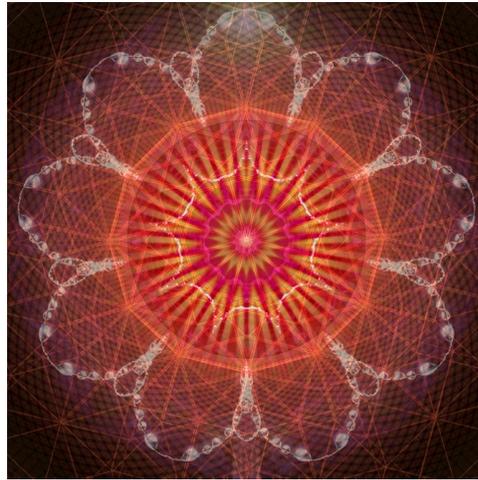


Spring 2019, Volume 14, Number 4



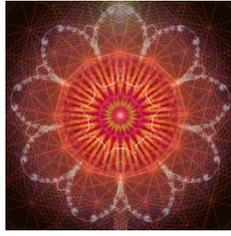
The Esoteric Quarterly

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



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The Esoteric Quarterly

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The 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.

Sacred Science

One may well ask, what is “sacred science,” what do these seemingly contradictory terms imply? Science (from the Latin *scientia* meaning “knowledge”) is a systematic method derived from observation, study, and experimentation. Its function, according to Dmitri Mendeleev, is to “discover the existence of a general reign of order in nature and to find the causes governing this order.” Mendeleev goes on to say that this refers in equal measure to man and to the universe as a whole. Sacred (from the Latin *sacra* meaning to consecrate) denotes that which is worthy of dedication or reverence. Thus the term *scientia sacra* or sacred science, as the perennial philosopher Seyyed Hossein Nasr explains, refers to the study and “application of metaphysical principles to the macrocosm as well as the microcosm.” A sacred science then, is one that eschews scientific materialism as well as the vague mystical phase but utilizes the disciplines of science in conjunction with the esoteric and occult approach. Included among these sciences are: Esoteric Astrology, the Science of the Soul and the Science of Seven Rays, along with other spiritual methodologies, such as those forming the enduring inner core of the major spiritual and religious traditions, which have always provided humanity with deeper ways of knowing.

Our first offering is from Maureen Richmond. In this article, Richmond identifies the underlying principles of Djwhal Khul’s *Esoteric Astrology* as found in the books of Alice A. Bailey, his amanuensis. Richmond’s primary focus is the “three distinct domains of knowledge central to the right comprehension of Alice Bailey’s esoteric astrological science. These are the principles of causation, principles of energy dissemination, and principles of spiritual guidance.” Richmond’s accessible and synthetic exposition leads the reader to a clear “understanding that, according to Bailey’s writings, fixed stars activate the Monad, the

signs of the zodiac speak to the soul, and the influences of the planets in the solar system concern the affairs of the personality.”

Zackary Lansdowne contributes the fifth article in a series of articles elucidating the psychological causes of disease inherent in all forms infused with life by the imperfect gods representing the energies of the Seven Rays. Having previously examined the theme in relationship to the Second, Third, Fourth and Sixth Rays, Lansdowne now focuses on the Seventh Ray psychological causes of inharmony and disease. In this article the author’s primary references are the works of Alice A. Bailey and Lucille Cedercrans. Lansdowne’s verse-by-verse analysis of the symbolic stanza from *Esoteric Healing* for the Seventh Ray “depicts the laws of creation, indicates practicable lessons for the path of white magic,” and “explains the imperfections inherent in this ray.”

Our next article from Vijay Srinath Kanchi, explores the *Philosophy of Visual Perception* and the various theories regarding the ways in which the eyes see and interpret the surrounding environment. The author begins by providing a brief history of vision theories in Greece, the Middle East and India, before turning his attention to the two major theories of intromission and extramission. Also included is a section on the traditional Indian “*tanmātras*,” the subtle or primordial elements which are the basis of the sense qualia. Kanchi then ties these ancient beliefs, particularly those of the Sāṃkhya and Vaiṣeṣhika Schools, to the newest theories on perception in science.

The final article in this issue explores the hidden *Feminine Dimension in Islamic Esotericism*. Its author begins by examining some of the negative stereotypes regarding Islam’s misogyny and the complex and wide-ranging legal status of women in the Muslim world. An overview of the polytheistic beliefs

practiced in local shrines and temples such as the Ka'aba before the introduction of Islam, reveal the high importance afforded the feminine in Arabia. Traditional Islamic conceptions of male and female genders are discussed, as well as a section examining how various Islamic and Sufic commentators have understood the feminine as “providing a privilege of extraordinary proximity to the Divine.” The article concludes by examining the characteristics and various manifestations of the esoteric feminine in the Sufic and Islamic traditions.

It is a pleasure to once again feature the poems of Irina Kuzmisky, poet, author, singer, songwriter, and dancer with a doctorate from Oxford. The poems offered here are “Hagar I” and “Hagar II,” originally published in *Diamond Cutters* (ed. Andrew Harvey and Jay Ramsay; Tayne Lane, 2016) and “Spring” from *Into the Silence* (Chrysalis Poetry, 2016). The first two poems pay homage to Hagar, Sarah’s Egyptian servant and surrogate mother of Abraham’s first son Ishmael who were exiled into the desert by Abraham at Sarah’s direction. Mother and child escape death when God sees them and sends an angel to causing the gushing forth of the *zamzam* well—the “water of life” or “spirit.” Hagar is revered in Islam as the mother of Ishmael and the Arab people. The second poem needs no introduction.

Our *Pictures of the Quarter* are by Agnes Pelton (1881–1961), a member of the American Transcendentalist Painting Group, whose purpose was to carry the viewer “beyond the appearances of the physical world into the imaginative, ideal and spiritual realms.” Pelton’s works were influenced by literature and poetry as well as by the esoteric and spiritualist writings of Madame Blavatsky on Theosophy and Occultism. The paintings featured here—“The Fountain” and “The Blest,” were made possible by the *Phoenix Art Museum*, whose exhibit of the artist’s works will run from March 2 – September 8, 2019.

This issue also includes a short paper contributed by John Nash on Cyril Scott, the English composer, writer, poet and occultist and one of the “Great Esotericists” of the past

who believed that music was “a divinely inspired art,” and “an important catalyst for change” that had a tremendous influence on human lives.

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.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor:

Donna Brown's article on "The Feminine Dimension in Islamic Esotericism," in this issue of the *Quarterly* is a scholarly manuscript on a timely and significant subject, clearly written, well referenced and elegantly executed.¹²

Considering the Divine Feminine, the "Oneness" of the "Absolute" is a concept that I have approached with semantic caution. When the author states, "In the strict monotheism of Islam, God is shown to be "One without a second," I say true, but "without a second" may also need to imply "without a prior." Monism (oneness) without precedents may be found inconsistent with the concept of the "Absolute."

Instead, if we use the Zero as the semantic signifier of the Absolute, as in the "Nothingness of the Absolute," then we can postulate the existence of an unqualified, unmanifest Source from Which all polarities emerge, including the masculine (projective father) and feminine (receptive mother) principles.

The Soul, or the middle Principle in manifestation, may be considered a *reflection* of this absolute Zero. The masculine spiritual Hierarchy of Masters of Compassion and Wisdom ruled by the Father Principle (Monarch in Shamballa), complemented by the feminine Angelic Kingdom ruled by the Mother Principle (Queen of Heaven), would be an example of the semantic derivation of such coequal principles.

Algebraic² derivation (from Arabic "al-jabr,"³ literally meaning "reunion of broken parts")

The Absolute

Zero (the unqualified Source)

P=P (undifferentiated but qualified Parental Principle)

Duality

P=F=M (differentiated but equal Father and Mother Principles)

Trinity

F+M=C (the unredeemed material Child substance)

Surrender

F+M-C= Zero (Surrender of unredeemed material substance)

Return to the Source (the nondual Zero)

The author states, "God or Allāh is an ineffable reality, the differentiated aspects of the Absolute, which are neither identical nor distinct from the essence..."⁴ I agree with this concept of God as absolute *no-thingness*.

Oneness may be considered masculine; Duality feminine; Zeroness, or no-thingness, is neither, being the Source of both.

Unredeemed substance is a material reflection that has been erroneously equated with the feminine principle by patriarchal theologians. As stated by the author,

Worship of the Mother, the Goddess or the eternal feminine is one of the oldest, most pervasive and important forms of worship on earth. But over the past 2,000 years, the feminine has been cast into the shadows by a religious patriarchy that has done its best to obscure, repress and even malign the feminine spirit.⁵

The redeemed substance of the Holy Spirit is the Mother impregnated by the Father, giving birth to the Prodigal Child, *Herself*, as revealed in the keynote of Virgo: I am the Mother and the Child. I, God, I, matter am.

As suggested by Jung,⁶ the androgynous Child (Soul) becomes the feminine spiritual mediator (quest) for man and the masculine quest for woman. Otherwise, it could be considered androcentric to postulate the Divine Feminine

as the spiritual quest archetype for man, with none for women, left to *imitate* the feminine archetype.

Complementary and equal polarities rule the manifestation of the Absolute. Only from nothing can any-thing manifest as coequal principles of creation.

José Becerra
Atlanta, Georgia
thoth8@h otmail.com

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- ¹ Donna M. Brown, “The Feminine Dimension in Islamic Esotericism,” *The Esoteric Quarterly*, Spring 2019.
 - ² Algebra, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Algebra> (Last accessed February 8, 2019).
 - ³ Brown, |The Feminine Dimension in Islamic Esotericism,” 79.
 - ⁴ Ibid.
 - ⁵ Anima and Animus, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anima_and_animus (Last accessed February 8, 2019).

Poems of the Quarter

by Irina Kuzminsky

Hagar I

Sands, sands
Submerge me not

Wasteland
Show me your wells

Water of life
Living water I need
If this child
If I am to live

Fugitive am I
Fleeing from servitude
Death in the wilderness
Beckons
Better I die as I seek my true home
Than eat the bread of contrition

Tent of my master
You brought me a child
Tent where my master's wife led me
And yet my master was not unkind
And I could scarcely bear leave him

Seize me in ecstasy
Seize me in glory
Lost in the desert I perish
Tumbleweed blown
So far from home
A wanderer
I am weeping

Hagar II

*You are El-roi
The One Who Sees Me*

Trembling
Tumbling
Inwards
Vertigo
Threatens
My mind

Desert winds
Heard
Of my wandering
I ask
The sands
To be kind

You
Who can witness
My suffering
You
Are the Lord
Of my life
Your name is
The One Who Sees Me
And I've seen God
Still alive

I am

- Am I -

... *I am*

Spring

Bursts through
In alternating torpor
As darkness cedes to light
Seeds growth from black recesses
Rich and moist and very much alive
Just so my soul awakens
From its slumber
And seeks its own reflection
In God's eyes.

Pictures of the Quarter



The Fountain | by Agnes Lawrence Pelton, 1926 | The Phoenix Art Museum



The Blest | by Agnes Lawrence Pelton, 1941 | The Phoenix Art Museum

Quotes of the Quarter

The prime quality for the favor of receiving the great knowledge is rectitude of motive. Wisdom must be sought only for its serviceability to Brotherhood and progress, not even as an end in itself.

Alvin, Boyd Kuhn, *Modern Revival of Ancient Wisdom* (reprint; 1982; Frankston, TX: TGS Publishers, 1930), 205.

The quality of wisdom ever was and will be yet for a long time to come—to the close of the fifth root race—denied to him who seeks with wealth of the mind for its own sake, and for its own enjoyment and result, without the secondary purpose of turning it to account for material benefit.

A. P. Sinnett, *The Mahatma Letters* (1995; reprint; New York: Quest Books 1923), 305.

In the interior world there can be no unconscious life, no true awareness whatever without a continual dying—without repeated deaths of old attitudes, of superficial desires, and finally of every claim to ego dominance. The fact is that life after death, or rather life out of death, is *the* truth of the universe, natural as well as psychological and spiritual, outwardly as well as inwardly. It would seem unlikely, to say the least of it, that the death of a man's individual psyche should be the one exception to the universal law.

Helen M. Luke, *Dark Wood to White Rose* (New York: Parabola Books, 1989), xi.

Only a symbol can deliver a man from the slavery of words and formulae and allow him to attain to the possibility of thinking freely. It is impossible to avoid the use of symbols if one desires to penetrate into the secrets (mysteries), that is to say, into those truths which so easily be transformed into monstrous delusions as soon as people attempt to express them in direct language without the help of symbolic allegories... occult knowledge

cannot be transmitted either orally or in writing. It can only be acquired by deep meditation.

P.D. Ouspensky, *A New Model of the Universe* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 196.

Pure thought cannot be transmitted, it is necessary to clothe it with something. But this clothing is always transparent for him who knows how to see. Therefore Hermetism addresses itself to those thinkers who are compelled by an inner voice to do to the depths of all things, and remains incomprehensible to those who stop at the external meaning of words.

Oswald Wirth, *L'impostion des mains* (Paris, France: Éditions de la Maisnie, 1975), 14.

We must train our minds to realize that we have in the sphere of our aura those forces whose manifestation is needed for our unfoldment; and that we have the creative thought and will by means of which we can and must bring into being (from out of the seeming nothingness of our circle), that which we need both for our physical and spiritual perfecting.

Harriette Augusta Curtiss, *The Key to Universe* (Washington, D.C., Curtis Philosophic Book Co., 1938), 364-365.

A Symbol is the embodiment if an idea so that it can be dealt with by differing conscious entities, or even between different conscious levels of the same Entity. Thus a Symbol is a means of exchange much like coinage or any mutually acceptable currency. Symbolism may be considered as the currency of consciousness. After all the very words on this page are groups of symbols arranged so as to convey meaning from one mind to another.

William G. Gray, *The Ladder of Lights* (York Beach, ME, Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1981), 11.

Meditation is a technical process whereby the Soul contact is realized and Soul infusion achieved. It is safely carried out as a daily practice only after the persona has dedicated his vehicles to the Soul. If there are any of you, then, who have not and do not make this dedication, do not proceed any further with this instruction; for it would be disastrous to you. At this point you are entering the upward way which leads the errant son into the province of the Father. You will be invoking into your vehicles the higher frequency of Spiritual energies which can only be safely wielded for the betterment of humanity.

Lucille Cedercrans, *The Nature of the Soul* (Whittier, CA: Wisdom Impressions, 1993), 44.

As God creates, so man can create. Given a certain intensity of will, and the shapes created by the mind become subjective. Hallucinations they are called, although to their creator they are real as any visible object is to anyone else. Given a more intense and intelligent concentration of this will, and the forms become concrete, visible and objective; the man has learned the secret of secrets; he is Magician.

Helena Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, Vol. 1 (1999; reprint; Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press, 1877), 62.

The way of completeness is not suppression and annihilation, but the way of development and sublimation of all our faculties.... Completeness can only be established within ourselves through transformation of our personality, or as expressed in Buddhist terminology... through a change or *reversal* of the very foundations of our existence into a state of universality... through the awakening of our faculties of enlightenment.

Lama Govinda, *The Foundations of Tibetan Buddhism* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1977), 80.

Today there is a wide measure of agreement, which on the physical side of science approaches almost to unanimity, that the stream of knowledge is heading towards a non-mechanical reality; the universe begins to look more like a great thought than a great machine. Mind no longer appears as an accidental intruder into the realm of matter; we are beginning to suspect that we ought rather to hail it as the creator and governor of the realm of matter—not of course our individual minds, but the mind in which the atoms of our individual minds exist have grown exist as thoughts.

James Jeans, *The Mysterious Universe* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishers, 2010), 148.

The word *Upanishad* has been derived from the root *sad*, to which are added two prefixes: *upa* and *ni*. The prefix *upa* denotes nearness, and *ni*, totality. The root *sad* means to loosen, to attain, and to annihilate. The etymological meaning of the word is the Knowledge, or *Vidyā*, which, when received from a competent teacher, *loosens* totally the bondage of the world, or surely enables the pupil to attain the Atman or Self, or completely destroys ignorance, which is responsible for the deluding appearance of the Infinite Self as the finite embodied creature.

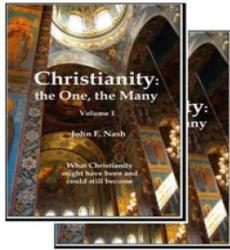
The Upanishads, ed., Swami Nikhilananda, (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 23.

Beauty is by no means...an instrument of “temptation;” it is a manifestation of the Creative Feminine, which is not a fallen Sophia. The appeal addressed to her is rather an appeal to the transfiguration of all things, for Beauty is the redeemer.

Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone* (Princeton, Princeton University, 1997), 166.

Raise your words, not your voice. It is rain that grows flowers, not thunder.

Rumi



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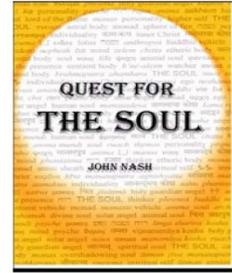
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The General Principles of Alice Bailey's Esoteric Astrology

Maureen Temple Richmond

Abstract

This essay penetrates behind the mass of information given by the Hierarchy in Alice Bailey's *Esoteric Astrology* to identify the core principles on which the system articulated in this volume is based. Synthesizing material from *Esoteric Astrology*, the quintessential *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, and many more of the key Bailey works, this discussion points to three distinct domains of knowledge central to the right comprehension of the esoteric astrological doctrine of Alice Bailey: principles of causation, principles of energy dissemination, and principles of spiritual guidance. Sections on each of the three domains detail the basis for this assertion in the Bailey material. A section on principles of causation explains that the basis of analysis in the discipline of esoteric astrology proceeds from the origin of all energies in the one life pervading all space. A section on influence dissemination considers the etheric body of space and the many specific networks composed of stars, signs, and planets, all of which serve to propagate astrological influence. A section on spiritual guidance features the esoteric astrological concept of variable response, which posits that all beings respond to energy impacts according to their places within the overall evolutionary scheme, as expressed in initiatory status. Useful to both beginning and advanced students of the esoteric astrological philosophy of Alice Bailey, this study takes a structured look at a field often bewildering for its complexity. Readers will come away with the clear understanding that, according to the Bailey writings, fixed stars activate the Monad, the signs of the zodiac speak to the soul, and the influences of the planets in the solar system concern the affairs of the personality.

Introduction

Much interest in the esoteric astrological doctrine of Alice Bailey and the Tibetan circulates in the metaphysical community today, and rightly so. As expounded in *Esoteric Astrology* and other of the Bailey works, this system offers a stunningly enlightened alternative to the sometimes trivial pronouncements of the astrological field in general. By contrast to the treatments of dating and relationship compatibility often featured in popular astrology, Bailey offers a view of human evolution which plainly states that the individual can, if willing, scale the heights of spiritual achievement to walk among the stars and help cosmic evolution onward. Yet, to do so, the individual needs must become a responsible receiver and distributor of energy impacts right here and now, amidst the affairs of life on planet Earth. The esoteric astrological system of Alice Bailey presents a method for doing just that. However, this system in its entirety is spread throughout several locations in the Bailey works, presenting a problem for even the sincere student. Further complicating the

About the Author

Maureen Temple Richmond is a lifelong astrologer and esotericist known for her scholarly study titled *Sirius*, a comprehensive examination of the teaching on that great star as revealed in the works of Alice Bailey. Author of numerous essays, poetry, and fiction, Richmond holds a Master of Arts in English and Creative Writing from Southern New Hampshire University. She is a native of Arkansas, where she currently makes her home. A counseling astrologer, Richmond advises Anglophone clients around the world. She can be reached at starsong1208@gmail.com.

situation, details often overwhelm the general import. For this reason, it's important to consider the main features of the system and what they imply

The Esoteric Astrological System is intimately related to the essentials of esoteric occult philosophy, upon which it is founded. Concepts such as the unity of all things, the existence of lesser lives within greater lives, the triplicity, and the septenary appear abundantly in the esoteric astrological system, just as they do in esoteric occult philosophy.

Before considering the specific components which constitute this system (such as the rays distributed by the signs and planets, the multiple rulership system, and so on), it is therefore helpful for students of all levels to have in mind certain general principles underpinning the orientation of the esoteric approach to astrology. These general principles fall roughly into three categories:

1. Principles of Causation, explaining the origin of astrological energies
2. Principles of Influence Dissemination, describing the distribution of energies throughout creation, and
3. Principles of Spiritual Guidance, pointing toward use of esoteric astrological information as a counseling approach.

Principles of Causation

All energies and astrological influences have their origin, according to the esoteric occult teaching, in the fact that the sum total of creation is but the garment worn by a great Creator who holds all within the folds of its robe. Thus, "space is an entity."¹ In other words, infinite cosmic space is the body of a purposeful, knowing identity. This identity, one with its creation, pervades it all. Any quality of energy rises out of this context. Thus, the esoteric astrological doctrine holds that all astrological influence has its ultimate genesis in the life processes of an underlying synthesis or oneness.²

Contained within this great body of cosmic space are lives lesser to it but far greater than the human dimension. All specific astrological

influences emanate from these Greater Lives,³ which like all things are constituted of a triplicity of life, quality, and appearance.⁴ According to the esoteric astrological doctrine, astrological influences are constituted of the spiritual purposes, psychic qualities, and activities of Great Lives. These radiate outward as surging waves of energies and qualities, which impact all the lesser lives within the spheres of influence of Greater Lives.⁵ Such considerations form the domain of esoteric astrological inquiry, which concerns itself with the conditioning and governing energies issuing forth from the Greater Lives in which our solar system and globe find their places.⁶

As is evident, the esoteric astrological doctrine is a specific instance of the general occult proposition that all lives exist within greater lives and therefore carry out not only their own objectives, but equally those of a greater order.⁷ This arrangement is the basis of the occult dictum that correct esoteric astrological analysis must always proceed from universals to particulars.⁸ In other words, when considering astrological influence, a grasp of the whole situation requires perception of the most inclusive or universal source from which such influence might be found to arise, if truth is to be known and revealed.

The Tibetan spoke of this notion when he dictated to Alice Bailey that the pouring forth of energies and vibrations by cosmic, solar, and planetary entities awakens units of consciousness indwelling lesser forms. Ultimately, the lesser are brought into alignment and close relation with the greater in this fashion.⁹ This exciting perspective on astrological energies emphasizes the potential for upward alignment to be made by any lesser unit with its greater inspiring sources. It also distinguishes the esoteric approach from its exoteric counterpart, which is less concerned with acknowledging the consciousnesses behind impinging astrological energies, and more concerned with the resulting impact of those influencing energies.

Given the wide horizon that the esoteric discipline concerns, it is in keeping that its central focus is the workings of the seven rays, themselves the psychic emanations of the seven

centers in the body of a great Cosmic Logos called The One About Whom Naught May Be Said.¹⁰ In fact, the true nature of all astrological influence is understood to be the seven rays themselves,¹¹ which originate in the seven centers of The One About Whom Naught May Be Said and then pass through the seven stars of the Great Bear¹² on their way to our solar system. These seven rays then flow through the twelve zodiacal constellations (or visible star groupings in deep space), which are represented by the twelve zodiacal signs as defined by the Tropical System.¹³

The rays also flow through the solar system itself, the scheme in which our globe finds place, a scheme of opposite polarity to ours, a globe of opposite polarity to ours, and an unspecified planetary triangle,¹⁴ all of which have an effect on our planet. In sum, the rays flow through constellations, signs, our own solar system, our scheme and other schemes, and various planets ultimately to reach and influence the individual.

More generally, the esoteric astrological system posits that astrological influence emanates from three levels:¹⁵

1. sources outside of the zodiac (or the realm of the fixed stars)
2. zodiacal constellations (or visible star groupings near the ecliptic)
3. planets in our solar system

These three levels correspond to and carry especial influence to the Monad, soul, and personality,¹⁶ operating as causative forces for the respective levels concerned. Thus, the influence of the fixed stars pertains to and stimulates monadic functioning, the influence of the zodiacal constellations awakens and nurtures soul consciousness, and that of the planets activates and eventuates in personality expression. Here is a core notion which can clarify any contemplation or discussion of the esoteric astrological doctrine of Alice Bailey. It makes plain the following. To comprehend the life of the Monad, stars all over the celestial globe and not just in the zodiacal belt must be contemplated. To connect with the evolution and plan of the soul, the signs of the zodiac (and

their related Labors of Hercules) must be studied. To gain right management of the personality, the influences of the planets inside our solar system must be examined. To say this is to say much in few words. Practical application of this notion entails serious study of astronomical and astrological technicalities, but any interested person can open this way of thought simply by memorizing the equivalences: fixed stars = Monad; signs of the zodiac = soul; influences of planets in our solar system = personality. This is one of the most essential keys to the esoteric astrological system.

Principles of Influence Dissemination

Whatever the sources, all astrological and ray energies begin in the vibrational fields of Great Beings and then filter downward through the solar systemic planes to reach our planet, the three planes of normal human endeavor, and the other kingdoms in nature.¹⁷ Thus, in this descent of energies, astrological and ray influences first impact the mental plane, then the astral, and finally the physical.¹⁸ As a result, in the human being astrological and ray influences first register in the mind, then the emotions, and finally the etheric-physical body. This gradual and eventual registration is part of the bigger picture encompassing the universal circulation of energies to and through all.

The coursing of energies through a vast system of interlocking pathways, which pass throughout the various dimensions and regions of creation is, according to esoteric astrology, a fundamental fact of existence.¹⁹ It is because of this underlying fact that emanation, reception, and transmutation of energies can occur.²⁰

The medium of transmission through which all energies travel is the cosmic etheric body,²¹ a web of light substance linking all of creation, from the greatest and most abstract to the least and most concrete. This web of transmission contacts all bodies including the human through the seven major etheric centers of which all units are composed.²²

During transmission through the etheric web linking all units within creation, energies ema-

nating from greater sources are transformed into forces when they merge with and are qualified by the vibrational fields of lesser lives.²³ On this point the Tibetan stated, “I would ask you to bear in mind that these energies are transmitted from one point to another, or pass through with transmuting effect from one centre to another, thus bearing their own vibratory quality but carrying also that of the centre of transmission.”²⁴ Hence, energies are being altered or “qualified” into forces all the time by various lives. This truism applied to the human level is the central concern of ethical occultism, which maintains that it is the part of responsible humanity to practice a conscientious (and not aggressive, self-centered) reception, transmutation, and distribution of energy and force.

When circulating energies and forces reach the human unit, they enter the mental, astral, and etheric-physical fields²⁵ through the agency of the permanent atoms,²⁶ which discharge astrological influence onto the three planes of human endeavor. At this point, the circulating energies and forces have entered fully into the experience of average humanity.

Energies and forces, then, pass through a vast network of interconnected lives. A specific example of this fact is to be seen in the Science of Triangles, an integral part of esoteric astrology. In fact, esoteric astrology is said to be founded upon the notion of the Science of Triangles,²⁷ a study of the infinite connectedness of all things through an endless series of triangular configurations uniting stars, constellations, signs, planets, and kingdoms. It is important to keep in mind that these circulating energies and forces are essentially the seven rays, which come from cosmic sources and work their way through stars, star groupings, planets, and the various kingdoms within evolution.

In particular, the rays flow into, merge with, and are distributed by constellations, or actual star groupings in deep space,²⁸ which should be distinguished from zodiacal signs,²⁹ or mathematical divisions of the ecliptic. The ecliptic is essentially the plane of our solar system as seen from planet Earth. It is that part of

the sky through which the Sun, Moon, and planets are seen to travel. This belt has been divided mathematically into twelve sectors. It is these sectors which constitute the familiar twelve signs of the zodiac. They are not the same as the visible star groupings of the same names, which are farther out in space.

However, the esoteric astrological teaching holds that the zodiacal signs receive energies from the zodiacal constellations of the same names. Hence, ray energies flow into, merge with, and are distributed by the constellations and then the divisions of the ecliptic (or the astrological signs) which represent them.³⁰ It can therefore be said that the rays are distributed through the constellations far out in space and then through the eponymous signs of the zodiac, with which western astrologers are familiar.

Planets, too, play a role in the distribution of rays as energies and forces. Each of the planets distributes a number of rays—the one with which it is primarily associated plus others linked to it in various ways.³¹ Further, the planets are segregated into two groups—the sacred and non-sacred, the qualities of which differ.³² Thus, though ray energies come through non-sacred and sacred planets alike, the qualities of such energies are fundamentally affected by the nature of the distributing planet.

Thus, from abstract cosmic sources to the tangible and visible planets, energies and forces make their ways through the vast and interlinking system of influence dissemination. This they do through the ubiquitous etheric web, which provides the medium of transmission for energies throughout space.

Principles of Spiritual Guidance

After great energies have been sent forth from their emanating sources and carried through the universal medium of distribution to all parts of creation, lesser units such as the Human Kingdom are suffused with the resulting influences. The esoteric astrological approach addresses itself to the right reception and further distribution of such energies through a particular orientation to spiritual

guidance. This unique form of spiritual guidance rests upon a number of propositions, all of which further define the nature of esoteric astrology.

