

*The Esoteric  
Quarterly*

**Spring 2008  
Volume 4  
Number 1**

*A publication of the  
School for Esoteric  
Studies*

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



---

**The School for Esoteric Studies.**

345 S. French Broad Avenue, Suite 300. Asheville, North Carolina 28801, USA.  
[www.esotericstudies.net/quarterly](http://www.esotericstudies.net/quarterly); e-mail: [editor@esotericstudies.net](mailto:editor@esotericstudies.net).

---

# *The Esoteric Quarterly*

*The Esoteric Quarterly* is published by the School for Esoteric Studies. It is registered as an online journal with the National Serials Data Program of the Library of Congress. International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) 1551-3874.

Further information about *The Esoteric Quarterly*, including guidelines for the submission of articles and review procedures, can be found at: [www.esotericstudies.net/quarterly](http://www.esotericstudies.net/quarterly). All correspondence should be addressed to **editor@esotericstudies.net**.

---

## **Editorial Board**

Donna M. Brown (United States)

Gail G. Jolley (United States)

Bruce Lyon (New Zealand)

Dorothy I. Riddle (Canada)

Nancy Seifer (United States)

Robert G. Waggener (United States)

Editor in Chief: John F. Nash

---

Copyright © *The Esoteric Quarterly*, 2008.  
All rights reserved.

Copies of the complete journal or articles contained therein may be made for personal use on condition that copyright statements are included. Commercial use without the permission of *The Esoteric Quarterly* and the School for Esoteric Studies is strictly prohibited.

# *The Esoteric Quarterly*

## Contents

Volume 4, Number 1. Spring 2008

	Page		Page
<b>Features</b>		<b>The Way of Salvation in the Gnostic Gospel of Truth</b>	31
Editorial	5	Zachary F. Lansdowne	
Publication Policies	5	<b>Origins of the Christian Kabbalah</b>	43
Letters to the Editor	6	John F. Nash	
Quotes of the Quarter	7	<b>Book Reviews</b>	
Poem of the Quarter: “ <b>The Soul Quest</b> ” by Linda Francis	8	<i>The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos: Humanity and the New Story</i>	59
Advertisements	9	by Brian Swimme	
<b>Articles</b>		<i>How Wide the Heart</i>	59
<b>Meditating on the Mysteries, Ancient and Ageless:</b>		by Marko & Ana Pogačnik	
<b>Part I. The Ancient Mysteries.</b>	11	“ <i>Freemasonry</i> ” and Ritual Work. <i>The Misraim Service: Texts and Documents from the Cognitive-Ritual Section of the Esoteric School 1904-1919</i>	60
<b>Part II. The Mysteries, Modern Psychology, and Initiation.</b>	16	by Rudolf Steiner and others.	
Joann S. Bakula			
<b>Wise Use of Destructive Energy</b>	25		
Dorothy I. Riddle			

The mission of the *Esoteric Quarterly* is to provide a forum for the exploration of esoteric philosophy and its applications. Full-length articles and short 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@esotericstudies.net](mailto:editor@esotericstudies.net).

# Ageless Wisdom Online

Are you interested in learning about the Ageless Wisdom but find the quantity of information available to be overwhelming and confusing?

We offer a free five-month online introductory course in the basics of the Ageless Wisdom along with training in creative meditation. The program is self-paced and designed to serve as a springboard from which further explorations may be made more confidently.

**For more information, please email us at:**

**info@esotericstudies.net  
and reference Dept. Q.**

***School for Esoteric Studies***

345 S. French Broad Ave, Suite 300.  
Asheville, NC 28801  
www.esotericstudies.net

## Our Fourth Year

---

With this issue, the *Esoteric Quarterly* enters its fourth year of publication, serving the worldwide community of esoteric students by providing a medium for sharing insights, ideas and knowledge. Our journal continues to win broad acclaim. A recent correspondent honored us by commenting that “the quality of articles is superb.” That is of course a tribute to the excellent work of the authors who entrust their articles to us. It is also a tribute to our Editorial Board that reviews and selects articles for publication. More on our Board later.

The current issue begins with a two-part article by Joann Bakula that discusses the ancient mysteries and prospects for restoration of the mysteries in the Aquarian Age, as predicted by a number of esoteric writers. Dr. Bakula points out that restoration will be made possible by a combination of meditation and service. She also notes that it will involve kingdoms of nature both above and below the human.

Dorothy Riddle’s article discusses the destructive aspects of Will. Destructive energy is often misunderstood or feared, but Dr. Riddle explains it as a natural element in evolution, allowing new forms to take the place of forms which no longer serve useful purposes. She also points out that destructive energy is expressed by all seven rays, not just the first ray.

Zachary Lansdowne’s article discusses the early Christian text, the *Gospel of Truth*. In that somewhat-difficult text, “salvation” is conceived of as overcoming ignorance. Correspondingly, as Dr. Lansdowne notes, the Logos serves as the savior through facilitating the flow of knowledge into human consciousness.

The final article in this issue presents an historical account of the emergence of the Christian Kabbalah. The Kabbalah originated within esoteric Judaism and remains a vibrant

aspect of Jewish mysticism, philosophy and psychology. However, Christian scholars of the Renaissance drew upon its ancient wisdom to shed new light on doctrine, to provide a framework for Hermetic magic, and even to serve an ecumenical function.

In this issue we continue the recent practice of including a Poem of the Quarter, the current one is devoted to the Soul Quest. And as always we offer some thoughtful quotes, several of which relate to the published articles. This issue concludes with three more book reviews to guide readers as they contemplate the bewildering array of titles coming onto the market.

We announce with sadness Bruce Lyon’s retirement from the Editorial Board of the *Esoteric Quarterly*. We shall miss Bruce who served with distinction since the *Quarterly*’s inception, but we wish him well in his future endeavors.

On the plus side, we welcomed Dorothy Riddle of Vancouver, Canada, onto our Board last Fall. Dorothy, who also serves on the Board of Directors of the School for Esoteric Studies, brings to the *Esoteric Quarterly* a wealth of knowledge and experience. Immediately prior to publication of this issue, Barbara Maré of New Zealand and Joann Bakula of the United States also joined the Editorial Board. We look forward to their participation in preparing the Summer and future issues of the *Quarterly*. We are fortunate and privileged to have these outstanding individuals on the team.

John Nash  
www.uriel.com

### Publication Policies

Articles are selected for publication in the *Esoteric Quarterly* because we believe they represent a sincere search for truth, sup-

port the service mission to which we aspire, or contribute to the expansion of human consciousness.

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

We encourage critical thinking and evaluation of ideas. However, we will not allow this journal to be used as a platform for attacks on individuals, 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 the 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 the 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 clear our policy on this issue. 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.”

## Letters to the Editor

---

To the Editor,

The *Esoteric Quarterly*'s Fall 2007 article: “The Power and Timelessness of Ritual,” by John Nash, strikes resounding chords of symbiotic harmony within my soul. A woman in my thirties with deep connections to healing energy and ancestral roots, I am encouraged and hopeful that the return to ritual in spiritual traditions will open many pathways for people with wounds from Reformer experiences. The reclaiming of magic as a pure and good connection to God in Christianity, Islam, Judaism and other world religions is a necessary portal for our civilization to journey through if we ever hope to dissolve the iron grip of fear that holds so many immobilized in illness, discontent, and emptiness. As Dr. Nash mentions, “Poorly or carelessly performed ritual can easily become empty and meaningless. It might even attract negative energies.”

My experience with this began when I was child and felt confused and trapped by the “sacraments” my church practiced because of the lack of sincere spirit connection. On a

deeper consciousness level, I am also aware of previous life experiences with the witchcraft genocide that ravaged our globe as the powers of darkness rose in an attempt to desecrate our connection with Angelic Beings. As the mother of two young children, I have been blessed with constant reminders that we model heart and spirit connections with the higher realms in our daily lives and will be held accountable if a disregard is shown for the magic present in everyday circumstances. Our children are coming into this earthly plane with higher frequencies of Spirit awareness and will help us to embrace the return to the white magic that was once so prevalent in our religious ceremonies. And as Nash also reminds us, Christianity's potential ability to “provide the ethical base the western mystery tradition has often lacked”, is strongly supported by the recent discoveries of ancient mystery texts previously lost before this century.

As in all things, the divine plan of the astral light beings seems to have brought us higher in our spiral dance to a more enlightened awareness of Christ's teachings and deep

rooted connection to the mystery schools. As if seeing the puzzle pieces fall into place, our slow evolution toward divine enlightenment has been the result of and simultaneously created the time for master music compositions, enlightened healing arts, technological visual and intercommunicative devices which are all bringing us step by step closer to the center of the labyrinth where the universal mosaic can become clearer. Connection and understanding not through our earthly senses but the surreal ability to see without sight and to hear without ears. An integrated commu-

nity of light conscious human beings able to intuitively connect through mind, heart and soul connections will one day heal our global condition and elevate us to a balanced phenomenological existence. Thank you for such a thoughtful and clearly articulated article that has been an inspirational source for soul searching.

Respectfully,

Deborah Betko  
Alexandria, Virginia.

## Quotes of the Quarter

---

Many heroic mythologies are solar in structure. The hero is assimilated to the sun; like the sun, he fights darkness, descends into the realm of death and emerges victorious. Here darkness is no longer, as it is in lunar mythologies, one of the modes of being of divinity; instead, it symbolizes all that the god is *not*, hence the adversary *par excellence*. Darkness is no longer valorized as a necessary phase in cosmic life; in the perspective of solar religion, it is opposed to life, to forms, and to intelligence.

Mircea Eliade.  
*The Sacred and the Profane*.  
Harvest Books, 1959.

The universe emerges out of all-nourishing abyss not only fifteen billion years ago but in every moment. Each instant protons and antiprotons are flashing out of, and are as suddenly absorbed back into, all-nourishing abyss. All-nourishing abyss then is not a thing, nor a collection of things, nor even, strictly speaking, a physical place, but rather a power that gives birth and that absorbs existence at a thing's annihilation. The foundational reality of the universe is this unseen ocean of potentiality. If all the individual things of the universe were to evapo-

rate, one would be left with an infinity of pure generative power.

Brian Swimme  
*The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos*.  
Orbis Books, 2001

The ancients spoke well when they established man between eternal and temporal things for the reason that he is neither purely eternal nor purely temporal, since he partakes of both natures. And to man, who thus exists as a mean between the two, power is given to assume whichever nature he wishes. Hence there are three kinds of men to be found. Some are numbered with the gods, although such are but few. And these are the men who, having subjugated the vegetative and the sensitive, have become almost completely rational. Some from total neglect of the intellect and from occupying themselves with the vegetative and sensitive alone, have changed, as it were, into beasts. And perhaps this is what the Pythagorean fable means when it says that men's souls pass into different beasts. Some are called normal men; and these are the ones who have lived tolerably according to the moral virtues. They have not, however, devoted themselves entirely to the intellect or held entirely aloof

from the bodily powers. Each of these two latter sorts has a wide range, as is plain to see. With this agrees what is said in the Psalm: "Thou hast made him but a little lower than the angels," etc.

Pietro Pomponazzi of Mantua. *On Immortality. The Renaissance Philosophy of Man.* Univ. of Chicago Press, 1948.

**J**ehudah the Hasid [a 13th-century German rabbi], though fully convinced on the effectiveness of magic and other occult disciplines, was sharply opposed to their practice. He appears to have sensed very clearly the contrast between the magician who prides himself on his control of the elements, and the humble Hasid who craves no form of

power. But his perception of the danger did not prevent the magical elements in his heritage from gaining the upper hand over his moral ideal. In the legend he appears as the bearer and dispenser of all those magical powers and attributes which he was at such pains to renounce, and this legend is by no means the product of later generations: it began to form already during his lifetime. In this conception, the Hasid appears as the true master of magical forces who can obtain everything precisely because he wants nothing for himself. Nowhere else in Judaism has man the magical creator been surrounded with such a halo.

Gershom Scholem.  
*Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism.*  
Schocken Books, 1946.

## Poem of the Quarter

---

### The Soul Quest

Linda "Tiger" Francis

**O**h, Ego of Darkness  
You claim to be my friend, but are you?  
My Soul Quest is to know the wisdom of "The Spirit."  
Father Universe and Mother Earth,  
Have told me that my greatest gift will unfold,  
By tapping into "The Spirit."  
So, eternal flame of truth warm me.  
Lead me into the Light—Self Enlightenment,  
Where there is:  
Gratitude,  
A daily awareness of awesome beauty,  
An appreciation of the simple things,  
Where there is love, fearlessness,  
forgiveness,  
And an inner peace that shines its rays of light  
Into the face of all humankind.

Blue winged bird of flight take me to my personal truth,  
To claim my divine heritage, with honor.  
Lift my wings to soar above the dark shadows of the ego.

Oh Ego, not in the least will I hate you,  
I will not go to war with you, either,  
For I have noticed in hate and war there are no winners.

Instead, I will shine light in your eyes,  
And watch you run to a dark corner somewhere out of sight,  
For fear is not only your tool of choice for controlling us,  
But it is also your greatest enemy -  
The Fear of the Light.



**WHEN  
THE SOUL  
AWAKENS**

**The Path  
to Spiritual Evolution  
and a New World Era**

Nancy Seifer  
and  
Martin Vieweg



**"Fascinating and enlightening."**

"A treasure trove of information that demystifies the nature of the soul and spiritual experience ... so informative that it could be used as an introductory text in a course on the Ageless Wisdom."

**"Truly soul food for people hungry for spiritual truth."**

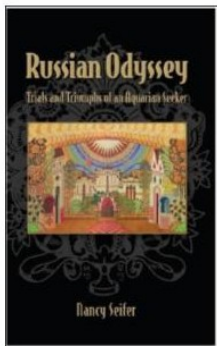
215 pages. Price \$18.95

iUniverse, 2008

ISBN: 978-0-595-46580-4 (pbk)

**Order from online bookstores or see:**

[www.whenth soulawakens.org](http://www.whenth soulawakens.org)



***Russian  
Odyssey***

***Trials and  
Triumphs of an  
Aquarian Seeker***

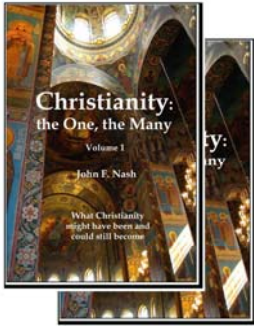
by ***Nancy Seifer***

"What a great service this book provides to other disciples on the Path."

"It has the intimacy and insight of a personal memoir while being an historical and prophetic document. I laughed and cried. It moved me to my soul."

322 pp. • \$19.54 • [xlibris.com](http://xlibris.com)

ISBN: 1-4134-0081-7



**Christianity:  
The One, the Many**  
*What Christianity  
might have been and  
could still become*  
by **John F. Nash**  
Xlibris, 2007

**The rich history of Christianity  
and a bold vision of its future.**

"Encyclopedic in its coverage."  
"A masterpiece of research, insight and faith."  
"A must-read for believers and nonbelievers alike."  
"Now I know there's a place in Christianity for me."

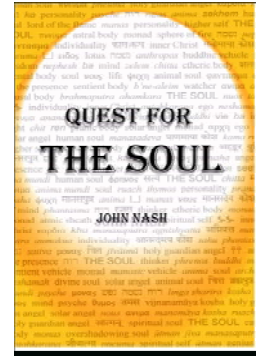
Two volume set.  
Paperback \$39.98, hardback \$59.98.

**For ordering information see:  
[www.uriel.com/bookstore](http://www.uriel.com/bookstore).**

## Quest for the Soul

*The Age-Old Search  
for Our Inner  
Spiritual Nature*

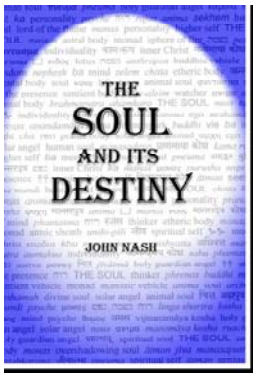
by *John Nash*



"A masterpiece that weaves together the history of the soul through past ages up to the present time... This living history of the soul creates understanding and meaning of our purpose in life. Its kaleidoscopic view makes it essential reading for all students of human evolution. The book is a classic for all seeking closer relationship with the soul."

302 pages. Price \$18.75  
1stBooks Library, 2004.  
ISBN: 141403251X

**For ordering information see:  
[www.uriel.com/bookstore](http://www.uriel.com/bookstore).**



**The Soul  
and Its  
Destiny**  
by *John Nash*

The soul's sacred journey,  
from the teachings of Alice  
Bailey, the major  
Theosophists, and others.

"For those who aspire to grow in knowledge on the spiritual path, this is a great gift for the soul's journey onward. New insights are greater understanding of the unity of all, and a desire to serve others. ... A labor of love."

320 pages. Price \$20.75  
AuthorHouse, 2004.  
ISBN: 1418402753

**For ordering information see:  
[www.uriel.com/bookstore](http://www.uriel.com/bookstore).**

# Meditating on the Mysteries, Ancient and Ageless

Joann S. Bakula

---

## Abstract

Part I of this two-part article is a discussion of the ancient Greek mystery of Eleusis as representative of “the platform upon which the restored mysteries can be based,” and is related especially to one of the twelve full moon meditations: Virgo. Meditations by the esoteric group can be preparatory to the restoration of the Mysteries and link back to the great myths and religions as they apply. Each meditation can be understood in the light of philosophy, psychology and religion.

Part II includes discussions of psychological preparation for the mysteries, right human relations illustrated by Greek drama, creative work, the third initiation, the *ajna* center of directing, the fifth ray, the process of experiment-experience-expression, monthly meditation and fields of service. The article concludes with some effects of the mysteries on non-human kingdoms, above and below the human, revealing a synthesis of spiritual and physical expression. Psychological purification, facilitated by right human relations, can make possible the restoration of the mysteries on earth.

## Part I The Ancient Mysteries

### Introduction

The ageless mysteries have been expressed in myth and ritual since humankind first gained the ability to express its deepest ponderings. Initiation into the Mysteries was a sublime part of life in ancient Greece, supported by the state. Thrust into the stream of life and consciousness without knowledge of what came before or what the end product should be like, the narratives of time and cycles, meanings and wholes, are told in the stories of a culture. There have been high points

throughout our short memory of the history of civilizations that have given formal expression to the mysteries. Today we have another opportunity to expand and deepen our understanding of the questions that humanity holds dearest. With the emergence of global awareness that we all live on the same planet and belong to one human family, another more inclusive and universal view comes up like earthrise. Now we embark on a new journey, this time with camera—an odyssey in mind and myth and space. This is a time when a new planetary myth, adequate to the time, can begin to emerge. A new planetary ritual can also emerge, such as that based upon the sun-moon alignment at the full moon, which, being the same for all, unites us as people of one time and one planet, born in Space.

The new ritual of planetary full moon meditations is open to each individual wherever they are and to the one humanity of all nations under one sun. In this new world with its emerging myth and ritual, comes the sublime opportunity to meditate on the mysteries of the lifespan and consciousness of all life, the evolution of human consciousness, and the one human family. The value of the individual, and the basic pattern of the macrocosm reflected in the microcosm provide similar opportunities. The enduring myths and rituals of the past provide “the platform upon which the restored teaching can be based, and the structure which can express, in powerful ritual and in organ-

---

## About the Author

Joann S. Bakula, Ph.D., is a Transpersonal and Humanistic Psychologist, who has taught at a number of colleges across the United States. In the early 1990s she served as manager of the Lucis Publishing Company in New York. Dr. Bakula is author of *Esoteric Psychology: A Model for the Development of Human Consciousness*.

ised detailed rites, the history of man's moving forward upon the Path of Return."<sup>1</sup> Alice A. Bailey and the Tibetan Master for whom she wrote said these monthly planetary meditations may form the basis of a world religion some time in the future. In the meantime we are the weavers who "bind back" (the root meaning of religion) to the great myths and religions, who link into the depths of heart, mind and will, and who link to the future with reason and intuition. Meditations by the esoteric group can be preparatory to the restoration of the Mysteries and link back to the great myths and religions as they apply.

The sun traces a circular path through the constellations of the zodiac, as the monthly meditations trace our orbit around the sun. In this way we see worlds within worlds in which ours, too, has a place in the whole. This cycle is the same for everyone on earth and through time, as is that of the other heavenly body, the moon, and its cycles, drawing all of humanity into the same journey through time. This is the circular journey through the year and its seasons, a journey through time, cycles and the seasons of life. Various analogies of space, sun, and moon to spirit, soul, and karma, for instance, or Sirius, the sun and earth, to spirit, soul and body unite us in a variety of common myths and themes of worlds within worlds, higher and subtler than this dense one. Although the narratives and their symbols differ around the world, they form a rich source for meditating on the myths and spiritual teachings of all ages that constitute a platform for the restoration of the mysteries in this our new time.

Twelve planetary meditations form a ritual open to all individuals and cultures, universal in scope, creating a courtyard, a bailey, to the temple of the mysteries. This meditation is our new ritual for a new age. Myth stretches out in timeless layers to earliest oral traditions before the ancient Greeks, but written descriptions of myth embodied in rite and ritual in the Mysteries is rare. The importance of ritual as the structure of both civic and religious events is well known. The division of time into periods reflecting sunrise and sunset, birth and death, is part of philosophy, psychology and religion;

this, and its opposite, the timeless moment and the realm beyond time. The societal behavior patterns following the yearly seasonal cycle are ageless and reflective of the seasons of human life, as well as the cycle of all living things. The recurrence of ritual in cultures and religions has recently been documented in John Nash's article in this journal, entitled "The Power and Timelessness of Ritual."<sup>2</sup> The perennial urge to transcend time is well expressed in the *Atharva Veda*: "who, the One among many, is he towards whom the seasons and the groups of seasons move?"<sup>3</sup> This is also the power of the 7th ray, the incoming energy of our age.

## **Meditating on the Mysteries of the Past**

One highpoint in the history of Mystery is ancient Greece, from which the roots of science, philosophy, democracy, drama and comedy in the Western world grew. Two of the most famous mysteries of ancient Greece are the Eleusinian and Dionysian mysteries. The Mysteries of Eleusis, celebrated for over 2,000 years, centered around the story of Demeter and Persephone, the mother and the child, told in myth and ritual.<sup>4</sup> The Mysteries had two parts: one was public and participated in by many, and the other a private and secret ceremony in which the prepared candidates were initiated. The candidates for initiation walked the fifteen miles from Athens to Eleusis in a nighttime procession, symbolic of searching in the dark, preparing mind and psyche for the sacred ritual to take place at the Temple of Demeter. Because the initiates, the *mystai*, were sworn to secrecy, much is extrapolated and inferred from the hints that are given in the literature of the time, and the archeological and anthropological findings of our time. The power of the Mysteries is well known, even if the substance is only hinted at.

