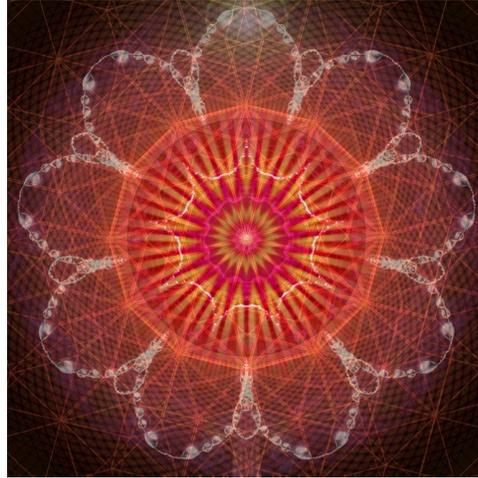


Fall 2016, Volume 12, Number 3



# *The Esoteric Quarterly*

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

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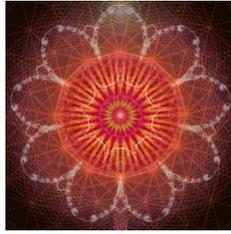
**Esoteric philosophy and its applications  
to individual and group service and  
the expansion of human consciousness.**



Washington, DC, USA.

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# *The Esoteric Quarterly*

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

## Christian and Islamic Esotericism

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Virtually every major religious tradition has both outer, exoteric forms and teachings and its inner or esoteric dimension. According to Frithjof Schoun, the great 20<sup>th</sup> century metaphysician, the inner, esoteric dimension deals with a hierarchy of values and with “the invariable hidden beneath the veil” of diverse religious expressions. As such, esotericists are not content to accept the spiritual experiences of others and the formulated doctrines of those who may never have had such experiences, but seek the way of self-knowledge, wisdom and the experience of the Divine Presence for themselves. For example, while traditional Islam is rooted in a literal reading of the Qur’an, Sufis seek “the kernel hidden in the shell”—the metaphorical and symbolic layers of meaning in the words and its scriptural accounts. Similarly, Christian esotericists seek the Christ both within and without, and strive to understand the mystery of spiritual transformation and liberation concealed from the uninitiated. As the featured articles in this issue show, Christian esotericists and Sufis seek the inner reality over outward religious observances, doctrine and dogma, yet neither reject the exoteric dimension or form, which serves as the outer vehicle for Gnosis.

The first article in this issue, from John Nash, explores “the opportunities and challenges facing esotericists who become practicing Christians, and Christians who are drawn to modern esotericism.” It begins by touching upon some of the reasons why many esotericists reject and devalue Christianity. In addition to examining past abuses and negative stereotypes, Nash discusses Christianity’s rich spirituality as well as its intrinsic esoteric dimensions. Nash’s primary focus, however, is on the overlap between Christian and modern esotericism—“esotericists who have embraced Christianity, and traditional Christians who have embraced elements of modern esoteric teachings.” The article concludes with a discussion on Christianity, the Hierarchy and

the Seven Rays, with particular attention given to the Sixth Ray, and Sixth Group of Disciples who are slated to play a major role in the development of the New World Religion.

Our next offering from Zachary Lansdowne takes a psychological approach in unveiling the strange visions and symbols in *Revelation* Chapter 9. The author’s approach consists of four basic principles: 1) an interpretation of signs and symbols; 2) the idea that each occurrence depicts a stage, or inner experience on the spiritual journey; 3) the idea that each symbol within an episode represents an aspect of the aspirant’s consciousness; and 4) the principle that John’s visions represents the conscious attitude of an aspirant, whereas the other symbols represent aspects of an aspirant’s subconscious and superconscious natures. Lansdowne’s article illustrates that the “*Revelation of St. John* is actually a veiled statement of an esoteric, or hidden, doctrine of early Christians,” which depicts “the cleansing of the subconscious realm.” Thus it offers “detailed and practical instructions for the spiritual journey—a roadmap to the awakening of higher consciousness.”

The final full-length feature in this issue provides an introduction to the fundamentals of Sufism in an effort to conveying something of its inherent universality and rich metaphysical significance. The article commences with an inquiry into Sufism’s controversial origins. It defines Sufism as a “science of the soul, as an esoteric or initiatic path of self-purification and self-realization, which teaches that Allah or the Supreme Identity can be known and experienced directly.” The article provides an overview of Sufi thought, methods and practice drawn primarily from classical or Islamic Sufi orders. Universalist and non-Muslim Sufi orders, which promote interfaith cooperation and religious freedom, are also discussed. The Sufi Path to Union, which involves, among other

things, the purification of the carnal soul or lower nature, Sufi Gnosis, the Alchemy of the Heart and the Invocation of God's Beautiful Names, comprise the articles primary themes.

In addition to the full-length features in this issue, William Meader has contributed a short paper. The paper, *Walking the Spiritual Path* provides a contemporary perspective on what it means to tread the Path, wherein Meader says that we must reverse the way in which we initially think about what being on the Path means.

This issue of the *Quarterly* also contains two book reviews that are certain to be of interest to our readers. They are: *A Synthesis of Alchemy: An Inquiry into the Secrets of Hermetic Philosophy* by Dorje Jinpa, and *Mandala in the Heavens: How the Greek star myths tell the story of the Path of Initiation*, by Paul LaFerla.

As per our custom, we have included two inspiring poems—*The Last Incarnation and Arahat*—from Adam A. De Franco. Adam is student of the wisdom and seeks to share his experience of life's insights through his poetic visions. He is currently working with a group of disciples to create a retreat center in Northern California that will provide esoteric education and training for the future. For additional information we encourage you to visit: [www.wisdomretreat.center](http://www.wisdomretreat.center).

Our *Pictures of the Quarter* are from the visionary Portuguese artist, Joma Sipe. Sipe's astonishingly beautiful work, some of which was also featured in the Fall 2013 issue, are based almost entirely on inspiration. In speaking of his work, Sipe says: "The intricate and elaborate process of creating each work includes the purpose of transmitting a message, although sometimes that message cannot be understood immediately. Each work disperses and concentrates the light that emanates from each line in the painting. This light represents Being and our deeper Essence, the deep heart of the energy that inhabits everything that exists. This energy seeks to break the barrier of the physical dimension to meld with the universal Energy that condenses, materializes, and takes form in each canvas." For more

information on the artist see the advertisement in this issue or visit: [www.jomasipe.com/](http://www.jomasipe.com/).

Donna M. Brown  
Editor-in-Chief

### **Publication Policies**

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

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

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

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

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

Additionally, we expect authors to disclose any prior publication of an article, adapted from a book or any another source, at the time of its submission.

## Letters to the Editor

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Maureen Richmond's article *Affirming Planetary Purpose* (*Esoteric Quarterly*, Summer 2016, p. 45-54) is outstanding in its breadth and depth but, in my opinion, suffers from defects that may undermine some of its main points. I address here two major problems and a minor issue.

1. There seems to be serious confusion between planes and principles. This is probably how it occurred. Richmond first writes about the sevenfold cosmic organization (p. 46-47) without anywhere mentioning that the buddhic plane is the fourth one (or the fourth cosmic ether), but I think it is presumed. Then at the beginning of the next section there is a leap from planes to principles: "According to the Tibetan, this positioning indicates that our Solar Logos is working toward the co-ordination of the fourth or buddhic principle and vehicle" (p. 47). This sentence ends with the supporting footnote 10, which refers us to Alice Bailey's *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, p. 115. This reference, however, is invalid as the Tibetan nowhere on p. 115 identifies the buddhic principle or vehicle as the fourth one. The closest approximation I found in the *Treatise* nearby is a brief mention of "the fourth plane vehicle, the buddhi."<sup>1</sup>

In what follows Richmond extends the identification of the fourth plane with the fourth principle to human beings and freely speaks of buddhi as the fourth human principle.

The identification mentioned above is not acceptable for two reasons. First off, the fourth plane vehicle is not the same thing as the fourth vehicle as no straightforward correspondence between the seven planes and the seven principles is possible. Regardless of how the seven principles are numbered, they extend over six planes only excluding Adi (or even five if we decide not to count Monad as a principle).

Second, neither Alice Bailey nor Helena P. Blavatsky ever called buddhi the fourth principle (with one exception<sup>2</sup>). The most common way of listing the human principles is as follows: atma, buddhi, manas (or higher manas), kama (or kama-manas), emotional body, vital body, and physical body. Counting in this order, buddhi is the 2nd principle; counting in the reverse order, it is the 6th one. Here are a few quotations that support this numbering:

Bailey: "*Buddhi*. The Universal Soul or Mind. It is the spiritual soul in man (the Sixth Principle) and therefore the vehicle of Atma, the Spirit, which is the Seventh Principle"; "the sixth logoc principle, or *Buddhi*, and therefore the sixth principle of man."<sup>3</sup>

Blavatsky: "the sixth principle in man—*Buddhi*"; (a chart of human principles): "VI...*Buddhi*"; (another chart of human principles): "2. Spiritual Soul (*Buddhi*)"; "6. *Buddhi*, Spiritual Soul."<sup>4</sup>

2. Richmond analyzes buddhi in its three aspects: pure love, intuition, and discernment. Here we enter a huge gray area marred by poor or misleading nomenclature, for instance, love that is not love. The Tibetan also did not avoid this trap. However, semantic issues aside, there are a real problem here when Richmond links buddhi to both intuition and discrimination. At this point it is appropriate to ask, what happened to the (higher) manas, which is not even mentioned in the article? Like buddhi, it is a way of knowing but should be different from buddhi. Telling the one from the other may help clarify the basic features of buddhi.

Richmond first discusses buddhi as *discernment*, which I accept. Further down, she says that "the Tibetan equated intuition with '*discrimination*'" (p. 51; italics added) and "the Tibetan used the term '*discrimination*' in conjunction with buddhi" (p. 52). Let us see if this is really so. Below are two of her

supporting quotations from Alice Bailey to which I added the third one (on manas) for clarification purposes:

Animal.                      Human.                      Divine.

<...>

d. Taste (embryonic) Taste. Discrimination.  
Intuition.

d. *Tasting*. He *tastes* then finally and discriminates, for taste is the great sense that begins to hold sway during the discriminating process that takes place when the illusory nature of matter is in process of realization. Discrimination is the educatory process to which the Self subjects itself in the process of developing intuition—that faculty whereby the Self recognises its own essence in and under all forms. Discrimination concerns the duality of nature, the Self and the not-self, and is the means of their differentiation in the process of abstraction; the intuition concerns unity and is the capacity of the Self to contact other selves, and is not a faculty whereby the not-self is contacted.

The principle of manas in its discriminating activity, perfecting the inter-relation between the Self and the not-self.<sup>5</sup>

Careful reading of these quotations demonstrates that Richmond's statement that "the Tibetan used the term 'discrimination' in conjunction with buddhi" is correct but her claim that "the Tibetan equated intuition with 'discrimination'" is incorrect because it is not supported by the first two quotes above. The first quote is apparently what allowed Richmond to put discrimination and intuition on the same footing; but it has been overlooked that they belong to two different orders of things, "Human" and "Divine." The Tibetan merely said that discrimination leads to intuition. What, in my opinion, the Tibetan tried to convey is this: Manas deals with the duality of nature and with both the Self and the non-self and uses the quality or function of discrimination for this purpose. Discrimination may result in the rejection of certain things. This activity leads to the development of intuition as the ability to directly discern the

inner essence of things. On the other hand, on the plane where buddhic intuition operates there is unity and no duality and hence no need to tell the Self from the non-self. Buddhi-intuition does not reject anything. The Tibetan even states that buddhi is not intended (perhaps unable?) to contact the non-self.

Elsewhere the Tibetan very clearly and in great detail explains the place of manas and buddhi in the scheme of things. He stresses that, "the distinctive quality of manas is discrimination," whereas "the buddhic principle has for its distinctive quality love, and demonstrates as wisdom working through love."<sup>6</sup>

To put it into mundane terms, everyone who had both glimpses of intellectual intuition (the precursor of the higher manas) and some mystic experiences (a counterpart of buddhic knowing on the emotional plane) will never confuse these, as they are so much different. For the classic description of intellectual intuition and the world of ideas or archetypal forms refer to Plato's dialogues. The main feature of the intellectual intuition relevant for this discussion is that it views the ideal forms *from outside* and discriminates between them; it is like looking at a wonderful landscape from a high vantage point and trying to make sense of it. Accounts of genuine mystic experiences which are readily available show the reverse picture: looking *from inside* because there is the union of the observer and the observed spiritual things which is called *unio mystica*. Therefore, two key basic features of buddhi are the overwhelming sense of unity and viewing from inside.

One may observe that each of these faculties, manas and buddhi, is deficient per se. Ideally, they have to work in unison, with buddhi using manas as a vehicle.

3. The seven schemes picture used in the article is incomplete: there is more to it (e.g., the three additional synthesizing schemes), which was never mentioned:

On the second plane are found the seven Heavenly Men, Who are His principal centres of force. There are others, but we are not here concerned with Them. These latter have achieved a certain specific goal,

and are the embodiment of centres which are now quiescent or out of manifestation, the logioic kundalini having turned its attention elsewhere. Under another enumeration they make the ten of the esoteric life, and can also be enumerated as twelve, thus forming the twelve-petalled Lotus, or the heart centre in the Body of the ONE ABOUT WHOM NOUGHT MAY BE SAID.<sup>7</sup>

Maxim Osinovksy

<sup>1</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, p. 114. All references to Alice Bailey's books are to the online editions available on the Lucis Trust website and accessible from: [https://www.lucistrust.org/online\\_books/welcome\\_o\\_books\\_website](https://www.lucistrust.org/online_books/welcome_o_books_website).

<sup>2</sup> There is a rather extensive discussion of various numbering schemes for human

principles in *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, p. 261-268. One of them (on p. 263) Lists five principles with buddhi as the fourth one. It is hardly relevant for our purposes as it shows the higher principles only from the point of view of the Spiritual Triad.

<sup>3</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *Initiation Human and Solar* (New York: Lucis Trust 217; *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire* (New York: Lucis Trust), 899.

<sup>4</sup> H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*. Vol. 2, pp. 231, 593, 596, 632. Online edition at: <http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/sd/sd-hp.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology II*, p. 559; *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, pp. 200 and 201.

<sup>6</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, p. 337-339.

<sup>7</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, p. 519-520.



Dear Editor Brown:

I would like to share a few observations related to John Nash's sweeping article, *Esotericism and Mathematics*, which appeared in the Winter 2016 issue of the *Esoteric Quarterly*. These observations will focus mainly on the number 74.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Blavatsky wrote, "All systems of religious mysticism are based upon numerals" (*Isis Unveiled II*, 407). Then, many decades later, Djwhal Kuhl, through his amanuensis, Alice Bailey, taught that "Number gives the clue to the form and purpose of the life which the form veils" (*The Rays and the Initiations*, 81).

Gematria, a term Nash defines and uses frequently, is a Hebrew word coined in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and derived from a Greek word meaning "geometry." He notes that using Greek gematria, known as *isopsephia*, the values of Ιησους (Jesus) and Χριστος (Christ) have values of 888 and 1480, respectively. As he mentions, Alice Bailey has written that 888 and 666 hold the mystery of two "Heavenly

Men" (*A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, 306). First, let's note that all three of these numbers are multiples of 74.

- 888 = 74 x 12
- 1480 = 74 x 20
- 666 = 74 x 9

Nash employs the RAN (reduced alpha number) system discussed by John Berges. This is really a derivative of what Berges calls the AN (alpha number) system. In the AN system the letters of the English alphabet are assigned sequentially to the 26 counting numbers: A = 1, B = 2, C = 3...Z = 26. Mathematicians call this a one-to-one mapping. Then, to obtain the value of an English word, add the numbers corresponding to the letters, which comprise the word, but *do not* further reduce the value. In what follows, whenever the AN value of a word or phrase is given, the word will appear in all capitals. Given that the three Greek gematria values given above are all multiples of 74, it is a bit stunning to find that the *English* gematria (AN) value of JESUS is 10 + 5 + 19 + 21 + 19 = 74.

There seems to be some uncanny agreement here.

Is there anything special about the English language? After all, it is only the third most common *native* language in the world, after Mandarin and Spanish. Yet, as a visit to the WWW will reveal, there are a host of reasons it is referred to as the “global language.” Three of these are (1) it is spoken in virtually every part of the world, (2) it is the most widely learned second language, and, (3) it is the language used most widely in conducting international business. The list of firsts goes on and on. Is English perhaps even the “key” to a modern esoteric system? By applying English gematria to THE KEY, we also obtain 74.

JOSHUA = 74: There is an etymological thread that runs between the names of Joshua and Jesus. When transliterated into Greek, the Hebrew name, Joshua, became Iesous, and then when further translated into Latin it is rendered as Iesus. Finally the translation from Latin to English gave us Jesus. Bible scholars tell us that what this means is Joshua and Jesus are the same name.

The ethnicity of the historical Jesus was JEWISH = 74, he was called the MESSIAH = 74, and the four Bible books chronicling his life are known as gospels (GOSPEL = 74). He died on the CROSS = 74, probably the most iconic Christian symbol, although its usage predates the crucifixion of Jesus.

Helena Blavatsky and associates published a periodical entitled *Lucifer* from 1887 to 1897. Then in the 1920s, Alice Bailey, who seemingly viewed herself as carrying on the work of Blavatsky, founded the “Lucifer Publishing Company.” Her early books, such as *Initiation, Human and Solar*, and *Letters on Occult Meditation* were originally published under that name as can be easily verified online. You can imagine the uproar coming from fundamentalist Christians on this. LUCIFER, meaning “light bearer,” has a value of 74, and MORNING STAR carries a value of 148, or twice 74. In the final chapter of the Bible we read, “I am...the bright and morning star” (Revelation 22:16).

POINT = 74: Nash notes that each of the first four stanzas of the Great Invocation begins with either “From the point...” or “From the center...” On page 1 of her voluminous two-volume work, *The Secret Doctrine*, Blavatsky tells that the point in the circle represents the “dawn of differentiation” (*Secret Doctrine I*, 1).

Let’s investigate the number 74 from some other angles.

- Adding Numbers 1-7: The result is the number 28, a number mathematicians term a *perfect number*. A perfect number is one whose proper divisors sum to the number itself. Since  $28 = 1 + 2 + 4 + 7 + 14$ , it is perfect. Is it just coincidental, that in the 28<sup>th</sup> chapter of the New Testament (Matthew 28) we read of Jesus telling his disciples to be perfect. Perfect numbers are relatively quite rare. Only 49 have been found to date. The first six are 6, 28, 496, 8128, and 33550336. They thin out appreciably after that while increasing rapidly in size. The 49th one is 4,677,235 digits long!
- $7 - 4 = 3$ : The 3 can suggest THE TRINITY whose value is 148, or twice 74. Also, if we add the first 3 numbers we get the first perfect number 6.
- $7 + 4 = 11$ : In mainstream numerology 11, along with 22 (twice 11), is known as a *master number*. We know Jesus was frequently addressed as “Master.”
- 7/4: According to the Pew Research Center ([www.pewresearch.org](http://www.pewresearch.org)), the United States is the nation with the largest population of Christians. Considering that JESUS = 74, perhaps it is then fitting that 7/4 in the year 1776 is the most celebrated date in United States history. 1776 is itself evenly divisible by 74 ( $1776 = 74 \times 24$ ) and even by 888 ( $1776 = 888 \times 2$ ), taking us back to the value of Jesus in Greek gematria. Additional, the English gematria value of THE USA ( $33 + 41$ ) is 74.
- GD: If we replace the 7 and 4 with the

- 7th and 4th letters of the English alphabet we have GD, the consonants in the English name of Christianity's supreme deity. Some Hebrew scholars today choose to write G-D instead of GOD. The reasoning—a bit odd—is to avoid the risk of accidentally erasing or defacing the name of God which they see as violating something stated in Deuteronomy 12:3-4. Perhaps also relevant in this context is that words in ancient, written Hebrew, as used in the Old Testament, contained no vowels—only consonants.

In today's world it does not seem far-fetched to view Islam as some sort of parallel or counterpart to Christianity, and Muhammad as a parallel to Jesus. Currently these religions are the first and second largest in the world, *but*, Pew Research predicts that Islam will overtake

Christianity by the end of the current century, There are several spellings of the founder but by far the most prevalent one is MUHAMMAD which has a value of 74, exactly matching the value of JESUS. It is curious that several passages in the Koran refer to Jesus as the Messiah, as for example Koran 4:171 which reads in part, "The Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary."

Is the above merely a carefully hand-picked collection of facts which can all be explained by the power of randomness, or does it hint at something more overarching? That is for each reader to decide. I ask you to consider that just because a question cannot be answered in a meaningful way doesn't necessarily mean a meaningful answer does not exist.

Monte J. Zerger  
[mjzgerger@centurylink.net](mailto:mjzgerger@centurylink.net)

## Poems of the Quarter by Adam A. De Franco

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### *The Last Incarnation*

Attire this one in clear light  
a throne, a monastery, or a cobbler's nook no longer matter.

He is ready to depart at any given moment  
without regrets, fatigue, or remorse  
his cup is full his combination complete the matter settled.

He wears a kind of white garment  
the rapture of matter  
with flames of swirl behind  
this is how he prepares for his last incarnation.

He walks where nature would lead him  
he is a dweller of forest and mountain  
is accustomed to voices and fire  
he carries a stone from Himalaya  
the foundation of a temple.

He is a simple man an open channel  
burnt with ecstasy  
they come in the faint blue light  
to kiss his hands.

“Why do you rush into my cell  
I have nothing but books  
I cannot work miracles  
What do you find in me?”

They place my hands upon their heads  
as if it would cure them  
but I myself feel nothing  
It cannot be that this light comes from my fingers...

As far as I can remember nothing remarkable happens  
I am pulled out of myself like quicksilver  
I see dark blue sparks near them  
I am about to go somewhere besides this  
then with a silent breath  
from a shape deep inside the eye I caress their souls...

Sometimes they confess their sins  
a flash reaches out  
the spirit rushes in  
touch them as if they were my people

I am a simple man

a pilgrim on the road  
without blanket, money or home.

The clouds shall be my tent  
the sound of rain my symphony  
the forest gate my temple  
the flowers never smelt so strong.

Soon I will break the roof beam  
the flood of stars will enter  
soon I will light the last fire  
I will cook the last meal  
suddenly a peel of flame over my head  
it has begun...

***Arahat***

body of fire  
the perfect confluence  
of scintillating thermonuclear flesh and anti-matter  
your body is completely open.

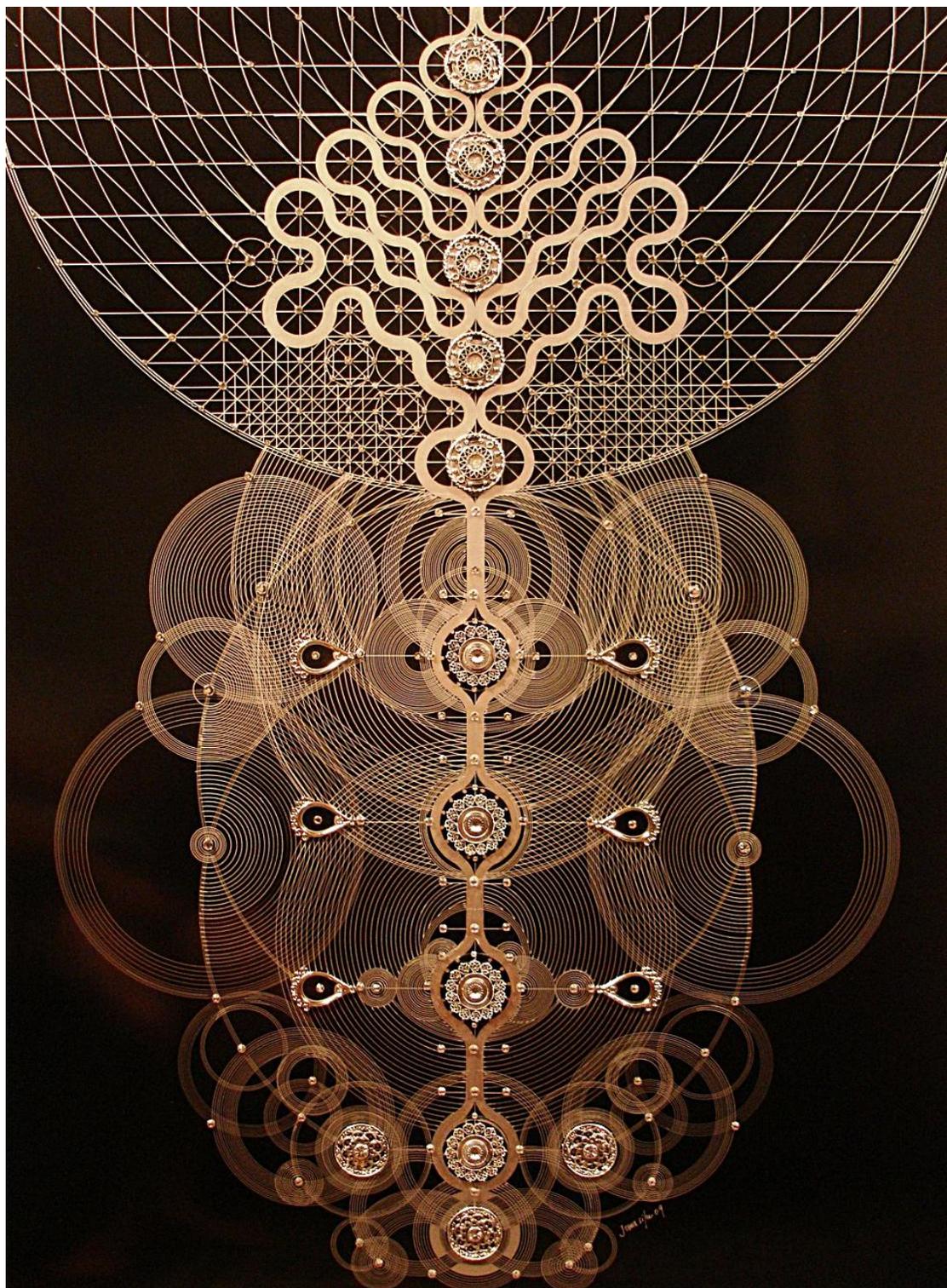
you are the most wild creature on earth  
a dragon of liberation  
your face has the whole world on it  
something unknown has consumed you completely  
the distillation of crushed bones  
body cut in pieces  
a heart of wonderful extraordinary chaos  
the foam that has fallen off a cliff.

you are done with compass  
maps  
and the four winds of borders  
now there is only indescribable bliss  
a trigger of strange sudden fires.

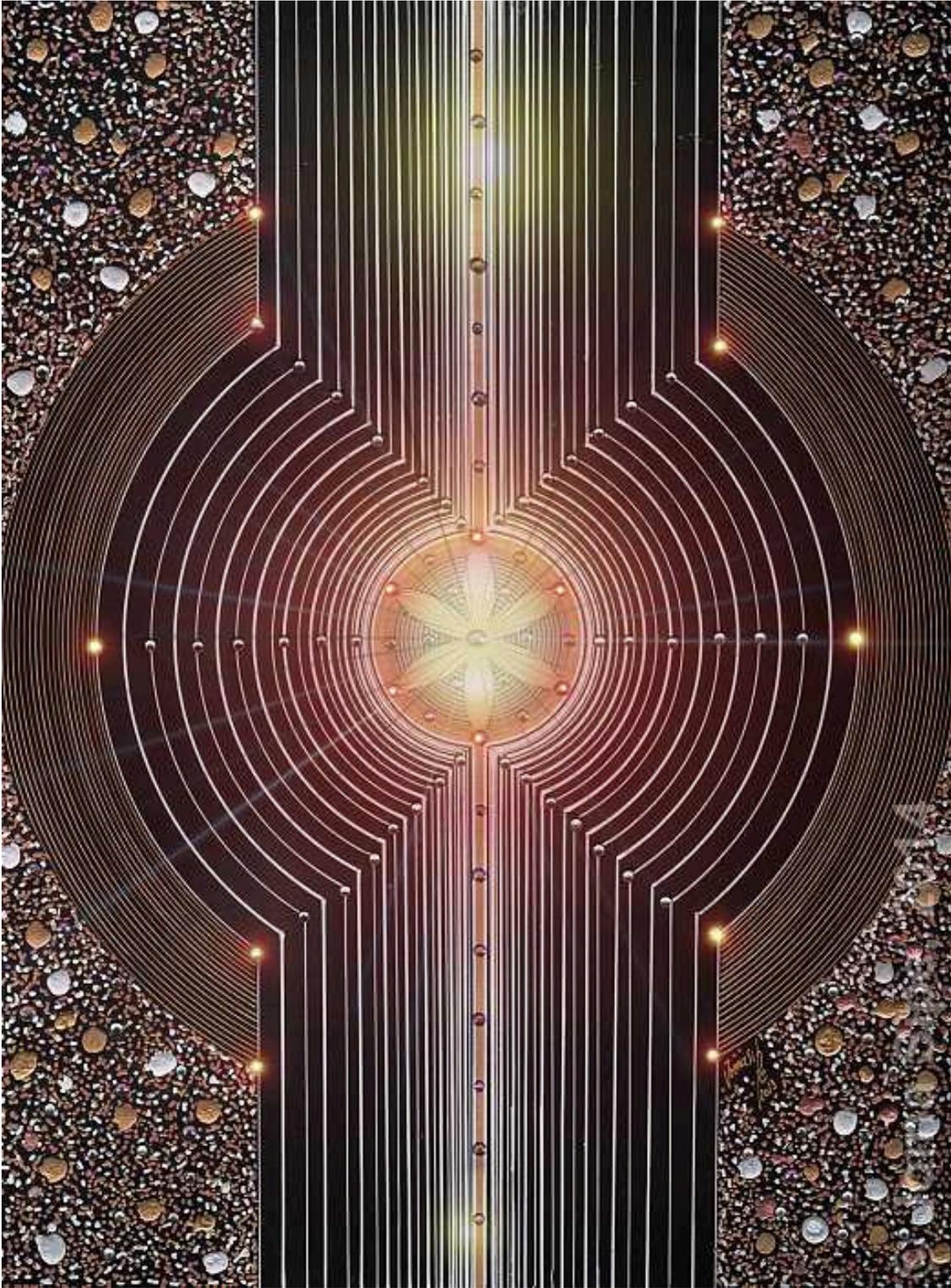
you have declined to make a mark  
you have become totally undecipherable  
even to yourself  
this riveting stormy tempest wound  
from which you cannot ever escape  
has made you a human wilderness  
with fiery raiment.

## Pictures of the Quarter by Joma Sipe

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Where Angels Are Born | by Joma Sipe | 2013



Isis Unveiled VII | by Joma Sipe | 2013



Crystal Sea | by Joma Sipe | 2013

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## Quotes of the Quarter

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That which is called Christian Religion existed among the ancients, and never did not exist, from the beginning of the human race until the Christ came in the flesh, at which time the true religion that already existed began to be called Christianity.

St. Augustine, cited by Dr. Alvin Boyd Kuhn in his *Shadow of The Third Century* (Elizabeth N.J.: Academy Press, 1949), 3.

HAVING seen that the religions of the past claimed with one voice to have a hidden side, to be custodians of “Mysteries,” and that this claim was endorsed by the seeking of initiation by the greatest men, we must now ascertain whether Christianity stands outside this circle of religions, and alone is without a Gnosis, offering to the world only a simple faith and not a profound knowledge. Were it so, it would indeed be a sad and lamentable fact, proving Christianity to be intended for a class only, and not for all types of human beings.... But that it is not so, we shall be able to prove beyond the possibility of rational doubt.

If the esoteric teaching can be re-established and win patient and earnest students, it will not be long before the occult is also restored. Disciples of the Lesser Mysteries will become candidates for the Greater, and with the regaining of knowledge will come again the authority of teaching.

(Annie Besant, *Esoteric Christianity* (Brooklyn NY: Sheba Blake Publishing, 2015), 36-37.

The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried.

G. K. Chesterton, *What's Wrong With The World*, Part 1, Chapter 5, “The Unfinished Temple.” (Reprint 2009; CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform 1910).

And when the Bible has taken its place as a fragment of the Ageless Wisdom; when we bring to bear upon it the same critical methods that we use in other cases, instead of investing it with arbitrary and supernatural origins; when we apply to it the same esoteric key which we know to be applicable to all such records; it will wield us a truly scientific and philosophical religion, which shall be free from the degrading superstition which has been built up upon the literal acceptance of its letter and word.

William Kingsland, *The Esoteric Basis for Christianity* (Whitefish, MO: Kessinger Publishing, LLC (September 10, 2010), xxxvi.

The Apocalypse is a manual of spiritual development and not, as conventionally interpreted, a cryptic history or prophecy.... it is in very truth the key of the Gnosis. Incomprehensible as the book may seem to the exoteric scholar, however great his intellectual attainments, keen his mental acumen, and vast his store of erudition, to the mere tyro in the sacred science the general meaning of the Apocalypse is perfectly clear. It is unintelligible to the conventional scholar simply because its subject-matter, veiled in symbolical language, relates to the Mysteries of the early Christian Society, the esoteric teachings which it was not lawful to reveal.... Now, in plain words, what does this very occult book, the Apocalypse, contain? It gives the key to that divine Gnosis which is the same in all ages, and superior to all faiths and philosophies—that secret science which is in reality secret only because it is hidden and locked in the inner nature of every man, however ignorant and humble, and none but himself can turn the key.

James Morgan Pryse, *The Apocalypse Unsealed* (reprint 2003; Whitefish. MO: Kessinger Publishers, 1910) 5-6.

The whole universe is a sacrament, which mirrors the divine reality; . . . each created thing, though nothing in itself, is of infinite value and significance, because it is the sign of a mystery which is enshrined in the depths of its being. . . . Each human being is not merely an isolated individual carried along on the flux of time and doomed to extinction, but a member of a divine society, working out its destiny in space and time and subject to all the tragic consequences of subservience to the material world, but destined to transcend the limitations of time and space and mortality, and to enter into that fullness of life where there shall be “neither mourning nor weeping nor pain any more.”

Bede Griffiths, *The Golden String* (reprint 1954; Springfield, IL: Templegate Publishing, 1980).