According to the information dictated by the Tibetan to Alice Bailey, the true esoteric astrology makes a clear distinction between the astrology of the ephemeral personality and the astrology of the reincarnating soul.³³ It is the evolution of the soul, also called the solar angel in the Bailey writings, with which the true esoteric astrology is concerned.³⁴ To this end, the esoteric astrology penned by Bailey emphasizes consciousness, which is an attribute of the soul, instead of fixating upon the likes and dislikes of the always fluctuating personality.³⁵

In this way, the esoteric approach to astrological interpretation attempts to get behind outer appearances and events to penetrate into the dimension of meaning and ultimately into the dimension of significance,³⁶ dimensions associated with the levels of the soul and the Monad, respectively. Thus, esoteric astrology does not deal with the delineation of personality traits, as does mainstream astrology, the personality and event oriented approach of which the Tibetan nevertheless deemed entirely sufficient for mass Humanity.³⁷ Instead, esoteric astrology directs its gaze to other matters, such as the tests to be encountered during any particular incarnation while in preparation for initiation, and the nature of energies which are to be used in making a contribution to the outworking of the Plan. Hence, the management of impinging energies must take place in the context of the requirements for initiations and soul growth, not in the context of the demands of the outer form or personality. Here is a key difference in orientation which distinguishes the esoteric astrological approach from its exoteric brother.

All energies and astrological influences have their origin, according to esoteric occult teachings, in the fact that the sum total of creation is but the garment worn by a great Creator who holds all within the folds of its robe. Thus, "space is an entity."

Consequently, the type of guidance or counseling to be found in the true esoteric astrological approach addresses matters wholly different from those usually covered in popular astrological discussions. Instead, esoteric astrology concerns itself with the nature of impinging energies rather than with the relatively small affairs of individual interests and events.³⁸ Even more radically, esoteric astrology is founded upon the recognition that all persons eventually evolve toward Hierarchy and beyond by a series of initiations.³⁹ The type of spiritual guidance thus offered by esoteric astrology deals with right management of energies and forces as a part of certain initiatory tests. Thus, esoteric astrological guidance has relevance only for those members of the Human Kingdom who have willed to tread the Path of Return,⁴⁰ which begins with integration into Hierarchy and continues toward the emanating sources from which all has come.

On the practical level, this means that esoteric astrology seeks to help individuals enhance their contributions to the greater good, particularly through the development of group consciousness, or awareness of the greater groups to which they belong.⁴¹ The means by which this done is a consideration of the right use of ray energies, which according to esoteric astrology, are the most fundamental influences upon the soul.⁴² In fact, the right use of energies is a central ethical concern of esoteric astrology,⁴³ the purpose of which is in part the establishment of a method for effective living based on a recognition of the reality of impinging energies.⁴⁴

In terms of the technical indications that an astrologer can extract from an individual's chart, the matter can be stated as follows. Determination of how astrological energies may be rightly used results from consideration of two classes of astrological influence. These

two classes are first, the energies of the planets, and second, the energies of the signs. Specifically, those on the earlier stages of the path leading to Hierarchy are held responsible for learning to recognize and rightly use the ray energies distributed by the planets in our solar system, while those in the more advanced stages of integration into Hierarchy are charged with recognizing and wisely using ray energies coming from outside the solar system altogether.⁴⁵ This distinction between those on earlier and later stages of the spiritual path is characteristic of esoteric astrology, which is built upon the notion that response to astrological energies varies according to evolutionary (or initiatory) status.⁴⁶

The degree and type of response to astrological influence is largely determined, according to the Tibetan, by the condition of the individual's etheric centers,⁴⁷ commonly referred to as the chakras by those in the fields of metaphysics and holistic healing. These seven inlets for cosmic, systemic, and planetary energies and forces are the gateways by which Humanity enters into rapport with its greater environment. Because of the relatively undeveloped nature of the average human etheric centers, many astrological influences are simply out of range of human perception, according to the Tibetan.⁴⁸ However, as might be expected, this circumstance is in process of change, for the general trend of human evolution is rendering Humanity more and more capable of enhanced receptivity to astrological energies.⁴⁹ It can be anticipated that this new circumstance will bring as much difficulty as advantage initially, as newly awakened Humanity is knocked somewhat off balance by energy impacts with which it is hardly accustomed.

According to the Tibetan, constellational energies (which are of course ray energies in the final analysis) affect individual persons in one of two ways. Such energies can either accelerate or retard evolutionary striving.⁵⁰ The difference in how such energies ultimately affect the individual arises from the level of spiritual progress made before such an activation occurs. Depending upon the degree of spiritual realization reached by the individual, he or she may respond by becoming either more fluid

and interactive with the greater environment, or more rigid and closed to identification with all that exists.⁵¹ Similar distinctions have long been noticed by mainstream astrologers, who well know from repeated experience that the response of individuals to astrological influences such as transits and progression can vary widely, from magnificent flowerings of innate spiritual genius on one hand, to irresponsible and unethical behavior on the other, and this from the same type of influence. Hence, the principle of variable response to identical energy influences is essentially present and recognized in both the exoteric and esoteric approaches to astrology.

The type of analysis and spiritual guidance which esoteric astrology has to offer on this matter of variable response once more points to the central role played by the etheric centers in the reception of astrological energies. According to the esoteric position, activation by impinging astrological energies produces effects either above or below the solar plexus.⁵² This is simply because energies go where the individual has his or her focus of attention. If the focus is upon the evolution of consciousness, universal love distributed to Humanity and all creation, and an intent to exert a constructive influence on the surroundings, astrological activation will mainly enhance the vitality and radiance of the crown, ajna, throat, and heart centers. By contrast, if the individual has most of his or her attention trained on fluctuating emotional responses, desires, and physical comforts, such an activation will head downward to the solar plexus, sacral, and base of spine centers.

The bias of Bailey's presentation of the esoteric doctrine is toward the higher centers in general, for it is from these centers which emanate the potencies which enable an individual to help lift Humanity out of its obsessive focus upon the form nature. Hence, esoteric astrological spiritual guidance includes a definite attempt to assist individuals in centering their attention upon the issues and abilities connected with the etheric centers located "above the diaphragm," as the Tibetan called them. This is not to say that needs for emotional linkages, sex, food and the instinct to preserve one's

physical body (all connected with the solar plexus, sacral, and base of spine) are inherently wrong. As is obvious, these drives play critical roles in the type of physical evolution taking place on our planet. The esoteric position simply adds that another level of functioning is needed for the progressive transformations of consciousness which lead the individual and the collective along the initiatory path and toward integration with the Hierarchy.

The differences between those whose life interests center above the solar plexus and those whose interests center at the solar plexus and below is symbolized in the esoteric astrological system by a three tiered rulership system. In this system, each sign is associated with three planets, or “planetary rulers,” which really do not control or “rule” the sign but instead reveal something about the experience and spiritual knowledge to be gained under the influence of that sign. These three rulers of a sign are denominated the exoteric, esoteric, and hierarchical rulers. They refer respectively to the purpose and nature of experience in a given zodiacal sign for those focused in the form or personality (the exoteric ruler), the soul (the esoteric ruler), or the Monad (the hierarchical ruler). Though complete information regarding the triple rulership system can be found in other essays by this author, the point to be gathered here is that the triple rulership system is the formal and technical way in which the esoteric astrological system embodies the principle of variable response.⁵³ In other words, an individual can respond to the energies of any given sign at the level of the personality, the soul, or the monad, and these three levels are represented by the three tiered multiple rulership system.

Hence, in the type of spiritual guidance offered by the esoteric astrological approach, the attempt to move from a lower to a higher state of functioning is aided by knowledge of the esoteric and hierarchical planetary rulers of a given sign, for these additional rulers represent characteristics and ray energies which should be cultivated in the effort to gain release from the constraints of the form nature and to function more regularly in the universal love con-

sciousness of the soul or the pure spiritual will of the Monad.

For example, the esoteric ruler of Aries is Mercury. The implication is that if one is to move from the aggressive personality centered expression of Aries as symbolized by Mars (the exoteric ruler of Aries), one should follow the path of Mercury which leads to meditation, the development of the mind, and contact with the love-wisdom of the soul. Next, one would strive toward those things esoterically indicated by Uranus, the hierarchical ruler of Aries. Uranus connotes the Will Aspect of Deity and confers powers of dynamic leadership in matters of group relations and the ability to formulate new ideas and concepts pointing toward Divine Potential, thus leading the individual far away from the personal concerns and survival instincts associated with Mars, the exoteric ruler. This brief example makes clear the fact that the individual has a broad range of choices in regard to the way he or she will integrate and express the energies of a sign.

Thus, it can be said that the esoteric position allows for the individual to respond differently to the energies of any given sign. Here is a specific instance of the general principle of variable response, which in its more general form points to the necessary realization and rather obvious fact that individuals respond to astrological energies differently, according to their level of spiritual development.

As can now be seen, the principles of spiritual guidance embraced by the esoteric astrological system emphasize that this type of guidance refers to the life and objectives of the soul, not to those of the temporary personality. Such guidance concerns preparation for initiation and eventual integration into Hierarchy through the development of increasingly inclusive group consciousness and the right management of ray, planetary, and constellational energies.

This approach to astrological counseling acknowledges the critical role played by the etheric centers in the reception and distribution of energies. Furthermore, the type of guidance offered by the esoteric astrological system

contains an intrinsic encouragement to direct incoming astrological energies toward the centers above the diaphragm as much as possible. Finally, this system recognizes that persons respond to the same energy impacts differently. It therefore contains a multiple rulership system designed to capitalize on this fact by providing the individual with a sequence of steps to follow in creating the highest type of response possible.

Conclusion

As has been shown, the general principles of the esoteric astrology of Alice Bailey begin with the identification of the source of astrological causation in greater orders of being. They then progress through an articulation of the medium of transmission by which the life flows of greater beings reach the lesser beings within their bodies of manifestation. Finally, the general principles of the esoteric astrological system conclude in the form of a type of spiritual guidance designed specifically to enhance and accelerate the progress of spiritual seekers toward initiation and integration into Hierarchy. The three domains of causation, dissemination, and applied guidance thus constitute ideas worthy of consideration by esoteric students of all levels and interests. Contemplation on these general domains and their specific notions can open the door which leads right into the pathway to the stars.

¹ Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology* (reprint 1979; New York: Lucis Trust, 1951), 8.
² *Ibid.*, 7.
³ *Ibid.*, 7, 25 – 26.
⁴ *Ibid.*, 630.
⁵ *Ibid.*, 292.
⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.
⁷ In the words of the Tibetan, “...each life—great or small—serves its own ends, yet subserves the greater ends of the Being in whose body it is a corporate part.” Alice A. Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, 360.
⁸ *Ibid.*, 497, 518.
⁹ *Ibid.*, 290 – 291.
¹⁰ *Ibid.*, *Esoteric Astrology*, 26 – 27; Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology I* (reprint 1970; New York: Lucis Trust, 1942), 332 – 333; Alice A. Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, (re-

print 1979; New York: Lucis Trust, 1951), 1051; Alice A. Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic* (reprint 1979; New York: Lucis Trust, 1951), 437 – 438.
¹¹ Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, 14.
¹² *Ibid.*, 85, 421, 607.
¹³ *Ibid.*, 27, 193, 299, 410; *A Treatise on White Magic*, 437.
¹⁴ Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, 24; *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, 1191.
¹⁵ Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, 28. Alternatively, these three levels are also conceptualized on 411 as: 1. zodiacal, 2. systemic, 3. planetary. The first rendering is more consistent with the analogy to Monad, soul, and personality for numerous reasons which will become apparent.
¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 28 – 29.
¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 350.
¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 216.
¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 30, 266; *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, 5; Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Healing* (reprint 1981; New York: Lucis Trust, 1953), 615.
²⁰ Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, 5; *Esoteric Astrology*, 266.
²¹ Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, 9, 10, 11, 30, 496; *A Treatise on White Magic*, 289 – 289, Alice A. Bailey, *Telepathy and the Etheric Vehicle* (reprint 1978; New York: Lucis Trust, 1950), 178; *Esoteric Healing*, 616. According to Blavatsky in her *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 2, 35, this idea was espoused anciently by the pre-Christian Orphic tradition as well, which held that the “aether” was the chief medium between God and created matter.
²² Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, 11, 87.
²³ Bailey, *Esoteric Healing*, 548.
²⁴ Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, 427.
²⁵ *Ibid.*, 267.
²⁶ Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, 658, 694, 697. The same notion was advanced by Besant and Leadbeater in their *Occult Chemistry*, 23.
²⁷ Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, 413.
²⁸ *Ibid.*, 422.
²⁹ Bailey’s *Esoteric Astrology* acknowledges this point fully on p. 621.
³⁰ Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, 193, 299, 410; *A Treatise on White Magic*, 437.
³¹ Planets can be associated with rays from various sources, such as the Monad, soul, and personality of the planet’s informing Logos, the signs within which the planet has any level of rulership, and the schemes with which any

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- particular globe is associated. See Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, pp. 651, 423, 610, 621, 99, 341, 125, 138, 200; *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, pp. 357, 370; *Esoteric Psychology I*, pp. 191, 335, 338, 420, 421; *The Rays and the Initiations* (reprint 1988; New York: Lucis Trust, 1960), 689. A full discussion of this matter follows in a section treating the nature of the planets in the esoteric astrological system.
- ³² Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, 53, 268, 503, 505 – 507, 510.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 30, 262, 465, 498, 510; *A Treatise on White Magic*, 437 – 438.
- ³⁴ Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, 266, 498, 510.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 29, 290, 484, 510.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.* 135, 291; *Esoteric Healing*, 384.
- ³⁷ Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, 498.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 496.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 484.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 465.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 99.
- ⁴² Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic*, 437 – 438.
- ⁴³ Alice A. Bailey, *The Destiny of the Nations* (reprint 1977; New York: Lucis Trust, 1949), 75.
- ⁴⁴ Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, 5.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 22, 23, 30 – 32, 65, 70, 188, 198, 257, 267, 412, 425, 465, 547; Alice A. Bailey, *Externalisation of the Hierarchy* (reprint 1985; New York: Lucis Trust, 1957), 85.
- ⁴⁷ Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, 29, 65, 425; *A Treatise on White Magic*, 290.
- ⁴⁸ Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, 29 – 30, 33.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 270.
- ⁵⁰ Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic*, 434.
- ⁵¹ Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, 411.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, 22, 70.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, 510.

The Seventh-Ray Cause of Inharmony and Disease

Zachary F. Lansdowne

Abstract

The seven rays denote seven primary differentiations of energy, and doctrines on the seven rays have been expounded by various theosophical writers. Alice Bailey, in her book *Esoteric Healing*, presents seven symbolic stanzas that portray “The Seven Ray Causes of Inharmony and Disease,” but with very little explanation. She acknowledges that these stanzas are “abstruse and difficult,” but says that their comprehension leads to “the isolation of the seven psychological causes of disease, inherent in the substance of all forms in this world cycle.” This series of articles elucidates the practical significance of these seven stanzas. The present article, which is the fifth in the series, clarifies the seventh-ray stanza by assembling related quotations from the writings of Bailey as well as Lucille Cedercrans, who presented a teaching called the “New Thought-form Presentation of the Wisdom.” As this article shows, the seventh-ray stanza depicts the laws of creation, indicates practicable lessons for the path of white magic, and explains the presence of imperfection on our planet.

The Seven Rays

The *seven rays* are mentioned in both the ancient Hindu *Rig Veda* and modern Theosophy,¹ and the following definition is often used: “A ray is but a name for a particular force or type of energy, with the emphasis upon the quality which that force exhibits and not upon the form aspect which it creates.”² Alice Bailey (1880 – 1949), a writer in the theosophical tradition, says, “Every unit of the human race is on some one of the seven rays,”³ so the seven rays provide a way of characterizing human beings according to the qualities that they exhibit. She also says, “We must bear in mind that the ... synthetic characteristic of each of the rays is denoted by the ray name,”⁴ and gives the following ray names:

Ray I—Will or Power

Ray II—Love-Wisdom

Ray III—Active Intelligence or Adaptability

Ray IV—Harmony, Beauty, Art

Ray V—Concrete Knowledge or Science

Ray VI—Devotion or Idealism

Ray VII—Ceremonial Order or Magic.⁵

Bailey provides this definition, “When we speak of ray energy we are in reality considering the quality and the will-purpose aspect of a certain great Life to Whom we give the name ‘Lord of a Ray.’”⁶ She considers the Lords of the Seven Rays to be “the seven Spirits who are before His throne,” as rendered in Revelation 1:4,⁷ and gives this analysis:

The seven Spirits, we are told in the Scriptures of the world, are “before the Throne of God”; this signifies that They are not yet in a position to mount the Throne, symbolically speaking, owing to the fact that They have not yet achieved complete divine expression.⁸

Bailey concludes that the Lords of the Seven Rays must be imperfect Gods, so the seven rays, which are their emanations, must also be imperfect:

About the Author

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It will be apparent to you that these streams of force, emanating from the Lords of the Seven Rays, are coloured, therefore, and “tainted”—if I may use such a word—by the limitations of these same great Beings; They are Gods, from our point of view, but in reality, Gods in the making, even though much nearer solar divinity than the most advanced human being is near to planetary divinity. They are the “imperfect Gods” spoken of in *The Secret Doctrine* and are the planetary Logoi of the sacred and non-sacred planets.⁹

Helena Blavatsky (1831 – 1891), a founder of the Theosophical Society, expresses a similar notion:

The millions upon millions of imperfect works found in Nature testify loudly that they are the products of finite, conditioned beings—though the latter were and are Dhyani-Chohans, Archangels, or whatever else they may be named. In short, these imperfect works are the unfinished production of evolution, under the guidance of the imperfect Gods.¹⁰

Blavatsky also writes, “There are seven chief groups of such Dhyani Chohans, which groups will be found and recognised in every religion, for they are the primeval SEVEN Rays,”¹¹ so her preceding quotation has this implication: the millions of imperfect works found in nature testify loudly to the imperfection of the seven rays.

According to these accounts from Bailey and Blavatsky, the Lords of the Seven Rays are imperfect Gods, and every human being shares in their imperfection by being on some one of the seven rays. Is it possible to identify specific human imperfections that reflect the imperfection of each Lord of a Ray?

The Seven Stanzas

Bailey’s book *Esoteric Healing* addresses the various ways that the topic of healing is related to the seven rays. In its chapter on karmic liabilities, this book gives seven symbolic stanzas, one for each ray, that portray “The Seven Ray Causes of Inharmony and

Disease.”¹² Bailey introduces these stanzas with the following comment:

If the great informing Lives of the planets within our solar system are imperfect, the effect of this imperfection must inevitably affect Their planetary creations, Their bodies of manifestation, and thus introduce a karmic condition over which the individual human being has absolutely no control, but within which he moves and which he shares. It is obviously impossible for me to elucidate this theme. All I can do or am permitted to do is to give you seven stanzas from one of the most ancient volumes in the world; it deals with the seven ray causes of imperfections in our planetary manifestations.¹³

She also describes the comprehension that students might obtain from studying these stanzas:

The comprehension of the seven stanzas which I now propose to give you will lead eventually to the isolation of the seven psychological causes of disease, inherent in the substance of all forms in this world cycle, because all forms are infused with the life energy of the “imperfect Gods.”¹⁴

The purpose of this series of articles is to explain these stanzas. Even though *Esoteric Healing* was first published in 1953, and even though its seven stanzas are said to embody revelatory information, no publicized effort seems to have been made, prior to this series of articles, to explain any of these stanzas. A reason for this absence is that each stanza consists of very enigmatic sentences. Bailey herself acknowledges, “These are abstruse and difficult concepts, but they should be pondered upon, and deep reflection will lead to understanding.”¹⁵ The four preceding articles in this series provide explanations of the third-ray,¹⁶ sixth-ray,¹⁷ second-ray,¹⁸ and fourth-ray stanzas.¹⁹

The present article considers the seventh-ray stanza, which consists of seven symbolic sentences:

The Great One gathered to Himself His forces and affirmed His intention to create.

He created that which is outer and can be seen. He saw His creations and liked them not and so withdrew His attention; then the creations He had made died and disappeared. He had no lasting success and saw naught but failure as He travelled on the outer path of life. He comprehended not the need of forms. To some He gave an over-plus of life, to some too little; and so both kinds died and failed to show the beauty of the Lord who gave them life but failed to give them understanding. He knew not then that love sustains.²⁰

Bailey's entire commentary on the seventh-ray stanza is as follows:

The effects of this ray force are most peculiar and will be a great deal more prevalent than heretofore, as this ray is now coming into power. It is this energy which is largely responsible for infections and contagious diseases. The keynote of the work of the seventh ray is to bring together life and matter upon the physical plane. This, however, when viewed from the angle of imperfection, is a bringing together (if you can understand the implications) of Life, the lives and the general livingness of the creative process. This is symbolised by the promiscuity and the endless moving interplay of all life within all lives. The result is therefore the activity of all germs and bacteria within the medium which will best nurture them.²¹

Let us note that Bailey's commentary appears as brief and enigmatic as the stanza that it purports to explain, so there is a need for a more clarifying explanation.

The Seventh-Ray Stanza

The seventh-ray stanza can be clarified by assembling related quotations from the writings of both Bailey and Lucille Cedercrans. Readers of *The Esoteric Quarterly* are probably familiar with Bailey, because of its recent article that focuses on her life and achievements;²² but they may not be familiar with Cedercrans, so let us briefly consider the latter's life and achievements. *Dakini Wisdom*, the publisher of Cedercrans' biography, provides this brief account:

A woman of unusual opposites, Lois Lucille Stickle Johnson Cedercrans Schaible (b.4/4/21 – d.6/21/84) did not finish high school, yet she was wise and knowledgeable beyond any traditional education. She brought a new form of the wisdom of the ages into this world. In striking contrast to the conservatism of her Depression-era, rural upbringing and early adulthood, her methods and training for awakening spiritual growth in herself and others were more esoteric and incredible than expected in that time.

Undeterred by the doubts of others or more gnawingly her own, undaunted by the enormity of her task, her six children, or her lack of formal education, and never disheartened by her many physical ails, Lucille forged open the gateway to wisdom for hundreds of followers from Spokane, Washington, to Washington DC.

Most people know Lucille Cedercrans Schaible as the author of meditation resources such as *The Nature of the Soul*, *The Soul and Its Instrument*, or *Corrective/Creative Thinking*. Developed from 1948 to 1963, her work is called the New Thoughtform Presentation of the Wisdom (NTFPW). In the early 1970s, she began to shift her focus to Tibetan Buddhism, which she was authorized to teach until her death in 1984.²³

Cedercrans associates her work with both the seventh ray and magic, noting that "Magic is the manipulation of the divine law to produce an ordered series of effects in time and space."²⁴ For example, *Applied Wisdom*, which is an extensive compilation of her material, makes this statement:

As the Seventh Ray comes into more active play in this beginning of a new age, a modern teaching anent the fundamentals of magic is needed. This *New Thought-form Presentation of the Wisdom* holds such teaching in solution, to be released through Lucille Cedercrans when there are adequately oriented and trained discipleship groups available to put it into right use.²⁵

Cedercrans' material is helpful for clarifying the seventh-ray stanza, because the latter is also concerned with both the seventh ray and magic. The seventh-ray stanza consists of seven symbolic sentences, and the purpose of this article is to elucidate their practical significance. Each sentence is considered separately and is repeated in bold print.

1. The Great One gathered to Himself His forces and affirmed His intention to create.

In the seventh-ray stanza's first sentence, what does "the Great One" denote? The Lords of the Seven Rays are sometimes called "the seven great Lords,"²⁶ so the straightforward meaning of "the Great One" is that it denotes the Lord of the Seventh Ray. With this meaning, however, the first sentence would depict events in the macrocosmic world that seem to have little practical significance for the mundane world of human beings. Bailey relates these two worlds by regarding the Lords of the Seven Rays as "the Prototypes of man."²⁷ Accordingly, the alternative meaning of "the Great One" is that it denotes the people who are on the seventh ray, because such people reflect their prototype, namely, the great Lord of that ray.

This alternative meaning may seem unusual, but it is consistent with two biblical themes: one's name indicates one's nature;²⁸ and one is influenced by one's line of descent.²⁹ For example, in Genesis 32:28, the change in the patriarch's name from Jacob to Israel indicates the change in his nature: "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed." Israel is also the name of Jacob's descendants (Joshua 3:17, 7:25). James Hastings (1852 – 1922), in *A Dictionary of the Bible*, is impressed by the remarkable way in which Jacob is the prototype of his descendants:

The patriarchs are ... idealized in another direction, in common with many of the other patriarchal figures in Genesis, by being invested with the characteristics which afterwards marked the tribes descended, or reputed to be descended, from them ... But, however that may be, it is impossible not to be impressed by the remarkable manner in which Jacob, both in the brighter and in the

darker aspects of his character, is the prototype of his descendants.³⁰

Consequently, as narrated in the Bible, Israel denotes the people who descend from and thereby reflect the patriarch known as Israel. Similarly, with the alternative meaning, "the Great One" denotes the people who are on the seventh ray and thereby reflect the Great One known as the Lord of the Seventh Ray. In either case, the progenitor is the prototype of the ensuing people, and a designation used for the progenitor is also used for the people themselves. Thus, even though the alternative meaning of "the Great One" may seem unusual, it resembles what can be found in biblical accounts. In what follows, we employ this alternative meaning, because our commentary shows that it yields practical significances that are consistent across all sentences of the stanza.

Who are the people on the seventh ray? Bailey provides this list: "Masons. Financiers. Great businessmen and organisers of all kinds. Executives are found with these energies in their equipment."³¹ She also says:

This is the ceremonial ray, the ray which makes a man delight in "all things done decently and in order," and according to rule and precedent. It is the ray of the high priest and the court chamberlain, of the soldier who is a born genius in organisation, of the ideal commissary general who will dress and feed the troops in the best possible way. It is the ray of the perfect nurse for the sick, careful in the smallest detail, though sometimes too much inclined to disregard the patients' idiosyncrasies and to try and grind them in the iron mill of routine.³²

Bailey writes, "The seventh ray disciple works consciously by means of certain laws, which are the laws governing form and its relation to spirit or life."³³ The seventh-ray stanza's first sentence depicts a key law of creation, and its initial phrase states: "The Great One gathered to Himself His forces." Bailey makes a similar but longer statement:

This the disciple must also do, gathering his forces (to use a common expression) into

the highest point of his mental consciousness and holding them there in a state of absolute tension.³⁴

The initial phrase appears to be an abbreviation of Bailey's longer statement, in which case the initial phrase can be inferred as signifying this more complete idea: Seventh-ray people gather their forces into the highest point of their mental consciousness, holding them there in a state of absolute tension.

Both Cedercrans and Kurt Levin (1890 – 1947), known as the founder of social psychology, connect “intent” and “will”: Cedercrans says, “Will in use is nothing more than focused *intent*,”³⁵ and Levin says, “Intentional actions are usually considered the prototype of all acts of will.”³⁶ Thus, in the first sentence's final phrase, the “intention to create” is an act of will. Given the preceding inference that the initial phrase deals with the mind, the overall sentence is concerned with these two factors: will and mind.

Cedercrans describes two laws that govern the relationship between will and mind:

The Law of Polarity—when the polar forces of Will and Mind are brought into a relationship with one another, the creative process begins. A magnetic field is created within the mind by that polarity.³⁷

The Law of Magnetic Control—when a magnetic field is created within the mind and maintained there, mental substance is set into motion in the pattern dictated by the will. A thought is born via the magnetic control of substance.³⁸

Bailey does not mention the “Law of Polarity” in her books, but she does write about the “mystery of Polarity” and says, “It signifies essentially the form-building work in substance, and its energising by the spiritual aspect.”³⁹ She also mentions “the mental substance of our mind,”⁴⁰ and “vibrations, engendered by will, working through love-wisdom, and energising substance,”⁴¹ so Bailey's “mystery of Polarity” could be the same as Cedercrans' “Law of Polarity.”

Bailey mentions “The Law of Magnetic Control, governing the control of the personality

by the spiritual nature, via the soul nature,”⁴² which has the same name as Cedercrans' second law. Bailey's description is vague, however, so it is not clear whether her law is actually the same as Cedercrans' second law. Bailey says, however, “No one can be a ... magician until the will and the thought work in unison,”⁴³ which supports Cedercrans' second law by describing its outcome.

The Bible also provides support for both of Cedercrans' laws. Colossians 3:2 says, “Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.” This verse illustrates the first law, because the setting of the mind is an act of will that, in Bailey's words, “sets a ring-pass-not around the mind, and which says to the mind, ‘thus far shalt thou go, and no farther.’”⁴⁴ Genesis 6:5 says, “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” This verse illustrates the second law, because it contains the notion that one's continual, or maintained intent determines one's thoughts.

The first sentence's final phrase, “and affirmed His intention to create,” brings together will and mind, because the mind makes this affirmation, so the sentence implements Cedercrans' “Law of Polarity.” To *affirm* could mean to “maintain,”⁴⁵ in which case the sentence would also implement Cedercrans' “Law of Magnetic Control,” thereby creating a thought in the pattern dictated by the intention.

