions of reality are apprehended. I would also point out that these higher states of consciousness and the subtle realms that are experienced are entirely consistent with esoteric and mystical doctrines. Accordingly, I regard the NDE research as being the most important collection of data available to contemporary consciousness researchers. While skeptics routinely proclaim that extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence, the NDE literature—in which thousands upon thousands of cases have been accumulated and critically examined—have more than satisfied the criteria of extraordinary evidence. Indeed, it is clear that the massive evidence documenting the NDE demands that the burden of explanation

has shifted. It is the skeptics who must provide a truly extraordinary materialist explanation to account for this astonishing body of evidence; a challenge which, to date, they have repeatedly and thoroughly failed to meet.

As a result of Dr. Raymond Moody's pioneering work, *Life After Life*,³⁹ and the efforts of several other prominent researchers who have investigated this intriguing phenomenon, there is now widespread awareness amongst the general public, in most post-technological societies, of the standard NDE protocol. In such instances, those who have "died"—as evidenced by unconsciousness due to anoxia (lack of oxygen to the brain) resulting from the arrest of breathing and/or blood circulation—report that they continue to be aware of themselves, while often relating that they have existed outside of their bodies and observed the medical personnel's efforts to revive them. They then describe: traveling down a tunnel; emerging into a brilliant light which they perceive to be a loving source of higher intelligence; encountering deceased relatives and friends; undergoing "life reviews" that often involve not only a comprehensive and utterly coherent re-examination of the events of their own lives but also include an understanding of their effects on others and their reactions; and communicating with "beings of light" who sometimes present the "deceased" with the choice of returning to live in the physical body or remaining on this subtle plane. Collectively, these accounts challenge the materialist's fundamental assumption regarding the nature of human consciousness: that it is produced by the brain's activities and is, therefore, coterminous

with the death of the physical body.

In *Life After Life*, Moody provided an extraordinary body of anecdotal evidence regarding the NDE. Interestingly, he began his work on the NDE with the intention of "explaining away" the NDE. He admits that, until he examined the NDE phenomenon in detail, he would

have found such stories incredible and, accordingly, would have dismissed them out of hand. However, as he accumulated evidence about what he discovered to be a startlingly common experience, he began to realize that he could neither dismiss nor explain this phenomenon. In light of his own conversion, Moody challenged the skeptic "to poke around a bit for himself"—claiming that many who have done so "have come to share my bafflement over these events."⁴⁰

Moody noted that, in his research, he had identified twelve elements that recurred in accounts of the NDE. However, he cautioned that he had not found any case in which a subject had identified all the elements as being a part of his or her experience; similarly, he stated that there was no single element which every one of his subjects reported. (Subsequently, Moody reported that he had encountered cases in which all twelve elements were present.) Repeatedly, Moody's twelve elements have been confirmed by numerous researchers over the past 35 years. The following summary and description of the elements are derived from Pim van Lommel's discussion of them in his recent book, *Consciousness Beyond Life: The Science of the Near-Death Experience*.⁴¹ The elements consist of:

1. the ineffability of the experience; it is

NDE research constitutes compelling evidence, which leads to ... the conclusion that human beings are capable of experiencing consciousness separately from their physical bodies and independently of their brain's physiological processes. ... These experiences involve the existence of higher states of consciousness in which subtle dimensions of reality are apprehended. ... These higher states of consciousness and the subtle realms that are experienced are entirely consistent with esoteric and mystical doctrines.

- not reducible to or explicable in terms of ordinary language;
2. a feeling of peace and quiet; the pain is gone;
 3. the awareness of being dead, sometimes followed by a noise;
 4. an Out-of-Body Experience; from a position outside and above one's body, the individual witnesses his own resuscitation or operation;
 5. a dark space, people are pulled toward a small pinpoint of light;
 6. the perception of an unearthly environment; a dazzling landscape with beautiful colours, gorgeous flowers and, sometimes, music;
 7. meeting and communicating with deceased persons, mostly relatives;
 8. seeing a brilliant light or "a being of light"; experiencing complete acceptance and unconditional love and gaining access to a deep knowledge and wisdom;
 9. the panoramic life review; seeing one's entire life flash before one;
 10. the preview or flash forward: having the impression that one is witnessing a part of one's life that is yet to come;
 11. the perception of a border; being aware that, if one crosses this border or limit, one will be unable to return to one's body and life in the physical Universe; and
 12. the conscious return to the body, accompanied by great disappointment at having something so beautiful taken away.

Throughout the NDE literature, there are numerous accounts of people experiencing a brilliant supernal Light. The Light is sensed as being a presence, which communicates unconditional love and/or transmits extraordinary knowledge. As with Grof's descriptions of holotropic states, the Light is described as constituting a field of infinite consciousness.

Those who have undergone such advanced NDEs provide reports that are remarkably similar to Huxley's characterization of those who have had what he termed "the full-blown mystical experience." Such individuals are transformed by the experience of being illuminated: they lose their fear of death; they develop a passion for knowledge and knowing; and they acquire a deep gratitude for the privilege of being alive. They undergo a dramatic and enduring transformation in their values: which results in them recognizing the importance of serving others, as well as regarding spirituality as being far more important than material concerns and egoistic satisfaction.

Although Moody's research and that of his fellow NDE pioneer, Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, were intriguing, they were anecdotal. Accordingly, Dr. Kenneth Ring, an American psychologist, undertook research of the NDE with the intention of categorizing and interpreting the phenomena within a scientific framework. In his 1980 book, *Life at Death*,⁴² Ring stated that his research had affirmed Moody's claim that any researcher who chose to study the NDE "sympathetically and diligently will find that there is ample case material."⁴³ Further, Ring's investigation yielded a striking correspondence with the twelve elements that Moody had delineated in his analysis of the NDE. For more than 35 years, Ring has continued to carry out pioneering research into the NDE. He also provided a major impetus for the systematic study of the NDE by establishing the International Association for Near-Death Studies ("IANDS") to investigate this extraordinary phenomenon and to attempt to grasp its significance.

As a transpersonal psychologist, who was already familiar with a great deal of the anecdotal NDE material, Ring's interest and his enthusiasm for continuing research is, perhaps, not surprising. However, during approximately the same time as he was conducting his initial study, Dr. Michael Sabom, an American cardiologist at Emory University, undertook his own study for the purpose of debunking the NDE. With his colleague, Sarah Kreutziger, he took up Moody's challenge to "poke around" and, much to his surprise, discovered that the

results of interviews carried out with patients who had survived a near-death crisis were consistent with Moody's results. In 1982, Sabom published his book *Recollections of Death*,⁴⁴ reporting his investigation of 116 near-deaths survivors. His results were consistent with those which Ring had independently gathered and reported. In his investigation, Sabom placed particular emphasis on attempting to corroborate evidence that patients adduced regarding their auditory and visual perceptions while they were "out of their bodies." He concluded that there was compelling evidence that those experiencing NDEs were capable of providing accurate and verifiable information regarding the events that transpired while they were clinically dead.

Consciousness Beyond Life

During the past 30 years, there has been a veritable explosion of NDE research. As the reality of the NDE has become increasingly public, resistance to reporting such experiences has become less formidable—although the potentially negative consequences of doing so are certainly substantial and should be regarded with caution. The cover of the October 15, 2012 edition of *Newsweek* magazine featured the claim from Eben Alexander, an American neurosurgeon, that "Heaven is Real."⁴⁵ In his recent book, *Proof of Heaven*,⁴⁶ Dr. Alexander recounts his extraordinary experiences of higher-dimensional realities—after having contracted viral meningitis and going into a coma. Based on his transformative experience, Alexander provides the following pointed summary of the inadequacy of the materialist/skeptical position on the NDE:

Like many other scientific skeptics, *I refused to even review the data* relevant to these phenomena. *I prejudged the data, and those providing it*, because my limited perspective failed to provide the foggiest notion of how such things might actually happen. *Those who assert that there is no evidence for the phenomena indicative of extended consciousness, in spite of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, are willfully ignorant.* They believe that they know the truth without needing to look at the facts.⁴⁷ [emphasis added]

In 2010, Dr. Pim van Lommel, a Dutch cardiologist, published the English version of his book, *Consciousness Beyond Life*, which represents perhaps the most comprehensive examination of NDE research, as well as presenting significant theoretical commentary as to how such research impacts scientists' understanding of and approach to the study of consciousness.⁴⁸ Van Lommel had begun his NDE research in 1986: when he began to ask all the patients at his clinic, who had undergone resuscitation, whether they could recall anything of the period during which they were being resuscitated. He writes that: "I was more than a little surprised to hear, with the space of two years, twelve reports of such near-death experience among just over fifty cardiac arrest survivors."⁴⁹ Van Lommel says that he had not been open to such reports because, according to medical knowledge, "it is impossible to experience consciousness when the heart has stopped beating."⁵⁰ He adds that his entire education had taught him that there is "a reductionist and materialist explanation for everything."⁵¹ Until he began to investigate NDEs, van Lommel says that he "had always accepted this as indisputably true."⁵²