The story of the myth itself is that Demeter was an immortal who dwelt on Mount Olympus as one of the dozen immortal gods. Persephone (Kore to the Romans) her daughter, was picking flowers one day on Sicily, when kidnapped by Hades (Pluto to the Romans) another god of Mount Olympus, who had se-

cretly been promised her in marriage by her father Zeus. The divine mother roamed the earth looking for her daughter, could not find her, and would not be comforted. After time the daughter was located in the underworld but could not be liberated. The mother had warned the child not to eat anything from the nether world or she would have to return there. She ate pomegranate seeds and was doomed to spending some of her time below. Zeus declared that Persephone was required to live down below for one-third of the year and could live with her mother two-thirds of the year (although versions of the time allotment differ).

This relationship suggests, among other things, the heavenly parentage from an immortal and a continued relationship with this divine mother. At the same time, the tasks of both 'netherworlds,' of the earth world, of life, hunger and procreation, and of fear of the death world, occupy most of the time of a mortal. Repeated in myths and religions around the world, the journey from oneness with the divine parent, to earthly existence, deathly existence, and reunion through resurrection, in one form or another, is told as a primary story in all cultures. Demeter is also called mother of the dead, and, therefore, has access to all the worlds and to those who exist in any state in the complete cycle of all three worlds. The mystery, it would seem, is one of birth, existence, death and resurrection, as well as one of the relationship of mother as spirit (Demeter), and daughter as soul (Persephone) on earth, bringing flowers, grains, growth and renewal. Another interpretation is to see the time in the dark world as sleep, with two-thirds

of a day spent in the light of consciousness. The continuity of the teaching through the ages is evident in its content and process, said by many to originate from the same source.

Demeter is known for having given the sacred mysteries and the gift of agriculture. It is easy to see how one could serve as a metaphor for the other. Food is an integral part of this Greek myth and a necessity for mortals from time of birth. Eat of it and you shall return. Crave the food of earthly experience and return

is chosen time and again. Continuing relationship with the divine parent in us all is the promise, a divine parent who seeks the child, and who has power in the upper world, the lower world, and the underworld. One of what Sophocles called the 'thrice-blessed' gifts of Demeter unveiled in these mysteries is to see a glimpse of the whole of existence, and to take back to ordinary consciousness a joyful assurance of what is veiled to physical knowledge. And this is no small gift. Remembrance comes that we ourselves chose a mortal life and that it was

---

**Continuing relationship with the divine parent in us all is the promise, a divine parent who seeks the child, and who has power in the upper world, the lower world, and the underworld. One of what Sophocles called the 'thrice-blessed' gifts of Demeter unveiled in these mysteries is to see a glimpse of the whole of existence, and to take back to ordinary consciousness a joyful assurance of what is veiled to physical knowledge. And this is no small gift.**

---

for strictly redemptive purposes. We chose life here both from the desire to experience matter, to raise it up, and we crave to return here until our world is redeemed. We eat of the food of life, the grains of the field, and the grains of truth.

### **The Perennial Vision of the Whole**

**C**ould the vision seen in the Eleusinian Mysteries have been of the human Godseed being conceived, maturing and being harvested all with supernatural speed in the space

of the initiation process? The mystai were sworn to secrecy on pain of death or exile, so nothing is known save the reference to 'vision' in the initiation process. Only one aspect is agreed upon by all witnesses, "the climax of the Eleusinian Mysteries was not a ritual, or anything which the mystes did or physically experienced, but a *vision*."<sup>5</sup> Bailey, too, describes the unfolding of vision, "Initiation leads to the mount whence vision can be had, a vision of the eternal Now, wherein the past, present, and future exist as one;...a vision of the Logosic thoughtform on the archetypal plane, a vision that grows from initiation to initiation until it embraces all the solar system."<sup>6</sup> In Alice Bailey's book, *Initiation, Human and Solar*, the two primary revelations are called the revelation of the Presence and the revelation of the vision. Aristides in his discourse on Eleusis writes of the "ineffable visions,"<sup>7</sup> the very same term that the near-death experiencers use; indeed, the first and most common description among the fifteen core elements of the NDE, the near-death experience, is 'ineffability,' the inadequacy of language to describe dimensions unavailable to normal sense perception.<sup>8</sup>

Demeter commissioned a king to go all over the earth spreading grains, teaching agriculture and the making of cereals and to sow the whole inhabited earth. Her Roman name is Ceres, root word of cereal. Is the ripening of the human grain food for God? In other words do we reunite in the body of God when we achieve maturation? Are we reunited with God only when the human God-seed ripens into knowing and being its full nature? Is this why the Roman Hippolytus refers to the symbol as "that great and marvelous mystery of perfect revelation... cut wheat"?

That there is more to the human seed than the animal part is and always will be the faith of the majority. Just what is harvested as the unique contribution of humanity to the food of God or the planetary Logos is a theme for meditation. As noted in the *Maitri Upanishad*, "Now, that golden Person within the sun who looks down upon the earth from his golden place is He who dwells within the lotus of the heart and eats food. He who dwells

within the lotus of the heart and eats food is the same as that solar fire dwelling in the sky, called Time, the invisible, which eats all things as its food."<sup>9</sup> Time is a primary illusion, dissipated gradually through the graded initiations into the Mysteries. "Myth is significant for the light it throws on the structure of time...myth relates events which took place *in principio*, at the beginnings, in a primordial, atemporal moment, a *sacred time*. This mythical time or sacred time is qualitatively different from profane time, from the continuous and irreversible time of our everyday, desecralized existence. In narrating a myth, we reactualize, as it were, the sacred time in which occurred the events of which we are speaking."<sup>10</sup>

### The Cycle of Wheat

Wheat as metaphor makes such a good symbol for meditation that Roberto Assagioli suggests visualization of it as a technique for spiritual psychosynthesis in his book *Psychosynthesis*, after an exercise visualizing the blossoming of the rose. He calls the wheat visualization exercise, the "Cycle of Wheat," and describes the cycle "from the tiny seed all the way through the many processes which end in a loaf of bread; that is, the tilling and fertilizing of the soil; the sowing of the seed; the action of sun and rain; the seed growing into a plant, maturing, flowering and the forming of the grain; the ripening, the harvesting, the storing and grinding of the grain; finally the making of bread which, eaten as food, is transformed into living organic substance for maintaining the human body."<sup>12</sup> The mystery of what grows from heaven and what grows from earth is an on-going meditation, as is the analogy of the two as macrocosm and microcosm. The initiation ritual into the Greek mysteries of Eleusis showed, it is conjectured, the miraculous maturation of a grain of wheat with supernatural suddenness, which we might consider emblematic of exhilarated growth shown in the initiation process, or the vision of the complete cycle of 'upper world,' lower world and underworld of death and burial in earth, all shown in one fast moving sequence.

One is reminded of the Buddhist monastic rules regarding food. "Monks must eat their

meals after the sun rises and before it crosses its zenith. No solid food is taken in the afternoon.”<sup>13</sup> Perhaps both of these traditions and myths are analogous to the cycle of existence. Early in the cycle, the earthly environment is taken in as food, keeping in mind the fundamental Hindu teaching that everything is food for the senses. The zenith marks the end of the morning season, so to speak, for a disciple who is reaching fruition of the cycle and whose craving is for the ‘food’ of truth or dharma. Indeed, the original, primordial realm in Tibetan Buddhism was at first called the ‘seed realm’ by some Westerners.<sup>14</sup> Today it is more commonly translated as the densely arrayed or densely packed realm, of the first, central, and primordial Dhyani Buddha family,<sup>15</sup> because seeds imply something that is not, in reality, there. Sogyal calls the wisdom coming from this *Dhyani Buddha*, the “wisdom of all-pervading space.”<sup>16</sup>

## Virgo

One of the oldest symbols of the astro-mythological system is the sign of Virgo, depicting a woman holding a sheaf of wheat, a sign of Demeter, later turned into the sign of the Virgin. In some portrayals she is shown with a bundle of wheat in one hand and ‘seed wheat’ in the other. (The first-magnitude star in the constellation of Virgo is Spica, meaning ‘seed wheat,’ or ‘ear of wheat or corn.’) The divine-mother and magical child relationship is a meditation on both macrocosm-microcosm and on the polarity inherent in all formfull-formless life, or spirit-matter. Using the astro-mythological circle, “It is in Virgo, after complete individualisation in Leo, that the first step toward the union of spirit and matter is made.”<sup>17</sup> The seed thought suggested in the Bailey books for the Virgo meditation is, as we know, “I am the Mother and the child. I, God, I, matter am.” A poet of another age wrote, “The child is father of the man,” and, we would add, of the woman, the mother, and the father.

The only thing separating the child from the adult is time, time during which we change and

mature. It is the psycho-spiritual change that is crucial to Self-knowledge. When we collapse time between child and divine mother, we get a glimpse of the whole. The seeds of character and destiny are there in the child, which is in us still, hidden now in the depths of being. If we were a magical child then, we are still. We are all magical in the core, the soul, which has its own knowledge and work, goals and methods, quite aside from those of the personality in the world. It is with a similar sense of openness to the future and to possibility, expectation, wonder, awe, becoming, receptiveness, responsiveness, and willingness to explore the new, that we enter into the monthly ritual of deep meditative thought preparing for the future of the mysteries using the full moon approach to God, Hierarchy or Reality.

The cycle of original oneness, dispersement, and return or reunification has the universal quality of the ageless mysteries told in the path of forthgoing and return, and the prodigal son. Thrown into this existence with no memory of what came before and none of what comes after, this ritual presentation of the mysteries opened up consciousness to its potential as immortal soul, seer through time. Which life-span do you accept becomes the crucial aspect of self-knowledge and self-identification. Comparison to the myth of Isis and Osiris is frequent, and often reduced, unfortunately to vegetation myths and desire for a good crop, but more generous minds look deeper. The spreading of the grain, the dismemberment and rememberment of Osiris and Dionysus, and Hiram Abif in Masonry, and the life, death, descent into hell and resurrection of Jesus Christ, all indicate the dispersal of the central truths hidden from human eyes but known to that part of consciousness that transcends the body world. In Greek philosophy, dismembered Dionysus is seen as both creator god and creature. From the perspective of Jungian psychology, when god enters the field of time and form through a human, it is dismembered. Self-recollection is the gathering together of the pieces of the self, the integration of the self through conscious assimilation of the split-off contents.<sup>18</sup>

## Part II

### The Mysteries, Modern Psychology, and Initiation

#### Psychological Purification: Preparatory to the Mysteries

Seen from a psychological point of view, other mysteries of the Classical period rested on a platform of sacred tragedies. The same themes were presented differently each season and performed in great civic festivals, the Civic Dionysia, in spring and, less publicly, in the greater mysteries celebrated in fall. The themes and stories were, therefore, very familiar to everyone. The candidates to the greater mysteries may have been required to engage in a depth of psychological purification beyond Freud's fondest dreams. The tragedies of Sophocles and Aeschylus, for instance, were re-enacted year and after year for the public as basic patterns of human karma, if you will, or "the Law of Cause and Effect,"<sup>19</sup> offering liberation through catharsis to those who could see themselves in the field of action.

The dramas of Aeschylus contrasted the world of dreadful conflict, portrayed within a family as in the trilogy, the *Oresteia*, to the rule of law and reason "where argument and persuasion may prove superior to hatred and violence."<sup>19</sup> It is a society that idealizes and mirrors Athens, but is mythological "where Athena presides over an archetypal law-court."<sup>20</sup> In the *human* world, the world of action in time, the injustice is always the result of wrong action. In the *sacred* dramas, the same is true except that the world outside of time, the world of the immortals, enters into the action in the form of Fate or the Furies or some other way. The combination of unresolved human relationships and intrusions from the spiritual world make up the central arc of the sacred tragedies. The invoked response of the 'heaven' world to human need and its relationship to the 'earth' world is ever the gift of the mysteries.

#### Right Human Relations

The Tibetan Buddhist for whom Bailey wrote has summarized the Eightfold Noble Path, as "right human relations." The obstacles to right human relationships and the obstacles to truth as *maya*, glamour and illusion, or ignorance, are described in *Glamour: A World Problem*. These are the primary obstacles to initiation into the mysteries on one level or another for all of the initiations. Recognition that the ideal of right human relationships—and its opposite pole of wrong relationships—are both acted out, consciously and unconsciously, as the basic pattern of the human psyche was used by the Greek dramatists to produce catharsis and revelation of how redemption is achieved. Sophocles' King Oedipus was a hero because of the way he responded to his terrible fate. He was cursed by the gods to act out in Thebes, of being an orphan unknowingly killing his father and marrying his mother: events that happened many years before the play begins. Recognition of the slowly unveiled truth is the substance of the drama. "Central to Sophoclean tragedy is the gap between reality and appearance, understanding and illusion....the audience understands the double meanings or the deeper truths behind the superficial sense of the words."<sup>21</sup>

Still, although there may be an order to the world, the pattern is often too elusive for onlookers to grasp, despite the presence of the chorus commenting on the action, pondering its significance, and placing it in a larger religious and ancestral perspective."<sup>22</sup> Recognition of "the world of patterns which underlie all activities of the Oversoul and the individual souls" is the work of esoteric psychologists. "These patterns are literally the divine ideas, as they emerge from the subjective group consciousness and take those mental forms that can be appreciated and appropriated." As an individual "advances on the path of evolution and nears the status of an initiate, the conditioning of the form, innate and inherent, will continuously approach nearer and nearer to the requirements of the pattern.... When, at the



third initiation, union of the pattern and the conditioned form is achieved, the Transfiguration of the initiate takes place.”<sup>23</sup>

Freud would later recognize this deeply buried unconscious pattern as instinctual in the human psyche, but rejected it as any form of ‘eternal truth.’ Freud called instincts “mythical entities” and made mythic truth the basis of his ‘scientific’ or atheistic psychology avoiding all applications to the religious. Jung sought to integrate mythic and religious elements into a psychology of the soul and of what Huxley and others called God-immanent. The *Tibetan Book of the Dead* acknowledges the same *Oedipal pattern*—extraordinary as this may seem—in the Bardo of Becoming (the section called Closing the Womb Door), the *Sidpa Bardo*, giving this pattern a surprisingly universal quality.<sup>24</sup>

Purification to the ancient Greeks was neither superficial nor sentimental. A depth of understanding was required then, that we would find hard to equal today. The flawed patterns of patricide, fratricide and eating your own (King Oedipus, Medea, Agammemnon, Orestes, Electra and Iphigenia) were laid bare requiring a courageous heart to see the basic polarities that exist in human nature, part animal, part divine, and all too human. Rollo May wrote of the kingly and the beastly in Oedipus as “all part of this great myth. In this sense psychoanalysis is a reflection of the basic interpersonal patterns which have been present since the dawn of human history.”<sup>25</sup> May sums up what is important: “When we read the actual drama of Oedipus, as it came to Freud and comes to us from the pen of Sophocles, we are surprised to see that the myth has nothing to do with conflicts about sexual desire.... The only issue in the drama is whether [Oedipus] will recognize and admit what he has done. The tragic issue is that of seeking the truth about oneself; it is the tragic drama of a person’s passionate relation to truth. *Oedipus’ tragic flaw is his wrath against his own reality.*”<sup>26</sup> He reminds us that “The myth is always being reinterpreted, growing, changing, even adding to itself.”<sup>27</sup>

The roots of the Greek Mysteries were in the depths of psychology, and realization of the

nature of God-immanent. The Greeks had no gospels, sacred books or fixed representation of the gods. The major emphasis of their Mysteries was on the effect of and response by advanced individuals to the energies of the gods. The platform and structure of this group initiation is still a challenge for us today. It is helpful to keep in mind that religion, philosophy, and psychology interrelated then in a way that only the Buddhists seem to preserve today. In universities the three departments are very separate. Despite this, or perhaps because of this, we are far behind the intelligentsia of ancient Greece, especially in the depth and use of our understanding of human patterns. Today we use science mainly to control outer behavior, not to understand it. Perhaps this is why the Tibetan for whom Alice Bailey wrote said that the restored mysteries will make real “the nature of religion, the purpose of science and the goal of education. These are not what you think today.”<sup>28</sup>

If psychology is to take a truly scientific look at the basic laws of nature in relation to the human, it would have to, it would seem, overcome its walls separating observer from the observed and field from field, many of which are built on ideologies, not ideas. The archetypes are ideas, as Plato wrote, and in the view of some psychologists these form the structure of human consciousness as Jung wrote (e.g., *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*).<sup>29</sup> The deepest levels of awareness can only be discovered through myth and ritual, Jung and many others in the existential, humanistic, and transpersonal fields have found. He saw myth as the necessary interlink between the human spirit and natural man. Even Aristotle, known more for science than myth, said that “the friend of wisdom is also a friend of myth.”

### Creative Work: the Law

**I**n the mythology of the ancient Greeks the Law has two basic ways of working out: from Zeus or god-transcendent, and from within as karma-immanent or sowing and reaping actions, which were based upon “qualities of both character and thought...the two natural causes from which actions spring.”<sup>30</sup> This is most memorably illustrated in the *Oresteia*,

that great trilogy of family karma in which tragedy witnessed results in the community earning the gift of law from Zeus. To the ancient Greeks, all great events were partly conditioned by massive movements in a distant past, which are the province of fate, as well as other nonhuman controlling powers, such as the Furies, and also by situational influences affected by human motivations. Any of these could distort events, even within the pattern of fate. The weighing and enunciation of causal factors included the historic, personal, karmic, situational, environmental, psychological, and gender factors involved. It is the “nexus of motives and past history,” plus the voluntary and semi-voluntary acts when “all the potentialities converge in action.”<sup>31</sup> Zeus decided that “there shall be...a ritual devised by Apollo, one of the new gods, which will sacramentally abolish the taint of blood.”<sup>32</sup> Athena “sets up a new legal court of human jurors to investigate the motives of the crimes and the degree of guilt involved. The end of this is to supersede the function of the Furies, who are the representatives of the old gods.”<sup>33</sup>

The great human tragedy affected the world itself, heralding a new world order with accompanying ritual, in which humankind assumed some of the non-human roles of the previous time. They were beginning to assume super-human roles, reflecting the archetypal court itself. Zeus himself decreed, “a change in the order of the world”<sup>34</sup> at the conclusion of this drama, which was the essence of psychological and social purification or catharsis through witnessing the sacred tragedies. Zeus ended the reign of blood vengeance of the Furies and began a new order of the world. Humanity itself assumed the role of administrator of law and juror of appraisal. “The issue is the change in purification procedure, which implies the new construction of guilt” leading to Athena’s institution of the human jury.<sup>35</sup> At the end of the “complete action” of the trilogy we have assurances that a resolution has occurred between Zeus, or God-transcendent, and the human world!

Meditation on the laws of the soul and the ultimate law of God, as well as the role of just systems in building a culture of peace are all

appropriate to planetary meditation and preparation for the restoration of the Mysteries. The meditation in Libra, for instance, is on the “balancing and careful weighing of values, and of achieving right equilibrium between pairs of opposites” through the right use of the analytical mind. “It holds the balances between so-called right and wrong, positive and negative.” The balanced scales are the symbol of both the sign of Libra and the human justice system. One of the very names by which the students of the School of Planet Earth are known as is adjudicators, “adjudicators between the polar opposites.”<sup>36</sup> Adjudication means to hear and settle a case by judicial procedure. The Lords of Karma are the ultimate adjudicators, but the procedure humans devise in order to imitate the gods or God is evidently part of our work and even sacred duty. Could the means we choose to determine justice as fair adjudicators speed up or slow down the process of Earth becoming a sacred planet? What far-reaching effects could the corruption of the justice system have? There are many interesting questions that can be raised

### **The Mysteries, Science, and the Third Initiation**

**W**e are reminded that “not all will seek the church or Masonry for the revitalizing of their spiritual life. The true Mysteries will also reveal themselves through science.”<sup>37</sup> As esotericists, we know that the third initiation is linked with the fifth ray of science. The effects of this fifth ray energy in relation to humanity and to the individual initiate may be summarized in many ways, one of which is in the area of thought. “The fifth ray energy produces three major areas of thought, or three prime conditions wherein the thought-forming energy expresses itself: a.) science, education, medicine, b.) philosophy, ideas, ideals, c.) psychology, in the process of modern development.”<sup>38</sup> Psychology without the tempering influence of philosophy and spirituality tends to stop halfway, a problem the transpersonal psychology movement hoped to lighten. Bailey used the secular labors of Hercules to illustrate mythic psychology in a spiritual way. And most importantly, used zodiacal myths and symbols as key themes

leading from interpersonal relations to transpersonal relations. The effects of the different ray energies on each initiation serve to purify from the illusion of maya, glamour and mental illusions, as well as to reveal the powers of the soul and its expression as a ray energy.

The third initiation is an initiation of transfiguration, using the fifth ray of science and reason, resulting in a transfigured mind no longer “satisfied with personality methods” which

“make the lower mind the instrument of power.”<sup>39</sup> The transfigured mind is “responsive primarily to ideas, intuitions and impulses coming from the soul, and begins its true task as an interpreter of divine truth and a transmitter of ashramic intention.”<sup>40</sup>

The disciples’ keynote is “right direction as the result of right reaction to hierarchical intention and the injunctions of his own soul...He then works as a scientist.”<sup>41</sup> Revelation through the mysteries can occur only when “the mind and the will-to-good are closely fused and blended and...conditioning human behavior.”<sup>42</sup>

The Tibetan forecasts many benefits from the restoration of the Mysteries: “There are planetary energies and forces which men as yet cannot and do not control; they know nothing of them and yet upon them the life of the planet is dependent.”<sup>43</sup>

Some of these are human powers and from them the sciences will benefit enormously.<sup>44</sup> “The ground is being prepared at this time for this great restoration,” and “it will take a new vision and a new approach to life experience”

itself;<sup>45</sup> it will take changes in awareness and in training to make the needed alterations and revitalization. The restoration is dependent upon the “fitness of humanity to provide the right setting”<sup>46</sup> plus understanding the nature and consciousness of the Christ,<sup>47</sup> as God-Hero of our time—as Hercules was God-Hero to the ancient Greeks. As the human family learns its relationship to both the kingdom below, the natural kingdom, and the kingdom above, the

spiritual kingdom, it will achieve the perspective of mediator necessary to assume its conscious role. “Humanity as a whole has to learn its relationship,”<sup>48</sup> in both directions, to earth and to Hierarchy. “This sense of proportion can only be learned by the mind principle and those beginning to be mentally polarized.”<sup>49</sup> And humanity does indeed look like it is beginning to awaken as a whole to its responsibility to the environment and the life forms of nature.