The Kaaba (literally “cube” for such is its shape), the “House of God” in the centre of Mecca, is a symbol of the Centre of our being. When the exile turns his face in the direction of Mecca he aspires above all, if he is a Sufi, to the inward return, to the reintegration of the fragmented finite individual self into the Infinitude of the Divine Self.

Martin Lings, *What is Sufism* (Cambridge, UK: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 37.

The Divine Reality is at the same time Knowledge and Being. He who seeks to approach that Reality must overcome not only ignorance and lack of awareness, but also the grip which purely theoretical learning and other “unnatural” things of the same kind exert on him. It is for this reason that many Sufi’s, including the most outstanding representatives of gnosis such as Muhyi-d-Dīn ‘Arabī and ‘Omar al-Khayyām affirmed the primacy of virtue and concentration over doctrinal learning.

Titus Burckhardt, *Introduction to Sufism* (Bloomington IN: World Wisdom, Inc., 2008), 76.

We may know who we are or we may not. We may be Muslim’s, Jew’s or Christian’s but until our hearts become the mold for every heart we see only our differences.

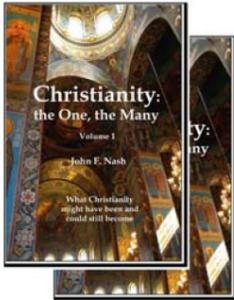
Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī, *Rumi’s Little Book of Love* (San Antonio, TX: Hierophant Publishing, 2014), 123.

Sufism serves the function of reminding man of who he really is, which means that man is awakened from his dream which he calls ordinary life and that his soul is freed from the confines of that illusory prison of the ego.... Man seeks his psychic and spiritual needs outwardly precisely because he does not know who he is. Sufism reminds man to seek all that he needs inwardly within himself, to tear his roots from the outer world and plunge them into the Divine Nature, which resides at the centre of his heart. Sufism removes man from his lowly state... in order to reinstate him in his primordial perfection... where he finds within himself all that he sought outwardly, for being united with God he separate from nothing.

Seeyed Hossein Nasr, *Sufi Essays* (Chicago, IL: Kazi Publications, 1999), 32.

All the various types of teachings and spiritual paths are related to the different capacities of understanding that different individuals have. There does not exist, from an absolute point of view, any teaching which is more perfect or effective than another. A teaching’s value lies solely in the inner awakening which an individual can arrive at through it. If a person benefits from a given teaching, for that person that teaching is the supreme path, because it is suited to his or her nature and capacities. There’s no sense in trying to judge it as more or less elevated in relation to other paths to realization.

Namkhai Norbu, *Dzogchen: The Self-Perfected State* (Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications, 2003), 39.



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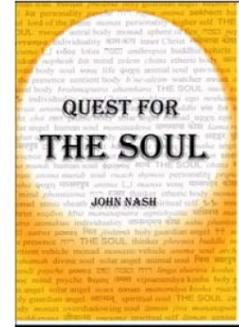
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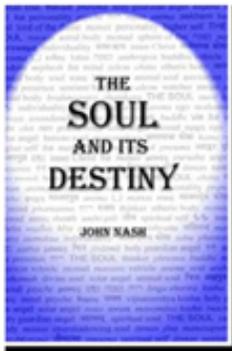
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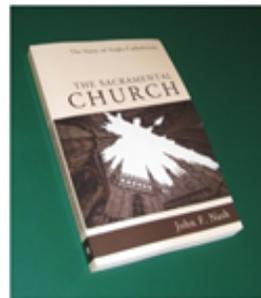
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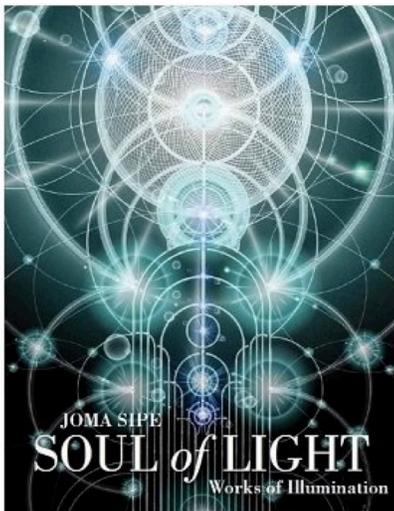
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# Opportunities and Challenges of Christian Esotericism

John F. Nash

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## Summary

Christianity was unpopular among prominent esotericists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Even today, many esotericists either distance themselves from religion altogether or are drawn to non-western religions like Buddhism. Yet Christianity has its own esoteric dimension and a long history of interaction with external esoteric movements. The common ground between Christianity and modern esotericism offers particularly attractive opportunities to individuals and groups from both sides.

This article examines the opportunities and challenges encountered by esotericists who embrace Christianity, and Christians who are drawn to modern esotericism. The opportunities include service in the “sixth group” of disciples; support of the second and sixth-ray ashrams working to revitalize Christianity; building a New World Religion in which Christianity may play a major role; even temporary assignment to an ashram directly involved. The challenges include coping with stereotypes and criticism from fellow Christians and esotericists, and adjustment to a possibly unfamiliar ray environment.

## Introduction

For more than 1,500 years, institutional Christianity dominated western civilization. Religious influence is now greatly diminished, and younger generations are growing up in a more secular society. But a multifaceted Christian culture is still conspicuous, and most western esotericists either come from Christian backgrounds or at least have been exposed to the beliefs, practices and attitudes of Christianity.<sup>1</sup> Smaller numbers have come from, or been exposed to, institutional Judaism or Islam. The present article focuses on Christianity. Other authors are encouraged to examine the oppor-

tunities and challenges associated with those sister religions.

Alice Bailey, writing for the Tibetan Master Djwhal Khul, defined religion as “the name . . . which we give to the invocative appeal of humanity which leads to the evocative response of the Spirit of God.” She continued: “This Spirit works in every human heart and in all groups. It works also through the Spiritual Hierarchy of the planet. It impels the Head of the Hierarchy, the Christ, to take action and the action which He is taking will lead to His return with His disciples.”<sup>2</sup>

Yet many esotericists shun organized religion. Some were hurt by ignorant or insensitive religious teachers early in life. Some view religion as inseparable from the evils perpetrated in its name. Some concede that religion may be relevant to the Path of Aspiration, but believe that it offers nothing to people on the Paths of Discipleship and Initiation.<sup>3</sup> Some assert that organized religion is in its death throes: a relic of Piscean culture, soon to disappear as we move into the Aquarian Age.

Other esotericists see continuing value in religion but are drawn to the religions of South Asia, the indigenous religions of other parts of the world, or nature religions. Given the trans-Himalayan teachings’ prominence in modern esotericism, Hinduism and Buddhism naturally

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## 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*. *Christianity: The One, the Many*, was reviewed in the Fall 2008 issue. His latest book: *The Sacramental Church* was published in 2011. For further information see the advertisements in this issue and the website <http://www.uriel.com>.

have special appeal. Hindu scholars and jurists, like Tallapragada Subba Row, Muthuswamy Chetty, and Raghunatha and Srinivasa Rao, contributed to the early development of the Theosophical Society. Helena Blavatsky, Henry Olcott, A. P. Sinnett, and for a while Charles Leadbeater turned to Buddhism. Gottfried de Purucker, president of the American Theosophical Society, was groomed for the Anglican priesthood but soon developed a preference for eastern religion.<sup>4</sup> Helena Roerich, amanuensis for the Agni Yoga teachings, and her artist-husband Nicholas, embraced Buddhism.

The religions of South Asia gained further appeal in the mid-twentieth century, when western society became acquainted with eastern meditative practices and the various forms of yoga. The larger New Age Movement drew much of its inspiration from eastern religions. Concepts like reincarnation, karma and avatars have become useful metaphors in modern conversation, even if their factual reality has yet to win universal acceptance.

To embrace the religion of a non-western culture can be an attractive option for western esotericists. For those still in the thrall of glamour, the embrace of an exotic religion may be a fashionable accessory to esoteric work. More generally, the embrace of a non-western religion may signal to others, and to the esotericist, a decisive break with a Christian past. It also avoids real or implied identification with the negative stereotypes Christianity carries in modern western society. By contrast, the seeker may be unaware of negative stereotypes a nonwestern religion carries in its own culture.

Esotericists who continue to practice Christianity, return to Christianity after a period of absence, or embrace Christianity for the first time, enjoy none of those benefits. Instead, they face significant challenges. Christianity's very familiarity counts against it. Nevertheless, to overcome the challenges and embrace Christianity, to whatever depth may seem appropriate, can be an attractive option. Esotericists may discover in Christianity rich opportunities for spiritual growth and service, even great joy and fulfillment. This is the path of

Christian esotericism—or esoteric Christianity, according to one's frame of reference—explored in the present article.

Christian esotericism can be defined in various ways. It can refer to Christianity's own esoteric dimension: the totality of its inner life, contrasting with the tangible features of church buildings, clergy, laity, sacred texts, hymnals, committees, and so forth. It can refer to the interface between institutional Christianity and forms of esotericism that developed, over the millennia, outside the institutional structure. Or it can refer more specifically to the overlap with modern esoteric teachings, notably the trans-Himalayan teachings disseminated since 1875. This last definition is the most relevant to our present discussion, but we should not lose sight of the term's broader meanings.

Within the area of overlap are denominations, like the Unity Church, Liberal Catholic Church, and Christian Communities, established for the very purpose of synthesis. But the majority of people populating the common ground are esotericists who become involved in traditional Christian denominations and members of traditional denominations who develop an interest in esoteric teachings.

As we look forward to the reappearance of the Christ, the externalization of the Hierarchy, and the restoration of the mysteries, we anticipate great changes in religion. In particular, we understand that a New World Religion will emerge. We do we know what form the new religion will take, any more than we know what form the Christ will assume when he reappears. But Christianity has the opportunity to be one of its major pillars and may remain a distinctive element, working with others in the pursuit of shared, overarching goals. Esotericists on the Path of Discipleship have opportunities to work in the ashram of the Master Jesus, or the Christ, to help Christianity move forward on its journey, whatever the future may hold.

Christians who venture into esoteric studies—or who simply come into contact with esotericists in their midst—also have much to gain. They too may have important roles to play in the ashrams. At the very least, modern esoteric

teachings can provide new insights into traditional Christian doctrine and religious practices. For example, they could help Christianity move beyond an emphasis on salvation—however that concept is interpreted, and we shall comment on it later—toward an emphasis on the progressive expansion of consciousness, and on individual and collective transformation. Cross-fertilization between esotericism and Christianity, with which some two billion people identify, could have far-reaching effects.

People coming from both sides face challenges. In addition to whatever personal conflicts they may experience, they must deal with negative stereotypes and criticism from other Christians and esotericists. Esotericists embracing Christianity, especially those on the Path of Discipleship, may have to cope with dissonance between their own soul or personality rays and the sixth ray of Christianity. This article explores the various opportunities and challenges, and points to ways in which the challenges can be deflected or overcome.

### Christianity: Darkness and Light

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a major “installment” of the trans-Himalayan teachings was revealed, and the richness of Hinduism and Buddhism gained new recognition. Most Theosophists and others involved in receipt and dissemination of the teachings refrained from inter-religious polemic, whatever personal choices they made. But two individuals, among the most heavily involved and wielding corresponding influence, went on record with harsh criticism of western religion, depicting it—especially Christianity—as spiritually bankrupt.

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891), co-founder of the Theosophical Society and author of the landmark *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*, presented a litany of allegations against western religion:

[A]n unspiritual, dogmatic, too often debauched clergy; a host of sects, and three warring great religions [Judaism, Christian-

ity and Islam]; discord instead of union, dogmas without proofs, sensation-loving preachers, and wealth and pleasure-seeking parishioners’ hypocrisy and bigotry, begotten by the tyrannical exigencies of respectability, the rule of the day, sincerity and real piety exceptional.<sup>5</sup>

Special censure was reserved for Roman Catholicism and the papacy: “At Rome, the self-styled seat of Christianity, the putative successor to the chair of Peter is undermining social order with his invisible but omnipresent network of bigoted agents, and incites them to revolutionize Europe for his temporal as well as spiritual supremacy.”<sup>6</sup>

Blavatsky did not criticize “the pure teachings of Jesus,” but “unsparingly denounce[d] their debasement into pernicious ecclesiastical systems that are ruinous to man’s faith in his immortality and his God, and subversive of all moral restraint.”<sup>7</sup> Elsewhere she predicted the early collapse of Christianity, brought down by its own failures and the advance of science:

From one end of Christendom to the other there prevails neither real peace, brotherhood, contentment, firm religious faith, nor a preponderating tone of morality in official or private life. The press bristles with the proofs that Christianity has no right to be considered as an active purificatory force. More may be added. The gradual liberation of thought by the progress of scientific research has undermined the very foundations of the Christian religion, and the edifice, erected during eighteen centuries with so much difficulty and at such appalling sacrifices of human life and national morality, is tottering like a tree that sways to its fall.<sup>8</sup>

Alice Anne Bailey (1880–1949) wrote the insightful *From Bethlehem to Calvary*, which presented an esoteric interpretation of events in the life of Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup> She served for thirty years as amanuensis to the Tibetan Master Djwhal Khul, communicating a wealth of material about Christ and his work that we shall draw upon extensively in this article. In *The Externalization of the Hierarchy* we read:

I would remind you that I write as one who believes in the great spiritual realities and

who regards the unfolding spirit of man as the unshatterable evidence of the existence of “the One in Whom we live and move and have our being.” I speak as one who believes in and loves the Christ and who knows Him to be the Master of all the Masters and the Teacher alike of angels and of men. I am one who looks to Christ as the supreme expression of divinity upon Earth and Who knows the extent of His sacrificial work for humanity, the wonder of the revelation which He brought, the imminence of His return and of His coming Assumption of spiritual rule in the hearts of men everywhere.<sup>10</sup>

Bailey proclaimed in her autobiography: “I glory in the name of Christian but I now belong to the inclusive kind and not the exclusive.”<sup>11</sup> Yet she left no doubt in readers’ minds about her views on organized religion, with Christianity—presumably the “exclusive kind”—as the primary target:

The orthodox world religions are rapidly falling into the background of men’s minds even whilst we are undoubtedly approaching nearer to the central spiritual Reality. The theologies now taught by the ecclesiastical organization (both in the East and in the West) are crystallized and of relatively little use. Priests and churchmen, orthodox instructors and fundamentalists (fanatical though sincere) are seeking to perpetuate that which is old and which sufficed in the past to satisfy the enquirer, but which now fails to do so.<sup>12</sup>

Employing the pejorative term *churchianity*, Bailey echoed Blavatsky’s criticism that Christianity had deviated from Christ’s true message, laying blame on Paul of Tarsus and the clergy of later periods:

Churchianity has . . . laid itself wide open to attack, and the mass of thinking people . . . will spell the doom of the churches and endorse the spread of the true teaching of the Christ. It is not possible that He has any pleasure in the great stone temples which churchmen have built, whilst His people are left without guidance or reasonable light upon world affairs; surely, He must feel

(with an aching heart) that the simplicity which He taught and the simple way to God which He emphasized have disappeared into the fogs of theology (initiated by St. Paul) and in the discussions of churchmen throughout the centuries. Men have travelled far from the simplicity of thought and from the simple, spiritual life which the early Christians lived.<sup>13</sup>

Using the same term, Bailey stated elsewhere:

[C]ontrol by the forces of separativeness (which are ever the outstanding characteristic of the lower sixth ray activity) can be seen nowhere more potently than in religious and Church history with its hatreds and bigotry, its pomp and luxurious appeal to the outer ear and eye, and its separativeness from all other forms of faith as well as its internal dissensions, its protesting groups and its cliques and cabals. . . . Theologians have lost (if they ever possessed it) the “mind that is in Christ” and the outstanding need of the Church today is to relinquish theology, to let go all doctrine and dogma and to turn upon the world the light that is in Christ, and thus demonstrate the fact of Christ’s eternal livingness, and the beauty and the love which it can reflect from its contact with Him, the founder of Christianity but not of Churchianity.<sup>14</sup>

Blavatsky’s and Bailey’s criticisms of Christianity may seem exaggerated, and the literary tone is disturbing.<sup>15</sup> But the charges oblige us to ask three questions:

- To what extent were the criticisms justified?
- Were similar views shared by their contemporaries, or by esotericists of earlier times?
- If the charges were justified, has Christianity since changed for the better?

### ***Christianity Past and Present***

Christianity carries negative stereotypes, which, however distorted they may be, express the collective karma—the “original sin”—every Christian bears. In order to address the stereotypes we need to identify Christianity’s failures, place them in context, and try to de-

termine whether they destroyed Christianity, weakened it—or, in the long run, perhaps even strengthened it.

The religion we know as Christianity was the human response to a great thoughtform, embodying the Second Aspect of Deity, Love-Wisdom, created by Christ during his Palestinian mission 2,000 years ago. The thoughtform gave definite form to a link established for the first time between Shamballa, the Hierarchy of Masters, and humanity.<sup>16</sup> Significantly it was created early in the Piscean Age, and early in the cyclic manifestation of the sixth ray.<sup>17</sup> Christ's thoughtform was intended for the whole world. Christianity was just one response; other religions responded in their own ways.

Christ nurtured the thoughtform, throughout the two millennia of Christian history, in his role as head of the second-ray Department of Religion and Education. He was aided by the Master Jesus, head of the sixth-ray ashram of Devotion and Idealism, to whom Christianity was entrusted as a major responsibility. Their joint work was supported by other senior initiates and senior members of the deva evolution.

Human response to the thoughtform began with the apostles and continued with the work of Paul, the church fathers, and the millions of others—clergy and laity—who participated in and molded Christianity over the centuries. Not unexpectedly, tension developed between the thoughtform's lofty intent and humanity's ability and willingness to respond to it.

Christianity built upon two antecedent traditions: Jewish religious culture and Greek philosophy. The former offered a strong sacerdotal tradition and belief in a covenant between God and his people. The latter emphasized the rational quest for truth. As Christianity moved from a Jewish into a primarily Greek environment, a shift for which Paul took considerable credit, conflation of the two traditions became increasingly asymmetric. Emphasis changed from ethics—people's relationships with God and one another—to theology, a discipline that was essentially unknown in biblical Judaism. The increasing mental focus was understandable since the fifth subrace was emerging in

Europe and the Middle East. Unfortunately it took on a negative quality.

The formulation of creeds and systematized doctrine took precedence over Christ's message of love and healing, and over the church's pastoral care of its people. Creeds and dogmatic decrees are inherently dualistic: they are designed to separate believers from non-believers, orthodoxy from heresy, the saved from the damned. Excommunications, anathemas and pervasive intolerance led, before long, to the atrocities of forced conversions, witch trials, the crusades, and the Inquisition.<sup>18</sup>

Pauline Christianity and the increasing emphasis on doctrine gave rise to two other developments, initially subtle, but with profound long-term consequences. One involved the meaning of *salvation*. The English word "save" is derived, via the Latin *salvare*, from the Greek words *sozo* and *soteria*, both of which can mean "heal" or "make whole."<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, salvation could be understood—and still is in much of Eastern Orthodox Christianity—as a healing process. But in the West it came to mean "deliverance from sin and hell." In turn, *redemption* was narrowly defined as Christ's self-sacrifice on the cross to procure our deliverance from damnation. The second development was a change in the meaning of *faith*; from "trust in a loving God," it came to mean "belief," and too often "unquestioned acceptance of church teachings."

Christianity became corrupted by its own institutional success. Christ promoted a message of simplicity, sharing and sacrifice. But ambition surfaced at an early date; the apostles James and John jockeyed for position in the Kingdom: "Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory."<sup>20</sup> As the church grew, over the course of four centuries, from a handful of people to a mighty imperial force, temptation expanded exponentially. By the Middle Ages, with the coalescence of ecclesiastical and political authority, bishops, cardinals and popes wielded almost unlimited power. Too often they neglected their responsibilities to serve as Christ's anointed agents in the world, and instead used their positions to amass personal wealth and pursue lives of luxury—even de-

bauchery. Never have Lord Acton's words rung so true: "power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."<sup>21</sup>

Reprehensible as those abuses were, much good was accomplished. Medieval Christianity produced saints as well as sinners. Men and women embraced lives of asceticism, took monastic vows, and/or served the poor and the sick. Countless millions led decent lives, turned their thoughts to God, and worshipped according to the practices of the time and place. The liturgy and the sacraments preserved the sense of covenant and nurtured spiritual growth. Gifted people expressed their aspirations through architecture, the visual arts, music and drama.

The Reformation sought to address problems of ecclesial corruption and materialism, but it also stripped away much of the sacredness of medieval Christianity, leaving the Protestant churches spiritually barren. The Church of Rome never lost its sense of the sacred, but the Counter-Reformation gave it a fortress mentality, where exclusivism reigned supreme. And almost every segment of western Christianity became entangled in politics. The Eastern Orthodox churches also became increasingly isolated, tools of the secular powers in their own jurisdictions. Notions of separation of church and state lay centuries in the future.

In the West, the Reformation was followed by—and, in the view of some historians, led to—the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution. Traditional beliefs were threatened, the machine became the new deity, and materialism of a new kind became the driving cultural force. Liberal theology emerged in an attempt to accommodate "modernism" into Christian beliefs, but in the process it destroyed what little remained of mystery and the sacred in Protestant Christianity.

Yet even during the dark days of the post-Reformation period, seeds of new birth lay waiting to germinate. The evangelical revival of John and Charles Wesley reenergized the devotional life of the masses. The catholic revival in Anglicanism built upon elements of sacramental liturgy, which had carefully been preserved in the Church of England, moving

the denomination closer in ritual styles and beliefs to the pre-Reformation English church.<sup>22</sup> A similar movement took place in Lutheranism, building upon sacramental liturgy preserved in the Church of Sweden. Immigrants from Greece, Russia, Armenia and elsewhere brought Eastern Orthodoxy to the West, exposing westerners to the richness of Orthodox traditions. The Second Vatican Council and, most recently, the pontificate of Pope Francis changed the face of Roman Catholicism.<sup>23</sup>

Institutional Christianity is not just trying to recover former glory; it is building a new future. Mutual understanding and respect among major Christian denominations is at an all-time high. Ecumenical outreach and interdenominational worship and service projects have largely replaced the all-too-familiar sectarian polemic. Narrow Piscean ideals are quickly giving way to the expansiveness and inclusiveness of the Aquarian Age.

Christian denominations are exploring closer mutual relationships, even formal mergers. An ecumenical commission involving high-level representatives of the Anglican Communion and the Eastern Orthodox churches affirmed in 1984: "The unity of Christians with Christ in baptism is a unity of love and mutual respect which transcends all human division, of race, social status and sex. This unity in Christ is God's gift to the world by which men and women may learn to live in unity with one another, accepting one another as Christ has accepted them."<sup>24</sup> Contentious doctrinal issues, like justification by faith (between Rome and the Lutheran churches)<sup>25</sup> and devotion to Mary (Rome and the Anglican Communion)<sup>26</sup> have largely been resolved. Pope Francis and Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople have declared their intention to work toward healing the Great Schism that divided eastern and western Christianity in 1054. They also work tirelessly for environmental justice.

Agreements to establish "full," or "partial, communion" provide for the exchange of clergy, recognition of one another's sacraments, and encouragement of joint worship—even if some doctrinal issues remain to be resolved. As early as 1951, representatives of the

Churches of England, Denmark, Iceland and Norway expressed a desire for closer cooperation.<sup>27</sup> The agreement laid the groundwork for the Porvoo Communion, negotiated in 1992, establishing full communion among fifteen Anglican and Lutheran churches in Europe. In the United States the Episcopal Church is in full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, the Moravian Church, and the Old Catholic Church. Similar relationships have been established elsewhere.

Progress has also been made on yet another front: the contemplative life. As early as the 1840s, monastic orders were revived in the Anglican churches. Since then ecumenical monasteries have been established, providing an attractive option for men and women drawn to lives of prayer and the richness of diverse traditions. As demonstrated throughout history, dogma may divide, but the inner spiritual life unites. In the 1960s, three Roman Catholic monks repackaged the contemplative practices of western monasticism for use by laypeople; the result was Centering Prayer, which has now spread to many other denominations.<sup>28</sup> It reminds people that they need not turn to South Asia as the sole source of meditative tradition. For those who do look to the East, practices like Christian Zen incorporate elements of much-older Buddhist counterparts.<sup>29</sup>

Major segments of institutional Christianity have instituted needed reforms, strengthened their spiritual life, and taken important steps toward unity and inclusiveness. The political entanglements that Blavatsky and Bailey complained of are things of the past. Sadly, as we shall see, other segments of Christianity have yet to reconnect with the pure message of Christ, and new forms of political involvement are causing concern.

### *Traditions of Christian Esotericism*

No “school of esoteric Christianity” developed, comparable with the Shingon school of Buddhism, the Sufi orders of Islam, or the Kabbalistic schools of Judaism. Rather, from the outset, Christianity developed an intrinsic esoteric dimension, expressed through prayer, mysticism, the liturgy, sacraments, and a general sense of “the sacred.” Of greatest significance were the Mass and the Eucharist, affirming that Christ was, and still is, with his church in an almost tangible way. Mystical theology emerged, albeit with more encouragement in the eastern churches than in the West, when mystical insights were allowed to contribute to the

corpus of Christian knowledge. Sacramental healing continued uninterrupted in the East, and has now been restored in western churches after 1,500 years of neglect.

The list of individuals who contributed to Christianity’s intrinsic esotericism is almost endless. It would certainly include the fifth/sixth-century Syrian Neo-Platonist known as the Pseudo-Dionysius, seventh-century mystic John Climacus, ninth-century Irish scholar John Scotus Eriugena, twelfth-century German abbess Hildegard of Bingen, and sixteenth-century Spanish abbess Teresa of Ávila. The list continues into modern times with Russian mystic Vladimir Solovyov, Russian theologian Sergei Bulgakov, French Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and American mystic Thomas Merton. Countless others could be named.

Christianity’s intrinsic esotericism—as well as its wider appeal—includes its aesthetics. Beauty transcends ordinary language to raise human consciousness in a unique way. In the words of

*Through involvement in Christianity, esotericists can gain access to rich traditions of spirituality, intrinsic esotericism, and sacred aesthetics; a rich liturgy; and experience the uniquely Christian expression of divine mystery. Importantly, they can contribute to its worldwide service mission. Those tempted to satisfy a religious impulse by participating in non-western religions should be aware that Christianity may also have a great deal to offer.*

Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, beauty “dances as an uncontained splendor around the double connection of the true and the good and their inseparable relation to one another.”<sup>30</sup> Institutional Christianity gave a high priority to church architecture and decoration, notably in the magnificent Gothic and Byzantine cathedrals.<sup>31</sup> Stained glass windows, altarpieces, paintings, and sculptures not only had aesthetic value; at a time when literacy rates were low, they instructed the masses of the people in scripture and major aspects of doctrine.

Music, according to the Mahatmas, is “the most divine and spiritual of arts.”<sup>32</sup> Settings of the Mass and the daily offices, like Vespers, are among the most celebrated compositions of the Renaissance, Baroque and Classical periods. The Mass for major feasts like Christmas and Easter expresses beauty and majesty rivaling the dramas of the ancient mysteries. When the emissaries of Vladimir I of Russia returned from Constantinople, after attending Great Liturgy (High Mass) in the basilica of Hagia Sophia, they reported: “We knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth.”<sup>33</sup>

The transformation of stone into cathedrals; sounds into Masses, motets and oratorios; and words and movement into high ritual, was as significant, in its own way, as the transubstantiation of the Eucharistic elements. Their common goal was the transformation of ordinary people into saints—and the transformation of the many into that Unity referred to as the Mystical Body of Christ.

Independent esoteric movements grew up alongside or on the fringes of institutional Christianity; Gnosticism, Neo-Platonism, Hermeticism, the Christian Kabbalah, Rosicrucianism, and early Freemasonry were notable examples. A number of individuals attempted to build bridges between these movements and mainstream Christianity, including renowned theologian Clement of Alexandria (c.150–c.215), Irish scholar John Scotus Eriugena (815–877), Dominican friar Meister Eckhart (c.1260–c.1328), Greek Neo-Platonist Georgius Gemistos Pletho (c.1355–c.1452), Italian Renaissance philosopher Giovanni Pico

della Mirandola (1463–1494), and German Jesuit priest Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680).<sup>34</sup>

Others remained on the fringes, like alchemist Cornelius Agrippa (1486–1535); Dominican friar and astrologer Giordano Bruno (1548–1600); Lutheran mystics Jakob Böhme (1575–1624) and Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772); and Freemasons Jacques Martinez de Pasqually (1727?–1774), Louis Claude de Saint-Martin (1743–1803), and Karl von Eckartshausen (1752–1803).

Institutional Christianity viewed fringe esotericism, and sometimes its own, with distrust. As early as the second century, even before a well-defined orthodoxy had taken shape, church father Irenaeus wrote a five-volume treatise attacking Gnosticism.<sup>35</sup> Later, the work of renowned mystics Gregory Palamas (1296–1359), Theresa of Ávila (1515–1582), and Anne Catherine Emmerich (1774–1824) came under scrutiny by church authorities. Eckhart, Agrippa, Böhme and Swedenborg were denounced as heretics. Bruno went to the stake. Closer to our own time, stigmatics Therese Neumann (1898–1962) and Padre Pio (1887–1968) endured repeated investigations and charges of fraud.

When the church exercised political as well as religious power, it had the opportunity to suppress esoteric movements and persecute individual esotericists. The inevitable result was to drive the movements underground. Secret occult societies were formed to serve as custodians of esoteric teachings and, to the extent possible, protect members from persecution. But secrecy only heightened the fears of ecclesiastical authorities and allowed rumors—many of them exaggerated or false—to circulate and gather strength.

The Reformation had mixed effects on Christianity’s intrinsic esotericism. Its impact on sacred music was relatively small. Johann Sebastian Bach, arguably the world’s greatest composer; and George Frideric Handel, who’s “Messiah” is the most-revered sacred choral work ever written; were both Lutherans. English composers, like Thomas Tallis, William

Byrd, Orlando Gibbons, and Henry Purcell were either Anglican or worked in an Anglican environment.

Other aspects of intrinsic esotericism were damaged or destroyed. The suppression of religious orders drastically reduced opportunities for the contemplative life—though, as we have seen, monasticism has been revived in Anglicanism and elsewhere.

Some of the new liturgies seemed bent on eradicating any sense of the sacred. Sacraments were turned into mere symbols, or were eliminated altogether. Church buildings were no longer viewed as sacred spaces but were simply meeting houses. A seventeenth-century Scottish manual of worship prescribed: “When the congregation is to meet for publick worship . . . . Let all enter the assembly, not irreverently, but in a grave and seemly manner, taking their seats or places without adoration, or bowing themselves towards one place or other.”<sup>36</sup> In waves of iconoclasm, church bells were melted down, frescoes painted over, statues beheaded, and shrines desecrated.<sup>37</sup>

The Protestant churches continued to persecute esotericists, as Böhme and Swedenborg could testify. But persecution was on a smaller scale than it had been under Roman Catholicism, and Protestant Europe provided conditions in which esoteric movements could emerge, in a limited way, from the shadows. The Rosicrucian Manifestos were published in the Calvinist region of Germany—and even embraced some of John Calvin’s political and social ideals.<sup>38</sup>

As traditional bonds between institutional Christianity—Roman and Protestant—and secular authority progressively weakened, more visible expressions of esotericism appeared, even in Roman Catholic countries. Freemasonry, in its wide variety of forms, flourished in eighteenth-century Europe, except in the Papal States, where a 1738 edict prohibiting Roman Catholics from membership was rigidly enforced.<sup>39</sup>

Within the heterogeneous world of early Freemasonry were several individuals, groups and movements that emphasized Christian esotericism. For example, German mystic and phi-

losopher Karl von Eckartshausen’s influential work, *The Cloud upon the Sanctuary*, describes the “Invisible Celestial Church,” a religious tradition that preserved elements of the ancient mysteries.<sup>40</sup> Other examples were the several incarnations of Martinism, espoused in turn by Pasqually; his disciple, Saint-Martin; and Gérard Encausse (1865–1916).<sup>41</sup> Encausse also co-founded a Cathar-revival church, l’Église Gnostique de France.

Alphonse Louis Constant (1810–1875), who adopted the pseudonym “Eliphas Lévi,” initially studied for the Roman priesthood but then embarked on a lifelong mission to reinvigorate the sacraments through cross-fertilization with ceremonial magic. “Religion,” he wrote, “can no longer reject a doctrine anterior to the Bible and in perfect accord with traditional respect for the past, as well as with our most vital hopes for progress in the future.” “The crook of the priesthood,” he continued, “shall become the rod of miracles.”<sup>42</sup>

English esotericist Anna Kingsford (1846–1888) converted to Roman Catholicism, but continued to serve as a trance medium, receiving important teachings spanning Hermeticism and Christianity from the “Elder Brothers.”<sup>43</sup> In turn, Kingsford influenced Annie Besant (1847–1933), second president of the Theosophical Society, whose landmark *Esoteric Christianity, or the Lesser Mysteries* (1901) and other work will be discussed in their turn.

The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was founded in 1888 and flourished for about ten years. During its heyday it counted more than one hundred members, including such Victorian celebrities as Florence Farr and William Butler Yeats. And even though it drew upon pagan occult practices and Kabbalistic teachings, one of its members was Anglo-Catholic mystic Evelyn Underhill. Violet Mary Firth (1890–1946) was initiated in a Golden Dawn derivative organization, taking the name “Dion Fortune.” In addition to her substantial literary output, she founded the Fraternity of the Inner Light, which engaged in magical ritual but retained a Christian flavor.

The New Thought Movement produced both religious and secular offshoots. Mary Baker

Eddy (1821–1910) founded the Church of Christ, Scientist. Ernest Holmes' (1887–1960) Science of Mind initially sought to position itself as a secular healing ministry but eventually developed into the nonsectarian Church of Religious Science. Another product of New Thought was Unity, or “the Unity Church,” which combines esoteric teachings with evangelical styles of worship.

Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) served as head of the German Section of the Theosophical Society but leaned more toward Rosicrucianism and had links with German Freemasonry. He eventually left the Theosophical Society to form his own organization, the Anthroposophical Society, and spent much of his professional life lecturing on topics in esoteric Christianity. His *Christianity as Mystical Fact* (1902) had a different focus from Besant's book, published the previous year, but was equally influential. Lectures by Steiner were compiled into book-long commentaries on the four gospels, and what he termed the “fifth gospel.” In 1922 Steiner co-founded the Christian Communities, a new Christian denomination expressing a desire to renew Christian worship.<sup>44</sup> The Communities, with their distinctive interpretation of the sacraments, functioned as a kind of religious subsidiary of the Anthroposophical Society.