After his interest had been piqued by the surprisingly positive results he had obtained from his preliminary study of the NDE, van Lommel joined with Ruud van Wees and Vincent Meijers—psychologists who specialized in NDEs—to conduct the first large-scale "prospective" study of the NDE. As van Lommel explains, all of the early NDE research shared the same methodological shortcoming: the studies were "retrospective." The data was based on interviews with people who responded to advertisements, articles, television and radio broadcasts seeking accounts of NDEs.⁵³ While the information gained from such studies is certainly valuable, it also presents problems with respect to reliability—as researchers cannot determine what distinguishes those who respond to the request to participate in the research from those who do not. By contrast, a "prospective" NDE study involves "consecutive patients with a predefined diagnosis within days of their coma or cardiac arrest and ask them whether they have any memories of the period of unconsciousness."⁵⁴ Van Lommel

and his colleagues undertook a prospective, longitudinal study: wherein the subjects consisted of consecutive cardiac arrest survivors drawn from ten Dutch hospitals, who were followed for up to 8 years. The study examined the question as to whether “the common life changes that are reported after an NDE were the result of surviving a cardiac arrest or whether these changes were caused by the NDE itself.”⁵⁵ For every 100 successfully resuscitated patients included in the study, at least 200 died of cardiac arrest in the same period. All the patients who remained alive were interviewed—after 2 and 8 years—in order to determine the nature of life changes, if any, that followed after the NDE. A control group consisted of resuscitated patients who had not had an NDE, but were matched for age and sex with those who had.

The study, which Van Lommel and his colleagues carried out, was published in the December 2001 issue of the prestigious British medical journal, *The Lancet*. They reported that the percentages of the subjects experiencing the moderate, deep, and very deep NDEs—only 12 % in total—was much lower than the results of retrospective studies. Van Lommel attributes this finding to the prospective nature of the study, and the fact that the patients were much older than those typically studied. He reports that he and his colleagues were particularly surprised to find that *medical factors failed to explain the occurrence of an NDE*. He also notes that only a small percentage of those involved in the study had an NDE in which they reported an enhanced consciousness. As van Lommel says, if this enhanced consciousness was attributable to a physiological cause, such as oxygen deficiency—an “explanation” which skeptics frequently adduce as the material basis of the NDE—then it would follow that *all the patients in their study should have experienced an NDE*. In addition, van Lommel adds that psychological explanations were not applicable because the onset of the cardiac arrest was, for most patients, so sudden that they failed to notice it.

In *Consciousness Beyond Life*, van Lommel reviews, in great detail, the various psychological and physiological theories that have been

put forth by materialists. He concludes that none of them:

... explain the experience of an enhanced consciousness, with lucid thoughts, emotions, memories from earliest childhood, visions of the future, and possibilities of perception from a position outside and above the body. They also lack an adequate explanation for the fact that *everything experienced during the NDE appears more vivid and real than what happens during everyday working consciousness*. The fact that an NDE is accompanied by accelerated thought and access to greater than ever wisdom remains inexplicable. Current scientific knowledge also fails to explain how all these NDE elements can be experienced at a moment when, in many people, brain function has been seriously impaired. There appears to be an inverse relationship between the clarity of consciousness and the loss of brain function.⁵⁶ [emphasis added]

As van Lommel says, conventional scientific wisdom is unequivocal: in the absence of brain activity, there can be no experience of consciousness or awareness. But as confounding as the NDE is in defying that understanding, things become that much more peculiar—insofar as those who undergo the NDE experience lucid consciousness, with what they regard as undeniably heightened intellectual and emotional functioning. But, then too, even if materialists were able to identify some wondrous physiological process that would produce these inexplicable experiences, they would still be left with the enormous problem of accounting for the extraordinary content and impact of the experiences. In addition, as van Lommel notes, there is no explanation, within contemporary science and psychology, for the fact that people from all cultures and in all ages have reported NDEs. He also notes that there is no ready answer for the puzzling fact that, while a significant number of people do have NDEs, most people who are rendered unconscious by life-threatening crises do not report having an NDE. In other words, the more that we examine the NDE, the more mysterious it becomes.

Van Lommel notes that, since his group's study was published, there have been three additional prospective studies: Bruce Greyson's 2003 study of 116 patients; the 2001 British study of 63 patients which was carried out by Sam Parnia, an intensive care physician, and Peter Fenwick, a neuropsychiatrist; and a second British study of 39 patients which Penny Sartori, a senior intensive care nurse, conducted. All four studies reached the same conclusion which van Lommel summarizes:

...consciousness, with memories and occasional perception, can be experienced *during* a period of unconsciousness—that is, during a period when the brain shows no measurable activity and all brain functions, such as body reflexes, brain-stem reflexes, and respiration have ceased. It appears that at such a moment a lucid consciousness can be experienced independently of the brain and body.⁵⁷

Regarding the long-term effects of the NDE, van Lommel reports that a significant passage of time is often required in order for those who have had an NDE to integrate the pronounced changes in their views on a host of important subjects. In his study, the second interviews—which were conducted 8 years after the cardiac arrest—revealed that there was “a significant decrease in fear of death among people with an NDE and a significant increase in belief in an afterlife.”⁵⁸ In sum, van Lommel reports that:

... eight years after the cardiac arrest, all patients had changed in many respects: they had a greater interest in nature, the environment, and social justice; they showed more love and emotions; and they were more supportive and more involved in family life. Nonetheless, those who have experienced an NDE during their cardiac arrest remained significantly different. Specifically, they were *less afraid of death and had a stronger belief in a life after death*. They showed greater interest in spirituality and questions of meaning as well as a greater acceptance of and love for oneself and others. Likewise, they had a greater appreciation of ordinary things whereas their interest in possessions and power had decreased. People without an NDE showed a

marked decline in spirituality.”⁵⁹

Van Lommel claims that, in the past 50 years, more than 25 million people have had an NDE! He adds that recent research in the United States and Germany suggests that approximately 4.2 percent of the population report NDEs; in the United States that would mean 9 million people have reported an NDE!⁶⁰ Nevertheless, even these figures may well underestimate the prevalence of the experience due to the widespread dismissal of such reports amongst medical personnel and the frequency with which patients censor themselves for fear of ridicule or disparagement. While he readily acknowledges that consciousness remains “a huge mystery,” Van Lommel regards the NDE research—the frequency with which these experiences occur and the consistency of the recurring definitive elements—as providing the substantive basis for making fundamental changes in science's assumptions about and approaches to the study of consciousness. The experience of higher-dimensional realities and the singular nature of the states of consciousness involved—in the absence of any discernible evidence of brain functioning—lead van Lommel to conclude that consciousness is non-local:

Complete and endless consciousness is everywhere in a dimension that is not tied to time or place, where past, present, and future all exist and are accessible at the same time. This endless consciousness is always in and around us. We have no theories to prove or measure nonlocal space and nonlocal consciousness in the material world. The brain and the body merely function as an interface or relay station to receive part of our total consciousness and part of our total memories into our waking consciousness. ... Our consciousness transmits information to the brain and via the brain receives information from the body and the senses. The function of the brain can be compared to a transceiver; *our brain has a facilitating rather than a producing role; it enables the experience of consciousness*. There is also increasing evidence that consciousness has a direct effect on the function and anatomy of the

brain and the body, with DNA likely to play an important role.⁶¹ [emphasis added]

Finally, in what I regard as one of the most important statements in his wonderful book, van Lommel states that people who have had NDEs “have been my greatest teachers”: that his conversations with them and his study of the NDE has “changed my views on the meaning of life and death.”⁶² In this respect, he is putting forth an opinion that many NDE researchers—from Kubler-Ross and Moody ... to Ring and Sabom ... to Alexander—have expressed. Humbled by the extraordinary nature of the NDE and its profound and enduring impact on those who experience it, these researchers have not only demonstrated their intellectual integrity—by accepting that which their scientific training had taught them was impossible—but have recognized the importance of the experience for those who have been illuminated by their visionary experiences and their apprehension of higher-dimensional realities. In the true sense of scientific objectivity, van Lommel and other NDE researchers have overcome their prejudgment and opened their minds to what P.D. Ouspensky termed “system-destroying facts.” And, in doing so, they have embraced the incomparable opportunity of participating in what appears to promise a revolutionary breakthrough in human knowledge.