The re-establishing of the Mysteries is itself necessitated by the need for group initiation in the future; hence the new hierarchal experiment in externalizing the ashrams.<sup>50</sup> In the time of the Eleusinian Mysteries, initiation

was individual; group initiation was forbidden by law.<sup>51</sup> The need of an awakening world public, whether scientist or mystic, for a time to meditate together on the common problems humanity faces is great. The analytical mind is clearly not enough; it tends to create as many problems as it solves. The difference between what Martin Heidegger called the calculating mind and the meditative mind<sup>52</sup> makes *all* the difference, whether it is called post-formal op-

---

**The mind responsive primarily to ideas “begins its true task as an interpreter of divine truth and a transmitter of ashramic intention,” developed through the use of the ajna center. For those who have overcome the obstacles of the initiations of the threshold, as they are called, the opportunity to serve increases, especially at the time of group meditations and the full moon approach. At this point a new pathway may emerge in which extra-planetary energies may affect the full moon meditator... and be “directed outward into its destined field of service.”**

---

erations or the direct perception of intuition. The thirst is great for an intelligent, holistic, compassionate approach to living life, both individually and as groups within the human family. From the esoteric perspective, the spiritual teaching is entrusted to us. What we are able to do to make this teaching apparent in the world may be in direct relation to our entrance into the mysteries themselves. This, our new, world meditation ritual, is both the means for entering into the Mysteries *within us*, through meditation, and the means by which the world may participate in the ritual together in service of the whole. The twelve monthly meditations will constitute a revelation of divinity and divine characteristics in humanity.

### **Revelation through the Centers**

The Mysteries are not revealed primarily through vision or through the processes of initiation, but through the etheric body and its responsiveness to energies via its system of *nadiis* and centers.<sup>53</sup> They are revealed by “the action of certain processes within the etheric body,” through which we can glimpse what is hidden.<sup>54</sup> “They put him in possession of a mechanism for revelation and make him aware of certain magnetic and radiatory powers or energies within himself which constitute channels of activity and modes by which he may acquire what initiates use. This is an area for which the time is not yet ripe for widespread exploration, yet the knowledge necessary for individual experimentation is available.<sup>55</sup> The knowledge puts him in possession of a mechanism of revelation and make him aware of certain radiatory and magnetic powers or energies within himself which constitute channels of activity and modes whereby he may acquire that which it is the privilege of the initiate to own and to use.”<sup>56</sup> Such qualities are often referred to as the searchlight of the mind and the magnetic quality of the heart. The name of our School itself is, of course, “The School of Magnetic Response.”<sup>57</sup> The centers, being a universal structure, find power in recognition of Shamballa as the will center, Hierarchy as the heart center, and humanity itself as a head center seeking relationship and knowledge of its role in the principal planetary triangle.

The mind responsive primarily to ideas “begins its true task as an interpreter of divine truth and a transmitter of ashramic intention,”<sup>58</sup> developed through the use of the ajna center. For those who have overcome the obstacles of the initiations of the threshold, as they are called, the opportunity to serve increases, especially at the time of group meditations and the full moon approach. At this point a new pathway may emerge in which extra-planetary energies may affect the full moon meditator (from SK to crown and *ajna* centers), and be “directed outward into its destined field of service,” despite ordinarily lacking conscious recognition of its presence.<sup>59</sup> The sacred planets all transmit energy throughout the system; they *are* the Ray Lords, and embody the energy of the rays in its highest, most creative form, lacking the impurities evident in the rays as personality types.

Helena Blavatsky correlated the seven sacred planets with the seven Heavenly Men, the seven Spirits before the Throne, the seven Spirits of the Planets, the Biblical Archangels, the seven creative Powers, the *Rishis*, and the collective *Dhyan Chohans*. “They are the veiled synthesis.”<sup>60</sup> The names of the rays found in *Esoteric Psychology*, Vol. II, give us a key to their varied purposes, goals, and objectives.<sup>61</sup> These goals and rhythms will become more evident to meditators as the human and spiritual worlds grow closer. Keeping in mind the Tibetan's three directive words of integration, direction, and science, the disciple handles his/her life, environment and circumstances, directing the energy available at the full moon from ashram to field of service,<sup>62</sup> all of which begin with the perception of universality.

### **Experiment, Experience and Expression**

From the perspective of the soul or Self, life is seen as “experiment, experience and expression,” from entrance into the human kingdom to exit; the same three keynotes apply to the aspirant and to the initiate.<sup>63</sup> “Every initiation is approached by the disciple or initiate in a spirit of divine experimentation, but with a scientific aspect, because an initiation is

a culminating moment of achievement, and success is a graded series of experiments with energy....The results of the experiment of initiation and of experience with the then endowed energies emerge as the ability of the initiate to express divinity more fully”<sup>64</sup> and to reveal the ray quality, mode of approach, and distinctive natures of their particular ray expression. All have the same goal, all experiment, all go through the same experience and express equally the divine nature. Knowledge and subsequent recognition of the ray qualities and energies, of ashramic affiliation and fields of service, and of the variety inherent in the full spectrum of the seven ray expression, is made evident by the unique contribution of the Tibetan and Alice Bailey. This pathway leading from the depths of being to the field of human action and work is made clear through knowledge of the theory of the seven rays, proven only through experience and expression.

Historic expansions of human consciousness, whether vertical or horizontal have always resulted in expression through the arts, from Greek architecture and sculpture to the art of the Renaissance. The expression of an expanded and liberating vision through the arts is, indeed, proof of deepening life. The “two legendary initiates” most often portrayed in art associated with the ancient Greek Mysteries, “Dionysos and Herakles” were heroes considered worthy to be worshipped as gods in art and tribute.<sup>65</sup> The Tibetan’s predictions for the arts of the future resulting from the restoration of the Mysteries are dazzling. “The Mysteries will restore colour and music as they essentially are to the world and do it in such a manner that the creative art of today will be to this new creative art what a child’s building blocks is to a great cathedral such as Durham or Milan.”<sup>66</sup> The five initiations in the life of the Christ remain perennial in the life of the aspirant: “such are the five great dramatic events of the mysteries,”<sup>67</sup> which are the subject of so much beauty in art and music for 2000 years.

## Effects of the Mysteries on Non-human Kingdoms

“The Hierarchy has its own life and its own goals and objectives, its own evolutionary rhythm, and its own spiritual expansions,”<sup>68</sup> and these are not the same as the human. Part of the energy emanating from the Will center, Shamballa, is not intended for strictly human use, but for the “vitalizing into renewed livingness of the seven major Ashrams, thus enabling the entire Ashram of the Christ to lift itself on to a higher spiritual level and closer to the door which leads to Life.”<sup>69</sup> The restoration of the Mysteries involves the entire system from superhuman to sub-human kingdoms, and the deep Hierarchical mysteries “are not in any way related to the Mysteries which will concern humanity.”<sup>70</sup>

The effects of the mysteries on the Hierarchy are described as: “The steady pulsation of the evolutionary rhythm which permeates every atom, form, group, and centre upon our planet, producing effects” from the lowest to the highest forms of existence.<sup>71</sup> The kingdoms above and the kingdoms below have their own modes, methods and ways of achievement. Each has its own peculiar destiny and unique goals. Hierarchy must move forward in such a manner that the physical planes are encompassed, as well as the higher, “the five worlds of superhuman evolution.”<sup>72</sup> This is required under the Law of Synthesis.

The activity must cover the three worlds of human evolution and the three of the Spiritual Triad, of atma/will, buddhi/intuition, and manas, overlapping on the mental plane. The reappearance and restoration on the physical plane and subsequent life of service are an expression of the inherent spiritual impulse impelling a united hierarchical expansion in both directions, toward Life and toward the physical plane, as one inclusive activity. The merging of the fourth and fifth kingdoms, and establishment of that brotherhood which will become the germ or seed of the coming manifest-

tation of the hierarchy, is the Heart of the God (directly related to the heart of the sun) in physical expression. “The entire field of the world—meaning in that phrase all the kingdoms of nature in united inner and outer relationship—will be the medium of recognized spiritual experience.”<sup>73</sup>

## Conclusion

Each month the opportunity to link back to myths around the world, to apply our existing teaching to the obstacles humanity faces today, and to link forward to the possibilities of the future Mystery schools, awaits us. The mysteries of the past, expressed in myth and ritual, provide a platform upon which the restored mysteries can be based. The Greek myth of Demeter revealed primordial divine parentage, made living through initiation into the mysteries. Vision of the whole cycle of time and relationship to the whole of life links back and presses forward to the mysteries in our meditation in Virgo. The psychological purification required in preparation for the Greek mysteries delved into the depths of human relationships, revealing the karma of filial patterns.

Right human relations summarizes for us the purification needed in preparation for the restoration of the mysteries in the future. Science and the fifth ray also help in clearing away the obstructions of illusions and distortions resulting from ignorance. Catharsis resulted, for the Greeks, in the creation of the jury system of law. Interpreting divine truth and ashramic intention is our goal today, but will take a new vision and new approach to the life experience. Vision, presence, revelation and creative work in destined fields of service are some of the gifts of the mysteries of initiation. The mysteries affect non-human kingdoms as well, revealing the synthesis of all life.

---

<sup>1</sup> Bailey, Alice, A. *The Rays and the Initiations*, NY: Lucis Publishing Co, p. 331.

<sup>2</sup> Nash, John. “The Power and Timelessness of Ritual.” *Esoteric Quarterly*, Fall 2007.

<sup>3</sup> *Atharva Veda*, cited in Nash, “The Power and Timelessness of Ritual.”

<sup>4</sup> Mylonas, George. *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries* Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1969.

<sup>5</sup> Otto, Walter F. “The Meaning of the Eleusinian Mysteries,” in *The Mysteries*, ed Joseph Campbell. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971, p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> Bailey, Alice A. *Initiation, Human and Solar* NY: Lucis, 1951, p. 13-14.

<sup>7</sup> Aristedies in *Otto*, p. 21.

<sup>8</sup> Moody, Raymond. *Life After Life* NY: Bantam, 1975, pp. 25-26.

<sup>9</sup> *Maitri Upanishad*, cited in Joseph Campbell, *The Mythic Image*.

<sup>10</sup> Eliade, Mircea.. Cited in *Man in Time*, ed Joseph Campbell Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957, p. 173.

<sup>11</sup> Assagioli, Roberto. *Psychosynthesis* NY: Viking, 1965, p. 216.

<sup>12</sup> Dalai Lama & Fabien Ouaki. *Imagine All the People* Somerville, MA: Wisdom, 1999, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Evans-Wentz, W. Y. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* London: Oxford, 1960, p. 105.

<sup>14</sup> Fremantle, Francesca & Chogyam Trungpa. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* Boston: Shambhala, 1987, p. 42.

<sup>15</sup> Sogyal Rinpoche. *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* NY: Harper Collins, 1992, p. 278.

<sup>16</sup> Bailey, Alice A. *The Labours of Hercules* NY: Lucis, 1992, p. 121.

<sup>17</sup> Jung, Carl G. *Psychology and Religion: East and West*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1980, p. 264.

<sup>18</sup> Bailey, Alice, A. *The Reappearance of the Christ* NY: Lucis, 1976, p. 118.

<sup>19</sup> Rutherford, Richard. Introduction to *Herakles*. NY: Penguin, 2002, p. xv.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. ix.

<sup>23</sup> Bailey, Alice, A. *Esoteric Psychology*, Vol II NY: Lucis, 1970, pp 55-56.

<sup>24</sup> Thurman, Robert. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. NY: Bantam, 1994, p 184.

<sup>25</sup> May, Rollo. *The Cry for Myth*. NY: Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1991, p. 75.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 75.
- 28 Bailey, *Rays*, p. 332.
- 29 Jung, Carl G. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1980.
- 30 Aristotle. *Poetics* NY: Dover, 1997, p. 11.
- 31 Grene, David. Introduction to *The Oresteia by Aeschylus* Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1989, p. 5.
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 *Ibid.*
- 34 *Ibid.*
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- 36 Bailey, Alice, A. *Esoteric Astrology* NY: Lucis, 1979, p. 693.
- 37 Bailey, *Reappearance*, p. 122.
- 38 Bailey, *Rays*, p. 601.
- 39 Rollo, *The Cry for Myth*, p. 78.
- 40 Bailey, *Astrology*, p. 205.
- 41 Bailey, *Rays* pp. 690-692.
- 42 *Ibid.*, p. 331.
- 43 Bailey, *Reappearance*, p. 123.
- 44 *Ibid.*
- 45 Bailey, *Rays*, p. 332.
- 46 *Ibid.*, p. 333.
- 47 *Ibid.*
- 48 *Ibid.*
- 49 *Ibid.*, p. 334.
- 50 Bailey, *Rays*, p. 111.
- 51 Mylonas, George. *Eleusis* Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969, p. 237.
- 52 Heidegger, Martin. *Discourses* NY: Harper & Row, 1966.
- 53 Bailey, *Rays*, p. 337.
- 54 *Ibid.*
- 55 *Ibid.*, p. 336.
- 56 *Ibid.*, p. 337.
- 57 Bailey, *Astrology*, p. 693.
- 58 Bailey, *Rays*, p. 688.
- 59 *Ibid.*, p. 690.
- 60 Blavatsky, H. P. *The Secret Doctrine* Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1968.
- 61 Bailey, Alice A. *Esoteric Psychology*, Vol II NY: Lucis, 1970, p. 62-89.
- 62 Bailey, *Rays*, p. 691.
- 63 *Ibid.*, p. 337.
- 64 *Ibid.*
- 65 Mylonas. *Eleusis*, p. 213.
- 66 Bailey, *Rays*, p. 332.
- 67 Bailey, Alice A. *From Bethlehem to Calvary* NY: Lucis, 196, p. 23.
- 68 Bailey, *Rays*, p. 335.
- 69 *Ibid.*
- 70 *Ibid.*
- 71 *Ibid.*, p. 336.
- 72 *Ibid.*, p. 335.
- 73 *Ibid.*, p. 334.





# Wise Use of Destructive Energy

Dorothy I. Riddle

---

## Abstract

An important component of our ability to be of service is our appropriate use of the destructive component of divine Will energy, yet it is often misunderstood or viewed as only an expression of Ray One energy. In actuality, evolution presupposes an ability to eliminate old, dysfunctional forms and forces so that there is room for new growth. We see that cycle of destruction and renewal played out in the seasons of nature each year. We also see the negative results of the fear of such change in the tenacity of old political and economic systems that outlive their relevance and ultimately become “evil.” This paper explores the positive nature of the destructive dynamic and proposes a typology for understanding how to use it wisely.

## Introduction

For many, the term “destructive” has a strictly negative connotation. We become attached to Love as the predominant energy in our universe, equating it with compassion, caring, magnetic attraction, and unification. However, the destructive process is a critical part of the evolutionary or growth process<sup>1</sup> as it allows us to eliminate old forms or patterns and remove hindrances to clear energy flow. We can see an example of this positive destructive process in operation in the working out of goodwill since its initial stage is the identification of cleavages that need to be eliminated – i.e., those stereotypes, prejudices, and hatreds that result in the heresy of separateness.<sup>2</sup>

## Destructiveness and the Ray Energies

Those esotericists used to thinking in terms of the typology of ray energies<sup>3</sup> typically equate destruction with Ray One, often called

the Ray of the Destroyer. This potent energy brings about “...the death of negation and the inauguration of true activity. It is the energy which can be called ‘divine incentive’; it is the life in the seed which destroys successively all forms in order that realized fruition may eventuate.”<sup>4</sup>

The dynamic of setting limits or eliminating barriers to growth, however, is not limited to Ray One. Each of the other rays also expresses a component of the destructive dynamic:

- a) Ray 2 expresses as the withdrawal of magnetic bonds, resulting in...“the destroying aspect of this pure will...[as] one of the major manifestations of the Love nature of the One in Whom we live and move and have our being...”<sup>5</sup>
- b) Ray 3 expresses as the repulsion of non-truths – i.e., the rejection of energy that doesn’t have the needed quality – or the stilling of vibration.
- c) Ray 4 expresses as “...the will to destroy limitation. This is not the same thing as the will to destroy negation as in the case of Ray I, but is an allied aspect...”<sup>6</sup>
- d) Ray 5 expresses as purification with fire.
- e) Ray 6 expresses as the killing of desire and is often “...far more destructive than

---

## About the Author

Based in Canada, Dorothy I. Riddle, Ph.D., has worked globally on issues related to services and economic development. Her speaking and writing related to spiritual development have focused primarily on feminist spirituality. She is the Project Director for the development of the Spiritual Evolution Assessment Scale (SEAS), [www.SEAScale.net](http://www.SEAScale.net) and for the two portals: [www.servicegrowth.net](http://www.servicegrowth.net) and [www.servicegrowth.org](http://www.servicegrowth.org).

the first ray, for there is not so much wisdom to be found, and, as it works through desire of some kind, it is following the line of least resistance for the masses, and can therefore the more easily produce physical plane effects.”<sup>7</sup>

- (f) Ray 7 expresses as the prerequisite to realignment and reorganization.

## Understanding the Destructive Dynamic

The destructive dynamic takes a number of forms, expressed through four primary methods: (a) visualization of the desired effect; (b) channelling of streams of light (the “advancing light”); (c) the use of sound vibrations, or Words of Power; and (d) the use of fire or Fohat. In order to use this dynamic effectively in service, it is critical that we be clear about the goal that we wish to achieve and the level of Will expression from which we are working (which will in turn determine the primary cosmic law that we need to utilize). Table 1 summarizes the methods available by the nature of the goal to be achieved, the level of will expression available, and the law to be utilized:

Please bear in mind that methods available at the Personality Will level may also be used at other levels; however, the reverse is not true. Also, each of the laws may operate at other levels of Will expression but are shown at the level where they are most clearly in operation with regard to the use of destructive energy.

*The Personality Will.* At the level of the Personality Will, we generally focus positive destructive activity either on avoiding the consequences of others’ violent behavior or on purification of our own three-fold personality. At the most basic level, we protect ourselves through visualization techniques such as reflecting back to others (e.g., through shielding with silver) the destructive energy they direct towards us or by the use of specific words (e.g., “begone,” “I will not...”) to banish the effects of others’ negative energy. If we wish to avoid perpetuating “evil,” we typically focus on the practice of harmlessness<sup>8</sup> in our own

behavior. We also use the Personality Will for purification<sup>9</sup>, especially as we become aware of the need to control our emotional activity and its energetic consequences. Through the purification process, we eliminate the ongoing negative effects of our astral life and begin shifting our focus into the mental body.

It is at the level of the personality, prior to the third initiation, that a great deal of caution needs to be exercised with regard to the intention with which we use the will for destructive purposes. All too often we use self-will to assert our own needs and desires in a selfish and self-absorbed manner, heedless of the impact of our behavior on others. We believe we know better than others what is best and so we use will energy to force our views on others, violating their right to make their own decision. We indulge desire in feeling entitled to privileges not available to others and thus perpetuate the great heresy of separateness. One of our responsibilities as aspirants and disciples is to eliminate desire through a process of attrition<sup>10</sup> – i.e., to stop giving it any recognition or attention. This process sets the stage for our being able to re-focus our energies in service. After the third initiation, the Personality Will is in the process of becoming fused with the Monadic Will and so positive intentionality (i.e., the will-to-good) gradually becomes a given.

*The Soul Will.* Once we are operating at the level of the Soul Will, we become able to use light as a destructive medium under the Law of Attraction. One of the roles of the soul is to assist in the purification process through the power of focused light energy, eliminating all that hinders divine manifestation by gradually substituting good for evil. In part the soul does this through “occult obliteration,” wherein the personality (and the three bodies integrated within it) becomes fused with the soul.<sup>11</sup> Light can also be used to dissolve “deadened” astral sediment. This approach of the Soul Will is appropriate for removing something that has outgrown its usefulness, particularly if there is no longer an energy source to refuel its growth, and is part of the rhythm of growth, birth and death.

**Table 1. Goals and Methods**

Goal to Be Achieved	Level of Will Expression			
	Personality	Soul	Triad	Monad
Protection	Reflective shielding Incantations			
Removal of hindrances & toxicity	Purification	Substitution Occult obliteration	Neutralization Transmutation	Burning up
Removal of energy source	Attrition	Restitution Elimination Absorption	Dampening	Abstraction Cauterization
Stimulation of inbuilt defenses			Inoculation	Pruning back
Annihilation				Cleansing Breaking up crystallization
<b>Primary Cosmic Law*</b>	Law of Economy	Law of Attraction	Law of Repulse	Law of Synthesis
<b>Primary Method</b>	Visualization	Light	Sound	Fire

\* Supplemented by the systemic laws of Disintegration and of Sacrifice and Death.

Operating under the Law of Attraction, the Soul Will also manifests its destructive aspect through the removal of attention or focussed energy so that magnetic bonds dissipate and the form can no longer coalesce. “Divine indifference” is a variation on this form of destructive use of the will as it deprives glamor or astral substance of attention and thus of energy.<sup>12</sup> The Law of Attraction, which provides coherence in manifestation, also brings about the imbalance that results in the dissolution of the physical body (“restitution”), the dissipation of the emotional and mental bodies (“elimination”), and the integration of the soul back into the universal soul (“absorption”).<sup>13</sup> Lest we fear death, “...we need to remember

that the worst death of all (as far as humanity is concerned) would be if a form of civilization or a body form became static and eternal; if the old order never altered and the old values were never transmuted into higher and better ones, that would indeed be a disaster.”<sup>14</sup>

*The Triadal Will.* The Triadal Will manifests its destructive aspect not only through the withdrawal of energy but also through its active ability to neutralize toxic or negative energy. While the Triadal Will can make use of the creative imagination (visualization) and of light, it operates primarily through the Law of Repulse. It can also utilize the power of sound and the Words of Power, which function by

causing an expansion of the targeted form until it breaks up or explodes.<sup>15</sup>

At this level of the Will, we have both the ability and the responsibility to destroy the astral phenomena for which we are creatively responsible, as well as destroying some proportion of astral substance that, although we did not create it, was created by groups with which we are affiliated.<sup>16</sup> Simply withdrawing attention or loosening the bonds of magnetic attraction under the Law of Attraction is not enough.<sup>17</sup> Here we are engaged in the active destruction of energized thoughtforms that have substance. Through the Triadal Will, we use both streams of light and Words of Power, united in expression through the three triadal levels, to combat the vibrant astral world.<sup>18</sup>

Using the Triadal Will, we are able to absorb, dissolve, and transmute destructive energies and dampen or neutralize evil emanations or vibrations.<sup>19</sup> They may also be rendered harmless through additional techniques such as helping others to resist evil through “inoculation” with alternate mental ideas or attitudes. The hallmark of the destructive work of the Triadal Will is that the component parts of a substance remain basically intact though harmless.