Annie Besant's exploration of esoteric Christianity eventually led to the “christianization” movement within Theosophy. Charles Leadbeater (1854–1934), who had once been an Anglican priest, returned from his excursion into Buddhism to help found the Liberal Catholic Church, a religious subsidiary of the Theosophical Society. The LCC acquired a high-church orientation, an episcopate, and a claim to the apostolic succession through the collaboration of a bishop in the Old Catholic Church. Leadbeater served as the LCC's second presiding bishop and wrote its liturgy, based on the Roman Missal and Anglican Prayer Book, with Theosophical interpretations.<sup>45</sup> Both Leadbeater and Theosophist Geoffrey Hodson (1886–1983), an ordained priest in the LCC, applied their clairvoyant gifts to the study of devic beings attracted to and participating in Christian worship.

Two individuals who were influenced by Rudolf Steiner's teachings were Valentin Tomberg and Judith von Halle. Tomberg (1900–1973) was born to Russian Lutheran parents but was drawn to Martinism and Hermeticism. He was shunned by the Anthroposophical Society and by the Russian Orthodox Church, both of which considered him too controversial. Undeterred, Tomberg went on to publish a number of works, including the insightful *Meditations on the Tarot: A Journey into Christian Hermeticism* (1984).<sup>46</sup>

Von Halle (1972–) was born to German Jewish parents but lectured on topics in esoteric Christianity at the Steinerhaus in Berlin. In 2004 she received the stigmata: permanent wounds on her body corresponding to those inflicted on Jesus at the crucifixion. At the same time she acquired the clairvoyant ability to view events during his passion, death and resurrection.<sup>47</sup> Her detailed accounts resemble those of fellow-stigmatic Anne Catherine Emmerich, written two centuries earlier. Von Halle's experiences caused great controversy in the Anthroposophical movement. Some segments supported her, but she was dismissed from the Steinerhaus and endured ongoing attacks by high-ranking members, charging that her stigmata was fraudulent and her clairvoyant activities were damaging to the Society.<sup>48</sup>

In summary, we can identify a number of individuals and groups, before and during the time Blavatsky and Bailey were writing, who experienced little if any tension between their esotericism and Christianity. But other individuals and groups, including practicing Christians and even members of religious orders, were harassed or persecuted for involvement in esotericism. Not surprisingly, persecution was particularly severe when institutional Christianity exercised coercive political power. The Church of Rome, in particular, did not hesitate to use intimidation, imprisonment, torture, and grisly execution to stamp out beliefs and practices—esoteric or otherwise—that it found threatening. We have also seen examples, like that involving Judith von Halle, when esoteric institutions harassed and persecuted individuals for becoming too “Christian,” or for participating in the “wrong” forms of esotericism.<sup>49</sup>

### *Continuing Darkness*

While major segments of institutional Christianity have sought to strengthen their spiritual life and promote inclusiveness, other elements have either hesitated to move forward, or have moved in the opposite direction. In them, the form aspect has become increasingly crystallized, stifling whatever indwelling life might once have existed. The news media tend to focus on these reactionary elements, reinforcing negative stereotypes, and encouraging a perception of Christianity as anti-science, divisive, coercive, corrupt, irrelevant to modern life, or simply ridiculous. Sadly, some problems may not even have received media attention.

Major divisive issues remain among and within denominations. Prospects for closer union between mainline Anglican and Lutheran churches, on the one hand, and Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, on the other, are now less favorable, following the ordination of women clergy.<sup>50</sup> Denominations are divided internally, as became clear in 2016, when the Episcopal Church was excluded from full participation in the Anglican Communion for its redefinition of marriage to include same-sex unions.<sup>51</sup> Methodist and Presbyterian churches are deeply divided on the blessing of same-sex unions and ordination of gay and lesbian clergy. The Church of Rome has yet to consider ordaining female or openly gay male priests, or to bless the marriages of divorcees or same-sex couples. Moreover, it is unclear whether decades-old patterns of sexual abuse by clergy have finally been eradicated.

Fundamentalism infects large segments of Christianity. Particularly in the United States, some evangelical fundamentalists have joined forces with right-wing political extremists trying to turn the clock back on the legal and moral rights of women, gender minorities, ethnic minorities, the poor, and most recently refugees. An often-overlooked fact is that evangelical fundamentalism—which depicts itself as “conservative”—dates only from the late nineteenth century; it was a reaction against liberal theology and “modernism.”<sup>52</sup> But, in a strange irony, both fail to recognize the essential nature of spirituality. Fundamentalism and

liberal Christianity are a pair of opposites, locked in eternal conflict but sharing a denial of the sacred.<sup>53</sup>

Megachurches and television ministries offer a form of Christianity based on mass entertainment. Many of their leaders enjoy lifestyles that would be the envy of medieval cardinals and popes—paid for by the masses of ordinary people. Worse, some of those leaders promote a “prosperity gospel,” or “prosperity theology,” which promises financial blessing on those who have faith, are receptive, and donate to leaders’ ministries.<sup>54</sup> Anyone still waiting to receive God’s blessing evidently lacks in faith or has not contributed enough. Not only are the poor being bilked out of hard-earned money, the very notion of divine blessing to satisfy greed is theologically abhorrent and contrary to the message of Christ.

Such practices even extend to elements within esoteric Christianity. Charles Filmore (1854–1948), co-founder of the Unity Church, wrote of the importance of tithing, posing the question: “Should one regard one’s tithe as an investment that pays rewards?”<sup>55</sup> He supported his answer in the affirmative—leaving no doubt that material rewards were included—by citing scriptural passages like: “Honor the Lord with your possessions, And with the firstfruits of all your increase; So your barns will be filled with plenty, And your vats will overflow with new wine.”<sup>56</sup> Unity, and other churches of the New Thought Movement, provide opportunities for substantial numbers of people to practice esoteric Christianity with an evangelical flavor, and their healing ministries do a great deal of good. But they need to reflect on whether their prosperity teachings are not overly self-serving, and, more importantly, to determine whether related practices—occult practices—do not cross the line into sorcery.<sup>57</sup>

These practices remind us that esotericism has its own dark side. The knowledge gained from esoteric teachings and the occult practices that characterized much of the western esoteric tradition conveyed considerable power. That power was not always used for the good of humanity, and certain individuals veered onto the “left-hand path.” The Enlightenment and rise of materialism may have been promoted

by the Planetary Hierarchy to slow the development of the western esoteric tradition and avert threats from increasing popular participation in occult rituals. The threat may have been even greater than it was in Atlantis, because of humanity's higher level of mental ability.

The synthesis of eastern and western esotericism, beginning in the nineteenth century, placed modern esotericism on a more secure footing; the contemplative focus of the East balanced the West's focus on ritual. Significantly, the Hierarchy delayed the revelation of important new esoteric teachings—the primary basis of modern esotericism—until the Enlightenment had run its course and the East-West synthesis was well under way.

Esotericism's dark side is no secret to the outside world. Just like Christianity, esotericism—and especially “occultism”—carry negative stereotypes. In the popular imagination, occultism may call to mind Satanic rituals, witch covens, the conjuring of elementals, fraudulent séances, unsavory psychics, newspaper horoscopes, and the sensationalism and false promises of the New Age Movement. Even Christians who dismiss those stereotypes for what they are may feel uneasy about esotericism, fearing that it may expose them to unforeseen dangers or threaten their faith.

### **Options**

Notwithstanding Christianity's and esotericism's respective stereotypes, attractive opportunities continue for individuals and groups from the two sides to meet in the common ground of Christian esotericism. They can explore one another's teachings, traditions and practices; they can cooperate to fulfill common service ideals; and they can build a climate for spiritual growth beneficial to all. But which segments of Christianity offer the best prospects?

Tens of thousands of denominations compete for the loyalty of the roughly two billion people who identify themselves as Christian.<sup>58</sup> Five broad categories of denominations are relevant to our present discussion:

1. Churches with conservative theologies, traditional sacramental liturgies,

strong exclusivist discipline, and restrictive gender policies. Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy are the most important members of this category.

2. Churches with moderately conservative theologies, traditional sacramental liturgies, moderate discipline, and inclusive gender policies. Major segments of Anglicanism and Lutheranism belong in this category, including the Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. Some Methodist churches are moving into this category.
3. Churches with liberal theologies and inclusive gender policies, but weak liturgical traditions and discipline. Some Presbyterian and Unitarian churches belong in this category. Most congregations of the United Church of Christ, an American denomination, also qualify.
4. Charismatic and Pentecostal churches (other than megachurches) with weak liturgical traditions. Gender policies are determined locally, and discipline is likely to be local.
5. Evangelical fundamentalist churches with weak liturgical traditions and restrictive gender policies. Strong discipline may be imposed locally. A majority of Baptist churches belong to this category.

Within this broad spectrum are islands of opportunity where esotericists could find a home. Important considerations are the sacredness of liturgy; attitudes to inclusiveness (gender, marital status, ethnicity, social class, orthodoxy); and opportunities to engage in meaningful service, either internally or with fellow Christians in the larger world. An issue of particular importance is whether an individual could reveal his or her involvement in esotericism. Esoteric teachings could always be incorporated into a personal understanding of doctrine, but the need to maintain secrecy might lead to serious tension. Moreover, a denomination's resistance

to new insights into its teachings would limit an individual's opportunities for service.

Categories 2 and 3 may offer the best prospects. Both offer good opportunities for service and potential receptiveness to modern esoteric teachings. They welcome married priests, irrespective of gender, and in many cases welcome openly gay or transgender persons into membership and the ministry. Category 2's liturgical tradition offers greater intrinsic esotericism. It is worth noting that esotericists adapt to sacramental ritual more readily, than do people from the larger secular world, because of their understanding of the basic concepts of occult ritual; they are also sensitive to sacred mystery. Churches in the third category have largely lost their liturgical traditions and esotericists may find them overly rationalistic.

Churches in the first category are attractive options from the standpoint of the richness of their liturgies and intrinsic esotericism. But rigid orthodoxy of beliefs makes them less likely to consider new insights or interpretations, and involvement in esotericism might have to be concealed. Moreover, restriction of the priesthood and other positions of responsibility to single, celibate, heterosexual males may offend esotericists' sense of inclusiveness.

The fourth category offers interesting possibilities because of the strong emphasis on spiritual healing. The fifth category offers a strong tradition of service, but esotericists would likely view its narrow, fundamentalist outlook and pervasive intolerance as major obstacles.

In addition to selecting a denomination, an esotericist would need to choose a particular congregation or parish. Significant differences may exist at the local level in liturgy, theological emphasis, attitudes to discipline and inclusiveness, and receptiveness to esoteric teachings. The larger cities obviously present more choices; in small towns or rural areas choices may be quite limited.

How deeply esotericists become involved in the lives of their chosen Christianity denomination and congregation is a matter of personal choice. But they must realize that superficial involvement is unlikely to build trust or open

up opportunities for meaningful influence. Esotericists who do not become involved to a significant degree also forgo the joy that can come from collective worship—particularly sacred ritual—and may forgo associated opportunities for spiritual growth. On the other hand, significant involvement does not imply an obligation to embrace every article of doctrine or observe every liturgical rubric. Some distance may be needed if the esotericist is to offer new insights into traditional Christian teachings and fresh perspectives on religious practices.

For their part, practicing Christians have unprecedented opportunities to explore esotericism. It would not take the intelligent Christian seeker long to survey the various aspects of esotericism and identify areas of potential interest—as well as pitfalls to avoid. The increasing visibility of esoteric Christianity will reassure them that they are not alone in their search, and contacts with informed esotericists who have come into their churches can provide valuable guidance.

### **Christianity, the Hierarchy, and the Rays**

The Christ oversees all world religions in his capacity as World Teacher and head of the Department of Education and Religion. He takes his place on the direct channel of the second ray of Love-Wisdom from Shamballa to humanity, and is its principal exponent below the level of the Planetary Council. Reporting directly to him is the Master Koot Hoomi, Chohan of the major second-ray ashram. Within that ashram are several subsidiary ashrams, one of which is headed by the Master Djwhal Khul, who attained the fifth initiation in 1875, or thereabout.

Christianity is the immediate responsibility of the Master Jesus, who, we understand, has a sixth-ray soul, expressing Devotion and Idealism, and a first-ray personality, expressing Will and Power.<sup>59</sup> “[T]he keynote of His Presence,” to quote Charles Leadbeater, “is an intense purity, and a fiery type of devotion that brooks no obstacles.”<sup>60</sup> According to Alice Bailey, Jesus attained the fifth initiation as Apollonius of Tyana in the first century CE.<sup>61</sup>

And soon thereafter he may have activated the sixth-ray ashram—the fourth, in historical sequence—“around the nucleus of light, started by the ray Lords much earlier.”<sup>62</sup> The Master Jesus is described as *Chohan* of the sixth-ray ashram, implying that he has now attained the sixth initiation.<sup>63</sup>

In the organization structure of the Planetary Hierarchy, Chohans of the third through seventh-ray ashrams ordinarily report to the Mahachohan, head of the Department of Civilization.<sup>64</sup> But Christ currently is supervising ashramic work for Christianity and other major religions: “The Master Jesus, the inspirer and director of the Christian Churches everywhere, . . . works at present under the Christ for the welfare of Christianity; other Masters hold similar posts in relation to the great oriental faiths.”<sup>65</sup> “At present” suggests that this may be a temporary arrangement, reflecting the importance of religion in the Hierarchy’s near-term agenda.

The Masters Jesus and Koot Hoomi, we are told, both work with the leaders of Christian denominations. Somewhat surprisingly, considering her criticism of institutional Christianity and its leaders cited earlier, Bailey stated: “Certain great prelates of the Anglican and Catholic Churches are wise agents of His [Jesus’].”<sup>66</sup> And: “The Master K.H. works also with the prelates of the great Catholic Churches—Greek, Roman and Anglican—[and] with the leaders of the Protestant communions.”<sup>67</sup>

The Master Jesus is described as an effective leader who works through the churches of the West, inspiring officials and ordinary people open to his guidance: “[He] works especially with the masses of the Christian people who inhabit the occidental countries, and who gather in the churches. He is distinctively a great leader, an organizer, and a wise general executive. . . . His connection with all true church leaders and executives is very close. He acts ceaselessly on the inner esoteric council of the churches.”<sup>68</sup> No information has been revealed on the goals, responsibilities or membership of that council.

Writing no later than 1949, Bailey revealed that the Master Jesus is “now” taking a more

direct role in the affairs of Christianity, particularly the Church of Rome:

[T]he whole field of religion will be re-inspired and re-orientated from Rome because the Master Jesus will again take hold of the Christian Church in an effort to re-spiritualize it and to re-organize it. From the chair of the Pope of Rome, the Master Jesus will attempt to swing that great branch of the religious beliefs of the world again into a position of spiritual power and away from its present authoritative and temporary political potency.<sup>69</sup>

The pontificates of Popes John XXIII (1958–1963) and Francis (2013–) would seem to confirm that the prophecy is being fulfilled.

Like Christ himself, Christianity has a second-ray soul and sixth-ray personality.<sup>70</sup> Christianity’s contrasting rays—like our own—create “esoteric conflict” productive of growth and transformation.<sup>71</sup> But Christianity is also influenced by the fourth, fifth and seventh rays. And other Masters support Christianity in areas pertaining to their ray interests and responsibilities.

For example, we are told: “The Master R. . . works largely through esoteric ritual and ceremonial, being vitally interested in the effects, hitherto unrecognized . . . of the Churches everywhere.”<sup>72</sup> Sacramental ritual, with its seventh-ray associations, played a major role in the medieval church and continues to do so in the Roman and Orthodox churches. Significantly, the restoration of high ritual in the Anglican and Lutheran churches, which began in the mid-nineteenth century, is occurring at a time when the seventh ray is coming into cyclical manifestation. Despite claims that liturgical ritual is a thing of the past, we can expect it to play an increasing role in Christianity as seventh-ray influence gains strength. Ritual, we should remind ourselves, was central to the ancient mysteries—which, we understand, are also to be restored.<sup>73</sup>

Devic beings of various orders support the Master Jesus’s work. Bailey explained: “A special group of devas work under His command. . . . [A]nd with Him the groups of violet angels cooperate.”<sup>74</sup> These latter, who work

primarily on the etheric subplanes, are likely to be more active as seventh-ray influence increases: “With the coming in of the ceremonial ray of violet, we have the amplification therefore of the violet vibration, always inherent on these levels, and the great opportunity therefore for contact between the two kingdoms.”<sup>75</sup>

Many types of transformation occur on the etheric subplanes, including healing work and transubstantiation of the Eucharistic elements. Hildegard of Bingen was one of many individuals in times past who described the appearance of angels during the Mass. More recently, Slovenian spiritual scientist Marko Pogačnik reported seeing an angel and a figure resembling Christ over the altar at a chapel in Venice.<sup>76</sup> Geoffrey Hodson noted that a distinct order of angels participates in Christian worship:

There is an order of angels attached to the Christian Church, who, being dedicated to the service of Christ, and serving as channels and conservers of His blessing and His power, attend every service held in His name. Filled with His love and compassion, they seek to bear those priceless gifts to the souls of men; at the great celebration of the mystery of the bread and wine they come, that every thirsting soul shall receive according to his need.<sup>77</sup>

Elsewhere, he described the appearance of the Gandharvas, or music devas, during performances of sacred music, like the plainchant *Agnus Dei* and Franz Schubert’s *Ave Maria*.<sup>78</sup> He also commented on devic presences at religious healing rituals like the sacrament of anointing: “[T]he Archangel Raphael is definitely attracted and he may either attend in person or manifest his power and his presence through the angels of his hierarchy who are already in attendance. This naturally increases the amount of power available.”<sup>79</sup>

Only people with clairvoyant gifts may be able to see these “Christian” angels now, but Hodson predicted that eventually they will become more visible: “Men know and see them not, and so the angel servers pass unnoticed and unknown. In the religion of the future they will emerge from their invisibility, and men will

see them face to face.”<sup>80</sup> Meanwhile, many more people sense the presence of devic beings, and religious ritual, sacred music, and sacred spaces provide unique opportunities to do so.

Also supporting the work of the Christ and the Master Jesus are initiates of various degrees, disciples and servers. Helena Blavatsky claimed that “[s]ome of the early Popes were Initiates.”<sup>81</sup> Alice Bailey referred to St Paul as “that great initiate,” stating that he attained the third initiation for his work described in the *Acts of the Apostles*.<sup>82</sup> She also identified Martin Luther as a “lesser initiate.”<sup>83</sup> It would be tempting to equate initiation with sainthood, but a more realistic correspondence would be to *theosis*, or deification, as understood in Eastern Orthodoxy.<sup>84</sup>

The initiations discussed in modern esoteric teachings customarily are related to events in the life of Christ: Nativity, Baptism, Transfiguration, Crucifixion, and Resurrection. Yet Bailey stated that “it is the seventh initiation which is the true resurrection. The correct name for the fifth initiation is the Initiation of Revelation.”<sup>85</sup> Taking a different perspective, Rudolf Steiner identified seven stages of “Christian Initiation”: The Washing of the Feet; The Scourging; The Crowning with Thorns; The Mystic Death; The Burial; the Resurrection; the Ascension.<sup>86</sup>

### ***The Sixth Ray and the Sixth Group of Disciples***

The sixth ray, the dominant influence on Christianity, has been in global manifestation “for close on two thousand years.”<sup>87</sup> Writing in the 1930s, Bailey declared that the ray “began to pass out in 1625” and is now “[p]assing rapidly out” of manifestation.<sup>88</sup> But in the same work she stated that the ray “is slowly passing out,”<sup>89</sup> and that “its potency, though greatly weakened, can still be felt.”<sup>90</sup>

When a ray passes out of cyclic manifestation, souls on that ray no longer incarnate, though we are told that “it will be about two hundred years [again from the 1930s] before all the sixth-ray egos pass out of incarnation.”<sup>91</sup> It is important to remember that individuals still incarnate with sixth-ray personalities (we un-

derstand that there are no sixth-ray monads). Moreover, sixth-ray groups, institutions, nations, and members of the Hierarchy may still play significant roles in human affairs. As we shall see shortly, sixth-ray influence will also continue in the sixth subrace of human evolution.

The Master Jesus remains the guiding hand in Christianity, and he will channel sixth-ray energy into the world until his mission is completed. We live in the end-times of the sixth-ray's period of manifestation, and, accordingly, we are more familiar with its negative qualities than its positive ones. Lest anyone imagine, however, that the Master Jesus expresses a negative ray, we should remind ourselves that one of the sixth ray's descriptors is: "Growth towards the light."<sup>92</sup>

We do not know what priorities the Master Jesus has set for the remainder of his mission. But he will probably continue to take a "more direct" role in the affairs of Christianity. Among much else, we are told that "a Master, or an initiate who has taken the third initiation" will be placed at the head of "the various great divisions of the Church."<sup>93</sup> Such a development would have far-reaching implications.

The Master Jesus can also be expected to play a prominent role in the Hierarchy's plan to create a New World Religion. The emergence of a new religion from "the Church, the Masonic Fraternity and the educational field" is one of the prophecies of the trans-Himalayan teachings.<sup>94</sup> Assisting the Hierarchy in its effort is a group of disciples, referred to as "workers in the Field of Religion."<sup>95</sup> The group, "already formed," is the sixth of several focused on different areas of human endeavor. In Bailey's words:

***Establishment of a New World Religion is a major priority of the Christ, the Master Jesus, and other members of the Planetary Hierarchy. Assisting the Hierarchy in this endeavor is the "sixth group" of disciples: "workers in the field of religion." Christianity may be one of the principle foundations on which the new world religion will be built, and esotericists on the path of discipleship are in an excellent position to lend support.***

This group is, in a pronounced sense, a channel for the activity of the second Ray of Love-Wisdom, that of the World Teacher—an office held at present by the Christ. The platform of the new world religion will be built by the many groups, working under the inspiration of the Christ and the influence of the second ray and these—in their totality—will constitute this sixth group.<sup>96</sup>

Important correspondences should be noted. The Master Jesus and Christianity express *sixth*-ray energy. The *sixth* group of disciples is charged with helping

to establish the New World Religion. The *sixth* subrace is already making its debut on the planet, and the *sixth* root race will emerge from it.<sup>97</sup> The sixth ray will be a dominant influence on the sixth subrace—presumably even though it will be out of cyclic manifestation—while the second ray will dominate the sixth root race.<sup>98</sup> These correspondences suggest that we are entering a critical phase in the evolution of Christianity and world religion in general.

Christianity may continue in recognizable form until the New World Religion is fully functioning.<sup>99</sup> When that will occur depends on the sixth group's effectiveness and responsiveness to Hierarchical guidance. Perhaps the new religion will attain the desired state of functionality in the same general timeframe as the externalization of the Hierarchy, and we are told that a date for the externalization will "in all probability . . . be set" at the next General Assembly of the Hierarchy, scheduled for 2025.<sup>100</sup> Note that no promise was made that the externalization *will begin* in 2025: merely that a date will be set.

Disciples are drawn to a particular ashram on the basis of their soul rays and sooner or later pledge themselves to the Master who heads that ashram.<sup>101</sup> Disciples with sixth-ray souls may already be pledged to the Master Jesus and may already be working in the sixth group. Since the soul and personality rays are normally different, again creating “esoteric conflict,” those disciples may experience personality-level dissonance with the group. On the other hand, abilities and skills gained during the particular lifetime will no doubt contribute to the group’s work.

Disciples with a different soul ray may already be pledged to a Master in one of the other ashrams. From time to time, however, a disciple may be reassigned to another ashram for a specific purpose. There are strong indications that certain disciples from second-ray ashrams, like the Master Djwhal Khul’s, are being reassigned to serve the Master Jesus. Presumably they are working either in the Jesus’ own sixth-ray ashram or in his “temporary office” in the department of the Christ. When disciples or Masters are reassigned to another ashram, they retain their native soul-ray characteristics and contribute related abilities to the work of the new ashram. Second-ray disciples reassigned to serve the Master Jesus will contribute their energies and experience during this critical period in the evolution of Christianity.

Precedents for temporary reassignment have been reported on more than one level. Alice Bailey, a disciple of the Master Koot Hoomi, served as amanuensis to the Master Djwhal Khul for the last thirty years of her life. She also founded the Arcane School, and it and its offshoots provide unique opportunities for qualified disciples to enter the Master Djwhal Khul’s ashram. With more profound implications, the Master Jesus, whose sixth-ray ashram would normally report to the Mahachohan, “works at present under the Christ for the welfare of Christianity.”<sup>102</sup> Also we were told in the 1920s that the Master Rakoczi, then head of the seventh-ray ashram “hold[s] office temporarily under the [first-ray] Manu” as “regent for Europe and America.”<sup>103</sup> Soon thereafter, he was promoted to Mahachohan and now heads the third-ray Department of Civilization.

### *The Sixth-Ray Environment*

For the disciple, a temporary reassignment presents an exceptional service opportunity. But the disciple could find him or herself in a startlingly unfamiliar ray environment. Consider, for example, the case where a disciple from the Master Djwhal Khul’s second-ray ashram is reassigned to the sixth-ray ashram of the Master Jesus. Some dissonance would be expected because of the disciple’s soul ray, and greater dissonance if the disciple does not have a sixth-ray personality.

Ray dissonance might be somewhat alleviated if the disciple had sixth-ray influence in the form of a “legacy ray,” carried over from a previous life.<sup>104</sup> The legacy ray influence would likely be associated with the astral body, since the physical and mental bodies normally cannot lie on the sixth ray. The eligibility of a disciple, with no other sixth-ray influence, to be reassigned to the sixth-ray ashram might even rest on the existence of a resonant legacy ray. The astral body remains intact until the fourth initiation, and eligibility would not be affected by attainment of the second initiation and mastery of the emotional nature.

The sixth ray is the ray of devotion and idealism. Its “special virtues,” according to Alice Bailey, are “devotion, single-mindedness, love, tenderness, intuition, loyalty, reverence”; and “virtues to be acquired” are: “strength, self-sacrifice, purity, truth, tolerance, serenity, balance and common sense.” By contrast, the ray’s vices are: “Selfish and jealous love, over-leaning on others, and partiality, self-deception, sectarianism, superstition, prejudice, over-rapid conclusions, and fiery anger.”<sup>105</sup> Bailey offered the following stereotype of the undeveloped sixth-ray personality:

The man who is on this ray is full of religious instincts and impulses, and of intense personal feeling; nothing is taken equably. Everything, in his eyes, is either perfect or intolerable; his friends are angels, his enemies are very much the reverse. . . . The best type of this ray makes the saint, the worst type, the bigot or fanatic, the typical martyr or the typical inquisitor. . . . The man on this ray is often of

gentle nature, but he can always flame into fury and fiery wrath. He will lay down his life for the objects of his devotion or reverence, but he will not lift a finger to help those outside of his immediate sympathies.<sup>106</sup>

The segments of Christianity to which disciples are likely to be assigned are already taking on more of the sixth ray's higher expressions. Senior members of the sixth-ray ashram would be expected to exhibit all the characteristic virtues and none of the vices. But those on the outskirts, with whom a reassigned disciple might first come into contact, might well lack some of the virtues and be still working to overcome the vices.

One of the lower expressions of the sixth ray is separativeness. A disciple coming from a second-ray ashram, in which great emphasis is placed on cooperation, might be startled to encounter separative attitudes on the fringes of the sixth-ray ashram. Harsh sectarian rhetoric may have abated in recent decades. Yet "fiery anger" can still erupt in debates, particularly intramural debates, over articles of doctrine, scriptural exegesis, or liturgical rubrics.

Nowhere is the heat of battle more intense than in academic journals devoted to religious and biblical studies, where separativeness may be reinforced by fifth-ray energies. Those on each side of an issue may passionately defend the opinions and research of their "immediate sympathies," while trying to discredit the work of opponents. Scriptural passages, texts by church fathers, decrees of church councils, writings of saints, and pronouncements of church leaders provide an arsenal of combat weapons. To outsiders, the spiteful sniping comes across as distinctly "un-Christian," but insiders accept it as the norm. Significantly, we read: "The sixth ray activity led to the formation of bands of disciples, working in groups but not in close relation, and subject to internal dissension, based on personality reactions."<sup>107</sup>

The second-ray disciple may also find the devotional aspects of Christianity challenging.<sup>108</sup> Devotion to Christ, God the Father, the Trinity—and, in some denominations, the saints,

Mary, and the Eucharistic elements—lies at the heart of Christianity's sixth-ray personality. To place potential problems in context, we should remember that devotion can be expressed through gestures, ritual, music, art and architecture, as well as through prayer; and not all of these are likely to stir negative reactions. Even in the case of prayer, any negative reactions will probably be restricted to certain types of prayer.<sup>109</sup> Much depends on the language in which they are written and the images they evoke. In the liturgy he developed for the Liberal Catholic Church, Charles Leadbeater took pains to avoid scriptural passages that "complain, grovel or curse."<sup>110</sup>

How to express devotion is only one of many issues concerning liturgical language. Some denominations have had to choose between retaining a sacred language, like Latin, Greek, or Old Church Slavonic, and using the vernacular. Other denominations had to choose between an archaic and a contemporary vernacular.<sup>111</sup> If a contemporary vernacular is used, issues concerning gender-specific pronouns must be resolved, some of which have theological implications. Mainline denominations have learned that no set of changes will please everyone.

Whatever language a particular denomination, or local congregation adopts for its public worship must be treated with respect. We should remember that tolerance, balance and common sense are among the sixth-ray virtues we must all acquire. Private devotion can draw upon a wide range of resources and can assume whatever form may suit individual taste.

Adjusting to the ray characteristics of a different ashram calls for great patience and focus on the work to be accomplished. Finding oneself in an unfamiliar ray environment is not entirely different from moving to another country. An immigrant has to learn the language and customs and adjust to new cultural norms. He or she must behave with a degree of humility, recognizing that the natives value their traditions, aspirations, symbols and rituals. The immigrant may be dismayed that certain forms of negativity are more common than they were in the old country—perhaps forgetting that other forms are less common. The

disciple reassigned to another ashram must make similar adjustments in behavior and awareness, but the end result can be a successful and rewarding contribution to the ashram's work.

## Concluding Remarks

Esoteric Christianity is not something new. Christianity always had a strong esoteric dimension of its own, albeit diminished by the Reformation, the Enlightenment, materialism, liberal theology, and most recently fundamentalism. Intrinsic esotericism remains strongest in the sacramental churches, which include Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and major segments of Anglicanism and Lutheranism. Independent esoteric movements also developed on the fringes of Christianity. Sadly, institutional Christianity perceived those movements as a threat, and when ecclesiastical and civil power coalesced to provide opportunities, the church took extreme measures to suppress the movements and persecute participants.

The present study has explored in greatest detail the area of overlap between Christianity and modern esotericism, populated by esotericists who have embraced Christianity and traditional Christians who have embraced elements of modern esoteric teachings. This population is increasing, and the cross-fertilization offers substantial benefits to both sides. Fortunately, institutionalized persecution is a thing of the past, and attitudes have become more tolerant.

Esotericists might be discouraged by the harsh criticisms of Christianity by two individuals who played prominent roles in the dissemination of the trans-Himalayan teachings. But they should be encouraged by the contribution those individuals made to our understanding of the work of the Christ and the Master Jesus. They should also be encouraged by the positive experiences of other prominent figures who fruitfully combined esotericism and Christianity. Through involvement in Christianity, esotericists can gain access to rich traditions of spirituality, intrinsic esotericism, and sacred aesthetics; a rich liturgy; and experience of the uniquely Christian expression of divine mys-

tery. Importantly, they can contribute to its worldwide service mission. Those tempted to satisfy a religious impulse by participating in non-western religions should be aware that Christianity may also have a great deal to offer.

The path of Christian esotericism is challenging. Those treading the path should recognize that Christianity has frequently fallen short of its ideals, and must contend with negative stereotypes, as well as with suspicion on the part of traditional Christians and other esotericists. But esotericists should not be discouraged by the burden of official doctrine. Rather, they should help—with diligence, sensitivity and patience—to instill new meaning in that doctrine, to give new emphasis to love, healing, service, transformation, and the elevation of consciousness.

Establishment of a New World Religion is a major priority of the Christ, the Master Jesus, and other members of the Planetary Hierarchy. Assisting the Hierarchy in this endeavor is the “sixth group” of disciples: “workers in the field of religion.” Christianity may be one of the principal foundations on which the new religion will be built, and esotericists on the path of discipleship are in an excellent position to lend support.

Disciples may be candidates for temporary reassignment from their native ashrams to work with the Master Jesus. Those who accept such assignments face additional challenges stemming from possible dissonance between their own soul and/or personality rays and the sixth ray of Christianity. Sixth-ray influence may be declining globally, but it is likely to remain significant in Christianity for decades to come. As a ray passes out of manifestation its negative characteristics tend to be most apparent, but the positive qualities of the sixth ray should serve as a guiding light. The greater light will come from Christianity's second-ray soul.

This article's focus has been on participation in Christianity by esotericists. From the other direction, practicing Christians may discover in esoteric teachings new insights into traditional doctrine and practices. “Mysteries be-

yond our comprehension” may become readily understandable, and doctrinal contradictions or paradoxes may be resolved in a larger synthesis. Traditional Christians who embrace esotericism face their own set of challenges, including criticism from fellow Christians, suspicions of heresy, or simply fears that they are trespassing on dangerous ground. They must also be able to see beyond esotericism’s negative stereotypes—even as esotericists work to dispel those stereotypes. Yet, again, if Christians accept the challenges, their interest can set them on new paths of spiritual development and service. They too can be part of the sixth group of disciples. Esotericists who have joined their churches can provide valuable help and guidance.

More than ninety years ago we were told that certain “great prelates of the Anglican and Catholic Churches are wise agents of” the Master Jesus; and in the 1950s we were told Orthodox, Roman, Anglican and Protestant leaders were working with him and the Master Koot Hoomi. Since then, those denominations have taken great strides toward humility and inclusiveness. Moreover, the sixth group of disciples, “already formed” in 1948, is now robustly active. Sadly, derisive comments about institutional Christianity and its leaders, along with the pejorative term “churchianity,” still appear in esoteric writings, even in recent publications of an esoteric school. Such practices have no place in an environment that claims to be guided by the second ray. Criticism of Christianity has been justified in times past. But now, all of us—traditional Christians, non-Christian esotericists, and Christian esotericists—might want to look into our hearts to see what prejudices lurk there and what changes need to be made.

