

## Book Reviews

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***Sophia Sutras: Introducing Mother Wisdom*, by Carol E. Parrish-Harra.** Tahlequah, Oklahoma: Sparrow Hawk Press, 2006. Paperback, 290 pages. US\$24.95. For further information see: [www.sparrowhawkpress.com](http://www.sparrowhawkpress.com).

“Wisdom,” or in Hebrew *Chokmah*, gradually gained prominence during the biblical period, and by the time *Proverbs* was written she had acquired if, not divine status, something close to it. The Lord, we were told, possessed Chokmah “in the beginning” and she was “his delight” [vv 8:22-30]. In the early centuries of the Common Era, Chokmah, now known by her Greek name *Sophia*, really was accepted by the Gnostics as a divine feminine individuality. They placed her in eternal, creative union with the masculine *Logos-Christ*, anticipating in this cosmic union the dual second ray of aspect: Love-Wisdom.

Orthodox Christianity was less enamored of Sophia, but Theophilus, second-century bishop of Antioch promoted her as the third person of the Trinity. Unfortunately his insight was lost in the louder assertion of Athenagoras of Athens that the third person should be the neuter *Pneuma* (“Spirit”). Meanwhile, Christ lost his cosmic “bride” and became just Jesus’ last name.

Sophia has always been revered in the Eastern Orthodox Christianity, and the work of the 19th–20th-century Russian theologians Vladimir Soloviev, Pavel Florensky, and Sergei Bulgakov has received wide acclaim. The west neglected her, except for the work of Jakob Böhme in the late 16th century and a very few others, until the recent revival of interest in our own time. Now Sophia is the darling of feminist theologians and many others who seek a broader understanding of Deity and relief from the diet of masculine images the church has fed us. Sophia’s new-found popularity has spawned a flurry of books, many of

them trivial, published to ride the marketing band-wagon.

*Sophia Sutras: Introducing Mother Wisdom* is one of the few books of lasting value in this genre. It goes beyond the familiar litany of biblical and other passages referring to Chokmah/Sophia to explore Sophia’s presence in—and impact on—humanity and the world. This presence is depicted as the softer healing, transformative, enlightening force that complements the harder force of rational knowledge that has dominated western civilization. Sophia’s presence is sensed in “‘creativity,’ ‘intuition,’ ‘impulses,’ ‘hunches,’ ‘gut feelings,’ or ‘inner knowing’” [p. 22].

Carol Parrish-Harra does not invoke Sophia as an alternative to the divine images and symbols of Christianity, as a goddess to satisfy the needs of feminists who have rejected Christian patriarchy. Rather she presents Sophia as a necessary complement to those images and symbols, without which we miss essential elements of the message of Christ. In writing this excellent book Parrish-Harra draws both on her extensive knowledge of esotericism and on her own insights—demonstrative in a powerful, evocative way the creative potential that springs from the synthesis of Logos and Sophia.

Much of the book is devoted to the theme of expressing the long-suppressed or devalued feminine elements in human consciousness and bringing them into harmony with over-emphasized masculine elements. Thus we read:

A returning matriarchy cannot resolve the challenges of our time, but the return of the divine feminine brings a movement to restore balance, thus assisting the creation of a complementary capability within humanity. The collective can then begin the effort needed to establish an unprecedented co-working between the sexes. Such an

achievement can begin to usher in a new order of creation, an era that will resolve alternating strife and maximize human potential—fully human [p. 206].

“To follow Sophia,” Parrish-Harra urges us, “is the opportunity of our time... She leads to dynamic adventures requiring that we face our fears, learn to love, and dare to move more fully toward our potential” [p. 271].

*Sophia Sutras* is an attractive book, combining the ongoing narrative discussion with vignette meditations to heighten awareness of the presence of Sophia. Illustrations include the famous fresco from St. Sophia’s Cathedral in Novgorod, Russia, that richly expresses traditional Orthodox sophianic devotion. Sadly the illustrations had to be in monotone, but readers will be encouraged to look for color reproductions elsewhere.