*The Monadic Will.* The most dramatic destructive aspect of the will with which we interact (while we operate within the cosmic physical plane) is the fiery power of the Monadic Will, which is used to cleanse in the sense of utterly destroy. The Monadic Will operates under the Law of Synthesis.<sup>20</sup> Through the appropriate channelling of fiery energy, we become able to “burn up” all that hinders the work of the divine will.<sup>21</sup> This process results in a much more thorough destruction of that which is old and hindering than does the transmuting func-

tion of the Triadal Will. If we wish to break up and dissipate once and for all the ancient thoughtform (composed of all the selfishness and fuelled by our worst desires and actions) that hovers over the human race, the work must be done at the level of the Monadic Will.<sup>22</sup>

One of the specific acts of destruction for which the Monadic Will is responsible is the burning up of the causal body at the fourth initiation when the soul is recognized as a hindrance to direct communication and energy flow between the monad and the personality.<sup>23</sup>

As It focuses directly on the personality via the antahkarana, the Monadic Will also burns up any remaining elements of self-will.<sup>24</sup>

Working with energy from Shamballa, the Monadic Will is also capable of abstracting the sources of evil within this planetary system – i.e., calling them forth so that they no longer simply fester under the surface of human awareness and then sealing them off in a kind of “cauterization” process so that they are blocked from creating further dam-

---

**Once we are operating at the level of the Soul Will, we become able to use light as a destructive medium under the Law of Attraction. One of the roles of the soul is to assist in the purification process through the power of focused light energy, eliminating all that hinders divine manifestation by gradually substituting good for evil.**

---

age.<sup>25</sup>

Another function of the Monadic Will is the cyclic destruction of older forms, thereby stimulating new growth and diversity.<sup>26</sup> This function is much like the pruning back that gardeners do in order to encourage more healthy or productive or resilient structures. Care is needed to conceptualize this process as dynamic and not get caught up in a belief that the goal of our evolution is “perfection” – which is a static state that ultimately becomes “evil.”

The Monadic Will is the closest energy that we have in this solar system to the ability to annihilate or reduce to virtual nothingness. This

use of fire is based on the Law of Sacrifice, related to the will-to-good, and lays the foundation for a new round of creative building based on sounder values.<sup>27</sup> This energy can be used to destroy planetary evil, though the destruction of cosmic evil must be left to a level of will energy that operates from outside of the cosmic physical plane (i.e., from the cosmic mental level). Remembering the strengthening effect of “pruning back,” it is important that any annihilation is thorough, as partial annihilation could ultimately strengthen those thoughtforms being targeted.

### Use of Destructive Energy in Service

When we describe the initiatory process as the traversing of the “burning ground,” we are in essence describing our engagement with the destructive aspect of the Will. Our service work, to be effective, must contain elements of this destructive process as the cycle of change begins with the breaking down of the old forms and ideas. “When the true nature of Service is comprehended, it will be found that it is an aspect of that divine energy which works always under the destroyer aspect, for it destroys the forms in order to release. Service is a manifestation of the Principle of Liberation, and of this principle, death and service, constitute two aspects.”<sup>28</sup>

There are five basic stages in the successful destructive use of the will:<sup>29</sup>

- a) Determining the nature of the goal to be achieved  
This is a critical and often overlooked stage without which we can potentially exacerbate the problem or, at a minimum, be less than effective. For example, by simply “sending light” to a situation where there are inimical forces at work, we can actually provide those forces with more energy to do harm. Or, by not recognizing that there is toxic energy to be abstracted first, we can “seal in” that toxic energy that then continues to fester under the surface.
- b) Identifying the resources available to achieve the goal

The resources available will depend on whether we are looking in general for a solution to be implemented by a group or whether we are focused more specifically on what we ourselves can do. If the former, we need to determine whether or not there are resources beyond our direct control that we could evoke as a group. If the latter, we need to take into account our own level of spiritual development (i.e., the level of Will expression available to us) and our ray structure (in terms of how we are likely to express the will-to-be energy).

- c) Selecting the method to be used  
We also need to identify which of the four basic methods would be most appropriate, and then review the related laws and their operations.
- d) Implementing the appropriate strategy  
Once we are clear on what is needed and the best role we can play, we need to act accordingly – whether it is to withdraw attention from the source of difficulty or to neutralize astral debris or to burn out negative thought forms.
- e) Stabilizing the results  
To be effective over time, there needs to be a period of stabilization to make sure that the change has taken hold and that we have a firm foundation for the next cycle of spiritual growth.

The critical element in all of this is our intentionality. It is easy to see that cruelty or domination or selfish wilfulness need to be removed. More generally, though, “evil” is based in the heresy of separateness – the viewing of others as different from ourselves, as persons to be managed or protected or manipulated. If we impose ideas or concepts on others, even with the “best of intentions,” we are also infringing on free will and perpetuating the very evil that we set out to destroy. In dealing with others who have no such scruples, it can be very tempting to believe that the end will justify the means, forgetting that how we are in the world in fact shapes our world. Instead, we need to be careful to use destructive

energy always in a context of compassion and harmlessness.

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Alice A. Bailey. *The Externalisation of the Hierarchy*. Lucis, 1957, p. 518.
  - <sup>2</sup> Alice A. Bailey. *The Rays and the Initiations*. Lucis, 1960, pp. 750-752.
  - <sup>3</sup> Alice A. Bailey. *Esoteric Astrology*. Lucis, 1951, pp. 605-606.
  - <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 597.
  - <sup>5</sup> Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations*, p. 311.
  - <sup>6</sup> Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, p. 598.
  - <sup>7</sup> Alice A. Bailey. *Esoteric Psychology, Vol. II*. Lucis, 1942, p. 144.
  - <sup>8</sup> Alice A. Bailey. *A Treatise on White Magic*. Lucis, 1934, pp. 318-319.
  - <sup>9</sup> Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations*, pp. 30-31.
  - <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210.
  - <sup>11</sup> Alice A. Bailey. *Glamour: A World Problem*. Lucis, 1950, pp. 270-271.
  - <sup>12</sup> Alice A. Bailey. *Discipleship in the New Age, Vol. I*. Lucis, 1944, p. 88.
  - <sup>13</sup> Alice A. Bailey. *Esoteric Healing*. Lucis, 1953, pp. 433-434.
  - <sup>14</sup> Bailey, *The Externalisation of the Hierarchy*, p. 115.
  - <sup>15</sup> Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic*, pp. 318-319.
  - <sup>16</sup> Alice A. Bailey. *Discipleship in the New Age, Vol. II*. Lucis, 1955, pp. 378-379. Also: Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations*, p. 306.
  - <sup>17</sup> Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations*, p. 307.
  - <sup>18</sup> Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age, Vol. II*, pp. 378-379.
  - <sup>19</sup> Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic*, pp. 318-319.
  - <sup>20</sup> Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations*, p. 310.
  - <sup>21</sup> Bailey, *The Externalisation of the Hierarchy*, p. 536.
  - <sup>22</sup> Alice A. Bailey. *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*. Lucis, 1925, p. 948.
  - <sup>23</sup> Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations*, pp. 223, 316-317.
  - <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.
  - <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87. Also: Bailey, *The Externalisation of the Hierarchy*, p. 701.
  - <sup>26</sup> Bailey, *Esoteric Healing*, pp. 670-671.
  - <sup>27</sup> Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age: Vol. II*, p. 402.
  - <sup>28</sup> Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic*, p. 537.
  - <sup>29</sup> Adapted from Bailey, *The Externalisation of the Hierarchy*, p. 692.

# The Way of Salvation in the Gnostic Gospel of Truth

Zachary F. Lansdowne

---

## Summary

The *Gospel of Truth* is an early work of Christian mysticism that presents a path of salvation that differs markedly from that of modern mainstream Christianity. The purpose of this article is to explain that mystical path. The *Gospel of Truth* is sometimes puzzling to read, because we have only translations of an ancient translation, and because the original composition was written in a symbolic and veiled manner. This article will elucidate the puzzling passages by relating them to contemporary spiritual teachings.

## Background

Coptic, or Coptic Egyptian, is nearly extinct, but once flourished as a literary language. Two Coptic versions of the *Gospel of Truth* were discovered in 1945 at Nag Hammadi in Egypt as part of an extensive collection of ancient Gnostic texts. One Coptic version is largely intact but the other is in fragments. Thought to be originally written in Greek, this Gospel is presently available only in these two Coptic versions, and in various translations derived from these Coptic versions.

Neither of the surviving Coptic versions includes an explicit title. The title “Gospel of Truth” was given to the composition, because these words appear at the beginning of its first sentence:

The gospel of truth is joy to those who have received from the Father of truth the gift of knowing him by the power of the Logos, who has come from the pleroma and who is in the thought and the mind of the Father; he it is who is called “the Saviour,” since that is the name of the work which he must do for

the redemption of those who have not known the Father. (Grant 16:31-17:1)<sup>1</sup>

As indicated by this first sentence, the *Gospel of Truth* is concerned with salvation or redemption. Here, “Father” is the name used for God. “Logos” is the Greek word that is often translated as “Word,” such as in the first verse of the *Gospel of John*: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”<sup>2</sup> “Pleroma” is the Greek word that literally means “fullness” and refers to the spiritual realm. This first sentence indicates that human beings do not achieve salvation alone and unaided; instead, we can receive help from the Logos, who has come forth from the pleroma and is called “the Savior.” Thus, the Logos is the mediating principle between the Father and human beings, and its nature and function are described throughout the rest of the *Gospel of Truth*.

The *Gospel of Truth* is anonymous, but it is sometimes attributed to Valentinus, who was an influential Gnostic Christian teacher during the second century C.E. Bentley Layton, a professor of religious studies, considers such an attribution to be plausible for the following reasons: 1) the *Gospel of Truth* has a stylistic resemblance to known fragments of Valentinus’ writings; 2) the reputed eloquence of Valentinus makes him a good candidate to have composed such an eloquent gospel; and 3) the *Gospel of Truth* lacks certain themes and

---

## About the Author

Zachary Lansdowne, Ph.D., served as President of the Theosophical Society in Boston. His book: *The Revelation of Saint John*, which provides a verse-by-verse analysis of the entire *Revelation*, was reviewed in the Fall 2006 issue of the *Quarterly*.

features found in more complex Valentinian systems of thought, which suggests an early date of composition.<sup>3</sup>

Irenaeus of Lyons, in his work commonly called *Against Heresies*, referred to a composition titled the “Gospel of Truth” that was written by followers of Valentinus: “But the followers of Valentinus, putting away all fear, bring forward their own compositions and boast that they have more Gospels than really exist. Indeed their audacity has gone so far that they entitle their recent composition the *Gospel of Truth*, though it agrees in nothing with the Gospels of the apostles, and so no Gospel of theirs is free from blasphemy.”<sup>4</sup>

If the *Gospel of Truth* found at Nag Hammadi is the same work mentioned by Irenaeus, then it probably would have been composed before 180 C.E., because that is when Irenaeus’ work is usually dated. If the *Gospel of Truth* was written by Valentinus, then it probably would have been composed prior to 160 C.E., because that is often said to be the year in which he died.

## Methodology

To understand some of the symbols used in the *Gospel of Truth*, we will consider related verses from the Bible. The *Gospel of Truth* does not make any direct citation of biblical text, but it includes numerous allusions to both Old and New Testament verses, sometimes combining those allusions. Even though the New Testament canon had not been identified at the time the *Gospel of Truth* was composed, this Gospel alludes to verses in *Matthew*, *Luke*, *John*, *Romans*, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, *Ephesians*, *Colossians*, *Hebrews*, *1 John*, and *Revelation*.<sup>5</sup>

We will show that the key ideas in the *Gospel of Truth* are similar to those found in several contemporary spiritual teachings: the writings of Alice A. Bailey, who was a theosophist; the writings of Joel S. Goldsmith, who was a Christian mystic; and *A Course in Miracles (ACIM)*, which is a system of Christian mysticism. This demonstration will serve to clarify the *Gospel of Truth*, since a passage originally composed in modern English ought to be eas-

ier to understand than a translation of an ancient translation that is missing some words.

## Nature of Error

The purpose of this article is to explain the way of salvation that is described in the *Gospel of Truth*. Before the Gospel sets forth that way, however, it describes the condition from which we need to be saved:

Ignorance of the father caused agitation and fear. And the agitation grew dense like fog, so that no one could see. Thus error found strength and labored at her matter in emptiness. Without having learned to know the truth, she took up residence in a modeled form, preparing by means of the power, in beauty, a substitute for truth. (Layton 17:10-20)

Here, we are told that ignorance of the Father leads to error, and that error did not know the truth and prepared a substitute for truth. This notion of error plays a central role in the *Gospel of Truth*, but to what does it refer? Harold W. Attridge, a historian of religion, acknowledges the “difficulty in assessing the provenance and affiliation of Error.”<sup>6</sup> Some scholars have suggested that this “error” corresponds to the mythical figures of Sophia,<sup>7</sup> Demiurge,<sup>8</sup> or Isis.<sup>9</sup> We, however, make another suggestion here.

Let us consider the next passage:

This, then, was not a humiliation for him, that illimitable, inconceivable one. For they were as nothing, this terror and this forgetfulness and this figure of falsehood, whereas this established truth is unchanging, unperurbed and completely beautiful. For this reason, do not take error too seriously. Thus, since it had no root, it was in a fog as regards the Father, engaged in preparing works and forgetfulnesses and fears in order, by these means, to beguile those of the middle and to make them captive. (Grant 17:21-36)

Here, we are told that error is a figure of falsehood, a nothing, and lacking a root, but having the ability to beguile and capture human beings. Later, the text refers to error by using both the terms “illusion” and “devil”:



Since there had been terror and confusion and uncertainty and doubt and division, there were many illusions among them. . . Do not be a place for the devil, for you have already destroyed him. (Meyer 29:2-6; 33:19-21)<sup>10</sup>

In the Bible, the term “devil” sometimes refers to a tempter—not a power or person, but an impersonal source of evil offering temptation. For example, *Luke 4:13* states, “And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season.” From this point of view, sin does not originate in us; instead, an external tempter—the devil—has tempted us into sin. In and of itself, the devil has no power over us; it only appears to have power if we succumb to its temptation.

In summary, the *Gospel of Truth* characterizes error in the following ways: product of ignorance, fashioner of truth’s substitute, figure of falsehood, nothingness, lacking a root, beguiler and captor of human beings, illusion, and devil. The following definition, which we will use in this article, is consistent with all of these characterizations: “error” is the devil in the sense of consisting of illusions, or false beliefs, that are part of our environment and can beguile human beings, but do not originate from any particular person.

Several contemporary writers employ the same notion of error in their books. For example, Goldsmith states: “It is not your patient who is responsible for his ills, nor is it anybody else. It is not your patient who is responsible for his nature or his character—or lack of it. It is only his ignorance of how to separate himself from these impersonal or devilish influences which come to him as temptations or suggestions but which, in and of themselves, are nothing until he accepts or believes them.”<sup>11</sup> Here, Goldsmith agrees with several characterizations used for error in the *Gospel of Truth*: product of ignorance, nothingness, beguiler and captor of human beings, illusion, and devil.

Bailey says, “The world is full of illusions, many of them veiled under the form of idealisms.”<sup>12</sup> Many political, economic, religious, and social ideals exist in the world around us. If we accept an ideal and pursue it in a fanati-

cal way, trying to impose it on someone else, then that ideal has become an error for us. Thus, we may say that any ideal with fanatical adherents is an instance of error, illusion, or the devil.

## Book of the Living

The Greek word “gnosis” can have the same meaning as the English phrase “knowledge of the Father.” Andrew Robison, a theologian, explains: “Broadly speaking, this gnosis is an understanding of the totality of existence and one’s self in the context of this totality.”<sup>13</sup> In a passage quoted in the last section, we are told that ignorance of the Father leads to error. Because the opposite of ignorance is knowledge, knowledge of the Father, or gnosis, brings about our salvation, which is freedom from error.

A book is a symbol for knowledge. To represent the knowledge necessary for our salvation, the *Gospel of Truth* uses the symbol of the “Book of the Living,” which alludes to the “book of life” in *Revelation 13:8*.<sup>14</sup> The first passage that mentions this book is:

In their hearts the living book of the living was revealed, the book that was written in the father’s thought and mind and was, since the foundation of all, in his incomprehensible nature. (Meyer 19:34-20:3)

The Apostle Paul spoke of the “power to establish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began” (*Romans 16:25*). Kendrick Grobel, a professor of biblical theology, interprets the book mentioned by the *Gospel of Truth* as being that ancient mystery: “The ‘Book’ of which it often speaks is this preliterary gospel of Paul which is pre-existent not merely to Christ’s advent but to the universe itself insofar as the author identifies it with the Living Book of the Living.”<sup>15</sup>

Because the Book of the Living “was written in the father’s thought and mind,” we consider this book to be what *Isaiah 55:9* calls the “thoughts” of God and what theosophical writers call the “plane of divine ideas.” The “book

of life” in *Revelation* 13:8 can also be interpreted as the plane of divine ideas.<sup>16</sup>

According to another passage, the Father reveals the Book of the Living as knowledge:

For he revealed it as a knowledge with which all its emanations agree, namely, the knowledge of the living book which he revealed to the Aeons at last as his letters, displaying to them that these are not merely vowels nor consonants, so that one may read them and think of something void of meaning; on the contrary, they are letters which convey the truth. They are pronounced only

when they are known. Each letter is a perfect truth like a perfect book, for they are letters written by the hand of the unity, since the Father wrote them for the Aeons, so that they by means of his letters might come to know the Father.  
(Grant 22:35-23:18)

Aeon is the Greek word that often means age or lifetime. Various Gnostic myths use the term “Aeons” to designate the mythical inhabitants of the pleroma, and so some scholars assume that this term has a similar meaning in the *Gospel of Truth*.<sup>17</sup> Throughout the Gospel, however, statements made concerning Aeons are true for human beings. For example, in the above passage, Aeons are said to be ignorant of the Father but can learn about him. Moreover, *Colossians* 1:26 uses Aeons to denote the men and women who live in the various ages, or periods, of the world. Consequently, some scholars believe that the term “Aeons,” in the Gospel, refers both to the inhabitants of the pleroma and to human beings.<sup>18</sup> For simplicity, our suggestion is to take Aeons as denoting only human beings, rather than as referring to some other kind of entity.

In the above passage, we take each letter as representing a single divine idea, because “each letter is a perfect truth.” Knowing these divine ideas is a key step in the way of salvation, because these letters were written “so that they by means of his letters might come to know the Father.” Thus, these divine ideas convey knowledge of the Father, or gnosis.

The metaphor of these letters suggests that these divine ideas are received and grasped progressively and serially. Examples of these divine ideas might include the following realizations listed by Bailey: “Through the intuition, progressive understanding of the ways of God in the world and on behalf of humanity are revealed; through the intuition, the transcendence and the immanence of God is sequentially grasped and man can enter into that pure knowledge, that inspired reason, which will enable him to comprehend not only the processes of nature in its fivefold divine expression but also the underlying causes of these processes.”<sup>19</sup>

The *Gospel of Truth* also states:

This is the perfection in the thought of the Father and these are the

words of his reflection. Each one of his words is the work of his will alone, in the revelation of his Logos. Since they were in the depth of his mind, the Logos, who was the first to come forth, caused them to appear, along with an intellect which speaks the unique word by means of a silent grace.  
(Grant 36:39-37:12)

This passage indicates that the Logos can transmit the thoughts of God to the intellect, or human mind, by means of a silent grace. In Bailey’s metaphysical system, the notion of the “soul” plays the same role as the Logos. Bailey agrees with the foregoing passage by writ-

---

**[T]he Gospel of Truth characterizes error in the following ways: product of ignorance, fashioner of truth’s substitute, figure of falsehood, nothingness, lacking a root, beguiler and captor of human beings, illusion, and devil. “[E]rror” is the devil in the sense of consisting of illusions, or false beliefs, that are part of our environment and can beguile human beings, but do not originate from any particular person.**

---

ing, “the soul is consciously aware . . . of the thoughts of God” and it is “possible for the soul to act as the intermediary between the plane of divine ideas and the mental plane.”<sup>20</sup>

## Receptive Meditation

**H**ow can we learn these divine ideas? The *Gospel of Truth* answers this question in two passages:

But those who are to be taught, the living who are inscribed in the book of the living, learn for themselves, receiving instructions from the Father, turning to him again. (Grant 21:3-8)

This is the word of the gospel about the discovery of fullness, for those who await salvation coming from above. Their hope, for which they are waiting, is in waiting, and this is their image, the light in which there is no shadow. (Meyer 34:36-35:6)

In the first passage, we are encouraged to turn inwardly to the Father and receive his instructions. In the second passage, we are encouraged to wait for the “salvation coming from above,” which is also called “the light in which there is no shadow.” Let us combine both answers: we need to turn inwardly to the Father, be receptive toward his instructions, and wait patiently for them. Such turning, receptivity, and waiting characterize the practice of what has been called “receptive meditation.”

In the Old Testament, *1 Samuel* 3:9 describes the attitude of receptive meditation: “Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth.” Bailey describes it as follows: “Definitely and with full concentrated interest and attention—you orient yourself to the soul; you stand consciously ready for impression. What that impression will convey, what thought will come to you or what call to service will sound forth, you know not. Your attitude is one of a radiant, silent, poised expectancy. . . Note (if it comes) the emergence of some clear thought, the clarification of some bewilderment, the expansion of some mental perception into an intuition.”<sup>21</sup>

During receptive meditation, we listen for the voice of the Father. The *Gospel of Truth*, in the next passage, indicates that this voice is actually the Holy Spirit:

For, as for everyone who loves the truth—because the truth is the mouth of the Father; his tongue is the Holy Spirit—he who is joined to the truth is joined to the Father’s mouth by his tongue, whenever he is to receive the Holy Spirit, since this is the manifestation of the Father, and his revelation to his aeons. (Attridge 26:33-27:7)<sup>22</sup>

*ACIM* agrees with this passage by saying that “the Holy Spirit is the Communication Link between God the Father and His separated Sons.”<sup>23</sup> Although mainstream Christianity considers the Holy Spirit to be different from the Logos, the *Gospel of Truth* uses these terms as synonyms, as shown by earlier quotations that refer to each as a revelation and as the factor that causes the words of God to appear.<sup>24</sup>

## Application of Knowledge

**M**ysticism is defined as “any doctrine that asserts the possibility of obtaining knowledge of spiritual truths through intuition acquired by fixed meditation.”<sup>25</sup> The *Gospel of Truth* has a mystical orientation, as shown by the passage quoted earlier that says, “In their hearts the living book of the living was revealed.” We take this passage to mean that a divine idea from the Book of the Living is revealed during receptive meditation as intuitive understanding, because *Proverbs* 14:33 says, “Wisdom resteth in the heart of him that hath understanding.” Grobel has a similar interpretation: “Unlike ordinary books, which can be vocalized without understanding, this ‘Book’ can be read at all only by understanding.”<sup>26</sup>

What happens to error when we receive intuitive understanding of a divine idea? The *Gospel of Truth* gives this answer:

Error was agitated, and she did not know what to do. She was troubled, she lamented, she attacked herself, because she knew nothing. For knowledge, which leads to the destruction of error and all her expressions, approached. Error is empty; there is nothing within her. (Meyer 26:19-27)

*ACIM* gives a similar answer: “What can correct illusions but the truth? And what are errors but illusions that remain unrecognized for what

they are? Where truth has entered errors disappear. They merely vanish, leaving not a trace by which to be remembered. They are gone because, without belief, they have no life. And so they disappear to nothingness, returning whence they came.”<sup>27</sup>

The *Gospel of Truth* makes a strange statement regarding the Book of the Living:

No one had been able to take up this book, since it was ordained that the one who would take it up would be slain. And nothing could appear among those who believed in salvation unless that book had come out. (Meyer 20:3-9)

What does it mean to say that whoever would take up this book would be slain? Two kinds of death can be found in the Bible. The loss of physical life is the first kind mentioned, namely, in *Genesis* 3:19. Paul, however, refers to the second kind of death when he says, “I die daily” (*1 Corinthians* 15:31). This second kind is the progressive elimination of selfishness, and it occurs on a daily basis until the process of self-purification has been completed. The “second death” in *Revelation* 2:11 can be interpreted as the second kind of death.<sup>28</sup>

Assuming that the Gospel is referring to the second kind of death, it is making the following point. Receiving intuitive understanding of a divine idea will dispel the illusions that oppose this idea, but it may not eliminate our habitual thoughts, feelings, and behavior that are based on those illusions. Consequently, simply receiving understanding of a divine idea is not sufficient; we must also take up the Book of the Living in the sense of applying our new knowledge from that book, eliminating everything in our lower nature that is inconsistent with this knowledge.