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<sup>1</sup> Some confusion arises in use of the terms “East” and “West.” In the Christian literature the terms conventionally distinguish between the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches, taken as a group, and the Roman, Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, and other churches, taken as a group. In esoteric literature, the terms more commonly distinguish between the Eurocentric west-

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ern esoteric tradition and the eastern esoteric tradition that developed in South Asia. Hopefully, context will indicate the terms’ meaning where they appear in this article.

<sup>2</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *The Reappearance of the Christ*, New York: Lucis, 1948, 43.

<sup>3</sup> Bailey refuted the suggestion that aspiration is purely “astral” in nature: “Students must lose sight of the foolish and erroneous idea that aspiration is really an emotional attitude. It is not. It is a scientific process, governing evolution itself.” Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology I*, New York: Lucis, 1936, 326.

<sup>4</sup> Purucker served under Katherine Tingley in the American Theosophical Society, which had broken away from the Adyar Society. He served as president from 1929 to 1942.

<sup>5</sup> Helena P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 1, Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press, 1877, ix.

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

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, iv.

<sup>8</sup> Helena P. Blavatsky, “The State of Christianity,” *The Theosophist* (April, 1880), 181.

<sup>9</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *From Bethlehem to Calvary*, New York: Lucis, 1937. This book was not dictated by the Tibetan Master.

<sup>10</sup> Bailey, *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, 403.

<sup>11</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *The Unfinished Autobiography*, New York: Lucis, 1951, 1.

<sup>12</sup> Bailey, *The Reappearance of the Christ*, 137-138. Parentheses in original.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 140-131. Parenthesis in original. Although Bailey appeared to criticize Paul in this passage, elsewhere she not only described him as an initiate but also revealed that he was a previous incarnation of the Master Hilarion. See Alice A. Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar*, New York: Lucis, 1922, 38, 59.

<sup>14</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *The Destiny of the Nations*, Lucis, 1949, 39-40. Parenthesis in original. The term *churchianity* appears ten times in Alice Bailey’s books.

<sup>15</sup> Helena Blavatsky made no secret of her hostility to Christianity. In particular, she criticized the attitudes and activities of Christian missionaries in India, some of whom allegedly conspired against her. Alice Bailey’s situation is more complex. As noted she made significant contributions to Christian thought through her own books and those written for the Tibetan Master. All the available evidence suggests that she took her work as amanuensis seriously and strove to receive and transcribe

the information without distortion. But the information was filtered through her consciousness, and her vocabulary and mindset no doubt played a role in transcription. Whether the tone of her rhetoric can be attributed to personal experiences and prejudices is an open question. Bailey was raised in the Church of England, served as an evangelistic missionary, endured an abusive marriage to an Episcopal clergyman, and finally was abandoned along with their three children.

<sup>16</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, New York: Lucis, 1957, 161-162.

<sup>17</sup> We do not know when the sixth ray came into manifestation. But we were told: “The effect of the activity of this ray [Ray VI], during the past two thousand years, has been to train humanity in the art of recognizing ideals, which are the blue prints [sic] of ideas.” Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology II*, New York: Lucis, 1942, 143-144.

<sup>18</sup> Forced conversions of Jews were widespread when Christian forces reoccupied Spain after centuries of religious harmony under Muslim rule. Most of the crusades were fought against Muslims, but the “Albigensian Crusade” targeted the Christian Cathars of southern Europe. The inquisitions were series of tribunals designed to stamp out heresy. The three main ones were the Medieval Inquisition (1184–1230), Spanish Inquisition (1480–1834), and Roman Inquisition (1542–). In 1908, the Roman Inquisition was renamed the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office, and renamed again in 1965 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Of the estimated 75,000 cases judged by the Roman Inquisition in Italy alone, approximately 1,250 resulted in the death sentence. No such sentences have been handed down for more than a century.

<sup>19</sup> “Save” and “salve” both derive from these Greek words, via the Late Latin *salvare*, “to make safe, secure.”

<sup>20</sup> *Mark* 10:37. Unless stated otherwise, all biblical quotations are from the King James Bible.

<sup>21</sup> John E. E. Dalberg-Acton, letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton, April 5, 1887.

<sup>22</sup> John F. Nash, *The Sacramental Church*, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011.

<sup>23</sup> Pope Francis has demonstrated Christ-like compassion for the poor and repressed within his own flock and beyond. He has also embraced a simple lifestyle. Francis could not unilaterally sell off the Vatican’s timeless

treasures, but he lives in a small apartment separate from the opulent papal palace.

<sup>24</sup> Anglican–Orthodox Joint Doctrinal Discussions, Dublin Agreed Statement: *The Mystery of the Church*. 1984, I, 12.

<sup>25</sup> Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, Oct. 1999.

<sup>26</sup> Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission, Seattle Statement: *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*, 2005.

<sup>27</sup> The Church of England and the Churches of Norway, Denmark and Iceland, *Report of the Committee Appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury*, 1951.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Keating, *Invitation to Love: The Way of Christian Contemplation*, New York, Continuum, 2010, 90.

<sup>29</sup> William Johnston, *Christian Zen*, New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 1997, 46.

<sup>30</sup> Hans U. von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 1. Fort Collins, CO: Ignatius Press, 1961. i, 18.

<sup>31</sup> The investment in “great stone temples” has been criticized on the grounds that resources should have been diverted to welfare programs. But the issue of priorities was debated from the very beginning of Christianity: “The poor you will always have with you” (*Mark* 14:7, *Matthew* 26:11)—and continues today. Not incidentally, construction of the medieval cathedrals revitalized the cities, created jobs, and stimulated building technologies.

<sup>32</sup> A. T. Barker (ed.), *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, letter no. XXIVb, 85B, (8), London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1923, 188.

<sup>33</sup> Timothy Ware (Bishop Kallistos Ware), *The Orthodox Church*, 1963. London: Penguin, 1997, 264.

<sup>34</sup> Kircher also achieved fame for publishing a map of Atlantis, which he claimed was based on “Egyptian sources and Plato’s description.”

<sup>35</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* (“Against Heresies”), c.180.

<sup>36</sup> Parliament of the Kingdom of Scotland, *Act of the Parliament Approving and Establishing the Directory for Publick Worship*, Edinburgh, February 6, 1645.

<sup>37</sup> In some cases, shrines that served as popular pilgrimage destinations were destroyed for political reasons. Secular leaders feared that large gatherings of people might pose a threat to their authority.

<sup>38</sup> The two most influential manifestos were: the *Fama Fraternitatis, des Loblichen Ordens des*

*Rosenkreutzes* (“Declaration of the Worthy Order of the Rosy Cross”), published in 1614, and the *Confessio Fraternitatis R.C. ad Eruditos Europea* (“Confession of the Fraternity R.C. to the Erudite of Europe”), 1615. Both were published in Cassell (now Kassell) in northern Hesse, Germany.

<sup>39</sup> John F. Nash, “Occult Orders in Western Esotericism,” *The Esoteric Quarterly* (Spring 2014), 75-104. The edict prohibiting Roman Catholics from joining Masonic organizations was renewed by subsequent popes. Today, most Roman Catholic men accept the edict as binding. Few Masonic orders accept women.

<sup>40</sup> Arthur E. Waite, Introduction to Karl von Eckartshausen, *The Cloud Upon the Sanctuary*, 1909, x.

<sup>41</sup> Encausse wrote under the pseudonym “Papus.”

<sup>42</sup> Éliphas Lévi, *The History of Magic*, New York: Samuel Weiser, 1913, 374.

<sup>43</sup> John F. Nash, “Anna Bonus Kingsford (1846–1888),” *The Esoteric Quarterly* (Winter 2012), 76-78.

<sup>44</sup> John F. Nash, “Rudolph Steiner (1861–1925),” *The Esoteric Quarterly* (Spring 2016), 70-74.

<sup>45</sup> The liturgy was published in *The Science of the Sacraments*, London: St Alban Press, 1920. Page numbers cited herein are from the abridged 2005 Berkeley, CA: Apocryphile Press edition. The complete text can be found at [http://www.anandgholap.net/Science\\_Of\\_Sacraments-CWL.htm](http://www.anandgholap.net/Science_Of_Sacraments-CWL.htm).

<sup>46</sup> The book was published anonymously (and posthumously) in French, with an introduction by Roman Catholic theologian Hans von Balthasar. The English translation was published in 1985.

<sup>47</sup> Judith von Halle, *And if He Has not been Raised and Secrets of the Stations of the Cross and the Grail Blood*, both by Forest Row, UK: Temple Lodge 2007.

<sup>48</sup> For a discussion of the stigmata, and comments on Emmerich’s and von Halle’s work, see John F. Nash, “Stigmata and the Initiatory Path,” *The Esoteric Quarterly* (Summer 2013), 49-72.

<sup>49</sup> Esoteric institutions do, of course, have the responsibility to distance themselves from sorcery and similar abuses of occultism. In no way did Von Halle’s work fall into that category.

<sup>50</sup> While mainstream Anglican and Lutheran churches ordain women, certain breakaway sects retain an all-male clergy.

<sup>51</sup> Statement from Primates 2016, Anglican Communion News Service, Jan. 14, 2016. The Anglican Church of Canada, has taken the first step toward approving same-sex marriage, despite the threat of similar ostracism. Opposition to same-sex marriage in the Anglican Communion comes primarily from African bishops, some of whom serve countries where homosexual practice is a criminal—even capital—offense.

<sup>52</sup> At the Niagara Falls Conference of 1895, clergy from several denominations defined five “fundamental points” of doctrine: the inerrancy of scripture, the virgin birth, substitutionary atonement, the bodily resurrection of Jesus, and the authenticity of his miracles. In addition to adhering to the five points, evangelical fundamentalists often exhibit attitudes of defensiveness, resistance to change, and denial of scientific discovery. It is important to note that not all evangelicals are fundamentalists; nor are all fundamentalists evangelicals.

<sup>53</sup> The Church of Rome has been guilty of its own kind of fundamentalism. Notorious was Pope Pius X’s “oath against modernism,” which all clergy and seminary professors were required to swear, from 1910 until 1967. Unlike evangelical fundamentalists, however, Roman Catholics never denied the sacred.

<sup>54</sup> Joel Scott Osteen, senior pastor of Lakewood Church, Houston, TX, the largest Protestant church in the United States, urged his readers: “Will you believe? Will you allow that seed to take root? The angel told Mary that she would conceive without knowing a man. In other words, God was saying it could happen through supernatural means. It can happen without the bank loaning you the money.” *Your Best Life Now*, Houston: Faithworks, 2015, 11.

<sup>55</sup> Charles F. F. Moore, *Prosperity*, Unity Village, MO: Unity, 1936, 132.

<sup>56</sup> *Proverbs* 3:9-10.

<sup>57</sup> A forty-day “Prosperity Prayer Program” offered by Unity Worldwide Ministries includes the following affirmations: “Large sums of money, big happy surprises and rich exciting ideas come to me now – under grace, in perfect ways for my personal use and I use them

- wisely.” “Let me learn to think of dollars as I do leaves or fruit on trees, as the natural and inevitable result of the law active within.” “I lift up my thoughts and feelings to be aware, to understand, and to know that the Divine Presence I Am is the source and substance of all my prosperity. I am conscious of the constant activity of this Divine Presence of Infinite Prosperity. Therefore my consciousness is filled with the Light of Truth.” Source: <https://www.unityworldwideministries.org/40-day-prosperity-prayer-program>. Last accessed July 17, 2016.
- <sup>58</sup> The estimate of 33,000 denominations, published in David B. Barrett, et al., *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 2/e, Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001, is exaggerated because “denomination” was defined as an organized Christian group within a country. However, a reliable estimate must exceed 22,000, the number of independent denominations specifically identified as having no international counterparts.
- <sup>59</sup> Michael Robbins, *Tapestry of the Gods*, vol. 3. Online: <http://esotericastrologer.org/articles/esoteric-astrology-and-the-the-seven-rays-tabulations/>. Last accessed July 31, 2016.
- <sup>60</sup> Charles W. Leadbeater, *The Masters and the Path*, Adyar, India: Theosophical Publishing House, 1925, 42.
- <sup>61</sup> Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar*, 56-57.
- <sup>62</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, New York: Lucis, 1925, 386-387.
- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 439.
- <sup>64</sup> An organization chart for the Planetary Hierarchy can be found in Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar*, 49. An expanded version is provided in John F. Nash, *The Soul and Its Destiny*, Bloomington, IN: Authorhouse, 2004, 82.
- <sup>65</sup> Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, 46-47.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.
- <sup>67</sup> Bailey, *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, 506.
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>69</sup> Bailey, *The Destiny of the Nations*, 59.
- <sup>70</sup> Alice Bailey disclosed Christ’s soul and personality rays in *The Destiny of the Nations*, 38. According to Tallapragada Subba Row, one of the first scholars to write authoritatively about the seven rays: “[I]t is only the first two Rays that have ever given rise to universal religions.” See his “First Ray in Buddhism,” *Esoteric Writings*, Adyar, India: Theosophical Publishing House, 1895, 527.
- <sup>71</sup> The Solar Logos is said to be unique in having the same soul and personality ray (Ray II), which “determines both His quality and His purpose.” Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology I*, 334-335.
- <sup>72</sup> Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar*, 58-59. Since that was written the Master Rakoczi has been promoted to Mahachohan of the Department of Civilization. We have not been told whether he retains his “day-to-day” responsibilities for the seventh-ray ashram, or who else may have taken over those responsibilities.
- <sup>73</sup> Bailey, *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, 514.
- <sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 506.
- <sup>75</sup> Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, 911.
- <sup>76</sup> Marko Pogačnik, *Christ Power and the Earth Goddess*, Forres, Scotland: Findhorn Press, 1999, 14-17. Charles Leadbeater spoke of the “Angel of the Eucharist” and “Angel of the Presence”—this latter evidently named after the Real Presence in the Eucharist. However, he explained that the Angel of the Presence is “not a member of the glorious kingdom of the Angels, but is actually a thought-form of the Christ, wearing His likeness.” *The Science of the Sacraments*, 33.
- <sup>77</sup> Geoffrey Hodson, *The Inner Side of Church Worship*, London: St Alban Press, 1930.1975, 15.
- <sup>78</sup> Geoffrey Hodson, *Clairvoyant Investigations*, Madras, India: Theosophical Publishing House, 1984, 78-86, 89-92.
- <sup>79</sup> Hodson, *The Inner Side of Church Worship*, 62.
- <sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.
- <sup>81</sup> Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine I*, 311.
- <sup>82</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, New York: Lucis, 1951, 213. Interestingly, as noted earlier, Bailey blamed Paul for Christianity’s deviation from Christ’s teachings.
- <sup>83</sup> Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar*, 38.
- <sup>84</sup> For a discussion of theosis see John F. Nash, “Theosis: a Christian Perspective on Human Destiny,” *The Esoteric Quarterly* (Spring 2011), 15-33.
- <sup>85</sup> Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations*, 643.
- <sup>86</sup> Rudolf Steiner, lecture, Karlsruhe, Germany, October 14, 1911. Included in *From Jesus to Christ*, Forest Row, UK: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1991, 165.
- <sup>87</sup> Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, 439-440.
- <sup>88</sup> Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology I*, 26.
- <sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 358.

- <sup>90</sup> Ibid., 348. World events might suggest that the sixth ray's negative aspects remain relatively strong.
- <sup>91</sup> Ibid., 26. During times of cyclical pralaya, "Egos who are on that particular Ray will take form elsewhere on other globes, and in other chains, and not so much on our planet." Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, 439.
- <sup>92</sup> Ibid., 242. The description pertained specifically to the vegetable kingdom, whose "four-fold perfection . . . is unparalleled in any other," but who would dispute that it holds a promise for the Master Jesus and humanity as we strive, on parallel arcs, toward new levels of perfection?
- <sup>93</sup> Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar*, 61-62.
- <sup>94</sup> Bailey, *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, 511.
- <sup>95</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age I*, New York: Lucis, 1944, 38.
- <sup>96</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>97</sup> The sixth root race is predicted to emerge in 700-to-800 years' time. Annie W. Besant and Charles W. Leadbeater, *Man: Whence, How and Whither*, Adyar, India: Theosophical Publishing House, 1913/1971, 361ff. The typical pattern is for new root races to be created from the corresponding *subrace* of the previous root race.
- <sup>98</sup> Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology I*, 429.
- <sup>99</sup> At that time, the seventh ray may replace the sixth as the dominant influence in western religion. We can speculate that the New World Religion may have a second-ray soul and seventh-ray personality.
- <sup>100</sup> Bailey, *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, 530.
- <sup>101</sup> "One of the first ways in which man is learning this truth is through the discovery of that vibration—emanating from a particular Master—which produces a reaction in himself, and which calls forth a response. Thus he is enabled to find out upon which ray his soul is found and to which ray group he should be attracted. This is of importance to the aspirant, and should be considered more carefully than has hitherto been the case, for by it the aspirant determines the nature and the quality of his soul type, and of the centre through which he (occultly speaking) goes out upon the Path. He discovers likewise the group of forms and of lives with which he is linked, to which he must render service, and by which he can be served." Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology I*, 261.
- <sup>102</sup> Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar*, 46-47.
- <sup>103</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>104</sup> The concept of a legacy ray is discussed in Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age I*, 466. Michael Robbins invoked the concept to explain why Alice Bailey, whom he believed had a second-ray soul and first-ray personality, could have served as an evangelical Christian missionary in young adulthood. The reason, he suggested, was that her astral body was initially on the sixth ray, as a "legacy ray." Eventually, he surmised, it was transmuted onto the second ray. Source: <http://makara.us/04mdr/01writing/03tg/bios/Bailey.htm>. Last accessed July 15, 2016.
- <sup>105</sup> Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology I*, 208-209.
- <sup>106</sup> Ibid., 209.
- <sup>107</sup> Ibid., 360.
- <sup>108</sup> Christianity, Judaism and Islam all place considerable emphasis on devotion, no doubt reflecting the cyclic sixth-ray influence. In the East, Bakti Yoga is specifically aimed at devotion to deities, and devotion to one's guru is expected even by disciples on the initiatory path. Devotion also extends into the secular world, with impulses like patriotism, as well as devotion to a person or cause.
- <sup>109</sup> Devotional prayer is only one type of prayer; others are prayers of petition, intercession, penitence, praise and thanksgiving. Prayer can also be divided into *apophatic*, or silent, prayer and *kataphatic* prayer, based on words and images. All liturgical (that is, scripted) prayers and most unscripted, or spontaneous, prayers are kataphatic.
- <sup>110</sup> Leadbeater, *The Science of the Sacraments*, 61.
- <sup>111</sup> Similar issues arise in the choice of scriptural translations. For example, the King James Bible—whose language was archaic even when it was written—is widely valued for its dignity, poetic quality, and "sacredness," even though modern translations of the Hebrew and Greek may technically be more accurate.

# The Locusts of the *Revelation*: Repressed Guilt Feelings

Zachary F. Lansdowne

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## Abstract

*The Revelation of St. John*, sometimes called the *Book of Revelation* or the *Apocalypse*, is the last book of the Bible. It has been a mystery ever since it first appeared about 2000 years ago, because of its obscure and perplexing nature. Chapter 9 of the *Revelation* contains some of its most bizarre figures: creatures called locusts come out of smoke, are armed with the deadly sting of scorpions, and sting people who do not have the seal of God in their foreheads. This article interprets Chapter 9 by using an allegorical method: every object is taken as a symbol representing some aspect of an aspirant who is on the spiritual journey. As a result, Chapter 9 is seen as portraying the cleansing of the subconscious realm, and the locusts as signifying repressed guilt feelings.

## Traditional Method of Interpretation

*The Revelation of St. John* gets its title from its first verse: “THE Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified *it* by his angel unto his servant John.” *Angel* is a translation of the Greek word (*aggelos*) that can also be rendered as “messenger,” “envoy,” or “one who is sent.” In this first verse, the angel of Jesus can be interpreted as inspiration that imparts instruction from Jesus, so the *Revelation* is traditionally regarded as an inspired book.

Stephen Hunter describes the difficulty of interpreting the *Revelation*:

The *Revelation* is the most difficult book to interpret of any in the New Testament canon. Its meaning is often involved in

much obscurity, and the interpretation of eminent scholars has differed so widely in the past that we cannot always be sure, especially in the more difficult portions, that the particular view which appears to us the more satisfactory or convincing is certainly the correct one. This divergence of opinion has had the unfortunate effect of disparaging the worth of the *Apocalypse* as a part of the Word of God in the mind of many earnest students, who have come to regard its meaning as so obscure, and hidden in such hopeless perplexity, that any further attempt to interpret it is entirely fruitless.<sup>1</sup>

This article is concerned only with Chapter 9 of the *Revelation*, which Peter Williamson characterizes as being probably its most bizarre and terrifying chapter:

We have now reached the chapter of *Revelation* whose imagery is probably the most bizarre and terrifying of all. It is the stuff of our worst nightmares. If we look for a comparison in the world of cinema, *Rev 9* resembles a horror movie.<sup>2</sup>

The traditional method of interpreting the *Revelation* could be called “external-temporal,” because it construes the figures and episodes as representing events that occur in the external world at definite times, either in the future or

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## About the Author

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in the past. When using the traditional method, many commentators consider those figures and episodes to be literal descriptions of future events. As an example, with regard to the locusts that appear as demons in Chapter 9, Robert Vacendak makes the following prediction: “The demons will be like a huge army of locusts in that they will cover the earth to wreak havoc, not on vegetation, but on unregenerate sinners.”<sup>3</sup>

Other commentators, even though they use the traditional interpretative method, identify the figures and episodes differently. For example, the popular writer Hal Lindsey considers the bizarre images to be the attempts by a first-century writer to use the phenomena of his ancient time for the purpose of portraying the technical marvels of our modern time. In particular, Lindsey says, “the locusts might symbolize an advanced kind of helicopter.”<sup>4</sup>

Some commentators consider the figures in the *Revelation* to be depictions of past events. For example, David Chilton says, “the locust plague ... may refer in part to the actions of Gessius Florus, the procurator of Judea, who for a five-month period (beginning in May of 66 with the slaughter of 3,600 peaceful citizens) terrorized the Jews, deliberately seeking to incite them to rebellion.”<sup>5</sup>

None of the interpretations yielded by the traditional method seems consistent with what the *Revelation* says about itself. According to Revelation 1.1, its purpose is to show “things which must shortly come to pass.” Likewise, Revelation 1:3 states, “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.” Thus, according to its own verses, the *Revelation* deals with the *present* time—that is, with the present time of whoever may be reading it—so it contains instruction that any reader can apply immediately to become blessed.

### **Allegorical Method of Interpretation**

Helena Blavatsky (1831 – 1891), founder of the Theosophical Society, makes a key distinction: “Every ancient religious, or rather

philosophical cult consisted of an esoteric or secret teaching, and an exoteric (outward public) worship.”<sup>6</sup> Blavatsky also says, “All esoteric truths were given out to the public by the Initiates of the temples *under the guise of allegories.*”<sup>7</sup> James Pryse (1859 –1942), a theosophist and colleague of Blavatsky, says that the *Revelation* is an esoteric doctrine of early Christianity given out under the guise of allegories:

Incomprehensible as the book may seem to the exoteric scholar, however great his intellectual attainments, keen his mental acumen, and vast his store of erudition, to the mere tyro in the sacred science the general meaning of the *Apocalypse* is perfectly clear. It is unintelligible to the conventional scholar simply because its subject-matter, veiled in symbolical language, relates to the Mysteries of the early Christian Society, the esoteric teachings which it was not lawful to reveal.<sup>8</sup>

If the *Revelation* were an esoteric teaching given out under the guise of allegories, then deciphering the allegories would reveal the hidden teaching. Roy Zuck describes the interpretative method of allegorizing scripture:

Allegorizing is searching for a hidden or secret meaning underlying but remote from and unrelated in reality to the more obvious meaning of a text. In other words the literal reading is a sort of code, which needs to be deciphered to determine the more significant and hidden meaning. In this approach the literal is superficial, the allegorical is the true meaning.<sup>9</sup>

Lynn Dunston mentions the criticism that is sometimes made regarding allegorizing scripture:

The fundamental problem with allegorizing Scripture is that it assigns a “deeper” meaning to the text that the original author never intended to convey ... When seeking the meaning of any given passage of Scripture, it is vital that the author’s *intended* meaning be sought rather than a “deeper” allegorical meaning.<sup>10</sup>

If Pryse were correct concerning the *Revelation*, then its intended meaning would be the “deeper” allegorical one, so the foregoing criticism would not apply to an effort of allegorizing it.

Several commentators provide hints regarding the allegorical meaning of the *Revelation*:

Blavatsky states: “The fact is ... the whole *Revelation*, is simply an allegorical narrative of the Mysteries and initiation therein of a candidate, who is John himself.”<sup>11</sup>

Edgar Cayce (1877 – 1945), a mystic noted for answering questions while in a trance, characterizes the *Revelation* in this way: “For the visions, the experiences, the names, the churches, the places, the dragons, the cities, all are but emblems of those forces that may war within the individual in its journey through the material, or from the entering into the material manifestation to the entering into the glory, or the awakening in the spirit.”<sup>12</sup>

Paramahansa Yogananda (1893 – 1952), founder of the Self-Realization Fellowship, writes: “Certainly in the Revelation of St. John we are led by means of metaphor into the profound insights of the yoga science in which Jesus initiated his advanced disciple John, and others, whose consciousness thereby ascended to the exalted Self-realized state of the kingdom of God within.”<sup>13</sup>

Let us convert these hints into corresponding principles of interpretation. First, according to Blavatsky’s quotation, the *Revelation* portrays the experiences of an aspirant on the spiritual journey. Second, according to Cayce’s quotation, every object in the *Revelation* symbolizes an aspect of an aspirant’s inner life. Third, according to Yogananda’s quotation, the *Revelation* contains metaphors that signify the insights of yoga science, which is the science behind the yoga practices that originated in ancient India. Blavatsky, Cayce, and Yogananda, however, interpreted only a few symbols in the *Revelation*, and none of them attempted a verse-by-verse analysis of any chapter.

This article attempts to decipher the allegorical meaning of the first twelve verses of Chapter 9, denoted as Revelation 9:1-12, while adhering to the three foregoing principles of interpretation and using clues found principally in three sources:

*Earlier Sacred Scriptures*. Gerhard Krodel, a Bible scholar, reports that the 404 verses of the *Revelation* allude 518 times to earlier sacred scriptures.<sup>14</sup> These earlier scriptures include books of the Old Testament, New Testament, and Pseudepigrapha. The latter books are biblical in character but are not considered canonical.

*Alice Bailey* (1880 – 1949), a member of the Theosophical Society before leaving it to pursue her own activities, shows high regard for the *Revelation*: “In the *New Testament*, John, the beloved disciple, was privileged to gain a cosmic picture and a true prophetic vision which he embodied in the Apocalypse.”<sup>15</sup>

*A Course in Miracles (ACIM)*, a modern system of spiritual psychology, describes the meaning of the *Revelation* in this way: “The first step toward freedom involves a sorting out of the false from the true. This is a process of separation in the constructive sense, and reflects the true meaning of the Apocalypse. Everyone will ultimately look upon his own creations and choose to preserve only what is good, just as God Himself looked upon what He had created and knew that it was good.”<sup>16</sup>

By using the allegorical method of interpretation, along with the foregoing principles and sources of clues, this article shows that Chapter 9 of the *Revelation* portrays, in Bailey’s words, “the psychological cleansing of the subconscious to which individuals submit themselves.”<sup>17</sup>

## Revelation 9:1-12

Revelation 9:1-12, based on the King James Version of the Bible, is as follows:<sup>18</sup>

1. And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit.

2. And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.
3. And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power.
4. And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.
5. And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment *was* as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man.
6. And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.
7. And the shapes of the locusts *were* like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads *were* as it were crowns like gold, and their faces *were* as the faces of men.
8. And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as *the teeth* of lions.
9. And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings *was* as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle.
10. And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power *was* to hurt men five months.
11. And they had a king over them, *which is* the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue *is* Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath *his* name Apollyon.
12. One woe is past; *and*, behold, there come two woes more hereafter.

## Origin and Mission of the Locusts

Verses 1 through 6 describe the origin and mission of the locusts. Each verse is

considered separately and is repeated in bold print.

***1. And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit.***

Verse 1 begins by saying, “And the fifth angel sounded.” The first principle of interpretation, which was described earlier, regards the *Revelation* as portraying the experiences of an aspirant who is on the spiritual journey. This principle suggests that the sounding of an angel signifies a milestone that defines the start of a new stage on the spiritual journey. There are seven angels altogether, so the sounding of the fifth angel indicates that the aspirant has reached a relatively advanced stage.

The verse divides the universe into three parts: “heaven,” “earth,” and “bottomless pit.” Exodus 20:4 and Philippians 2:10 also divide the universe into three similar parts: “heaven,” “earth,” and “under the earth.” According to the second principle of interpretation, which was also described earlier, the three parts of the universe symbolize three aspects of an aspirant’s inner life, so it is necessary to correlate these three parts with the appropriate inner aspects:

*Heaven.* According to the third principle of interpretation, the *Revelation* contains metaphors that signify the insights of yoga science. The notion of the *causal body* can be found in yoga science, where its Sanskrit name is *karana sarira*; *karana* means cause and *sarira* means body.<sup>19</sup> Let us compare Matthew 6:20, “But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven,” with Bailey’s statement, “The content of the causal body is the accumulation by slow and gradual process of the good in each life.”<sup>20</sup> These two statements would be similar if heaven signified the causal body.

*Earth.* Wikipedia states, “Earth is one of the four classical elements in ancient Greek philosophy and science. It was commonly associated with qualities of heaviness, matter and the terrestrial world.”<sup>21</sup> Bailey sometimes uses the term “matter aspect” as a synonym for the personality,<sup>22</sup> which is the threefold lower self consisting of the

physical body, emotional body, and mental body.<sup>23</sup>

*Bottomless Pit.* The bottomless pit, or the abyss, is mentioned in Luke 8:31 and Romans 10:7. *A Commentary on the Book of the Revelation*, which was written by a study group based on Cayce's messages, considers the bottomless pit to be the "subconscious mind" or "area of repression."<sup>24</sup> Bailey uses a similar image to depict the subconscious realm: "The subconscious realm is like a deep pool from which a man can draw almost anything from his past experience, if he so desires, and which can be stirred up until it becomes a boiling cauldron, causing much distress."<sup>25</sup>

Consequently, the three parts of the universe, "heaven," "earth," and "bottomless pit," are taken as signifying these inner aspects: the causal body, personality, and subconscious realm, respectively.

The middle clause states, "and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth." The celestial *stars* appear to us as points of light, because they are very far away, so their apparent diameter is very close to zero. In other contexts, Bailey says, "The star is but a point of light,"<sup>26</sup> and speaks of "the light which streams from the Observer."<sup>27</sup> Correspondingly, in the middle clause, the falling star is taken as the focal point of the light that streams from the Observer. The first principle of interpretation implies that the pronoun *I* denotes an aspirant who has reached the portrayed stage on the spiritual journey. The clause says that the aspirant sees the "star fall from heaven unto the earth," which means that he or she sees the focal point fall from the causal body unto the personality, so the aspirant's center of consciousness must have shifted from the personality to the causal body. Bailey also mentions this shift: "the transference of the polarisation from the Personality ... into the causal body."<sup>28</sup> Thus the clause implies that the aspirant is observing the personality in a detached way, because he or she is observing it from the vantage point of the causal body.

A *key* is a symbol of authority and release (Isaiah 22:22). In verse 1, "the key of the bottomless pit" signifies the key to the entire process of cleansing the subconscious realm. What might that key be?

Proverbs 28:13 states, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper," which indicates that repressing unpleasant memories does not pay off. Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939), founder of psychoanalysis, makes the conscious remembrance of repressed material the basis of his therapy: "We can express the aim of our efforts in a variety of formulas: making conscious what is unconscious, lifting repressions, filling gaps in the memory—all these amount to the same thing."<sup>29</sup> *ACIM* describes the needed recognitions:

The escape from darkness involves two stages: First, the recognition that darkness cannot hide. This step usually entails fear. Second, the recognition that there is nothing you want to hide even if you could. This step brings escape from fear. When you have become willing to hide nothing, you will not only be willing to enter into communion but will also understand peace and joy.<sup>30</sup>

As suggested by the preceding quotations, the key to the entire process of cleansing the subconscious realm is this recognition: there is nothing in that realm that is desirable to hide.

What faculty in the aspirant would have the preceding recognition? I. K. Taimni, a theosophical writer, says, "The first function of the Causal body is that it serves as the organ of abstract thought."<sup>31</sup> In contrast, the mental body, which is sometimes called the "lower concrete mind," serves as the organ of concrete thought.<sup>32</sup> Wikipedia says, "*Abstraction* in its main sense is a conceptual process by which general rules and concepts are derived from the usage and classification of specific examples."<sup>33</sup> The preceding recognition is a rule or concept that has been derived from experience, so it would come from the causal body.

The verse's final clause is: "and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit." The

pronoun “him” refers to the falling star, which in turn signifies the observation of the personality from the vantage point of the causal body, so the clause depicts the causal body as giving its recognition to this observation.

In summary, verse 1 has the following meaning: *After reaching a relatively advanced stage on the spiritual journey, the aspirant observes the personality from the vantage point of the causal body. The causal body gives to this observation the following recognition: there is nothing in the subconscious realm that is desirable to hide.*

**2. And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.**

Verse 2 introduces several new symbols, so let us consider their meanings. A *smoke screen* is defined as “an action intended to conceal or confuse or obscure.”<sup>34</sup> *A Commentary on the Book of the Revelation* considers *smoke* to be a symbol of “confusion” or “obscurity.”<sup>35</sup> Accordingly, “smoke” in verse 2 signifies, in Bailey’s words, “the form of a black cloud of emotional matter, of some dark emotion that seems to imperil all stable vibration and plunges the bewildered student into a blackness of despair.”<sup>36</sup>

Although the word *soul* has various meanings, it is used in this article to denote the inner divine voice in a human being, which is how Bailey generally uses it.<sup>37</sup> Malachi 4:2 uses the sun as a metaphor for the soul: “But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings.” Bailey also speaks of “the soul, the inner

sun,”<sup>38</sup> so “the sun” in the verse is taken to be the soul.