Some Concluding Remarks

The parallels between the accounts of those who have experienced visionary states of consciousness in life and those who have undergone the NDE are striking in terms of the content and their transformative effects. Despite my many years of interest in consciousness and my study of esoteric and mystical teachings, I confess that, for far too long, I underestimated the significance of the NDE literature. While I understood that NDE accounts essentially substantiated mystical and esoteric claims regarding the nature of consciousness and reality, I believe that I mistakenly assumed that I had a basic grasp of the significance of the NDE. In the past few years, I have read a dozen books on the NDE—which is, to say, that I have merely scratched the surface. Much

to my chagrin and delight, I have come to recognize how little I knew about the NDE, as well as how much there is to be learned from studying this amazing body of research. To a certain extent, I have found that reading NDE books is the intellectual equivalent of eating potato chips; once one begins, it is extremely difficult to stop. They seem to satisfy a certain hunger. On a more serious note, I will reiterate my contention that no one who professes to be interested in the study of consciousness can ignore the NDE research. Yet, within the mainstream of academic psychologists who study consciousness, I have been unable to discern any sign that anyone grants the NDE any consideration whatsoever! For example, in Susan Blackmore’s 2006 book, *Conversations on Consciousness*,⁶³ there is no mention of the NDE. The subtitle of Blackmore’s book is: *What the Best Minds Think about the Brain, Free Will, and What it Means to Be Human*. Although she converses with some twenty-one consciousness theorists and researchers—including such luminaries as Daniel Dennett, Francis Crick, David Chalmers, Patricia and Paul Churchland, Roger Penrose, John Searle, V.S. Ramachandran, and Richard Gregory—no one seems to have regarded the NDE to be of significant importance to include in their varied and far-ranging speculations on the nature of human consciousness. Similarly, the visionary/transcendent experience is also ignored. Of course, there are numerous psychologists who do regard the NDE as an essential subject in the study of consciousness. Unfortunately, it seems that, by adopting that perspective, one’s views are marginalized within academic psychology—wherein anything which is even mildly suggestive of being “mystical” is perfunctorily dismissed.

Based on my understanding of the subject, I believe that it is reasonable to assert that those reporting NDEs:

- (1) experience consciousness in the absence of any measurable physiological indices of life and/or brain activity;
- (2) experience themselves as self-conscious entities existing separate from the physical body such that they perceive their physical bodies from an external

perspective;

- (3) experience higher states in which the nature of knowing is dramatically altered and involves different speeds of information processing, distinct types of memory, and episodes of unitive consciousness in which one feels at one with the Universe and knows everything at once;
- (4) undergo transformative experiences in which they come to identify the over-whelming importance of love and knowledge;
- (5) directly and unequivocally experience supernal Light as higher consciousness and/or presences/beings;
- (6) encounter deceased loved ones and friends—including individuals they have not known in life but subsequently become identifiable—as well as spiritual entities and/or presences;
- (7) undergo life reviews that may include not only lucid recapitulations of one's entire existence—including one's own actions, thoughts, and feelings—but also direct apprehension of the effects of one's thoughts, feelings, and actions on others;
- (8) experience being given the choice of being able to return to one's body and current life or remaining in the after-life dimension; and
- (9) undergo dramatic and enduring transformations—post NDE—in terms of values, ethics, morals, beliefs, interests, and discernment of the nature, meaning, and purpose of existence.

It is obvious that even a cursory examination of each of these elements of the NDE demands significant discussion. In the next article, I propose to focus on: the experience of supernal Light; the dramatic alteration in knowing; the experience of unitive consciousness; the life review; and the recognition of the importance of love. I will argue that, while each of these topics poses significant challenges in terms of attempting to interpret and conceptualize the psychological dynamics involved, there are

important clues with the esoteric literature which may prove fruitful. At the very least, I would suggest that, in contrast to modern psychology and science, esoteric teachings provided a framework in which the NDE is readily accommodated. I will also cite van Lommel's explication of how the NDE defies current medical and scientific understanding of the brain, and leads him to conclude that consciousness must be conceptualized as being non-local. Finally, I will argue that the visionary/transcendent experience substantiates esoteric conceptualizations of humans as multi-dimensional beings existing in a multi-dimensional Universe.

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- ¹ Paramahansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, 1946 (Los Angeles: Self Realization Foundation, 1971).
 - ² Ibid., 148.
 - ³ Ibid., 148.
 - ⁴ Ibid., 148.
 - ⁵ Ibid., 148-149.
 - ⁶ Ibid., 149-150.
 - ⁷ Ibid., 150.
 - ⁸ Christopher Holmes' series of articles, "The Origins and Nature of Human Consciousness," appears in *The Esoteric Quarterly* (Fall, 2010; Winter, 2010; Spring, 2011; Fall, 2011). His discussion of Yogananda's experience of cosmic consciousness appears in the Spring, 2011 issue, 48-51.
 - ⁹ Maurice Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind*, 1901 (New York: EP Dutton And Company, Inc., 1969).
 - ¹⁰ Aldous Huxley, "Visionary Experience," in John White, ed., *The Highest States of Consciousness* (New York: Anchor Books, 1972), 34-57.
 - ¹¹ Raynor Johnson, *Watcher on the Hills: A Study of Some Mystical Experiences of Ordinary People* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1959).
 - ¹² Aldous Huxley, "Visionary Experience," in John White, ed., *The Highest States of Consciousness*, 49.
 - ¹³ Ibid., 50.
 - ¹⁴ Abraham Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak Experiences* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1964).
 - ¹⁵ For a very interesting history of Leary and Alpert's rise and fall at Harvard, see Don Lat-

- tin, *The Harvard Psychedelic Club* (New York: Harper One, 2010). Lattin examines the lives of Leary, Alpert, Houston Smith, and Andrew Weil—their divergent perspectives and priorities—during the halcyon days of the Harvard psychedelic experiment.
- 16 John Lilly, *Centre of the Cyclone: An Autobiography of Inner Space* (New York: Bantam Books, 1972).
- 17 Stanislav Grof, *The Cosmic Game: Explorations of the Frontiers of Human Consciousness* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998). Grof has continued his work over the 15 years since this work was published. However, as my discussion is based on that work, references to his data sources are drawn from that account.
- 18 Ibid., 5.
- 19 Ibid., 6.
- 20 Ibid., 7.
- 21 Ibid., 8-9.
- 22 Ibid., 10.
- 23 Ibid., 11.
- 24 Ibid., 15.
- 25 Ibid., 15.
- 26 Ibid., 15.
- 27 Ibid., 16-17.
- 28 Ibid., 25.
- 29 Ibid., 26.
- 30 Ibid., 26.
- 31 Ibid., 26.
- 32 Ibid., 26.
- 33 Ibid., 27.
- 34 Ibid., 27.
- 35 Ibid., 28.
- 36 Ibid., 30.
- 37 Ibid., 254.
- 38 While there has been an extraordinary growth in the number of reported NDE cases, the phenomenon is hardly a recent development. Michael Talbot notes that, while the reported incidence of NDEs has increased dramatically with the advances in cardiac resuscitation treatments, there are numerous accounts of the phenomenon through history. Thus, he states that the NDE appears to be “a universal phenomenon.” Furthermore, he notes that NDEs have been described at great length in the eighth century *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, the 2,500 year old *Egyptian Book of the Dead*, as well as the works of Plato and Patanjali, amongst others. Talbot cites the work of Carol Zaleski, who states that medieval literature is filled with accounts of NDEs. Michael Talbot, *The Holographic Universe* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992), 240.
- 39 Raymond A. Moody, Jr., *Life After Life*, 1975 (New York: Bantam, 1976).
- 40 Ibid., 6.
- 41 Pim van Lommel, *Consciousness Beyond Life: The Science of the Near-Death Experience* (New York: Harper One, 2010).
- 42 Kenneth Ring, *Life At Death: A Scientific Investigation of the Near-Death Experience* (New York: Quill, 1982)
- 43 Ibid., 32.
- 44 Michael Sabom, *Recollections of Death: A Medical Investigation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982)
- 45 “My Proof of Heaven,” *Newsweek*, October 15, 2012, 28-32.
- 46 Eben Alexander, *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon’s Journey into the Afterlife* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2012) 153.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 Although I have read numerous books on the NDE, I do not profess to be an expert on the subject. Hence, I make my assessment of van Lommel’s book while readily acknowledging that I have not read many other works which are highly recommended by those whose judgment on these matters I trust.
- 49 Ibid., vii.
- 50 Ibid., vii.
- 51 Ibid., viii.
- 52 Ibid., viii.
- 53 Ibid., 137. Van Lommel explains that Sabom’s research was “partly prospective.”
- 54 Ibid., 15.
- 55 Ibid., 137.
- 56 Ibid., 137.
- 57 Ibid., 133.
- 58 Ibid., 149-149.
- 59 Ibid., 149.
- 60 Ibid., 9.
- 61 Ibid., xvii.
- 62 Ibid., xix.
- 63 Susan Blackmore, ed. *Conversations on Consciousness: What The Best Minds Think About The Brain, Free Will, And What It Means To Be Human* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Astrology in the Bible

Ralph Ellis

Abstract

The Old and New Testaments are often portrayed as being written in isolation, and bearing little or no connection to the beliefs that preceded them. But this view is unlikely in the extreme, as the Israelites were resident in Egypt for many centuries prior to the claimed Exodus and were likely to have been influenced by Egyptian monotheism (of Pharaoh Akhenaton).¹ It is well known, for instance, that Proverbs 22 comes from the *Instructions of Amenemopet*, while elements of the Sermon on the Mount come from *Maxims of Ani*.² There are many other examples of Egyptian influence in the Bible.

This particular article explores the possibility that Egyptian astrology was once a central component within both Judaism and Christianity, but that it has been obscured from popular view by subsequent transcriptions, translations and deliberate obfuscation of the original text. Indeed, the evidence that follows also suggests that the astrological foundations of some secular symbolism may likewise have been lost to mainstream historical understanding. The observations presented here may be considered subjective, but the evidence is so consistent as to be on a par with the best that religio-historical research has to offer.