The Gospel describes how people undergo such self-purification:

By means of knowledge they will purify themselves from multiplicity into unity, devouring matter within themselves like fire, darkness by light, death by life. (Meyer 25:12-19)

What might these symbols mean? *Ephesians* 4:25 speaks of the essential unity of human beings: “for we are members one of another.” So, in the above passage, “multiplicity” might refer to feelings that human beings are separated into multiple divisions. *Galatians* 5:24 states, “And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.” In the above passage, “devouring matter within themselves” might be equivalent to crucifying the flesh, in which case it would imply eliminating passions and lusts. *Proverbs* 28:13 states, “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper,” and so “darkness” might denote repressions, which are covered sins. *1 John* 3:15 states, “Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer,” so “death” might refer to all forms of hatred, including resentment and anger.

In summary, these two quotations are interpreted as having essentially the same meaning: “it was ordained that the one who would take it [this book] up would be slain”; and “by means of knowledge they will purify themselves.” Accordingly, we need to take any new divine idea that we receive from the Book of the Living and use it to slay ourselves psychologically, so that we purify our thoughts, feelings, and behavior. Bailey makes a similar point: “Through the disciple’s grasp and application of these divine ideas or seed thoughts, he becomes initiate,”<sup>29</sup> where the term “initiate” connotes spiritual attainment.

## Role of Jesus

In the *Gospel of Truth*, the principal emanation of the Father is called both the “Word” and “Son.”<sup>30</sup> In mainstream Christianity, Jesus is considered to be identical with both the Word and Son. Attridge and MacRae, however, say that in the *Gospel of Truth* “the relationship between the Son and Jesus remains obscure” and “no explicit distinction is made between the two figures.”<sup>31</sup>

Let us clarify Jesus’ role in the *Gospel of Truth*. The first passage mentioning him is:

Through the hidden mystery Jesus the Christ enlightened those who were in darkness because of forgetfulness. He enlightened them

and showed the way, and that way is the truth he taught them. (Meyer 18:11-21)

Thus, Jesus enlightened his followers through his teachings.

The Gospel continues:

For this reason error was angry with him and persecuted him, but she was restrained by him and made powerless. He was nailed to a tree, and he became fruit of the knowledge of the father. This fruit of the tree, however, did not bring destruction when it was eaten, but rather it caused those who ate of it to come into being. (Meyer 18:21-29)

The tree in this passage is related to both the tree on which Jesus was crucified and the tree in *Genesis 2:17*. The knowledge that Jesus brings “causes those who ate of it to come into being,” suggesting that those who receive this knowledge are transformed into a new and higher state of existence.

Another passage about Jesus states:

Jesus became a guide, a person of rest who was busy in places of instruction. He came forward and spoke the word as a teacher. Those wise in their own eyes came to test him, but he refuted them, for they were foolish, and they hated him because they were not really wise. After them came the little children, who have knowledge of the father. When they gained strength and learned about the expressions of the father, they knew, they were known, they were glorified, they gave glory. (Meyer 19:21-34)

This passage is related to *Luke 18:16-17*, which also mentions “little children.” Here, we are told to become as little children in the sense of being humble, if we wish to be saved.

The *Gospel of Truth* describes Jesus’ speech:

But the materialists were alien and did not behold his likeness nor recognize him, although he came forth incarnate in form. Nothing obstructs his course—for imperishability is indomitable. Moreover he proclaimed beforehand that which was new, expressing what is in the heart of the Father and bringing forth the flawless Logos. (Brown 31:1-12)<sup>32</sup>

The foregoing translation characterizes Jesus’

speech as “bringing forth the flawless Logos.” Other translations render this phrase as: “he had produced the Word that has no defect”,<sup>33</sup> and “he had brought forth the flawless Word.”<sup>34</sup> By saying that Jesus brought forth, or produced, the Logos, this passage seems to be making a distinction between Jesus and the Logos.

Other works in the Valentinian Christian tradition explicitly make this distinction, stating that the human Jesus was redeemed by being joined with the Logos at his baptism.

For example, Theodotus, one of Valentinus’ second-century followers, speaks of “the Name which descended upon Jesus in the dove and redeemed him” (*Excerpts of Theodotus 22*).<sup>35</sup> Here, the “Name” is a reference to the Logos, as discussed later in this article; and the “dove” relates to Jesus’ baptism, as shown by *Matthew 3:16*.

The *Gospel of Truth* provides more information about Jesus’ role:

When he entered the empty ways of fear, he passed by those stripped by forgetfulness. For he encompasses knowledge and perfec-

---

**The *Gospel of Truth* describes three stages on the way of salvation: first, the stage of receiving divine ideas from the Logos and then applying them to purify our lower nature; second, the stage of acting as if the Logos were in charge of our lives, even though many illusions still remain in us; and third, the stage of rest, in which our lower nature is restful because our illusions are largely absent, permitting the Logos to act through us.**

---

tion, and he proclaims what is in the heart.  
(Meyer 20:34-39)

Thus, we have two teachers: the inner teacher who speaks in our hearts, sometimes called the Logos, Word, Son, or Holy Spirit, which the Gospel uses as synonyms; and the outer teacher, Jesus, who brought forth the Logos and thereby outwardly proclaimed what we are receiving in our hearts.

In particular, Jesus outwardly disclosed the content of the Book of the Living:

Jesus appeared, put on that book, was nailed to a tree, and published the father's edict on the cross. Oh, what a great teaching! He humbled himself even unto death, though clothed in eternal life. He stripped off the perishable rags and clothed himself in incorruptibility, which no one can take from him.  
(Meyer 20:23-34)

In conclusion, as presented in the *Gospel of Truth*, Jesus brought forth the Logos into the external world, and his life and death serve to corroborate outwardly the teachings that we receive from the Logos within our hearts.

### **As-If Behavior**

**L**et us summarize the meaning of the Book of the Living. This book symbolizes the knowledge of the Father, or gnosis, that we must learn to be saved. Each letter in this book symbolizes a divine idea. Reading a letter symbolizes receiving intuitive understanding of the corresponding divine idea. Because the letters are read sequentially, this book defines a journey of discovery that begins with the reading of the first letter and ends with the reading of the final letter. As described by *ACIM*, "The journey to God is merely the re-awakening of the knowledge of where you are always, and what you are forever. It is a journey without distance to a goal that has never changed."<sup>36</sup>

For those aspirants who have made some progress on this journey, the later part of the *Gospel of Truth* provides more advanced instruction, starting with this admonition:

Speak from (the perspective of) the superior day, in which there is no night; and from the star that does not set, since it is perfect.

Speak, therefore, from the heart, for it is you who are the day that is perfect, and it is within you that there dwells the star that does not set. Speak of the truth with those who seek it, and of acquaintance with those who have sinned in the midst of their error. Make steady the feet of those who have stumbled, and stretch out your hands to those who are sick. Feed those who are hungry, and unto those who are weary give repose; and awaken those who wish to arise, and get up from your sleep. For it is you who are unsheathed intelligence. If strengthening is thus, it is truly strong.  
(Layton 32:26-33:11)

Here, "the star that does not set" refers to the Logos, which is said to be within us. Because we are told to speak from the perspective of "the star that does not set," we are encouraged to speak as though the Logos were illuminating our thoughts and words.

The next passage in the Gospel tells us to refrain from giving our attention to those things that we have cast away:

Do not focus your attention upon other things—that is, what you have cast away from yourselves. Do not return to eat what you have vomited. Do not be moth-eaten, do not be worm-eaten, for you have already gotten rid of that. Do not be a place for the devil, for you have already destroyed him. Do not strengthen what stands in your way, what is collapsing, to support it. (Meyer 33:12-23)

In other words, if we do give our attention to the impurities that we have discarded, we are actually strengthening them and bringing them back into our lives.

The foregoing instruction assumes that we have reached an intermediate stage on our journey: we have discovered that we can be illumined by the Logos through receptive meditation, but still are attracted to habitual thoughts and feelings based on illusions, even to thoughts and feelings that we have already cast away from ourselves. According to the principle "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he" (*Proverbs 23:7*), we can become illumined by regarding ourselves as illumined and acting

as though we were illumined. The foregoing instruction encourages us to proceed in that way.

Bailey calls the resulting activity the “as-if type of behavior” in the following passage, where she uses “soul” as a synonym for the Logos:

There comes a time in the disciple’s life when he must assume that he knows; he must take the position that he comprehends, and must proceed to act upon the comprehended knowledge. . . Govern yourself always “as if” your divine comprehension was perfected and the result in your daily life will be “as if” all concealed glammers and all hiding deceptive veils were non-existent. . . The as if-type of behaviour (for the disciple) brings in a still higher factor than that of thought; it involves the constant attempt to live as if the soul (not the mind but through the mind) is in constant control and the dominating aspect of expression.<sup>37</sup>

### The Father’s Name

Near its end, the *Gospel of Truth* includes an extensive discussion on the Father’s name, beginning with the following passage:

The name of the father is the son. In the beginning he gave a name to the one who came from him, while he remained the same, and he conceived him as a son. He gave him his name, which belonged to him. (Meyer 38:7-12)

In two verses of the New Testament (*John* 17:12 and *Philippians* 2:9), Jesus is said to have received the divine name. Thus, the notion that the Son possesses the divine name is part of mainstream Christianity. A distinctive feature in the *Gospel of Truth* is that the Son is said to be identical with the divine name, not just a possessor of it.

Einar Thomassen, a professor of the history of religions, acknowledges that the Valentinian notion of the divine name is a “puzzling theme.”<sup>38</sup> Consequently, there have been a number of studies on this theme, some of which have examined the historical derivation of the divine name from Jewish theology, other studies have used later works in the Valentinian

tradition to clarify how the divine name is used in earlier works, and still others have drawn on semiotic theory, which considers the process by which meaning arises in human communication. Next, we present our own approach.

John L. McKenzie, a biblical scholar, says, “It is a widespread cultural phenomenon that the name is considered to be more than an artificial tag which distinguishes one person from another . . . but it is thought to tell something of the kind of person he is.”<sup>39</sup> The Bible often uses a personal name as an indication of the bearer’s nature. For example, *1 Samuel* 25:25 states: “for as his name is, so is he.” A change in the personal name often indicates a change in the person, such as the change from Abram to Abraham (*Genesis* 17:5). In *Revelation*, “name” can be consistently interpreted as “nature.”<sup>40</sup> Similarly, our approach here is consistently to interpret “name” as “nature.”

The *Gospel of Truth* speaks of the “heart of the Father” at one point, and the “hot pleroma of love” at another point (Grant 31:11, 34:30-31). As given earlier, the first sentence in the *Gospel* states that the Logos “has come from the pleroma,” and so we may say that the Logos has come from love. Because *1 John* 4:8 states that “God is love,” we may say that the nature, or “name,” of the Father is love. In addition, Bailey says, “The Word is issuing from the heart of God, emerging from a central point of love. That Word is love itself.”<sup>41</sup> If Bailey is correct, then we may say that the Logos, or Word, is the “name of the Father,” because the Logos is “love itself.”

Here is another passage concerned with the Father’s name:

When it was pleasing to the father that his son should be his pronounced name, and when he who came from the depth disclosed this name, he divulged what was hidden, for he knew that the father is free of evil. That is why the father brought him forth, so that he might speak about the place from which he had come and his place of rest, and that he might glorify the fullness, the majesty of his name, and the father’s sweetness. (Meyer 40:23-41:3)

The above passage states that the Son came “from the depth” and “divulged what was hidden.” Accordingly, the Father operates from a hidden, deep realm, and so his nature cannot be directly sensed or appreciated by human beings. But the Father’s Son, which is the Logos or Word, has come into our world, and so the nature of the Logos can be directly sensed and appreciated by human beings. Because “his son should be his pronounced name,” the Logos is actually the expression, or manifestation, of the Father’s nature within our world.

Here is a third passage regarding the Father’s name:

Who then can utter his name, the great name, except him alone to whom the name belongs, and the children of the name, on whom the father’s name rests, and who themselves rest on his name? (Meyer 38:25-32)

This passage indicates that it is possible for human beings to “utter his name,” which means that it is possible for us to express the divine nature within our own lives. But, for us to be “children of the name,” the Father’s name must rest on us, and we must rest on his name. In other words, we must be aware of the divine nature within us and we must rest on that nature.

*Hebrews* 4:11 also speaks of “rest” as a state of blessedness: “Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest.” Why is it difficult to enter into that rest? The *Gospel of Truth* indicates that our illusions make us restless:

Since there had been terror and confusion and uncertainty and doubt and division, there were many illusions among them. (Meyer 29:2-6)

Goldsmith considers every illusion to be an instance of the belief that external conditions—whether persons, places, or things—have the power of good or evil over us.<sup>42</sup> If that is so, then every illusion would cause some sign of restlessness within us, perhaps feelings of terror, confusion, uncertainty, doubt, and division.

If we do observe some sign of restlessness within our mental, emotional, or physical bod-

ies, the *Gospel of Truth* tells us how to free ourselves from it: turn once again to the Father, receive another divine idea that dispels another illusion, and apply the new idea to purify our lower nature. Bailey describes the result: “one by one those bodies which veil the Self are brought to a point where they are simply transparencies, permitting the full shining forth of the divine nature.”<sup>43</sup>

## Salvation

According to the *Gospel of Truth*, ignorance of the Father leads to error, which in turn leads to envy and strife. In contrast, people who have been saved, or redeemed, have knowledge of the Father, are illumined by the Logos, and express the divine nature within their own lives. The final part of the Gospel describes human beings who have been saved:

They rest in one who rests, and they are not weary or confused about truth. They are truth. The father is in them and they are in the father, perfect, inseparable from him who is truly good. They lack nothing at all but are at rest, fresh in spirit. They will hearken to their root and be involved with concerns in which they may find their root and do no harm to their souls. (Meyer 42:21-37)

In other words, human beings who have been saved are those who are “at rest,” which means that they rest on the divine nature, thereby permitting that nature to act through them.

In earlier quotations, the *Gospel of Truth* describes Jesus as “a person of rest” and “bringing forth the flawless Logos.” When human beings become saved, they become like Jesus, because they are also at rest and allow the Logos to act through them. Thus, the way of salvation in the Gospel enables human beings to become like Jesus.

In the final paragraph of the Gospel, the anonymous author discloses that he himself has been saved:

Such is the place of the blessed, such is their place. As for the others, let them know, in their own places, that I should not say more, for I have been in the place of rest. There I shall dwell, to devote myself, constantly, to



the father of all and the true brothers and sisters, upon whom the father's love is lavished, and in whose midst nothing of him is lacking. (Meyer 42:37-43:8)

Because the author states "I have been in the place of rest," he is claiming to have written his composition based on his own experience.

## Conclusions

The way of salvation found in the *Gospel of Truth* involves a radical reliance on the Logos, which is given a variety of names throughout the Gospel: Savior, Word, tongue of the Father, Holy Spirit, star that does not set, Son, and name of the Father. Although the Gospel acknowledges that we can be saved by a book, that book is the Book of the Living, which is written by the Father and communicated to us by the Logos.

The *Gospel of Truth* describes three stages on the way of salvation: first, the stage of receiving divine ideas from the Logos and then applying them to purify our lower nature; second, the stage of acting as if the Logos were in charge of our lives, even though many illusions still remain in us; and third, the stage of rest, in which our lower nature is restful because our illusions are largely absent, permitting the Logos to act through us.

Because contemporary scholarship has found the *Gospel of Truth* to be puzzling, the following points of clarification were made. Error, the condition from which we need to be saved, consists of illusions, or false beliefs, that are part of our environment and can beguile human beings, but do not originate from any particular person. Although the term "Aeons" is sometimes translated as "eternal realms," in the *Gospel of Truth* this term refers to human beings. Jesus brought forth the Logos into the external world, and so his life and death serve to corroborate outwardly the teachings that we receive from the Logos within our hearts. The name of the Father can be interpreted as the nature of the Father.

Several examples were presented to explicate the abstract notions found in the *Gospel of Truth*: any ideal with fanatical adherents is an instance of error, illusion, or the devil; a list of

divine ideas that might represent the letters in the Book of the Living; and the suggestion that divine love is equivalent to the "name of the Father." This article showed that the key ideas in the *Gospel of Truth* are similar to those found in several contemporary spiritual teachings. This demonstration helps to clarify the *Gospel of Truth*, and it also shows that, in at least philosophy and religion, "there is no new thing under the sun" (*Ecclesiastes* 1:9).

- 
- <sup>1</sup> This quotation is from R. M. Grant, *Gnosticism* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), and it is also available from the Internet: <http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/got.html>. Grant, however, acknowledges that the actual translation was made by W. W. Isenberg. Standard enumeration of Nag Hammadi documents is based on entire codices, according to which the *Gospel of Truth* begins on page 16, line 31 of its codex. The identification, Grant 16:31-17:1, indicates that this quotation is from Grant's book and is the English translation of the Coptic text from page 16, line 31 to page 17, line 1.
  - <sup>2</sup> All biblical verses are taken from the King James Version.
  - <sup>3</sup> B. Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures* (New York: Doubleday, 1987), p. 251.
  - <sup>4</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, book 3, chapter 11, paragraph 9.
  - <sup>5</sup> J. Williams, *Biblical Interpretation in the Gnostic Gospel of Truth from Nag Hammadi* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988), analyzes many biblical paraphrases in the Gospel of Truth.
  - <sup>6</sup> H. W. Attridge, "The Gospel of Truth as an Exoteric Text," in C. W. Hedrick and R. Hodgson (eds.), *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, and Early Christianity* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2005), pp. 239-255.
  - <sup>7</sup> S. Petrement, *A Separate God: The Christian Origins of Gnosticism* (San Francisco: Harper, 1990), p. 379.
  - <sup>8</sup> H. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), p. 190.
  - <sup>9</sup> J. Helderman, "Isis as Plane in the Gospel of Truth?" in M. Kranse (ed.), *Gnosis and Gnosticism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981), pp. 26-46.
  - <sup>10</sup> M. Meyer, *The Gnostic Gospels of Jesus* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005).

- <sup>11</sup> J. S. Goldsmith, *Realization of Oneness* (New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1967), p. 53.
- <sup>12</sup> A. A. Bailey, *Glamour: A World Problem* (1950; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1973), p. 184.
- <sup>13</sup> A. C. Robison, "The *Evangelium Veritatis*: Its Doctrine, Character, and Origin," *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 43, 1963, pp. 234-243.
- <sup>14</sup> K. Grobel, *The Gospel of Truth* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 59, says, "the author's name for the book is 'Book of the Living.'" The word "living," which sometimes appears before "book," is taken as an epithet rather than as part of the title.
- <sup>15</sup> Grobel, *The Gospel of Truth*, p. 20.
- <sup>16</sup> Z. F. Lansdowne, *The Revelation of St. John* (York Beach, ME: Red Wheel/Weiser, 2006), p. 112.
- <sup>17</sup> Meyer, *The Gnostic Gospels of Jesus*, pp. 95-112, replaces "Aeons" with "the eternal realms" throughout his translation of the Gospel of Truth.
- <sup>18</sup> Petrement, *A Separate God*, p. 381, states: "It seems to me that in the *Gospel of Truth* . . . the word 'aeon' is not yet always the technical word that it will generally be for the Valentinians. It still has something of its ordinary meaning: it can refer to the periods of the world, the 'ages,' the 'aeons,' that is, to men and women who live in these ages."
- <sup>19</sup> Bailey, *Glamour*, pp. 135-136.
- <sup>20</sup> A. A. Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic* (1934; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1979), pp. 456-457.
- <sup>21</sup> A. A. Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, vol. II (1955; reprint. New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1972), p. 490.
- <sup>22</sup> H. W. Attridge and G. W. MacRae, "The Gospel of Truth," in J. M. Robinson (ed.), *The Coptic Gnostic Library* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), vol. I. Internet: <http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/gostruth.html>.
- <sup>23</sup> *A Course in Miracles (ACIM)* (second edition; Glen Ellen, CA: Foundation for Inner Peace, 1992), vol. I, p. 96.
- <sup>24</sup> In the *Gospel of Truth*, the Holy Spirit is spoken of as a revelation (27:6) and the Father's tongue (26:35); the Logos is spoken of as a revelation (37:6) and the revealer of the Father's words (37:7).
- <sup>25</sup> *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary* (second edition; New York: Collins World, 1976).
- <sup>26</sup> Grobel, *The Gospel of Truth*, p. 85.
- <sup>27</sup> *ACIM*, vol. II, p. 192.
- <sup>28</sup> M. P. Hall, *The Apocalypse Attributed to St. John* (Los Angeles: Philosophical Research Society, 1981), p. 63; Lansdowne, *The Revelation of St. John*, p. 19.
- <sup>29</sup> Bailey, *Glamour*, p. 171.
- <sup>30</sup> In the *Gospel of Truth*, the "Word" is described as coming from the thought and mind of the Father (16:35-36), revealing the Father's words (37:7), and supporting the totality (24:3); the "Son" is described as coming forth from the Father (38:8-9), revealing secret things (40:28), and glorifying the Father (41:1-3).
- <sup>31</sup> Attridge and MacRae, "The Gospel of Truth," in Robinson (ed.), *The Coptic Gnostic Library*, vol. I, p. 74.
- <sup>32</sup> T. P. Brown, *Metagospels: Thomas and Philip and Valentine* (Athens: Ecumenical Coptic Project, 1992). Internet: <http://www.metalog.org/files/valent.html>.
- <sup>33</sup> Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*.
- <sup>34</sup> Grobel, *The Gospel of Truth*.
- <sup>35</sup> R. P. Casey, *The Excerpta ex Theodoto of Clement of Alexandria* (London: Christophers, 1934), p. 59.
- <sup>36</sup> *ACIM*, vol. I, p. 150.
- <sup>37</sup> Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, vol. II, pp. 554-556.
- <sup>38</sup> E. Thomassen, "Gnostic semiotics—the Valentinian notion of the Name," *Temenos*, vol. 29, 1993, pp. 141-156, cites many studies concerned with the divine name.
- <sup>39</sup> J. L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (1965; reprint; New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), p. 603.
- <sup>40</sup> *A Commentary on the Book of the Revelation Based on a Study of Twenty-Four Psychic Discourses by Edgar Cayce* (1945; reprint; Virginia Beach, VA: A.R.E. Press, 1969), p. 141; Lansdowne, *The Revelation of St. John*, p. 14.
- <sup>41</sup> A. A. Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology*, vol. I (1936; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1979), p. 65.
- <sup>42</sup> J. S. Goldsmith, *The Thunder of Silence* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), p. 56.
- <sup>43</sup> A. A. Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations* (1960; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1976), p. 6.