*Air* is a symbol of intuitions.<sup>39</sup> Bailey mentions “the intuitions which are sent to you from your soul,”<sup>40</sup> which indicates that the light of the soul reaches us through intuitions. The light of the sun reaches us through air, just as the light of the soul reaches us through intuitions, so construing “the air” in the verse to be a symbol of intuitions is consistent with construing the sun to be a symbol of the soul.

The final clause of the verse is: “and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.” The meaning of this clause is similar to Bailey’s description of “the casting over the disciple of a cloud of emotional or mental matter which suffices to hide the real, and to temporarily obscure that which is true.”<sup>41</sup> Here, the “real” and the “true” refer to the soul and its intuitions, respectively.

Consequently, verse 2 has the following meaning: *After the preceding observation and recognition have opened the subconscious realm, emotional confusion arises out of that realm, like the smoke of a great furnace, and the soul and its intuitions are obscured by the emerging confusion.*

**3. And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power.**

The first clause of verse 3 is: “And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth.” Locusts are large migratory grasshoppers that cause great damage to crops wherever they swarm. In the Old Testament, a devastating locust plague is sometimes used as a symbolic representation of an invading army that brings

***The Revelation is the most difficult book to interpret of any of the New Testament cannon. Its meaning is often involved in much obscurity, and the interpretation of eminent scholars has differed so widely in the past that we cannot always be sure, especially in the more difficult portions, that the particular view which appears to us more satisfactory or convincing is certainly the correct one.***

destruction (Judges 6:5, Joel 1:1–2:27). According to the second principle of interpretation, the locusts symbolize an aspect of the aspirant's inner life, but what could it be?

The Old Testament portrays guilt as a burden that destroys one's inner peace, such as in Psalm 38:6: "I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long." *ACIM* also says, "Peace and guilt are antithetical,"<sup>42</sup> so guilt feelings destroy inner peace like locusts destroy crops. Freud describes the emergence of "an unconscious sense of guilt" into "a conscious sense of guilt"

The battle with the obstacle of an unconscious sense of guilt is not made easy for the analyst. Nothing can be done against it directly, and nothing indirectly but the slow procedure of unmasking its unconscious repressed roots, and of thus gradually changing it into a conscious sense of guilt.<sup>43</sup>

Repressed guilt feelings that emerge into consciousness are like an invading army that brings destruction, so the locusts in verse 3 are construed as depicting such feelings, because such feelings are like what locusts depict elsewhere in the Bible. *A Commentary on the Book of the Revelation* also interprets the locusts as "repressed negative emotions" that emerge into "old regrets and guilt feelings [that] are activated."<sup>44</sup> As before, "smoke" and "earth" signify emotional confusion and the personality, respectively, so the first clause has this meaning: Long-repressed guilt feelings come out of the emotional confusion into the personality.

The second clause is: "and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power." Scorpions are common in the wilderness through which the people of Israel journeyed (Deuteronomy 8:15). This animal is about four to six inches long, with two claws and eight legs; its slender tail is usually curved upward and forward over its back and holds a venomous stinger. The Old Testament figuratively uses scorpions to represent enemies (Ezekiel 2:6) and cruelty (1 Kings 12:11).

Bailey describes how a thought-form can act as a poisoning agent and thereby be like a venomous stinger:

A thought-form can also act as a poisoning agent, and poison all the springs of life ... A violent dislike, a gnawing worry, a jealousy, a constant anxiety and a longing for something or someone may act so potently as an irritant or poison that the entire life is spoilt, and service is rendered futile.<sup>45</sup>

Accordingly, verse 3 has this meaning: *Long-repressed guilt feelings come out of the emotional confusion into the personality. These feelings destroy inner peace like locusts destroy crops. They have the power to poison or corrupt thoughts and feelings, which is like the venomous power of scorpions.*

**4. And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.**

Verse 4 begins by saying, "And it was commanded them," but the verse does not identify the associated commander. As shown by the rest of the verse, this command implements the recognition, depicted by "the key" in verse 1, that there is nothing in the subconscious realm that is desirable to hide. According to verse 1, this recognition comes from the causal body after the aspirant's center of consciousness has shifted from the personality to the causal body. When such a shift occurs, the personality becomes the instrument of the causal body, as Bailey explains: "The vehicle which seems of paramount importance can become and should become of secondary importance as it becomes simply the instrument of that which is higher than itself."<sup>46</sup> Thus the command in verse 4 comes from the causal body and is directed at the personality.

Verse 4 alludes to Exodus 10:14–15, which describes a plague of locusts destroying all vegetation in Egypt:

And the locusts went up over all the land of Egypt ... and they did eat every herb of the land, and all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left: and there remained not any green thing in the trees, or in the herbs of the field, through all the land of Egypt.

In contrast, the locusts of verse 4 seem remarkable, because they are told *not* to harm three kinds of vegetation: “the grass of the earth,” “any green thing,” and “any tree.” Our attempt to allegorize this verse is based on both the second principle of interpretation to which the three kinds of vegetation symbolize three aspects of the aspirant’s inner life, and the third principle of interpretation, according to which some metaphors signify the insights of yoga science.

In yoga science, the dense physical body has an underlying vital body, or energetic counterpart, that has the Sanskrit name, *pranamaya kosha*. Here, *prana* means energy, *maya* means appearance, and *kosha* means sheath.<sup>47</sup> This vital body, however, is acknowledged and called other names elsewhere: “golden bowl” in the Bible (Ecclesiastes 12:6);<sup>48</sup> “etheric body” in theosophy; and “biofield” in alternative medicine. The Old Testament uses the color *green* to represent vitality and growth, as in Job 8:16, “He *is* green before the sun, and his branch shooteth forth in his garden.” Consequently, “green” in the verse signifies the vital body.

In yoga science, the Sanskrit word *nadis* denotes an extensive and intricate network of energy channels in the vital body. A single nadi is a thin channel of force, so its form is similar to that of a blade of grass. Several Hindu *Upanishads* claim that there are 72,000 nadis in the vital body.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, a lawn has many blades of grass. Hence, the “grass” in the verse is taken as the nadis. In yoga science, the Sanskrit word *chakra* denotes an energy center in the vital body,<sup>50</sup> so “any green thing” is taken as any chakra.

The phrase “nerve tree” is sometimes used in articles on human anatomy to denote a nervous system, because the latter has the appearance of a tree. Jutta Bell-Ranske, a theosophical writer, interprets the two trees in Revelation 11:4 as the “the ganglionic nerve-system.”<sup>51</sup> Similarly, “any tree” in the verse is construed as signifying any nervous system.

According to the preceding significances, the verse lists the nadis, chakras, and nervous

system together, as though these three parts of the human constitution were somehow related. Bailey indicates that the nadis and chakras activate the nervous system:

The etheric body is the mechanism of vital, pranic life, and “sub-stands” or underlies the outer, familiar equipment of the nervous system, which feeds and actuates all parts of the physical organism. The relationship existing between the centres, the nadis and the entire nervous system comprises the field of the new medicine and indicates the new major field of research.<sup>52</sup>

*Mental Health Daily* states, “In some cases, individuals may experience a traumatic event that triggers such a potent stress response via the sympathetic nervous system, that memory of the event becomes repressed.”<sup>53</sup> By combining this statement with the previously indicated relationship between the vital body and nervous system, the following conclusion is obtained: the nadis and chakras can act through the nervous system to bring about repression.

In the verse, the verb “hurt” is the translation of a Greek word (*adikeo*) that is often rendered as “do wrong” in other biblical verses, such as Matthew 20:13. Although “hurt” has the connotation of inflicting pain, “do wrong” need not involve pain but has the connotation of acting unjustly. In the verse, “that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree” is construed in this way: that the emergent guilt feelings should not trigger a stress response—from the nadis and chakras acting through the nervous system—that results in repression.

Bailey describes the step depicted in the verse:

The disciple puts himself into the positive or conditioning environment wherein the trials and the disciplines are unavoidable and inevitable. When the mind has reached a relatively high stage of development, the memory aspect is evoked in *a new and conscious manner* and then every latent pre-disposition, every racial and national instinct, every unconquered situation and every controlling fault rises to the surface of consciousness and then—the fight is on.<sup>54</sup>

By concluding with the phrase, “the fight is on,” this quotation indicates that progress is made by moving from a false peace, brought about by repression, to conscious inner conflict.

After the repressed guilt feelings rise to the surface of consciousness, with what do they conflict? Bailey speaks about the self-image:

Being created by the lower personal self and not by the soul, it [this “image”] is impermanent and is simply held together by the man’s lower energy. When the man begins to function as the soul this “image” he has created, through his “fancy” or his reaction to delusion, is dissipated by a supreme exertion. It has no real existence once there is nothing in the aspirant to feed it, and the realization of this enables him to free himself from its thralldom.<sup>55</sup>

Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895 – 1986), a member of the Theosophical Society before leaving it to pursue his own activities, says that the self-image can be hurt:

What is hurt? The image that you have built about yourself, that has been hurt. Why do you have an image about yourself? Because that is the tradition, part of our education, part of our social reactions. There is an image about myself, and there is an image about you in relation to my image. So I have got half a dozen images and more. And that image about myself has been hurt. You call me a fool and I shrink: it has been hurt.<sup>56</sup>

In verse 4, “men” symbolizes self-images, as in Colossians 3:9, “ye have put off the old man with his deeds.” “Forehead” is a symbol of mind or consciousness, as in Jeremiah 3:3, “thou hadst a whore’s forehead, thou refusedst to be ashamed.” Ezekiel 9:4 provides the background for sealing in the forehead: “And the LORD said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.” Accordingly, “the seal of God in their foreheads” signifies the presence of truth in their minds. Thus, in

the verse, “those men who have not the seal of God in their foreheads” represent self-images based on the lack of truth, such as pride, vanity, or some other form of illusion.

In summary, verse 4 has this overall meaning: *The causal body commands that the emergent guilt feelings should not trigger a stress response—from the nadis and chakras acting through the nervous system—that results in repression. Consequently, the guilt feelings rise to the surface of consciousness and hurt only the self-images based on illusion.*

**5. And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man.**

The first phrase of verse 5 is: “And to them it was given that they should not kill them.” Here, the first “them” refers to self-images, and the second “them” to guilt feelings. To *kill* means “to deprive of life,”<sup>57</sup> so the repression of a guilt feeling has the purpose of killing it. Moreover, Melanie Erceg, a psychologist, says, “we needed ... to repress/disown/kill some of our feelings,”<sup>58</sup> so she treats “repress” and “kill” as synonyms. Let us substitute “repress” for “kill” in the first phrase so that it obtains this meaning: the command was given to the self-images that they should not repress the guilt feelings after these feelings have risen to the surface of consciousness. This command comes from the causal body, as in the preceding verse.

The second phrase is: “but that they should be tormented five months.” In other words, the self-images, which are denoted by “they” in the phrase, need to go through a period of being “tormented.” The phrase, however, uses the passive grammatical voice, so it does not disclose the actual source of the torment. We might think that the torment comes from the risen guilt feelings, but that is not the case. *ACIM* provides this explanation:

Defense is frightening. It stems from fear, increasing fear as each defense is made. You think it offers safety. Yet it speaks of fear made real and terror justified.<sup>59</sup>

Consequently, the second phrase depicts the step in which the aspirant defends the self-images from attacks by the risen guilt feelings, so the aforementioned torment actually comes from the aspirant's own defense.

Eventually the aspirant gains the understanding that the guilt feelings must simply be observed without any defense, as *ACIM* also explains:

No one can become an advanced teacher of God until he fully understands that defenses are but foolish guardians of mad illusions. The more grotesque the dream, the fiercer and more powerful its defenses seem to be. Yet when the teacher of God finally agrees to look past them, he finds that nothing was there. Slowly at first he lets himself be undeceived. But he learns faster as his trust increases. It is not danger that comes when defenses are laid down. It is safety. It is peace. It is joy. And it is God.<sup>60</sup>

William Smith, a noted theologian and scholar, observes that, in the Old Testament, "*Five* appears in the table of punishments, of legal requirements."<sup>61</sup> For example, Exodus 22:1 states, "If a man shall steal an ox ... and kill it, or sell it; he shall restore five oxen for an ox." Other examples of the number *five* appearing as a part of a punishment can be given.<sup>62</sup> In the second phrase, "five months" signifies the length of time that the aspirant is tormented by his or her own defense, which is the length of time that he or she needs before gaining the understanding that the guilt feelings must simply be observed without any defense. The *Wisdom of Solomon* (12:23) speaks of this torment: "Wherefore, whereas men have lived dissolutely and unrighteously, thou hast tormented them with their own abominations."

In particular, the aspirant typically uses reasoning as a defense, the consequence of which Bailey describes as follows:

Ancient suffering, dire memories, haunting miseries, deep-seated in the subconscious rise to the surface frequently and cause a condition of fear and of distress which no amount of reasoning seems able to quiet.<sup>63</sup>

Chris Argyris, a theorist who studies learning processes, provides more information about defensive reasoning:

The consequences of defensive reasoning include escalating misunderstanding, self-fulfilling prophecies, and self-sealing processes. All these escalate because the logic used is self-referential, which does not encourage the detection and correction of error. When these conditions are combined, a generic syndrome against learning is created.<sup>64</sup>

Defensive reasoning is said to be "self-sealing," because it obscures its own existence.<sup>65</sup> In other words, defensive reasoning has the purpose of protecting self-images but denies having such a purpose. Argyris says, "Self-referential logic means testing a claim by the same logic that generated it in the first place."<sup>66</sup> For example, if the aspirant were to use self-referential logic in a defense, then after deducing that a particular self-image were true, he or she would use the same reasoning to test that deduction.

The third phrase of verse 5 is: "and their torment *was* as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man." Wikipedia reports, "Most scorpion stings vary from small swelling to medically significant lesions in severity."<sup>67</sup> The preceding Bailey quotation mentions "a condition of fear and of distress which no amount of reasoning seems able to quiet," so defensive reasoning compensates for its perceived ineffectiveness through what Argyris calls "escalating misunderstanding, self-fulfilling prophecies, and self-sealing processes." Accordingly, the torment from defensive reasoning increases through the escalation of associated features, so it is like the torment from a scorpion's sting, which increases through the swelling of associated tissues.

In summary, verse 5 has this overall meaning: *The causal body gives the command that the self-images should not repress the risen guilt feelings, even though the self-images will be tormented as long as a defense is used against these feelings. The aspirant typically uses reasoning as a defense, the torment from which increases through the escalation of features associated with the reasoning, so it is like the torment from a scorpion's sting, which*

*increases through the swelling of tissues associated with the sting site.*

**6. And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.**

Verse 6 mentions “death,” which generally signifies a terminating event in the physical world. According to the second principle of interpretation, however, death symbolizes an aspect of the aspirant’s inner life, but what could it be? *ACIM* states,

Death is a thought that takes on many forms, often unrecognized. It may appear as sadness, fear, anxiety or doubt; as anger, faithlessness and lack of trust; concern for bodies, envy, and all forms in which the wish to be as you are not may come to tempt you.<sup>68</sup>

The above quotation provides a notion of death that satisfies the second principle, because it says, “Death is a thought that takes on ... the wish to be as you are not.” Let us consider two examples of such death thoughts. Repression denotes the forgetting process by which unacceptable memories are prevented from entering the conscious mind. Thus the wish to repress is a death thought, because it is, in the words of the quotation, “the wish to be as you are not.” *ACIM* also states, “Reality opposes nothing. What merely is needs no defense, and offers none. Only illusions need defense because of weakness,”<sup>69</sup> so the fact that the self-images need defense shows that they are not real but are mere illusions. Thus the wish to defend self-images is another death thought, because it is also the wish to be as you are not: in this case, the wish to be illusionary self-images.

Verse 5 incorporates the two death thoughts described in the preceding paragraph. If verse 6 referred to only one death thought, then its second clause would needlessly repeat its first one, so our commentary assumes that the two clauses refer to two death thoughts. If verse 6 referred to the same two death thoughts that are incorporated into verse 5, then it would be an outgrowth of verse 5. Our commentary assumes that verse 6 does refer to the same two death thoughts, and that “men” signifies the

aspirant. Consequently, verse 6 portrays the aspirant as tempted to carry out both death thoughts but refusing to do so, which means that he or she refuses to repress the guilt feelings and refuses to defend the self-images. Put differently, after learning the lesson depicted in verse 5, which is that torment comes from defending self-images, the aspirant reaches the step depicted in verse 6, which is making the effort to, in Bailey’s words, “stand aside and observe with dispassion.”<sup>70</sup>

Krishnamurti also encourages the dispassionate observation of guilt:

Is it possible to observe the thing in its entirety, wholly, and in the very observation of that totality, see the ending of it? Is it possible to observe your hurt or your anxiety or your guilt, totally? Suppose I feel guilty. Can I look at that guilt, see how it arose and what was the reason for it, see how I am dreading more of it, see the entire structure of guilt, and observe it wholly? Of course I can, but I can observe it wholly only when I am aware of the nature of being hurt. I can be aware of it if there is no direction or motive involved in that awareness.<sup>71</sup>

Consequently, verse 6 has the following meaning: *The aspirant is tempted to repress the risen guilt feelings but refuses to do so, because he or she understands that such repression would continue bondage to subconscious forces. The aspirant also is tempted to defend his or her self-images from attacks by the guilt feelings but refuses to do so, because he or she understands that such defense would bring ineffectual emotional torment. Consequently, the aspirant observes the guilt feelings with dispassion and gains the following insights.*

### **Attributes of the Locusts**

Verses 7 through 12 describe the locusts’ attributes. Each verse is considered separately and is repeated in bold print.

**7. And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on**

***their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men.***

Robert Mounce, in his commentary on the *Revelation*, introduces verse 7 as follows:

Up to this point we have learned of the origin and mission of the demonic locusts. Now John describes them. Long-haired, horse-shaped, flying locusts with scorpion tails and golden crowns above human faces marred by lions' teeth, they have to be reckoned among the more bizarre creatures in the Apocalypse. The total impact is one of unnatural and awesome cruelty.<sup>72</sup>

Given that the locusts signify guilt feelings, their bizarre attributes symbolize the characteristics of guilt. What are those characteristics?

The first clause of verse 7 is: "And the shapes of the locusts *were* like unto horses prepared unto battle." Job 39:19-24 describes a horse prepared for battle: "Hast thou given the horse strength? hast thou clothed his neck with thunder? ... He paweth in the valley, and rejoiceth in *his* strength: he goeth on to meet the armed men ... He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage." *ACIM* says, "The guilty always condemn, and having done so they will still condemn."<sup>73</sup> Accordingly, a guilt feeling is like a horse prepared for battle, because it is always ready to attack other people with condemnation.

Our analysis of the remainder of verse 7 uses the concept of *projection*, which Todd Feinberg defines as follows:

In psychoanalytic terms, projection is an unconscious process wherein unacceptable thoughts, feelings, or motivations are *rejected* and *projected* outside of the self, typically onto other persons. In this fashion, one's own thoughts and feelings do not become conscious self-attributes, but are experienced as aspects of the external world.<sup>74</sup>

Bailey indicates that projection is a problem faced by aspirants: "he [an aspirant] knows too that at present they [fellow aspirants] cannot help but see in him and even in their Master

the very qualities which are dominating them. For, my brother, we see in others what is in us, even when it is not there at all or to the same extent."<sup>75</sup>

The second clause is: "and on their heads *were* as it were crowns like gold." Carl Jung (1875 – 1961), founder of analytic psychology, gives this description: "When he projects negative qualities and therefore hates and loathes the object, he has to discover that he is projecting his own inferior side, his shadow, as it were, because he prefers to have an optimistic and one-sided image of himself."<sup>76</sup> A crown of gold is a symbol of royalty (2 Samuel 12:30). In the clause, the crown represents the optimistic and one-sided self-image that one obtains by projecting one's guilt onto someone else.

The third clause of verse 7 is: "and their faces *were* as the faces of men." Frederick (Fritz) Perls (1893 – 1970), developer of Gestalt therapy, says, "We see guilt as projected *resentment*."<sup>77</sup> Given that the locusts signify guilt feelings, the "faces of men" are pictures of people whom the aspirant has harmed and whom the aspirant believes still has resentment for it.

Thus verse 7 has the following meaning: *A guilt feeling is like a horse prepared for battle, because it is always ready to attack other people with condemnation. Projecting guilt onto other people in the form of blame or judgment enables one to have an optimistic and one-sided self-image, like wearing a golden crown. Guilt is projected resentment, because within any guilt feeling is a picture of someone whom one has harmed and whom one believes still has resentment for it.*

***8. And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions.***

The first clause of verse 8 mentions "the hair of women," about which 1 Corinthians 11:15 states, "But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her." This statement acknowledges that women's hair can be attractive to look at. Other verses of the Bible make the same acknowledgement, as recounted by Nancy Tischler:

In the Song of Songs, the Shulammitte's flowing locks thrilled Solomon (Song of Solomon 4:1, 6:5). The art of braiding was noted in several places in Scripture (Isaiah 3:24; 2 Samuel 14:26; Judges 13). Women's hair was considered so beautiful that it was a snare even for the angels, causing Paul to insist that women keep their heads covered [1 Corinthians 11:5-6]. In early Christian (or Roman) fashions, the women wore their hair waved, curled, frizzed with irons, arranged in tiers, and twined about the head like a high diadem with locks reserved to fall over the forehead and on the temples ... This elaboration of hair styles may have been part of Paul's concern about the distractions women's uncovered hair brought to the worship service.<sup>78</sup>

As indicated by the above quotation, the female protagonist in the Song of Solomon (6:13) is denoted as "the Shulammitte," perhaps because she came from an unidentified place called Shulem.<sup>79</sup>

The first clause of verse 8 is: "And they had hair as the hair of women." Given that "they" and "hair of women" signify guilt and attractiveness, respectively, the clause has this meaning: Guilt, when projected upon other people, is attractive to look at, like the hair of women. *ACIM* describes this attraction of guilt:

The attraction of guilt produces fear of love, for love would never look on guilt at all. It is the nature of love to look upon only the truth, for there it sees itself, with which it would unite in holy union and completion ... Fear is attracted to what love sees not, and each believes that what the other looks upon does not exist. Fear looks on guilt with just the same devotion that love looks on itself. And each has messengers which it sends forth, and which return to it with messages written in the language in which their going forth was asked. Love's messengers are gently sent, and return with messages of love and gentleness. The messengers of fear are harshly ordered to seek out guilt, and cherish every scrap of evil and of sin that they can find, losing

none of them on pain of death, and laying them respectfully before their lord and master.<sup>80</sup>

Consequently, fearful people find guilt to be so attractive to look at that they seek out and cherish every scrap of guilt that they can find in someone else. The biblical story of King David illustrates this attraction of guilt. After committing adultery with Bathsheba, David is attracted to finding guilt in someone else, as described in 2 Samuel 12:1-7:

And the LORD sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich *man* had exceeding many flocks and herds: But the poor *man* had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him. And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, *As* the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this *thing* shall surely die: And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity. And Nathan said to David, Thou *art* the man.

The second clause of verse 8 mentions "the teeth of lions," which is a symbol used in earlier scriptures. Joel 1:6 states, "For a nation is come up upon my land, strong, and without number, whose teeth *are* the teeth of a lion." John Kitto, a noted biblical scholar, provides this explanation: "A nation having the teeth of lions, and the cheek-teeth of a great lion, denotes one which devours with irresistible force."<sup>81</sup> Sirach 21:2 states:

Flee from sin as from the face of a serpent: for if thou comest too near it, it will bite thee: the teeth thereof are as the teeth of a lion, slaying the souls of men.

In other words, sin bites the sinner with irresistible force. The second clause of verse 8, “and their teeth were as *the teeth* of lions,” has a corresponding significance. The possessive adjective “their” assigns the possession of the “teeth” to guilt feelings, so the clause has this meaning: Guilt feelings punish the guilty person with irresistible force, like the teeth of lions.

As support for the foregoing significance, *ACIM* states, “Guilt asks for punishment, and its request is granted. Not in truth, but in the world of shadows and illusions built on sin.”<sup>82</sup> Several research studies show that self-punishment arises from the feeling of guilt.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, Freud finds that illness in his patients comes from their self-punishment that arises from their sense of guilt:

In the end we come to see that we are dealing with what may be called a “moral” factor, a sense of guilt, which is finding its satisfaction in the illness and refuses to give up the punishment of suffering. We shall be right in regarding this disheartening explanation as final. But as far as the patient is concerned this sense of guilt is dumb; it does not tell him he is guilty; he does not feel guilty, he feels ill. This sense of guilt expresses itself only as a resistance to recovery which it is extremely difficult to overcome. It is also particularly difficult to convince the patient that this motive lies behind his continuing to be ill; he holds fast to the more obvious explanation that treatment by analysis is not the right remedy for his case.<sup>84</sup>

Thus verse 8 has this meaning: *Guilt, when projected upon other people, is attractive to look at, like the hair of women. Guilt feelings punish the guilty person with irresistible force, like the teeth of lions.*

**9. And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle.**

The first clause in verse 9 is: “And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron.” A *breastplate* is a symbol of protection, as in 1 Thessalonians 5:8, “But let us, who are of the

day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love.” *Iron* is a symbol of strength, as in Job 40:18, “His bones *are* like bars of iron.” Given that “they” denote the locusts, which in turn signify guilt feelings, the first clause indicates that a guilt feeling cannot be harmed by any defense that might be used against it. What are these defenses?

Otto Fenichel (1897 – 1946), a prolific writer on psychoanalysis, states, “There is a group of defenses against affect that deserve special attention because of their clinical importance: the defenses against guilt feelings.”<sup>85</sup> He also lists some of these defenses:

Guilt feelings may be *repressed*. Frequently rationalizations as to the necessity of committing a forbidden deed secure a repression of guilt feelings.

Frequent in occurrence are attempts at *projecting* guilt feelings. “Someone else has done it, not I” is the leitmotiv of many a neurotic character.

There are different types of *quasi-projections* of guilt feelings. Any guilt can be borne more easily if someone else has done the same thing. For the sake of the feeling of relief that can thus be attained, persons who either have done something about which they feel guilty or wish to do such a thing are searching for another person in the same situation; they feel greatly relieved if they succeed in finding anyone who does or has done the same deed. They may even provoke other persons to do things about which they feel guilty.

Certainly there are many *reaction formations* to guilt feelings. People may behave extremely and provocatively nonchalant and carefree, may even be proud of “having no conscience scruples,” only to learn in analysis that their attitude needs a great amount of counteracthexis to hold severe guilt feelings in check.

An *isolation* of guilt feeling is a frequent occurrence in compulsion neurotics; they do things without any guilt feeling, and experience an exaggerated feeling of guilt

on some other occasion without being aware of the connection.<sup>86</sup>

How successful are these defenses against guilt feelings? Fenichel gives this answer:

Defenses may be more or less successful; they may work under certain circumstances and be insufficient under others. All the minutiae of everyday life are perceived either as temptations for repressed impulses or as warnings of possible punishments, and may thus disturb the equilibrium anew. Certain experiences may evoke the return of what has been warded off in the defense, which may in turn necessitate defenses against the defenses. There are reaction formations against reaction formations. Conditions favorable and opposed to the objectionable impulses arise, so that many contradictory layers develop; however, the layers are not placed evenly one above the other but are full of rifts.<sup>87</sup>

Consequently, these defenses conceal, or ward off, the guilt feelings but do not actually eliminate them, so these defenses provide only an illusion of escape. *ACIM* asks, “Yet what advantage has an illusion of escape ever brought a prisoner? His real escape from guilt can lie only in the recognition that the guilt has gone.”<sup>88</sup>

The last part of the verse portrays the locusts in this way: “and the sound of their wings *was* as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle.” This portrayal is facilitated by three facts that Robert Chisholm lists: (1) “The heads of locusts and horses are similar in appearance.” (2) “Both locusts and human armies advance swiftly.” (3) “The locusts’ buzzing wings resemble the sound of chariot wheels.”<sup>89</sup>

Given that the locusts signify guilt feelings, their portrayal as an attacking swarm suggests that the various guilt feelings strengthen one another and attack together. Psalm 38:4 has a similar notion: “For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: As an heavy burden they are too heavy for me.” Fenichel makes a similar observation:

Actually, defensive conflicts are more complicated than this [preceding] description indicates. An isolated conflict between one particular drive and one particular opposing anxiety rarely occurs. More frequently there are complex and powerful interactions between many drives and many anxieties.<sup>90</sup>

Thus verse 9 has this meaning: *A guilt feeling cannot be eliminated by any defense that might be used against it—such as repression, projection, quasi-projection, reaction formation, or isolation. The various guilt feelings strengthen one another and attack together.*

**10. And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months.**

The first clause of verse 10 is: “And they had tails like unto scorpions.” Richard Myers gives this account of a scorpion’s tail:

When a scorpion is about to strike it curves its tail and stinger forward over its body, delivering the sting toward the front rather than toward the back or side ... A scorpion can go from a relaxed position to striking position very quickly.<sup>91</sup>

According to the *Random House Roget’s Thesaurus*, “*Anger* is the general term for sudden violent displeasure accompanied by an impulse to retaliate.”<sup>92</sup> When its tail goes very quickly from a relaxed position to a striking position, a scorpion seems to display a sudden violent displeasure accompanied by an impulse to retaliate.

Leon F. Seltzer, a clinical psychologist, describes how guilt feelings can give rise to anger:

What I’d like to clarify in this post is that a good deal of our anger is motivated by a desire not to experience guilt—and *beyond* this, the distressing emotions of hurt and fear. It’s by now generally agreed upon that anger, as prevalent as it is in our species, is almost never a primary emotion. For underlying it ... are such core hurts as

feeling *disregarded, unimportant, accused, guilty, untrustworthy, devalued, rejected, powerless, and unlovable*. And these feelings are capable of engendering considerable emotional pain. It's therefore understandable that so many of us might go to great lengths to find ways of *distancing* ourselves from them.<sup>93</sup>

In the first clause, the pronoun "they" refers to guilt feelings, so "they had tails like unto scorpions" has this meaning: Guilt feelings can give rise to a sudden violent displeasure, or anger, towards someone or something else, just as a scorpion's tail can go very quickly from a relaxed position to a striking position.

The second clause is, "and there were stings in their tails." *ACIM* mentions the "sting of guilt,"<sup>94</sup> which is self-condemnation, so "stings in their tails" are taken as multiple condemnations brought about by guilt. What is the meaning of this explanation? In another context, Nabil Hagag mentions such condemnations: "anger at guilt feelings disrupting peace of mind."<sup>95</sup> Even though anger is an emotion, it is also a defense, so the clause is given this meaning: One can have anger at one's own guilt feeling as a way of defending oneself from it.

The third clause is: "and their power was to hurt men five months." As explained in the commentary for verse 5, "five months" signifies the length of time that one is tormented by one's own defense. In the context of verse 10, "five months" is the length of time that one has anger at a guilt feeling. In practice, this length of time might be five seconds, five minutes, or five days, depending upon how long one takes to collect oneself and to observe the feeling without anger. The clause indicates that the hurtful power of a guilt feeling continues as long as one has anger at it. *ACIM* provides this explanation: "For

attack makes guilt real, and if it is real there is no way to overcome it."<sup>96</sup>

The third clause also indicates that a guilt feeling loses its power as one observes it without anger. Krishnamurti provides this explanation:

All the implications of guilt, all the implications of its subtlety, where it hides, is like a flower blooming. And if you let it bloom, not act, not say, "I must do or must not do," then it begins to wither away and die. Please understand this ... If you discover it, you see that it is so, then psychologically it is an enormous factor that frees you from all the past and present struggles and effort.<sup>97</sup>

In summary, verse 10 has this meaning: *Guilt feelings can give rise to a sudden violent displeasure, or anger, towards someone or something else, just as a scorpion's tail can go very quickly from a relaxed position to a striking position. One can have anger at one's own guilt feeling as a way of defending oneself from it. While one has anger at a guilt feeling, one has no way to overcome its hurtful power; but as one observes it without anger, one finds freedom from its power.*

**11. And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon.**

The first phrase in verse 11 is: "And they had a king over them." According to the second principle of interpretation, everything in this phrase symbolizes an aspect of the aspirant's inner life. A *king* is a ruler and so is responsible for what is ruled. The pronoun "they" signifies guilt feelings, so their "king" symbolizes the inner aspect responsible for guilt feelings. What is that aspect? Bailey writes,

It would be wise to remember that the entire problem we are considering can be traced back to the outstanding human weakness, the great sin or heresy of separateness. There is surely no greater sin than this; it is responsible for the entire range of human evil. It sets an individual against his brother; it makes him consider his selfish, personal interests as of paramount importance; it leads inevitably to crime and cruelty; it constitutes the greatest hindrance to happiness in the world, for it sets man against man, group against group, class against class and nation against nation.<sup>98</sup>

Guilt feelings are included within the range of human evil, so “the great sin or heresy of separateness” can be inferred as their “king” in the sense of being responsible for them. *ACIM* corroborates this inference: “For separation is the source of guilt.”<sup>99</sup> Moreover, Bailey mentions “this great illusion of separateness,”<sup>100</sup> so this sin or heresy is actually an illusion.

The second phrase is: “*which is the angel of the bottomless pit.*” *Angel* is the translation of the Greek word that can also be rendered as “messenger,” and the “bottomless pit” refers to the subconscious realm, so the illusion that governs guilt feelings also governs the message of the subconscious realm.