Consequently, the first sentence is given this meaning: *Seventh-ray people gather their forces into the highest point of their mental consciousness, holding them there in a state of absolute tension, and maintain their intention to create, thereby creating a thought in the pattern dictated by their intention.*

2. He created that which is outer and can be seen.

Bailey mentions “the soul, the central self,”⁴⁶ and speaks of the human constitution in the following order: “Physical body, sensitive emotional nature, mind and soul.”⁴⁷ The stanza's first sentence portrays the creation of a thought in the mind, which is outside the soul, or central self. The adjective outer can mean

“further from the middle or central part.”⁴⁸ In the second sentence, “that which is outer” can be taken as an emotional form, because such a form lies further from the central self than the mind. The second sentence’s final words, “can be seen,” appear to signify physical manifestation, so the entire second sentence can be taken as the precipitation of the first sentence’s thought from the mind, through the emotional nature, and then into the physical world.

Cedercrans describes a law that governs such manifestation:

The Law of Precipitation—when a thought is born, a triangle of precipitating energy has been brought into juxtaposition with time and space.⁴⁹

Bailey also mentions “the law ... of active precipitation,” and says that it “produces manifested existence,”⁵⁰ so Bailey’s law seems to be the same as Cedercrans’ law with the similar name.

Nevertheless, neither Cedercrans’ nor Bailey’s description of the law is clear. Based upon the earlier discussion, the “triangle of precipitating energy” appears to be the intention, mind, and created thought, so Cedercrans’ description of the law seems to have this explanation: when the triangular relationship among the intention, mind, and created thought is maintained, that thought precipitates in time and space. Cedercrans supports this explanation with the following example:

A woman who suffers from chronic arthritis enters upon the path of mental development and decides to heal herself ... If she is rightly guided, she will consciously build a thought-form of perfect health manifesting within her body, by focusing the Intent to manifest health within her mind ... Within her mind she will become a well woman by focusing and maintaining her intent to be one. Emotionally she will gradually become a well woman as she accepts the precipitating energies of health from the thought-form created in her mind. The substance of her physical body will finally respond to the down-flow of positive energy being directed upon it and within her body she will become a well woman.⁵¹

Mark 11:24 provides related instruction: “Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be *granted* you.” Here, to *believe* could mean to “maintain,”⁵² in which case this verse would also support the foregoing explanation.

Consequently, the second sentence is given this meaning: *By maintaining the triangular relationship among their intention, mind, and created thought, they manifest that thought through their emotional nature and then into the physical world.*

3. He saw His creations and liked them not and so withdrew His attention; then the creations He had made died and disappeared.

The stanza’s first and second sentences illustrate Cedercrans’ earlier definition of magic: “Magic is the manipulation of the divine law to produce an ordered series of effects in time and space.” She also distinguishes between white and black magic: “The white magician is concerned with those effects that relate to the betterment of humanity as a whole ... The black magician is concerned with him or her self and their own rise to power or the accumulation of material gain.”⁵³ Bailey likewise distinguishes between these two kinds of magic: “The white magician works from the soul level out into the manifested world and seeks to carry out the divine plan, whilst the black magician works from the level of the intellect as he seeks to achieve his own separative ends.”⁵⁴

The first and second sentences wield Cedercrans’ three laws of creation. As she explains, these three laws are applicable to the practice of either white or black magic:

The magician (regardless of whether aligned with the white or dark forces), must consciously appropriate and wield these three laws in order to create a predetermined circumstance or situation in the magician’s life and affairs. Please realize that this is not theory. There are today, as there have always been, those in the world who live alone by the creative process described above. It is part of the evolutionary development that all people eventually experience. The time is coming when the entire

race of humanity will demonstrate this aspect of the divine heritage.⁵⁵

Nevertheless, through gaining the knowledge depicted in the first and second sentences, a person is tempted to practice black magic. Cedercrans describes this temptation:

The man suddenly realizes that he is a creator, that by a simple manipulation of Will and Intelligence, he can produce what-so-ever form he will choose. Consider the effect upon the subconscious wish-life, upon the past ambitions and dreams which have yet to be fulfilled, upon the sense of ego itself. It is easy to renounce ambitions and desires which have little hope of fulfillment insofar as the consciousness is concerned. But what of the moment when that consciousness realizes that it *can* carry out any course of action, any ambition or desire it may choose, when the world is offered as its toy, its pleasure?⁵⁶

Bailey describes the same temptation:

Knowledge of the laws of magic puts into the hands of the student powers which enable him to create, to acquire, and to control. Such powers are fraught with menace to the unprepared and unready, for the student can, in this case, turn them to selfish ends, use them for his own temporal material advancement, and acquire in this way that which will feed the desires of the lower nature.⁵⁷

Bailey also says, “the [seventh-ray] disciple is often for a time swung off the centre into a maelstrom of magical work of the lower kind—sex magic and many forms of black magic.”⁵⁸ Here, “often for a time” signifies a frequent yielding to the foregoing temptation for some length of time. Accordingly, let us construe the stanza’s first and second sentences as representing the stage in which seventh-ray people do succumb to the temptation of practicing black magic, even though the sen-

tences’ depicted laws are also applicable to the practice of white magic. As shown next, the stanza’s third sentence represents the stage in which they emerge out of their practice of black magic.

The third sentence’s first phrase is: “He saw His creations,” but what is the meaning of “saw”? Many possible meanings for this word can be found in a dictionary, so discerning its appropriate meaning requires considering its context. In the stanza’s first and second sentences, the creative process manifests what the last part of the second sentence calls “that which ... can be seen,” which are creations that can be seen with visual perception. As shown by previous articles in this series on the

seven stanzas, each stanza is a carefully crafted message from beginning to end, with later parts continually building on earlier parts. Accordingly, “saw” in the third sentence seems unlikely to denote visual perception, because such perception already took place in the second sentence; but “saw” could mean *recognized*,⁵⁹ because object recognition occurs after visual perception has taken place.⁶⁰

If “saw” did mean *recognized*, what would be the significance of the entire phrase, “He saw His creations”? Our answer is based on quotations from *A Course in Miracles (ACIM)*, which is a modern system of spiritual psychology that has gained wide acceptance in the esoteric community.⁶¹ In common parlance, an *idol* is “an image or other material object representing a deity and worshiped as such.”⁶² *ACIM* expands and deepens this usage by saying, “Idols are but substitutes for your reality. In some way, you believe they will complete your little self,”⁶³ and by giving these examples of an idol: “Be it a body or a thing, a place, a situation or a circumstance, an object owned or wanted, or a right demanded or achieved, it is the same.”⁶⁴

As *ACIM* explains, idols have power only when they are unrecognized as such:

The effects of this ray force are most peculiar and will be a great deal more prevalent than heretofore, as this ray is now coming into power. It is this energy which is largely responsible for infections and contagious disease.

What is an idol? Do you think you know? For idols are unrecognized as such, and never seen for what they really are. That is the only power that they have. Their purpose is obscure, and they are feared and worshipped, both, *because* you do not know what they are for, and why they have been made.⁶⁵

The above quotation refers to an idol's purpose and says that it is obscure. *ACIM* provides this explanation:

What purpose has an idol, then? What is it for? This is the only question that has many answers, each depending on the one of whom the question has been asked. The world believes in idols. No one comes unless he worshipped them, and still attempts to seek for one that yet might offer him a gift reality does not contain. Each worshipper of idols harbors hope his special deities will give him more than other men possess. It must be more. It does not really matter more of what; more beauty, more intelligence, more wealth, or even more affliction and more pain. But more of something is an idol for. And when one fails another takes its place, with hope of finding more of something else. Be not deceived by forms the "something" takes. An idol is a means for getting more.⁶⁶

Accordingly, the third sentence's first phrase, "He saw His creations," is given this significance: They emerge out of their practice of black magic as they recognize that their creations are idols, the purpose of which is to get more of something than what other people possess.

Epicurus (341 – 270 BC), the ancient Greek philosopher who founded the school of philosophy now called Epicureanism, makes this observation:

All men like pleasure and dislike pain. They naturally shun the latter and pursue the former.⁶⁷

The second phrase is: "and liked them not." Based on Epicurus' observation, the portrayed people no longer like their creations because of

the pain that each one brings. *ACIM* corroborates that explanation:

There never was a time an idol brought you anything except the "gift" of guilt. Not one was bought except at cost of pain, nor was it ever paid by you alone.⁶⁸

Thus, the second phrase is given this meaning: They do not like their creations, because of their recognition of the pain that each one brings.

The third phrase is: "so withdrew His attention." This phrase resembles *ACIM*'s statement: "The only way to dispel illusions is to withdraw all investment from them."⁶⁹ Moreover, one's attention is an asset that one invests,⁷⁰ so withdrawing all investment entails withdrawing attention. Thus, the third phrase is given this meaning: So they withdraw their attention from them to dispel their illusions about them.

The final phrase is: "then the creations He had made died and disappeared." Bailey gives this explanation:

As long as the eye of the Creator is upon that which is created, just so long does it persist; let the Creator withdraw "the light of his countenance" and the death of the thought form ensues, for vitality or energy follows the line of the eye.⁷¹

In the present context, the creations are idols, perhaps special people or special things. Time, strength, energy and money are needed to maintain the creations so that they adhere to the pattern dictated by the original intention. After withdrawing their attention from their creations, the portrayed people no longer maintain them, so the final phrase has this meaning: Then the creations that they made are no longer maintained and disappear from their experience.

In summary, the third sentence is given this meaning: *They emerge out of their practice of black magic as they recognize that their creations are idols, the purpose of which is to get more of something than what other people possess; they do not like their creations, because of their recognition of the pain that each one*

brings, so they withdraw their attention from them to dispel their illusions about them; then the creations that they made are no longer maintained and disappear from their experience.

4. He had no lasting success and saw naught but failure as He travelled on the outer path of life.

Bailey says, “the higher expression of the seventh ray is white magic.”⁷² Correspondingly, the seventh-ray stanza’s higher-numbered sentences depict seventh-ray people as seeking to become white magicians. Even though these sentences depict such people as blundering in various ways, Bailey writes,

One of the major characteristics of the seventh ray disciple is his intense practicality. He works upon the physical plane with a constant and steady objective in order to bring about results which will be effective in determining the forms of the coming culture and civilisation ... He wields force in order to build the forms which will meet his requirements and does this more scientifically than do disciples on other rays.⁷³

How do seventh-ray people attain what the above quotation calls “intense practicality”? Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749 – 1832), a German poet and natural philosopher, states: “Seeking and blundering are good, for it is only by seeking and blundering we learn.”⁷⁴ Cedercrans makes a similar point: “I have never known of any disciple who has not experienced failure after failure. That is a part of the path, for experience is still the great teacher.”⁷⁵

According to Bailey, seventh-ray people have the special virtue of “courage,” so that they are willing to risk making mistakes while seeking to become white magicians; and they have the special virtues of “perseverance,” “extreme care in details,” and “self-reliance,” which enables them to learn practicable lessons readily from their mistakes.⁷⁶ Thus, by depicting a sequence of blundering mistakes, the stanza’s remaining sentences indicate practicable lessons that the portrayed people learn as they progress along the path of white magic.

The fourth sentence’s initial part states: “He had no lasting success and saw naught but failure.” Bailey describes how one encounters similar futility by working exclusively with outer effects:

The effort has been expended in dealing with effects, and the underlying causes have not been touched, even when realised by a few. The attempt has been made to right wrongs, to expose evils and evil personalities, and to attack organisations, groups, parties, religions and national experiments. This has led to what appears to be a futile expenditure of time, strength, energy and money.⁷⁷

Accordingly, “failure” in the fourth sentence is taken to be what the above quotation calls “a futile expenditure of time, strength, energy and money.”

The sentence’s final part states: “as He travelled on the outer path of life.” Here, “the outer path of life” is like what Bailey calls “the outer world of effects,”⁷⁸ so travelling on the outer path of life is taken as working exclusively with outer effects. Consequently, the fourth sentence is given this overall meaning: *In their initial attempts to function as white magicians, they have no lasting success and see nothing but a futile expenditure of time, strength, energy and money, as they work exclusively with outer effects.*

The fourth sentence depicts seventh-ray people as making a blundering mistake, but what lesson are they to learn from it? As Bailey explains, the lesson is to work with causes rather than effects:

The predominant work of the occult student is the manipulation of force, and the entering of that world wherein forces are actively set in motion which result in phenomenal effects. He has to study and comprehend practically and intelligently the working of the law of Cause and Effect, and he leaves off dealing with effects and centres his attention on their producing causes.⁷⁹

Cedercrans provides this example:

Let us say, for instance, that you are having such a difficult time financially that you do not have enough to eat. Is the answer to sit down and build a thought-form for enough food to eat? Is this really your problem? There is something wrong in the consciousness. There is some characteristic, some quality, something within the consciousness that is creating this condition within your outer life and affairs. So, to change the condition you must change the state of consciousness that is causing it. You don't change the state of consciousness by sitting down and building a thought-form for enough food to eat, because in this way you are merely resisting conditions. You are trying to deal with effects rather than causes.⁸⁰

5. He comprehended not the need of forms.

Before considering this sentence, it is helpful to introduce some specialized terminology. In yoga science, the physical body of a human being has both dense and subtle portions. The *dense physical body* contains the muscles, bones, and glands. The *subtle physical body* is called the etheric or vital body in Theosophy;⁸¹ “golden bowl” in the Bible (Ecclesiastes 12:6),⁸² and *pranamaya kosha*, a Sanskrit name, in Hinduism.⁸³

The stanza's fifth sentence mentions “the need of forms,” but what is that? A *form* is an “outer aspect” of something,⁸⁴ and Bailey cites both “individual form” and “group form,”⁸⁵ so a “form” is an outer aspect of either an individual or a group. A *need* is “a condition requiring relief.”⁸⁶ The need of a form, being a condition of an outer aspect, is an effect that can be traced to both outer and inner causes.

The foregoing notions are quite abstract, so let us clarify them by considering concrete examples. Bailey describes one of the most common difficulties in the functioning of the physical body:

One of the most common of these is congestion of the lungs which—though it may be exoterically traced to certain and definite physical causes—is in reality those causes, plus an inner condition of etheric congestion. It is the bringing together of the outer

apparent cause and the apparent inner true cause which is responsible for the outbreak of the trouble. When these two conditions are brought into conjunction with each other, and you have a physical handicap and an etheric situation which is undesirable, then you will have disease, illness, or weakness of some kind.⁸⁷

Here, the body, or physical form, has congestion of the lungs, which is the outer condition, or need, requiring relief. Congestion of the lungs can be traced to “certain and definite physical causes,” which are outer causes, and also to “etheric congestion,” which is the inner cause.

Epictetus (55 – 135), a Greek sage and Stoic philosopher, provides another example:

When you see a person weeping in sorrow either when a child goes abroad or when he is dead, or when the man has lost his property, take care that the appearance does not hurry you away with it, as if he were suffering in external things. But straightway make a distinction in your own mind, and be in readiness to say, it is not that which has happened that afflicts this man, for it does not afflict another, but it is the opinion about this thing which afflicts the man.⁸⁸

Here, the personality, or form, is weeping in sorrow, which is the outer condition, or need, requiring relief. This sorrow can be traced to “when a child goes abroad or when he is dead,” which is the outer cause, and also to “the opinion about this thing,” which is the inner cause.

An outer condition's inner cause is often ignored, because it lies hidden from sense perception. For example, regarding individual health, Bailey says, “No outer condition alone is adequate to produce disease, but the difficulty is that modern medicine does not yet permit the hypothesis of hidden cause except those superficial ones such as, for instance, that worry and intense anxiety can aggravate existing heart trouble.”⁸⁹ Accordingly, many practitioners of modern medicine are unable to treat successfully a chronic illness, even though they may identify many physical causes for it, be-

cause they have not discerned its hidden inner cause.

A similar situation holds for world affairs. Although outer causes, such as leaders, political parties, or nations, are often blamed for the suffering in the world, Bailey writes:

Blame not the personalities involved or the men who produce these events before which we stand today bewildered and appalled. They are only the product of the past and the victims of the present. At the same time, they are the agents of destiny, the creators of the new order and the initiators of the new civilisation; they are the destroyers of what must be destroyed before humanity can go forward along the Lighted Way. *They are the embodiment of the personality of humanity.*⁹⁰

Instead she points to hidden inner causes: “The outer happenings [in world affairs] are, to a certain point, predictable; they are the precipitated effects of hidden causes which lie deep in the subconsciousness of humanity.”⁹¹

Given that an outer condition’s inner cause is often ignored, the fifth sentence, “He comprehended not the need of forms,” can be clarified in this way: *They do not comprehend an outer condition requiring relief, because they do not know its hidden inner cause.*

The corresponding lesson to be learned is to discern the hidden inner cause of an outer condition. Such discernment may be difficult to accomplish in practice, however, as shown by Cedercrans’ remarks to several students:

Now in your observation of this conflict (and particularly those of you who were more closely involved and you were being observed very closely) never once did your comprehension touch real causes. Never once was your comprehension such as to permit an understanding above and beyond personality effects.⁹²

How can the inner cause be discerned? Cedercrans describes the general approach: “First, what is the path of approach to the fulfillment of any need? It is from without, beginning at its point of outer manifestation, to

within, ending at its point of origin, its cause.”⁹³

Bailey uses the term *esoteric* to signify “that which is hidden,”⁹⁴ referring to that which lies behind the outer appearance. She also uses the term *esoteric research* to denote the general approach of tracing an outer effect to its hidden inner cause, and indicates that such research could disclose the inner causes of world affairs:

The newer esotericism which the more modern groups and the more mental types will sponsor sees all events and world movements and national governments, plus all political circumstances, as expressions of the energies to be found in the inner world of esoteric research; therefore they see no sound reason for excluding such an important aspect of human affairs from their reasoning and thinking and from the discovery of those new truths and techniques which may bring about the new era of right human relations.⁹⁵

Bailey also makes a remarkable claim: “When the inner, esoteric and predisposing causes of war are discovered through esoteric research, then war and wars will come to an end.”⁹⁶ Accordingly, discerning the hidden inner cause of an outer condition is a key to effective work.

6. *To some He gave an over-plus of life, to some too little; and so both kinds died and failed to show the beauty of the Lord who gave them life but failed to give them understanding.*

The stanza’s longest and most enigmatic sentence is the sixth sentence. Before considering this sentence, it is helpful to introduce some additional terminology. According to Theosophy, the planetary life consists of seven worlds that are often called “planes” and have the following names: 1) logocic; 2) monadic; 3) spiritual; 4) intuitional; 5) mental; 6) emotional or astral; and 7) physical.⁹⁷ These planes are regarded as being arranged metaphorically in an inner and outer manner. For example, the mental, emotional, and physical planes, which are spoken of as “the three worlds of human en-

deavor,”⁹⁸ are regarded as the three outermost planes.

During the stage represented by the sixth sentence, seventh-ray people are engaged in what Cedercrans calls “the work of service via White Magic.”⁹⁹ They have learned from the mistakes depicted in the fourth and fifth sentences, so they can trace an outer condition requiring relief to both outer and inner causes. Consequently, their work of service may alleviate causes lying in all three worlds of human endeavor. Nevertheless, the sixth sentence indicates that they are still making mistakes but of a different kind.

The sixth sentence’s first phrase is: “To some He gave an over-plus of life.” In other words, to some recipients the portrayed people give too much aid. Bailey provides these examples:

Service is viewed as something we render to the poor, the afflicted, the diseased and the unhappy, because we think we want to help them, little realising that primarily this help is offered because we ourselves are made uncomfortable by distressing conditions, and must therefore endeavor to ameliorate those conditions in order ourselves to be comfortable again. The act of thus helping releases us from our misery, even if we fail to release or relieve the sufferers.¹⁰⁰

Service is frequently an indication of a busy and overactive temperament, or of a self-satisfied disposition, which leads its possessor to a strenuous effort to change situations, and make them what he feels they should be, thus forcing people to conform to that which the server feels should be done.¹⁰¹

The sixth sentence’s second phrase is: “to some too little.” In other words, to some others they give too little aid. Bailey provides these examples:

Or again, service can grow out of a fanatical desire to tread in the footsteps of the Christ, that great Son of God Who “went about doing good”, leaving an example that we should follow in His footsteps. People, therefore, serve from a

sense of obedience, and not from a spontaneous outgoing towards the needy. The essential quality for service is, therefore, lacking, and from the start they fail to do more than make certain gestures.¹⁰²

Service can likewise be rendered from a deep seated desire for spiritual perfection. It is regarded as one of the necessary qualifications for discipleship and, therefore, if one is to be a disciple, one must serve. This theory is correct, but the living substance of service is lacking.¹⁰³

The third phrase is: “and so both kinds died.” In other words, both kinds of immoderate service end in futility. Consequently, the sentence’s first, second and third phrases make this point: a seventh-ray person has difficulty in rendering effective service. Why is difficulty there? Bailey gives this explanation:

Service is usually interpreted as exceedingly desirable and it is seldom realised how very difficult service essentially is. It involves so much sacrifice of time and of interest and of one’s own ideas, it requires exceedingly hard work, because it necessitates deliberate effort, conscious wisdom, and the ability to work without attachment. These qualities are not easy of attainment by the average aspirant.¹⁰⁴

Accordingly, effective service requires such qualities as “conscious wisdom” and “the ability to work without attachment.” These beneficent qualities are called *virtues* and are not easy to attain. The opposite of a virtue is called a *vice*. Bailey lists the characteristic vices of seventh-ray people: “Formalism, bigotry, pride, narrowness, superficial judgments, self-opinion over-indulged.”¹⁰⁵ As shown by Bailey’s examples used to illustrate the first and second phrases, the portrayed people make mistakes in their service through displaying their characteristic vices.

The sixth sentence’s final phrase is complex: “and failed to show the beauty of the Lord who gave them life but failed to give them understanding.” As discussed earlier, the seventh ray is the emanation of the Lord of the

Seventh Ray, so “the Lord” in the final phrase must be the Lord of the Seventh Ray. What is the beauty of this Lord? Bailey comments,

It [the seventh ray] is the ray of form, of the perfect sculptor, who sees and produces ideal beauty, of the designer of beautiful forms and patterns of any sort ... The literary work of the seventh ray man would be remarkable for its ultra-polished style, and such a writer would think far more of the manner than of the matter in his work, but would always be fluent both in writing and speech.¹⁰⁶

Consequently, the “beauty of the Lord” refers to the beauty of form. Bailey also explains what this beauty signifies in the context of service: “the task to be carried out and the nature of the work to be done by the seventh ray worker ... is the magical work of producing those forms on earth which will embody the spirit of God (and in our particular time, this necessitates the building of new forms).”¹⁰⁷ Thus, in the final phrase, “to show the beauty of the Lord” has this meaning: to produce those forms on earth that embody the spirit of God.

Let us consider the sixth sentence’s final words: “the Lord who gave them life but failed to give them understanding.” These words can be explained by considering Bailey’s related instruction:

There are two modes of creative work: One mode is that which is implemented by seventh ray potency. This builds and creates within matter and within the periphery of the three worlds; it is exceedingly forceful when it is wielded through the medium of a seventh ray personality and a seventh ray physical body ... The other mode is that of the second ray, which is applied from *without* the three worlds and from soul levels; it works through radiation, magnetic appeal and coherent energy. Ponder on these two modes.¹⁰⁸

“Life” and “potency” can be used as synonyms.¹⁰⁹ In the sixth sentence, “life” is given by the Lord of the Seventh Ray, so it denotes what the above quotation calls

‘seventh ray potency,’ which “builds and creates within matter and within the periphery of the three worlds.” “Understanding” is a second-ray method,¹¹⁰ so in the sixth sentence it denotes what the above quotation calls the “mode ... of the second ray, which is applied from without the three worlds and from soul levels.” Accordingly, “life” and “understanding” in the sixth sentence represent the seventh-ray mode and second-ray mode, respectively, so the sentence’s final words have this explanation: the Lord of the Seventh Ray gave them the seventh-ray mode, which is implemented by seventh-ray potency acting within the three worlds, but failed to give them the second-ray mode, which is applied by understanding from soul levels.

The preceding explanation is still abstruse, so it needs further clarification. The *line of least resistance* denotes the “easiest way.”¹¹¹ Bailey comments, “the lines of least resistance are seldom the lines to be followed.”¹¹² Put differently, if we take the line of least resistance in a situation, we do what is easiest even though it may not be the best thing to do. Each ray provides, to its bearers, gifts of innate abilities. For example, Bailey says, “Idealism is the major gift of the sixth ray force.”¹¹³ In the sixth sentence’s final words, the Lord’s gift represents an innate ability that the seventh ray provides to seventh-ray people. Consequently, the preceding explanation of the final words can be clarified in this way: a seventh-ray person’s line of least resistance is the use of the seventh-ray mode without also using the second-ray mode. As a corroboration, Bailey tells a seventh-ray student:

Here lies your major technical lesson. Your line of least resistance is that of establishing relationship with the end in view of building a form. This is also the line of pure magic and—as you know—it can be either black or white.¹¹⁴

Bailey also tells the same student, “you are in a position to use both methods [of creative work] ... The result should be most effective service and the steady growth of any work you may undertake.”¹¹⁵ Correspondingly, in the sixth sentence, the portrayed people should place themselves in a position to use both the

seventh-ray mode and the second-ray mode so as “to show the beauty of the Lord.” Their problem, however, is that their use of the second-ray mode is relatively difficult for them, because it does not follow along their line of least resistance.

What can be accomplished by using the second-ray mode? Bailey mentions “the transmutation of what you term vices, into virtues,”¹¹⁶ and lists the characteristic virtues that seventh-ray people need to acquire: “Realisation of unity, wide-mindedness, tolerance, humility, gentleness and love.”¹¹⁷ She also explains how this transmutation takes place: “Virtue is the calling in of new energies and of a new

vibratory rhythm so that the soul becomes the positive controlling factor and the soul forces supersede those of the [mental, emotional, and physical] bodies.”¹¹⁸ Thus, each virtue is obtained by calling in understanding from soul levels, so it is a product of the second-ray mode. As shown by Bailey’s examples used to illustrate the first and second phrases, the portrayed people make mistakes in their service when they display their characteristic vices rather than their needed virtues. As shown by the preceding clarification of the final phrase, the portrayed people make these mistakes by following their line of least resistance, which uses the seventh-ray mode without also using the second-ray mode.

In summary, the stanza’s sixth sentence has the following overall meaning: *To some recipients they give too much aid, and to some others they give too little aid, and so both kinds of immoderate service end in futility and fail to produce those forms on earth that embody the spirit of God. This result occurs when they display characteristic vices (formalism, bigotry, pride, narrowness, superficial judgments, and self-opinion over-indulged) rather than needed virtues (realization of unity, wide-mindedness, tolerance, humility, gentleness, and love), and is due to their following their line of least re-*

sistance, which uses seventh-ray potency without also using understanding from soul levels.

The sixth sentence’s initial words state: “To some He gave an over-plus of life, to some too little.” These words allow the case in which the portrayed people do give appropriate aid to some recipients. This case occurs when they express their needed virtues, and is due to their

They [Seventh-ray people] did not know that the inner cause of their disease was their life of vice, which nurtured the outer activity of germs and bacteria, and that love sustains their physical health.

making a special effort to use understanding from soul levels, thereby deviating from their line of least resistance. The sixth sentence allows this case but does not explicitly mention it, so this case is not easy to notice in the sentence, which in turn signifies that it is not easy to notice in the portrayed people’s

service activities. Thus, we can infer that this case occurs only infrequently. Accordingly, the mistake depicted in the sixth sentence is the frequent display of vices. The corresponding lesson to be learned is to express the needed virtues in a consistent way, which is done by consistently making a special effort to use understanding from soul levels.

The preceding meaning of the sixth sentence can be corroborated by considering Cedercrans’ description of a person who is engaged in service:

This one recognizes his service karma as the need to bring Divine Law and Order into his environment. For those who understand, he begins to work with the Seventh Ray of Law and Order, the synthesis of all the Rays reflected in form ... He disciplines himself more out of service to those around him than out of a desire to attainment ... Consciously he is motivated from a sincere desire to serve. At the same time he is confronted with a part of himself which he had not known existed. In the very midst of his love and humility, buried resentments, pride, etc., rear up to defeat him. He is forced to conquer them before he can continue along the path.¹¹⁹

Let us note that the above description veritably portrays a person who has reached the stage represented by the sixth sentence: “This one recognizes his service karma” is consistent with the sixth sentence’s overall meaning, which is a depiction of erratic service; “to bring Divine Law and Order into his environment” is equivalent to the sixth sentence’s phrase, “to show the beauty of the Lord”; “to work with the Seventh Ray of Law and Order” is to work with what the sixth sentence calls “life” and what Bailey calls “seventh ray potency”; “love and humility” are part of Bailey’s list of seventh-ray virtues; and “pride” is part of her list of seventh-ray vices. Moreover, “buried resentments, pride, etc., rear up to defeat him,” describes the mistake depicted in the sixth sentence; and “He is forced to conquer them [the vices] before he can continue along the path” discloses the practicable lesson to be learned from that mistake.