# Origins of the Christian Kabbalah

John F. Nash

---

## Summary

This article explores the emergence of the Christian Kabbalah from its Judaic antecedents. The birth of that major feature of the western esoteric tradition was made possible by the confluence of traditions in the High Middle Ages and Renaissance when Jewish mystical texts and insights became available to Christian scholars. The Christian Kabbalah first appeared in Florence in the early 15th century and spread to Germany and the rest of Europe. It had obvious theological applications, but much interest also focused on discovering the timeless underpinnings of all world religions and on healing the breach among Christians, Jews and Muslims.

The Christian Kabbalah was part of a more general investigation of occult traditions which included Hermeticism—a combination of astrology, alchemy and magic. Unfortunately, from the standpoint of the tradition's purity, Hermeticism steered the Christian Kabbalah away from its intellectual and mystical roots toward a preoccupation with magic. Not surprisingly, ecclesiastical authorities became increasingly suspicious, although hostility was also motivated by prevailing anti-Semitism. In any event, the Christian Kabbalah—like its Judaic antecedent—never became a mass movement; it remained the pursuit of a small elite of scholars, aristocrats and churchmen.

## Background

By the 13th century Sephardic Jewish scholars from Baghdad to Spain were actively engaged in Kabbalistic studies.<sup>1</sup> But Christian scholars were virtually ignorant of their work, and the Kabbalah had no appreciable impact on Christian doctrine or even on its underlying mindset. Over the next several centuries all that would change; a “Christian Kabbalah” emerged, to the dismay of both

Christian ecclesiastical authorities and rabbinic Jewish authorities.

The objective of this article is to explore the emergence of the Christian Kabbalah, from the 14th to the end of the 17th century. The intent of this article is not to present a comprehensive exploration of either the Judaic or the Christian Kabbalah; nor could that be done in a journal article of any reasonable length. Due attention is paid to major topics of interest that captivated the Christian Kabbalists, but the article's thrust is primarily historical.

Numerous works on the Judaic Kabbalah and its incorporation into 19th and 20th-century esotericism are readily available.<sup>2</sup> Development of the Christian Kabbalah from the 17th century onward, and the more detailed exploration of its outcomes, can be subjects for further study.

## Classical Judaic Kabbalah

The *Kabbalah* (Hebrew: קבלה, “received” or “tradition”) has its roots in an oral tradition of Jewish mysticism, extending back to biblical times, perhaps even to Moses or Abraham.<sup>3</sup> That tradition was viewed as divine revelation, interpreted and commented upon by generations of mystics and scholars. However, the Judaic tradition eventually became overlaid by Pythagorean, Platonic and Neoplatonic metaphysics.<sup>4</sup> The classical Kabbalistic texts were

---

## About the Author

John F. Nash, Ph.D., is a long-time esoteric student, author and teacher. Two of his books, *Quest for the Soul* and *The Soul and Its Destiny*, were reviewed in the Winter 2005 issue of the *Esoteric Quarterly*. His latest book is *Christianity: the One, the Many*. See the advertisements on page 10 of this issue and also the website: [www.uriel.com](http://www.uriel.com).

published in Spain and southern France in the 12th and 13th centuries, but most likely they were based on manuscripts or at least fragments dating back to the early centuries of the Common Era. The texts included the *Sefer ha-Bahir* (ספר הבהיר, “Book of Illumination”), the *Sefer Yetzirah* (ספר יצירה, “Book of Creation”), and the monumental *Sefer ha-Zohar* (ספר הזוהר, “Book of Splendor”). The *Zohar* was written in the style of Midrashic and Talmudic texts, offering discursive commentary on the *Torah* and other books in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>5</sup>

The Kabbalah appealed both to the intellect and to the intuition, providing a system of esoteric symbolism with theological, contemplative, theurgical and psychological potential. The elaborate schema of the Tree of Life was the work of 16th-century Jewish scholars in Palestine. But even in 1400 there was broad understanding of the *sefiroth* (singular: *sefirah*, ספירה), a word whose roots connoted “number,” “writing,” and “sound” or “revelation.”<sup>6</sup> The number symbolism clearly reflected Pythagorean—or perhaps earlier Egyptian—influence. The *Zohar* also described the *Ain Soph* (אין סוף), the unmanifest, unknowable Godhead from which the emanations emerge.<sup>7</sup> The *sephiroth* can be viewed variously as successive emanations of the divine essence, as the forms or “vessels” into which those emanations flowed, as divine “persons” in the sense of the persons of the trinity, as *logoi* intermediate between the Godhead and humanity, or as archetypal forces of great potency.

The original *sefiroth*, numbered 1-10, were known by the following archetypal names: *Kether* (כתר, “Crown”), *Chokmah* (חכמה, “Wisdom”), *Binah* (בינה, “Understanding”), *Chesed* (חסד, “Mercy”), *Geburah* (גבורה, “Judgment”), *Tifareth* (תפארת, “Beauty” or “Harmony”), *Netzach* (נצח, “Victory” or “Eternity”), *Hod* (הוד, “Splendor”), *Yesod* (יסוד, “Foundation”), and *Malkuth* (מלכות, “Kingdom”). *Gedulah* (גדולה, “Greatness”) was used as an alternative name for *Chesed*, and *Din* (דין, “Severity”) as an alternative to *Geburah*. *Tabun* (תבון, “Intelligence”) was an alternative to *Binah*. A later addition to the *sefi-*

*roth*, *Daath* (דעת, “Knowledge” or “Gnosis”), was left unnumbered. The Hebrew names, English translations, and interpretations of the *sefiroth* are summarized for quick reference in Appendix 1.<sup>8</sup>

The Kabbalah also provided a guide to spiritual development, inviting seekers to explore the nature of Divinity and its creation as well as the higher reaches of the human psyche. The *Sefer Yetzirah* discussed 32 paths, or *netivoth* (singular: *nativ*, נתיב), to God. Ten of those “paths” corresponded to the *sefiroth*, while the remaining 22, each identified by a letter in the Hebrew alphabet, became identified with the relationships among them. The *netivoth* offered seekers distinctive spiritual challenges and opportunities.

Finally, and not incidentally, forms of experiential Kabbalah emerged that focused on the names of God and the names of angels and archangels related to the *sefiroth*. Invocation of the divine names offered the potential for ecstatic mysticism and also for the acquisition of occult powers. Magic was not a major feature of the medieval Judaic Kabbalah, but it was not neglected either.<sup>9</sup>

## Later Developments

The modern Judaic Kabbalah owes a great deal to the work of a community of 16th-century Jewish scholars who settled in Safed (Tzafed), Galilee, traditional burial site of the second-century rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, mentioned in the *Zohar*.<sup>10</sup>

Preeminent among the Safed scholars were Moses ben Jacob Cordovero (1522–1570) and Isaac ben Solomon Luria (1534–1572). The former was a Spanish émigré, one of tens of thousands of Jews expelled from Spain in 1492, while the latter was born in Palestine of German parents. Cordovero and Luria proposed alternative versions of the Tree of Life, providing a new understanding of geometric relationships among the *sefiroth*. Their work drew attention to the rich symbolism of polarities which is so much a feature of modern Kabbalistic study.

The Safed school also promoted belief in a primeval cosmic catastrophe in which the *sefi-*

roth were shattered by influx of the divine force. That catastrophe is referred to as the “breaking of the vessels.”<sup>11</sup> God had to repair the sefirot in order for the universe to come into permanent manifestation; but the damage had longer-lasting implications. “Shards” of the broken vessels, each of which contained a divine spark, were scattered throughout the world, and devout Jews are responsible for gathering the shards to reestablish divine order.<sup>12</sup>

### Bridge to Christian Europe

The Kabbalah came to the attention of western Christian scholars through several channels. Important Kabbalistic schools had been established in Moorish Spain and in Provence in the south of France. The Provençal scholar and mystic Isaac the Blind (c.1160–1235) compiled and edited the *Bahir* and the *Sefer Yetzirah*. Moses de Leon (1250–1305), who lived in Castile, compiled the *Zohar* and added extensive commentary. The newly available books, written in Hebrew or Aramaic,<sup>13</sup> soon became available to Christian scholars.

Also, Jewish scholars were dispersed throughout Europe as a result of the general Diaspora which had been in progress for centuries,<sup>14</sup> and contact with Christian scholars was almost inevitable. Abraham ben Samuel Abulafia (1240–c.1295) whose studies included Kabbalah, philosophy, linguistics and numerology was born in Saragosa, Spain, but traveled widely throughout the Mediterranean region, including Rome. He became fascinated with gematria<sup>15</sup> and with permutations of letters in the divine names, particularly the unutterable Tetragrammaton, יהוה.<sup>16</sup> Ben Abulafia contributed much to the development of the ecstatic mystical Kabbalah.<sup>17</sup> We shall see later that he narrowly escaped execution by the Catholic Church.

The Italian rabbi Menahem ben Benjamin Recanati whose life spanned the end of the 13th century and the early part of the 14th devoted a major part of his work to the Kabbalah. Two centuries later, the Jewish humanist scholar Yohanan Alemanno (c.1435–1505), who set-

tled in Florence, combined Hebraic and Kabbalistic studies with interests in Neoplatonism and magic.

### Figure 1. Petrus Alphonsi's Glyph of the Trinity



Many Jewish scholars converted to Christianity and incorporated esoteric Jewish teachings into their new faith.<sup>18</sup> For example, Moses Sephardi (1062–1110) was baptized in 1106 and took the new name Petrus Alphonsi. Born in Aragon, he eventually moved to England and may have served as a court physician to King Henry I. Petrus created a glyph relating the Tetragrammaton to the Christian trinity (Figure 1), a forerunner of the Tree of Life constructed five centuries later. Another convert to Christianity was Samuel ben Nissim Abulfaraj, an Italian Jewish humanist scholar who resided in Florence and wrote under the pseudonym Flavius Mithridates. He is best known for his Latin translations of 3,500 pages of Hebrew mystical works, including the *Biblioteca Cabbalistica*, a large compilation of Kabbalistic literature. Yet another convert was Dactylus Hebraeus; he was mentioned by Giovanni Pico, whose work will be discussed shortly, but we know little else about him.

As the Byzantine Empire went into decline, many Eastern Orthodox scholars came to the west, bringing with them collections of rare manuscripts in Greek, Hebrew and Arabic. Wealthy patrons of Renaissance scholarship sent emissaries in search of additional manu-

scripts to stock their libraries. Among those manuscripts were Greek classics, currently unknown in the west. It should be remembered that Latin had long been the sole language of scholarly discourse in the west, and few western scholars understood Greek; even fewer could read the Semitic languages.

Other manuscripts addressed Kabbalistic or Hermetic topics.<sup>19</sup> Hermeticism had a lineage distinct from that of the Kabbalah, although it is possible to argue that they had a common origin in prehistory. In any event, the Hermeticism we know was a body of philosophical, alchemical, magical and astrological teachings of Egyptian, Persian, and possibly Chaldean origin. The term “Hermeticism” reflected a common belief that it represented the secret teachings of Hermes Trismegistus (“Thrice-Great Hermes”), revered as “father of Occult Wisdom; the founder of Astrology; the discoverer of Alchemy.”<sup>20</sup> At the time of the Renaissance, that Hermes—a conflation of the Egyptian Thoth, the Greek Hermes, and the Roman Mercury—was thought to have been a real person from remote antiquity.<sup>21</sup> Whatever the teachings’ real origin may have been, the extant Hermetic texts are now thought to have been written in the early centuries of the Common Era. Hermeticism, even more than the Kabbalah, overlapped with Neoplatonic and Gnostic thought.

### **Christian Kabbalists of the Renaissance**

**T**he Christian Kabbalah first took definite form in the 15th century, in the city-state of Florence in northern Italy. It was one of a number of exciting “new” fields of interest in the Florentine Renaissance. Others were Neoplatonism, which would reinforce the Hellenic content of the Kabbalah, and Hermeticism.

When a mid-15th-century Florentine proclaimed “*mi pare nascere*” (“I seem to be reborn”), he gave birth to the term “Renaissance” by which we refer to the cultural and intellectual rebirth that had begun a few decades earlier.<sup>22</sup> It was driven by a dream of recovering the greatness of classical Greece and Rome, together with an economic boom that

offered hope that the dream might be fulfilled. The new wealth enabled leading families to support scholarship and the arts. Foremost among those families were the Medicis, particularly the three generations consisting of Cosimo de’ Medici (1389–1464), hailed by his fellow citizens as *Pater Patriae* (“Father of the Fatherland”); his sickly son Piero; and his grandson Lorenzo, “the Magnificent.”

### **Italian Scholars**

Among many other endeavors, the Medicis established a library that soon became the largest in the world since the destruction of the Ptolemaic library in Alexandria. Dispatched by Lorenzo on just one of his book-buying sprees, Giovanni Lascaris returned from the east with more than 200 ancient manuscripts.<sup>23</sup> The library’s collection became a treasure trove of religious, philosophical and esoteric manuscripts that attracted leading scholars to Florence. Moreover, the broad range of languages in which they were written stimulated linguistic studies. The Vatican Library in Rome, though smaller at that time, also grew rapidly in size. The “library of Eugenius IV in the first half of the fifteenth century contained 340 books... but by the time Nicolas V died in 1455 there were... almost twelve hundred volumes.”<sup>24</sup> By 1484 the collection had expanded to 3,600 volumes, of which 1,000 were in Greek.

In 1438 representatives from the eastern and western churches met at Ferrara, near Bologna, to try to heal the Great Schism of 1054. Later, Pope Eugenius moved the meeting to Florence, and now it is customarily known as the Council of Florence. Deliberations continued until 1445.<sup>25</sup> A prominent member of the Orthodox contingent was the Greek philosopher and esotericist Georgius Gemistos, also known as Plethon. Gemistos had studied at the Islamic School of Theology at Brusa, in northwestern Turkey, and was an authority on Zoroaster and Plato. He also promoted an esoteric version of Christianity with Neoplatonic leanings. His lectures in Florence attracted the attention of Cosimo de’ Medici, and he was persuaded to remain in Florence after the council concluded.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to the library, Cosimo de' Medici founded the *Accademia Fiorentina o Societa di Eloquenza*, or Florentine Academy or Society for Eloquence, in 1541.<sup>27</sup> The Academy competed, but also contrasted, with great centers of learning like the Universities of Paris and Cologne. Whereas the latter preserved the Aristotelian mindset of 13th-century scholasticism, the Florentine Academy saw a return to Plato as its guiding influence; indeed the Academy was viewed as a recreation of Plato's school in Athens. The Academy acquired a well-deserved reputation for the study of Greek, whereas the University of Padua, which the Medicis also founded, focused on Latin studies. Study of Plato and Neoplatonism was accompanied by a synthesis of ideas from other exoteric and esoteric sources. The latter took on a special mystique because of a widely held belief during the Renaissance that wisdom came from the east, perhaps from sources predating both Hebrew and Greek traditions.<sup>28</sup> The notion that *Matthew's* three wise men came from the east played into that belief.

Priest and scholar Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) was appointed head of the Florentine Academy and in due course was chosen by Piero de' Medici to tutor his son Lorenzo.<sup>29</sup> Ficino set out to translate the entire works of Plato into Latin, but for a while he was reassigned to translate the *Corpus Hermeticum* from its original Greek. The 15-17 treatises of the *Corpus* had already been compiled into a single volume by Byzantine editors. Ficino's translation was published in 1463 and reprinted more than 20 times over the next 150 years. Like most of his contemporaries, Ficino believed that the *Corpus Her-*

*meticum* had been written by a real, very ancient, Hermes Trismegistus.

Ficino's most famous student, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494), is regarded as the first true Christian Kabbalist. Born into a noble family, he was an intellectual prodigy who studied in Padua and Rome before moving to Florence.<sup>30</sup> He became one of the most influential scholars of the early Renaissance. Estimates that Pico knew 22 languages<sup>31</sup> may have been colored by the esoteric significance of that number—for instance, there are 22 let-

ters in the Hebrew alphabet—but we do know that he was tutored in Hebrew and Aramaic by Samuel ben Nissim Abulfaraj and Yohanan Alemanno.<sup>32</sup> Pico accepted the claims of Jewish mystics that the Kabbalah represented an unbroken oral tradition dating back at least to Moses and Mount Sinai. At the young age of 24 he drew up a list of 900 theses, or *conclusiones*, on philosophy, the Kabbalah, magic and theology<sup>33</sup> and challenged anyone to a debate on their merits before a papal audience. In an accompanying *Oration on the*

---

**Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494), is regarded as the first true Christian Kabbalist. Born into a noble family, he became one of the most influential scholars of the early Renaissance... Pico accepted the claims of Jewish mystics that the Kabbalah represented an unbroken oral tradition dating back at least to Moses and Mount Sinai... His work stimulated interest in the Kabbalah and other aspects of Judaism throughout Christian Europe.**

---

*Dignity of Man*, Pico defended his bold challenge:

[I] have dared... to offer a disputation concerning the lofty mysteries of Christian theology, the highest topics of philosophy and unfamiliar branches of knowledge, in so famous a city, before so great an assembly of very learned men, in the presence of the apostolic senate.<sup>34</sup>

The debate never took place, but the effect on contemporary thought was profound. His work stimulated interest in the Kabbalah and

more generally in Hebraic studies throughout Christian Europe. One of Pico's best-known later works, dedicated to Lorenzo de' Medici, was *Heptaplus*, a sevenfold cosmological commentary on *Genesis*. He insisted that the Kabbalah contained the keys to Hermeticism, but his interest was purely theoretical. Pico never practiced magic, and he denounced the use of astrology for purposes of divination.<sup>35</sup>

Pope Sixtus IV (reigned 1471–1484) is alleged to have supported Kabbalistic studies.<sup>36</sup> But the highest-ranking churchmen to take a direct interest was probably Cardinal Egidio Antonini da Viterbo (c.1465–1532). Egidio was prior-general of the Augustinian Order and, later, Latin patriarch of Constantinople. A humanist scholar, he believed that Hebrew was the only true sacred language and searched the Hebrew scriptures for hidden meanings.<sup>37</sup> Egidio was proficient in several other ancient languages and studied the *Qur'an* in the original Arabic. In 1525 the Venetian Franciscan friar Francesco Giorgi Veneto (1466–1540), also known as Zorzi, wrote the influential book *On the Harmony of the Universe* and dedicated the work to Pope Clement VII. Giorgi's book presented a comprehensive picture of creation, drawing upon Kabbalistic, Hermetic and Platonic concepts.

## Germany and Beyond

The study of Jewish esotericism soon spread beyond northern Italy. Johann Reuchlin (1455–1522), one of the first Christian Kabbalists outside Italy, was born at Pforzheim in the Black Forest region of Germany. Reuchlin met Giovanni Pico during a visit to Florence but studied Greek and Hebrew under leading scholars at Basel and Paris. In due course Reuchlin taught at the University of Tübingen, and his reputation attracted students from all parts of the Holy Roman Empire. At the time it was customary for German students to go to Florence for post-graduate studies. Marsilio Ficino paid tribute to the quality of Reuchlin's students: "The German youth who visit the academy of Florence come as well furnished as others leave it." Reuchlin's growing mastery of Kabbalah led to the publication of *De Arte Cabalistica* ("On the Art of the Kabbalah") in 1517.

Several prominent Kabbalists were diplomats. The German diplomat, humanist and philologist Johann Albrecht Widmannstetter (1506–1557) had studied at Tübingen. Some of his Kabbalistic writings appeared under the pseudonym "Lucretius." Widmannstetter's close contemporary Guillaume Postel (1510–1581) was a French diplomat and linguist. Sent as an interpreter by King Francis I to the French embassy to the Turkish sultan Suleiman the Magnificent in Constantinople, Postel gathered Eastern manuscripts for the royal library. For many years he worked to translate the *Bahir*, the *Sefer Yetzirah*, and the *Zohar* into Latin, and his translations were finally published in 1552.

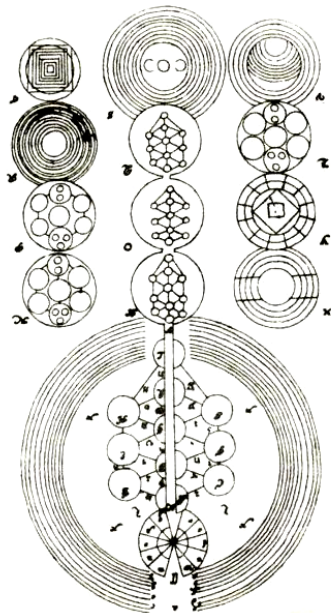
Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486–1535) was a German government official, military strategist, and court physician. He was also a Catholic theologian, philosopher, and occultist. Agrippa was one of the first writers to note similarities between Kabbalistic teachings and Gnosticism, suggesting that the latter was influenced by earlier esoteric Judaism.<sup>38</sup>

None of the individuals mentioned so far benefited from the far-reaching work of the Safed scholars. However the Safed work became available to later Christian Kabbalists, who included several Protestants.<sup>39</sup> One was the Lutheran Jakob Böhme (1575–1624) who was born in Görlitz, Silesia. On Trinity Sunday 1600 he had a spiritual experience that launched him onto a lifelong quest for *gnosis*. Böhme found himself part of a group devoted to the work of the German-Swiss physician and alchemist Paracelsus. Böhme's formal education may have been limited, but he became interested in medicine, the Kabbalah, and the Hermetic arts. He may also have read the works of the Dominican friar Meister Eckhart (c.1260–c.1328) with whom he shared important beliefs. Böhme had little interest in promoting his ideas, and records of his studies were kept mainly for personal reference. The books we have were compiled and published by his followers, in some cases without his knowledge or consent. However several long letters to friends have survived.



Another Protestant Kabbalist was Christian Knorr von Rosenroth (1631–1689). Also from Silesia, he was influenced by Böhme. Von Rosenroth studied at the universities of Wittenberg and Leipzig and traveled through Holland, France, and England. He became a respected student of Oriental languages, especially Hebrew. Von Rosenroth planned to prepare a new Latin translation of the *Zohar* but instead published the four-volume *Kabbalah Unveiled* (1678–1684).<sup>40</sup> Among other things it offered a depiction of the Tree of Life that drew heavily on the Safed work (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Von Rosenroth's Tree of Life**



Yet another 17th-century German of interest, this time a Jesuit priest, was Athanasius Kirchner (1602–1680). Kirchner studied topics ranging from geology and medicine to Sino-logy. He also became an early Egyptologist. Those studies persuaded him that Adam and Eve spoke the Egyptian language and that Hermes Trismegistus was none other than the Old Testament Moses. In his *Egyptian Oedipus*, published in 1653, Kirchner reproduced a Tree of Life that closely resembled the one proposed by the Safed scholar Moses Cor-dovero.