Precession

Readers who have received an orthodox Christian education may be quite confident that the Bible contains no information or veneration of “heretical” beliefs like astrology whatsoever. In fact, surely astrology is Pagan and idolatrous and the complete antithesis of Judaism and Christianity? While this may be a widely held view among the general public, it is simply not true, and so it may come as a bit of a surprise to some readers to learn that astrology was originally a central component within Judaeo-Christian society and beliefs.

And while the more enlightened reader may observe that many references to the heavens can be found in the Tanakh and Gospels—including the Jewish good luck greeting of *mazel tov*, which is more accurately translated as “good constellation”—references to astrology and the zodiac appear to be entirely absent. It is only when we look deeper into these sometimes incomprehensible texts that we can find references to astrology; but this is not the daily astrology found in modern magazines, rather a study and veneration of millennial astrology. This long-term study of the heavens is known as precessional astrology, and it is more akin to what we would now call astronomy, as it is based upon an actual astronomical event known as the precession of the equinox.

Precession is an actual astronomical effect that changes the dominant constellation that rises with the dawn Sun at the vernal equinox (the spring equinox) roughly every 2,140 years. It happens because the earth “wobbles” gyroscopically on its axis, making the axis of the Earth rotate around the constellation of Draco (around the ecliptic pole) once every 25,680 years. But this rotation has a secondary effect, which causes the vernal equinox sunrise (the vernal point) to pass through each constellation in turn, but in a retrograde fashion to normal

About the Author

Ralph Ellis has worked as a software engineer for many years, and has put that analytical training to good use in the analysis of historical and biblical texts. For more than 30 years Ralph has toured the Mediterranean, researching Egyptian and biblical history and looking for similarities and parallels between these two disciplines from the secular viewpoint. The outcome of this tireless research is ten books that connect biblical history directly with Egyptian history, in a fashion that has never been explored previously. For more information visit: www.edfu-books.com/.

astrology. Therefore, the Sun takes about 2,140 years to transit each of the twelve constellations. The terminology this celestial motion generates is as follows:

- The very long period of 25,680 years is called the Great Year.
- The shorter period of 2,140 years is known as the Great Month.

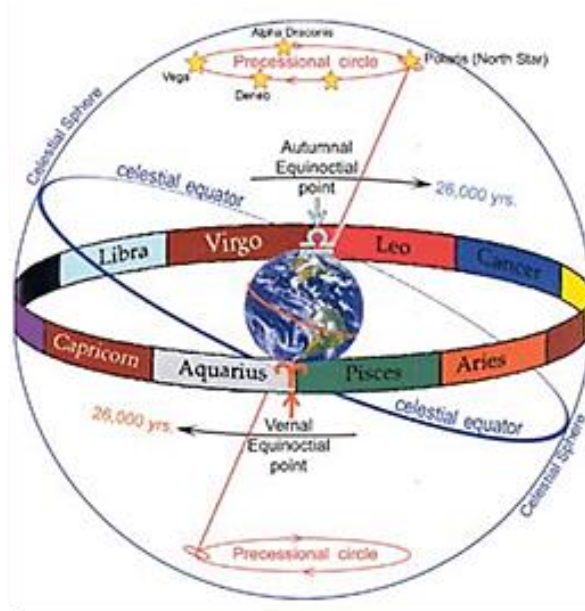


Figure 1. The precession of the equinox around the constellation of Draco takes nearly 26,000 years to complete. This period is known as a Great Year. This precessional “wobble” moves the ‘vernal point’ through each constellation of the zodiac, one by one.

But the constellations are not all of the same size, and so the Great Months are not all of the same duration. The established start-dates for the recent Great Months are as follows (all dates +/- 20 years or so):

Sign	Start date	Icon
Taurus	4300 BC	(bulls)
Aries	1750 BC	
(sheep)		
Pisces	10 AD	(fish)
Aquarius	2550 AD	(wa-
ter) ³		

There is often some disagreement over these dates, because many astrologers simply assume that all the constellations are of equal size, and thus suppose 2140 years for each Great Month. However, in the author's view, this methodology is erroneous, and the date for the new Great Month should be taken at the point when the vernal point (the Sun rising at

the spring equinox) first approaches the next constellation. Since Pisces is quite a large constellation, this methodology means that the Great Month of Aquarius does not start until the year 2550. The dotted red line in Fig 2 demonstrates this claim quite well, as the Vernal Point on this diagram has still not quite exited from Pisces by the year 2500. The information above was taken from Voyager 4.0.3, one of the most respected computer planispheres which includes all the precessional effects, including standard precession and nutation.

It is also worth noting that the star charts used in modern astrology, as given in magazines and newspapers, are nearly one precessional month out of date as they have not been updated since the turn of the first-century.⁴ Thus the constellation that everyone thinks they were born under is completely incorrect. Most Aquarians should become Capricornians, and

most Capricornians should become Sagitarians, etc., etc., throughout the whole of the zodiac.

So if we are to discover any references to astrology within the Bible, it is likely that we need to look at precessional astrology; and the first change in the constellations for which we might find evidence happened in about 1750 BC, when Taurus (the bull) turned into Aries (the ram). Remember that this millennial movement of the Sun through the constellations is a factual astronomical event, as can be seen on the following image from a computer

planisphere, where the path of the Sun is marked in red. The numbers here are in thousands of years either side of our normal year zero (00 AD). As can be seen, in about 1800 - 1700 BC the vernal equinox sunrise was moving away from Taurus (the bull) towards Aries (the sheep), while in about AD 10 it moved from Aries (sheep) to Pisces (fish). The boundary between these constellations is not clear-cut, which is why there are differences of opinion about the precise date for each Great Month.

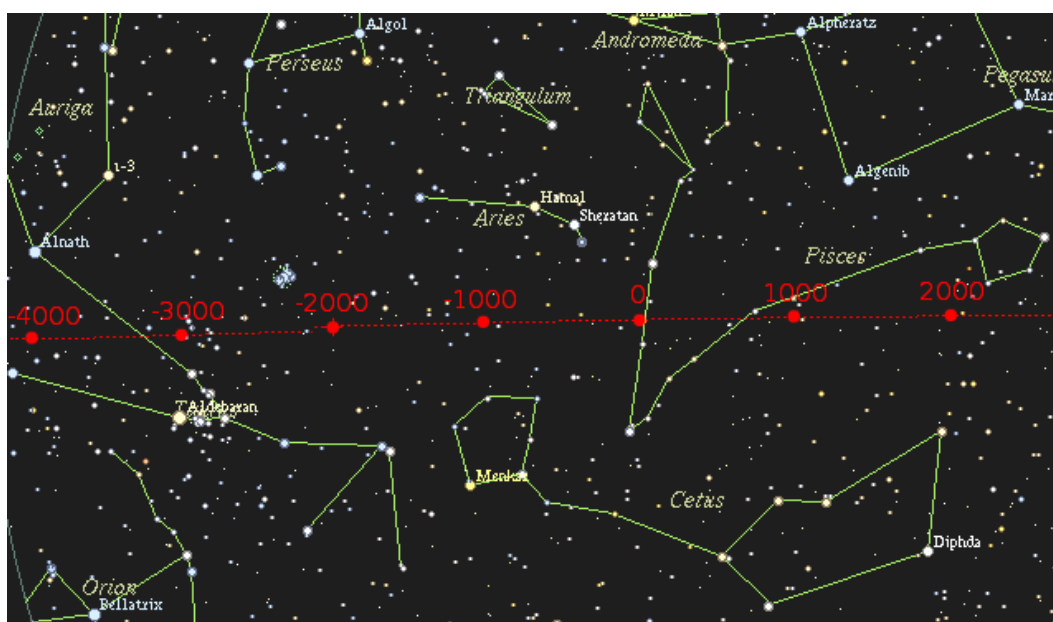


Figure 2. The path of the vernal equinox sunrise (the Vernal Point), as it courses through the constellations. In 1750 BC, it moved from Taurus to Aries, while in about AD 10 it moved from Aries to Pisces.⁵

Torah Shepherds

But how does all of this fit into the biblical storyline? Where does the Torah mention the vernal equinox or the zodiac? This is where a researcher has to look critically and laterally at what the Torah was trying to originally explain, before it was either poorly or purposely mistranslated. The first clue to reality of biblical astrology is that the biblical patriarchs of this very same era (1800 - 1700 BC) became known as “shepherds” just as the Great Month of Taurus (bulls) ended, and the Great Month

of Aries (sheep) began. Was this change in name merely a coincidence or was it due to the fact that the Jews chose to become poor shepherds who tended a few sheep? Actually, no, and we can be confident of this answer because the change in terminology was both widespread and consistent throughout biblical history. In addition, we know that Abraham, the first of these biblical “shepherds” was hardly a poverty-stricken nomad with a small flock of goats. Respective accounts from the Torah and Josephus Flavius, the first-century CE historian⁶ contradicts these claims.