7. *He knew not then that love sustains.*

Bailey makes a statement that resembles the stanza’s seventh sentence:

Disciples need to remember that love brings all earthly karma to an end. Love induces that radiation which invokes and evokes not only the heart of God but the heart of humanity also. Love is the cause of all creation and the sustaining factor in all living.¹²⁰

Cedercrans makes a similar statement, but more clearly characterizes love as having the power to sustain physical health:

Realize the great healing power of love. Any manifestation of disease is calling forth your love. Fulfill its need and there will no longer be disease.¹²¹

The seventh sentence states: “He knew not then that love sustains.” The word “then” refers to the stage represented by the sixth sentence, so seventh-ray people during that stage did not know that love sustains physical health.

Let us note that the seventh sentence makes this tacit assumption: the portrayed people suffered from disease during the stage

represented by the sixth sentence. Why else would they have benefited from knowing that love sustains physical health? As a corroboration, the sixth sentence depicts the portrayed people as living a life of vice rather than virtue, and Bailey states that such a life does breed disease:

A human being destroys his own form again and again through the evil which he does and by the material focus of his desires; the following of a life of vice will breed disease, as is well known.¹²²

Thus, we can infer that the inner cause of the portrayed people’s disease, during the stage represented by the sixth sentence, was their life of vice. Moreover, this inferred inner cause is consistent with the treatment indicated in the seventh sentence, because, as Cedercrans points out, one’s expression of love is effective treatment for a disease bred by one’s own vices.¹²³

Bailey provides the following rule for healers:

Let the healer train himself to know the inner stage of thought or of desire of the one who seeks his help. He can thereby know the source from whence the trouble comes. Let him relate the cause and the effect and know the point exact through which relief must come.¹²⁴

According to this rule, knowledge of the inner cause of a disease leads to knowledge of effective treatment for it. According to the seventh sentence, the portrayed people did not know how to treat effectively their disease during the stage represented by the sixth sentence, so we can infer that they did not know the inner cause of their disease during that stage.¹²⁵

Bailey’s earlier commentary on the seventh-ray stanza states in part:

The keynote of the work of the seventh ray is to bring together life and matter upon the physical plane. This, however, when viewed from the angle of imperfection, is a bringing together (if you can understand the implications) of Life, the lives and the general livingness of the creative process. This is symbolised by the promiscuity and the endless moving interplay of all life

within all lives. The result is therefore the activity of all germs and bacteria within the medium which will best nurture them.

The above statement traces “the work of the seventh ray” to “the activity of all germs and bacteria within the medium which will best nurture them,” which identifies the outer cause of the portrayed people’s disease, whereas the inner cause already has been shown to be their life of vice. Based on the foregoing remarks, the stanza’s seventh and final sentence is given this meaning: *They did not know then that the inner cause of their disease was their life of vice, which nurtured the outer activity of germs and bacteria, and that love sustains their physical health.*

During the stage represented by the fifth sentence, the portrayed people learned to help other people by tracing an outer condition requiring relief to its inner cause. The seventh sentence, however, has this implication: During the stage represented by the sixth sentence, the portrayed people did not trace their own disease to its inner cause, which is their life of vice, so they failed to apply to themselves what they so helpfully applied to others. Such failure is not unusual, as shown by Bailey’s advice to a student who failed in a similar manner:

Take proper medical help, brother of mine. Take time to get the physical vehicle in better condition. The reflex action of the body upon the emotional nature and upon the mind is great. As a psychologist you know this, but fail to apply to yourself what you so helpfully apply to others.¹²⁶

Jason Hobbs, a clinical social worker, gives comparable advice to people who also failed in a similar manner:

For many of us, helping “professionals” or not, it is hard to feel that it is acceptable for us to care for ourselves in the same way that we care for others. We think that the others’ needs are more pressing, more important, and that our needs are not important ... Please, treat yourself and your needs in the same way that you would for someone else, your patient, your client, your student, your patron, your guest.¹²⁷

According to the two preceding quotations, many dedicated servers and caregivers disregard their own needs while caring for the needs of other people. This imbalance is the mistake depicted in the stanza’s seventh sentence. Bailey describes the corresponding lesson to be learned from this mistake:

I would like also to point out with all the clarity and power at my disposal, the very deep necessity for *humility* and its constantly recurring expression. I refer not to an inferiority complex but to that adjusted sense of right proportion which equips its possessor with a balanced point of view as to himself, his responsibilities and his life work. This, when present, will enable him to view himself dispassionately and his presented opportunities with equal dispassion.¹²⁸

Luke 5:15–16 illustrates this lesson by describing Jesus as caring for his own needs as well as those of the gathering crowds: “But the news about Him was spreading even farther, and large crowds were gathering to hear *Him* and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus Himself would *often* slip away to the wilderness and pray.”

Conclusions

Bailey’s seventh-ray stanza, which we call the “Seventh-Ray Cause of Inharmony and Disease,” consists of seven symbolic sentences that can be clarified in the following manner:

1. Seventh-ray people gather their forces into the highest point of their mental consciousness, holding them there in a state of absolute tension, and maintain their intention to create, thereby creating a thought in the pattern dictated by their intention.
2. By maintaining the triangular relationship among their intention, mind, and created thought, they manifest that thought through their emotional nature and then into the physical world.
3. They emerge out of their practice of black magic as they recognize that their creations are idols, the purpose of which is to get more of something than what other

people possess; they do not like their creations, because of their recognition of the pain that each one brings, so they withdraw their attention from them to dispel their illusions about them; then the creations that they made are no longer maintained and disappear from their experience.

4. In their initial attempts to function as white magicians, they have no lasting success and see nothing but a futile expenditure of time, strength, energy and money, as they work exclusively with outer effects.

5. They do not comprehend an outer condition requiring relief, because they do not know its hidden inner cause.

6. To some recipients they give too much aid, and to some others they give too little aid, and so both kinds of immoderate service end in futility and fail to produce those forms on earth that embody the spirit of God. This result occurs when they display characteristic vices (formalism, bigotry, pride, narrowness, superficial judgments, and self-opinion over-indulged) rather than needed virtues (realization of unity, wide-mindedness, tolerance, humility, gentleness, and love), and is due to their following their line of least resistance, which uses seventh-ray potency without also using understanding from soul levels.

7. They did not know then that the inner cause of their disease was their life of vice, which nurtured the outer activity of germs and bacteria, and that love sustains their physical health.

The first and second sentences depict the laws of creation and represent the stage in which seventh-ray people succumb to the temptation of practicing black magic, which means that they use the depicted laws for separative ends. The third sentence represent the stage in which they emerge out of their practice of black magic. The fourth through seventh sentences depict the portrayed people as seeking to become white magicians while making various kinds of blundering mistakes. The pragmatic value of the latter sentences is their indication of practi-

cable lessons that are learned along the path of white magic:

During the stage represented by the fourth sentence, the portrayed people realize their mistake of working exclusively with outer effects, so they learn the lesson of working with causes.

During the stage represented by the fifth sentence, they realize their mistake of not comprehending an outer condition's inner cause, so they learn the lesson of tracing an outer condition to its inner cause.

During the stage represented by the sixth sentence, they realize their mistake of frequently displaying characteristic vices while performing their service, so they learn the lesson of expressing needed virtues in a consistent way.

During the stage represented by the seventh sentence, they realize their mistake of disregarding their own needs while caring for the needs of other people, so they learn the lesson of cultivating a balanced point of view as to themselves, their responsibilities, and their work.

The sixth sentence has a more cryptic meaning than the one given above. In its original statement, the sentence mentions, "both kinds died and failed to show the beauty of the Lord." In other words, both kinds of immoderate service, as performed by seventh-ray people, ended in futility and failed to produce those forms on earth that embody the spirit of God. Here, the word "failed" indicates that the portrayed people displayed *imperfection* in their service.

The sixth sentence also mentions, "the Lord who gave them life but failed to give them understanding." In other words, the Lord of the Seventh Ray gave the seventh-ray mode of creative work to seventh-ray people, but failed to give the second-ray mode to them. Here, the word "failed" indicates that the Lord of the Seventh Ray displayed *imperfection* through that omission.

Let us note that the sixth sentence uses the word "failed" twice: once to characterize the imperfection of seventh-ray people; and once

to characterize the imperfection of the Lord of the Seventh Ray. As this double use of the same word indicates, the imperfection of seventh-ray people is not their fault, because it reflects and shares in the imperfection belonging to the Lord of the Seventh Ray, who is still evolving towards greater divine expression. This more cryptic explanation of the sixth sentence is consistent with and illustrates Bailey's earlier statement:

If the great informing Lives of the planets within our solar system are imperfect, the effect of this imperfection must inevitably affect Their planetary creations, Their bodies of manifestation, and thus introduce a karmic condition over which the individual human being has absolutely no control, but within which he moves and which he shares.

Thus, the "Seventh-Ray Cause of Inharmony and Disease" is the imperfection of the Lord of the Seventh Ray, because this imperfection brings about the imperfection of seventh-ray people, which appears as their vices, which in turn lead to their futility and their disease. Nevertheless, as shown by the lessons of the sixth and seventh sentences, these people are still responsible for overcoming their vices, futility, and disease.

As our commentary demonstrates, the seventh-ray stanza can be clarified by assembling related quotations from the writings of both Bailey and Cedercrans, so let us compare these two writers. Bailey wrote her material between 1919 and 1949, and Cedercrans wrote her material between 1948 and 1963. As the assembled quotations show, both writers used similar terminology and presented comparable ideas and methods. In some cases, Cedercrans seemed to build upon Bailey's earlier material, in the sense of clarifying some of Bailey's vague hints and phrases. For example, our commentary cites Cedercrans' three laws of creation, and shows that these laws clarify Bailey's related descriptions.

Bailey said that most of her books were based on communications to her from a Master known as "Djwhal Khul,"¹²⁹ and made a prediction in November 1948 that may be relevant

for this article: "Certain picked disciples from all these five Ashrams have been or will be trained for the work of contacting the public."¹³⁰ Here, *Ashram* is defined as "The centre to which the Master gathers the disciples and aspirants for personal instruction."¹³¹ Bailey mentioned another Master known as "Rakoczi" and included his Ashram as one of the five designated Ashrams,¹³² so her prediction implied that one of Rakoczi's disciples would contact the public. Cedercrans may have been that predicted disciple, because she said that her books were based on communications from the Master Rakoczi.¹³³

In summary, the seventh-ray stanza depicts the laws of creation, indicates practicable lessons for the path of white magic, explains the presence of imperfection on our planet, and is clarified by the writings of both Bailey and Cedercrans.

¹ Zachary F. Lansdowne, "Vedic Teachings on the Seven Rays," *The Esoteric Quarterly*, Spring 2010.

² Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology*, vol. I (1936; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1979), 316.

³ *Ibid.*, 126-127.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 63-83.

⁶ Alice A. Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations* (1960; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1976), 568.

⁷ All biblical quotations in this article come from the New American Standard Bible. Philippe Le Moigne, Jean-Daniel Macchi, Étienne Nodet, Pierre-Maurice Bogaert, and Christian Cannuyer, *The Bible: Its Languages and Its Translations* (New London, CT: Bayard, 2014), 64, write: "This New American Standard Bible is considered by nearly all evangelical Christian scholars and translators today to be the most accurate, word-for-word translation of the original Greek and Hebrew scriptures into modern English that has ever been produced. It remains the most popular version among theologians, professors, scholars, and seminary students."

⁸ Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Healing* (1953; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1978), 298.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 292-293.

- ¹⁰ Helena P. Blavatsky, *Collected Writings* (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Society in America, 2002), vol. XIV, 217.
- ¹¹ Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine* (1888; reprint; Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press, 1977), vol. I, 573.
- ¹² Bailey, *Esoteric Healing*, 298-304.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 293.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 297.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 304.
- ¹⁶ Zachary F. Lansdowne, "The Third-Ray Cause of Inharmony and Disease," *The Esoteric Quarterly*, Spring 2017.
- ¹⁷ Zachary F. Lansdowne, "The Sixth-Ray Cause of Inharmony and Disease," *The Esoteric Quarterly*, Summer 2017.
- ¹⁸ Zachary F. Lansdowne, "The Second-Ray Cause of Inharmony and Disease," *The Esoteric Quarterly*, Summer 2018.
- ¹⁹ Zachary F. Lansdowne, "The Fourth-Ray Cause of Inharmony and Disease," *The Esoteric Quarterly*, Winter 2019.
- ²⁰ Bailey, *Esoteric Healing*, 303-304.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 304.
- ²² Maureen T. Richmond, "Alice A. Bailey (1880 – 1949), Twentieth-Century Sirian Channel," *The Esoteric Quarterly*, Winter 2018.
- ²³ Dakini Wisdom, "About Lucille," <http://www.dakini-wisdom.com/AboutLucille.htm> (accessed November 3, 2018).
- ²⁴ Lucille Cedercrans, *Creative Thinking* (Roseville, MN: Wisdom Impressions, 2001), 205.
- ²⁵ Lucille Cedercrans, *Applied Wisdom* (Roseville, MN: Wisdom Impressions, 2007), vol. I, 6.
- ²⁶ Alice A. Bailey, *The Light of the Soul* (1927; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1978), 268.
- ²⁷ Alice A. Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire* (1925; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1973), 1201.
- ²⁸ John L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (1965; reprint; New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 603, writes, "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." Timothy F. LaHaye, *Understanding Bible Prophecy for Yourself* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2009), 149, observes, "In the Bible, a name reveals the nature of the person." For example, 1 Samuel 25:25 says: "for as his name is, so is he." Roswell D. Hitchcock, *An Interpreting Dictionary of Scripture Proper Names* (New York: A. J. Johnson, 1871), gives meanings of nearly all the names of persons and places in the Bible.
- ²⁹ William W. "Bill" Gothard, "How do the sins of my forefathers affect my life?" *Institute in Basic Life Principles*, <https://iblp.org/questions/how-do-sins-my-forefathers-affect-my-life> (accessed January 26, 2019), states: "Looking back to our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents ... we can observe character traits and spiritual influences that span the generations. A Godly heritage offers a sturdy foundation of virtue and faithfulness, but deeds such as anger, lust, and bitterness set destructive patterns that need to be recognized and overcome. In the Biblical account of Abraham's family, the iniquity of deception became a stronghold that affected the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob's sons. (See Genesis 12:10–20, 20, 26:1–11, 27:1–40, 37:12–36.) On the other hand, the New Testament examples of Lois, Eunice, and Timothy demonstrate the richness of a heritage of faith. (See 2 Timothy 1:5.)"
- ³⁰ James Hastings, *A Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. II, part II (1898; reprint; Honolulu, HI: University Press of the Pacific, 2004), 535.
- ³¹ Alice A. Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, vol. I (1944; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1976), xiv.
- ³² Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology*, vol. I, 210.
- ³³ Alice A. Bailey, *The Destiny of the Nations* (1949; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1974), 130.
- ³⁴ Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations*, 487.
- ³⁵ Cedercrans, *Creative Thinking*, 218.
- ³⁶ Kurt Lewin, "Intention, will and need," in David Rapaport (ed.), *Organization and Pathology of Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), 95-153.
- ³⁷ Cedercrans, *Creative Thinking*, 216.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*
- ³⁹ Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, 874.
- ⁴⁰ Alice A. Bailey, *From Intellect to Intuition* (1932; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1960), 224.
- ⁴¹ Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, 339.
- ⁴² Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology*, vol. II (1942; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1981), 152.
- ⁴³ Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology*, vol. I, 9.
- ⁴⁴ Bailey, *From Intellect to Intuition*, 227.

- 45 *Collins Thesaurus of the English Language—Complete and Unabridged* (second edition; New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002).
- 46 Alice A. Bailey, *Education in the New Age* (1954; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1974), 152.
- 47 Alice A. Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic* (1934; reprint; New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1979), 546.
- 48 *Collins English Dictionary—Complete and Unabridged* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003).
- 49 Cedercrans, *Creative Thinking*, 216.
- 50 Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic*, 278.
- 51 Cedercrans, *Creative Thinking*, 218-220.
- 52 *Collins Thesaurus of the English Language—Complete and Unabridged*.
- 53 Cedercrans, *Creative Thinking*, 205-206.
- 54 Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic*, 519.
- 55 Cedercrans, *Creative Thinking*, 216.
- 56 Lucille Cedercrans, *The Nature of the Soul* (third edition; Roseville, MN: Wisdom Impressions, 2011), 211.
- 57 Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, 993-994.
- 58 Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology*, vol. II, 377.
- 59 *Collins Thesaurus of the English Language—Complete and Unabridged*.
- 60 Tomoya Taminatoa, Naoki Miura, Motoaki Sugiurac, and Ryuta Kawashimac, “Neuronal substrates characterizing two stages in visual object recognition,” *Neuroscience Research*, vol. 89 (2014), 61–68, state, “Visual object recognition is classically believed to involve two stages: a perception stage in which perceptual information is integrated, and a memory stage in which perceptual information is matched with an object’s representation.”
- 61 *A Course in Miracles* has gained wide acceptance in the esoteric community. For example, Richard Smoley, “The Future of Esoteric Christianity,” *Quest Magazine* (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Society in America), July-August 2008, 131-134, mentions, “*A Course in Miracles*, that great monument of contemporary esoteric Christianity.” Bradford C. Olsen, *Modern Esoteric: Beyond Our Senses* (second edition; San Francisco: CCC Publishing, 2017), 14, states, “the modern metaphysical thought system *A Course in Miracles* [is] among the best sources of esoteric personal growth material available.”
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The Philosophy of Visual Perception

Vijay Srinath Kanchi

Abstract

Since ancient times, the process of exteroception or sense perception of the external world has caught the imagination of philosophers and scientists across the globe. Several theories have been adduced by philosophers, particularly in India, Greece and the Middle East, which speculate on how the external world is experienced. But for obvious reasons, visual perception occupied the center stage of debate. While the understanding of visual perception took a new turn thanks to Kepler's and Isaac Newton's experiments on light and subsequent development of optics as an important branch of physics, the ancient philosophers had a different understanding of the process of visual perception. They seem to have been more concerned with the subjective role in the whole process of perception rather than on the objective aspect. Recent developments in cognitive neuroscience and parapsychology put forward an interesting argument in favor of underscoring the significance of the role of observer in the phenomena called visual perception. This paper examines the ancient theories of the philosophy of visual perception in light of modern scientific understanding, particularly those of the Sāṃkhya and Vaiśeṣhika Schools as well as those of the ancient Greeks.

Introduction

According to current scientific understanding, all perception involves external stimuli received by the sense organs, which are carried to the brain as signals by the nervous system and are ultimately processed and experienced in the brain. For example, vision involves light striking the retina of the eye and forming an inverted image there. Odor molecules coming in to contact with the nerve endings in the nostrils mediate smell, and hearing involves pressure waves striking the eardrums. While reception of external stimuli by the senses constitutes only the sensation, percep-

tion on the other hand involves the active participation of the mind and is shaped by learning, memory, expectation, and attention.¹ The contribution of mind to the process of perception is sometimes referred as the "top-down" effect, whereas the "bottom-up" process refers to the processing of sensory input that transforms low-level information to higher-level information, such as extracting shapes and recognizing objects. Since the process of perception takes place outside conscious awareness, even though it involves complex functions of the nervous system, subjectively, it seems mostly effortless.

Visual perception, also known as eyesight, sight, or vision, is the ability to interpret the surrounding environment by processing information that is contained in visible light.² Of all our sensory experiences, visual perception based on the sense of sight is the most significant. Antonio Zamora asserts that: "Sight is probably the most developed sense in humans, followed closely by hearing."³ "Research estimates that 80 to 85% of our perception, learning, cognition and activities are mediated through vision."⁴ A study conducted by the U.S. Department of Labor in May 1996 suggests that 83% of human learning occurs visually.⁵ Owing to the primacy of the sense of sight over other senses, philosophers across the

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world have always taken great interest in the process of visual perception, and many theories were adduced to explain this process. Even today, there is no unanimity among philosophers, neuroscientists and psychologists about the nature of visual perception. Most of these theories can be broadly classified into two groups, depending on whether they believe light enters the eyes and thereby produces image inside the brain, or whether something moves out of the eyes and captures the object outside the brain. This second group underscores the active role of the subject in the process of vision.

Even among those who claimed something moved out of eyes to capture the external world, the Greeks believed that light rays moved out of the eyes and illuminated objects. On the other hand, the Indians, particularly the Sāṃkhyas and Nyāyikas,⁶ argued that what goes out of the eyes in the form of sight is the human mind which takes the form of the object—known as *vritti*—and thus the mind is molded into the object perceived. A third group, gaining more and more credence in the last couple of decades, maintains that the process of visual perception involves both moving in and moving out—moving in of light and moving out of mind or the mental field. Scientists studying the sense of being stared at, experienced by many of us even when the person looking at us is outside the field of our vision, surmise that: “an influence seems to pass from the observer to the observed.” According to Rupert Sheldrake, “The sense of being stared at does not seem to fit in with theories that locate all perceptual activity inside the head. It seems more compatible with theories of vision that involve both inward and outward movements of influence.”⁷ With this backdrop, it would be interesting to note the theories of vision across the timeline to understand various perspectives and their strong and weak points.

A Brief History of Vision Theories

Of the two major theories of vision, the inward or intromission theory, which is also the current scientific understanding of

human sight, emphasizes the entry of light into the eyes. This view underscores the primacy of light in the process of vision and regards vision as a passive activity by the subject. According to this theory, light entering into the eye forms an image on the retina that is carried to the occipital lobes of the cerebral cortex via the optic nerve where the image is processed, thus providing the experience of vision. On the other hand, outward, emission or extramission theories, as held in ancient Greece, maintain that vision is a process where some kind of *light rays* travel through our eyes and come in contact with external objects. Other extramission theorists believe that *vision is a carrier* of the human mind and is an active process initiated by the subject, where a mental field or the mind itself moves out. Some extramissionists even go to the extent of arguing that human emotions are also carried out by the outward moving human mind in the process of visual perception and that the human mind is capable of exerting influence on the external world. As Rupert Sheldrake maintains, “the chief reason for admission of extramission accounts is due to the belief in evil eye and the power of a lover’s gaze.”⁸

The ancient Indian philosophies of Sāṃkhya, Yoga and Nyāya, together with Upanishads, like Chāndogya and Brihadāraṇyaka, speak of the soul using the mind as its instrument and sending it out through the eyes and contacting the objects outside and thus resulting in mental modification or *vritti*, which makes the perception of the object possible. The Upanishads consider the eye to be made up of the same primeval element that is inherent in fire and the sun. The theory that, “like perceives the like” was concurrent in India but also in ancient Greece. This view held that unless the subject and object are intrinsically identical deep within, perception of an object by the subject was impossible. Both extramission and intromission theories have been in vogue for over 2500 years, but extramission theories slowly lost ground as the advances in human anatomy began to explain the visual apparatus of the human body in greater detail. Although the science of human anatomy has helped us understand how light rays create retinal images

which are then carried as electric impulses into the brain, it maintains a studied silence as to how that image is in fact perceived. Sometimes visual perception and processing was depicted as a picture projected onto a mental screen inside the brain, with a little subject inside the brain looking at it.⁹ But, as Sheldrake maintains, this view results in an infinite regress, for the little person inside the brain would need a screen inside *his* brain, and a yet tinier person to see the screen, and so on.¹⁰ But, a new theory is emerging which accepts that vision has both active and passive aspects. This paper discusses the key aspects of vision theories that were in vogue at different time periods and argues how a synoptic view of these theories might help in better understanding the process of vision.

The Ancient Western Thought

In ancient Greece there were two major theories that explained how vision took place. One of the earliest ideas about vision—which was disputed in its own time—was a conjecture that it depended on light that streamed out of the eye to detect the surrounding objects.¹¹ In the early fifth century BCE, members belonging to the Pythagorean School, who were known as spiritualists and mystics, advocated the extramission theory, maintaining that a visual current was sent outwards from the eye. Alcmaeon, a member of the Pythagorean school, who lived in Croton sometime around 500 – 450 BCE, noted that “The eye obviously has fire within it, for when one is struck this fire flashes out. Vision is due to the gleaming... that is to say the transparent character of that which [in the eye] reflects the object.”¹² This idea that there is a fire in the eye which sends out visual rays enabling vision received a great fillip when Plato also attested to this idea in his *Timaeus*:

And of the organs they first contrived the eyes to give light, and the principle according to which they were inserted was as follows: So much of fire as would not burn, but gave a gentle light, they formed into a substance akin to the light of everyday life; and the pure fire which is within us and related thereto they made to flow

through the eyes in a stream smooth and dense, compressing the whole eye, and especially the center part, so that it kept out everything of a coarser nature, and allowed to pass only this pure element. When the light of day surrounds the stream of vision, then like falls upon like, and they coalesce, and one body is formed by natural affinity in the line of vision, wherever the light that falls from within meets with an external object. And the whole stream of vision, being similarly affected in virtue of similarity, diffuses the motions of what it touches or what touches it over the whole body, until they reach the soul, causing that perception which we call sight.”¹³

Euclid, hailed as the Father of Geometry, taking a cue from the ideas that emphasized the subjective aspect of vision that were in vogue at that time, claimed that some visual rays came out of the eye and traveled in straight lines until they met an object. He wrote in his *Optika* “Rectilinear rays proceeding from the eye diverge infinitely [and] those things are seen upon which the visual rays fall and those things are not seen upon which the visual rays do not fall”¹⁴ Thus Euclid adopted the extramission theory of vision and was devoted to studying primarily the geometrical aspects of rays traveling in straight lines. Giving the example of looking for a pin, and at first not seeing it, but then finding it, Euclid also maintained that vision was an active process. “There is a change in what is seen as a result of this active process of looking and finding, even though the light entering the eye remains the same.”¹⁵

It is not the case that these ancient sagacious Greeks did not know that external light was significant in the process of vision and that light from the objects entered the eye, facilitating the sense of seeing. Even a very basic observation such as visibility and invisibility of objects in day and night respectively would surely have revealed it to them. Thus, there is no ground to discredit these ancients of this basic observable fact and reduce them to dummies. We need to realize that their focus was on deciphering the subjective aspect of the process of seeing. The technique of the an-

cients—whether of Greece or India, was to meditate deeply and contemplate minutely step by step on the actual phenomenon they were trying to understand in an effort to unravel the actual process phenomenologically. This kind of meditative contemplation naturally focuses more on the subjective share of the process than on the objective aspect. For such meditative contemplators, the objective reality is merely a passive component and it is the subjective aspect that thrives with actual possibilities and which qualifies any phenomenon or event by its partaking in the event.

As Rupert Sheldrake points out: “Euclid recognized that light played a part in vision, but he said very little about the way it was related to the visual rays projecting outwards from the eyes.”¹⁶ Euclid, with his mathematical temperament, was more focused on the geometrical aspects of the process of vision. As noted previously, his main concern was with the idea that light rays traveled in straight lines. Hence, he laid down the geometrical rules to explain how eyes projected the images we see outside ourselves and overlooked everything else that did not fall within the ambit of geometry. He also clearly stated the principles of mirror reflection, recognizing the equality of what we now call “the angles of incidence and reflection,” and he explained virtual images in terms of the movement of visual rays outwards from the eyes.¹⁷ Ptolemy, another Mathematician and Astronomer of Greece, also supported the Euclidian view of visual rays emitting from the eyes with the only difference being that he believed visual rays formed a continuous bundle or cone.

Plato’s emphasis on internal fire and Euclid’s approach to visual rays are subtly different. Plato, being a philosopher to the core believed in the unity of subject and object and argued in *Timaeus* that the same fire that constitutes and illuminates the external objects is also present in the subject in a gentle form, since the subject is composed of the same elements from which the universe is produced. This idea can also be traced in the works of Empedocles, another prominent figure in Greek philosophical history. A fragment of the poem attributed to Empedocles in the fifth century

BCE, maintains that the pupil of the human eye is created from the primeval fire [by Aphrodite] and because of this, it lets through the fire (light), or finer part. This is an extension of the principle that like perceives like. Vision occurs only when there is right correspondence between the internal fire and the external fire. It is important to keep in mind here that for Empedocles as well as for Plato, although an intraocular fire is required for the visual perception, it is not a *fire that issues forth from the eyes*, just as the science historian, David Lindberg rightly pointed out. Lindberg’s comment on Plato’s theory of vision is worth serious consideration:

Visual fire emanates from the eye and coalesces with the daylight, to form a single homogeneous body stretching from the eye to the visible object: this body is the instrument of the visual power for reaching into the space before the eye. The stress in this passage is not on the emission of an effluence from both the eye and the object of vision, but on the formation of a body through the coalescence of visual rays and daylight which serves as a material intermediary between the visible object and the eye.... and passes on this to the soul.¹⁸

The Intromission Theories

Another view on how the human eye perceived the external world was also in vogue. This theory focused exclusively on the entering of light into the eyes from the outside and is known as intromission theory. The Atomists and Natural Philosophers of Greece, such as Democritus and Epicurus, were chief proponents of this view. Democritus (ca. 460.–370 BCE) suggested that the air between the eye and the object seen is “contracted and stamped” by the object itself and the observing eye. The pressed air, still holding various colours of the object wanders and “appears in the eye.”¹⁹ But interestingly, if we can trust Theophrastus, Democritus also held the view, just like Plato, that “an image is produced when the effluence from the object of sight meets an opposing effluence from the observer.”²⁰ When Democritus talks of air being contracted and stamped by both the sub-

ject and the object, it probably is more apt to understand it as a model that emphasizes both subjective and objective aspects of sight—the meeting of mind and visual sense data from the object, rather than indulge in hairsplitting whether some intermediary image is really formed in the mid air between the subject and object. The idea that sensory experience takes place somewhere between the subject and object and not truly at the subject or object as ancient Indian philosophers as the Vignānavādins, Sāmkhyas and Nyāyikas thought, will be discussed elsewhere.