Some readers may also be disappointed that, like a number of other works whose titles refer to Sophia, this book is more about the divine feminine than about Sophia herself. As so often seems to happen in works of this genre, the book soon leaves Sophia to speak of the Buddhist Kuan-Yin and other goddesses and avatars. Clarity is lost when all aspects of the divine feminine are lumped together, and Sophia loses her distinctive qualities.

Another disappointment is a lack of references in key areas. For example no reference was cited to support the statement: “As the Renaissance began, the church shortened the name Holy Spirit of Wisdom, to simply the Holy Spirit” [p. 9]. This reviewer has been unable to find any usage of “Holy Spirit of Wisdom” in the medieval literature.

Nevertheless, these are small matters compared with the insights Parrish-Harra so generously shares. We enthusiastically recommend *Sophia Sutras* and are confident that readers will enjoy it.

Dr. Carol Parrish-Harra is co-founder and spiritual leader of the Sancta Sophia seminary and the Sparrow Hawk intentional community in Oklahoma. She is known throughout the United States and elsewhere for her many

speaking tours. Also her books have made significant contributions to the esoteric literature. The story of her life and work, *Messengers of Hope*, is now in its second edition.

Editorial staff

***The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* by Seyyed Hossein Nasr.** New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.

As a result of the events of 9/11 and the ensuing war on terror, interest in Islam in the West has mounted. Some would go so far as to say that this interest has become, at least in some quarters, something of an obsession, rooted in fear, misunderstanding and even deliberate distortion. Sadly, Islam has come to be viewed as inherently violent, inferior and devoid of any shared values with Judaism, Christianity or the other major religious traditions. These attitudes have not only denigrated and impoverished one of the world’s great religions; they have fueled the mutual demonization of Islam and the West, and contributed to an atmosphere that threatens the stability and security of humanity’s future.

Numerous authors have attempted to explain Islam to the West, but perhaps none so clearly and authentically as Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Dr. Nasr is one of the world’s foremost intellectual figures in Islamic esoterism, the philosophy of science, comparative religion and metaphysics. Born in Iran, and educated in Iran and the West, with degrees from MIT and Harvard, he is ideally suited to author this book on the core spiritual and social values of Islam and their enduring correspondences to the other Abrahamic faiths.

Professor Nasr’s book does not justify religious extremism; rather, it seeks to offset the distorted portrayals of Islam by giving us a deeper appreciation of its determining ethos, diversity and universal appeal. More importantly, the author seeks to “open a spiritual and intellectual space for mutual understanding” that will surely help to heal the yawning chasm separating Islam and the West from one another.

*The Heart of Islam* opens with a presentation on the central credo of Islam, namely, the Oneness of God, the multiplicity of revelation and the unity of truth. It provides a clear exposition of the total continuum of Islam, i.e., Sunnism, Shi'ism and Sufism, including the various "interpretations" of Islam today. In addition to providing a wealth of insight on the inner life of Islam, its scripture and tradition, Dr. Nasr explains how secularism and the powerful forces of globalization have helped shape the more extreme patterns emerging in Islam at present. Professor Nasr also sheds much light on the "philosophy of law" or *Shari'ah* as well as the theme of divine and social justice that so thoroughly permeates Islamic life. However, he dispels the commonly held notion that "the God of Islam is a God of Justice but not of Mercy, Compassion, Forgiveness and Love.

The author also provides us with a lucid and perhaps surprising perspective on Islam's conception of freedom, ethics and human rights, on responsibility to God, to each other and the whole of creation. Dr. Nasr closes his book with a call to all Muslims to "awaken from the dream of forgetfulness," so that they may live in accordance with Islam's divine precepts. And he asks Muslims and all those in the West who are seeking peace and meaning in their own lives, to realize that "in love there is no difference" and that the Heart of all religion is One.