And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, who numbered three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan. (Gen 14:14)⁷

And what did ... our forefather Abraham do? Did he avenge the insult by force of arms? Yet he had three hundred and eighteen army officers under him and an immense army under each of them. (Jewish War 5:9:4)⁸

There is a significant discrepancy here –the Torah records 318 trained servants, while Josephus indicates that these servants were actually army officers. So which account is accurate? It is worth remembering that Josephus was using a much older Torah than the one extant in modern Judaism, for he was given the Torah from the ruins of the Temple of Jerusalem in AD 70, by commander (emperor) Titus.⁹ Furthermore, William Whiston (1617-1752), the English theologian, historian, and mathematician, best known for his translations of Josephus, claims that this scroll dated from the fifth-century reign of Artaxerxes,¹⁰ and so it is likely that Josephus' version of these events is the more authoritative. This is perhaps confirmed by the biblical account which uses the term *chaniyk* (Kynx) for "trained servant," which in this context may well have been derived from *chaniyth* (tynx) meaning "spear."¹¹

The result of this textual comparison suggests that Abraham had an army led by 318 commanders. If each commander was a centurion, Abraham's army would have numbered 31,800 men, which is quite an army for a poverty-stricken shepherd with a few dozen goats, as he and the patriarchs are often portrayed. So why does the Torah contain accounts that conflict so strongly with the popular view that is promulgated by the Judaeo-Christian priesthood? One answer is that the scribes might have changed these accounts in order to portray their heroes in a more favorable light, rather than concede that the patriarchs led a powerful military force that lost a bitter civil war in Egypt and were forced out of the country.

The Hyksos¹²

In addition to the biblical patriarchs being shepherds, the Hyksos pharaohs of Egypt were similarly known as shepherds—the Shepherd Kings. And since Abraham was a "shepherd" who controlled a vast army some 30,000 strong, it is highly likely that he was actually a Hyksos king—especially since the Hyksos were one of the few peoples in this era that could have afforded such a large standing army. While this confident assertion may seem controversial and without merit at this stage, a later article will prove to greater satisfaction that the Hyksos and Israelites were indeed one and the same people. However, just as an illustration of the evidence available in favor of this proposition, Josephus Flavius says of his people, the Israelites:

(Manetho) promised to interpret the Egyptian history out of their sacred writings, and premised this: that "our people had come into Egypt, many ten thousands in number, and subdued its inhabitants;" and when he had further confessed that "we went out of that country afterward, and settled in that country which is now called Judea, and there built Jerusalem and its temple." Now thus far he followed his ancient records...¹³

It is clear from this and other quotations that Josephus equated the Israelites with the Hyksos, despite this assertion probably being controversial even in this early era. More recently, some Egyptologists have questioned whether "Hyksos" does indeed mean "Shepherd," and thus questioned the obvious connection between the Hyksos pharaohs and the biblical Patriarchs. This translation was originally made by Manetho, the 3rd century BC Egyptian historian whom Josephus was quoting, and yet we can be fairly sure that Manetho was correct because the title Hykau Khasut (ie: the Hyksos) is spelt with the shepherd's crook. In fact, since the initial term, Hykau meaning "king," contains the shepherd's crook, this title can easily be read as "Shepherd King" without including the secondary title Khasut meaning "Foreign Lands."¹⁴



Figure 3. The hieroglyphs for Hykau Khasut (Kings of the Foreign Lands), which Manetho transliterates and shortens into “Hyksos” (the Shepherd Kings). Wallis Budge indicates that the second word in this title may have been derived from the Shasu, a Semitic people.

In addition to these historical “shepherds,” we have many other conversions to sheep veneration within this age or era—kings who were born during the Great Month of Aries. These include Alexander the Great and Pharaoh Ptolemy III, who both wore the horns of a ram (Aries) in their hair. They did so, at least in part, not because a ram is a masculine animal, but

because they had been born in the Great Month of Aries, and recognized themselves as Kings of Aries (or Shepherd Kings). This transposition in cosmic veneration, from Taurus-bulls to Aries-sheep, was also why Gilgamesh, the great Sumerian hero-figure, killed the Bull of Heaven (Taurus).



Figure 4. Alexander the Great (above) and Pharaoh Ptolemy III (below) both wore ram's horns, in recognition and celebration of the Great Month of Aries. They also wore a “Diadema” headband, tied behind the head that represented the circular course of the Sun through the constellations.¹⁵

The reverse of Alexander's coin shows an image of “Britannia,” the same symbol that has been embossed onto many British coins throughout the centuries, but the image is actually of the goddess Athena. The bust of ‘Ptolemy’ shown here is actually Ptolemy in the guise of Hercules, and the ram’s horn is cleverly disguised just above the central hole. Note also that this coin of Ptolemy displays a “Christian: Chi-Rho symbol, between the legs of the eagle, but do remember that this coin was struck in the 3rd century BC. For an in-depth discussion on the Sabaeen origins of the chi-rho symbol, please see the book “King Jesus.”

Joseph and Pharaoh

So what further evidence do we find in the Bible that the early Judaic priesthood venerated the precessional zodiac? Surprising as it may seem, we may well have a verbatim description of this change in the Great Month, from Taurus to Aries, in the Torah story of Joseph—the patriarch who wore a coat of many colors.¹⁶

The period in question is just after the historically attested Exodus of the Hyksos Pharaohs of Egypt, who were evicted from Egypt in about 1570 BC.¹⁷ Remember that the Hyksos were known as the Shepherd Pharaohs, and it will be a frequent assertion in this article that these Hyksos peoples were related to or allied to the Israelites, which is why the Israelite patriarchs were known as “shepherds.” In the Torah’s account of these events, Joseph went down into Egypt and became both the Prime Minister of Egypt (the Vizier) and the High Priest of Heliopolis. Joseph then invites his brothers down into Egypt; but he has a warning for them and says to them:

And it shall come to pass, when Pharaoh shall call you, and shall say, What is your occupation? You shall say, “Thy servants’ trade has been about cattle from our youth even until now, both we, and also our fathers”.... for every shepherd is an abomination unto the Egyptians. (Gen 46:33)¹⁸

However, while this sentence is quite clear, it makes absolutely no sense in agricultural terms, for the Egyptians had no proscription against eating sheep. Quite the reverse; in fact, for it was the bull that was sacred in Egypt, much as it is in India to this day. But this warning makes every sense in terms of precessional astronomy, and its attendant veneration or religion. What Joseph actually meant by this warning was:

And it shall come to pass, when Pharaoh shall call you, and shall say, What is your religion? You shall say, “Thy servants’

religion has been to venerate the Apis-bull (Taurus) from our youth even until now, both we, and also our fathers” ... for every Hyksos Shepherd (venerator of Aries) is an abomination unto the Egyptians. (Gen 46:33)¹⁹

Of course, the Hyksos Shepherds were an abomination to the (Upper) Egyptians, because they had only just waged a prolonged and very bitter civil war against the Hyksos and evicted them from the country. Thus this particular Torah verse is probably a word-for-word account of a meeting between Joseph and the Upper Egyptian pharaoh. In other words, the Torah does contain valid and very interesting historical information, if we know how to interpret it, and much of that information points towards precessional astrology being a central component of the early Judaeo-Christian belief system.

The Galilee Zodiac

But the centuries passed, and the Earth continued to wobble or precess on its axis, in its predictable fashion, and the Great Month of Aries finally drew to a close at the turn of the first-century AD. We then witnessed the rise of the Great Month of Pisces, and the simultaneous rise of the New Testament accounts. And it is in the Nazarene creed of Jesus and James that we find further evidence for the veneration of astrology in the Bible. The first evidence for this comes from recent archaeology in the region. Six very early synagogues have been excavated in Judaea and Jordan in the last decades and strange as it seemed to archaeologists and rabbis alike, all of them had a mosaic zodiac on the floor.²⁰

The following example is the magnificent zodiac at Hamat Teverya, just south of Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee, which is worth looking at in some detail.²¹ So contentious are these zodiacs, and the alternate history of Judaism that they betray, that the Hamat zodiac was attacked and badly damaged in 2012.²²

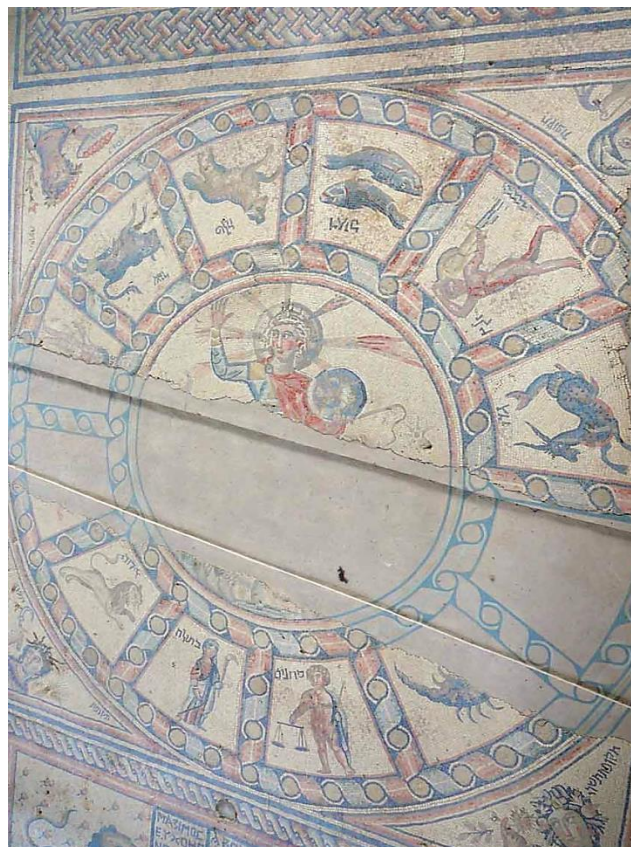


Figure 5. The zodiac on the floor of the synagogue excavated at Hamat Teverya. The “Jesus-figure” wearing a halo in the center of the zodiac is Helios, the Sun-god. Thus the Sun is surrounded by the twelve constellations, just as it is on a planisphere.