The third phrase is: “whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon.” John McKenzie 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>101</sup> The Bible often uses a personal name as an indication of the bearer’s nature. For example, 1 Samuel 25:25 says: “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). Consistent with such usage, *A Commentary on the Book of Revelation* interprets *name* as “nature.”<sup>102</sup>

The Hebrew word *Abaddon* is used in the Old Testament to mean destruction (Job 31:12), place of destruction (Job 26:6), or personification of destruction (Job 28:22). The Greek word *Apollyon* means destroyer. Given that a personal name is an indication of the bearer’s nature, either the Hebrew or Greek name can be inferred as having this significance: the illusion responsible for guilt has a destructive nature. *ACIM* corroborates this inference: “The mind can make the belief in separation very real and very fearful, and this belief *is* the ‘devil.’ It is powerful, active, destructive and clearly in opposition to God.”<sup>103</sup>

Consequently, verse 11 has the following meaning: *All guilt feelings are governed by the illusion of separateness, which also governs the message of the subconscious realm. When accepted as being true, this illusion is powerful, active, and destructive.*

**12. One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter.**

The first clause in verse 12 is, “One woe is past,” which indicates that the aspirant’s problem of dealing with the subconscious realm is no longer current. In other words, the aspirant has successfully cleansed the subconscious realm and found freedom from guilt. How was that accomplished?

Krishnamurti describes a general principle about understanding: “When we are free to look, to explore what the problem is, then out of that observation, that exploration, there comes understanding. And that understanding itself is action, not a conclusion leading to action.”<sup>104</sup> Bailey also says, “If there is right understanding, there will necessarily be right action.”<sup>105</sup> Krishnamurti, however, distinguishes between an intellectual comprehension of words and the understanding of their content:

The understanding of words which is called intellectual comprehension is utterly empty. You say, “I understand intellectually, but I cannot put it into practice,” which means, really, that you do not understand. When you understand, you understand the content

... Hearing the words is not the understanding of their content. The word is not the thing. The word is not understanding.<sup>106</sup>

The point is that one cannot find freedom—from the subconscious realm and guilt—simply by reading the words of this article. Instead, one must gain right understanding by accomplishing the preceding steps.

The second clause is: “*and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter.*” Bailey writes, “Each expansion of consciousness, each step upon the ladder, but opens before the Initiate another sphere to be embraced, and another step ahead to be taken.”<sup>107</sup> In other words, the spiritual journey seems boundless, because each solution of the most apparent problem leads to the awareness of subtler problems that still remain. In the clause, “behold” is used in the imperative mood for the purpose of calling attention, and “two woes more hereafter” refer to subtler problems that must be solved in the future.

Consequently, verse 12 has this meaning: *Through the understanding gained by accomplishing the preceding steps, the aspirant cleanses the subconscious realm and finds freedom from guilt. Afterwards, he or she becomes aware of subtler problems that still remain and must be solved in the future.*

## Conclusions

*The Revelation of St. John* is actually a veiled statement of an esoteric, or hidden, doctrine of early Christians. When interpreted allegorically, the first twelve verses of Chapter 9 depict the cleansing of the subconscious realm:

1. After reaching a relatively advanced stage on the spiritual journey, the aspirant observes the personality from the vantage point of the causal body. The causal body gives to this observation the following recognition: there is nothing in the subconscious realm that is desirable to hide.
2. After the preceding observation and recognition have opened the subconscious realm, emotional confusion arises out of that realm, like

the smoke of a great furnace, and the soul and its intuitions are obscured by the emerging confusion.

3. Long-repressed guilt feelings come out of the emotional confusion into the personality. These feelings destroy inner peace like locusts destroy crops. They have the power to poison or corrupt thoughts and feelings, which is like the venomous power of scorpions.
4. The causal body commands that the emergent guilt feelings should not trigger a stress response—from the nadis and chakras acting through the nervous system—that results in repression. Consequently, the guilt feelings rise to the surface of consciousness and hurt only the self-images based on illusion.
5. The causal body gives the command that the self-images should not repress the risen guilt feelings, even though the self-images will be tormented as long as a defense is used against these feelings. The aspirant typically uses reasoning as a defense, the torment from which increases through the escalation of features associated with the reasoning, so it is like the torment from a scorpion’s sting, which increases through the swelling of tissues associated with the sting site.
6. The aspirant is tempted to repress the risen guilt feelings but refuses to do so, because he or she understands that such repression would continue bondage to subconscious forces. The aspirant also is tempted to defend his or her self-images from attacks by the guilt feelings but refuses to do so, because he or she understands that such defense would bring ineffectual emotional torment. Consequently, the aspirant observes the guilt feelings with dispassion and gains the following insights.
7. A guilt feeling is like a horse prepared for battle, because it is always ready to attack other people with condemnation. Projecting guilt onto other people in the form of blame or judgment enables one

- to have an optimistic and one-sided self-image, like wearing a golden crown. Guilt is projected resentment, because within any guilt feeling is a picture of someone whom one has harmed and whom one believes still has resentment for it.
8. Guilt, when projected upon other people, is attractive to look at, like the hair of women. Guilt feelings punish the guilty person with irresistible force, like the teeth of lions.
  9. A guilt feeling cannot be eliminated by any defense that might be used against it—such as repression, projection, quasi-projection, reaction formation, or isolation. The various guilt feelings strengthen one another and attack together.
  10. Guilt feelings can give rise to a sudden violent displeasure, or anger, towards someone or something else, just as a scorpion's tail can go very quickly from a relaxed position to a striking position. One can have anger at one's own guilt feeling as a way of defending oneself from it. While one has anger at a guilt feeling, one has no way to overcome its hurtful power; but as one observes it without anger, one finds freedom from its power.
  11. All guilt feelings are governed by the illusion of separateness, which also governs the message of the subconscious realm. When accepted as being true, this illusion is powerful, active, and destructive.
  12. Through the understanding gained by accomplishing the preceding steps, the aspirant cleanses the subconscious realm and finds freedom from guilt. Afterwards, he or she becomes aware of subtler problems that still remain and must be solved in the future.

As can be seen from this list, verses 1 through 12 depict steps that provide instruction in a progressive way. Bailey makes a similar point about her own series of rules: "Each of these rules holds in it the seed of that understanding which must be evoked before the next rule can

be mastered. All that is given is ever based on that which has gone before."<sup>108</sup>

Verse 11 portrays the recognition of illusion. Victims of illusion have difficulty in recognizing that they are such victims, however, as Krishnamurti explains:

Ignorance of the ways of the self leads to illusion; and once caught in the net of illusion, it is extremely hard to break through it. It is difficult to recognize an illusion, for, having created it, the mind cannot be aware of it.<sup>109</sup>

Bailey writes, "It is the soul itself which dispels illusion, through the use of the faculty of the intuition,"<sup>110</sup> so the aspirant would need the intuitions of the soul to have the recognition portrayed in verse 11.

Verse 2 portrays the step during which emotional confusion obscures the intuitions of the soul. How can these intuitions be regained? Bailey speaks of the effort to "rightly practice true discrimination and that dispassion which bring the controlled astral and mental bodies under the guidance of the soul."<sup>111</sup> Here, "astral" is a synonym for emotional.<sup>112</sup> Verse 6 portrays the step during which the aspirant observes the risen guilt feelings with dispassion and thereby regains the intuitions of the soul. Thus verses 7 through 11 portray the resulting series of steps during which the intuitions of the soul reveal insights about guilt.

The steps portrayed by verses 1 through 5 are actually the lower correspondences of the steps portrayed by verses 6 through 10, thereby illustrating Bailey's comment: "All growth is cyclic and one progresses from step to step in spiral fashion and this ever involves a retracing (apparently) of one's steps."<sup>113</sup> The steps portrayed by verses 11 and 12 assimilate and consolidate the earlier steps, so they are what Bailey calls "periods of quiet unemotional growth and assimilation":

For you, there come now some months of inner consolidation. You have heightened your vibration since I last instructed you and have learnt and realised much of what the inner path of reality signifies. Such

cycles of realisation must inevitably be succeeded by periods of quiet unemotional growth and assimilation. During these months, the high moments may perhaps cease and the work will go on with no realised tensions and, consequently, with no moments of startling import.<sup>114</sup>

As the foregoing analysis has shown, *The Revelation of St. John*, through its bizarre and perplexing images, provides detailed and practical instructions for the spiritual journey—a roadmap to the awakening of higher consciousness.

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- <sup>97</sup> Jiddu Krishnamurti, *Last Talks at Saanen 1985* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), 123.
- <sup>98</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *Problems of Humanity* (1947; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1972), 87.
- <sup>99</sup> *A Course in Miracles*, Text, 312.
- <sup>100</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *Telepathy and the Etheric Vehicle* (1950; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1975), 138.
- <sup>101</sup> John L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (1965; reprint; New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 603.
- <sup>102</sup> *A Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 163.
- <sup>103</sup> *A Course in Miracles*, Text, 50.
- <sup>104</sup> Jiddu Krishnamurti, *You are the World* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1972), 42.
- <sup>105</sup> Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology*, vol. II, 118.
- <sup>106</sup> Jiddu Krishnamurti, *The Collected Works of J. Krishnamurti: 1949-1952* (Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt, 1991), 17.
- <sup>107</sup> Bailey, *Letters on Occult Meditation*, 264.
- <sup>108</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations* (1960; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1976), 48.
- <sup>109</sup> Jiddu Krishnamurti, *Commentaries on Living, First Series* (1956; reprint; Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1970), 82.
- <sup>110</sup> Bailey, *Glamour*, 83.
- <sup>111</sup> Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic*, 230.
- <sup>112</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar* (1922; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1974), 31.
- <sup>113</sup> Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, vol. I, 108.
- <sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 323.



# An Introduction to Sufism

Donna M. Brown

## Abstract

This article seeks to introduce the reader to one of the world's great spiritual currents—to Sufism or *Tasawwuf*, as it is known in the Muslim world. The article draws primarily from classical or Islamic Sufi orders, and utilizes the terminology familiar to those orders in an effort to provide a generally accepted overview of Sufi metaphysics, practices and methods. It touches intermittently upon Universalist and non-Muslim Sufi orders, which teach various classical Sufi philosophies and practices, but which represent an eclectic synthesis all their own. The article discusses Sufism's complex and controversial origins, along with such pivotal concepts such as Oneness with God, the Unity of Existence and The Perfect Man. Also examined is the Sufi Path to Union, which involves, among other things, the purification of the carnal soul or lower nature, Sufi Gnosis, the Alchemy of the Heart and the Invocation of God's Beautiful Names. An examination of the major way stations or milestones on the path back to the Divine Presence is included.

## Sufism and its Origins

Think not that if thou passest away, the world will also be gone: A thousand candles have burned out, yet the circle of Sufis remains.

(Popular Sufi Saying)

Sufism is a vast, multifaceted path of spiritual advancement that can be difficult to define or simplify. There are many traditional Sufi orders, branches or paths (*tarīqah*), as well as a number of non-traditional Sufi groups, each with a particular emphasis. Traditional Sufis, who make up the vast majority, mix conventional Islamic observances and disciplines, such as the mandatory call to daily prayer (*salat*), with a broad range of additional spiritual methods and practices. Sufis can be associated with Sunni Islam,<sup>1</sup> Shi'a Islam,<sup>2</sup> or

other currents of Islam. Non-traditional groups,<sup>3</sup> found primarily in the West, require no adherence to Islamic law (*Shariah*) or the Muslim faith, and combine multiple traditions. Even the term *Sufi* (*Tasawwuf*)<sup>4</sup> has a wide variety of meanings and interpretations based on different sources and traditions. Complicating the issue further is the fact that the inner, oral and initiatic dimensions of Sufism are, especially in the traditional orders, veiled from the uninitiated. Therefore, a full explanation of Sufism in an article such as this will be necessarily incomplete.

Broadly considered, Sufism can be held to be the esoteric or inward dimension of Islam, which began to develop in the 8<sup>th</sup> century and which “was generated,” as the German professor of Divinity, F.A.D. Tholuck understood, “out of Muhammad's own mysticism.”<sup>5</sup> If, however, Sufism is considered from an earlier historical and universalist perspective, Sufism's antecedents can be traced back to various religions in the pre-Islamic Middle East, i.e., to the “desert fathers” or mystics of Syria and Egypt, to the Essenes, the ancient Pythagorean orders, and the mystery schools of the Egyptians, Zoroastrians and the Pahlawan<sup>6</sup> religion in Iran. Therefore, before discussing what Sufism is, or providing an outline of the fundamentals of Sufi doctrine and methods from both traditional and non-traditional perspectives, this article will touch upon the controversy surrounding the origins of Sufism.

## About the Author

**Donna M. Brown** is a long-time student and teacher of esoteric philosophy. Her background includes a career in the arts and election to public office in the District of Columbia. She has served as a Board Member for the *Center for Visionary Leadership* and the *School for Esoteric Studies* where she continues as a commentator. Donna is also involved with a Universalist Sufi Order.

Religious scholars and even Sufis themselves disagree about the origins of Sufism. In the *Mystical Dimension of Islam*,<sup>7</sup> Annie Marie Schimmel (1922–2003), turns to a well-known parable from Rumi<sup>8</sup> about a group of blind men who each touch a different part of an elephant to illustrate the difficulty in discussing Sufism and its origins. In the estimation of E. H. Palmer (1840–1882), the Mid-East/Arab specialist and explorer who helped unveil the Sufi journey to God, Sufism was a kind of “theosophical mysticism,” and a “development of the primeval religion of the Aryan race.”<sup>9</sup> The Dutch scholar Reinhart Dozy (1820–1883), in his *Essai sur l’histoire de l’Islamisme*, argued for the Indo-European origins of Sufism, which he reasoned came from Indian and Persian sources.<sup>10</sup>

Helena Blavatsky (1831–1891) seems to have supported these views and maintained that Sufism’s linguistic roots relate to Sophia or Wisdom. In *The Secret Doctrine* she links Sufism to the now lost Chaldean Religion, which had been translated into Arabic and preserved by some Sufi initiates.<sup>11</sup> She goes on to describe Sufism as:

A mystical sect in Persia something like the Vedantins; though very strong in numbers, none but very intelligent men join it. They claim, and very justly, the possession of the esoteric philosophy and doctrine of true Mohammedanism. The Suffi (or Sofi) doctrine is a good deal in touch with Theosophy, inasmuch as it preaches one universal creed, and outward respect and tolerance for every popular exoteric faith. It is also in touch with Masonry. The Suffis have four degrees and four stages of initiation: 1st, probationary, with a strict outward observance of Mussulman rites, the hidden meaning of each ceremony and dogma being explained to the candidate; 2nd, metaphysical training; 3rd, the “Wisdom” degree, when the candidate is initiated into the innermost nature of things; and 4th final Truth, when the Adept attains divine powers, and complete union with the One Universal Deity in ecstasy or Samâdhi.<sup>12</sup>

Hazrat Inayat Khan (1882-1927), founder of the Sufi Order International (now the *Sufi Or-*

*der Ināyati*), a non-Muslim Sufi movement in the West, emphasized the multi-religious roots of Sufism and sought to bring a message of spiritual liberation to the West based on religious unity and the wisdom of all faiths.<sup>13</sup> He maintained that: “Every age of the world has seen awakened souls, and as it is impossible to limit wisdom to any one period or place, so it is impossible to date the origin of Sufism.”<sup>14</sup> In Hazrat Khan’s distinctively western version of Sufism, the barriers of race, creed or religion are eliminated, for Khan saw Sufism not as a religion, but more exactly as an experience and “a way of life that enhances and fulfills every religion.” “The Sufi, he said, “sees the truth in every religion.”<sup>15</sup>

Another influential popularizer of Sufism in the West was Idries Shah (1924 –1996). Shah, who claimed to be an emissary for the Central Asian Sufi tradition where Gurdjieff (1886 –1949) allegedly obtained his teachings, said that: “esoteric wisdom is independent of ‘mere religion’ and is often disguised in an ‘exoteric religious’ form.”<sup>16</sup> For Shah there was only one truth, and he concluded that Sufism must be independent of Islam. He presented Sufism as a universal form of wisdom, emphasized its adaptive and dynamic nature and framed his teachings in Western psychological terms.

Others, such as Mehmet Sabeheddin, a contemporary researcher, writer and spiritual teacher who focuses on the fluid and multi-faceted dimensions of Islam and Sufism says:

No one knows who the first Sufi was. Sufism is not a religion, and ultimately exists above and beyond all labels. It is said Sufism is older than Islam and that it really had no beginning, being just the latest flowering—taking on the form of Islam—of the ancient secret tradition stretching back to Adam.

A Sufi tradition relates how “the seeds of Sufism were sown in the time of Adam, fermented in the time of Noah, budded in the time of Abram, and began to develop in the time of Jesus, and produced pure wine in the time of Muhammad.” The Prophet Muhammad and Jesus are revered as the greatest Sufis. Sufi Masters like Ibn ‘Arabî

and Suhrawardi studied Plato and Pythagoras declaring the Pagan sages to be Sufis.<sup>17</sup>

Similar beliefs are even held by a few traditional Sufi orders who perceived Sufism as “a phenomena that has accompanied Humanity since the advent of self-consciousness.”<sup>18</sup> Such an interpretation, however, fully embraces Islam’s unmistakable contributions to Sufi thought and practice.

Numerous Western Oriental specialists have also claimed that Sufism is an innovation that has its roots in Hinduism, Buddhism, Neo-Platonism, or Christianity, but is not authentically Islamic. It is of interest to note here that many Muslims, especially the ultra conservative “Salafi” movement within Sunni Islam, claim that Sufism is “a Trojan horse for unwarranted innovations that owe their origins to non-Muslim civilizations”<sup>19</sup> such as those mentioned above. While the aforementioned pre-Islamic influences have been well documented<sup>20</sup> and will not be discussed in detail here, it must be remembered that Sufism, while not explicitly mentioned in the Qur’ān, is co-extensive with Islam. Titus Burckhardt (1908–1984), an expert on Islam, who dedicated his life to the study and exposition of the *philosophia perennis*, holds that Sufi masters only borrowed from pre-Islamic inheritances “provided they were adequate for expressing those truths which had to be made accessible to the intellectually gifted men of their age and ideas which were already implicit in strict Sufi symbolism in a succinct form.”<sup>21</sup> He goes on to say that most of what shapes the Sufi spiritual method is drawn from the Qur’ān and the Prophet’s teachings. Indeed, the majority of the worlds Sufis are Muslims who believe that Sufism is largely inoperative without its relationship to Islam. As such, they would be hard pressed to see Sufism as anything other than the inner dimension of Islam that had its beginnings in the period following the life of the Prophet Muhammad.

In a commentary on the Mevlevi Sufi Way,<sup>22</sup> the Rumi scholar, Ibrahim Gamard states that:

To use the word “sufism” to mean a universal spirituality that pre-dates Islam is to rob the term of its meaning and to make it

equivalent to the word “mysticism.” Mysticism can be defined as experiential or intuitive understanding of spiritual realities beyond intellectual understanding. Therefore, mysticism can take religious forms (spiritual experiences of feeling close to God) or non-religious forms (such as spiritual experiences involving nature or the cosmos). The mysticism of Islam is a distinct form of religious mysticism that is called “*tasawwuf*” [The inward or esoteric dimension of Islam that is both knowledge and action.] in Arabic and a Muslim mystic is called a “*sufi*” (author’s brackets).<sup>23</sup>

In an article discussing arguments for and against the non-Islamic origins of Sufism,<sup>24</sup> Mollie Magill traces the word “Sufi” (commonly meant to apply to those who wear “wool”), to the Arabic *Soofa*, meaning “purity of heart and the shunning of material wealth in reaction to the Islamic conquests.”<sup>25</sup> Magill also notes that the word “Sufi” can be equated with *Ahl al-suffā*, translated as “people of the bench,” and goes on to note that the “term was given to the poor companions of the prophet; devoted individuals.”<sup>26</sup> René Guénon (Sheikh Abdel Wahed Yahya), one of the great metaphysical luminaries who laid the groundwork for the Perennialist School of thought in the twentieth century, concluded that the term was a purely symbolic name, a sort of “cipher” whose true meaning is to be found in the gematrical value of the letters that form the word “sufi,” which has the same numerical value as the Arabic word *al-Hikmatu’l-ilahiya* or Divine Wisdom.<sup>27</sup>

Kabir Helminski, a Sheikh of the Mevlevi Order of Sufis that traces its inspiration to Jelaluddin Rumi, supports the assessment that Sufism is at heart Islamic mysticism, and that its serious study necessitates an appreciation of the message of the Qur’ān and its messenger. Louis Massignon (1883–1952), an influential Catholic scholar of Islam, also states that: “It is from the Qur’an, constantly recited, meditated, and experienced, that Sufism proceeded, in its origin and its development.”<sup>28</sup>

Acclaimed scholars and Sufi’s such as Burckhardt, Henry Corbin (1903–1978), Martin Lings (1909–2005), and Seeyed Hossein Nasr

(1933~), hold fast to the originality and authenticity of Sufism as the central, most powerful current of the Islamic Revelation. As such, Sufism is perceived as an “an interiorization and intensification of Islam,”<sup>29</sup> and as “Islam’s life-giving core.”<sup>30</sup> This argument is bolstered by pointing to Sufism’s inherently Islamic philosophical foundations, to its essential Qur’ānic support, and to the many Sufi scholars, systematizers, poets and mystics such as Rabbi’ā al-Adawiya (713–801), Al-Junayd al Baghdadi (830–910 AD), Abu Sulayman al-Darani (d. 830), Al-Ghazali (1058- 1111), and Ibn al-’Arabî (1165–1240), to name only a few, whose powerful influence shaped Sufism. The aforementioned 20<sup>th</sup> century experts, Burckhardt, Nasr, et al., along with a growing number of modern scholars, insist that to deny Sufism’s relationship with Islam is to deprive it of its originality as well as its impetus.<sup>31</sup> As Burckhardt maintains:

The decisive argument in favor of the Muhammadan origin of Sufism lies ... in Sufism itself. If Sufic wisdom came from a source outside of Islam, those who aspire to that wisdom—which is assuredly neither bookish or purely mental in its nature—could not rely on the symbolism of the Qur’ān for realizing that wisdom ever afresh, whereas in fact everything that forms an integral part of the spiritual method of Sufism is constantly and of necessity drawn out of the Qur’ān and from the teachings of the Prophet.<sup>32</sup>

Furthermore, traditional Islamic and Sufi scholars point to the fact that Sufism has been passed down from certain Spiritual Masters to their disciples in an unbroken chain (*silsilah*) leading back to the Prophet himself. This chain of transmission is thought to have taken place when Muhammad’s closest Companions pledged to wage the “Greater Jihad” against their own inner enemies or lower self. Since that time, a continuous chain of masters and disciples has handed down the esoteric ritual and teachings lying at the heart of the Quranic Revelation from one generation to another. However, in the non-Muslim orders the chain of transmission and authority is believed to lead back to the founder of their particular or-

der and/or to a combination of other and perhaps older sources. Nevertheless, as Hazrat Inayat Khan explains, the *silsilah* is of pivotal significance in the work of virtually every genuine Sufi order where it serves as the primary conduit of divine influx and the *Baraka* (the stream of blessings from Allah), which links the *murshids* (spiritual guides) of a particular order with “the combined spiritual power of their spiritual antecedents and with the unseen transformative forces that transpire behind the outward manifestation of the Chain.”<sup>33</sup>

In concluding this part of the discussion, it should be noted that this article does not wish to contribute to the controversy surrounding Sufism’s origins, nor does it attempt to settle the question as to its Islamic legitimacy. The author believes that it is important to acknowledge the universality or perennial nature of revelation and the idea that “Truth is One” in essence, albeit clothed in a diversity of forms, while recognizing the fact that Sufism has been and continues to be deeply and forcefully inspired by Islam.

## What Is Sufism?

See but One, say but One, know but One,  
In this are summed up the roots and branches  
of faith.

(Mahmud Shabistari)<sup>34</sup>

Sufism or *Tasawwuf*, like all esoteric teachings, is concerned with the interior or inward journey toward God. In general terms, Sufism, which is described as “wisdom uncreate,” can be defined as the actualization of divine ethics or the attributes of God and as the path to the “center of the cosmic wheel.” More evocatively, and to paraphrase Martin Lings (1909 -2005), Sufism is a Revelation that flows from the great Ocean of Infinity to the shores of our finite world.<sup>35</sup> Sufis are, by definition, concerned with “the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven,” the path back to the Source<sup>36</sup> and the inner spiritual states as opposed to formal disciplines, such as exoteric knowledge, theology or the law. Most Sufi’s,<sup>37</sup> however, do not dismiss Islamic disciplines, rather they employ them as a foundation from

which they can ultimately free themselves from the world of duality and the shackles of the concrete mind.<sup>38</sup>

Sufism can also be defined as a “science of the soul,” or as an initiatic path of self-purification and self-realization, which teaches that Allah or the Supreme Identity can be known and experienced directly. The ultimate goal for Sufis is *tahwīd* (the experience of oneness), the recovery of the lost state of original unity with God. S. H. Nasr, one of the great contemporary intellectual figures in Islamic history, explains in an essay on “Sufism and the Integration of Man,” that:

...The whole program of Sufism...is to free man from the prison of multiplicity, to cure him from hypocrisy and make him whole; for it is only in being whole that man can become holy.<sup>39</sup>

Such a program, he maintains, involves the integration of the body, mind and spirit, for “just as God is one, so man must become whole in order to become one.”<sup>40</sup> Hence, Sufism addresses the structure of reality and man’s place in it. Sufi doctrine consists of metaphysics, cosmology, psychology and eschatology. It combines both doctrine and method into an integral spiritual tradition, that includes invocative and various meditative or contemplative practices.<sup>41</sup> But, the goal of integration and union or oneness does not imply a disconnection or withdrawal from the outer world; indeed one of the principle aims for all Sufis is to make of the daily life a profound spiritual practice. *Tahwīd* or union involves regaining the state of human perfection that was possessed before the Fall. Such a person has actualized all his divine potential and become the “Perfect Man” (*Al Insān al-Kāmil*) and now serves as the perfect mirror in which God’s qualities and attributes are reflected.

Sufis are also seekers after the Truth (*al-Haqq*) who strive to selflessly experience and actualize Truth by the means of love—or an inner alchemy of the heart—based on inspiration, a successive process of unveiling and a devotion to the Real.

The core substance of Sufism might be described as: 1) the quest to understand the na-

ture of humanity, and realize the Unity of Being (*Wahdat al-Wujūd*) i.e., the belief that all existence is One, a manifestation of the Divine Reality from which all reality originates and to which it will return; and 2) an effort to facilitate recognition of the presence of love and wisdom in the world. Hence, the essential features of Sufism are the inward or direct experience of unity with the Divine (*Tahwīd*), and its focus on the love and knowledge, or heart and mind. This process commences with the struggle against the ego and the *nafs* or passions of the carnal soul.

But before discussing the various methods for experiencing unity with the God or Allah, it is necessary to examine three pivotal Sufi concepts: *Al-Insān al-Kāmal* (the Perfect Man), *Tahwīd* (union) and *Wahdat al-Wujūd* (the Unity of Being) in greater detail.

## Fundamental Concepts

### *Tahwīd - Oneness*

Knowledge of the absolute Oneness of God (tawhid) is the goal; it is the most glorious of the sciences and the most illustrious of the religious obligations.

(Sayyidna Ahmad ibn Ibrahim al-Naysaburi,<sup>42</sup>)

One of the defining themes of Sufism and the Qurānic Revelation, from both a traditionalist and Universalist perspective, is divine Unity, as expressed in the *shahāda* or testimony of faith, *Lā ilāha illa’ Llāh* (There is no God but God).<sup>43</sup> The testimony of faith holds that God (Allah, literally *Al-Ilāh* “the God”) is One (*Al-’Aḥad*) and Single (*Al-Wāḥid*).

The concept of God’s Oneness is also expressed by the Arabic word *tahwīd* (also transliterated as *tawheed*, *tauḥid* or *tauheed*), which emphasizes the unity and uniqueness of God as creator and sustainer of the universe.<sup>44</sup> Its appearance and use in the Qur’ān gives it special credence, especially among strict, legalist interpreters of Islam who hold that God exists as a distinct entity, separated and existing independently of the world. Such sober interpretations of *tahwīd* do not accept that there are any intermediaries in the worship of God.

Most classical Sufi's, however, hold that *tawhīd* has several meanings. As Dr. Steven Masood explains: *tawhīd* means: 1) belief in the Unity of the One Being; 2) discipline of the subjective and objective life in the light of that belief; 3) the experience of union and fusion with the Divine; and 4) a theosophical or philosophical conception of reality in the light of the true mystical experience.<sup>45</sup> He notes further that:

The first two senses are accepted by all Muslims. However, the third and fourth senses are the particular teaching of Sufi Islam. For them Tawhid in the third sense is to have the perception of the One Being through mystical experience. It is the highest experience of the unity of God. In the fourth sense, one loses his own identity and becomes one with the One being.<sup>46</sup>

In discussing the Sufi conception of God Hazrat Inayat Khan explains that to a Sufi,

God and man are not two; the Sufi does not consider God separate from himself. The Sufi's God is not in Heaven alone; He is everywhere. He sees God in the unseen and in the seen; he recognizes God both within and without. Therefore there is no name which is not the Name of God, and there is no form which is not the form of God, to the eyes of the Sufi.<sup>47</sup>

Sufi's seek to explicitly associate themselves with God—not to become Gods, but to unite completely their individual consciousness and identity with God, whose existence is both transcendent and immanent and therefore pervasive and manifest throughout all creation.

S. H. Nasr, who comes from a long line of Sufi's, when speaking of the principle reality of the One God, says in *The Heart of Islam* that

...His oneness (*tawhīd*) is "the axis around which all that is Islamic revolves. Allah is beyond all duality and relationality, beyond differences of gender and of all qualities that distinguish beings from each other in the world."<sup>48</sup>

Allah or God is neither male nor female, for at the highest level, the One is both Absolute and Infinite. Yet, in Sufism and Islam, the Divine Essence is seen as Infinite and is usually re-

ferred to in feminine form and often spoken of as "the Beloved." The feminine aspect of God, typified by such qualities as Mercy, Beauty and Wisdom, is seen as the non-creating, or metacosmic aspect. God as the Absolute, the Creator and the Sustainer, is addressed in the masculine form. Both masculine and feminine qualities are found in the nature of the Divine, which transcends the duality between them.<sup>49</sup>

Elsewhere, Nasr says that while creation or manifestation expresses first as polarization and then as a multiplicity, he notes that: "in relation to Divine Unity, multiplicity is veil."<sup>50</sup> He goes on to say that Divine Substance embraces "all the reverberations of the One in the mirror of the many which we call the world, or in fact the many worlds which at once hide and manifest the One."<sup>51</sup>

The Creator, in the Sufi view, is not removed from creation; it is just that there is one presence everywhere, which expresses as diversity within the unity. This idea has been expressed in the following Sufi poem from the Persian Sufi master, Fakhruddin Iraqi (1239–1289).

Each image painted on the canvas of  
Existence is the form of the Artist himself  
Eternal Ocean spews forth-new waves.  
Waves we call them; but there is only the  
sea.<sup>52</sup>

### ***Wahdat al-Wujūd - The Transcendent Unity of Existence***

Another doctrine that focuses on unity and the idea that God and His creation are One is *Wahdat al-Wujūd*. This philosophical doctrine is highly complex and controversial—controversial because it would seem to imply that God is both one and many. Although its advocates see it as a restatement of *tawhīd* in the advanced language and understanding of later Islamic history, some orthodox interpreters of Sufism surmise that *Wahdat al-Wujūd* denies the sovereign will of God and tends toward pantheism (all essences and manifestations are divine). They either reject the doctrine as heresy outright, or else dismiss it as misleading.

But from a Sufi perspective, the concept of *Wahdat al-Wujūd* is thought to be more or less

synonymous with the highest expression of *tawhīd* or the union,<sup>53</sup> which is only attainable by those who have achieved a lasting state of spiritual annihilation or *fana*. Sufi doctrine conceives the world as an emanation of Deity. In “so far as anything exists at all, it exists as a ray of His light.”<sup>54</sup>

As the legendary Iranian Sufi Master Mansur Al Halaji (858–922), maintained, *Wahdat al-Wujūd* does not imply that “everything is God,” but rather “God is everything and in everything,” while also “being beyond everything.” Such statements, like those of Al Halaji, Ibn ‘Arabi and others are analogous to the Hindu Advaitic doctrine, which states that the universe is one essential reality, and that all facets and aspects of the universe are ultimately an expression or appearance of that one reality.

While the two terms each imply the idea of Non-Duality and Unity or Oneness, there are some distinctions between them. *Tawhīd* represents the process of making one or the realization of God’s unity and uniqueness. There are however, various levels and degrees of union or *tahwīd*. These include such things as the realization of God’s attributes, his acts and his will. *Wahdat al-Wujūd* is *tawhīd* realized on a universal level. It implies a level of conscious identification with God or Allah and can be understood as the permanent realization of all the levels or degrees of *tahwīd*. Such a station is only achieved by the greatest of saints.

A famous Sufi mystic and poet, Ibn al-Fariīd (1181–1235) who wrote about the lover’s longing for the Beloved describes the concept of the Unity of Being thus;

She (the Supreme Being) appeared in phenomena. They supposed that this phenomenon was other than She, while it was she who displayed herself therein.

There is naught but Thee in the whole world. Everything in the universe is Thy Face that we see. In which every direction I turn my eyes, there are Thou. Without Thee, there is nothing that there is.<sup>55</sup>

This same idea of the all-pervasive existence of God (that God and his creation are one) in

creation is expressed in the following poem from Rumi:

I am dust particles in sunlight  
I am the round sun.  
To the bits of dust I say, Stay.  
To the sun, Keep moving.  
I am morning mist,  
And the breathing of evening.  
I am wind in the top of a grove,  
And surf on the cliff.  
Mast, rudder, helmsman, and keel,  
I am also the coral reef they founder on.  
I am a tree with a trained parrot in its  
branches. Silence, thought, and voice.  
The musical air coming through a flute,  
A spark of a stone, a flickering In metal.  
Both candle, And the moth crazy around it.  
Rose, and the nightingale Lost in the fragrance.  
I am all orders of being, the circling galaxy,  
The evolutionary intelligence, the lift,  
And what isn’t. You who know  
Jelaluddin, You the one  
In all, say who  
I am. Say I  
am You.<sup>56</sup>

If *tawhīd* and *Wahdat al-Wujūd* are considered in theoretical terms or as a doctrine of faith, both concepts are identical to that which is espoused in the *Bhagavad-gita*, where Krishna, in speaking to Arjuna, reflects this view. “Having pervaded the universe with Myself, I remain.”<sup>57</sup>

And elsewhere, where Krishna explains:

There is nothing else besides me, Arjuna.  
Like clusters of yarn-beads by knots on a thread, all this is threaded on me.