Several other individuals are often cited as Kabbalists of the period, including Paracelsus (1493–1541), John Dee (1527–1608), Robert Fludd (1574–1637), and Thomas Vaughan (1622–1666). Those individuals did indeed occasionally cite classical Kabbalistic texts or the writings of Renaissance Kabbalists, but their primary interest was alchemy or magic. They added little to the Kabbalah as a system of theology and mysticism and in some cases confused their followers as to its true intent. Neoplatonic and Hermetic influence on the Kabbalah and Hermeticism increased as the synthesis of systems of thought increased throughout the Renaissance. Attempts have been made to discern a new field of “Hermetic Kabbalah” but there is scant continuity between it and the medieval Judaic Kabbalah.

### Topics of Interest

Judaic Kabbalah was never a unified system of mysticism, occultism or philosophy; the various teachers shared personal insights and perspectives. As in many areas of esotericism, multiple descriptions can be formulated to capture a reality which transcends the rational mind. The most that we find is a distinctive mindset enshrined in classical texts and a set of concepts relating primarily to the cascading emanation of divine force in delicately balanced polarities. Corresponding polarities in the human constitution are implied.

Nor would it be realistic to look for a high degree of coherence within the Christian Kabbalah. Nevertheless certain recurring themes or topics of interest were addressed by prominent western scholars.

### Perennial Wisdom

Christian scholars explored the Kabbalah and other ancient esoteric traditions in the hope of discovering the timeless foundations of all world religions. That hope led to an early form of what, today, we would call ecumenism. A number of scholars of the period shared the dream of finding an all-embracing theology that could unify Judaism, Christianity and Islam—perhaps even paganism. Christianity was already viewed as an outgrowth and fulfillment of Judaism, and Islam claimed to be

the fulfillment of both. If indeed the roots of Kabbalah extended back to Abraham, then it might pervade all three Abrahamic religions.

The ecumenical vision had been expressed as early as the 13th century by the Catalan philosopher and mystic, Raymon Lull (1232–c.1316). Although Catalan was by that time predominantly Catholic, Muslims and Jews continued to play important roles in its politics and culture, as they had in Moorish Spain in earlier centuries. Lull identified nine *Dignities*, or *Dignitaries*, which he claimed transcended religious boundaries: *Bonitas* (Goodness), *Magnitudo* (Greatness), *Eternitas* (Eternity), *Potestas* (Power), *Sapientia* (Wisdom), *Voluntas* (Will), *Virtus* (Virtue), *Veritas* (Truth), and *Gloria* (Glory). Later commentators would correlate these dignitaries with the first nine sefiroth of the Kabbalah.

In the early Renaissance, Giovanni Pico sought to integrate the newly available Kabbalistic and Hermetic teachings with Christianity. Claiming that Christianity was founded largely on Kabbalistic teachings, he stated in one of his theses: “No science can better convince us of the divinity of Jesus Christ than magic and the Kabbalah.” Johann Reuchlin also stressed the importance of the Kabbalah, asserting “without it none can achieve something as elusive, as difficult, as the divine.”<sup>41</sup>

Egidio Antonini da Viterbo also helped bridge the gap between Christianity and other world religions. Giordano Bruno (1548–1600) was an Italian philosopher, mathematician, astronomer, and occultist. But, rather than trying to bridge any gaps, Bruno antagonized ecclesiastical authorities by his strident claim that his beliefs came from an ancient Egyptian religion, which eclipsed Christianity in importance. He would meet a grim fate for his outspokenness.

### **Kabbalah and Christian Doctrine**

A further motivation for Kabbalistic study was the possibility of adding to Christian knowledge. If the Kabbalah formed part of the perennial wisdom underlying all religions, it might provide new doctrinal insights. In his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, Pico asserted that the Kabbalah is full of implicitly Christian

doctrine. Johann Reuchlin made a similar claim, arguing in his *On the Art of the Kabbalah* that works of Jewish mysticism reflected classical traditions and supported Christian doctrine.

A topic of particular interest to the Renaissance Kabbalists was the trinity. The third-century CE Neoplatonist Plotinus had taught that all manifest reality, including the aspects of the trinity, resulted from emanations from the Godhead. This same doctrine became central to the Kabbalistic theological model: the divine essence, or light, streamed down into the sefiroth from the *Ain Soph*. Dactylus Hebraeus asserted that the first three sefiroth: *Kether*, *Chokmah* and *Binah*, corresponded to the trinity.<sup>42</sup> The 17th-century Christian von Rosenroth and the 18th-century English diarist Ambrose Serle would also explore that correspondence.<sup>43</sup> The three “sefiroth,” depicted in Petrus Alphonsi’s glyph, mentioned earlier, corresponded to *Chokmah*, *Binah/Tabun* and *Daath* which appeared in a passage in *Exodus*.<sup>44</sup>

Plotinus’ trinity was hierarchical, and presumably the Christian Kabbalists agreed. Plotinus also asserted that the universe represented a further emanation, below the level of the trinity. Kabbalistic teachings strongly affirmed that principle, declaring that even lowest sefirah, *Malkuth*, was divine. Indeed, *Malkuth*, which corresponded to our world, was commonly identified with the *Shekinah* (שכינה), the indwelling presence of God.<sup>45</sup> However official Christian doctrine insisted that the trinitarian persons are co-equal and that the universe was created *ex nihilo*, “from nothing.” The universe, according to the church, was certainly not divine; it was corrupt, even evil. Furthermore, official Christianity did not admit the existence of a Godhead distinct from or overshadowing the trinity.<sup>46</sup>

The Dominican friar and scholar Meister Eckhart (c.1260–c.1328) never mentioned the Kabbalah, but he leaned toward the notion of emanation from an undifferentiated Godhead resembling the *Ain Soph*.<sup>47</sup> For that and other teachings he came under suspicion of heresy. However, over the next several centuries, the confluence of Neoplatonic and Kabbalistic

teachings almost guaranteed that other Christian scholars would find similar notions of emanation appealing.

One was Jakob Böhme, who was influenced both by Eckhart and by the Kabbalah. He was fascinated by the passage in *John*: “[T]he light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not,”<sup>48</sup> and he interpreted it to mean that the Godhead is unknowable but immanent. He referred to the Godhead as the *Ungrund*, the “Void.”<sup>49</sup> Böhme also argued that the Godhead emanates first as a trinity and then as a septenary, foreshadowing modern esoteric teachings on the seven rays.<sup>50</sup> In the *Sefer Yetzirah*, emanation in Three and then in Seven was related symbolically to the three “mother” letters and seven “double” letters in the Hebrew alphabet.<sup>51</sup> François Mercure van Helmont (1618–1699), physician to the Electress of Pfalz and acquaintance of Gottfried Leibniz, identified the seven lower sefirot with the Seven Spirits before the Throne mentioned in *Revelation*.<sup>52</sup>

As noted earlier, Judaic Kabbalists attached considerable importance to the names of God for either mystical or occult purposes. Johann Reuchlin noted that the Hebrew name of Jesus, *Yehoshuah* (יהושוע).<sup>53</sup> was formed by the insertion of the letter *shin* (ש) at the midpoint of the Tetragrammaton, the unutterable name of God. Reuchlin proceeded to suggest that God had revealed himself in three stages, each of which corresponded to a particular divine name. During the world epoch which began with Abraham, God revealed himself through the three-letter name Shaddai (שדי). In the second epoch, ushered in by Moses, he revealed himself through the four-letter Tetragrammaton (יהוה). In the present, messianic epoch, initiated by Jesus Christ, he

reveals himself through the five-letter name *Yehoshuah* (יהושוע).<sup>53</sup> By completing the divine name, Jesus fulfilled and extended the Jewish covenant.

Reuchlin noted further that *shin* is one of the three mother letters in the Hebrew alphabet. It was significant, he argued, that, in the messianic epoch, God had incarnated through a woman. The very name “Jesus” captured in symbolic form the doctrine of the virgin birth. In due course the name of Jesus, long considered of devotional value, took on occult power. The 17th-century Franciscan friar Chrysostomus à Capranica sug-

gested that the emperor Ferdinand II invoke the powerful name *Yehoshuah* to ensure success in a military campaign against the Turks.<sup>54</sup>

Christian Kabbalists identified the sefirah *Tifareth* with Jesus Christ. Just as *Tifareth* served as the mediator between *Kether* and *Malkuth*, Christ was the *Logos*, the restorer of harmony after the fall of Adam.<sup>55</sup> The divine essence poured down on humanity through Christ. In response, we must seek reunion with

God through Christ. Humanity might be estranged from God, but it was still potentially divine and capable of a different kind of redemption from the one customarily taught by the church. That alternative view of redemption had much in common with the Eastern Orthodox notion of *theosis*, or “deification.” In the west, Meister Eckhart had also found that concept appealing.<sup>56</sup>

### Polarities

The power of the Kabbalah to model both the juxtaposition and the resolution of polarities was an evocative concept, and an important polarity was gender. For example, *Tifareth*’s position in the Tree of Life, intermediate be-

---

**Emergence of the Christian Kabbalah was a tribute to timeless and universal value—theological, cosmological, social and psychological—of its Judaic antecedent. It was also a tribute to the vision of Renaissance scholars who recognized the Kabbalah’s potential to describe and explore Christian beliefs about God, the universe, society and the individual.**

---

tween *Kether* and *Malkuth/Shekinah* was entirely consistent with the notion that Christ was born from the Father and the woman.

Guillaume Postel took the notion of gender polarity a stage further by proposing, as some Gnostics had done many centuries earlier, that God manifested in both masculine and feminine form. Over time Postel's belief acquired more than theoretical interest. In 1547 he met a Venetian prophetess named Joanna, whom he believed to be an incarnation of Christ.<sup>57</sup> Postel is quoted as saying: "The Word has been made man, but the world will only be saved when the Word shall be made woman."<sup>58</sup>

The human and cosmic aspects of gender also fascinated Jakob Böhme: "[T]he masculine principle is predominantly anthropomorphic and creative, whereas the feminine principle is predominantly cosmic and birth-giving."<sup>59</sup> Echoing a theory usually attributed to Plato's Aristophanes, Böhme asserted that Adam initially was androgynous and virginal.<sup>60</sup> That virginity was embodied in Sophia: "not a female, but a chasteness and purity without a blemish."<sup>61</sup> Sophia was the direct Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *Chokmah*.<sup>62</sup> Adam lost his primeval virginity through the fall, and Sophia's place was taken by his earthly companion Eve. Thereafter, according to Böhme, man remained in an incomplete state, yearning for his primeval wholeness. The solution lay not in withdrawal into ascetic celibacy, as the church urged, but in a spiritual reunion of the masculine and feminine; through woman man could once again find his primeval Sophia.<sup>63</sup> Masculine-feminine tension might be the source of much suffering, but it provided an environment in which our spiritual potential could be realized.

Another polarity explored in the Kabbalah was good and evil.<sup>64</sup> Kabbalistic teachings took a more sensitive attitude to that polarity than did orthodox Christianity.<sup>65</sup> Kabbalists viewed morality less as an absolute than as a question of balance between pairs of opposites. Certain actions produce imbalance and call for complementary actions to restore balance. For example, severity, represented by the sefirah *Geburah*, needs to be balanced by kindness and generosity, represented by *Chesed/Gedulah*;

otherwise it harms the actor as well as others. On the other hand, excessive generosity may need to be balanced by prudent withholding of bounty so that recipients can develop a sense of values. The resolution of opposites would be illustrated well in Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* by Dame Concord and her twin sons Love and Hate.<sup>66</sup>

## Response from Institutional Christianity

Anti-Semitism, never totally absent among medieval Christians, increased in intensity after the First Crusade. Persecution of Jews became common during the Renaissance and the centuries that followed. Jewish Kabbalists fared no better than other Jews. Abraham ben Samuel Abulafia, traveled to Suriano in the hope of meeting Pope Nicholas III who was residing there. Abraham was unaware that orders had been issued to burn him at the stake upon his arrival. Fortunately for him, the pope died that very day. Returning to Rome, Abraham was arrested but was released four weeks later. He died in exile in Malta sometime after 1291.

Christian Kabbalistic studies represented an interest in Judaism that contrasted uneasily with the prevailing anti-Semitism. Despite the involvement of monks, priests, cardinals, and even a pope, the church viewed such studies, Christianized or otherwise, with considerable suspicion, and official responses were ambivalent.

On the one hand there was a sense that interest in Jewish studies might help win Jews to Christianity. As we have seen many Jewish scholars did convert to Christianity,<sup>67</sup> and their expertise was viewed as useful for evangelical and, more importantly, polemical purposes. Converts from Judaism were often appointed to debate religion with practicing Jews, although the "disputations" typically took the form of tribunals targeting the Jewish populations of European cities.<sup>68</sup> Lifelong Christians like Giovanni Pico, Egidio da Viterbo, and Johann Reuchlin, who engaged in serious studies of Judaism could help in similar ways, attempting to undermine Jews' resistance to conversion. On the other, there was fear that

Jewish studies, particularly Kabbalistic studies which impacted on major areas of doctrine, might be a “Trojan horse” that could undermine Christian faith.<sup>69</sup> Christian students of Kabbalah might be tempted to convert to Judaism or persuade others to do so.

Marsilio Ficino’s interest in Hermeticism led to accusations of heresy by the church, and he was forced to mount a strong defense of his orthodoxy. His student Giovanni Pico was also questioned by the Inquisition. Despite Pico’s assurances that that Neoplatonism and Hermeticism were fully consistent with Christian doctrine, 13 of his *Theses* were condemned as heretical. After fleeing to France, Pico was eventually allowed to return to Florence and was placed in the custody of the Medici. He died at the early age of 31, poisoned, according to some allegations, by his own secretary. Pico’s funeral oration was given by the controversial monk and reformer Girolamo Savonarola.

Johann Reuchlin had dedicated *De Arte Cabalistica* to Pope Leo X. But that gesture did not insulate him from ecclesiastical disfavor. When the inquisitors of Cologne proposed to burn all Jewish books in the Holy Roman Empire, Reuchlin sought to stop them, arguing that the books were a sacred and intellectual heritage. Angered by that opposition, the Inquisition sent Reuchlin to Rome and, despite Cardinal Egidio’s support, he was fined for heresy. Later, like Martin Luther, Reuchlin secured the protection of a German prince. Reuchlin supported the Reformation cause, and Philipp Melancthon, Desideratus Erasmus, and Luther all came to him for instruction. He is often referred to as the “Father of the Reformation.”

During Cornelius Agrippa’s tempestuous career, he was denounced by secular and ecclesiastical authorities throughout Europe and eventually was condemned as a heretic. Among much else, his assertion of links between the Kabbalah and Gnosticism could scarcely be expected to win friends in ecclesiastical circles where the church fathers’ diatribes against Gnosticism were often cited. Under pressure from the Inquisition, Agrippa was forced to renounce the study of magic and spent the last

years of his life in quiet piety. He died in 1535 in Grenoble, France.

Guillaume Postel’s books were placed on the Index of Prohibited Books in 1555. When he appeared before the Inquisition to defend his views, he was judged to be insane rather than heretical. Notwithstanding, he was imprisoned in Rome for four years.<sup>70</sup> Upon release when Pope Paul IV died, he returned to France and continued to preach, only to be placed under house arrest by the Parlement in Paris for disturbing the peace. Postel spent the last eleven years of his life in the monastery of St. Martin des Champs and died there in 1581.

The outspoken Giordano Bruno, whose diplomatic skills never matched his intellectual gifts, became a major target of the institutional church. In a terrible reenactment of the betrayal of Jan Hus by the Council of Constance, Bruno was lured to Rome on a promise of safe conduct and burned at the stake in 1600.<sup>71</sup> More fortunate was the English poet John Donne (1572–1631), yet another man who believed that the Kabbalah offered a way to reconcile Judaism and Christianity.<sup>72</sup> Born a Catholic, he avoided persecution in Elizabethan England by converting to Anglicanism, whereupon he was appointed Dean of St Paul’s Cathedral.

Jakob Böhme always considered himself a devout Lutheran, but he was critical of institutional Christianity and its warring sects, comparing them to “Babel and the Antichrist.”<sup>73</sup> Böhme’s anticlericalism and unconventional theological views drew continual fire from church authorities. Silenced for several years, he began writing again in secrecy. His nemesis, the chief pastor of Görlitz, Gregory Richter, denounced Böhme from the pulpit and inflamed public opinion against him. On his deathbed Böhme is reported to have said “Now I go hence into Paradise.”<sup>74</sup> But his grave was desecrated by a mob.

Not surprisingly, the church took a dim view of any attempt to erode the doctrine of evil. To reduce the response to evil to the resolution of pairs of opposites flew in the face of orthodox moral theology and threatened to undermine the power over people’s lives that the church derived from belief in sin, judgment and hell.

## The Christian Kabbalistic Heritage

**E**mergence of the Christian Kabbalah was a tribute to the timeless and universal value—theological, cosmological, social and psychological—of its Judaic antecedent. Not insignificantly, that antecedent developed primarily from Sephardic Judaism. Why, one might ask, given what we know of subsequent events, did not medieval Christian Europe provide as fertile an environment as the Muslim world for the development of the Judaic Kabbalah? The answer may lie in the vibrancy of Islamic civilization as much as in the climate of tolerance it fostered.<sup>75</sup>

Nevertheless, Kabbalistic teachings found their way into Christian Europe early in the Renaissance. And great credit is due to the vision of scholars of the time who recognized the Kabbalah's potential to describe and elucidate Christian beliefs about God, the universe, society and the individual. On the other hand, we might note that the Christian Kabbalah differed from its medieval Judaic antecedent in its almost-complete dependence on written texts rather than the oral tradition of generations of rabbinic teachers. To that extent, use of the very term "Kabbalah" becomes questionable.

Be that as it may, if we look for a man whose contribution to the Christian Kabbalah was pivotal, he would have to be Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. In addition to popularizing the study of Hebraic texts, which would broaden the focus of Christian scholarship beyond what it had been in medieval times, he gave Kabbalistic studies legitimacy in Christian circles. Furthermore, he promoted the view that, by use of the intellect, man could ascend the chain of being—or perhaps we should say the Tree of Life—and approach the angelic realm, even the divine realm. Neglect of the intellect, by contrast, reduced man to a vegetative or animal level.

Despite the enthusiasm of Pico and the other scholars we have discussed, the Christian Kabbalah never became part of mainstream Christianity beliefs or practices. Interest was confined to a handful of intellectuals, mystics, and eccentric churchmen. Ironically, the synthesis

of Kabbalah and Hermeticism, which helped generate interest in the Kabbalah early in the Renaissance, discredited it in the eyes of ecclesiastical authorities and increased suspicious of anything with occult associations. Many leading scholars were persecuted or even executed for their involvement.

Nor was the contribution of leading Christian Kabbalists always recognized in their own time. Jakob Böhme's importance was only acknowledged several decades after his death, when his work inspired the Philadelphian Society, an esoteric group formed in England in 1670.<sup>76</sup> Eventually Böhme's work would influence Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831)<sup>77</sup> and psychologist Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961). Böhme was also held in high regard in 19th-century Russia, where mystics and even ordinary people referred to him as "the holy Jakob Böhme among our fathers."<sup>78</sup>

In England Kabbalistic teachings influenced the Cambridge Platonists, a group of academic theologians that included Benjamin Whichcote (1609-1683), Henry More (1614-1687), and Countess Anne Conway (1630-1679). In turn, their work as well as Böhme's influenced the artist and writer William Blake (1757-1827).<sup>79</sup>

In France, esoteric studies continued in the Martinist movement, named after Louis Claude de Saint-Martin (1743-1803). Saint-Martin and his teacher, Martinez de Pasqually were both influenced by Kabbalism. An interesting insight shared by the Martinists was Christ's role as the "repairer" of humanity. Their perspective on redemption echoed the Safed Kabbalists' assertion that God had to repair the world after the primeval catastrophe.<sup>80</sup> On the other hand, Christianity was lukewarm to suggestions that humanity might participate in the redemptive act; indeed the Protestant reformers insisted that man is totally dependent on divine grace for salvation.<sup>81</sup>

The early 17th-century Rosicrucian movement was influenced by both Kabbalistic and Hermetic teachings. In turn, Rosicrucianism influenced Freemasonry and 19th-century occultism. French occultism eventually blossomed in the work of Éliphas Levi and Papus, while the most visible expression of British

occultism was the Hermetic Society of the Golden Dawn.<sup>82</sup>

Meanwhile, interest in the Kabbalistic study declined in Jewish circles. An important reason was its association with the Sabbatean fiasco. In the 1660s, the charismatic but psychologically unstable Sabbatai Zevi (1626–1676) proclaimed himself the messiah and attracted popular support throughout the Jewish world. Zevi himself had no particular leanings toward the Kabbalah, but a leading supporter, Nathan of Gaza, used Kabbalistic teachings to bolster Zevi's claims. When Zevi converted to Islam to escape execution by the Turkish sultan, the movement collapsed.<sup>83</sup> The Judaic Kabbalah was tainted, and serious study remained muted until the 20th century.

A more general reason for the decline in Judaic Kabbalah was a perception on the part of rabbinic scholars that the Kabbalah had become contaminated by Hermeticism and “Christianized.” In particular, efforts based on Kabbalistic concepts to synthesize Jewish and Christian thought were opposed as strongly by Jewish authorities as by Christian ecclesiastical authorities.

However the work of Christian Kabbalists was not totally rejected. That of the German philosopher Franz Josef Molitor (1779–1860) has won admiration from Jewish historians. The prominent Jewish scholar Gershom Scholem judged his work to be “far superior to that of most Jewish scholars of his time.”<sup>84</sup> Of German birth, Scholem emigrated to Jerusalem before World War II.<sup>85</sup> More than any other individual, he was responsible for the revival of interest in the Kabbalah in Jewish circles. Now a broadly based Kabbalistic revival is in progress in Israel, the United States, and elsewhere.

<sup>1</sup> “Sephardic” refers to Judaic traditions that developed within the Muslim Empire from the seventh century onward. It contrasts with Ashkenazic Judaism that developed in Christian Germany and later spread to eastern Europe.

<sup>2</sup> See for example: Dion Fortune. *The Mystical Qabalah*, revised edition. Weiser Books, 1935.

Arthur E. Waite. *The Holy Kabbalah*. Citadel Press, (undated, 1929?). Gershom Scholem. *Kabbalah*. Meridian Books, 1974. Leonora Leet. *The Secret Doctrine of the Kabbalah*. Inner Traditions, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Alternative forms are “Qabalah,” the more direct transliteration of the Hebrew, and the Latinized “Cabala.” This last was often used in connection with the Christian Kabbalah.