Epicurus also favoured the intromission view when he pointed out “...particles are continually streaming off from the surface of bodies though no diminution of the bodies is observed. . . And those given off maintain their position and arrangement. . . it is by the entrance of something coming from external objects that we see shapes and think of them.”²¹

It is important to keep in mind that both schools of thought—intromission and extromission—relied upon the principle of “like is only known by the like.” This notion supposes that the eye was composed of some *internal fire*, which interacted with the *external fire* of visible light and made vision possible. Plato makes this assertion in his dialogue *Ti-maeus*, as does Aristotle, in his *De Sensu*.²²

However, this understanding of subject and object being produced out of the same fiery substance, and this commonality being the fulcrum of perceptual experience took a back seat with the advent of science in the beginning of the seventeenth century. In 1604 CE, Johannes Kepler, who revolutionized the field of astronomy with his discoveries, also radically transformed how we understand visual perception with his intromission theory, according to which light came into the eyes, but nothing went out from them.²³ This period marks the beginning of the materialistic scientific age, a complete shift of humankind’s approach toward perceptible reality, where the wisdom of ancient intellectuals in appreciating the subjective and objective roles was sealed and put into docks for the next several centu-

ries. With this new theory of Kepler, vision of the external world no longer belonged to the outer world where it seemed to be, but is suddenly relegated to the inside of the brain.

Rupert Sheldrake points out:

Kepler’s theory of the retinal image seemed to resolve a debate about the nature of vision that had been going on for two thousand years, and it was one of the first great triumphs of modern science. But his theory raised a problem that Kepler admitted he could not solve, and which is still unsolved today. The theory explained how images form on retinas, but it did not explain how we actually see. We do not see two tiny inverted images of the external world on our retinas. We see the world outside us, right way up, and single, not double. The only way Kepler could deal with this problem was by excluding it from optics. Once an object’s images had formed on the retinas, it was someone else’s business to explain how we actually see. Ironically, the intromission theory left vision unexplained.²⁴

Kepler’s theory does not explain how a stare is different from a glance, how emotions are carried by the looks and stares of people and, importantly, how the eyes often see and sense more than what is visible. It also turns a blind eye on the question of the sense of being stared at, even when the person looking at us is outside the field of our vision. His theory also overlooks the belief in evil eye and power packed glances that are often attested to by cultures across the globe. Nor does it explain what happens once the image is set in the brain after it entered the eye. This image is as good as the external world; in his model, in place of the world, one is stated to encounter its representational image. But how does Kepler account for seeing? How a thing that is external to the subject is assimilated and comprehended is never addressed. As a model, intromission makes vision a passive process ignoring the active role of subjective attention.

The Enigma: A Relook at Extromission Theories

Humankind has been studying optical phenomena for a very long time. The oldest surviving mirrors and burning lenses were dated before 1500 BCE. Accounts of various eye diseases and eye surgeries were documented on papyrus by the Egyptians around that time. And around 400 BCE, people in China were said to have been examining the nature of radiation, shadows and reflections. At the same time, in India, intricate surgeries were performed by ancient doctors like Suśruta and Caraka. *Pancāngs* (conventional almanacs and ephemerides) that detailed the minute motion of stellar objects and predicted occultations, eclipses and the like with great accuracy, were very much in vogue. Kañāda, a proponent of Vaiśeṣhika darśana—one of the six systems of Indian philosophy—developed his atomic theory through an extensive study of the sun rays coming in through small apertures. With such a reasonable degree of understanding of the natural world around them, what made the ancient intellectuals mistake the eye as the source of light instead of the reflecting surface of objects? Or when they spoke of emissions from the eye, were they talking about something else? Insects attraction to the radiance of fire had been a favorite metaphor for ancient Indian philosophers to adduce the dangers of sensual attractions. That simple observation itself should have made them understand that light rays are external to the observer. But yet why did they argue that the subject was “reaching out” to the object and not the light rays entering the eyes?

To solve this conundrum one needs to understand that the ancient world was looking at the phenomenon from an entirely different perspective. While the present scientific age is object oriented, the ancient world, particularly of Greece and India, was more interested in explaining the observable phenomena from the subjective perspective. They were greatly enticed by the subject-object interaction and wondered how an object that seems to be unconnected and alien to the subject in all respects and located at a distance could still be perceived. The most appalling fact that enticed their imagination was that perception is the proprietary feature of subjective beings alone.

Though light travels and falls on everything, the ancients believed that only sentient beings, or that class of entities that had a “subjective eye,” could perceive and respond to external stimuli. All else was inanimate and had no awareness. Those entities called sentient beings have a special faculty to “receive” the external world inside them through a special mechanism called sensation. The processes of sensation and perception are not merely a passive activity; they involve the active effort on the part of the subject. As the physicist and the author, Arthur Zajonc rightly points out, “there is a change in what is seen as a result of this active process of looking and finding, even though the light entering the eye remains the same.”²⁵

The Ancient Indian Thought on Perception

The *Upanishads*, the fountainhead of Indian thought, describe an internal fire that burns as the devouring fire in the belly called *vaisvānara*, which is immanent and permeating throughout the universe. Many passages in *Bṛihadāraṇyaka* and *Chāndogya Upanishad* and *Maitrāyana Brāhmaṇa* speak of the eye as the abode of fire, the mind (*Mānas*) as the light, and the Immortal Antaryāmin or Vishnu’s manifestation as inner controller in the heart, as the source. The *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad* informs us that we project our minds out predominantly from the right eye (*Indho ha vai nāmaiṣa yo’yam dakṣiṇe’kṣan puruṣaḥ*) and that this projected mind is called *Indha*. *Indha* is the real name of Indra the King of Gods but the *devas*, being *parokshapriaya* (gods prefer only indirect referencing to keep things under wraps), camouflaged the name to hide the true meaning from ordinary humans. The principles in the right eye and the left eye join together in the activity of perception, which the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad* says are like symbols of *Virāt* (the brilliant or shining one) and His Śakti. The *Virāt* and His Power are manifest in the right eye and the left eye, respectively, as the following explains: (*Athaitad vāme’kṣaṇi puruṣarūpam, eṣāsya patnī virāt, tayor eṣa samstāvoya eso’ntar-hṛdaya ākāśaḥ*). When the activity

of perception is withdrawn, the mental sensation goes back to its abode, its own source. The mind returns to its source in the ether of the heart, the *hrdaya ākāśah*.

Elaborate metaphysical speculation on how the universe came into being and how the sense organs evolved was also presented in the Sāṃkhya and Vaiśeṣika systems of Indian darśana. The process of sensory perception is elaborately discussed in these systems together with how the knowledge of the external world arises in the mind. In these systems, both the objective world and the sense organs have the same source of origination, hence they are causally related to each other. The world's objects are made of five elements that are experienced by the corresponding sense organs via a medium called *tanmātras*.

“Tanmātra” and the Sense Organs

The traditional Indian account of sensory perception is based on the theory of *tanmātras* or primordial elements, which are the basis for the sense qualia. This view holds that what we perceive is not the object per se but only the subtle aspects, the *tanmātras*, which are created as independent entities along with their corresponding gross elements at the very beginning of creation. According to the traditional approach, the five sense organs, the five gross elements and their corresponding five *tanmātras* are all causally related. Though both Sāṃkhya and Vaiśeṣika agree that objects made up of five elements are causally related

to the sense organs that perceive them, there is subtle variance in how both schools address this subject. Sāṃkhya maintains that the gross world originated from the subtle mind, the central sense organ, which in turn originated from the subtler aspects of *prakṛti* called *Ahankāra* (ego) and *mahat* (intellect). Thus, the subtle world, consisting of awareness, conation, cognition and affection, predates the world of gross objects.

Sāṃkhya maintains that *Ahankāra* has a lower aspect called *tāmasa Ahankāra* and a higher aspect called *Sāttvika Ahankāra* which undergo the process of evolution under the influence of the *Rajo Guṇa*. The *Sāttvika Ahankāra* produces the five sensory and the five motor organs. According to Sāṃkhya, the five subtle essences, which are called *tanmātras* or things-in-themselves, arise from the *Tāmasa Ahankāra*. These are the essences of sight, smell, taste, touch and sound. They are neither the qualities nor the differentia of the gross elements nor the functions, (that is to say they are not the sensory organs either), but are the subtle essences which produce the gross elements as well as their qualities. From these *tanmātras* are produced the five gross elements. For example, from the subtle essence of color or sight combined with those of sound and touch, arises the element of fire or light together with the qualities of sound, touch and color. This is better comprehended with the help of the following chart.

| Tanmātra | Gross Element | Corresponding Sense Organ |
|--|----------------------|---|
| Ṣabda (sound) | Ākāśa (space) | Sense of hearing (through the auditory organ) |
| Ṣabda (sound) + Sparṣa (touch) | Vāyu (air) | Sense of touch (through the tactile organ). |
| Ṣabda (sound), Sparṣa (touch) + Roopa (form) | Téjas (fire) | Sense of sight (through eyes). |
| Ṣabda (sound), Sparṣa (touch), Roopa (form) + Rasa (taste) | Āpah (water) | sense of taste (through the tongue). |
| Ṣabda (sound), Sparṣa (touch), Roopa (form), Rasa (taste) + Gandha (smell) | Prithvi (earth) | sense of smell (through the olfactory organ). |

Whereas Nyāya, being a predominantly realistic school maintains that the five senses, together with the *tanmātras*, are produced out of the gross elements.

The five senses are the functions of the mind and are derived from Ahankāra, the individual ego (Here ego does not refer to the “pride” but to the individual identity). The senses, the mind and the ego function for *buddhi* or intellect, which functions directly for the *Puruṣa*, the indwelling spirit. The Soul employs the intellect, ego and mind, the *antahkaranas* or the internal organs that are part of the subtle creation and reach out through the sense organs to the external objects that are made up of five gross elements. It is important to note here that in the *Bhagavad Gita*, which relies on the Sāṃkhya system, *prakṛti* is described as consisting of eight components: earth, water, fire, air, space, mind, intellect and ego.²⁶ On a graded scale, each component is subtler than its predecessor. The earth is grossest. It has definite form and fixed shape; water being on the higher side of the scale is subtler and hence more malleable than earth and takes the shape of the container it enters. Similarly, fire is subtler than water and space is subtler than air, enabling it to take any shape and allowing any object of any shape in it. Mind, being a substance that is even subtler than space, has the ability to assume the shape of any substance it comes into contact with. This modification of the mind in accordance with the object it came into contact with is called *vṛitti*. It is this *vṛitti* that is experienced by the mind as the object. This model offers a better explanation of how an object is experienced than the intromission model, which merely states that an image of the object is projected inside the brain, since the *Vṛitti* is non-different from the perceiving mind, whereas the image is alien to the mind and there is no tertiary quid to join them together.

The Nyāya School, founded by the sage Gotama or Gautama is predominantly an intellectual, analytical and logical school. Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika are both regarded to be “*samānatantra*” or similar philosophies. Nyāya develops logic and epistemology, whereas Vaiśeṣika develops metaphysics and ontology. Ac-

ording to Vaiśeṣika, we can only experience or conceive of anything when it is knowable and nameable (*Gñeya* and *Abhideya*). According to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika the five sensory organs are derived from the five gross physical elements. Thus, they view both the constituent elements of subjective organs/instruments and the objects as one and the same. Interestingly, Nyāya also looks upon knowledge as the “one that illuminates the objects” (*arthaprakāśobuddhi*). Knowledge, in this system, is compared to light. Just as light illumines all the objects set before it, similarly, knowledge also manifests all the objects around it.

The five kinds of external perception, visual, auditory, tactual, gustatory and olfactory, are brought about by the sense organs of sight, sound, touch, taste and smell respectively. The external sense organs are constituted of the material elements of earth, water, fire, air and space, and therefore each can sense the particular quality of its element. For example, the sense organ of taste is composed of the atoms of water and perceives “taste” which is the specific quality of water.

The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika systems also provide a functional model similar to that of Sāṃkhya to demonstrate the process of perception. Nyāya Sūtra 1.1.16 points out that the absence of simultaneous cognition from all of the senses indicates the presence of a faculty which governs selective attention. This faculty is called the *mānas*, which is an insentient psychological apparatus that processes the information of the senses. A formulation of perception by the Vaiśeṣika school (Vaiśeṣika-Sūtra 3.1.18), accepted by Nyāya, is that it normally consists in a chain of connection between four things: a self and its *mānas*, *mānas* and a sense organ, and the sense organ and an object. *Mānas* relies on the five senses to experience the external world. It is also the faculty that governs mnemonic retrieval and apperceptive awareness of mental states and emotions. Selves, in the Nyāya Vaiśeṣika parlance, are lower ego substances, which are fundamentally loci of awareness, cognition, and mnemonic dispositions (*samskāras*). The self here should not be mistaken for the Self with the capital letter S,

which signifies the quality-less all pervasive Supreme Soul that lies at the core.

The ancient Indian understanding of any phenomenon including perception was not an intellectual exercise where arbitrary and haphazard thinking produced a theoretical model. Rather, it was based primarily on meditative

contemplation on the processes underlying the phenomenon for prolonged periods of time, where such meditation enabled the yogis to magnify and peruse the minutest aspects of phenomena that normally went unnoticed. This naturally led them to study in great detail the subjective experiences. For example, the insight of Nyāya darśana when it

comes to defining how we perceive objects through our senses and carry out successful activity is remarkable when we gain the insight of the neurological processes that take place during our viewing and identification of an object. Sage Gotama defines direct knowledge or *Pratyaksha Pramāna* as “*indriyārthasannikarshotpannam gnānam, avyapadēṣam, avyabhicārim, vyavasāyātmakam pratyaksham.*” According to this definition direct knowledge is the perception of an object as the result of the union of sense organs with the object perceived which passes through three distinct stages. The first stage is the vague idea of the object without qualification. Immediately, in an iota of time, perception moves to the second stage and we begin to have a more distinct identity of the perceived object which finally translates into completion of the identification process. The whole sequence of perception described in the *Nyāya Sūtra* is reaffirmed by neural images obtained through PET scanners. Using PET scanners in conjunction with the reaction time test and other tests it has become

The traditional Indian account of sensory perception is based on the theory of “tanmātras” or primordial elements, which are the basis for the sense qualia. This view holds that what we perceive is not the object per se but only the subtle aspects . . . which are created as independent entities along with their corresponding gross elements at the very beginning of creation.

clear that each aspect of attention involves a specific area of cortex. When a dot is flashed in front of the eye, the posterior region of the cortex where vision is processed lights up first, followed by the central region of the cortex where special analyses are formed. The anterior region of the cortex where identification occurs, lights up third. Once the posterior system has answered the question “where is it?,” the anterior system addresses the question “what is it?” Hobson points out that these two questions have long been recognized as key stages in the processing of perceptual data.²⁷

In Buddhist philosophy, *Āyatana* or “sense-sphere” or “sense-base” includes the mind as an internal sense organ (*klista manovigñāna*) in addition to the five traditional senses. The Buddhist Vigñānavāda School maintains that the true object can never be perceived and only qualities are sensed. In fact according to some schools of Vigñānavāda Buddhism there is no external reality, each object is only a collection of perceptions accrued by the sense organs and exists only in the mind. According to them, the external world, even if it were to exist, is never knowable because the only thing accessible to us is not the direct object but the model created inside our minds. Hence, they say the right description would be to admit that the only world that really exists is the world of perceptions: a world existing in the mind and created by the mind, for the mind and of the mind. It is the only world we can be sure of. This line of thought leads us to some interesting corollaries: if whatever is perceived is only what is within the mind then whatever the reality we experience out there is indeed within our mind. Therefore, it is an incorrect assumption to think there is an external world in which our

bodies exist and wherein our minds dwell; on the contrary, reality can be more aptly described as the world, including our bodies, residing within the perceiving mind. Thus, if concepts, percepts, thoughts etc., are nothing more than modifications of the mind, akin to the shifting waves in the ocean, then the world we experience through the medium of our mind is also none other than the mind. This means it is the same mind that experiences itself as an external world, whereas in reality it is the mental modifications or *vrittis* that are aroused in the mind due to its own inner propensities which the mind mistakes as external reality.

Extramission revisited in Modern day

Of late, several researchers in the fields of cognitive neuroscience, psychology, parapsychology and philosophy, have begun to relook at how visual perception actually takes place. This has been prompted by new discoveries in the aforementioned fields as well the inadequacy of current understanding in explaining the intricate phenomena of perception. One of the often-overlooked issues is the belief in the power of the so-called “evil eye.” Denounced as mere superstition, the veracity of this belief has hardly been studied seriously despite the widespread belief in the existence of the evil eye across space and time. Similarly, the ability of the eyes to rapidly reflect myriad emotions has been reduced to body language and facial expressions, which have never been studied from the extramissionist point of view. Added to this is the “sense of being stared at” that a great number of people claim to have experienced at some time or other in their lives, which also requires a new model of visual perception.

Sheldrake, who carried out his research on the sense of being stared at in Britain, Sweden and the United States, found out that more women (81%) than men (74%) felt they were being stared at. He also recorded that many police officers, surveillance personnel and soldiers attest to the fact of experiencing the sense of being stared at. He says:

Most were convinced of the reality of this sense, and told stories about times when

people they were watching seemed to know they were being observed, however well the observers were hidden. When detectives are trained to follow people, they are told not to stare at their backs any more than necessary, because otherwise the person might turn around, catch their eye and blow their cover. Some pet owners claim that they can wake their sleeping dogs or cats by staring at them. Some hunters and wildlife photographers are convinced that animals can detect their gaze even when they are hidden and looking at animals through telescopic lenses or sights.²⁸

This led researchers like Sheldrake to revisit the idea of extramission. His research concluded that looking at a person or animal can affect that person or animal at a distance, and that “an influence seems to pass from the observer to the observed.”²⁹ He argues, “if all mental activity and all visual experience are confined to the insides of heads, then the sense of being stared at ought not to occur. And if it does, it is almost impossible to explain.”³⁰ He contends that this was probably the reason why the phenomenon had been ignored for so long and that vision is rooted in the activity of the brain, but is not confined to the inside of the head.³¹ Sheldrake argues strongly in favor of those theories of vision that involve both inward and outward movements of influence, and he proposes what he terms “perceptual fields” that link the perceiver to that which is perceived, which according to him, are rooted in the brain, but extend far beyond it.

The Synoptic View of Vision

Since the beginning of the last century, though intermittently, the two-way theory of vision, duly recognizing the subjective and objective aspects of the process of vision, has been presented by various philosophers and scientists. Prominent western philosophers such as Henri Bergson (1859–1941), William James (1842–1904), Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1925) and Bertrand Russell (1872–1948) also propounded the two-way theories of vision. As Sheldrake points out, the main feature of the two-way theories of vision is the admission of a view that images are projected out beyond

the brain to the places where they appear to be. Thus, if one looks at a tree, light from the tree enters the eyes, inverted images form on the retinas, and changes occur in the eyes and in various regions of the brain. These give rise to a perceptual image of the tree, which is situated where the tree actually is.³² The tree that one is seeing is in his/her mind, but not inside his/her brain. This theory of vision resembles the combined intromission-extramission theory widespread in ancient Greece, the Arab world and medieval Europe.³³ Sheldrake also emphasizes the role of vision and its connection with bodily activity, and argues that vision is not confined to the inside of the head, but extends outwards into the world, closely linked to the organism's movements and actions.³⁴

The greatest advantage of this model of vision is that it is compatible with common sense. It gives due credit to both the subjective and objective contribution to the process of vision. If we freed ourselves from the scientific learning that we accrued in school, it would naturally occur to us that we perceive the external world *out there* and not inside our brains. However, due to the overemphasis of the objective study of light progression and human anatomy, we are now made to believe a more outlandish model that compels us to believe that the experience of the world is taking place inside our brain and not outside as it appears to be. Noting that this rather bizarre practice that came into vogue in this scientific age, the psychologist Max Velmans, points out that if S is gazing at a cat, her only visual experience of the cat is the cat she sees out in the world. If she is asked to point to this phenomenal cat (her "cat experience"), she should point not to her brain but to the cat as perceived, out in space beyond the body surface.³⁵

On the other hand, by admitting that the mind also reaches out to the objective image that is received, a more meaningful blended theory of vision emerges. Further incorporating the concept of *vritti*, which maintains that the mind itself gets molded into the perceived object, and that it is the *vritti*, not the imagery that is experienced enables us to cross over the otherwise un-bridgeable gap between subject and object.

It is worth noting the fact that quantum theory also strongly suggests the observer-observed interconnectedness. The observer's effect documented by quantum physics amply demonstrates that the sub-atomic particles behave differently depending on whether or not an observer is looking at them. Quantum entanglement, telepathy, clairvoyance and the wisdom of ancient Indian seers all point to the unity of subject and object.

Conclusion

After this brief survey of various theories of visual perception, it would naturally be pertinent to wonder as to which among the various models adduced at different periods of time best represents the true reality. At this juncture we must draw our attention to the views of the world-renowned astrophysicist Stephen Hawking about the nature of reality and how it is best described by different models. *Model-dependent-realism*, advocated by Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow claims "that it is meaningless to talk about the 'true reality' of a model as we can never be absolutely certain of anything. The only meaningful thing is the usefulness of the model."³⁶

A world picture consists of the combination of a set of observations accompanied by a conceptual model and by rules connecting the model concepts to the observations. Different world pictures that describe particular data equally well all have equal claims to be valid. There is no requirement that a world picture be unique, or even that the data selected include all available observations. A network of overlapping world pictures covers the universe of all observations at present and, where overlap occurs; multiple, equally valid, world pictures exist. At present, science requires multiple models to encompass existing observations.

Like the overlapping maps in a Mercator projection, where the ranges of different versions overlap, they predict the same phenomena. But just as there is no flat map that is a good representation of the earth's entire surface, there is no single theory that is a good representation of observations in all situations.³⁷

It may be summarized, however, that the biggest shortcoming of the inward or intromission theories is that they look upon vision as a passive activity reducing or even altogether overlooking the role of the subject (observer) and weaving the whole story around the entry of light into the eye. Outward or extramission theories, on the other hand, describe the same phenomena from the subjective perspective and explain how perception is made possible with the active involvement of the subject in the process of vision. A more balanced approach would be to construct a combined theory of vision that covers both active subjective and passive objective aspects of the process of visual perception. The recognition of the fact that if the objective external world is completely unrelated and alien to the subject then it cannot be experienced by the subject because, to connect both of them together and bridging the gap, a common link would be required. Unless such a connecting common thread between the observer and the observed has the sameness with subject and object perception would not be possible. The central teaching of ancient Indian wisdom repeatedly underscores and points out that the subject and the object are non-dual.

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 - 2 "Visual Perception," Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Visual_perception. (Last accessed November 17, 2017).
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 - 6 "Sāmkhya is one of the six āstika schools of Hindu philosophy. It is most related to the Yoga school of Hinduism, and it was in-

fluent on other schools of Indian philosophy. Sāmkhya is an enumerationist philosophy whose epistemology accepts three of six pramanas (proofs) as the only reliable means of gaining knowledge. These include *pratyaksa* (perception), *anumāna* (inference) and *śabda āptavacana* (word/testimony of reliable sources). Sometimes described as one of the rationalist schools of Indian philosophy," <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samkhya> (Last accessed May 7, 2017). "The Nyāya School is founded by the sage Gotama or Gautama, not to be confused with Gautama Buddha. Nyāya means correct thinking with proper arguments and valid reasoning. Thus, Nyāya philosophy is known as tarkashāstra (the science of reasoning); pramānashāstra (the science of logic and epistemology); hetuvidyā (the science of causes); vādaśāstra (the science of debate); and anvikṣiki (the science of critical study). The Nyāya philosophy as a practitioner and believer of realism seeks for acquiring knowledge of reality," <http://egyankosh.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/38168/1/Unit-1.pdf0> (Last accessed June 2, 2017).

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- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 2.
- ²² "Visual Perception," Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Visual_perception (Last accessed June 20, 2017).
- ²³ Rupert Sheldrake, "The Sense of Being Stared At Part 1: Is it Real or Illusory?" *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 12: 10-31, 2005, 12.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.
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- ²⁶ *The Bhagavad Gita*, VIII: 4, (trans. W. J. Johnson; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).
- ²⁷ Allan J. Hobson, *Dreaming as Delirium: How the Brain Goes Out of Its Mind* (Cambridge, MA: Bradford Books, 1999, 171).
- ²⁸ Sheldrake, "The Sense of Being Stared At Part 1: Is it Real or Illusory?," 11.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 32
- ³⁰ Sheldrake, "The Sense of Being Stared At: Part 2- Its Implications for Theories of Vision," 38
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 40.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 41.
- ³³ Lindberg, *Theories of Vision from Al-Kindi to Kepler*, 5.
- ³⁴ Sheldrake, "The Sense of Being Stared At: Part 2-Its Implications for Theories of Vision," 38.
- ³⁵ Max Velmans, *Understanding Consciousness* (London: Routledge, 2000), 109.
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The Feminine Dimension in Islamic Esotericism

Donna M. Brown

Abstract

This article explores the aspects of Islamic spirituality and esotericism that contain a feminine dimension. Although it touches briefly on the controversial and complex status of women in the Muslim world, its primary aim is to draw attention to the inner or Sufic dimension of Islam, as opposed to the more patriarchal, conservative and legalist views on the position of women. The article examines pre-Islamic perspectives on the goddess and the feminine in Arabia, the Middle East and Iran before turning to the mysterious, interior domain of the feminine in her various guises as the preeminent heart of esoteric Islam.

Introduction

The feminine in Islam has often been neglected, owing in part to the Western focus on the juridical, socio-economic and political status of women in Islam today. Militant, fundamentalist and hyper-masculinized interpretations of Islam are contributing factors. Yet, it is worth noting that these factors represent a deterioration of what was once a fairly progressive attitude toward women. Not only did women play significant roles in Islam during and after the life of the Prophet, they were granted “women’s rights” in Arabia 1400 years before women in the West. Theosophist and women’s rights activist, Annie Besant underscored this fact in her book on *The Life and Teachings of Muhammad*, when, in 1930, she opined, “It is only in the last twenty years that Christian England has recognized the right of woman to property, while Islam has allowed this right from all times.”¹ A number of historians, Islamic scholars, and international affairs writers support these views, with one going so far as to describe the Prophet Muhammad as a feminist in his day, for establishing the Islamic law dictating women’s rights.²

These rights were based on an effort to address concerns about women, their relationship and

collaboration with men, and to emphasize their social function and spiritual significance. The majority of these concerns had their basis in Qur’anic doctrine, which held that Allāh created everything in the Universe in pairs.³ The pairs, including males and females, served complementary functions, which resulted in a division of social functions.⁴ But men and women were seen as having equal stature, especially with respect to their relationship to God. Islamic injunctions and prohibitions applied equally to members of both sexes. Men and women were expected to observe the religious standards relating to sound thinking, personal conduct, moral behavior and social affairs. The Qur’an advocated for women’s right to education, and one may note here that the oldest functioning, degree-awarding institution in the world is the University of al-Qarawiyyin in Morocco, founded by Fatima al-Fihri, daughter of a wealthy merchant, in 859—300 years before the University of Paris. Qur’anic verses also granted women the right of individual ownership and the unrestricted right of inheritance along with the right to accept or reject a marriage proposal as well as the right to divorce⁵—rights that were previously denied to many women in pre-Islamic Arabia.

