

A Way for the Courageous: Agni Yoga

Carol Parrish-Harra

Summary

Agni Yoga calls for a disciple with a specific kind of consciousness with ready will and fiery determination. In this most modern approach one's own inner presence is developed through continual evaluation of personal dedication and self-discipline, heart and mind. Natural within the approach are such challenges as equality for the *churched* and *unchurched*, respect for eastern and western practices, and an ever widening loyalty to one's own inner authority.

Herein glimpses of the lives of Russian devotees as they anchor the teachings in the midst of heavy work-a-day duties. Passionate information regarding the role of women is delivered by the Spiritual Hierarchy and recorded by Helena Roerich. An endless variety of concepts reveal guidance as to how to turn daily labor into spiritual service. Never is one expected to depart their own better judgment, but to refine and improve one's grasp of wisdom, intuitively and subjectively, while integrating high consciousness into one's own persona.

Introduction

Once hidden for the most part behind cultural veils, Agni Yoga is emerging to make its contribution to those individuals looking for modern tools with which to bridge the barriers separating tradition from tradition. Agni Yoga, also taught in the west as Living Ethics, offers one of the newer versions of the perennial philosophy. Known to dedicated students of the ageless wisdom, it outlines a vision of universality and ethics for humanity's would-be spiritual leaders offering hope for the possible future of humanity. Holding to the concept that only a few are ready at a time for the rigors of true ethical living, Agni Yoga offers a set of teachings to inspire those who believe they are ready to transform their own

lives and to guide others by example into an understanding of principles of transformation.

Agni Yoga suggests for the self-disciplined disciple of today that it is not enough to be obedient, but that self-actualization is the real challenge. While the teaching suggests, yes, indeed, we need a mentor and the discipline that such affords, our real work is to recognize the significance of the self within, called by whatever name. Themes important to the ethics of the path of initiation are used as major guidelines. Thus, we challenge ourselves to live within the perimeter of the embraced themes rather than simple straight rules. In this way each must proceed as they can, applying self-regulatory actions to daily experience. Discrimination is demanded in keeping with the Agni themes for enlightenment while building within oneself the virtues or facets of higher consciousness desired. Life makes it necessary some days for the emphasis to be one theme and some days another. No one tells the disciple what to do or how to respond for personal responsibility lies firmly on the disciple. Each knowingly must create a personal response to the opportunity to grow and/or to serve that which the Great Teacher, Life, provides.

Two powerful aspects of Agni teachings speak loudly to those ready for the message. This series of themes to which each one holds him-

About the Author

Author Carol E. Parrish-Harra has regularly presented programs in Russia. In 2005 she received the coveted International Nebolsin Award presented by the St. Petersburg Union of Scientists for "outstanding service in the field of education for the common good of humanity." She began her quest for the Roerichs's work in 1973 after receiving the words "Agni Yoga" in meditation.

or herself responsible and concepts of universality that demand we recognize our right-relationship to all people and all kingdoms of planetary life.

The Roerichs' Work

The Agni Yoga writings were given to Helena Roerich in a series of small books dictated by a Master of the Mysterious Himalayan Brotherhood that interjects assistance at critical times in the life of the planet. Helena took dictation from Master Morya sharing it as she was impressed and, in due time, released it in book form for those who were privileged to discover it. Nicholas Roerich, her sensitive artist husband and respected man of Science distributed the holy principles through his person and his contact with persons around the world.

The curious circumstances of the times are important to the understanding of Agni Yoga. Dictated to an aristocratic Russian intellectual after the Communist Revolution, the language avoids religious terminology and uses respectful language such as the Common Good, Cosmic Beauty, or similar terms, such as The Epoch of the Mother of the World.

Free of dogma and religious trappings, the books are truly manuals of ethical living, the term most commonly used as a subtitle to the materials. Dictated in Russian, the original writings were unknown in the West except to a few who had contact with Nicholas and Helena Roerich on their limited visits to the United States in 1920 and 1929. However the message of the Masters continued to come and be gradually spread over Europe and Asia.

Helena was a very private person and held herself out of the limelight, while Nicholas dedicated his life to emanating his concepts through his 7,000 odd paintings, approximately 30 books and the creation of the Banner of Peace. The sensitive material remained mostly hidden from public view in our country due to the difficulties Americans encountered as we lived in fear of Communism or anything Russian until more recent years.