<sup>4</sup> The term “metaphysics” was actually coined by Aristotle, who did not form part of that tradition; however the term is a convenient shorthand for the mystically oriented philosophy that stretched from Pythagoras to the third-century CE Neoplatonists.

<sup>5</sup> The origins of all three books are disputed. Legends trace the books back to the first centuries of the Common Era, while secular academics typically attribute authorship to Isaac the Blind and Moses of Leon themselves. Controversy over the authorship of the *Zohar* existed even during Moses de Leon's lifetime.

<sup>6</sup> *Sefirah* has three roots: *sefer* (ספר, “text”), *sefar* (ספר, “number”), and *sippur* (סיפור, “telling”). See: Aryeh Kaplan. *Sefer Yetzirah: the Book of Creation*. Weiser, 1997, pp. 19-20.

<sup>7</sup> The *Ain Soph* can be compared with the Hindu Brahman. In more detail, the Godhead was said to be hidden by three “veils,” the *Ain* (אין, “Ultimate”), the *Ain Soph* (אין סוף, “Limitless”), and the *Ain Soph Aur* (אין סוף אור, “Infinite Light”).

<sup>8</sup> The sefirotic names were common Hebrew words, and all are found—occasionally in evocative combinations suggesting early knowledge of Kabbalistic symbolism—in the Hebrew Bible. See for example: *1 Chronicles* 29:11; *Proverbs* 2:2-6; and *Proverbs* 9:10.

<sup>9</sup> Magic was practiced among the *Chasidim* of 12th- and 13th-century Germany. And a number of Italian Jews became interested in magic in the 15th century. The rabbi Meir ibn Gabbay (1480–c.1540) emerged as a leading theurgic Kabbalist in Turkey. See for example: Moshe Idel. *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*. Yale Univ. Press, 1988, pp. 175ff.

<sup>10</sup> Shimon bar Yockai is often claimed to have dictated the *Zohar* to a student while hiding in a cave after being condemned to death by Roman authorities.

<sup>11</sup> See for example, Raphael Afilalo (ed.). *The Kabbalah of the Ari Z'al according to the Ramhal*. Kabbalah Editions, 2004, pp. 41-58.

- <sup>12</sup> For a discussion of participation in the creative and redemptive acts, see: Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 173-181.
- <sup>13</sup> Parts of the *Zohar* were written in Aramaic. This was a language not generally spoken in medieval Europe, lending support to claims that the texts were written in the first–third centuries CE. However Syriac, the sacred and scholarly language of Persia, was closely related to Aramaic, and the early Kabbalistic texts likely were brought from Baghdad.
- <sup>14</sup> Some Jews never returned from Babylon after the exile. Many more Jews left Palestine during times of turbulence, particularly during Roman rule in the first and second centuries CE. Migrations continued throughout the late Middle Ages as the result of persecution, culminating in the mass deportation of Jews from Spain in 1492 and Portugal in 1497. By the 1500, few Jews remained in western Europe.
- <sup>15</sup> Gematria attaches numerical values to words and phrases and seeks meaningful correspondences with words and phrases with arithmetically related values.
- <sup>16</sup> The *Tetragrammaton* (“name of four letters”) is conventionally rendered *Yahweh* or *Jehovah*, but its correct pronunciation is unknown. Only the high priest of biblical Jewish was permitted to utter the name, and then only once a year, at Yom Kippur.
- <sup>17</sup> Abulafia is remembered for his prophetic text, the *Sefer ha-Yashar* (“Book of the Righteous”).
- <sup>18</sup> An estimated one-third of the Jewish population of Spain converted, often in the attempt to avoid ongoing harassment by Christian authorities.
- <sup>19</sup> Constantinople was conquered by the Fourth Crusade, in 1204, and Latin bishops appointed to the eastern patriarchate. The Byzantines regained control of Constantinople in mid-century, but the empire was mortally wounded and Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453.
- <sup>20</sup> *The Kybalion*. Yogi Publication Society, 1912, p. 17.
- <sup>21</sup> According to some legends Thoth was a contemporary of Abraham, even his teacher.
- <sup>22</sup> The famous quote appeared in a book by Antonio Averlino Filarete published between 1441 and 1464. See: Vincent Cronin. “Florence of the Medici.” *The Renaissance: Maker of Modern Man*. National Geographic, 1970, p. 79.
- <sup>23</sup> G. F. Young. *The Medici*. Modern Library, 1910/1930, pp. 197-198.
- <sup>24</sup> Myron P. Gilmore. *The World of Humanism*. Harper, 1962, p. 185.
- <sup>25</sup> An agreement was reached, and the patriarch of Constantinople endorsed it. But the agreement was widely viewed as a sellout to western Christianity, and the Orthodox laity and most of the clergy rejected it. When the city of Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453, many people viewed the conquest as punishment for the patriarch’s “betrayal” of his church.
- <sup>26</sup> See for example: Christopher Bamford. Introduction to “*Freemasonry*” and *Ritual Work*. Steinerbooks, 2007, p. xxxvi-xxxvii.
- <sup>27</sup> For a discussion of some of the Academy’s activities see: Désirée Hirst. *Hidden Riches: Traditional Symbolism from the Renaissance to Blake*. Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964, pp. 15-43.
- <sup>28</sup> Hirst, *Hidden Riches*, pp. 16-18.
- <sup>29</sup> Young, *The Medici*, p. 109.
- <sup>30</sup> Pico boldly claimed: “I have ranged through all the masters of philosophy, examined all their works, become acquainted with all schools.” *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, 1486. (Transl: Elizabeth L. Forbes.) Ernst Cassirer. *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*. University Of Chicago Press, 1948
- <sup>31</sup> Young, *The Medici*, p. 203.
- <sup>32</sup> Alamanno’s involvement in magic shows that such interests were not confined to Christian Kabbalists in 15th-century Italy.
- <sup>33</sup> The theses were published in Rome in 1486 as the *Conclusiones Philosophicae, Cabalasticae et Theologicae*. Judgments on how many dealt with the Kabbalah vary from 47 to 138. See: Richard H. Popkin. *Jewish Christians and Christian Jews: from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*. Springer, 1994, p. 18.
- <sup>34</sup> Pico, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, p. 239.
- <sup>35</sup> *Disputationes Adversus Astrologiam Divinatricem* (“Disputations against Divinatory Astrology.”)
- <sup>36</sup> Athol Bloomer. “The Eucharist and the Jewish Mystical Tradition, Part I.” *The Hebrew Catholic*, Summer-Fall 2002, pp. 15-18.
- <sup>37</sup> Diarmaid MacCullough. *The Reformation*. Penguin Books, 2003, p. 91. See also: John O’Malley. “Historical Thought and the Reform Crisis of the Early Sixteenth Century.” *Theological Studies*, vol. 28, 1967, pp. 531-548.
- <sup>38</sup> Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 5-6.
- <sup>39</sup> Dissemination of Kabbalistic texts at that time was aided by invention of the printing press.
- <sup>40</sup> *The Kabbalah Unveiled* was translated into English by S. L. Macgregor Mathers, co-founder of the Society of the Golden Dawn, and published in 1888.



- <sup>41</sup> Introduction to Johann Reuchlin. *On the Art of the Kabbalah*. (Transl: Martin Goodman & Sarah Goodman.) Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1993, p. 18.
- <sup>42</sup> Richard H. Popkin. *Jewish Christians and Christian Jews: from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*. Springer, 1994, p. 17.
- <sup>43</sup> Ambrose Serle. *Essays Upon Some Remarkable Names and Titles of Jesus Christ*, 1799. Quoted in: Hirst. *Hidden Riches*, pp. 282-283. A trinity can be extracted from the tree of life in more than one way, all of them revealing important correspondences, but none completely satisfying in its symbolism. See: John Nash. "The Trinity and Its Symbolism." *Esoteric Quarterly*, Spring 2005, pp. 33-46.
- <sup>44</sup> In *Exodus* 31:3 the Lord said "I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom [chokmah], and in understanding [tabun], and in knowledge [daath]."
- <sup>45</sup> For a discussion of the Shekinah's role in Jewish mysticism see: John Nash. "The Shekinah: the Indwelling Glory of God." *Esoteric Quarterly*, Summer 2005, pp. 33-40.
- <sup>46</sup> In Christian theology God the Father plays the *de-facto* role of a Godhead, with the unfortunate implication that the highest level of divinity is male.
- <sup>47</sup> Meister Eckhart. Sermon 5: *How All Creatures*. Matthew Fox (ed.). *Passion for Creation*. Inner Traditions, 1980/2000, p. 93.
- <sup>48</sup> *John* 1:5.
- <sup>49</sup> A similar notion was promoted by the 20th-century Protestant theologian Paul Tillich.
- <sup>50</sup> Jakob Böhme. *Four Tables of Divine Revelation*. London, 1654. Robin Waterfield (ed.). *Jacob Boehme*. North Atlantic Books, 2001, pp. 214-217.
- <sup>51</sup> *Sefer Yetzirah* 1:10. See for example, Aryeh Kaplan. *Sefer Yetzirah: the Book of Creation*. Weiser, 1997, pp. 7, 250-254, 262. The remaining twelve "single" letters correspond to the next stage of differentiation discussed in the esoteric literature: the 12 signs of the zodiac. The increasing complexity of manifestation is represented by the series: 1→3→7→12... Note that 7 = 3 + 4, while 12 = 3 x 4.
- <sup>52</sup> *Revelation* 1:4.
- <sup>53</sup> Reuchlin's arguments were presented in his book *De Verbo Mirifico* ("On the Miraculous Word"). See, for example: Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 198. Also, see the Introduction to *On the Art of the Kabbalah* by Martin Goodman & Sarah Goodman. Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1993, pp. xix-xxi.
- <sup>54</sup> Ken Gewertz. "Mystical Encounters." *Harvard Gazette Archives*, March 1996.
- <sup>55</sup> It should be noted that originally *Logos* connoted "mediator" or "bringer of harmony." Interpretation as "the Word" was a late development, popularized by the 17th-century King James Bible.
- <sup>56</sup> Eckhart, Sermon 5, p. 93.
- <sup>57</sup> Yvonne Petry. *Gender, Kabbalah, and the Reformation*. Brill 2004, pp. 5ff.
- <sup>58</sup> Éliphas Levi. *History of Magic*. (Transl: A. E. Waite.) Weiser, 1913/1969), p. 253.
- <sup>59</sup> Jakob Böhme. *The Threefold Life of Man*. (Transl: S. Janos.) Quoted in: N. Berdyaev. *Studies Concerning Jacob Boehme*, etude II, 1930, pp. 34-62.
- <sup>60</sup> In Plato's *Symposium* Aristophanes declared that man was originally androgynous but was cut in two by Zeus to curb his pride. Ever since, man has sought his female half, and vice versa.
- <sup>61</sup> Böhme, *The Threefold Life of Man*, pp. 34-62. See also Böhme's *Mysterium Magnum*. London, 1654, chapter 18.
- <sup>62</sup> "Chokmah" was a feminine Hebrew noun, and in Hellenic Jewish mysticism *Chokmah/Sophia* ("Wisdom") was regarded as a feminine divine entity. In the Kabbalah, *Chokmah* became a masculine force.
- <sup>63</sup> For a discussion of Böhme's teachings on gender and their influence on William Blake see: Hirst, *Hidden Riches*, pp. 92-96.
- <sup>64</sup> For a discussion of the pairs of opposites as they are addressed in the Kabbalah see: John Nash. "Duality, Good and Evil, and the Approach to Harmony." *Esoteric Quarterly*, Fall 2004, pp. 15-26.
- <sup>65</sup> Nash. "Duality, Good and Evil, and the Approach to Harmony," pp. 15-26.
- <sup>66</sup> Edmund Spenser. *The Faerie Queene*, Book VI, canto 10. London, 1596.
- <sup>67</sup> In some cases conversion was voluntary, but in many instances it was coerced, as occurred in 15th-century Spain.
- <sup>68</sup> Major disputations took place in Paris and Barcelona.
- <sup>69</sup> Hirst, *Hidden Riches*, pp. 110-111.
- <sup>70</sup> Yvonne Petry. *Gender, Kabbalah, and the Reformation*. Brill 2004, p.7.
- <sup>71</sup> Such treachery was not uncommon at the time. Martin Luther narrowly escaped a similar fate at the Diet of Worms in 1521. Not surprisingly, Galileo entered into a plea bargain with the Inquisition rather than risk further investigation.
- <sup>72</sup> See the discussion in Hirst, *Hidden Riches*, pp. 110-111.

- <sup>73</sup> Quoted in: Waterfield. *Jacob Boehme*, pp. 154-155. Source not provided.
- <sup>74</sup> John J. Stoudt. *Sunrise to Eternity*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1957, p. 191.
- <sup>75</sup> It must not be forgotten that the golden age of Islamic culture occurred while most of Christian Europe was still mired in the Dark Ages.
- <sup>76</sup> Prominent members of the Philadelphians were Anglican priest John Pordage (1607–1681) and Jane Ward Lead (1624–1704) who had a number of visions involving Sophia.
- <sup>77</sup> It is easy to see how Böhme’s resolution of opposites fed into Hegel’s theory of thesis, antithesis and synthesis.
- <sup>78</sup> Nikolai Berdyaev. *The Russian Idea*. (Transl: R. French.) Lindisfarne Press, 1947/1992, p. 37.
- <sup>79</sup> For an extended discussion of the Cambridge Platonists and their influence on Blake see: Hirst, *Hidden Riches*.

- <sup>80</sup> See note 20.
- <sup>81</sup> The Calvinists went so far as to insist that humankind was totally depraved and, even Christ’s atonement could only rescue a small elite, or “elect,” from eternal damnation.
- <sup>82</sup> For perspectives on the Society of the Golden Dawn see: Israel Regardie. *The Golden Dawn*. Llewellyn Publications, 1982. See also: Mary K. Greer. *Women of the Golden Dawn*. Park Street Press, 1995.
- <sup>83</sup> See the extensive account of Zevi and the movement in Gershom Scholem. *Kabbalah*, pp. 244-286. See also his *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. Schocken Books, 1946, pp.287-324.
- <sup>84</sup> Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 201.
- <sup>85</sup> Important works by Gershom Scholem, including *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* and *Kabbalah*, have already been cited.

### Appendix 1. Sefiroth in the Judaic Kabbalah\*

No.	Hebrew Name	Conventional English Name
1	Kether כתר	“Crown”
2	Chokmah חכמה	“Wisdom”
3	Binah or Tabun בינה תבון	“Understanding” or “Intelligence”
--	Daath דעת	“Knowledge” or “Gnosis”
4	Chesed, or Gedulah חסד גדולה	“Mercy” or “Greatness”
5	Geburah, or Din גבורה דין	“Judgment” or “Severity”
6	Tifareth תפארת	“Beauty” or “Harmony”
7	Netzach נצח	“Victory” or “Eternity”
8	Hod הוד	“Splendor”
9	Yesod יסוד	“Foundation”
10	Malkuth or Shekinah מלכות שכינה	“The Kingdom” or “The Indwelling Presence of God”

\* Kabbalists insist that the English names are just convenient labels and that the true nature of the sefiroth is deeper and more complex.

## Book Reviews

---

***The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos: Humanity and the New Story*, by Brian Swimme.** Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001. Paperback, 112 pages. US\$12.00. Also available in video for US\$59.95 by calling 1-800-273-3720.

In *The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos*, Brian Swimme has provided a clear and yet profound introduction to what cosmologists are learning about the physical universe in which we live. Those engaged in esoteric study may often feel that they sense the energetic dynamism that forms the Life in which we live and move and have our being, but without any tangible proof of its existence. Swimme articulates that same reality but links it to the findings of contemporary science. He describes in rich and evocative language the ongoing evolution and wisdom of the cosmos.

The text of this book is structured around the question of where is the center of reality, the heart of the cosmos. The answer from Swimme is more than the scientific explanation of Existence first materializing 15 billion light-years from Earth. He also describes how each of us is living at the center of the cosmos. He helps us learn to experience our reality in a manner that is personally transformative. He provides a context for linking occult laws with scientific phenomena, giving examples such as the Sun's extravagant daily sacrifice of transforming four million tons of itself into light that we might live.

Often our lives become segmented, with the exoteric aspects seemingly unconnected to our esoteric experience. Swimme provides us with a way of engaging with our physical reality from a deeply sacred perspective. It is not possible to read this small gem and emerge with one's worldview unchanged.

Dr. Brian Swimme is a professor on the faculty of Philosophy, Cosmology and Consciousness at the California Institute of Integral Studies.

His research focuses on the evolutionary dynamics of the universe, the relationship between scientific cosmology and more traditional religious visions, the cultural implications of the new evolutionary epic, and the role of humanity in the unfolding story of Earth and cosmos. He has authored a number of books including *The Universe Is a Green Dragon* and *The Universe Story* (in collaboration with Thomas Berry) and has produced several video series including *Canticle to the Cosmos* and *The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos*. Swimme travels regularly to speak on cosmology and ecology at conferences and organizations, including the United Nations, UNESCO, and the State of the World Forum.

Dorothy Riddle  
Vancouver, Canada.

***How Wide the Heart: The Roots of Peace in Palestine and Israel*, by Marko and Ana Pogačnik.** Lindisfarne Books, 2006. Paperback, 202 pages. US\$20.00.

Father and daughter, Marko and Ana Pogačnik have collaborated in writing several books, all of which pertain to the healing of the earth's landscape. Marko, an intuitive, has developed a profound sense of communication with the earth elementals. He discusses in lectures and books the tragedy that has befallen these evolutionary beings through neglect, thoughtlessness and destruction by human beings. A native of Slovenia, Marko studied sculpture and landscape art. With his daughter Ana, an archeologist and noted pianist, they have conducted many seminars and restorative projects designed to bring communication and understanding between communities and businesses and these beings which are eager for this healing process. This reviewer looks forward to hearing Marko Pogačnik speak at a seminar on Healing the Earth and Ourselves, sponsored by

SteinerBooks and Spiritual Research in New York City, March 2008.

*How Wide the Heart* describes a pilgrimage led by Marko and Ana Pogačnik in 2001. They and others interested in geomancy, and looking for ways to achieve lasting peace, traveled along the archetypal path that leads from the Pyramids across the Sinai Peninsula to Jerusalem. Along the way, they visited the holy sites of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. By meditating and tuning in to the vital energies of those ancient sites, they were able to decipher the emotional and spiritual dimensions of each location and put into place impulses for healing and regeneration.

The problems of Palestine and Israel, from this “heart center of the world,” are given a new examination in this book whereby one no longer feels helpless to “do” anything to promote peace and understanding. The analysis of conflicts is not so new perhaps, but the meditations which accompany the chapters in Part I and also the ones in Part II, written by Ana Pogačnik, are very deeply moving.

For many years I have led meditations, often about our heart nature. But these, coming as they do from a seemingly hopeless part of our planet, have lifted my spirit and inspired me at a deeper level. One quote is particularly evocative:

We cannot connect with the heart's energy and divine love out of fear of sin. Fear and eternal love have such different vibrations that they cannot find each other and never meet... Only through the heart and out of purest love can we experience the infinite divine power for which we are longing. [p. 112]

Centuries of religious heritage which have controlled us through our guilt or separateness, no matter whether Judaism, Christianity or Islam, do not serve us. The Pogačniks' connection with the spirits of the landscape as well as heavenly ones makes this book most valid in interpreting our heart's best interest. I recommend it for all concerned for the Earth and its myriad lives.

Sylvia Lagergren  
Johnson City, Tennessee

***“Freemasonry” and Ritual Work. The Misraim Service: Texts and Documents from the Cognitive-Ritual Section of the Esoteric School 1904-1919, by Rudolf Steiner and others.*** Introduction by Christopher Bamford; translated by John Wood. SteinerBooks, 2007. Paperback, 569 pages. US\$35.00.

It is widely known that Rudolf Steiner was appointed head of the newly constituted German Section of the Theosophical Society in 1902 and that, two years later, then-president Annie Besant asked him to lead the Esoteric Society for Germany and Austria. Within a few years, tensions developed between Steiner and the Theosophical Society that eventually led to a permanent split. In 1912 Steiner established his own organization, the Anthroposophical Society.

Most of us grew up viewing Rudolf Steiner as one of several influential individuals—others being Helena Roerich and Alice Bailey—whose roots lay in Blavatskian Theosophy but who chose for various reasons to follow their own paths. Certainly Steiner's esoteric teachings owed much to the earlier work of Helena Blavatsky and other first-generation Theosophists, albeit westernized and brought into closer alignment with Christianity. What many of us did not know was the extent of Steiner's connections with Masonic groups in Europe and his incorporation of Masonic ritual into the work of his Esoteric Society.

The recently published *“Freemasonry” and Ritual Work* is the product of an ongoing research effort sponsored by SteinerBooks to collect, translate (or retranslate), comment upon, and publish both the well-known speeches and writings of Rudolf Steiner and also his previously little-known works. This book provides a wealth of historical information on one of the outstanding esotericists of the last 150 years. It is a must-read for all who are fascinated by the evolution of western esotericism.

Documents reproduced in the book show that in 1905 Steiner and his future wife Marie von Sivers formed an association with the Order of Ancient Freemasons of the Memphis and Misraim Rites. The arrangement permitted Steiner

to form his own lodge, *Mystica Aeterna*, in Berlin. It was understood that inductees into the lodge would come primarily from the German Section of the Theosophical Society, and *Mystica Aeterna* became the “Misraim Service” of the Esoteric School.

Rudolf Steiner adapted existing Masonic rituals for initiation into the various grades and for other purposes, but he also developed new ones based on his own insights. As was customary in Masonic lodges, participants were sworn to preserve the secrecy of all rituals in use. After the Anthroposophical Society severed its connection with the Theosophical Society in 1913, some former members betrayed their oaths. In response Steiner announced:

Because of the betrayal it has become necessary to change our ritual in such a way that—while preserving the meaning of the main points—the rituals will have a different wording than that previously employed, so that they will not sound in unison with those of the others. [p. 144]

Little more than a year later, when World War I broke out, *Mystica Aeterna* ceased opera-

tions. Certain rituals were developed for the Christian Community, founded in 1922 to encourage religious renewal, but they were characteristically different from those previously used in the lodge.

Clearly, Rudolf Steiner sought to establish a link between Anthroposophy and the western esoteric tradition as it had been preserved through Freemasonry. However Marie Sivers Steiner denied that her husband had ever been initiated into the Craft. Writing in 1934 she explained:

Rudolf Steiner’s spiritual science, which is not restricted to secret circles nor practiced from the point of view of power politics but is available to all people, will be accepted in the consciousness of the present day. [p. 121]

Steiner, who is remembered for the breadth of his esoteric teachings, for his pioneering work in education and biodynamic agriculture, and for many other achievements, died 30 March 1925 in Dornach, Switzerland.

Editorial Staff