As we are beginning to see, all these early religions were Sabaeen (celestial and astrological), whose priests studied the Cosmos and the Solar System; and yet despite our recognition of their expertise, this zodiac still contains some remarkable and unexpected surprises. Firstly, it confirms that early (Nazarene) Judaism was tracking the precession of the equinox, because the head of Helios (the Sun) has been deliberately arranged in this zodiac to point at the conjunction between Aries and Pisces. Helios is pointing at a precessional date of the early 1st century AD, the very era when the Great Month of Aries gave way to the Great Month of Pisces. Thus the artist or priest who designed this zodiac clearly knew about precession, and no doubt he depicted this conjunction because this mosaic was constructed at this very time. (There is a record of Josephus Flavius being sent to a palace of

Herod, four furlongs south of Tiberias, to destroy depictions of animals there. Interestingly, the event described in this report points to the Tiberias zodiac, which also lies four furlongs south of Tiberias and contains depictions of animals.)²³

Note also that Helios, the Sun-god, is holding a blue spherical Earth. Remember that this is most probably a 1st century mosaic, and yet the artist knew that the Earth was spherical and looked blue when viewed from space. This explains why Copernicus was widely viewed as a charlatan in masonic circles, for the Emerald Tablets had long ago indicated that the planets were spherical and the Solar System was heliocentric.²⁴ But it has to be said that the predominance of blue seas on this mosaic’s spherical Earth is suggestive of a deep understanding of our world.

Helios, who is placed in the center of the Hamat Teverya zodiac, is pointing to the precessional conjunction between Aries (sheep) and Pisces (fish), which occurred in the early 1st century AD. It is at this time that Jesus, who was said to be born as a Lamb of God²⁵ (Aries), becomes a Fisherman or a Fisher of Men (Pisces).²⁶ Therefore, the image of Helios on this zodiac most probably represents Jesus himself, as the Son or Sun of God (the play on words also holds in the Greek), surrounded by the twelve signs of the zodiac, his twelve apostles and/or twelve tribes of Israel. In the clearest possible terms, the gospels are spelling out the true astrological basis and nature of Jesus Nazarene Church, by referencing “lambs” and “fish” in the correct astrological sequence, context and era; and by using the specific number symbolism of 12.

This overt link to the Age of Pisces is one of the reasons why the gospels placed such an emphasis on Jesus and miraculous fish catch in the Sea of Galilee. When Jesus lowered his nets into the sea to “catch fish” he was fishing for those who understood the significance of the Aries precession into Pisces, and were able to reorient themselves to these new, incoming energies.²⁷ The story of the “loaves and fishes,” where the bread represents knowledge²⁸ and fish represent Pisces, accords with the precessional theme. Seen in this light, these so-called biblical “miracles” might be seen as an occult record of pious evangelism for the Nazarene Church and its veneration of Pisces.

End of an Age

As we have seen from the previous examples, both the Old Testament and the New Testament contain verses that clearly relate a knowledge and veneration of precessional astrology. However, in many instances, the English translators appear to have done their best to conceal these cosmic and astrological allusions. Our first example is from Mathew:

And as (Jesus) sat upon the Mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him, saying: “Tell us when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming and of the End of the World?” (Mathew 24:3)

The translation of this verse form is not very enlightening because the translator used *kosmos* (meaning “world” in Greek) as opposed to *aion* (meaning “age”). The word *aion* actually refers to an “age,” just as it does in English to this day. An alternative translation of this verse might well be:

And as (Jesus) sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him, saying: “Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the End of the Age?” (Mathew 24:3)

So what “Age” was ending in the early 1st century AD, that Jesus could enlighten his disciples about? The answer is obvious, for the “End of the Age” being discussed here is the end of the Age of Aries in about AD 10. In other words, this verse contains a double conundrum, for here we have the twelve disciples, who represent the twelve constellations, asking a question about the ruling constellation of that era. Undoubtedly, this was a deliberate literary device by the gospel author that only the Enlightened were supposed to understand—although it has to be said that many of the disciples are regularly portrayed as understanding very little of the occult (hidden) aspects of the Nazarene creed.

It is possible to make a further translation of this verse involving the word “sign.” The word “sign” seems to be used to indicate a portent, yet the Greek word for “sign” (*semeion*), literally means a “mark” or “token.” Thus we might reasonably re-translate this verse once more, and derive:

And as (Jesus) sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him, saying: “Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of the constellation at thy coming, and the sign of the constellation at the End of the Age” (Mathew 24:3)

Thus we are now in a position to answer the disciples’ questions, and we could advise them that: “Jesus was born at the conjunction between the Age of Aries and the Age of Pisces, and this new era will not end until we reach the Dawning of the Age of Aquarius—these are the signs, grips, tokens and Ages you must study and pass on to future generations.”

The Fisher Kings

In addition to tracking the path of the constellations, the Sabaeo-Nazarene priesthood was always looking for a special monarch who was born at the start of the new Age, the next Great Month. And Jesus was that special king, an anointed one, the messiah or Christ.²⁹ Jesus was not simply the King of the Jews; he can also be viewed as the first King of Pisces—the first of the Fisher Kings of Arthurian legend. In a paper on the Fisher King from the University of Idaho's Arthurian and Grail resource pages, we read the following:

It is generally well-accepted that the fish is a symbol of Christ. In one prayer (Iesous Christos Theou HUios Soter, or Jesus Christ, Son of God the Saviour (the first

letters of each word spell out the Greek word for fish. Christ Himself is known as the fisher, and the fishnet is the symbol of the Christian sermon. Accordingly, the name of the Fisher King is connected with the words of the Saviour: "I shall make ye fishers of men" (Matth. IV.19, Mark I.17, Luke V.10), which would make anyone who converts many a rich fisher. Moreover, since fishing is directly equated with proselytizing in later Christianized versions, it makes sense that these sources would disregard the physical act of fishing altogether.³⁰

It is for these reasons that early Christianity adopted the symbolism of the fish and the primary Christian monogram, IXΘΥΣ, pronounced *ichthys*, which is Greek for "fish."

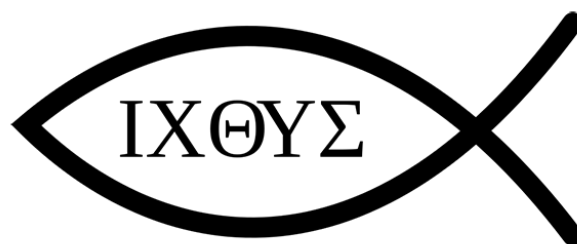


Figure 6. The modern IXΘΥΣ fish symbolism for Christianity, often displayed as a bumper-sticker on cars.

The enlightened and illuminated celestial creed of Nazarene Sabaeism was all but extinguished by the creed of Simple Judaism (Christianity) that followed it. Yet this celestial knowledge was not entirely extinguished, as much of it went underground, which is why the later Arthurian legends continually spoke of a line of semi-mythical Fisher Kings—the continuing line of kings who were born during the Great Month of Pisces and understood and venerated this Piscean symbolism. Just like Alexander and Ptolemy, who displayed the ram-horn symbolism of Aries in their hair, the symbol of the Merovingian kings of Gaul was the fish.³¹

As readers can perhaps now see, early Judaeo-Christianity could well be described as a Nazarene-Sabaeo stellar creed that looked to the stars and the planets; and the motions of these stellar bodies not only determined future

events, they also tracked and documented the lives and reigns of the various monarchs and monarchies. If a monarch is known to have been the third king of the Age of Aries, the date of his or her reign can be established with some precision and confidence, because their reign is marked and delineated by the movements of the heavens above. In fact, we use the very same chronological system to this day, for the year zero in our current calendar was not set to mark the birth of Jesus, rather it was set to honor the start of the Age of Pisces. So at the time of writing, we are now in *the year 2013 of the Age of Pisces*.

Conclusion

The evidence presented in this article is interesting on a number of levels. Firstly, it demonstrates that significant events described in the Torah and Gospels were recording the

knowledge and veneration of the precessional zodiac, which was one of the primary foundations of the Judaeo-Christian creed. But if readers accept this argument, they also have to accept that this veneration has been deliberately obscured, presumably for religio-political reasons, to portray the zodiac's symbolism as being agricultural or pastoral. It also means that the Greco-Egyptian zodiac that we are familiar with today was established in its present form in at least the early second millennium BC. Therefore, the classical zodiac must predate Greek culture and civilization. There is also the intriguing possibility, contained within the Torah accounts, that the biblical authors were recording verbatim discussions between Joseph and Pharaoh.