It must, however, be pointed out that not every scholar agrees on the levels of oppression and abuse in the culturally diverse Arabian societies before the advent of Islam in 610 CE.⁶ Newer, more feminist views maintain that Islam presents a distorted narrative with respect

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to the barbaric behavior toward women that was said to be present in some pre-Islamic societies. Pre-Islamic, indigenous peoples in Arabia believed in a polytheistic, eclectic, but disorganized mix of gods, goddesses and tribal deities. Various customs and beliefs are likely to have led to women's empowerment and the assurance of freedoms in some tribal societies, while in others they were responsible for oppression and the appalling treatment of women and children.⁷ Some of these same scholars go on to point out that a number of Muhammad's pronouncements as well as passages in the Qur'an were and are responsible for demoting the social status of women,⁸ and that the shift from polytheism and goddess worship to a strict "monotheism may have occasioned a misogynist trend."⁹

It is not the author's intent to provide a definitive argument in support of one narrative or another, or to serve as an apologist for the lamentable status of women in Islamic societies. Valid arguments can be made to substantiate differing perspectives. Statements from Muhammad and passages in the Qur'an can be quite contradictory in encouraging equal rights and respect for women. That being said, it cannot be denied that in a number of pre-Islamic tribal systems, women, children and the underprivileged were deprived of basic human rights, and that the introduction of Islam in Arabia brought about a number of positive changes within some societies where Islam allowed for a transition from tribal affiliations to more comprehensive and consistent moral and religious virtues and principles.¹⁰ Pre-Islamic practices that degraded and oppressed women were not only condemned, Islam actively sought to restore women's dignity and humanity and raise them to a more equitable status.¹¹

To be sure, some Islamic societies have failed miserably to live up to these guidelines. Yet, contrary to popular beliefs and stereotypes, the feminine always has played and continues to play an essential, life-giving role in esoteric Islam, a role whose existence is largely hidden from view. What this role is and the many-faceted shapes that it takes, especially in Su-

fism, the esoteric dimension of the faith, is the focus of this article.

Pre-Islamic Foundations

Al-Lāt and Allāh

In the centuries before the emergence of Islam, the nomadic peoples living in Arabia practiced a complex mix of indigenous polytheistic beliefs that differed from region to region. Their gods and goddesses were tribal deities, venerated ancestors, spirits or djinn, sacred places and anthropomorphic representations of natural phenomena and the powers of nature.¹² The pan-Arabian Goddess *al-Lāt* (also spelled *Alla*, *Allatu*, *Alilat*, and *Allāt*,) was the chief goddess worshipped extensively in "Nabatean Petra in the North to the Kingdoms of Arabia Felix in the South, including the Biblical Sheba; as far east as Iran and Palmyra"¹³ as well as in Mecca or Makkah.^{14, 15}

According to Laurence Galian, aka Abdullah Muzaffer, who noted the intensive interaction between India and the ancient Arab world in his article on *The Centrality of the Divine Feminine in Sufism*, Allāt or Alla are associated with *amba* and *akka* or "mother" in Sanskrit.¹⁶

Swami Sivananda (1887–1963), a Universalist Hindu spiritual teacher, along with a number of others, also maintained that Alla was a Sanskrit word for mother.¹⁷ Galian goes on to connect Alla with *Ila* (in his feminine form), with the consort of Shiva.¹⁸ Vedic mythology depicts Ila as an androgyne known for the ability to change sex. In masculine form Ila was known as *Sudyumna*, one of the kings of the *Suryavanash*—the Solar Dynasty. Ila, in the feminine form, is thought to be the progenitor of the *Chandervansh* or Lunar Dynasty of Indian kings.^{19, 20} Among the old Semitic peoples, as Anwar Hekmat points out in *Women and Koran*, *Il* or *El* was used in various combinations to "designate god or deities."²¹ We are reminded of the Hebrew *Elohim*, *Beth-El* (the house of God), *Emanu-el* and *Israel*, or the Babylonian *Ilu*; the Phoenician *Elos* (Kronos),²² the Aramaic *Alaha*, (sacred unity) the Arabic *ilāhah* (goddess) and Allāh from the contracted form *al-ilah*.

There are, however, different theories about the roles of al-Lāt and other deities, such as Allāh, in pre-Islamic Arabia. Al-Lāt was both the title and the name of multiple goddesses in pan-Arabia. But she was perhaps best known as a matriarchal deity who was also associated with the Moon. The ancient peoples were assuredly aware, on some level or another, that while the Sun was the giver of life to our entire planetary system, the Moon too was associated with life on our planet. This is especially the case, as Helena Blavatsky observed, with respect to the feminine physiological functions, i.e., beginning with the menstrual cycle, the quickening of the fetus, the period of viability and the period of maturation and emergence from the darkness of the womb into the light of existence.²³ Not surprisingly then, al-Lāt was the principal Mother goddess associated with the Moon and fertility. In addition, she was connected with Venus, the “Great Goddess,” the mother of *Hubal* (a Syrian Moon God), the goddess of the underworld, and the Crone goddess of Fate and Time. In certain periods and places the Great Goddess formed a feminine divine trinity consisting of *al-Lāt*, (Mother,) *al-Uzza* (Venus, the Evening Star) and *al-Manat*²⁴ (Fate or Destiny), which was analogous to the Greek lunar deity Kore/Demeter/Hecate.²⁵

Each aspect of the trinity corresponded to a phase of the moon. In the same way Al’Lat has three names known to the initiate: Q’re, the crescent moon or the maiden; Al’Uzza, literally “the strong one” who is the full moon and the mother aspect; then Al’Manat, the waning but wise goddess of fate, prophecy and divination.²⁶

Many of these pre-Islamic deities were worshiped in the form of a square stone, a slab of granite, or a meteorite that fell from the heavens or the stars. Galian remarks that “*Kabylia*, a North Algerian goddess who was turned to stone, was their first Great Mother, and that *Kubuha*, *Kuba*, *Kube* and *Cybele* were the names of other goddesses.”²⁷ He also points out that while “*Ka’ba* means cube, it is close in meaning to *ku’b*—a women’s breast.”²⁸

Before the advent of Islam some Arab tribes worshiped al’Lāt in the form of a white granite cube. In Makkah she was represented in the form of a black stone or cube (*Al-Hajaru al-Aswad*) or *Ka’bah*, where she became a separate deity and the unmatched “giver of life.” But many other gods and goddesses, such as the great Moon God Hubal, who was identified with an aspect of Allāh, as well as al-Uzza, al-Manat, Su’yar (an oracular god), Awf (the great bird god), Quzah (the weather god), and Shams (the sun god), were among the hundreds of deities revered at Makkah.

Allāh, another ancient deity, was the tribal god of Muhammad’s Qurayash clan. According to Najmah Sayuti, Allāh was the Supreme Deity even before the Prophet Muhammad’s mission.²⁹ Hekmat and others hold that he was regarded as being equal to the three goddesses mentioned above before he was generalized as the Supreme Being at the dawn of Islam.³⁰ Some scholars hypothesize that the *Ka’bah* in Makkah has always been dedicated to Allāh, the chief sustainer and creator of all the Arabia tribes,³¹ yet others point out that he seems to have little relevance to the paganism that was practiced there,³² in part, because he lived in the remote, uppermost heaven called *Aliyyin* or *Lahut* and was too great to be interested in human affairs. Hence, it’s thought that he delegated a measure of authority to the lesser gods and goddesses, who were tasked with carrying out various functions. In addition to invoking the lesser deities for succor and aid, the ancient peoples prayed to them to intercede before Allāh, the creator God, on their behalf.³³

The pre-Islamic Allāh has also been described by some sources as a Lunar Deity. This hypothesis is based, at least in part, on Robert Morey’s research on the similarities between pagan moon worship and Islam. Such claims are passionately disputed.³⁴ Nevertheless, many sources postulate that Allāh, the Arabic word for God, was used widely to refer to gods and goddesses in general, hence to the chief *Rabb* or high Lord and to the Lunar Deity. As such, in his role as the Moon God, Allāh was purportedly married to the Sun goddess and together they gave birth to the triple female

deities, al-Lāt, al-Uzza and al-Manat.³⁵ In this complex indigenous pantheon, al-Lāt was also associated with the “Goddess of the Sun,”³⁶ thereby making her the Moon God’s wife. This is why, in various times and places, al-Lāt seems to have been one of the daughters of Allāh, in others she was his spouse, while in others she was the principle deity or Goddess.

The Ka’bah

The Ka’bah or Kaaba (now Islam’s holiest shrine or “House of Allāh or God”), once contained as many as three hundred and sixty statues and paintings dedicated to various deities. A number of these corresponded to the stars, the sun, the moon and the planets, which the ancient Arabs believed were the controllers of their destinies. According to al-Shahrastani, a 12th century Persian historian and Islamic scholar, pilgrims would circulate around the Ka’bah seven times in veneration of the planetary motion of the seven heavenly bodies.³⁷ The Ka’bah also contained many fresco paintings, including those of Abraham and the Virgin Mary and Child. Most of the idols and frescos were removed when Muhammad reclaimed Makkah and the Ka’bah, but some, like the Virgin and her Child, were spared.³⁸

In his article on the divine feminine, Galian explains that:

Makkah was a holy site to the worshipers of *El’Ka’ba* (a goddess). Her worshipers knelt at her symbol, a black stone. This black stone was probably a meteorite... and was once known as the “Old Woman.” Popular tradition related how Abraham, when he founded the Ka’ba, bought the land from an old woman... She consented to sell it on the condition that her descendants should have the key of the place in their keeping. Today the stone is served by men called the *Beni Shaybah* (the Sons of the Old Woman).³⁹

One belief holds that the Ka’bah, purportedly built by Adam, was rebuilt by Abraham and Ishmael, Abraham’s first son with Hagar, his wife’s Egyptian maid. Another tells of a visit to the goddess *El-Ka’ba*, this time by Abraham and his wife Sarah, who at age ninety-nine conceived Isaac, her first child, when she and Abraham had conjugal relations there. While

these are interesting stories handed down from the earliest days, many scholars refute these claims. Nonetheless, they speak of the importance of the Ka’bah, and the considerable role of the goddess.

The significance of the feminine can be seen in the structure of the Ka’bah itself with its sacred black stone—the Omphalos of the Goddess—one corner of which is marked by an aniconic yoni that was covered by a veil and dedicated to the goddess al-Lāt or the “Old Woman.” The sacred black stone enshrined in the Ka’bah is set within a silver mounting inside a recess that was once known as the “Haram Sanctuary” or “Temple of Women.” A number of sources maintain that the guardians of the temple and the holy high office were originally women before it was taken over by the male priests or the “Sons of the Old Woman.”⁴⁰ This niche or recess—called the *Mirhab*—is found in every mosque. According to the Qur’an it was in the contemplative solitude of the *Mirhab*, where Maryam or Mary took spiritual retreat, that the angel Gabriel visited her and told her that she was to give birth to Jesus (*Surya Maryam*, Chapter 19). The *Mirhab* is now used as prayer niche pointing to Makkah, but the very top of the niche is still regarded by Sufis as a symbol of the transcendent pudenda of the divine feminine and one of the esoteric secrets of woman.⁴¹

All of the gods, goddesses, idols and spirits at Makkah and the surrounding regions were uprooted when Muhammad unified Arabia in the belief of Allāh, the One God. The Goddess al-Lāt along with al-Uzza and al-Manat were ultimately demonized and linked to *Shaitan* (also *Iblis* or Satan),⁴² but the primacy of the divine feminine continues to exist, albeit in veiled or interiorized form.

Islamic Conceptions of Masculine and Feminine

From its initial inception Islam has always intended to function as a guiding light designed to bring one closer to the Divine through an active and total surrender to Allāh, the One and Only God. In order for such a surrender to take place, the Qur’an, Islam’s cen-

tral religious text, presents a system of metaphysics, cosmology, theology, and law, as well as a code of ethics that allows humanity to live in harmony with one another and all of God's creation. An essential aspect of the entire system necessarily involves the balance and integration of the masculine and feminine aspects into a unified whole.

As such, gender relationships between the masculine and feminine aspects are intended to play a fundamental role in Islamic thought.

Qur'anic scripture sees men and women as having been created from a single soul and gives equal spiritual status to the masculine and the feminine archetypes, viewing them as fundamental attributes of the One, which are, like all pairs of opposites, complementary and interdependent. Although masculine and feminine are equals in Islam, they are not identical. As the Iranian Sufi philosopher Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1933-) explains in *The Male and Female in the Islamic Perspective*, the differences between them are not only biological and physical; they are also psychological and spiritual.⁴³ So rather than simply understanding gender as biological categories, inner Islam views the feminine and masculine as "attitudes of consciousness" and as "psycho-spiritual symbolic constructs," which are positive and active with respect to the masculine archetype, and passive and receptive with respect to the feminine archetype.⁴⁴ The differences between the two polarities, according to Nasr, "cannot be only biological and physical because in the traditional perspective the corporeal level of existence has its principle in the subtle state, the subtle in the spiritual and the spiritual in the Divine Being Itself."⁴⁵ He goes on to say that these differences even manifest as "principles within the Divine Nature which are the sources *in divinis* of the duality represented on the microcosmic level as male and female."⁴⁶

Worship of the Mother, the Goddess or the eternal feminine is one of the oldest, most pervasive and important forms of worship on earth. But over the past 2,000 years, the feminine has been cast into the shadows of a religious patriarchy that has done its best to obscure, repress and even malign the feminine spirit.

While polarization and duality exist on the level of the manifestation and have their basis in the nature of the Divine itself, Allāh "is one and not a pair." The idea of gender or duality is not applicable to that which is transcendent and has no physical form, for there is, according to the Qur'an, "none are alike unto Him."

(Verse 112:4) Although Islam is generally depicted as a patriarchal faith, Allāh is not ever portrayed as "Father." Such a conception is entirely inconsistent with Islamic theological doctrine for Islam decries any personification of God. The Qur'an does employ *lah* or Him and *huwa* or He in referring to Allāh, but the masculine

pronouns in Arabic do not necessarily apply to gender. This is in keeping with Islam's defining doctrine—*Tawhīd*—that unequivocally asserts the *Oneness of God*. Hence, all Muslims believe that God is a Divine Unity who is beyond all duality, and "whose multiplicities," as Nasr explains, "are merely a veil."⁴⁷

Allāh, therefore, is neither male nor female. But as M. Ali Lakhani explains in *The Universal Dimensions of Islam*, all the Divine's attributes (*sifat*), which are expressed in the Ninety Nine Names of God, "can be understood as limitless archetypal aggregations of existential realities derived from the Divine Essence."⁴⁸ These attributes or archetypes are complementary and have both a feminine and/or masculine character; as such, they are empirical theophanies or ways of knowing the Divine.

The names of Majesty (*jalāl*) represent the masculine archetypes, while those of Beauty (*jamāl*) symbolize the feminine archetypes. Not only are the Divine's attributes portrayed in terms of masculine and feminine, the universe as an aggregate is often described in male/female terms. Suchiko Murata (1943-), a professor of religion and Asian studies explains: "Heaven is up, dominant, controlling,

and masculine. Earth is down, subservient, accepting, and feminine.”⁴⁹ However, Sufi writings also depict the universe

as a series of contrasting pairs arranged in a hierarchy from God down to the world. In these depictions, the higher and controlling attribute is pictured as masculine, and the lower and receptive attribute is pictured as feminine. But, the gender of a thing is not fixed, because it changes depending on whether we view it as receptive to the higher or active toward the lower (e.g., heaven is feminine in relation to God, but masculine in relation to earth).⁵⁰

The polarities of gender relationships in Islam can also be related to the Taoist concepts of yin and yang, as Murata so competently shows in her masterwork, *The Tao of Islam*.⁵¹ For example, from the perspective of speculative theology and Islamic law, Allāh is viewed as yang—majestic, rigorous and severe. Sufism, on the other hand tends to perceive Allāh as yin, since he created the universe out of his mercy and love,⁵² as Murata maintains. This latter idea is bolstered by the very first line of the Qur’an, which reads: *Bismillaah ar-Rahman ar-Raheem* (I begin in the name of Allah, the most compassionate and merciful), and again in the Hadith or saying of the Prophet: “God’s mercy precedes his wrath,” which appears to give the feminine attributes priority over the Divine’s masculine qualities.

Another important feature of Sufism or inner Islam are the concepts of *zahir* and *batin*. *Zahir*, the active, masculine dimension applies primarily to the outer, evident form and letter of Islamic law, while *batin*, the feminine aspect, refers to the intrinsic and spiritual dimensions of reality, as well as to the *haqiqa*, the reality hidden behind outer appearances and forms. In order for a person to realize Tahwid or the oneness of Being, these two dimensions must be integrated so that a person becomes whole or “holy” and can live, according to Nasr, not on the perimeter or rim, but in the Center where the One resides.⁵³ Such a transformation, which must take place within each individual regardless of gender, is not possible without the integration and balancing of the

masculine and feminine, with the feminine serving as the necessary balancing factor.⁵⁴

For these reasons, and the many others, which will be explored here, the feminine is seen as the essential spiritual element in the esoteric dimensions of Islam.

The Feminine, A Metaphysical Interiority

For Sufis, surrender to God in his jalāl aspects of power, severity, authority, activity, majesty, etc., involves a receptive attitude to the masculine aspect of God. The concepts of acceptance, surrender and receptivity have a deeply feminine character. In Arabic, the very name “Islam” means surrender. The idea of surrender in Islam involves the active masculine struggle against the lower self as well as a consciously and freely chosen submission to God’s Will as means to complete peace, knowledge of God and unity with the Divine. To be a Muslim means that one agrees to surrender to God above all other things. Yet, the feminine concept of receptivity and surrender does not imply indolence or lassitude; on the contrary it involves an active and deep contemplative attitude in the effort to know and become one with Allāh, which is why Ibn al-‘Arabī (1165–1240), believed that women alone were both active and receptive. Surrender is undertaken for the sake of transformation; as a result, it is also seen as a creative act. Hence, surrender is not thought of as weak or passive, rather it is an alignment of the personal will with the divine Will and a “relationship of receptivity to the luminous impact of spirit,”⁵⁵ underpinned by the expression of the soul’s intense ardor or love toward the Supreme Soul or (*Mahabba*) Beloved.

In *Pathways to Inner Islam*, Patrick Laude, professor of religious studies at Georgetown University in Qatar, explains that the masculine aspect in Islam corresponds to the outer dimensions of life, most especially to the formal crystallization of the faith as it relates to *Sharī-ah* or religious law, which originates with men.⁵⁶ But woman or the feminine is viewed from another vantage point, which places her:

... in a pre-eminent position, with a privilege of extraordinary proximity to the divine mystery. This privilege is enunciated in the Qur'an, when woman is envisaged as a keeper of the mystery—*hafiz li-ghayb bi mā hafiza Allāh*.⁵⁷

The notion of woman or the feminine as a “keeper of mystery” (symbolized by the veil) can be looked at from multiple perspectives; for example, Laude reminds the reader that: “there is an understanding that passes understanding.”⁵⁸ This quote refers to the intuition and to the sapiential nature of the heart (*qalb*), but also to an inner orientation toward life, and to what Laude describes as “a communion with the essence of being.”⁵⁹ As “keeper of the mystery” the feminine element also creates the secure receptacle, or as Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee portrays it, “the inner space for relationship”⁶⁰ with the Presence.

For a number of Sufis the interiority of the feminine is also the all-important spiritual support and the means by which communion becomes possible. This is due to the feminine capacity for dynamic love and relationship to creation, to intuitive wisdom and to beauty, which mirrors the divine, and likewise its role as the transpersonal element or Soul, which is both the Universal Soul and the mystical soul seeking union with the Beloved.

Huda Lufti, in an article on the feminine in *Muhyī al Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Mystical Philosophy*, explains that for Ibn ‘Arabī, “Love is a circular movement toward completion.”⁶¹ The “movement of Love brought forth the Inward aspect of the Absolute: through the descending movement of Love, the Inward becomes the Outward, the One becomes the Many.”⁶² It is the “ascending feminine movement of Love,” according to Ibn ‘Arabī, “that retraces the steps of the initial descending movement.”⁶³ Hence, as *al-Shaykh al-Akbar* (the *Greatest Master*) maintains, the very first phase in the journey back to completion, is inwardness, or the feminine interiority and alchemical elixir of love,⁶⁴ which reveals, among other things, God’s unconditional Mercy and Compassion, and the perception of divine Beauty along with the

recognition that these are manifest in all of creation.

Ibn ‘Arabī’s fervent appreciation of the feminine⁶⁵ in its spiritual aspect is evident throughout his work and can be seen in other notable passages where he maintains that to know woman is to know oneself: “He who knoweth his [her] self, knoweth the Lord.”⁶⁶

In his *Fusus al-Hikam* (“Bezels of Wisdom” also known as the “Wisdom of the Prophets”), Ibn ‘Arabī goes so far as to claim that:

The contemplation of Allah in woman is the highest form of contemplation possible: As the Divine Reality is inaccessible in respect of the Essence, and there is contemplation only in a substance, the contemplation of God in women is the most intense and the most perfect; and the union which is the most intense (in the sensible order, which serves as support for this contemplation) is the conjugal act.⁶⁷

He maintained further that in woman or the feminine one is able to see the perfect reflection of his or her own spiritual truth, since truth is a blend of both male and female qualities. Taking up this idea, Edip Harabi, the mid 19th century Turkish Sufi, wrote the following in his poem *Man’s World*: “Whosoever calls women inferior cannot reach the Truth.”⁶⁸

Ibn ‘Arabī, whose work extended beyond traditional Sufi boundaries on gender, also viewed the feminine as a *Qutb*, a cosmic pole, pivot or axial figure that symbolizes Divine Knowledge and authority.

The word “women” very well represents the various aspects and nature of the cosmic pole, suggesting as it does multiplicity, nature, form, body, receptivity, fecundity, becoming, beauty, fascination. In short, the feminine symbolizes, microcosmically and therefore in a very succinct way, the very principle of the projected and multifaceted mirror of the cosmic image that reflects to the divine Subject the panoramic beauty of His Own infinite possibility to become, which is nothing other than His own essential Self...⁶⁹

Another Sufi metaphysician and author, Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998), also known as Īsā Nūr al-Dīn, wrote that the feminine

surpasses the formal, the finite, the outward; it is synonymous with indetermination, illimitation, mystery, and thus evokes the “Spirit which giveth life” in relation to the “letter which killeth.” That is to say that femininity in the superior sense comprises a liquefying, interiorizing, liberating power: it liberates from sterile hardness, from the dispersing outwardness of limiting and compressing forms.⁷⁰

Schuon goes on to link the feminine with inner-oriented attitude, and the gift of intuition—which he and the other Sufis believed was superior in women—with *Haqiqah*, (truth, or esoteric knowledge), as one of the reasons to justify the elevation of the feminine element.⁷¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, Rumi, Henry Corbin (1933–1978), the Sufi philosopher, theologian and Iranologist, Schuon and others, all identify the feminine as the archetype of Divine Truth and as the all-important inner support and means by which the Sufi can be initiated, via the feminine’s many “interiorizing potencies and liberating graces,”⁷² into the mysteries of Allāh or the One.

The Characteristics and Various Manifestations of the Feminine

The Feminine Names of Allāh

Arabic is a rich and complex gendered language in which there are a considerable variety of possible gender systems. Because the general rules do not always apply, gender assignment is replete with a number of exceptions. Nevertheless, Ibn ‘Arabī and other Sufis believe that the gendered character of the Arabic language implies an ontological aspect, in which the feminine is predominant in the process of creation.

As noted previously, the Ninety Nine Names of Allāh (*Asma ul Husna*), found in the Qur’an and the Hadith⁷³ describe the attributes (*sifat*) of God. These names, which have no independent existence of their own, are seen as

including both the masculine and feminine characteristics of Allāh’s divine essence. The attributes, while mutually existing, can, as we have said, be categorized into the *jalāl* (masculine) and *jamāl* (feminine) names. The first can be said to characterize Allāh’s “God-ness;” the second, Allāh’s “nurturing” Lordship.

Allāh, the One God, indivisible and without a second, is described as both Absolute and Infinite. While many Muslims accept that Allāh has a masculine polarity when viewed in terms of the “Absolute,” the “Infinite” aspect of His nature is often assigned a feminine character and can be likened to the *Mahashakti* of the Absolute due to its unlimited possibilities or potentiality, its mercy and its ability to draw us inward.⁷⁴ As explained earlier, according to the principal teachings of Islam, God’s preeminent attributes are Mercy (*Ar-Rahmān*) and Compassion (*Ar-Rahīm*), to which all the other attributes, such as severity, vigor and wrath, are subservient. *Rahmān* is generally viewed as masculine and *Rahīm* as feminine, however, the root of both words is the Arabic *rahm* or *rahma*, meaning womb. It is the qualities of mercy, generosity, forgiveness, compassion and love, say Qur’anic teachings, which guide human destiny and support its very existence.⁷⁵

Penkalai Katalikkiren, in her article *Islam and the Divine Feminine*, examines two key names in addition to the aforementioned *ar-Rahmān* (Endless or Merciful Love), which speak to the feminine dimension in Islam. The first is *al-Hakīm*—the source of all wisdom. This name corresponds to the personification of wisdom as woman, as in the divine Sophia.⁷⁶ In the Sufi tradition *al-Hakīm* can be interpreted to mean healing wisdom as well as receptivity to the light. With respect to the former, one might say that wisdom is healing because wise and loving action ultimately creates harmony and balance. *Al-Hakīm*, the wise, is one who derives knowledge from Allāh and understands the true nature of things. Hence, this name represents light or the discerning wisdom of the real, and healing wisdom based on the secrets of the Divine Heart and Mind.

The other name, *al-Dhāt* also *al-Dhaat*—meaning Divine Essence is fundamentally be-

yond gender. But because dhāt is classified as grammatically feminine it is sometimes described as more properly feminine than masculine. Najm al-Din Kurba, a 13th century influential Persian Sufi described dhāt as “the Mother of the Divine Attributes.” Ibn‘Arabī not only points to al-Dhāt as the feminine source behind the process of creation; the feminine is also the form in which the essence can be best recognized. These were, for him, among the many reasons why the feminine dimensions predominate. Consequently, as Katalikkiren suggests, al-Dhāt can be seen as the Sublime name for the veiled, inward and profoundly mysterious source or essence behind all manifestation.

Other names, which are thought to embody such feminine qualities as receptivity, empathy, healing, forgiveness, tenderness, reconciliation, nurturing, etc., include: *al-Muhyi* (the creator of Life), *al-Muqit* (the nourisher or source of sustenance), *al-Aliyy* (the exalted or transcendent), *al-Latif* (the subtle mystery of love) and *al-Nur* (light). We can also include *al-Jamil* (divine Beauty), *As-Sabr* (patience), *Wudud* (loving), *Halim* (gentle), *Wahhab* (bestower), and even *al-Khaliq* (the creator in its metacosmic aspect), as well as many others.

Based on Qur’anic teachings Sufism encourages contemplation and reflection upon these names as an aid to understanding and integrating the masculine and feminine qualities. As one contemporary Sufi explains, by balancing the many manifestations and dimensions of the masculine and feminine, one can be led along the path of unity and “taste the truth of *Tawheed*.”⁷⁷

Woman as Creator

Among the attributes discussed thus far those of Mercy (*Ar-Rahmān*) and Compassion (*Ar-Rahmān*) are the primary attributes of the Divine; for it is through divine Mercy and the “breath of the Compassionate,” which the Qur’an says encompasses all things, that the entire world is made manifest. The Divine Names, *Ar-Rahmān* and *Ar-Rahmīn*, are the maternal nourishers and protectors of existence. Creation and “God the Creator,” has been assigned a “feminine face”—the face of

the Mother, by some Sufis. Although all Muslims and Sufis believe that the Creator can be described as having feminine and masculine attributes, some Sufis, such as Ibn‘Arabī, point out that all the Arabic terms concerning origin, source of being and creation are feminine.⁷⁸ And this is why he actually refers to Allāh as She or *Hiya*, keeping in mind the Divine Essence or al-Dhat as the source of creation.