Arjuna, I am sapidity in water, light of moon and sun, the sacred syllable OM in all Vedas, sound in ether and manliness in men.

I am the subtle principle of odour in the earth, brilliance in fire, life in all beings and the austerity in me of askesis.

Arjuna, know me the eternal seed of all beings. I am the intelligence of the intelligent and the glory of the glorious.<sup>58</sup>

### ***Al-Insān al-Kāmil - The Universal Man***

One of the other significant concepts in Islamic theology and Sufism is *Al-Insān al-Kāmil* (The Perfect or Universal Man) The term was applied as an honorific title to describe the Prophet Muhammad, but it is also used to refer to those who have been totally transformed, achieved perfection or faultlessness and become a living manifestation of God or Allah.

The notion of the perfect man in Sufism is complex, due in large part to a number of different “philosophies of perfection.” But the doctrine is based on the premise that the primordial, archetypal man embodies within himself all of the divine attributes of the One Being (as expressed in His 99 Names), but has fallen from his perfect state and now has a false sense of self, which separates him from his Universal Self. Sufis believe that it separation from God that is the cause of all suffering, and that the ancient longing to return to the Essence is present but veiled in every human soul.<sup>59</sup> Man’s purpose in life is to regain this lost unity by reabsorbing himself so completely into the One Being’s essence that no distinction of consciousness exists between them. He then becomes the one “who has fully realized his essential oneness with the Divine Being in whose likeness he is made.”<sup>60</sup> Self-revelation of the One Being or God occurs thorough a series of stages and subjective experiences until complete annihilation (*fana*) takes place and the individual becomes *Al-Insan al-Kamil*, or the “Perfect Man.”<sup>61</sup>

The perfect or Universal Man refers to one who has realized Union or the Supreme Identity. As such, he has unified the spiritual or metaphysical and physical realms of existence in his own being. Such a one serves as an eminent spiritual meditator, a prophet, a Mahdi or *Qutb* (axis, pivot or pole) and is head of the saintly hierarchy. The *Qutb* or perfect man has a connection to God and passes on spiritual light and wisdom to the world. There are two different conceptions of the Perfect Man, the pole or *Qutb*: a temporal and a cosmic *Qutb*. The temporal *Qutb* resides on earth and is an active agent in the world, but the cosmic “pole” is manifested in the temporal “pole” as a virtue. The temporal *Qutb* is the leader or

guide for the earth-bound saints.<sup>62</sup> The cosmic *Qutb*, derives his power from Allah or the One, and serves as the “Axis of the Universe” on a higher plane.<sup>63</sup>

Although only a rare group of individuals can attain the level of the Perfect Man,<sup>64</sup> Sufis believe that such an attainment is inherently possible for every human being. Therefore, *Al-Insan al-Kamil* is the ideal set before all Sufis, the prototypical human being who serves as a perfect mirror reflecting the qualities and attributes of Divinity. As such, the concept of the Universal and Perfect Man plays an essential role in guiding Sufi’s toward their own perfection and service as a light unto the world.

### **The Path to Union**

#### ***Tazkiyat an-nafs - Purification and Augmentation of the Self***

He travels with whoever looks for Him,  
and having taken the seeker by the hand, He  
arouses him to go in search of himself.

(Al -Ansari)<sup>65</sup>

Success on the Sufi Path is directly tied to purification as a preparation for the receipt of sacred knowledge. In broad terms the concept of purification (*tazkiyat an-nafs*) is seen as the means to eliminate ego-centrality, negativity, base desire and weakness.<sup>66</sup> Thus, Islamic and Sufi psychological sciences (*Ilm-al Nafsiyat*) involve an awareness of what is hidden deep within the self in order to rid oneself of any and all adulterants or obstacles to soul realization. The exercise of *tazkiyat an-nafs* can be described as a system of spiritual therapeutics designed to purify the lower self so that one becomes a mirror reflecting the divine.

To facilitate purification, different Sufi brotherhoods may utilize various rites such as adherence to Islamic law, fasting, prayer, spiritual retreat, meditation, dreams, poetry, music and ritual movements and sacred turning or dance. Spiritual poverty (*faqr*) is also one of the cornerstones of Sufi spiritual practice and *tazkiyat*. While spiritual poverty can have a number of different meanings, its innermost meaning can perhaps be best summed up in a quote from the 11<sup>th</sup> century Persian Sufi and

scholar, Ali-Hujwir, who says: “the poor man is not he whose hand is empty of provisions, but he whose nature is empty of desires.”<sup>67</sup> The primary emphasis for nearly all Sufis is correct knowledge, disengagement from one’s own will, right motivation, correct actions and the opening and purity of the heart. The purification of the self is generally thought to involve:

- 1) Liberating oneself from the psychological distortions and complexes that prevent one from forming a healthy, integrated individuality in service to God and one’s fellowman. [This also involves cultivating the spiritual virtues (*fadā’il*) of the heart, such as patience, compassion, tolerance, detachment, etc.] (Author’s brackets.)
- 2) Freeing oneself from the slavery to the attractions of the world, all of which are secondary reflections of the qualities within the heart. By seeing these attractions as veils over one’s essential yearning for union with the divine, the veils fall away and the naked reality remains.
- 3) Transcending the veil that is the self and its tyrannical selfishness.
- 4) Devoting oneself and one’s attention to God or Allah; living in and through Allah, in *Haqiqah* (essential truth), and in Love.<sup>68</sup>

However, some Sufi Orders believe that the purification of the *nafs* involves more than purification of the ego; hence, they outline six or more formal stages of purification (to be discussed later) along the path to exalted spiritual development. This process of purification concerns the development of the soul, and involves an effort to eliminate anything that deflects from knowledge, love and service to one’s fellowman, as well as complete surrender to God or Allah.

Although there are numerous ways to transform the *nafs*, as Dr. Anab Whitehouse points out:

These ways are overlapping, reinforcing and not mutually exclusive in the sense that, for instance, what helps the heart,

helps the *nafs* to transform, and the spirit to be enlivened, and similarly what transforms the *nafs*, also has benefits for the heart and spirit, and so on.<sup>69</sup>

This idea is reflected in the dual meaning *tazkiyat an-nafs*, which in addition to the idea of purification or refinement, means augmentation of the Self or Soul. Concurrent with the act of purification of the *nafs* is the cultivation of the Soul’s virtues, its stature and spiritual piety.

One of the key practices employed by Sufis to purify the *nafs* and cultivate the highest moral virtues is the constant recollection and contemplation of Allah and his attributes.

### ***Dhikr - Remembrance of God and The Ninety-Nine Names of Allah***

I thought of you so often  
That I completely became You.  
Little by little You drew near  
and slowly but slowly I passed away.

(Javad Nurbakhsh)<sup>70</sup>

In the Qur’an the Prophet Muhammad invoked God or Allah by a number of different names in an effort to explain the metaphysical complexity of Divine Unity, God’s nature and His immanence or presence in creation. In response to this historical tradition, a practice arose involving the recitation (*dhikr* or *zhkir*) and contemplation (*fikr*) of “God’s Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names.” Supported by a widely accepted *hadith* regarding the “Recitation of Names,”<sup>71</sup> this act of remembrance and devotion is practiced by various religious orders or brotherhoods throughout much of the Islamic world. Although some strict Muslims<sup>72</sup> believe that there is no basis for the practice since it appears to contradict the *shadaha*<sup>73</sup> or profession of faith, i.e., “there is no God but God;” recitation and meditation on the 99 Names exists as the quintessential component in classical Sufism as well as Universal Sufism,<sup>74</sup> which also places an emphasis on the evocative use of the Ninety-Nine Names of God or Allah.

Muslim theologians and Sufis alike understand God's 99 Names as *sifat* or attributes of Allah. But they are careful to emphasize that the attributes of Allah "have no independent existence of their own" and "only exist as differentiated aspects" of God or Allah; "they are neither identical to nor distinct from the essence."<sup>75</sup> Rather, the Names are regarded as reflections of the divine essence, the One Reality. Ibn 'Arabî, the great Arab Andalusian scholar, described them as the "outward signs of the universe's inner mysteries."<sup>76</sup>

The practice of remembrance or *dhikr* (along with *wazifa*,<sup>77</sup> which involves the recitation and meditation on various Quranic phrases and Prophetic supplications), are a means by which the seeker is brought into the divine presence. As a form of ritual prayer or invocation it helps focus the attention and allows the practitioner to know, evoke and develop the different qualities or attributes of God or Allah. Thus the Names are a medium by which one can come to understand something of the divine potential inherent in every soul.<sup>78</sup>

The Ninety-Nine Names, in the words of Pir Zia Inayat Kahn, president of the *Sufi Order Ināyati*, a Universalist order, are not just theological abstractions. They are "sovereign remedies for the ailing human heart."<sup>79</sup> They are used for the purpose of psychological, mental and spiritual healing; for as the Qur'an says: "In the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest." (Verse 13:28). The Names and phrases can be recited silently in the mind or said aloud. They can also be sung and/or accompanied by various ritualized movements. As one commentator explains, the idea is to sound the Name "until only silence reigns and the seeker's ego is extinguished and only God remains. For true *dhikr*, as the saying goes, means forgetting the *dhikr*."<sup>80</sup>

In some Sufi Orders, knowing and reciting the Names of God as theurgic mantras or words of power, is a fundamental impetus for those who are seeking to open the heart and connect with the Divine. The practice, which is derived through initiatic knowledge, is based, in part, on the idea that sound and vibrations are the cause or basis of all manifestation and on the

***No one knows who the first Sufi was. Sufism is not a religion, and ultimately exists above and beyond all labels. It is said Sufism is older than Islam and that it really had no beginning, being just the latest flowering—taking on the form of Islam—of the ancient secret tradition stretching back to Adam.***

belief that each letter of the Arabic script derives its power from its links to "the four elements, to the heavens and the lower worlds, to numbers and to either light or darkness."<sup>81</sup> Each name is thought to be a unique, living field of energy<sup>82</sup> with its own frequency and light or color. Through the recitation and contemplation of certain names and sacred phrases, the sacred qualities or attributes of Allah

are revealed and unfolded in the life of the practitioner. More importantly, remembrance of Allah, one of the pillars of the Islamic and Sufi doctrine, can be fulfilled through the recitation and contemplation of God's Beautiful Names.

With respect to the Names themselves, Muslims and Sufis agree that the 99 Names of God are really 100, excepting 1. Allah (the One), being the Supreme Name that includes all the others. There are, however, more than 99 Names by which Allah is addressed in the Qur'an and Sunnah,<sup>83</sup> among other places. Some scholars claim that Allah actually has "three-thousand names: 1,000 known only by the angels, 1,000 known by the prophets, who include Abraham, Moses and Jesus; the 300 of the Torah or Old Testament; the 300 of the Psalms of David; the 300 of the New Testament; the 99 of the Koran; and, the 3000th name, the greatest name, *Ism Allah al-azam*, the concealed name of the God's Essence."<sup>84</sup> Others maintain that Allah has an infinite number of names. Therefore, 99, the most

commonly used number, is merely a symbolic figure depicting an unlimited quantity of attributes or vibrations that reflect the multiplicity of the Divine Essence.

### *Ma'rifa - Gnosis*

At the level of gnosis (*marifa*), there is  
“no me and no you.”

The individual realizes that all is God, that  
nothing and no one is separate from God.

This is the ultimate goal of Sufism.

(Robert Frager)<sup>85</sup>

As indicated earlier, one of Sufism's foremost concerns is the pursuit of Gnosis (*ma'rifa*), which is the highest knowledge that an individual can possess. Various writers, such as al Junayd<sup>86</sup> and Ibn al-'Arabī<sup>87</sup> placed an emphasis on gnosis and believed that the essence of the One Being is “all knowledge.” Both believed that there was no greater goal than human gnosis or knowledge of Allah. “The goal,” says John Gilchrist, a leading author on Islam, “is to attain a personal knowledge of the Divine Reality so that the knower and known are one and there is no awareness of any distinction of personality between them.”<sup>88</sup> Ma'rūf al-Karkhī (d. 815), a Sufi saint, who is thought to be the founder of the Sufi school of Bagdad, said that Sufism consists of “seizing upon Divine Realities and forsaking all that comes from creatures.”<sup>89</sup>

The term *ma'rifa*, as Reza Shah Kazemi explains, implies a paradox because the ultimate content of this knowledge radically transcends the individual...

In one respect it is a light that illumines and clarifies, in another respect its very brilliance dazzles, blinds and extinguishes the one who is designated as the knower. This luminous knowledge that demands “unknowing” is also a mode of being effacement; and it is the conjunction between perfect knowledge and pure being that defines the ultimate degree of *ma'rifa*. Since such a conjunction is only perfectly realized in the undifferentiated unity of the Absolute, it follows that it can only be through the Absolute that the individual can have access to *ma'rifa*.<sup>90</sup>

From above statements it becomes clear that *Ma'rifa* in Sufism is more than the attainment of divine knowledge. *Ma'rifa* or Gnosis implies Self-realization and the transcendence of polarities or the opposites, access to and unification with the divine presence and being enraptured by reality of the Absolute One.<sup>91</sup> For Sufis, this “knowing of God” is the very reason that humanity was created. This idea is expressed in a saying from the prophetic tradition: “I was a hidden treasure and I loved to be known, so I created the world.”<sup>92</sup>

But it is useful to point out that Islam and Sufism place a value on two kinds of knowledge, i.e., *ma'rifa*— knowledge that is related to God, and *ilm*— knowledge that has no apparent spiritual meaning. But these two terms, according to Abu-Yazīd, a 9<sup>th</sup> century Sufi from Iran, are seen as synonymous, for to know that God exists in the datum of manifestation is to know that God alone is. God's reality transcends the world, but also mysteriously penetrates all things. “For whomever is close to God (*Al-Haqq*) everything and every place is God, for God is everywhere and everything.”<sup>93</sup>

Another way of articulating this idea is to say that true gnosis surpasses limited, incomplete perspectives, without necessarily abolishing them, for *ma'rifa* is a perspective that includes both the transcendent and the immanent. In another well-known *hadith* or saying, the Prophet Muhammad explains the goal and the fruit of knowledge. “He who knows himself knows his Lord.” Elsewhere the Prophet stated that: “Seeking knowledge [of God or the Cosmos] is incumbent upon every Muslim,” and such knowledge should be sought far and wide, “even,” he says, “unto China.”<sup>94</sup>

Yet, one is advised not to acquire knowledge for its own sake, as this feeds the ego or little self (*nafs*) and leads one away from the Divine Essence. Ibn al-'Arabī, who developed a complex theosophical system akin to that of Plotinus, thought that knowledge, even of the Cosmos, could be a divergence, a veil or a blind if one did not recognize the Creator's workings behind all outer appearances or signs.<sup>95</sup> While the living realization of self-knowledge and God-knowledge is one of the Sufi's principle

quests, the precedence given to true knowledge in Sufism, as Burckhardt explains, “in no way implies an emphasis on the mind at the expense of the emotional faculties”<sup>96</sup> whose organ is the heart and center of person’s being.

### **Mahabba - Love**

The union of the mind and intuition, which brings about illumination, and the development which the Sufis seek, is based upon love.

(Idries Shah)<sup>97</sup>

The prominence of “Love” (*hubb* or *mahabba*) and the “Heart” (*qalb*) equals, and in some Sufi Orders, surpasses that of the knowledge or intellect. This is evidenced in the following quotes from the Qur’an, which teach that “God’s mercy is greater than His wrath” and that “God’s love is His supreme attribute.” In fact, Sufism is frequently called “the path of love” and “the religion of the heart.” In Islam and in Sufism in particular, the heart carries a special importance. The heart is seen as the seat of spiritual awareness. The heart is the man’s innermost reality, the center of consciousness and the true essence of human being. The following passage from the Qur’an (8:24) speaks to its significance in reminding us that: “Allah intervenes between man and his heart.”

Yunis Emre<sup>98</sup> (1240–1320), one of the great Turkish Sufi poets of love, maintained that while reason and free will can link one to God, it is the purified heart, the seat of the soul and also the intellect, which can intuit God’s essence. The heart, as Martin Lings held, can be found to be a synonym for the intellect, but in the full sense of the Latin *intellectus*, meaning

that which perceives the transcendent.<sup>99</sup> Lings goes on to say:

In virtue of being the centre of the body, the heart may be said to transcend the rest of the body, although substantially it consists of the same flesh and blood. In other words, while the body as a whole is “horizontal” in the sense that it is limited to its own plane of existence, the heart has, in addition, a certain “verticality” for being the lower end of the “vertical” axis which passes from Divinity Itself through the centres of all the degrees of the Universes. If we use the imagery suggested by Jacob’s Ladder, which is none other than this axis, the bodily heart will be the lowest rung and the ladder itself will represent the whole hierarchy of centres or “Hearts” one above the other. This image is all the more adequate for representing each centre as distinct from the others and yet, at the same time connected with them. It is in virtue of this interconnection, through which the centres in the body are, as it were, merged into one, that the bodily heart receives Life from Divinity and floods the body with Life.<sup>100</sup>

From these comments one can see why the heart in Sufism is often seen as synonymous with the spark of Spirit, which has both a Divine and Created aspect. The heart is also regarded as a solar symbol or inward Sun and a manifestation of one of the 99 Names of Allah—*al Nur*—the essence of the all-pervading Light or luminosity. The following lines from a Persian mystical poem, speak to the importance of opening the Heart. “Split the atom’s heart and lo! Within it thou wilt find a sun.”<sup>101</sup>



The Winged Heart superimposed upon the Sun<sup>102</sup>

The heart is not only the source of vision or light, but also the endless font of love. The great Sufi poets of love, like the female mystic Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah (d. 801), Emre and Rumi, believed that love dominates and determines the Sufi's inward and psychological states and is thus what defines the relationship between humans and God. Hazrat Inayat Khan explains that: "Love draws us back to Love."<sup>103</sup> He goes on to say that: "The greatest principle of Sufism is '*Ishq Allah, Ma'bud Allah*.'" (God is love, lover, and beloved.)

The Path of Love is the path that leads one away from the bondage of the *nafs* or base self to the freedom and wholeness of one's divine nature, a nature that loves and serves all beings as manifestations of God. Love has an immense transformative power and is one of the methods for achieving an inner alchemy by which the Sufi rids him or her self of "everything-other-than-God." The famous Andalusian Sufi, Ahmad ibn-al 'Arif (1088–1141), said that love is the "beginning of the valleys of extinction (*fanā*) and the hill from which there is a descent towards the stages of self-naughting.... In Sufism, the willful annihilation of the self—to die before you die<sup>104</sup>—and the resultant *baqa* (everlasting subsistence through God), takes place when magnetic power of the Spirit draws the soul to it and the loving heart lays down in the arms of the Beloved or God.

But, as has been previously noted, the emphasis in Sufism today tends to be on an intermingling or synthesis of love and knowledge. As Fakhrudin 'Araki (1213–1289), one of the great Sufi masters, poets and scholars held, "Love is not juxtaposed to knowledge, It is realized knowledge."<sup>105</sup> Nevertheless there are Sufis who tend to place a focus on either one or the other—either the mystical and ecstatic approach or sober, mental approach. This was especially the case in Sufism's formative period, where as Schimmel points out, "Sufism admitted a two-fold approach to God,"<sup>106</sup> which she illustrates with the following quotes from Hujwiri:

There is a difference between one who is burned by His Majesty in the fire of love,

and one who is illuminated by His Beauty in the light of contemplation.

There is a difference between one who meditates upon Divine acts and one who is amazed at the Divine Majesty; the one is a follower of friendship [wanting what is good for others], the other is a companion of love.<sup>107</sup> (Author's brackets)

Another Sufi theologian and poet, Maulanā Jāmī (1414–1492), held that there are two types of Sufis, the mystical and gnostic/prophetic: those who have annihilated the self and are submerged in complete union with the Divine, but return to the shores of separation to lead others to salvation; and those who remain within "the Ocean of Unity, that never a news or trace comes to the shore of separation...and the sanctity of perfecting others is not entrusted to them."<sup>108</sup>

The first type can be likened to the Bodhisattva ideal in Buddhism, those who have achieved Enlightenment, but are motivated by compassion to return to the world of samsara to aid others on the path to Buddhahood. The second type are those who have achieved Enlightenment and have chosen not to return to the realms of incarnation and maya.

### ***Maqāmāt or Stations on the Path***

As previously noted in the section on the purification of the lower self or *nafs*, classical Sufism describes a series of spiritual milestones, states, stations and degrees along the path of return. Although Sufis make a distinction between the stability of the stations (*maqāmāt*) and *ahwāl* (the many temporary states of the soul), the focus here will be limited to the permanent stations.

The various degrees or stations represent cumulative and permanent stages or degrees in self-awareness and spiritual development, which are attainable through sustained effort and spiritual practice.

Each metaphysical degree or *maqām* exemplifies the seeker's level of initiatic attainment and awareness of the spiritual subtleties behind the world of outer form, his perception of Truth, the meaning of life, especially one's

own life purpose, and one's attunement with Divine Will. Hence, the *maqām* reflect the dominant quality of the soul and signify where the seeker is "stationed" until he moves on to the station that looms ahead.

According to N. Hanif, the stations of wisdom, as they are also called, "are degrees of penetration into the divine unity," or Oneness of God.<sup>109</sup>

They mark progress on the path of discipline and attainment before the Sufi can achieve union with God.

There is no universally accepted order or number of stations. Different teachers and Sufi Orders have outlined the stations in a way that reflects their own experience and conceptions of reality. Thus, some Sufis say there are 4 stations, other list 6, or 7, and still others 40 or as many as 100. Adding to the complexity of the subject is the fact that some Sufis relate the *maqāmāt* to the heart, to various *Lataif-e-sitta*, the psychospiritual organs or centers of perception in the heart and or body, or to various classifications of knowledge. To complicate matters further, there is, in some quarters, a continuous process of modification and adjustment in the light of new understanding and experience on the path. Such fluidity can be seen to be one of the hallmarks of the Sufi path given that Sufis, as Helena Blavatsky says, have "no external, ritualistic, and dogmatic religion."<sup>110</sup> For, "the journey of the soul towards God, as S. H. Nasr explains, "includes too many imponderable elements to allow it to be reduced to a set scheme."<sup>111</sup>

Some Sufis, for example, view the stations as the grounds for a spiritual life which deal with such considerations as: 1) *tawba* or repentance; 2) *wará* or watchfulness; 3) *zuhd* or renunciation; 4) *faqr* or poverty (the absence of desire); 5) *ṣabr* or patience; 6) *tawakkul* or trust; 7) *riḍā* or acceptance.

Others give the following seven stations beginning with: 1) the *nafs* or the sensitive soul; 2) the *qalb* or heart; 3) 'aql or intellect; 4) *rūh* or spirit; 5) the *sirr* or secret of innermost heart; 6) *jafi* (also *khafi* or that which is hidden; 7) *al-afiā* or true Being.<sup>112</sup>

According to William Chittick, Ibn 'Arabī, considered by many to be one of the world's greatest Muslim philosophers, represented the various levels, states and stations as "the actualization of potential deiformity," (likeness to Deity).<sup>113</sup> In Ibn 'Arabī's characterization, the stations correspond to one or more of the divine archetypes or Names. Of special interest in his philosophy was the "Station of No Station," the station that includes all the other stations and is, in one sense, the final "Reality of Realities."

***God and man are not two; the Sufi does not consider God separate from himself. The Sufi's God is not in Heaven alone; He is everywhere. He sees God in the unseen and in the seen; he recognizes God both within and without. Therefore there is no name which is not the Name of God, and there is no form which is not the form of God, to the eyes of the Sufi.***

### ***Maqām lā Maqām -The Station of No Station***

The Station of No Station pertains to the Perfect Man who has come full circle in his evolutionary growth and development and has achieved union or *tawhīd*, knowledge of the Real. Chittick portrays the Perfect Man standing in this station as the "human analogue of Nondelimited Being, which assumes every delimitation without itself becoming limited."<sup>114</sup> Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi (1210–1274), one of the most influential Sufi thinkers, describes this station as the "exact middle" or "the point at the center of the circle of existence." The Station of No Station is also *fana*, the ultimate goal – a dissolution of the Sufi's consciousness and identity through a total absorption in the love and knowledge of God.

Thus the *Maqām lā Maqām* is the highest level of human perfection; it refers to one who expresses all of the Divine attributes or potentialities of God and has come to understand the

relationships within the Divine field that have hitherto been concealed by the veils of illusion.

The Station of No Station is often described as an unknown station that exists outside of our limited conception of space and time and represents liberation from the dual nature of existence. In the philosophy of Ibn ‘Arabī, the Station of No Station, as previously stated, embraces all the other stations. So as Anub Whitehouse explains, the Station of No Station is “the zero degree” before the seeker has attained the first *maqām*, the final “terminus” or station, and the place where the “two extremes meet and the serpent bites its own tail.”<sup>115</sup> He goes on to say that every station is a no station until a new unimagined station presents itself:

The station of no station would ... be the station where one no longer perceives that which is lower as such, where everything is leveled by reference to what is higher, and where it is revealed to us that all stations are perfect at whatever degree they might be situated. The degrees disappear. The miracle is to see that God is to be found in His totality at all degrees, at all stations where he manifests, in all degrees of manifestation, from the most radiant to the most obscure. ... [where] every thing is a *maqām*, the whole of life presents *maqāms*.<sup>116</sup>

The ascent to the Station of No Station is, in Whitehouse’s opinion, an attempt to bring together precreation, creation and de-creation into a unity. It is the place where all points of view are comprehended, where the object/subject disappears, where affirmation and negation cease to exist and the still point gives entry into the Divine Essence.<sup>117</sup>

The Station of No Station is further described as an unknown station. In his reading of Ibn ‘Arabī, Chittick says that:

The Station of No Station brings together every quality in utter differentiation, pure unity, sheer consciousness, total freedom, complete lack of delimitation and identity with Real self-disclosers. The nature of consciousness experienced in this station can only be expressed in analogies and metaphors. It is utterly inaccessible to ordi-

nary language, which is to say that people are blinded of the shining of its light. In fact of course, the light witnessed by human beings is forever shining in the darkness of the cosmos, it is only human capacity that prevents people from seeing it.<sup>118</sup>

The Station of No Station exists outside of our limited conception of space and time. It is the place where there is a direct recognition of the Unity of the One. While the Station of No Station is thought to be the final station and the actualization of all of God’s Beautiful Names, in truth “there can be,” as Whitehouse maintains, “no so set number of stages, states or stations,” for the Absolute Infinitude transcends and encompasses even the transfinite numbers and infinities.<sup>119</sup>

## Conclusion

This article explored the fundamentals of Sufism, which Sufis themselves have claimed to be deeply complex. Indeed, Sufism is multifaceted, diffuse and fluid, making it nearly impossible to present a one-dimensional model. There is a great spectrum of Sufi theory and practice as well as a wide variety of Sufi orders: classical, reformed and interfaith orders, which have been shaped within various cultural, political and historical contexts. Furthermore, “Sufism holds a secret,” which as Idries Shah says, “is only to be found in the spirit and practice of the Work.” “Sufism,” therefore, “cannot be understood by the intellect alone, neither can it be understood from the outside.”<sup>120</sup> Nor is it possible to advance beyond a superficial grasp of the Sufi Path without the guidance of a teacher who is one with the Beloved and connected to an unbroken lineage of authentic Masters.

In addition to Sufism’s complexity and dynamism, conflict and violence in the Middle East and elsewhere, along with the media’s negative portrayal of Muslims, has cast a great pall over everything Islamic. Nevertheless, Sufism, as this article has attempted to show, is one of the world’s great spiritual currents.

Sufism is an ancient school of self-knowledge, of human development, a system with a diversity of methods and disciplines designed to facilitate the realization of one’s identity with

Supreme Identity and one's oneness with God. Sufism is both philosophical and experiential. Some orders can be classified as "drunken." These are Sufis who tend toward the "Heart approach" and employ aesthetic and devotional practices, such as the Invocation of Names, rhythmic movement, music and poetry as a means of producing an ecstatic experience or "state" in which the participant's sense of self is dissolved in the Presence. Such an approach can be contrasted with a more "sober" or intellectual approach, which emphasizes knowledge, discernment and contemplation, and "fixity" on the Real. Many Sufi orders acknowledge the need "to see with both eyes," as Ibn 'Arabi says; in other words, to seek an all-important balance between the heart and head, plus right action.

Sufism also has a decidedly inclusive and universal nature. The core principles of Sufism belong to the transcendent unity of truth and wisdom lying behind all the major faiths and esoteric traditions. Like most spiritual paths, the Sufi Way encourages beautification and mastery over the lower self along with the development of qualities such as charity, service, compassion, humility, honesty, detachment and wisdom. Thus, Sufism serves the function of helping seekers to free themselves from the prison of the senses so that he or she becomes a perfect mirror, which reflects the attributes of Divinity. The ultimate goal on the Sufi path, as S.H. Nasr says, is to lead the disciple from "the particular to the Universal, from separation to Unity, from form to the supra-formal Essence," to *tawhīd* and to "the truth that has always been and will always be."<sup>121</sup>

It is the author's hope that this introductory paper will allow students of esoteric philosophy and the other metaphysical traditions to see Sufism as one of the world's hidden treasures and a profound exposition of the Perennial Wisdom and the Life of the Spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> Sunni Islam is the largest denomination of Islam making up approximately 80% of the Muslim population in the world. Sunni's hold that the Prophet Muhammad's first Caliph was his father-in-law Abu Bakr, a political and so-

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cial leader as well as a close companion of the Prophet. Sunni's regard themselves as the orthodox branch of Islam. For Sunnis, authority is shared by all within the community (even if certain individuals have, in practice, claimed special authority) Sunni Muslims may follow one of several law schools named after their four founders or Imams. Source: *New World Encyclopedia*.

[www.newworldencyclopedia.org/](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/).

<sup>2</sup> Shi'a Islam or Shi'ism is the second largest school within Islam. Shi'a Muslims also adhere to the teachings of the Islamic prophet Muhammad and his family. Shi'as believe that the Imam must belong to the direct lineage of Muhammad through his daughter Fatima and her husband (and Muhammad's cousin), Ali ibn Abi Talib (Imam Ali, the fourth caliph), who the Muhammad appointed as the sole interpreter of his spiritual legacy. Shi'as reject the first three caliphs as usurpers of Ali's Imamate. The theme of lineage and infallibility of the Imam developed within Shi'a Islam, as well as the idea of a hidden Imam who will bring God's judgment in the Last Days. There are several sub-divisions. The majority of Shi'a believe that the Imam is now "hidden" but will return as the Mahdi. Source: *New World Encyclopedia*, [www.newworldencyclopedia.org/](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/).

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted here that many classical or tradition Islamic Sufi's view the Universalist and Non-Muslim orders as quasi or pseudo Sufis, since they are more or less disconnected from the teachings of the Qur'an and Sharia or Islamic Law, which serves as the foundation of the classical Sufi Path.

<sup>4</sup> The common exoteric explanation of *Tasawwuf* means, "to wear wool." From an esoteric perspective *Tasawwuf* implies Divine Wisdom or Sophia based on an internal approach to Islam.

<sup>5</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, quoting F. A. D. Tholuck in his 1821 volume on Sufism (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 9.

<sup>6</sup> The Pahlawan religion (champions) was one of the Persian religions that focused on chivalry and etiquette around which the essence of Sufism is shaped. See for example: *Sufism in the Secret History of Persia*, by Milad Milani.

<sup>7</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> On one level, the widely diffused parable of the *blind men and an elephant* is a story of a

- group of blind men (or men in the dark) who were made to touch an elephant to learn what it is like. Each one feels a different part, but only one part, such as the side or the tusk. They then compare notes and learn that they are in complete disagreement. The story refers to one's biases and the inability to see the completed whole, as well as the problem of assessing the world purely through the senses.
- 9 E. H. Palmer, *Oriental Mysticism: A Treatise on Sufistic and Unitarian Theosophy of the Persians* (1876; reprint; London: Luzac and Co., 1969), 18.
- 10 Atif Khalil and Shiraz Sheikh, in *Sufism in Western Scholarship: A Brief Overview*, a paper made available through Academic.edu: <https://www.academia.edu/> (accessed March 22, 2016).
- 11 Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. I (reprint: 1888; Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press, 1974), 288.
- 12 Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Theosophical Glossary* (1930; reprint; London: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1892), 311.
- 13 Hazart Inayat Kahn was an Indian classical musician who had been initiated into the Chrishti Sufi Order. In 1907, he was encouraged by his spiritual teacher, Shaykh Muhammed Abu Hashim Madani to bring Sufism to the West (London). In so doing he abandoned Islamic Sufism in favor of an approach that did not emphasize Sufism's connection to Islam.
- 14 Inayat Khan. Quoted from *Sufism* in the unpublished papers from the Nektakht Foundation.
- 15 *The Life and Teachings of Hazrat Inayat Khan*, [https://wahiduddin.net/hik/hik\\_origins.htm](https://wahiduddin.net/hik/hik_origins.htm) (accessed March 21, 2016).
- 16 Idries Shah, *The Sufis* (reprint, 1964; London, UK: Octagon Press Ltd. 1999) 356.
- 17 Mehmet Sabeheddin, "The Secret Path: Sufi Mystics and the Spiritual Quest," in *New Dawn Magazine*, No. 85, July-August 2004. [www.newdawnmagazine.com](http://www.newdawnmagazine.com) (accessed March 22, 2016).
- 18 *The Origins of Sufism: Pre & Post Islam*: From a lecture by the Silsilah-e-Aaliya Mujumma Al Baharian Community.
- 19 Vincent Cornell, *Practical Sufism: An Akbri-an Foundation for Liberal Theology of Difference*, [http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/articles/cornell\\_practicalsufism.html](http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/articles/cornell_practicalsufism.html) (accessed March 21, 2016).
- 20 See for example: *Mystical Islam: An Introduction to Sufism*, by Julian Baldick, or *Sufism: A Global History*, by Nile Green.
- 21 Titus Burckhardt, *Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, (reprint: 1959; Bloomington, Ind: World Wisdom, Inc., 2008), 5.
- 22 The Mevlevi/Mawlawīyya Order is Sufi order in Konya, Turkey founded by Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī, the 13<sup>th</sup> century Persian poet and theologian.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Mollie Magill, *Discuss the Non-Islamic Origins of Sufism*, <https://moliemagill.wordpress.com/discuss-the-arguments-for-the-non-islamic-origins-of-sufism> (accessed February 14, 2016).
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 This system is based on the Abjad numerals, which are a decimal numeral system in which the 28 letters of the Arabic alphabet are assigned numerical values. They have been used in the Arabic-speaking world since before the 8th century Arabic numerals. In modern Arabic, the word *abjadīyah* means "alphabet." The *Qu'ran* is also structured on an ingenious mathematical formula, based primarily on the number 7. Gematria plays an important role in Sufism. Many Sufi's believe that the numbers are part of the creative system by which all things in the cosmos were created.
- 28 Louis Massingon, *Essai sur les Origines du Lexique Technique de la Mystique Musulmane* (Paris: Geuthner, 1954), 104.
- 29 Professor John L. Esposito, *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Modern Islamic World* (Oxford: ENG: Oxford University Press, 1995).
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Martin Lings, *What is Sufism* (Lahore, Pakistan: Suhail Academy, 1983), 16.
- 32 Titus Burckhardt, *An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, 4.
- 33 Hazrat Inayat Khan on "Silsila," *Who we are*, from the "Sufi Order International." <http://www.centrum-universel.com/silsilae.htm> (accessed may 20, 2016).
- 34 Shaykh Mahmud Shabistari, *Gulshan i raz: The Mystic Rose Garden* (London: Forgotten Books, 2012), 84.
- 35 Martin Lings, *What is Sufism*, 12.