And finally, there is evidence that this knowledge of the precessional zodiac has been lost, not only to modern religious authorities but also to the historical fraternity too, who do not appear to understand the ram's horn symbolism for Alexander the Great and Ptolemy III. However, this knowledge was not lost in the 1st century, with the demise of the Nazarene Church, and so in the next article we shall move on to the Middle Ages and Arthurian Legend, and see convincing evidence that the precessional zodiac was known about and fully understood even in this late era.

Note: This article was extracted from the following books by Ralph Ellis: *Cleopatra to Christ; King Jesus; Mary Magdalene; Princess of Orange and Jesus, King of Edessa*.

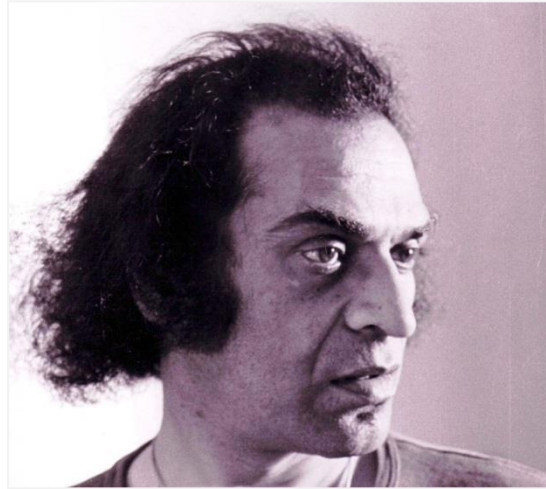
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- ¹ The idea that the religion of Pharaoh Akhenaton served as the foundation for Judaic monotheism is explored in: *Moses and Monotheism*, by Sigmund Freud.
 - ² Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, Vol. 1 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973), 220.
 - ³ Dates gathered from International Astronomical Union (IAU) data, and Voyager 4 planisphere.
 - ⁴ <http://www.livescience.com/9292-wobbly-earth-means-horoscope-wrong.html>. (accessed October 30, 2013).
 - ⁵ Chart from Voyager 4 planisphere software. Note that the change from Pisces to Aquarius

has to be after AD 2500, as the vernal point has still not exited Pisces at this date.

- ⁶ Josephus Flavius was a Roman Jew who was deeply involved in the Jewish Revolt of AD 70. He ended up being the chief Judaic propagandist for the Flavian Emperors of Rome, and through their patronage wrote a history of the Jewish Revolt and a comprehensive history of the Jewish people.
- ⁷ King James Bible
- ⁸ Josephus Flavius, *The Jewish War* (London: Penguin Books, 1970), 318.
- ⁹ Flavius Joesphus, *The Life of Flavius Josephus Life*, 75.
- ¹⁰ Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion*, Book 1, chapter 8, in *The New Complete Works of Josephus*, translated by William Whiston (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1999) 939.
- ¹¹ Brown, Driver, Briggs, *Gesenius - Hebrew Aramaic English Lexicon* (Peabody MA: Hendrikson Publishers, 1996), 47.
- ¹² The Hyksos were a Semitic people who are thought to have invaded Egypt in the 13th dynasty and became a fully Egyptianized people, with their leaders ruling Egypt as pharaohs in the traditional Egyptian fashion. The Hyksos were ejected on a mass exodus at the beginning of the 18th dynasty and it will be the author's contention, in a later article, that this Hyksos Exodus was one and the same as the Biblical Exodus.
- ¹³ Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion*, Book 1 (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1996), 1:14 and 1:26.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Adam Clarke, *Commentary on the Bible* (Ontario: Nelson Reference, 1832). See *Commentary on Psalms 65:11*.
- ¹⁶ Since Joseph had married the daughter of the (high) priest of Heliopolis, his ornate and colorful vestment signified that he was a priest of Heliopolis. See Exodus 41:45.
- ¹⁷ Peter Clayton, *Chronicle of the Pharaohs* (New York: Thames & Hudson). See entries for Kamose and Ahmose I.
- ¹⁸ King James Bible.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ Near Eastern Archaeology, A Reader. <http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/ancient-cultures/ancient-israel/jewish-worship-pagan-symbols/>. (accessed October 18, 2013)
- ²¹ <http://www.parks.org.il/parks/ParksAnd-Rserves/Hamat%20Tverya%20National%20P>

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- ²² ark/Pages/default.aspx. (accessed October 18, 2013).
- ²³ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/29/israel-zodiac-mosaic-damaged_n_1552985.html. (accessed October 18, 2013).
- ²⁴ Flavius Josephus, *The Life Josephus Flavius*, 12.
- ²⁵ Brian P. Copenhaver, *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 93.
- ²⁶ John 1:20 refers to Jesus as the “Lamb of God,” or “Agnus Dei” in John 1:29.
- ²⁷ Mathew 4:19 records Jesus as saying: “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.”
- ²⁸ John 21:5-6.
- ²⁹ The notion that bread can refer to knowledge is made clear in Mathew 15: 21-28.
- ³⁰ Kings Saul, David and Solomon were also hailed as the Messiah or Christ, they too were Judaeans kings. See 2Sam 22:51 or 2Sam 23:1.
- ³¹ http://www.uiweb.uidaho.edu/student_orgs/-arthurian_legend/grail/fisher/. (accessed October 30, 2013).
- Godefroid Kurth, *Histoire poétique des Mérovingiens* (London: British Library, 2011), 39.

Biographical Sketch of the Artist, Sohan Qadri (1932 – 2011)



*Informed by Eastern spiritual traditions, the art of Sohan Qadri neither evokes thought nor connects the viewer to anything outside itself; like meditation, it turns the attention inwards.*²
(Vibhuti Patel)

*Sohan Qadri with his painting liberates the word meditation from its fashionable taste and brings it back to its proper origin, uninfluenced by Western propaganda, misunderstandings and corruptions.*³ (Heinrich Böll)

Sohan Qadri—originally named Sohan Singh Barhing—the yogic seer, poet and Tantric painter, was born in the small village of Chachok, India, into a non-traditional Sikh/Hindu family. As a young child, he was initiated into yogic practices by two spiritual teachers who were living on or near his family's farm. At the age of seven, the quiet and withdrawn Sohan was introduced to his first teacher, Bikham Giri, a Bengali Tantric Vajrayana yogi or Buddhist-Shiva temple guru with whom he worked until he was thirty three. Under Bikham Giri's tutelage, Sohan Singh was to learn music, not things of the spirit. Yet, it was here that the young boy—who had some artistic talent—learned to draw yantras—the geometrical designs used for meditation—and was encouraged to participate in powerful rituals and breathing exercises.⁴

A few years later and still under the tutelage of Bikham Giri, Sohan Singh went to a famous Sufi tomb on the outskirts of the family farm where he developed a close and life-long relationship with the Sufi master, Ahmed Ali Shah Qadri, whose last name the artist eventually adopted as a sign of devotion.⁵ The master's sadhana or spiritual practice was a “mirror meditation,” a form of meditation also used by Zen Buddhists that involves “witnessing” in an effort to transcend the self. Sohan Qadri claimed to have “learned the practice silently without exchanging a word.”⁶ Ahmed Ali Shah gave him the mirror that he used in his practice all his life, a gift that Sohan Qadri treasured and carried with him everywhere.⁷

The rural village in the Punjab where Qadri grew up was half Hindu and half Muslim, and

filled with Sadhus or holy men. Qadri has described how his mother would take him to a Sikh temple in the morning, listen to talks on Advaita or Hindu philosophy at noon, or attend a Sufi gathering in the evening. He goes on to say that there were no religious divisions in his village and everyone lived in harmony.⁸

As a teenager, in the eighth grade, Qadri ran away to the Himalayas rather than take charge of the family farm. While there he made his way into Tibet in an expanded search for spiritual truth. His days were spent with spiritualists and forest dwellers or in remote Himalayan temples practicing Buddhist philosophy.⁹ Of particular interest to Qadri was Vajryana or Tantric Buddhism with its emphasis on the notion of *sunyata* or emptiness—a notion that was to figure prominently in the artist's work.

In the interim, a wrestler was dispatched by his mother to bring him home. After two more unsuccessful attempts to run away, Qadri made it clear that he had no intention of taking over the management of the family farm, despite being the first person in his village to matriculate.¹⁰ Against his parent's wishes, Qadri completed a fine arts degree at the Government College of Art in Simla, India and went on to form the "Loose Group" of painters and poets in India. For several years, he taught art at Ramgarhia College Phagwara and soon after became part of the circuit of the Indian modernists.¹¹ In 1965, he left India and began a series of travels that took him to East Africa, North America, Paris and Zurich. Mr. Qadri eventually settled in Copenhagen where he lived for over forty years.