This book is written for the general public and lacks some of the poetic beauty and erudition of Dr. Nasr's other works, but it is a "must read" for students of the world's religions and all those seeking to better understand the fractious dynamic unfolding on the world stage.

Donna Brown  
Washington, DC

***The Compass of Light, Vol. I: Figures of Speech in the Great Invocation, by Starling David Hunter III.*** United Arab Emirates: Brothers Printing Press, Sharjah, 2006.

**T**he Great Invocation, said to be of very ancient origin, was channeled by the Ti-

betan Master Djwhal Khul in 1945. Intended to become the "universal prayer" of the Aquarian Age, its importance was quickly recognized. The Invocation is recited on a regular basis by ordinary people, esoteric students, and groups around the world.

A more systematic use is through Triangles—groups of three people, often in different countries, who pledge to recite the Invocation on a daily basis while holding the thought of connecting lines of force providing a form through which Love, Light and Power can flow to humanity and the planet.

The Great Invocation has also been analyzed to reveal underlying numerological, astrological, mantric and other structures. The existence of these structures, which for the most part are not apparent to the casual user, point to its lofty point of origin and strengthen the realization of its intrinsic power. Knowledge of the same structures, together with a corresponding sense of its multiple layers of meaning, may encourage use of the Invocation as a basis for meditation.

*The Compass of Light* presents a novel analysis—based on rhetoric and figures of speech. Starling Hunter justifies this line of research by noting the care that the Tibetan evidently took, throughout his books, to choose the correct words to express his meaning:

[T]he Tibetan makes clear that to know the laws that govern speech is to know the laws that govern creation. Thus, any systematic investigation of His words, or those of any other master... is well worth our time and attention [p. 14].

Hunter also quotes the Tibetan's own reference to "the true, inner implications and significances" of the Invocation, which "are of very deep import," and his challenge to students to analyze "these amazing words" [*Discipleship in the New Age*, II, p. 156].

Hunter's research methodology is based on several precedents, including Ethelbert Bullinger's early-20th century analysis of scripture, a similar analysis of Shakespeare, and standard works on rhetoric. Following Bullinger, he divides figures of speech into the three catego-

ries of *omission*, *addition* and *change*. Hunter whittles the first category down to three figures of speech: ellipsis, zeugma and catabasis, the first two of which refer to words which are intentionally omitted and the third to situations where the sense of a word is implied but unstated.

The second category of *addition*, which consists of 13 figures of speech, refers to emphasis given to the text by such devices as word repetition or redundancy. One of them is parallelism. For example, “From the point of light within the Mind of God” and “From the point of Love within the Heart of God” display obvious parallelism and evoke resonance. Another example is: “From the center where the Will of God...” and “From the center which we call the race of men...”

The third category of *change*, consisting of eight figures of speech, refers to the deliberate alteration of words or their meaning or usage. Among them is the category of *change* is antithesis, the juxtaposition of contrasting concepts. For example, the capitalized “Mind of God” contrasts with the lowercase “minds of men,” leaving no doubt about the difference in consciousness. “Let light stream forth in the minds of men” is juxtaposed against “Let love stream forth into the hearts of men” to emphasize the difference between light/mind and love/heart.

One of the conclusions Hunter draws from his research is the need for caution in modifying the Invocation to adapt it to modern cultural norms or gender inclusivity. To change “minds of men” into “human minds,” as is found in a popular modern version, sacrifices parallelism and may destroy other intended figures of speech.

Of course the argument is often made that “translating” the Invocation into late-20th, early-21st century English is justified in the same way as translating it into Arabic or Japanese. The Tibetan encouraged translation into foreign languages to make the Invocation available to people throughout the world. And, assuming that he was aware of the Invocation’s inner structure, he must have recognized that something would be lost.