In several trips to the now former Soviet Union, it has been my privilege to interact with

students of the Roerich material in Russia. Since 1987 stories of how the teachings were shared has touched my heart. After the first publication, the books disappeared quickly from public distribution. Possession of religious or spiritual material was traitorous; Nicholas and Helena Roerich lived in Kulu Valley, India and the writings were very suspect. The paranoids of the time required no contact with foreign nationals and although they were Russian, these two were world travelers, so significant that he had been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. They were not the usual restricted Russians untainted by foreign contact; still many avoided contact for some years.

Helena Roerich's name is not on the published books; no claims are made. Simple paragraphs, numbered for reference, written in brief with each word carefully selected by the dictator are recorded. Russian devotees tell of copying these treasured writings onto small cards or pieces of paper—one thought per piece so they could be carried about without detection and contemplated in privacy. Each set of a few lines became a rich stanza to be explored, experienced and penetrated. The piece of paper might be chewed to destroy it if one fell under suspicion. People shared the treasured thoughts by typing or writing by hand, utilizing carbon paper, entire volumes as gifts to others hungry for such inspiration.

Perhaps the persecution of those who were caught with the teachings strengthened its impact. In Moscow Yuri Roerich, one son, lived and carefully shared. The other son, Svetoslav Roerich became an artist and remained in India. In Russia, artists fervently touched by the powerful art were careful how they spoke of Nicholas. Some were arrested; others found courage in the bold colors or words of the higher worlds.

Agni Yoga and the Ageless Wisdom

Agni Yoga contains no single new message, but repeats in modern terms the ageless wisdom; it contains guidelines for those who would become the daring ones of today encouraging them to strive to be now what is

destined to be the possible human of tomorrow. There is no promise of rest, but intense instructions for those who would confront their own human frailty and dare to become a disciple of the fiery world.

Ethical ideas are permeated with references to the subtle world of illusion and to the powerful fiery world of higher reality that can purify the astral dimension. Our thoughts are lifted time and time again to the life and reality beyond the human as the true reality and the life about us as the testing place.

Agni Yoga teachings are very hard for English students as the innuendos, easily understood to the Russians of the years 1924–1940, evade us as well as the subtleties of a language that does not translate easily to English. Additional translation is needed. Soon as our countries interact more, with both languages in common usage to one another's natives, a new version is bound to emerge. Also, there are factors relevant to the

Himalayas that may or may not have international value as reference to the use of local herbs, oils or scents. However, certain impelling facts emerge from these writings that intrigue students of the ageless wisdom.

In Russia much more is known, of course, about the Roerichs than here in the U.S. For example, Helena wrote on more than one occasion to Franklin Delano Roosevelt regarding the forthcoming World War II. The Franklin D. Roosevelt Museum and Library, of Hyde Park, NY will provide only copies of her correspondence to the president in which she references the Holy Ones and the danger on the horizon. There is no released record of his response. We know of Henry Wallace's devo-

tion to the Roerichs, and his relationship with them carried a political price when he ran for the office of Vice President with Roosevelt. Newspapers referred to his Russian Guru and he was ostracized by an American public as it was becoming increasingly fearful of Communism.

Being of Russian nationality cast the Roerichs and the Agni Yoga Society into difficulty publicly during the war years and the McCarthy era. Nothing Russian escaped unscathed so the teachings remained virtually hidden both in the Soviet Union and the United States. Devotees of the art world were fortunate ones for they who had personal contact with the Roerichs protected the seeds of the new Yoga that is only now emerging.

The writings themselves suggest the new teachings have only begun to be revealed. The concepts we have are to be used to clear the mind of false identities and separative philosophies so we might begin to discover the Universality of

the Greater Truth that can serve all humanity regardless of gender, religion or nationality.