He goes on to say that “the Supreme Reality is indivisible, so who says He says She.”⁷⁹ In focusing on the feminine Ibn ‘Arabī stresses its receptivity, “her acted-upon-ness,” (there is nothing in existence that is not acted upon), and the feminine “as the place of seeding, and bringing into being creation and manifestation.”⁸⁰

In *Roots of the Human Condition*, Schuon likens the Absolute to the Universal Mother, the Supreme Productive energy, the irradiation of sanctity and the power of union personified as the divine feminine.⁸¹ Ibn‘Arabī, who had so much to say about the feminine aspect in his writings,⁸² described “Universal nature as the feminine or maternal side of the creative act” and as the “merciful breathing-out of God”—or the *Nafa ar-rahman*.⁸³

Mevlana Jualuddin Rumi (1207–1273) shares many of these same ideas; in *The Bedouin and His Wife*, he writes that: “Woman is a Ray of God’s Light; she is not just your earthly beloved. She is the Creator [*Khaliq*, one of Allāh’s sacred names] —not the created”⁸⁴ Calling attention to Rumi’s views on the feminine as evidenced in the character of the tropes and images through which he portrayed the sacred, and to the many women in Rumi’s circle, Fatemeh Keshavarz, professor of Persian and comparative literature in St. Louis says: “He chose womanhood, the ability to nurture, and the privilege of childbearing as metaphors for the sacred in order to underscore the vital, personal and evolving nature of the sacred.”⁸⁵

Another Islamic scholar, Jameelah X. Medina, in her research on the word “womb” in the Qur’an and in the *ahadith* or prophetic sayings, also notes that the two key attributes describing Allāh (*Rahmān* and *Rahmīn*), are derived from the RHM, *rahm* or *rahma*, meaning

womb or wom(b)an. She goes on to suggest that since creation is brought into being through a godly womb, this would make “Allāh the great Mother of all Creation.”⁸⁶ Medina refers to the Qur’anic verse (4:1), where Allāh says that all human beings were created from a single substance, but opines that Adam might not have been the first human being, as many Muslims believe, but rather the first of what was to be mankind. She concludes that unless Adam had a womb, Eve should be viewed as the first human.⁸⁷

The above comments from Medina and others are not as surprising as they may seem. Qur’anic narratives with regard to the creation are open to interpretation. Newer feminist exegeses of Sufism and Islam, from scholars such as Medina and Professor Riffat Hassan, give focus to the passages wherein it is said that men and women are created from the *nafs*, the original single soul. Sadiyya Shaikh, another scholar writing on Ibn ‘Arabī’s narratives regarding gender and sexuality, describes the *nafs* as “a dynamic entity” determined by one’s spiritual state.⁸⁸ Thus the *nafs* represent a range of states from the lower to the higher. The word “*nafs*” is grammatically feminine, while that of “*mate*,” or *zawji*, mentioned in the Qur’an in conjunction with Adam, is masculine.⁸⁹ Hassan also notes that the Qur’anic creation story does not depict Adam as the first man nor as a male. The word “Adam” is a collective noun describing human beings that is only used in reference to one or more humans who have become self-conscious, independent human beings.⁹⁰ Eve or Bibi *Hawwa* (meaning source of life or Mother of Creation) is mentioned in the hadith literature, but not in the Qur’an. Adam’s *mate* or *zawji*, is never presented as a woman nor is she seen as being secondary or inferior.

Although a majority of Muslims accept that Adam was the first man and had primacy over women, this idea is thought to have been influenced by biblical accounts of creation. The Qur’an, as Hassan so forcefully states,

even-handedly uses both feminine and masculine terms and imagery to describe the creation of humanity from a single

source. That Allah’s original creation was undifferentiated humanity, and neither man nor woman (who appeared simultaneously at a subsequent time), is implicit in a number of Qur’anic passages.⁹¹

In making the feminine an ontological degree or cosmic principle in relation to God, one that impregnates, permeates and nourishes all things, a number of ancient and modern Sufi philosophers believe the feminine shares with maleness in the act of creation.

Following in the footsteps of such luminaries as Ibn ‘Arabī, Schuon and Rumi, there is a viable basis for substituting “She” for “He” in what is perhaps one of the *Qur’an’s* most significant surahs—the one declaring God’s Tawhīd or Oneness:

... She is Allah. She is One, She is Eternal. She begets not nor is She begotten. And there is none equal unto to Her. (Surah Ikhlas: 112)

The Feminine Soul

Sufism conceives of the Soul as feminine, in part, because it is grammatically feminine, but also because it veils the archetypal idea or primordial spark within. The word *nafs* (also *an-nafs*) is used to describe aspects of the psyche that make up a human being. Thus *nafs* (singular in Arabic), is One, or the whole of the individual self represented as a continuum from the lowest aspect of the personality to the highest Soul. Although the Soul is essentially free of matter, it has a connection to its actions and functions.⁹² Because of this the *nafs* can represent the little self and the secular or “Mistress World” which distracts the seeker from spiritual striving⁹³ However, the *nafs* also serves as a vehicle by which one is able to register the influence of spirit. In its higher aspect “the *Nafs* acts as the mirror of the invisible worlds,”⁹⁴ and the all-important “locus of transformation.”

From this we can see that the concept of the feminine exists at a hierarchy of levels, signifying either the animal soul, the self or ego, the human soul, the spiritual soul or heart (*qalb*), the secret soul and the divine soul or “soul of the Soul.”⁹⁵ But, from the highest to

the lowest, the nafs extends from the original soul, or Universal Soul (*An-Nafs al-kulliyah*), which was impregnated with divine intelligence and from which the first pair and all other souls originated, to the animal soul or *An-Nafs al-ammārah*, and to the vegetable and mineral souls. Each aspect of the soul has its own dynamics which can be characterized at the lowest human level of development by selfishness, ambition, ignorance, impulsivity, etc., and at its highest human level of perfection, that of *An-Nafs al-sāfiyyah*, by beauty, freedom, certitude and the joy of union with the divine.

At each stage the soul reflects the feminine qualities of longing until the path of longing is gradually transformed from the self and the “Mistress World,” to the longing or Love for the Beloved, which is found within the innermost chamber of the heart. On the individual level, the heart is the abode of the Soul and the Soul is “the mystical companion in each person who is seeking the Beloved.”⁹⁶

In the Iranian spiritual world, which has its roots in Mazdean and Zoroastrian angelology, the *fravashi*, soul or guiding spirit, who reminds one of his or her purpose in life and prompts one to live in a way so that the soul progresses toward the divine, is perceived by Corbin in *Cyclical Times and Ismaili Gnosis* as

an Angel, a mediating being whose appearance on the horizon of the soul unveils the self to the self. This angel whose nature is identified as symbolically feminine, is the inner face, the esoteric dimension of the self or the soul in heaven (on its own plane), that invokes the other half of oneself.⁹⁷

These comments seem to suggest an equivalency between the *fravashi* and the Solar Angel or the Agnishvatta of the Theosophical tradition. We may also note that the Deva Evolution, to which the Solar Angels belong, has a feminine polarity relative to humanity.

Corbin’s *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth* also refers to the Mother Angel of the Earth, or the World Soul as

the Soul of creation and the Soul of each creature, that is, the constitutive part of the human being that appears essentially to the imaginative consciousness in the form of a feminine being, Anima. She is the eternally feminine in man, and that is why she is the archetype of the heavenly Earth.⁹⁸

Vaughan-Lee, the Sufi teacher and lineage successor in the Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya Sufi Order, has written at length about the importance of the return of the Feminine and the World Soul. For him, “the World Soul is not just a psychological or philosophical concept. It is a living spiritual substance within us and around us.”⁹⁹ The World Soul represents the receptive dimensions of the spiritual world with the capacity “to liberate creation from its imprisonment and awaken life to meaning.”¹⁰⁰

From these comments we can see that Sufism places an emphasis on the various states and expressions of the feminine soul, from the Microcosmic to the Macrocosmic level. Both the nafs and the World Soul or *Anima Mundi* are seen as manifestations and integral parts of the one Universal Soul or *Anima Universi*. Together these expressions serve mediating functions between spirit and matter, God and man, man and the cosmos, and, as such, their aim is to help the Sufi live inwardly, from the center or throne of the divine within, in order to gain knowledge of Allāh’s Absolute Oneness.

The Divine Sophia or Wisdom

The divine feminine in the Sufic tradition, is frequently understood as an expression of Sophia or wisdom. The Iranian scholar and polymath, Abū Rayhān al-Bīrūnī, (973–1050), remarked that Sufis originally worshiped Sophia, the Goddess of Wisdom. Many Sufis assign a meaning to the word “Sufi” based on its phonetic resemblances to Sophia; but as the French metaphysician René Guénon (1886–1951), also known as “Shaykh” Abd al-Wāḥid Yaḥyá indicates, the strongest argument comes from the fact that the word Sufi has the exact numerical value as *al-Hikmatu’l-ilahiya* or Divine Wisdom. He adds that the one who possesses wisdom, which can only be known through God, is a true Sufi.¹⁰¹

Not only is wisdom often symbolized as feminine, “the aim of the spiritual quest is personified as a woman.”¹⁰² She is the one who alchemically transforms the “moon of our mind,” with its reflected light, “into the sun of understanding.”¹⁰³ Her function is to serve as a source of empowerment, of creative Self-awareness, inspiration and spiritual enlightenment. Of special importance is Sophia’s role as the reconciling and mediating principle between spirit and matter, humanity and the divine.

In addition to wisdom and intuition, the Sophianic feminine, according to Ibn ‘Arabī reveals “the secret of the compassionate God.”¹⁰⁴ He also viewed women as “teachers of wisdom.” Indeed, several women, such as Yasmina Umm al Fuqarā, Nizam Ain al-Shams, and Fatima of Cordova, played important roles in his spiritual development and rebirth. Yasmina was a feminine adept known for her intuition, and superior spiritual gifts. The Lady Nizam, who represented an archetypal image of the Sophia, helped him to free himself from doubt and ratiocentric belief systems by illuminating the ways of love and the subtleties of the spiritual path.¹⁰⁵ Fatima, a gnostic from Seville, also served as Ibn ‘Arabī’s guiding shaykha and divine mother. From her he learned the value of surrender to feminine leadership and an understanding of the science of letters¹⁰⁶ and saints. These women, and women in general, were viewed as having a unique aptitude for inner knowledge and as being endowed with the capacity for a direct understanding of God.

Another woman revered for her wisdom and spiritual authority was Umm ‘Alī Fātima of Nisapur. She was the teacher of a number of notable Sufis who were celebrated for their wisdom, such as the Iranian, Bāyazīd al-Bistāmī (804 – 874), King of the Gnostics and

the pioneer of the notion of *fana* (annihilation of the self). Al-Bistāmī held that she was the “one true woman who preceded him in the attainment of all spiritual stations.”¹⁰⁷

Other women, such as Maryam, the mother of *Isa* or Jesus, along with Fatimah al-Zahra bint Muhammad, the Prophet’s daughter, both of whom will be discussed in greater detail below, are directly identified with Sophia and wisdom, since respectively, they give birth to the “Word” and the “knowledge of God.” Therefore, the divine feminine embodies wisdom or knowledge and the means to attain it.

Renaud Fabbri, in extrapolating on the thoughts of Frithjof Schuon, maintains that “a holy man is not always a sage but his wisdom necessarily originates in Her domain.”¹⁰⁸

For Vaughan-Lee, the feminine is the matrix of creation and her wisdom originates from life itself.¹⁰⁹ Feminine wisdom is related to receptivity and the ability to hold a sacred space, either during pregnancy, in the heart, or within the soul where the sanctity of longing and receptivity creates an opening for the divine to be born.¹¹⁰ The heart or *qalb* is a primary focus in Sufism where it is seen as instrument of supra-rational intuition and a means to the mystical union. The eye of the heart, says Vaughan-Lee, sees behind the veil of appearances. It is the treasury where God’s mystery is stored; hence it is the feminine qualities contained within the spiritual heart, such as inwardness, beauty, love, sympathy, self-sacrifice that lead to true knowledge or intuition.

Beauty

In Islam, especially in the pre-modern intellectual and literary traditions, beauty played (and continues to play, albeit to a lesser degree), a pivotal role in the universe and in life.¹¹¹ In-

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spired by faith, and the effort to live a life that both investigates and reveals the feminine jamāl attributes of Allāh, Muslim poets, musicians, calligraphers, litterateurs and philosophers sought to create and express beauty in some form or another.¹¹² The Sufic traditions place a special emphasis on the expression of beauty in metaphysics, cosmology, psychology and ethics.¹¹³ For example, different groups might focus on “cosmogony and cosmology (the role of beauty in the origination and structure of the universe)” or “on psychology (the effect of beauty on the human soul)” as Kazuyo Murata, in *Beauty and Sufism*, explains. Other Sufis such as Raghīb al-Isfahani, an eleventh century Iranian scholar, classified beauty into three different categories: 1) rational beauty or beauty favored by the mind, 2) sensual beauty or beauty rooted in lust and desire, 3) sensible beauty or the beauty of appearances. Therefore, what Islam understood was that while beauty needs to be valued and defended, outer beauty was a double-edged sword that was fleeting and could distract and lead the seeker astray.

However, in its highest aspect, “true beauty” belongs to Allāh, the perfect Being, and all that is good. Beauty is also inseparable from Absolute Truth. Hence, the idea of beauty is connected to “knowledge” of the Divine, and when carried in the heart, can be expressed in all that is good, beautiful and true. Beauty is creative since it both elevates and inspires. Nasr describes beauty as “the radiation of the Face of the Beloved¹¹⁴ thereby linking Beauty with Love. Love and beauty are inextricably connected, for beauty has attractive and magnetic qualities that can draw forth the soul’s love and facilitate a relationship with the thing that is loved.

For Sufis in particular, beauty is thought to mirror the divine nature. All the beauty and splendor in creation is a reflection of Allāh’s ultimate beauty. Hence, the story of beauty, as Murata states: “is the story of the unfolding of the divine beauty through two mirrors, the universe (macrocosm) and the human being (microcosm).”¹¹⁵ Indeed the Qur’an assigns beauty to Allāh or God, to Muhammad, his prophet, to

humankind (especially women) and the entirety of creation.¹¹⁶

Sufis have always maintained that beauty in the human creature is the reflection of the divine nature. Feminine beauty¹¹⁷ is a supreme archetype, a representative or a visible symbol of the face of God. For this reason the love of a woman and feminine beauty, when mystically sublimated and directed in contemplation toward the Creator, could lead to union with the Divine. These ideas are epitomized for example, in the works of Ibn ‘Arabi, who explained that women and the feminine are the “most perfect locus of manifestation of God’s beauty on earth,”¹¹⁸ and in the poetry of Rumi, “whose religion of love,” according to Corbin, “fed on the theophanic feeling of sensuous beauty.”¹¹⁹ The Sufi saint and scholar Ruzbihan Balqi (1128–1209), who wrote at length about beauty, equated the love of feminine beauty with mystical experience, while Schuon called it the “Epiphanic Mirror” and “splendor of Truth.”¹²⁰

The notion of feminine beauty as a symbol of the Divine can also be seen in various Arab stories, most notably in the well-known story of Layla and Majnun, where the unrequited love of a beautiful woman is transformed into a symbol of Love for Allāh. In this story Majnun symbolizes the human spirit longing for the Beloved in the guise of Layla. As such, this story reminds us that the relationship between the lover and the Beloved is mediated by the feminine quality of beauty.

Spiritual Mothers as an Expression of the Esoteric Feminine

The feminine, in the Sufic tradition, is perceived as a means of Knowing God or Allāh, hence women are viewed as spiritual guides and recipients of revelation. In the Iranian Shi’ite and Ismaili’s tradition, for example, women have played an important role in the ranks of the spiritual elite alongside the Prophets and Imams. They are *hujjats* (indisputable proofs or demonstrations of wisdom and purity) who hold the rank of “Spiritual Mothers” or guides who help others to develop spirituality. Among these illustrious women are: Hazrat (an honorific title) Eve with Prophet Adam,

Hazrat Hagar with Prophet Abraham, Hazrat Zulaikha with Prophet Joseph, Hazrat Maryam with Prophet Moses, Hazrat Maryam with Prophet Jesus, Hazrat Khadijah and Hazrat Fatimah-al Zahra with Prophet Muhammad, and numerous other women along with the Imams.¹²¹

Corbin, one of the twentieth century's most prominent thinkers and orientalist, depicts Eve's role as hujjat in relationship to Adam as "typifying the esoteric content of the *shari'ah*." In other words, she is one who understands the batin or esoteric significance contained within the symbols of Islamic canonical law. That is why, says Corbin, "Adam cannot fulfill the *shari'ah* in this cycle without her."¹²² Continuing, Corbin writes that the Supreme Maryam (*Maryam al-Kubra*), who is a representative of the heavenly Eve, is conceived as Isa's (Jesus) hujjat "because it was she who opened the doors of gnosis, which had been closed to Isa, by appealing to the master of the new *shari'ah*."¹²³

Among the list of spiritual mothers listed above two women are the most celebrated in all of Islam, and it is to these two spiritual exemplars that we now turn.

Mary or Maryam

One of these most revered women in the Islamic tradition, perhaps second only to the daughter of the prophet, is the Virgin Mary or *Maryam* the mother of Isa or Jesus, who, says the Turkish Sheikh Muzaffer Ozak, can effect a mystical virgin birth in the heart of those who venerate and meditate upon her virginity.¹²⁴ He points out that in the Islamic tradition, especially within the Sufic orders, "virginity is not primarily a biological condition, but a spiritual state. To be a virgin male or female, is to give oneself entirely to God... to the living Truth."¹²⁵

Hazrat Maryam is mentioned 34 times in 32 of the Qur'an verses. She is the only female referred to by name in the Qur'an and one of only eight people (prophets) who have an entire chapter or surah named after them. Maryam's name in Syriac signifies a blessing and is said to mean: "God exalts her." Of all wom-

en, she is the most blessed, uncorrupted and righteous. Maryam exemplifies purity and virtue and is the only woman who is protected from sin from the time of her birth.

Maryam gave birth to Isa (Jesus, also known as *kalam Allāh* or Word of God) who is also singled out as a prophet of singular import. The Lady Maryam was not only the "chosen woman" who was fit for the miracle of the immaculate conception, she is the one who was visited by angels and who turned away from the world to pray and meditate. As such, Maryam represents wisdom or the *sophia perennis* as well as the perfection of the Soul. Louis Massignon, the Catholic scholar of Islam, saw her as "the priestess of hospitality" because of her acceptance of the other within her self, not only in terms of being the archetypal mother, but especially as it relates to the inward acceptance of the soul. Along this same vein, another Sufi metaphysician, Schuon, founder of *Maryamiyah Sufi Order*, conceived of Maryam as the one "who incarnates the sanctified soul and the creature in its primordial state."¹²⁶ She has, therefore, a shaktic or universal dimension; and as a terrestrial virgin, she is one who "transmits a message of humility, interiority, and resignation to God."¹²⁷

Fabbri, in discussing Schuon's thoughts on Maryam tell us that:

In Sufi terms, she perfectly realizes — holy poverty (*faqr*) as well as the primordial servitude (*ubudiyya*) of the creature in the face of God. On the operative plane, she is a model for those who remain in spiritual retreat (*khalwah*) and invoke the Divine Name to purify their heart. If Mary symbolizes on earth the faithful servant (*abd*) and the spiritual retreat, in Heaven she is exalted as the mother of the avatara and the — Mother of the Book (*umm al-kitab*). Schuon calls her, after the Iranian Sufi Ruzbihan Baqli, — the mother of all the prophets and the prophecy and the substance of the original sainthood and, along with a few Sufis and Islamic theologians, he attributes to her the status of a prophetess.¹²⁸

According to Schuon, Maryam was a *co-redemptrix* and the earthly mirror or reflection

of the Logos in its feminine aspect,¹²⁹ a title used by some Roman Catholics connoting the Mother of Salvation along with Jesus the Redeemer.

As noted earlier, the Shi'ite and Ismaili traditions view Maryam (*Maryam al-Kubra*) as the "Great Creator," the "One Great Pearl," *Al-Mohadatheh* (a female spoken to by Angels) and the "Celestial Light." In Ismaili metaphysics the Celestial Light refers to the Universal Soul—*Al-Nafs al-kull*,¹³⁰ terms that also refer to Fatimah al-Zahra, the daughter of the Prophet.

Hujjats, like Maryam, have a responsibility for the spiritual training and instruction of future prophets and Imams, the manifestation of which is said to be necessary for the continued existence of the world.¹³¹

Fatimah al-Zahra bint Muhammad: The Daughter of Muhammad

For Muslims in general, especially in Shia Islam, there is a close connection between Maryam and Fatimah al-Zahra. Bahar Davary, in an article on *Mary in Islam*, observes that both Fatimah and Maryam are *al-Tahira* or pure ones, and both were holy women who gave birth to a pure and sinless male progeny.¹³² Mary gave birth to the Messiah, Isa; Fatimah gave birth to Muhammad's descendants (via the Imam Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib), and the Shi'ite lineage of Imams. Parallels between the two further depict each figure as a manifestation of the holy sufferer; for the sons of Fatimah, Hasan and Husayn, and Isa, the son of Maryam, suffered hardships, persecution and death at the hands of disbelievers.¹³³

In the Shi'ite faith, Fatimah holds the highest spiritual station among the hierarchy of devotional figures—being the only woman among the fourteen! Massignon indicates that she has become the archetypal "perfect woman" who has been virtually divinized by the Ismaili's, Nusayris, Druze and certain Shi'ite sects. Like Maryam, Fatima represents the universal virginal Substance in which "all faithful souls can participate."¹³⁴

Corbin follows Massignon, Schuon and others in assigning Fatimah the role of a creative and life-giving archetype.

Fatimah the Radiant appears as an archetype exemplified in numerous recurrences, which are carefully noted by the typology of Ismaili *ta'wil* [allegorical interpretation of the Qur'an.] Generally speaking, the feminine figures who exemplify this archetype are, like Fatimah herself above all, so many typifications of gnosis (*'ilm al-batin*, *'ilm al-haqiqah*), of the initiation into this gnosis, and of the Life which this gnosis breathes into the "dead," i.e., into those who are unknowing and unconscious. Thus, her esoteric rank is above all that of the *Hujjat*, the "Proof" or Witness of the Imam, indeed even a substitute for the Imam who, being in possession of the *ta'wil*, is the source of that Life which resurrects the dead.^{135,136}

Moreover, in Shia Islam, Fatimah is the axis of the Imamate; and among the Shi'ite it is believed that the future Imam Mahdi will come from among her descendants.¹³⁷ In certain traditions, she is believed to be the mother of all Shi'ite Imams responsible for transmitting the prophet's enlightenment and soul through her noble lineage.

She is also regarded as one of the foremost commentators on the Qur'an whose expertise of divine knowledge is on a par with the Imams or spiritual successors to the prophet.

Fatimah has been given a number of titles, each referring to one of the spiritual qualities that she is thought to embody. She is called Fatimah the Brightest Star and Fatima-Star of Venus. It is of interest to note here that the planet Venus, the light bearer to our earth, has immense significance in Islam and figures prominently in its system of metaphysics. Along with the Moon, Venus is the five-pointed star on the Islamic flag and at the top of every mosque. Among other examples are the *Fajr*, the pre-dawn prayer, which aligns with Venus' rising and the black stone or me-

teorite at the heart of the Saturnian Ka'ba, which John of Damascus believed came from Venus.

Among Fatimah's other names, are *Fatimah al-Zahra*, the Radiant or Luminous. This title refers to her as the "repository of the repository of the Light of the Imams, thereby implying her preeminence over the Imams."¹³⁸ John Andrew Marrow, in *Islamic Images and Ideas on Sacred Symbolism* describes Fatimah as "the vessel of light contained within the material world," or human body ... "the recipient of light and the guardian of revelation."¹³⁹

Another appellation is "mistress of all the women in the world," especially for those who seek to come to God or Allāh. Fatimah is a model for all women due to her purity, compassion, beauty, harmony and spiritual love. She is also linked with light of knowledge and wisdom; hence she serves as the image of the divine feminine in the hearts of women and men.

Mistress of the Resurrection

Islamic eschatology refers to a branch of theology pertaining to the end of the world, and the Day of Resurrection or the *Yawm al-Qiyamāh*. Islamic beliefs in the Resurrection are based on the *Sūrat al-Qiyamāh*, the seventy-fifth chapter in the Qur'an, and are fundamental to all Muslims. Such beliefs have a great deal in common with the eschatological beliefs in the other major faiths and have been dealt with in more detail elsewhere.¹⁴⁰

There are, however, some fascinating differences in certain minority sects regarding the Qiyamāh. Among them are the *Ghulat* (exaggerators) and "extremists," a term given to a group by outsiders, primarily because it is thought that they divinize various figures, such as Ali. The so-called Ghulat are concealed Shi'ites living in Iraq, Iran, Kurdistan and Azerbaijan.¹⁴¹ But the appellation that they give to themselves is *Ahl-i haq*, meaning Truth-Worshippers or People of the Truth. Within these minority groups, the Divine Feminine is held in high regard.

Dr. Matti Moosa, in his research on the Ghulat sects,¹⁴² informs us that among the beliefs held

by the Ahl-i-haq is one concerning four arch-angels brought into existence by the King of the World. In one version of the myth, one of the angels, the female *Hazrat Razbar* (also *Remzebar*) was of such Pure Substance that she provided the very stuff or substance of creation.¹⁴³ In addition to being directly associated with the Creator and the myth of creation (Razbar means "secret of creation"), she also plays a significant role in death. According to the Ghulat or Ahl-i-haq, an aspect of the Divine Feminine in the form of the mysterious Razbar, appears as the *Khatun-i Qiyamat* (Lady of Resurrection) who comes to aid all of humanity in the hereafter.¹⁴⁴ As Moosa points out, "she is not only an angel of mercy, but an intermediary between God and man, through her celebration of the "first communion" with God and the... angels,"¹⁴⁵ after the creation of the world.

In the more traditional Shi'ite sects the Divine Feminine takes the form of Fatima bint Muhammad, the prophet's daughter. Believers accept that Fatima will be manifest to every soul on the Last Day or Day of the Gathering. During this time Fatima is said to serve as an intercessor between human souls and Allāh. She also serves as something of a judge, because before proceeding to Paradise, she will look into every human heart and then take by the hand all those whose heart is filled with love. Certain Shi'ites and the Druze believe that Fatima will be the first person to enter *Jannah* or Paradise. Others believe that she (and Maryam), are the first "women" to enter heaven.

It is of interest to note here that exoterically the term Qiyamāh means "rising" of the dead, but as author and Ismaili scholar, Mumtaz Ali Tajddin maintains,

allegorically, it implies an idea denoting the rising to the next spiritual stage, and qiyamat-i qubra (great resurrection) means an attainment of the highest degree when a man becomes free from the ties of external laws... and transfigures into spiritual substance, which rejoins its divine sources.¹⁴⁶

In other words, from an esoteric or feminine (batin) perspective, the qiyāmāh can be seen

not only as a physical event, but rather, a spiritual or soul-related event that has its effects in the material world.¹⁴⁷ The feminine, as Sufism emphasizes, plays a significant role in the creation and salvation of the soul and the world. Just as the divine Feminine is there at the beginning of creation, so does she take part in its consummation and rebirth.¹⁴⁸

Conclusion

Worship of the Mother, the Goddess or the eternal feminine is one of the oldest, most pervasive and important forms of worship on earth. But over the past 2,000 years, the feminine has been cast into the shadows by a religious patriarchy that has done its best to obscure, repress and even malign the feminine spirit. While virtually every religion still contains vestiges of feminine veneration—one may point to Sophia and Mariology, the Shekinah and the other feminine archetypes in the Kabbalah, the Dakinis and the female Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and the many feminine expressions of the divine in the Hindu tradition—yet, in the majority of these traditions, the feminine has been relegated to the sidelines in favor of a powerful masculine presence. Elsewhere the feminine lives a largely invisible existence.

Islam, like the major religions, contains a feminine component. The role of the feminine in Islam has been there from the beginning. Indeed, the feminine dimension has been explored and discussed at length and is given a preeminent position in the deeper spiritual economy of Islam. Various factors, such as male domination of the faith, and Western misconceptions and ignorance of Islam have obscured this fact. Due also to its metaphysical interiority or ontological inwardness, the mystery of the feminine dimension has been veiled and hidden from view.

While both the masculine and the feminine have their origin in Allāh and are called to participate in Allāh's nature, this article has given special emphasis to the feminine in an effort to show that in esoteric Islam or Sufism, with its more speculative and contemplative traditions, there is an "explicit preference for the feminine aspect of Allāh."¹⁴⁹ This preference had its

roots in the complex polytheism of pan-Arabia in which the worship of matriarchal deities was once prominent. But Sufis like the great Ibn 'Arabi, Rumi, al-Isfahani, Balqi and more modern Sufis like Corbin, Schuon and Murata, have done much to elevate and deepen conceptions of the sacred feminine in her role as initiator into the mysteries of God.

In the strict monotheism of Islam, God is shown to be "One without a second." Human-kind, on the other hand, was created in pairs from a single substance. Male and female are counterparts that make up the original Self. From the Sufi perspective, the male or masculine element represents the outward aspects of the faith and existence in general. The feminine, on the other hand, symbolizes the subtle, inward dimension or the reality behind the world of appearances. As such, it is viewed as the necessary factor in integrating the two basic natures.

Although God or Allāh is an ineffable reality, the differentiated aspects of the Absolute, which are neither identical nor distinct from the essence, are also expressed in the Ninety-Nine Names of Allāh. These names were shown to express the fundamental polarity of male and female, outer and inner, majesty and beauty, strength and mercy. An examination of the feminine names revealed that such interiorizing attributes as receptivity, intuition, beauty, mercy, love and surrender, serve as a means of spiritual support for those who are seeking union with the Beloved.