These varied experiences provided Qadri with a "deep ecumenical spirit," along with a "life-long meditation practice and study of Buddhist Philosophy," all of which, according to Dr. Robert Thurman, informed the artist's vibrantly colored minimalist work.¹² Others, such as the writer and art critic, Virtus Schade writes that:

Sohan Qadri ... believes in an inner and outer sphere in the life of man. Striving to establish contact with this world within, with one's true self, he sees as utterly essen-

tial for all of us. His art belongs to something of the most refined one can perceive, something which touches "the ultimate secret."¹³

Perhaps Qadri's work can most simply be described as "an effort to abandon representation in a search for transcendence." Qadri explained: "When I start on a painting, first I empty my mind of all images. They dissolve into primordial space. Only emptiness, I feel, should communicate with emptiness of the canvas."¹⁴ The artist's method involved an Eastern mode of expression called *bhava* denoting ecstasy and/or a mental attitude of self-surrender. In Qadri's work "bhava" manifests as a focus purely on color and form. He says:

I avoid the distraction created by images. ... If one's mind starts playing with the known, then the unknown will not be discovered. Certain arrangements of color and shape on the space entice you to find a story, but the moment you find one, you become blind to what you're seeing. You go away, mentally; you're knitting your own story about the painting, and you're away from this painting. I want the viewer to stay with this painting completely because that's one-pointed meditation.¹⁵

Qadri suffused dye on meticulously serrated paper, so that the paper is transformed from a two-dimensional surface into a luminous monochrome, three-dimensional medium. The careful repetition of incisions and punctures created a rhythmic structure based on an effortless method of creation in tune with his Tantric yogic practice.¹⁶ The painting's vertical lines represent the Kundalini or spinal alignment, while the horizontal lines might be seen as representing Samsara, Qadri says that his paintings "contain a power that can break down sensational expectation" and "the chattering of the mind, because they don't offer anything for the viewer to stand on" and in this way, they "invite us to fall into silence."¹⁷

Donna M. Brown

¹ Sohan Qadri, Copenhagen, 1985.

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- ² Vibhuti Patel, as quoted from “An Interview with Artist, Sohan Qadri.” <http://www.beliefnet.com/Entertainment/2005/01/The-Art-Of-A-Seeker.aspx>. (accessed November 8, 2013).
- ³ Heinrich Böll, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1972.
- ⁴ Vibhuti Patel, “An Interview with Artist, Sohan Qadri.”
- ⁵ From a biography of the artist, provided by The Sundaram Tagore Gallery, New York, NY.
- ⁶ Patel, “An Interview with the Artist, Sohan Qadri.”
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Extracted from the “Chandigarh Lalit Kala Akademi Condolences Meeting” in March, 2011.
- ¹⁰ Sundaram Tagore, “Dissolving Contours,” in

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- Robert Thurman et al., *Seeker: The Art of Sohan Qadri* (New York: Mapin Publishing, 2005), 112-130.
- ¹¹ Chandigarh Lalit Kala Akademi Condolences Meeting.
- ¹² Sundaram Tagore, “Dissolving Contours” in Robert Thurman et al., *Seeker: The Art of Sohan Qadri*, 109.
- ¹³ Virtus Schade, Art Critic and Writer, Copenhagen, 1978.
- ¹⁴ As quoted from the Obituary of the *Academy of the Punjab in North America*. <http://www.apnaorg.com/articles/amarjit29/>. (accessed November 11, 2013).
- ¹⁵ Sohan Qadri, from “An Interview with the Artist.”
- ¹⁶ As quoted from the Obituary of the *Academy of the Punjab in North America*.
- ¹⁷ Sohan Qadri, from “An Interview with the Artist.”

Book Reviews

Dying to be Me: My Journey from Cancer to Near Death, to True Healing, by Anita Moorjani. Hay House, 2012, 191 pages.

Proof of Heaven: a Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife, by Eben Alexander, M.D. Simon and Shuster, 2012, 208 pages.

Prelude to Eternity: A Journey to Beyond Death, by Anne Pennington Grenfell. Inspiring Voices, 2013, 124 pages.

Three books on a related theme came to my attention around the same time, and I thought it might be instructive to review all three together. *Proof of Heaven* and *Dying to be Me* are both first-hand accounts of the near-death experience (or NDE), but each author underwent a totally unique experience due to the nature of their illnesses. *Prelude to Eternity* is an account of the author's experience as she cared for her husband during his final days. Although it is not an account of an NDE, it is a spiritual journey in its own way.

Anita Moorjani's NDE experience parallels most of the stories we have all heard about NDE's: a sense of expanded consciousness and freedom, a connectedness to a loving universe, and seeing friends and family on the "other side" while also remaining fully aware of what is going on with the physical form and in the environment around the form. The author discusses the moment of choice when the dying person has to decide whether to return to the body or to continue to enjoy the greater consciousness and freedom in the other world. She also describes having had a clear sense that it was not yet time to leave the physical world because there was service that she needed to render in the world.

Eben Alexander's NDE experience, on the other hand, was totally different in that instead of the organs being shut down by cancer, leaving the brain intact, it was his brain that was being ravaged by a virus, leaving him cut off from an awareness of the physical realm. After losing contact with the physical world in his brain-damaged coma, Alexander first became aware of a "pulsing, pounding darkness." Clearly, there

was some degree of consciousness, but it was without an awareness of identity. Language, emotion and thoughts were non-existent. After what seemed like an eternity, he then became aware of "objects" around him. He describes them as being like "roots...like blood vessels in a vast, muddy womb." Since this experience was similar to being buried deep in the ground like a worm, he later called this place the "Realm of the Earthworm's-Eye View." His consciousness wasn't foggy; it was just extremely limited. He was merely a "lone point of awareness in a timeless red-brown sea."

Finally, Alexander began to get "uncomfortable in this world," feeling "trapped" in it. He reports seeing grotesque animal faces and hearing dull roars and rhythmic chants. His description makes it sound as if he were traversing through the astral plane. As the sights, sounds and smells intensified, he suddenly realized that he didn't belong there and needed to get out, but he had no idea where to go or how. After asking that question, a beautiful entity approached him from above. Alexander describes in precise detail his release into a whole new world of brilliance (the "Gateway"), accompanied by a guide, and his journey to the "Core," where he experienced the presence of God, whom he calls "Om," and where he received instruction.

Both Alexander and Moorjani received similar messages during their NDEs: there is nothing you can do wrong, there is nothing to fear, and all is love. They both experienced a kind of synthesis of the senses where hearing and seeing, for instance, were not separate experiences. Each also experienced instantaneous knowledge without words, knowledge that continued beyond the NDE experience. However, Alexander's experience seemed to go much deeper than Moorjani's since she did not seem to experience anything that resembled the astral plane, did not find herself in the presence of God and received no specific instruction. Alexander believes that he was able to travel deeper in his NDE than most others because he had lost his connection

to his identity on the physical plane and had no worries about what he was leaving behind or what his loved ones were feeling. Thus, he was free to access the true cosmic being that he was, that we all are.

Esoteric students understand the idea that penetration of the higher worlds depends on being able to release attachments to whatever level we find ourselves on so that we can move to the next level. Alexander's complete detachment from his previous life allowed him to leave it all behind and go further into the death experience.

Both Alexander and Moorjani became aware that it was not yet time for them to stay in this other realm. Each had work to do on the physical plane, and it would seem that part of this work was to communicate with the world of the living what they learned while out of the body and were dwelling on inner planes of experience. Alexander, in particular, as a neurosurgeon who had limited beliefs about consciousness, feels he has much to teach other scientists about the nature of consciousness. Yet both Alexander and Moorjani emphasize that manifesting love and compassion is the way to cultivate our genuine spiritual self since love makes up the fabric of the spiritual realm, and love and compassion is what our Creator feels for us.

In the third work reviewed here—*A Prelude to Eternity*—Anne Pennington Grenfell recounts the events of her life with her husband and allows us to see the special relationship that they shared. This special relationship made it all the more difficult for her to accept that she had to lose her husband to death so soon. At one point in the process, she was graced with a mystical moment in which she became convinced that God “is a universal Life Force of pure goodness

and energy, pulsating through and permeating all matter.” This is certainly in line with the messages brought back by Alexander and Moorjani. Grenfell also understood that “we are all connected to that Life Force and to each other, and we are loved unconditionally.” Therefore, it is possible to reach an understanding of the Life Force and the energy of pure Love without undergoing an NDE.

After her husband's transition, Grenfell had another mystical vision in which she saw the tunnel of light that her husband had traveled through on his way to the “Light.” Since it was not her time to travel through that tunnel herself, she was not able to see the Light shining through the end of it, but she was given this experience as proof of its reality.

As a result of these experiences she was able to move beyond terrible grief and live life with an awareness of the greater love that connects us all.

In the Tibetan Master Djwhal Khul's writings on the topic of death, he explains that the fear of death is based on the loss of the “I” or personal consciousness, on the loss of the form that we have identified with in life, as well as the loss of all our loved ones who have been left behind. He writes, “The hope of the future and the hope of our release from this ill-founded fear lie in the shifting of our emphasis to the fact of the eternal soul and to the necessity for that soul to live spiritually, constructively and divinely within the material vehicles.” The words about the death experience as written by these three authors reaffirm this statement. And they assure us that death is indeed a release into a greater life.

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