36 Ibid.  
37 Universal Sufism, as noted in the text, does not strictly adhere to Islam law. However, they share many of the same practices, methods and rites as the traditional orders. In contrast to the more traditional or Islamic orders, Universal Sufism focuses on the importance of eliminating the boundaries that divide traditional religions, and incorporates the “Wisdom of all Faiths” into its beliefs and practices.  
38 Eric Geoffroy, “Approaching Islam,” in *Sufism: Love and Wisdom*, edited by Jean-Louis Michon and Roger Gaetani (Bloomington, Ind., 2006), 50.  
39 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sufi Essays* (Chicago, IL: ABC International Group, 1999), 43.  
40 Ibid.  
41 Ibid., 39.  
42 Sayyidna Ahmad ibn Ibrahim al-Naysaburi, *A Code of Conduct*, tr.: Verena Klemm & Paul E. Walker; *The Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies*, Volume 5, Issue 3, Summer 2012, 44.  
43 Traditional Muslims repeat the shahāda: *lā 'ilāha 'illā-llāh, muḥammadur-rasūlu-llāh* (There is no God but God. Muhammad is God's messenger), five times a day, but Universal Sufism also rhythmically recites the first part of this phrase (*lā 'ilāha 'illā-llāh*) as part of the *dhikr* or Practice of Remembrance.  
44 The concept of *tahwid* have long been used by Islamic reformers and activists as an organizing principle for human society and the basis of religious knowledge, history, metaphysics, aesthetics, and ethics, as well as social, economic, and world order.  
45 Dr. Steven Masood, *Wahdat al-Wujūd: A Fundamental Doctrine in Sufism*, <http://www.stevenmasood.org/article/wahdat-al-wujud-fundamental-doctrine-sufism> (accessed May 7, 2016).  
46 Ibid.  
47 Hazrat Inayat Khan, “Prophets and Religions,” *The Unity of Religious Ideals*, Vol. 9, From the Hazrat Inayat Khan Study Database [www.hazrat-inayat-khan.org/php/views.php?h1=31&h2=14&h3=2](http://www.hazrat-inayat-khan.org/php/views.php?h1=31&h2=14&h3=2) (accessed May 7, 2016).  
48 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), 3.  
49 Ibid.  
50 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “The Male and Female in the Islamic Perspective,” *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Vol. 14, No. 1 & 2. (Win-

ter-Spring, 1980), World Wisdom, Inc. [www.studiesincomparativereligion.com](http://www.studiesincomparativereligion.com) (accessed May 7, 2016).

51 Ibid.  
52 Fakhruddin Iraqī, *Divine Flashes* (trans: William Chittick and Seeyed Hossein Nasr; Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1982), 69  
53 For more detailed information see for example: *In Search of the Lost Heart: Explorations in Islamic Thought*, by William C. Chittick, Mohammed Rustom, Atif Khalil.  
54 Medhi Azminrazavi, *Sufism and American Literary Masters* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 2014), 154.  
55 Ibnul Farid, *Taiyyat ul Kubra*, p. 245-46, as quoted from the *Shared Vision of Sufi and Yogic Vision* [http://www.bahaistudies.net/asma/the\\_shared\\_besuties\\_of\\_sufi\\_&\\_yogic\\_vision.pdf](http://www.bahaistudies.net/asma/the_shared_besuties_of_sufi_&_yogic_vision.pdf) (accessed April 11, 2016).  
56 Coleman Barks, and John Moyne trans., *The Essential Rumi* (San Francisco: Harper-SanFrancisco, 1995), 275-6.  
57 *The Bhagavad Gita*, trans. Annie Besant, 111. Available online at: <https://archive.org/details/bhagavadgt00besagooog> (accessed May 7, 2016).  
58 *The Sirimad Bhagavad-Gita*, trans., A Kaushik (New York: Hippocrene Books Inc., U.S., 1998), 186.  
59 See *The Doctrine of the Perfect Man (Al-Insan al-Kamil) and its Significance Today*, by Anisah Bagasra at: <http://www.israinternational.com/the-perfect-man.html>.  
60 Reynold A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* (reprint 1921; Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 2007), 78). This highly recommended book is also available online at: <http://sacred-texts.com/isl/siim/index.htm>.  
61 Ibid.  
62 P. Bearman; P. Kunitzsch and F. Jong, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2> (accessed May 21, 2016).  
63 Theja Gunawardhana, *Theosophy an Islam* (Nugegoda: Theosophical Society of Sri Lanka, 1983). 78.  
64 It is of interest to note that that the concept of the Universal or Perfect Man played a significant role in the Rumi's poems and that for Rumi, Shams al Din of Tabrizi was the em-

- bodiment of what he called the “Perfect Man.” One of the few contemporary individuals who came to believe that he had attained the level of *al-insan al-kamil* was the Iranian Shia Muslim religious leader, revolutionary, politician and the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ruhollah Mūsavi Khomeini. Khomeini never publically made such a claim, as it would have been considered heretical, but he was preoccupied with the concept of the perfect man. The belief not only formed the core of his writings, it was the impetus behind his desire, as Ted Thornton and numerous others have maintained, “to guide society from multiplicity to unity, from blasphemy to faith and from corruption to a life of absolute perfection.”
- 65 As quoted in *Love is a Fire* by Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee (Point Reyes Station, CA: The Golden Sufi Center, 2000), 20.
- 66 Certain Sufi Orders claim that the *nafs* reside in the lower abdomen where they create a hot smoke or fog that is the source of all evil desires and passions. If these desires are not controlled through spiritual disciplines, they escape from the stomach area and enter into the breast filling it with smoke. The light in the heart is obscured by this smoke and can no longer illuminate the breast. See for example: *A Sufi Work on the Stations of the Heart*, <http://faculty.washington.edu/heer/stations.pdf> . (accessed May 1, 2016).
- 67 Ali-Hujwiri, *The Kashf al-Mahjub* (The Revelation of the Veiled) of Ali b. 'Uthman al-Jullabi Hujwiri, trans., by Reynold A. Nicholson (Gibb Memorial Trust, 2014), 25.
- 68 See for example: <http://www.rifai.org/sufism/english/the-art-of-being/four-stages-for-the-purification-of-the-heart> (accessed, April 1, 2016).
- 69 Dr. Anub Whitehouse, *Sufi Amanesis: State, Stations, Stages and Practices*, January 4, 2010. <http://anubwhitehouse.blogspot.com/2010/01/states-stations-stages-and-practice.html> (accessed May 11, 2016).
- 70 Javad Nurbakhsh, *In the Tavern of Ruins* (London: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publications, 1992).
- 71 The *Hadith* in question is from *Jani-at-Tirmidhi* or *Sunan at-Tirmidhi*.
- 72 Strict orthodox Sunni Muslim sects, such as the Wahhabi disavow the practice.
- 73 *Shadhana* is an essential Islamic creed declaring the oneness of God. *lā 'ilāha 'illā-llāh*, There is no God but God.
- 74 The Universalist Order is now the “Inayat Khan Sufi Order” headed by Pir Inayat Khan.
- 75 Wali Ali Meyer, Bilal Hyde, Faisal Muqaddam and Shaabda Kahn, *Physicians of the Heart, A Sufi View of the Ninety-Nine Name of Allah* (San Francisco, CA: Sufi Ruhaniat International, 2001), 19.
- 76 As quoted in *Essential Islam: A Comprehensive Guide to Belief and Practice*, by Diane Morgan (Santa Barbara, CA: ABD-CLIO LLC, 2010), 10.
- 77 The word *dhikr* is the remembrance of God through the rhythmic repetition of Names. The term *wazifa* refers to the recitation of various verses or phrases as means of going beyond the divine quality or attributes of a specific name. However, the meaning of these terms change in the various branches of Islam and in the different Sufi orders where the names are interchanged.
- 78 Wali Ali Meyer, Bilal Hyde, Faisal Muqaddam and Shaabda Kahn, *Physicians of the Heart, A Sufi View of the Ninety-Nine Name of Allah*, xvii.
- 79 As quoted in *Physicians of the Heart, A Sufi View of the Ninety-Nine Name of Allah*.
- 80 *Dhikr – The Most Common Prayer of Islamic Mystics*. Online at: [http://www.holisticonline.com/Prayer/Spl\\_prayers/hol\\_prayer\\_Dhikr.htm](http://www.holisticonline.com/Prayer/Spl_prayers/hol_prayer_Dhikr.htm). (accessed June 22, 2016).
- 81 Roya Azul, *The Magical Power of Arabic Letters*. Online at: <http://www.theartofislamichealing.com/the-magical-powers-of-arabic-letters>. (accessed June 23, 2016).
- 82 Ibid.
- 83 *Sunnah* is the verbally transmitted record of the teachings, deeds and sayings, silent permissions (or disapprovals) of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad, as well as various reports about Muhammad's companions.
- 84 Shems Friedlander, *Ninety-Nine Names of Allah* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1993), Foreward.
- 85 Robert Frager, *Heart, Self and Soul: The Sufi Psychology of Growth, Balance, and Harmony* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 1999), 23.
- 86 Abu al-Qasim ibn Muhammad Junayd, al-Baghdadi was one of the most celebrated of

- the early Persian Sufi's of Islam. He is central figure in the golden chain or lineage of spiritual masters and was an important figure in the development of Sufi doctrine.
- 87 Muhyi-d-Dīn ibn 'Arabī (d.1240), is considered to be one of most influential Muslim mystics, poets and philosophers, and was given the appellation *ash-shaykh al-akbar* "the greatest of spiritual masters."
- 88 John Gilchrist, *Muhammad and the Religion of Islam* (Benoni: South Africa: Jesus to the Muslims, 1986), 346.
- 89 Eric Geoffroy, "Approaching Sufism," in: *Sufism: Love and Wisdom*, 57.
- 90 Reza Shah Kazemi, "The Notion and Significance of Ma'rifa in Sufism," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 13:2 (London: Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, 2002), 155-181.
- 91 Eunice Villaneda, "Ma'rifa and Gnosis: The System of Divine Knowledge in Sufism and Valentinianism" in the *Claremont Journal of Religion*, Vol. 3, Issue 2, (Long Beach, CA: California State University, 2014), 112.
- 92 This saying is from Hadith Qudsi, which are were given in the Prophet Mummmand's own words.
- 93 Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabī, as quoted in "The Notion and Significance of Ma'rifa," 158.
- 94 From a well known Hadith or saying of the Prophet Muhammad.
- 95 William C. Chittick, "Ibn 'Arabī on the Benefit of Knowledge," *The Essential Sophia*, WorldWisdom Inc., 2006. [http://www.worldwisdom.com/public/viewpdf/default.aspx?articlettle=Ibn\\_Arabi\\_on\\_the\\_Benefit\\_of\\_Knowledge\\_by\\_William\\_Chittick.pdf](http://www.worldwisdom.com/public/viewpdf/default.aspx?articlettle=Ibn_Arabi_on_the_Benefit_of_Knowledge_by_William_Chittick.pdf) (accessed April 2, 2016).
- 96 Titus Burckhardt, *An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, 22.
- 97 Idries Shah, *The Sufi's* (London: Octagon Press, 1964), 129.
- 98 Yunis Emre, a Sufi dervish, was one of Turkey's most distinguished poets who exercised a powerful influence of Turkish literature. Emre was venerated as a Saint after his death.
- 99 Martin Lings, *What is Sufism*, 48.
- 100 Ibid., 48-49.
- 101 These lines are thought to be from Bahā'u'llah, *The Seven Valleys*.
- 102 The symbol of the Sufi Path is a Heart with Wings superimposed upon the Sun. It depicts that the heart is medium between soul and body, spirit and matter. The Wings are the symbol of spiritual progress and aspiration. The Crescent represents the responsiveness of the crescent moon to the light of the Sun, for it gradually receives the light, which develops it until it becomes the full moon. Thus Crescent in the heart signifies that the Heart is responsive to the light of God and will be illuminated by the Sun. The explanation of the Five-Pointed Star is a symbol of the perfected Man or the God realized Man. The Sun is a symbol of the Spirit. The image here is used in the Universal Sufi Orders.
- 103 Hazrat Inayat Khan, "Dedication of the Universal," 1926.
- 104 The saying: "To die before you die," is attributed to the Prophet Muhammad. It is also a famous Zen saying.
- 105 As quoted from *BuddhaNet* in an article titled "Sufi and Dzogchen Reflections," <http://www.buddhanet.net/index.html> (accessed May 2, 2016.)
- 106 Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 6.
- 107 Al-Hujwiri, *The Kashf Al-Mahjub* (The Revelation of the Veiled), trans., Reynold A. Nicholson (Gibb Memorial Trust, 2000), 367.
- 108 Maulanā Jāmī, as paraphrased from the Schimmel's *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 6.
- 109 N. Hanif, *Biographical Encyclopaedia of Sufis: Central Asia and Middle East* (New Delhi: IND: Sarup Book Publishers Ltd., 2002), 469.
- 110 Helena P. Blavatsky, "A Treatise on Sufism," *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, Vol. 4 (CD-ROM; Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1882), 162.
- 111 Seeyed Hossein Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, 76.
- 112 Seeyed Hossein Nasr, *Sadr al-Dīn Sīrāzī and his Transcendent Theosophy* (Tehran, Iran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1978), 58.
- 113 William Chittick, "Ibn Arabi," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2014 Online at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ibn-arabi/> (accessed June 30, 2016).
- 114 William Chittick, "Ibn Arabi," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- 115 Anub Whitehouse, *Sufi Amanesis: State, Stations, Stages and Practices*.
- 116 Ibid.
- 117 Ibid.
- 118 William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 377.
- 119 Anub Whitehouse, *Sufi Amanesis: State, Stations, Stages and Practices*.

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<sup>120</sup> Idries Shaw, *The Sufi's* (London: The Indries Shah Foundation, 1964), 20.

<sup>121</sup> Seeyed Hossein Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, 32.



## Walking the Spiritual Path: A Contemporary Perspective

William Meader

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Spiritual development is akin to being on a long and arduous journey. Often called the *Path*, traveling it requires that an individual inwardly recognize the soul, and be committed to more fully expressing it in everyday life. Though long and difficult (at times), it is a journey that everyone must begin, in this life or another. The Path eventually leads a person to the summit of human evolution—perfected consciousness and enlightenment. Because of this, an understanding of the Path can be helpful when trying to walk it. To understand the Path we must first remember that human consciousness is dualistic. Essentially, there are two parts to the mind—a lower and higher division. The lower portion is connected to the ego (personality), and is usually the focus of our day-to-day consciousness. The higher portion contains qualities such as compassion, understanding and wisdom and is related to the soul. The soul and personality therefore form a fundamental duality within each of us.

As a prerequisite to walking the Path, one must *consciously* recognize this duality within him/herself. When clearly seen, an individual begins to yearn to express the soul more fully in all aspects of daily life. Within the privacy of his or her thoughts, a solemn pledge is then made. It is a vow to strive to be the soul deep within, and to adopt a set of spiritual disciplines in support of this end.

Interestingly, this is the deeper meaning behind the use of the word *disciple*. To strive toward the soul is to be a disciple of the soul. From a certain perspective, discipleship and the Path are interdependent notions. The two go hand-in-hand. Indeed, in some esoteric literature the spiritual journey has been called the *Path of Discipleship*.

*An Impersonal Approach to Life*

Many people believe that the Path is an outer journey. Though this is an understandable assumption, it is nonetheless a misperception. Instead, the Path is better understood as an inner passageway. To walk it necessitates that an individual strive to be the higher consciousness s/he inwardly senses. As such, it is more true to say that the Path is a psychological thread leading to the place where one's higher nature is found—the soul.

However, it should not be assumed that the Path has no relationship to outer life. It clearly does. A person's way of life always reveals his/her states of consciousness. The outer circumstances of life simply mirror the nature of the mind. When on the Path, a changed attitude toward life will invariably ensue. This is evidenced in a new and emerging set of values to live by, often to the dismay of society.

For example, the incentives of life become more impersonal. Society's encouragement to acquire wealth and prestige lose their persuasive power. Personal wants and desires become less significant, and the needs of the whole grow in importance. The more one identifies with the soul, the more impersonal and decentralized s/he becomes.

When consciousness lets go of its preoccupation with its individuality (ego), it then expands. Because of this, a person will begin to

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subtly sense humanity's oneness, and the motivation to serve will inevitably appear. Stated differently, the decentralization of consciousness leads to the recognition of oneness, and this gives rise to the impulse to serve. As such, life becomes increasingly service driven and impersonal.

### ***Prerequisites of the Path***

The requirements for walking the Path have changed over time. For many centuries the emphasis has been on the sacredness of love and its power to transform human life. Historically, love has been viewed as the centerpiece of spirituality, and that the way to God was through the heart. Yet, just as everything in creation is evolving, our understanding of the spiritual Path also changes over time. Though love is an essential quality of the soul, the higher mind is equally important.

As the rightful companion to the heart, higher mind is indispensable when on the journey toward enlightenment. Unlike the lower mind, with its emphasis on knowledge, the higher mind is the custodian of wisdom. Through it, we are able to grasp broad and abstract truths. It is therefore important to blend mind and heart, for they support each other. Love always insures that oneness is felt, while the mind conveys the soul's wisdom and purpose.

### ***Spiritual Service: A New Paradigm***

So much of the Path obliges us to assume responsibility for the welfare of humanity. Service is therefore an essential component to soul consciousness and discipleship. Yet in our contemporary understanding of the Path we see that the nature of service has also evolved. It has become something much broader and more encompassing.

In the past, service to those who are suffering has been the emphasis. The legacy of this is

found in the great humanitarian initiatives we see today. Of course, this is good and must continue. However, the higher understanding of service moves us to widen the context through which it is rendered. To know the oneness of humanity is to know that service is

possible everywhere, and in every circumstance.

Modern-day discipleship encourages us to realize that social systems are also evolving expressions of life. Whether we consider politics, business, education or the arts, all are living forces struggling to evolve into a higher form. As such, service can (and must) be rendered within every social institution.

Walking the Path requires that people see societal systems in this way. It is to know that all institutions are essentially spiritual, and all are venues where upliftment can be offered.

### ***The Dark Night Experience***

Travel along the Path is by no means consistent and steady. Often an individual will feel deeply aligned to his/her soul, only to later feel spiritually lost and bereft. Though such experiences are frustrating (to the personality, not the soul), it is something that naturally occurs. This is the basis for the *dark night of the soul* experience as initially conveyed by St. John of the Cross in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The dark night experience only occurs because there is still imperfection in the personality's relationship to the soul. Sometimes the personality unwittingly causes the dark night experience. Yet at other times the soul is the instigator. When the personality triggers the event, it is because its selfish tendency is reasserting itself. This causes the Path to become darkened and obscure, at least temporarily.

When the soul initiates the darkness, it is for the purpose of arresting the hastening person-

ality. The personality yearns to unite with the soul, but has not yet purified itself properly. At such times, the soul will cast a cloud of darkness over the personality, thus forcing it to more honestly appraise its readiness (or lack of it). Such dark night experiences are built into the nature of the Path itself, and are inescapable.

### ***Concluding Remarks***

To walk the Path requires that a person become conscious of his/her own duality—the soul and personality. From this realization, a commitment to live and express the soul's wisdom naturally ensues. Personal desires gradually (and inevitably) yield to the evolutionary needs of humanity. Service to the

larger whole is therefore a feature when walking the Path. And, though there are times when one loses sight of the Path, most often, such blindness is only temporary. Darkness is sometimes necessary, for it adjusts the personality as a prelude to receiving greater light.

Initially, to step onto the Path requires that we reverse our thinking about it. Though discipleship is proven through a life of service, this is merely an effect that arises when on the spiritual journey. It is not the Path itself. Instead, the Path is best understood as an inner passageway leading to one's authentic identity, the soul. In this regard, the ancient aphorism holds true—*“to find the Path one must become the Path.”*

## Book Reviews

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*A Synthesis of Alchemy*, by Dorje Jinpa, second edition, Ashland, OR: Pentarba Publications, 2016. Hardcover, 170 pages. List price US \$35. Available at: Amazon.com.

Few subjects have been as ill treated as alchemy. Thousands of medieval manuscripts purported to reveal alchemical secrets to the initiated, but most were impenetrable, and vital information was withheld or veiled in allegory. Worse, much of the content was copied from other manuscripts, leaving readers wondering which, if any, of the writers had personal knowledge of the art. Many would-be alchemists probably died from mercury poisoning, or from explosions in their labs. Fraud was not unknown, along with the greed of wealthy patrons. Yet alchemy maintained broad credibility for more than a millennium.

By the nineteenth century the scientific establishment had concluded that chemical elements were immutable. The present consensus is that elements cannot be transmuted by chemical means alone, though they can by nuclear fusion and fission and a few scientists concede that transmutation may take place in living organisms. But claims by twentieth-century individuals, like Jean Julien Fulcanelli and R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz, to have turned lead into gold are swept under the accommodating rug of “pseudoscience.” Meanwhile, Carl Jung—to the great relief of people troubled by the prospect that transmutation might actually be feasible—turned alchemy into a symbol of psychological integration and a set of archetypes populating the collective unconscious. New Agers use it as a metaphor for any kind of personal transformation. Serious esotericists suspect that there is something “out there,” but are unsure what it is, and fondly refer to any kind of esoteric activity as “the Great Work.”

Dorje Jinpa offers us new insights into alchemy, presenting, in little more than one hundred pages, a view of the subject that, even in

itself, is profoundly transformative. These 100-or-so pages make up Part One of *A Synthesis of Alchemy*; Part Two is an anthology of important writings, with interposed commentary. Jinpa gathers, interprets and integrates quotes from Buddhist, Taoists, Vedic Hindu, and other sources, as well as from the classical literature of the West, to present a synthesis of alchemical thought spanning two millennia and multiple levels of reality. Alchemy involves not just physical transmutation but, on higher levels, transformation and transfiguration (pp. 24-25).

Not surprisingly, much alchemical lore has been misunderstood. Jinpa compares Arabic alchemists, whom he judges were right in their methods, with Paracelsus whom he said erred. The author criticizes modern Tantra for its focus on physical sex, which was always renounced by the celibate adepts of the East (pp. 51-53, 63-54).

The alchemical literature is replete with symbols, in part to protect essential knowledge from potential abuse, but also because ordinary language is inadequate to express the underlying truths. For instance, Jinpa explains that “mercury” is a code word not only for the planet or the god Mercury, but also for Buddha. “Mercury, sulphur and salt” stand for life, consciousness and form; or spirit, soul and body. “The Mother Principle” relates to the etheric subplanes.

Physical transmutation involves extraction of the etheric essence—the “idea” of a substance—from dense matter, elevation of the essence’s vibration, and return of the vitalized essence into dense matter (pp. 23, 35-37). The process may occur naturally in a plant. More importantly, from our perspective, it can take place under the control of the Will within the alchemist’s own being; indeed the alchemist’s “crucible” is the etheric body (p. 57). But Will alone is not enough; it must be tempered by Love (pp. 48-49). The dual mechanism is expressed in the union of head and heart. When

the necessary creativity is added to the mix, we have the Ida, Pingala and Sushumna, or the three strands of the Antahkarana.

A major part of a high initiate's alchemical work is the condensation of psychic energy. The work may produce the Rod of Initiation wielded by the Christ or Sanat Kumara; the Philosopher's Stone, to be used in healing; Hermetic gold; the *bindu*, or "pearl" on an adept's brow; or even the "evolved, or *Bodhi-chitta* crystals" found in the cremains of saints (pp. 54-61). These last are said to be so powerful that they multiply after the saint's death and can be distributed to locations where his or her energy is needed. The author claims that one such crystal was carried to Oregon (p. 63). The multiplication and distribution of Bodhichitta crystals calls to mind the proliferation of relics in the Christian West, where, among much else, "splinters of the True Cross" are estimated to compare in their total mass with a battleship.

For the ordinary disciple, the all-important transmutation is of the human vehicles, from their initially coarse, dense form into the brilliant, light-filled, ethereal form of the high initiate. This transmutation runs parallel to the path of transformation of consciousness (p. 73-74). For much of the way the path is dark, recalling John of the Cross's "dark night of the soul": a period of "aridity" in which necessary cleansing takes place. But the seeker finds his or her way by the guiding light in the head. This light is portrayed variously as a brilliant light with a dark indigo center; a star in a blue circle, with a golden white halo; and the Rose Cross. It is nothing else than the light of the twelve-petalled Causal Body (p. 83).

As the light grows more brilliant it illuminates the whole etheric body. At the third initiation, the entrance to the Greater Mysteries, the etheric body takes on a silver, violet iridescence, earning the descriptor "Rainbow Body" (pp. 99-102). The etheric body becomes the "Body of Light," to which the Golden Fleece of classical mythology hinted. But it is not just wrapped around the dense physical body; it begins to supplant the dense physical form as the vehicle for the indwelling

life. Thus the Body of Light becomes the *augoeides* of Neoplatonist philosophy, or the *mayavirupa*, which adepts can materialize at will. The Body of Light is created by the descent of Spirit from above; "all" the disciple needs to do is remove the obstacles in the etheric, sentient and mental bodies (p. 85).

The descent of Spirit is itself an initiation. Scriptural precedents were Christ's baptism in the Jordan and the descent of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost. In Hermetic symbolism, the White Crowned King descends from his throne to marry the Red Daughter (the kundalini) in the Chemical Wedding (p. 91). The offspring of their union is the Child of the Sun (the Christ?). In an interesting aside, Jinpa interprets the Return of the Goddess as a prophecy of the Externalization of the Hierarchy (pp. 94-95). If this suggests that the Planetary Hierarchy has a feminine quality, he also suggests that the women's movement was divinely inspired (p. 106).

The Great Work is purposely and simultaneously the transmutation/evolution of material substance, consciousness and spirit. Its hallmarks are Oneness, Beauty, Energy, and Group Consciousness (p. 106). The Work is advancing rapidly—for example, Oneness is already expressed in physics, religion, and gender inclusiveness—but much destruction of outworn forms is necessary, and therein lie the woes the world is currently experiencing. (p. 107).

*A Synthesis of Alchemy* is a remarkable book, a must-read for all serious esoteric students. It is too dense to be skimmed. But from a careful reading one comes away, if not with working knowledge of the alchemical process, at least with an appreciation that alchemy is a serious subject, a sense that certain individuals have penetrated its secrets, and a realization that the secrets will eventually be revealed to us as we move forward on the path of discipleship and initiation. While the author makes no claims and betrays no ego, there is little doubt that Dorje Jinpa himself is privy to many of those secrets.

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***Mandala In The Heavens: How the Greek star myths tell the story of the Path of Initiation***, by Paul LaFerla, The Wisdom Bookshelf, Paperback, 245 pages, Publishers Price US\$22.95.

In the course of his studies, Paul LaFerla discovered that the circle of the classical constellations in the heavens is a mandala of enormous size. The mythological lore corresponding to the constellations, as he later came to see, yielded 12 groups of three constellations having certain similarities, such as three fish, three women, three heroes and three objects, etc. In addition, LaFerla realized that these 12 constellations could be paired with the 12 constellations of the Zodiac. Overtime, he found “that all 12 groups of three constellations could be paired with the 12 constellations and signs of the Zodiac according to a ‘likeness’ of some kind.”

Inspired further by the comments of the 9<sup>th</sup> century Arab astronomer-astrologer, Abu Masher, who called the decanate constellations “faces” and the constellation of the zodiac “bodies,” LaFerla came to understand that the three decanates or “three masks” depicted three different phases of energy. Using this key and Abu Masher’s “Sky Clock,” along with Greek constellational legends and the Ageless Wisdom teachings on Initiation and Esoteric Astrology, he recognized that there is an intelligent design in the sky which veils universal truths concerning the “timeless process of spiritual growth and development.”

After providing this background on his research methods, the author sets out to familiarize the reader, particularly those who are new to these ideas, with some of the fundamentals concerning the Astrology of the Soul and other relevant concepts from esoteric philosophy. The three chapters that follow explore the Three Crosses of esoteric astrology, which indicate the three basic stages or phases of human development. An explanation of the esoteric significances of the Cardinal, Fixed and Mutable Crosses and their relationship to the growth of consciousness is provided. An outline of the three-decanate constellations pertaining to each sign in the cross, based on a “likeness” of some kind is also included. In

discussing the Cardinal Cross, for example, the three birds, the Raven, the Eagle and the Swan are paired with Aries; the River, the Band, and the Arrow are paired with Cancer; the Cup, the Lyre and the Altar with Flame are paired with Libra, while the Ship, the Serpent Fighter and the Centaur are paired with Capricorn. Also included is a brief description of what each image depicts. For instance, the three-decanate constellations for Libra are said to symbolize the Heart, the Throat and the Brow/Head centers, respectively. These chapters and all the subsequent chapters contain full color illustrations of the twelve signs of the Zodiac as well as the constellation decanates as they were described in Greek mythology.

LaFerla next turns his attention to the star myths for the 36-decanate constellations, which unfold a narrative of the entire Path of Initiation as it is written in the heavenly mandala. In pairing each constellation with the apposite Greek star myth, and by providing a perceptive interpretation of its symbolism as well as a commentary on its relationship to the Wisdom teachings, LaFerla brings the mandala to life.

The journey through the celestial mandala begins on the Mutable Cross and in the constellation of Virgo, since it contains the active germ of spiritual life whose goal it is to shield, nature and reveal the hidden spiritual reality. LaFerla chooses the myth for Cassiopeia to represent the first decanate phase, which depicts the tests and trials that the integrated personality must undergo in its journey toward Soul consciousness. Queen Cassiopeia is shown sitting upon her throne. As LaFerla explains, this image represents the idea of the “self” “enthroned or seated in the mind. Such a reading is bolstered by the fact that Cassiopeia holds a palm frond, a symbol of victory or the attainment of personality integration and self-consciousness. Cassiopeia thinks of herself as “more beautiful than the Nereids,” the mermaids who lived in the sea. This means that she has a real measure of control over the waters of emotion and recognizes her “self” as being distinct from others, taking pride in it. However, LaFerla reminds us that

the brightest star in this constellation lies at the queen's heart, indicating that she is drawn to a higher reality and to spiritual things. Thus, this first decanate constellation marks the initial phase of personality integration and the incentive toward the life of discipleship.

The star myth that follows is the Sea Monster (Cetus). In this myth the arrogant Cassiopeia is punished by Poseidon who sends a sea monster to ravage the coast of her country. She fends off the attack by sacrificing her daughter, Andromeda, to the monster. Poseidon is said to represent the forces of desire, which creates the sea monster or dominant personality. Hence the myth can be understood to symbolize the phase of inner conflict between the self-centered personality (Cassiopeia) and the newly sensed, higher, spiritual reality or consciousness (Andromeda).

In the next myth Orion is promised the hand of a maiden in return for ridding the King's land of wild animals. After the King reneged on his promise, Orion takes the maiden by force (representing the fulfillment of personal desires). As a punishment Orion is blinded and banished to Lemnos where Hephaestus takes pity upon him and offers one of his assistants to serve as Orion's eyes. Orion heads eastward where the dawning light restores his vision. LaFerla sees this third phase of the journey as a struggle with the remnants of desire, and as a crisis of disillusionment where the personality-centered life loses its appeal and the man or woman gropes blindly in search for greater meaning. Greater meaning comes from Hephaestus, who symbolizes the Soul as the shaper of the personality, and whose young apprentice, sitting atop Orion's shoulders, implies the first attempts at meditation.

From here, LaFerla leads the reader through the star myths for each of the decanate constellations leading up to and including the First Initiation. The chapters that follow guide the reader through the decanate constellations

associated with the Second, Third and Fourth Initiations, until having come full circle, the sea monster is slain, and Andromeda (consciousness) is freed by the initiate Perseus who then marries her and returns her to her spiritual source at the Fifth Initiation.

The book includes two Appendices. Appendix A includes a "Sky Clock," (Table 1) used by the ancients to tell the time at night. Also included is a "Likeness Key" (Table 2), and a table (Table 3), that numbers the constellations according to their place on the Sky Clock. These are combined to arrive at the "Sequence Key" (Table 4), which tells the unfolding story of the Path of Initiation. Appendix A is somewhat complicated and may be difficult for the novice or non-astrologer to follow. Given the importance of these Tables, the author might have included them in the first chapter to give the reader a better understanding of how he arrived at the Sequence Key. Appendix B contains information on the various myths that were used by the author as well as a Pronunciation Guide.

*Mandala in the Heavens* provides insightful interpretations of the symbolism contained in each of the 36 star myths. It weaves key elements of esoteric philosophy into the text, in such a way as to provide an accessible introduction to the Ageless Wisdom teachings and the Path of Initiation. It should be noted here that this book, which breaks new ground on a fascinating but somewhat complex theme, deserves to be reviewed by an astrologer with a solid understanding of the decanate constellations and the ordered relationship between them.

That said, this book makes a valuable contribution to the subject. The author's effort to introduce the reader to the rich symbolism of the star myths, and unlock the meaning of the *Mandala in the Heavens* represents an inspired and welcome achievement.

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