The issue of translation within and among languages likely will be debated for a long time to come, and there are no easy answers to troublesome questions. Nevertheless, for sophisticated, English-speaking esoteric students, who can see beyond the ordinary meaning of potentially gender-offensive nouns, use of the 1945 version of the Invocation continues to have much merit. Linguistic and cultural archaisms do not seem to offend the millions of devotees of the King James Bible—which, incidentally, was considered archaic even when it was published.

In *The Compass of Light*, Starling Hunter has made an unusual and worthwhile contribution to continued analysis of the Great Invocation. Readers will be indebted to him for drawing our attention to this line of research and to the issues it raises. The book’s foreword is written by John Berges who gave us the numerological analysis of the Invocation in his 1997 book *Sacred Vessel of the Mysteries*, published by Planetnetwork Press.

We recommend *The Compass of Light* to serious students of the Great Invocation and the Tibetan’s teachings in general. Meanwhile we look forward to the publication of Volume 2, which will present the next phase of Hunter’s research.

Editorial staff

## News from the School

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### Invitation to Participate in the 2007 Subjective Group Conference

Prominent among the teachings of the Tibetan Master Djwhal Khul is the concept of *group work*. At the time the teachings were issued this concept was familiar to all via the fields of business, education, manufacturing, and other practical arenas that had been brought into being by the Industrial Revolution. “Many hands make light work,” people have always said, and the hand symbolism survived the paradigm change of the Revolution in the very word *manufacture*. How slowly the language can adapt to new paradigms is illustrated by a word that has few associations with making things *by hand*.

A corollary to the above quote is that the more hands that apply themselves to a task, the more powerful will be the result. An esoteric principle and law address this issue, referring specifically to subjective energies: the Principle of Unanimity and the Law of Group Endeavor.

What the Tibetan was referring to, and what challenged the original group of students to stretch their understanding, was *subjective* group work. Joining efforts on the inner planes is infinitely more powerful than simply doing physical plane work together. Essentially, whatever needs to be manifested physically stands a much better chance of success if the laws of manifestation are followed and the process is designed and impelled from the inner planes, in full consciousness. This now underlies the working method of all esotericists.

Forty-four years ago, in 1962, the staff of the School for Esoteric Studies initiated an experimental program that would give the School membership practical experience of working on the inner planes as a group. An annual Subjective Group Conference was designed to cover the period of the three

Spring Festivals, during which time the group studies and meditates on a common theme.

Following this period the group members gather together the insights they received and send them in to the School office. The staff then compiles a booklet from these insights and sends it out to all members, so that they can all share in all the insights. Experiencing this rhythmic event over these many years has made it clear that the group mind is greatly enhanced and enriched by this experience. We are sure that the radiatory power resulting from this group work contributes substantially to the working out of the Plan.

Now we would like to try something new with the 2007 Subjective Group Conference. In keeping with the fact that the larger group (made up of many groups) is assuming a more concrete identity within the Hierarchical network, we plan to invite those from the larger group who might like to participate to join us. This of course includes all readers of *The Esoteric Quarterly*.

Here is some information that may help readers decide. The period involved will be from just before the Easter Full Moon to just after the Goodwill Full Moon—March 31 to June 2, 2007. The topic we will all study and meditate on has not yet been chosen, but a good example is “The Dissipation of Glamour,” which is one of those under consideration.

Those who wish to participate will be sent, by email attachment, a compilation of writings on the topic, mainly from the Tibetan’s books. This Conference Set will contain 20 to 30 pages, and will include a meditation format and suggested seed thoughts to be employed during the five days of each Full Moon period. During the remaining days of each month a few minutes can be added to our normal daily meditation in order to keep us in touch with the group mind. Then, after the Festival period is over, everyone is in-

vited to send in their insights, in as brief or lengthy a form as desired.

In the next issue of the *Quarterly* we will insert a reminder, and also give out the topic of the Conference. Anyone who wishes to be

informed more quickly can send an email to the School office (ses@main.nc.us) and be put on an early-notice list. The topic will be chosen no later than mid-December.

John Cobb, President

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