Important Themes

Two major ideas dealt with at length in the thirteen volumes is the contribution of woman and how restored value must be given to the role of women for humanity to advance "but a woman slave can give to the world slaves only."¹ Free women can bring forth the freed consciousness of the new being. A powerful quote is:

In the hands of woman lies the salvation of humanity and of our planet. Woman must realize her significance, the great mission of

[T]he Master supports the disciple on the quest by understanding the humanness that is being transformed... Agni Yoga encourages each of us to struggle with our personal limitation while encouraging community life as a system of support. We are told community is an experiment to see how ready human beings are for the cooperative vision of a new humanity.

the Mother of the World; she should be prepared to take responsibility for the destiny of humanity. Mother, the life-giver, has every right to direct the destiny of her children. The voice of woman, the mother, should be heard amongst the leaders of humanity. The mother suggests the first conscious thoughts to her child. She gives direction and quality to all his aspirations and abilities. But the mother who possesses no thought of culture can suggest only the lower expression of human nature.²

There is much also about the coming of Lord Maitreya, the name given to the world teacher by the Buddhists. Probably this name was used because of the cultural background in which the Roerichs lived. Born Christians they had experienced the suppression of Russian Orthodoxy and Nicholas had found a more comfortable ecumenical environment in the Tibetan Temple of St. Petersburg. He contributed his artistic touch to the building and there found appreciation while his contemporary works had often been ostracized by the Patriarchy.

There is a story about a Russian Princess, Tensisheva, and a patroness of art, who supported the Roerichs and was an important member of the art community at Talashkino, near Smolensk, shortly after the turn of the century. There they had built a beautiful chapel in which to worship. Nicholas designed and executed a Mosaic of the Christ over the entrance. Inside there were frescoes of contemporary design remarkably done by the artists assembled there. The great day of dedication arrived; the bishop arrived but refused to dedicate the chapel because the art was non-traditional. The princess defended the chapel saying it was her chapel, she paid for it and she would use it. And indeed she did. The beautiful mosaic of the Christ known as Saint Savior, over the front entrance, remains one of today's outstanding works of art. The chapel served as a museum during the years when churches were closed in the USSR but has now been restored.

Hierarchical Work

“Our communities do not censure too much” begins another of the inspiring stanzas of the Agni writings. While filled with encouraging calls to strive, the Master supports the disciple on the quest by understanding the humanness that is being transformed. Condemnation scarcely touches the writing and threats of damnation are nil. Agni Yoga encourages each of us to struggle with our personal limitation while encouraging community life as a system of support. We are told community is an experiment to see how ready human beings are for the cooperative vision of a new humanity. A favorite of mine is the teachings about labor from *Fiery World*, Vol II:

Labor may be of four kinds:
toil with repulsion which leads to decay
unconscious toil, which does not strengthen
the spirit;
toil devoted and loving, which yields a good
harvest,
and finally, toil which is not only conscious
but also
consecrated under the Light of Hierarchy.³

This flaming measure of labor must be established. The very approach to the *Fiery World* demands realization of earthly labor as the most proximate step.

Few workers can discern the quality of their own work, but if the workers were to strive to align themselves with the Hierarchy they would immediately advance to the higher step. The ability to establish the sacred Hierarchy in one's heart is also an inner concentration, but such action comes through toil. By not wasting time upon oneself, it is possible in the midst of labor to become linked to Hierarchy.

“Let the Lord live in the heart, Let Him become as inalienable as the heart itself. Let the name of the Lord be inhaled and exhaled with each breath. Let each rhythm of labor resound with the Name of the Lord.” Thus, we find another perspective of the perennial wisdom

emerging from behind the curtain of persecution, a version that can add dimension to any religious persuasion or to an individual who chooses an ethical life outside religious practice. The eternal light has visited the mind of humanity once again and communicated another chapter to aid us in our ascent.

¹ *Woman*, March 1958, p. 51.

² *Letters of Helena Roerich*, Vol. 1. Agni Yoga Society, 1929-1938, pp. 6-9.

³ *Fiery World*, Vol. 11. Agni Yoga Society, 1934, pp. 78, 118.

A Planetary Awakening



Kathy Newburn

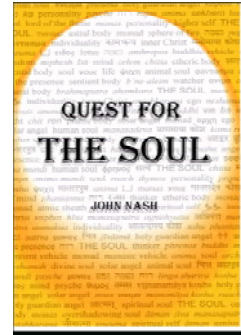
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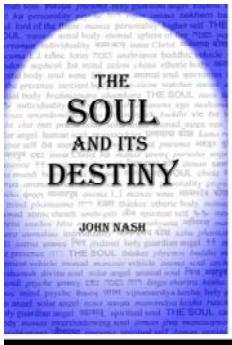
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