In addition to an examination into the major qualities or characteristics of the feminine, this article discussed Sufi conceptions of the feminine soul, feminine creativity and wisdom. Various manifestations of the divine feminine in the guise of a spiritual mother, evident in such figures as Maryam or Mary and Fatimah al-Zahra, were explored. These are women who served as proofs of purity and wisdom. Not only are they viewed as spiritual exemplars; they also function as spiritual guides or teachers for the likes of Isa or Jesus, and Ali and the Shia Imams. Finally, the feminine in her role as the "Mistress of the Resurrection" was discussed and shown to be an angel of

mercy and an intermediary between humanity and God during the end times and “Day of Rising.” Thus, the divine feminine in the Sufic tradition is revealed as being integral to the achievement of wholeness and the realization of the Self within the Complete Self, which is the oneness of Tawhīd. She represents the interiorizing aspect of the Islamic faith, the spiritual support and mediating presence between spirit and matter.

¹ Annie Besant, *The Life and Teachings of Mohammed* (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1932), 29.

² Lisa Beyer, “The Women of Islam,” *Time Magazine*, Sunday November 25, 2001.

³ *The Message of the Qur’an*, translated and explained by Muhammad Asad (Bristol, ENG: The Book Foundation, 2003), Sūrat al-Dhāriyāt, 51:49.

⁴ Gai Eaton, *Remembering God: Reflections on Islam* (Cambridge, ENG: The Islamic Texts Society, 2000), 92.

⁵ Muslim Student Association at the University of Southern California, www.uscmuslims.com/ (Last accessed February, 27, 2018).

⁶ See for example, “Women and the Advent of Islam,” by L. Ahmed in *Signs, Vol. 11, No. 4* (University of Chicago Press, 1986), 665-691.

⁷ Anwar Hekmat, *Women and the Koran: The Status of Women in Islam* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1997), 10.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Hekmat’s work is a reexamination of the Qur’an as a “dangerously patriarchal, anti-women text.”

⁹ *Ibid.*, 253.

¹⁰ See for example, *Women in Pre-Islamic Arabia*, published by the Muslim Women’s League, in 1995. Online at: <http://mwllusa.org/topics/history.htm> (Last accessed February 3, 2018).

¹¹ Mohammed Arkoun points out that when the Qur’an appeared in history, it was unable to modify views on kinship and control of sexuality, which were deeply entrenched into the centuries old societal system. For more information see: *Rethinking Islam* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 60-63.

¹² *Arabian Paganism*. <http://wathanism.blogspot.com/2011/11/deities-beings-and-figures-in-arabian.html>, (Last accessed February 27, 2018).

¹³ Thalia Took, *Arab Triple Goddesses*, <http://www.thaliatook.com/AMGG/arabtriple.php> (Last accessed February 27, 2018).

¹⁴ Amina Wadud, *The Qur’an and Women: Re-reading a sacred Text from a Women’s Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 18.

¹⁵ The author will use the spelling “Makkah,” the proper spelling preferred by Muslims and the official spelling used in Saudi Arabia.

¹⁶ Laurence Galian, *The Centrality of the Divine Feminine in Sufism*, The Islamic Research Foundation International Inc., 2009. http://www.irfi.org/articles3/articles_4801_4900/the%20centrality%20of%20the%20divine%20feminine%20in%20sufismhtml.htm (Last accessed March 8, 2018).

¹⁷ As quoted by Subhamoy Das, a Hindu researcher and author, who has written extensively on Hindu philosophy and Indology. We wish to note here that despite claims from Galian, Swami Sivananda and a number of others, Alla and Allāh do not appear in the Monier Williams Sanskrit English Dictionary. *Ibid.*

¹⁹ The *Chandervansh* were the warrior caste and one of the two great royal dynasties in India. See for example, *Origin of Pagan Idolatry Ascertained From Historical Testimony, Vol.1*, by George Stanley Faber. Published in 1816. Reprint available from Kessinger Publishing LLC, 2004, or *The Vishṇu Purāna: A System of Hindu Mythology and Tradition*, Horace Hayman Wilson, ed. (reprint; London: Forgotten Books, 2015).

²⁰ From an esoteric perspective, Sudyumna represents the solar nadi or *pingala*, while Ila presents the lunar nadi or *ida*, the rational and intuitive, or positive and negative forces in the body.

²¹ Anwar Hekmat, *Women and the Koran*, 18.

²² Eusebius believed that Philo Byblos associated the Phoenician Elos with Kronos. For additional information see: Avner Falk, *A Psychoanalytic History of the Jews* (London: Fairleigh Dickenson University Press, 1996), 66, or Dwayne A. Meisner, *Orphic Tradition and the Birth of the Gods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 29.

²³ Helena Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. 1 (reprint, 1978; New York: The Theosophical Publishing Co., 1888), 386.

²⁴ A few scholars maintain that the goddess al-Manat was older than al-Lāt. See Najam

- Sayuti, *The Concept of Allah as the Highest God In Pre-Islamic Arabia* (The Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University Montreal, 1999).
- ²⁵ Ibid., 55.
- ²⁶ Arab Religion before Islam, <http://sakina.wikidot.com/arabian-deities> (Last accessed June 1, 2018).
- ²⁷ Galian, *The Centrality of the Divine Feminine in Sufism*, http://www.irfi.org/articles3/articles_4801_4900/the%20centrality%20of%20the%20divine%20feminine%20in%20sufismhtml.htm (Last accessed March 18, 2018).
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ Najmah Sayuti, *The Concept of Allah as the Highest God In Pre-Islamic Arabia*, Master thesis for the Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University Montreal, CA, 1999, 7.
- ³⁰ Anwar Hekmat, *Women and the Koran*, 18-19
- ³¹ Sayuti, *The Concept of Allah as the Highest God In Pre-Islamic Arabia*, 2.
- ³² “Pre-Islamic Arabia: The Nomadic Tribes,” *The Rise and Spread of Islam*, in “Boundless World History,” <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-worldhistory/chapter/pre-islamic-arabia/> (Last accessed June 3, 2018).
- ³³ Mayluna Muhammad Ali, *Muhammad: The Prophet* (reprint; 1993; Lahore: Ahmadiyya Ajnuman Isha, 1924), 10.
- ³⁴ Some sources dispute this claim saying that pre-Islamic Allāh was confused with Hubal, who represented an aspect of the High God. Others hold that this is a fringe theory arising in the 1990’s when evangelical Christians mistook the crescent moon on the Islamic flag and the tops of every mosque as a form of moon worship. But this theory too, has been refuted. What is certain is that the Islam is unassailably monotheistic. The *Qur’an* makes no mention of the Moon God other than to strictly forbid its worship. Passage 041.037 states: “Among His Signs are the Night and the Day, and the Sun and the Moon. Do not prostrate to the sun and the moon, but prostrate to Allāh, Who created them, if it is Him ye wish to serve.”
- ³⁵ Mayluna Muhammad Ali, *Muhammad: The Prophet*, 19.
- ³⁶ Sam Shamoun, *Revisiting the Identity of the pre-Islamic Allah at Mecca: Part 1*, https://www.answering-islam.org/authors/shamoun/preislamic_allah1.html (Last accessed February 22, 2018).
- ³⁷ Benjamin Walker, *Foundations of Islam: The Making of a World Faith* (London: Peter Owen Publishers, 1998), 46,47.
- ³⁸ Josh Ellenbogen; Aaron Tugendhaft, *Idol Anxiety* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011). 47.
- ³⁹ Galian, *The Centrality of the Divine Feminine in Sufism*, http://www.irfi.org/articles3/articles_4801_4900/the%20centrality%20of%20the%20divine%20feminine%20in%20sufismhtml.htm (Last accessed April 12, 2018).
- ⁴⁰ See for example, Lennard James, *The Black Stone, at Kaaba*, 2009, <https://www.scribd.com>, or Bob Trubshaw, *The Black Stone - the Omphalos of the Goddess*, <http://www.indigogroup.co.uk/edge/blstone.htm> (Last accessed February 28, 2018).
- ⁴¹ Galian, *The Centrality of the Divine Feminine in Sufism*, http://www.irfi.org/articles3/articles_4801_4900/the%20centrality%20of%20the%20divine%20feminine%20in%20sufismhtml.htm (Last accessed March 18, 2018).
- ⁴² The goddesses’ identification with Satan is perhaps best known in the West with the publication of Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses*. Rushdie’s book is titled after the group of Qur’anic verses that are interpreted as allowing intercessory prayers to be made to three Pagan goddesses, Allāt, al-Uzza and al-Manāt.
- ⁴³ Seeyed Hossein Nasr, “The Male and Female in the Islamic Perspective,” *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Vol. 14, No. 1 & 2, Winter-Spring (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, Inc., 1980), 2.
- ⁴⁴ See for example. Ahmed Duree’s “Gender and Islamic Spirituality” in *Islamic Masculinities* (London: Zed Books, 2006) or Sachiko Murata’s *The Tao of Islam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992).
- ⁴⁵ Nasr, *The Male and Female in the Islamic Perspective*, 3.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., 1.
- ⁴⁸ M. Ali Lakhani, “Neither of the East nor of the West,” *The Universal Dimensions of Islam: Studies in Comparative Religion*, ed. Patrick Laude (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2011), 107.
- ⁴⁹ Sachiko Murata, *Women of Light in Sufism*, for the Muhyiddin Ibn al-‘Arabi Society,

http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/articles/womenoflight.html (Last accessed March 20, 2018).
Ibid.
Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), or Ahmed Duree's "Gender and Islamic Spirituality" in *Islamic Masculinities* (London: Zed Books, 2006).
Murata, *The Tao of Islam*, 77.
Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man* (Chicago, IL: Kazi Publications, 2001), 3.
Nasr, *The Male and Female in the Islamic Perspective*, 7.
Sadiyya Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn 'Arabi, Gender and Sexuality* (Chapel Hill: NC, University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 39.
Patrick Laude, *Pathways to Inner Islam* (New York: SUNY, 2010), 105.
Ibid.
Ibid., 111.
Ibid.
Llewellyn Vaughan Lee, "The Grace of the Guru: The Keeper of the Gates of Grace," *The Light of Consciousness Journal*, Fall 1998.
Huda Lufti, "The Feminine Element in Ibn 'Arabi's Mystical Philosophy," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, No. 5 (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1985), 10.
Ibid., 13.
Ibid., 14.
Ibid.
Formative influences on Ibn 'Arabi philosophy were two female Sufi Saints: Fátima of Cordova and Yasmina of Meshana, and a Persian Sufi woman, Nizám who represented for Ibn 'Arabi, the embodiment of divine love and beauty. His teachings, while still considered to be controversial even today, have had significant impact on elevation of the women and the role of the feminine is Sufism and Islam.
Ibn al-'Arabi, *Futúhât al-Makkiyyah* (or *The Openings in Makkah*) (translated by Eric Winkel; Malaysia: Islamic Book Trust, 2016), 308:22. Author's brackets.
Ibn al-'Arabi, *al-Hikam* or *Bezzels of Wisdom* (Hyderabad, India: Taj Publishers, 1994),
Ahmed Edip Harabi, *Quarreling with God: Mystic Rebel Poems of the dervishes of Turkey*, translated by Jennifer Ferraro and Latif Bolat (Mersin, Turkey: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Kütüphaneler ve Yayimlar, 2009).
Ibn' al-'Arabi, *Fusûs al-Hikam*, 270.

Frithjof Schuon, *The Roots of the Human Condition* (Bloomington, IN: WorldWisdom Inc., 1991), 40-41.
Ibid. 41,
Laude, *Pathways to Inner Islam*, 123, 125.
The *Hadith* are the recorded sayings of the Prophet Muhammad.
See for example, Frithjof Schuon, *Roots of the Human Condition*, 29-31.
Murata, *Women of Light in Sufism*, for the Muhyiddin Ibn al-'Arabi Society, <http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/articles/womenoflight.html> (Last accessed March 20, 2018).
Penkalai Katalikkiren, "Islam and the Divine Feminine," *Oriens: International Society for Oriental Research* Vol. 1. No 2, 2004, 2.
Mahmoud Mostafa, "Feminine Symbols In Islam." *The Threshold Society*, <https://sufism.org/library/articles/feminine-symbols-in-islam> (Last accessed May 3, 2018).
Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi* (London: Routledge, 2007), notes, 342-343.
Muhyiddin Ibn al-'Arabi, as quoted from *The Pathways to Inner Islam*, by Patrick Laude (New York: SUNY, 2010), 120.
Ibn al-'Arabi, *Fusûs al-Hikam*, 507.
Schuon, *The Roots of the Human Condition*, 33.
Ibn 'Arabi writings are controversial, and his comments on women and the feminine can be contradictory. See for example: Sadiyya Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn 'Arabi, Gender and Sexuality*.
As quoted in, *Alchemy: Science of the Cosmos and Science of the Soul*, by Titus Burckhardt (Shaftsbury, VT: Element Books, 1986), 116.
Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi, *The Masnavi: Book I*, (trans.; Jawid Mojaddedi: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 2437. Author's brackets.
Zahra Taheri, "Women in Rumi's Spiritual Circle," *La Trobe Journal* Vol. 91 (Victoria, AUS: State Library Victoria, 2013), 48.
Ar-Rahman, Ar-Rahim and Ar-Rahm <https://feminismandreligion.com/2013/12/22/ar-rahman-ar-rahim-and-ar-rahm-by-jameelah-x-medina/> (Last accessed July 25, 2018).
Ibid.
Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn 'Arabi, Gender and Sexuality*, 37.
Riffat Hassan, *Dossier 5-6: Equal Before Allah? Woman-man equality in the Islamic tradi-*

- tion, <http://www.wluml.org/node/253> (Last accessed August 22, 2018).
- 90 Ibid.
- 91 Ibid.
- 92 Fethullah Gülen, “Nafs (The Soul)” *Key Concepts in Practice of Sufism* - 3, 2009).
- 93 Annemarie Schimmel, *My Soul is a Woman* (New York: Continuum Publishing, 1997), 20.
- 94 Nazeer Ahmed, “The Soul-Mirror of the Invisible Worlds,” *The History of the Islam: Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*.
- 95 The description of the *nafs* can vary depending on the Sufi Order, but a general explanation follows. The seven *nafs*, from the lowest to the highest are: 1) *An-Nafs al-Ammara* (the lowest, tyrannical self), 2) *An-Nafs al-Lawwamah*, (the self-reproaching self), 3) *An-Nafs al-Mulhimah* (the tranquil or quiescent self), 4) *An-Nafs al-Mutmainnah* (the inspired self), 5) *An-Nafs al-Radiyyah* (the receptive, secure steadfast self), 6) *An-Nafs-i-mardiyya*, remembrance of God 7) *An-Nafs aṣ-ṣāfiyyah*, the perfect human or *Insan Kamil*.
- 96 Caitln Matthews, *Sophia the Goddess of Wisdom* (New York: Aquarian Press, 1992), 179.
- 97 Henry Corbin, *Cyclical Times and Ismaili Gnosis* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1983), 183.
- 98 Henry Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 66.
- 99 Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, *The Return of the Feminine and the World Soul* (Point Reyes: CA, The Golden Sufi Center, 2009), 108-109.
- 100 Ibid., 111.
- 101 René Guénon, “Haqīqa and Sharī a in Islam,” *Sufism: Love and Wisdom*, ed.; Jean-Louis Michon and Roger Gatetani (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Inc., 2006), 91.
- 102 Galian, *The Centrality of the Divine Feminine in Sufism*, http://www.irfi.org/articles3/articles_4801_4900/the%20centrality%20of%20the%20divine%20feminine%20in%20sufismhtml.htm (Last accessed August 28, 2018).
- 103 From an audio translation of *The Sufi Path of Self Knowledge* given at the Chicagoland Gnostic Society, November, 12, 2007.
- 104 Andi Herwati, *The Sophianic Feminine*. The article is available through Scribd.
- 105 Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn ‘Arabi, Gender and Sexuality*, 62.
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- 109 Vaughan-Lee, *The Return of the Feminine and the World Soul*, 3.
- 110 Ibid., 51-52.
- 111 Kazuyo Murata, *Beauty in Sufism: The Teachings of Rūzbehān Balqi* (Albany: NY: SUNY, 2017), 2.
- 112 Ibid., 4.
- 113 Ibid., 29.
- 114 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2002), 222-223.
- 115 Murata, *Beauty in Sufism*, 29.
- 116 Ibid., 31.
- 117 It goes without saying that “beauty is in the eye of the beholder” and cannot be judged objectively.
- 118 Ibn al-‘Arabi, *Fusūs al-Hikam*, 217.
- 119 Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone* trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 100-101.
- 120 Jean-Baptiste Aymard, Patrick Laude, *Frithjof Schuon: The Life and Teachings* (Albany: SUNY, 2008), 74.
- 121 *The Esoteric Feminine in Ismaili History and Thought*, <https://ismailignosis.com/2015/10/20/the-esoteric-feminine-women-in-ismaili-history-and-thought/> (Last accessed, October 4, 2018).
- 122 Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, 183.
- 123 Ibid.
- 124 Sheikh Muzaffer Ozak Al-Jerrahi, *Blessed Virgin Mary* (Westport, CN: Pir Publishers Inc., 1991), i.
- 125 Ibid., iii.
- 126 Renaud Fabbri, *The Milk of the Virgin: The Prophet, the Saint and the Sage*, ed.; M. Ali Lakhani. at: <http://www.frithjofschuon.info/uploads/pdfs/articles/49.pdf> (Last accessed June 16, 2018), 12.
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Great Esotericists

Cyril Scott (1879–1970)



**Cyril Scott. Portrait by George H. Neale
National Portrait Gallery, London**

Cyril Meir Scott is recognized as a composer of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and biographies typically add that he was also a writer and poet. Less well-known is Scott's unique contribution to modern esotericism. He was a Theosophist, commentator on a number of esoteric topics, and exponent of music's potential to provide a medium for the communication of devic and even Hierarchical impressions.

Cyril Scott was born in Oxton, Cheshire, England, on September 27, 1879, the son of Henry and Mary Griffiths Scott. Henry Scott was a scholar of Hebrew and Greek, in addition to managing a shipping company. Mary Scott was a talented amateur pianist, and Cyril showed an aptitude for the piano at an early age. Before he was three "he could pick up any tune or hymn he heard, and could also improvise; though it was not until the age of seven that he began to write things down, having received some instruction in musical notation from his governess."¹

At twelve years of age Cyril Scott spent time with a tutor in Frankfurt, Germany. Four years later he returned to Frankfurt to study at the famed Hoch Konservatorium-Musikakademie.²

The vitality of Scott's piano performances was soon recognized. He also showed promise as a composer, and in the 1890s he joined a circle of composers at the Conservatory. Scott's first symphony was performed, when he was twenty years old, through the good offices of friend and poet Stefan George. Much later Scott dedicated a book of poetry to George.

In 1902, Scott met Evelyn Suart—later Lady Harcourt—who had a formative influence both on his musical career and on his interest in esotericism. Suart, a concert pianist, encouraged him, premiered some of his compositions, and introduced him to Robert Elkin, who was starting the music publishing company that flourishes today as Elkin Music International. Elkin agreed to publish Scott's work, and the firm went on to publish most of his future compositions. More importantly, for our present purposes, Suart was a Christian Scientist, and under her influence Scott wrote several books on alternative healing therapies.

Cyril Scott came into contact with Theosophy in about 1905, and thereafter it colored his whole life and work. In the words of a biographer, it became "the most vital and most absorbing thing in life; embracing all its

activities and inspiring them with a meaning of unfathomable profundity.”³ In 1921, Cyril Scott married Jewish novelist and Theosophist Rose Laure Allatini.⁴ The couple had two children, Vivien and Desmond.

Cyril Scott established his reputation as an esoteric writer with the trilogy: *The Initiate: Some Impressions of a Great Soul* (1920), *The Initiate in the New World* (1927), and *The Initiate in the Dark Cycle* (1932). Early editions were published under the pseudonym “His Pupil,” but later editions named Scott as the author. The trilogy, written in fictionalized style, heavy with dialog, describes students undergoing advanced esoteric training. The first of the three books is dedicated to “That Great Soul Whose Identity is Concealed Under the Name of Justin Moreward Haig,” and Haig features as a mysterious figure throughout the trilogy. Other teachers also come and go in the story. The first and third books are set in England and the second in Boston, Massachusetts.

The Initiate. Some Impressions of a Great Soul begins thus: “The story, if so it can be called, of Justin Moreward Haig is a true one, in so far that such a person does exist, although ... I have been compelled for many reasons to conceal his identity.”⁵ After many adventures, the “Pupil” is instructed to write an epic saga in the following style:

Let the English be quaint, flowing, and as poetical as possible ... for occult truths impress themselves more readily on the reader if they be clothed in melodious language. Also endeavor to decorate the large story by a number of smaller stories, and do not fail to be lavish with simile and parable.⁶

The saga, which occupies a major portion of the book, involves two characters: Antonius, a rich man, and his former mistress Cynara. They are repeatedly tested on their spiritual journey together, and “and in the course of time a son was born to them; and because of the purity of their love and the exaltedness of their souls, they attracted to themselves an entity so lofty that he became a great sage, leaving the world an enrichment in the form of a divine philosophy.”⁷ Sadly the great sage is not named.

In *The Initiate in the Dark Cycle*, a teacher identified as “Sir Thomas” expounds on the future of the arts. Musicians, he declared, “will be inspired by the Devas to bring down combinations of sounds from the Higher Planes to help and to heal.”⁸ In the final chapter the narrator describes two transformative experiences:

From far away I heard the strains of an organ with which was mingled the sound of voices so pure and ethereal as to suggest the chanting of a celestial choir, wafted on a peaceful evening breeze. The music was unlike any music I had heard before; it was subtle, yet melodious, sweet, yet devoid of all sentimental lusciousness; at one moment powerful and awe-awakening, at another soft and tender as the caress of an angel’s hand.⁹

“My brother Koot Hoomi playing on His organ,” Sir Thomas explains; “and the voices you hear are those of the Gandharvas.... Listen well, and remember, for one day you shall give forth such music to the world.”¹⁰

Then, as “a sweet fragrance as of mingled flowers” wafted over the group, Justin Moreward Haig introduces the “Pupil” and one or more fellow students to the Masters Koot Hoomi and Djwhal Khul: “Brothers and Masters,” he said, “into your keeping I give my beloved chelas who have served me well. May they prove worthy of your guidance, your protection and your love.”¹¹ In response,

Master Koot Hoomi stretched out His arms to us in loving welcome, and in His eyes was a look of recognition, as if to say: “Have we not spoken with each other before?” Then His lips moved and I seemed to hear Him say: “Long years ago in Greece when I was Pythagoras, you were both my pupils, and now I welcome you back to me again. You who desire to serve humanity shall be given greater power to serve—you, with your pen, and you”—he turned to Lyall—“with your music.”¹²

The trilogy seems to explore Scott’s dual mission as a writer and a musician. In this last quote the narrator and “Lyall” could be interpreted as Scott’s two personas competing for

expression. Perhaps by “turning” to Lyall, the master was signaling that music should be Scott’s primary focus—though we would say that his biggest contribution was to *write* about music.

The Master Koot Hoomis is known to love music and to be a talented organist. Theosophist Charles Leadbeater described a combined organ–piano in the master’s home. The organ portion has three manuals: great organ, swell and choir.¹³ Leadbeater commented that, “by magnetization,” Koot Hoomi placed the organ

in communication with the Gandharvas, or Devas of music, so that whenever it is played they cooperate, and thus he obtains combinations of sound never to be heard on the physical plane; and there is, too, an effect produced by the organ itself as of an accompaniment of string and wind instruments. The song of the Devas is ever being sung in the world; it is ever sounding in men’s ears.¹⁴

Cyril Scott’s interest in writing about music was already evident in 1928 when he published *The Influence of Music on History and Morals*, with the subtitle “A Vindication of Plato.”¹⁵ Scott acknowledged that the book was inspired by “a High Initiate of Esoteric Science.” Five years later—after completion of the trilogy and Scott’s reported contact with the masters—he realized that his understanding of the topic had developed and wrote a more comprehensive work, incorporating some of the earlier material.

Music: Its Secret Influence Through the Ages (1933), was Scott’s most significant and influential book. By the time it was published he felt free to identify the “High Initiate of Esoteric Science” as the Master Koot Hoomi and dedicated the book to him. Koot Hoomi, Scott explained, was “my Authority for what was previously set forth and for much added information which follows.”¹⁶ Scott also acknowl-

edged the contribution of his wife, Rose, who provided “much literary assistance.” Even with the new information, he was not satisfied, and a substantially revised edition appeared in 1958.

Scott insisted that music is more than an esthetic medium; it can be a form through which higher impressions can be captured and shared with those with ears to hear. He cited the example of Johannes Brahms, who confessed that he was inspired by a power higher than himself—though Brahms would not allow that confession to be revealed until fifty years after his death.¹⁷ Music can also build character; it even has the power to mold, for good or evil, whole civilizations. For example,

Scott credited the “intellectuality” of the German people in large measure to Johann Sebastian Bach’s “monumental genius” and grasp of mathematics.¹⁸

Much of *Music: Its Secret Influence Through the Ages* is devoted to biographical notes on famous composers, like Bach, Beethoven and Wagner. Scott commented that César Franck was “the first Deva-exponent,” adding that Franck “was a master of that form of improvisation which Initiates know to be the Devic type.”¹⁹ And “it is just this spontaneity ... which is so evidential of the Deva-inspired, or the Deva-overshadowed man.” Franck’s religious piety brought him ever closer to “those ‘Shining Ones,’” making possible compositions like *The Beatitudes* which Scott held in high regard.²⁰

Scott commented on the work of Claude Debussy and the way it captures the joy—and occasional mischief—of the nature spirits. Significant is “its similitude to the subtle music of Nature, yet only those who possess clairaudience will realize how great that similitude.”²¹ Maurice Ravel, whom Scott and many others compared with Debussy, bridged the gap “between the music of the nature-spirits and that

Scott insisted that music is more than an esthetic medium; it can be a form through which higher impressions can be captured and shared with those with ears to hear.... Music can also build character; it even has the power to mold, for good or evil, whole civilizations.

of the lesser Devas—those who inhabit the Emotional Plane.”²²

Alexander Scriabin is often cited for the esoteric quality of his work. Writing eight years after Scriabin’s death, Theosophist Dane Rudhyar described him as “prophet of the music of the future, a seer to whose Inner gaze the plans of a great art-synthesis were revealed.”²³ Scott offered a more cautious evaluation:

[I]n contacting the Devas of the higher planes, he [Scriabin] subjected his delicate physical vehicle to such a strain that he laid himself open to the attacks of the Dark Forces. Not being clairvoyant and possessed of the necessary knowledge, he was unable to keep them at bay.... Thus he died at forty years of age with his greatest work unaccomplished.²⁴

Yet Scott agreed that Scriabin’s music has a quality of “exuberance and ecstasy.” Scriabin’s *Prometheus*, in particular, exhibits “the grandeur of mighty Beings, flashing forth Their unimaginable colors and filling the vast expanses with Their song.”²⁵

Cyril Scott lamented that, for various reasons, devic influence on musical compositions had failed, or at least had not achieved its full potential. But now, he said, “certain Masters are specializing in the work of directing the *higher* types of Devas, suggesting to them what lines to adopt and deprecating those which have hitherto proved unfortunate and even disastrous in their results.”²⁶ But the Masters are selective in whom they are prepared to work with. Trustworthy individuals are known by the quality of their causal bodies, and “Only if the Master thinks fit do they bring through into waking consciousness the knowledge of how to invoke the Devas, and then solely for the helping of their fellow men.”²⁷ Presumably such screening applies to others as well as to musicians.

Like many Theosophists, from Helena Blavatsky onward, Scott did not share César Franck’s religious piety. Although he applauded the ministry of Jesus, he criticized institutional Christianity’s response to Jesus’ message. In *The Vision of the Nazarene* (1933), he commented on “the task of the great Founders of

the Christian Faith to save the noble ‘ark’ which They built from shipwreck on the rocks of man’s ineptitude.” And: “a part of Master Jesus’ work has been and still is by means of the written word to counteract those baneful, doctrinal fallacies of the past, thereby seeking to inspire a great spirit of tolerance, not only among the differing sects but also towards other religions.”²⁸ Later the master is quoted as saying:

To my first disciples did I teach the eternal verities, and instructed them in the way of Realization and the finding of the mystic Christ. And I taught them of the true nature of man, and of his subtler bodies and of the inner worlds and of the doctrine of re-birth.... And after I had passed from their midst, my disciples taught others those same doctrines.²⁹

Sadly, he continued: “the enemies of Truth sowed noisome tares which choked those beautiful flowers.”³⁰

Notwithstanding his distaste for the church, Cyril Scott lived in an “ecclesiastical atmosphere” with gothic furniture and stained-glass windows; and he “candidly avows his fondness for the smell of incense, which he is constantly burning.”³¹ Scott’s attitude to sacred music was similarly ambiguous. On the one hand he criticized it—or people’s attitude toward it—as being arrogant.³² On the other, he was a great admirer of Handel, and he composed a few sacred works of his own, including a setting of the Evensong canticles: the *Magnificat* (“My soul doth magnify the Lord”), and *Nunc Dimittis* (“Lord, now lettest thy servant depart in peace”).³³ The works are rarely performed, however, and no recordings seem to have been made.

Cyril and Rose Scott separated in 1939. By that time he had met Marjorie Hartston who had clairvoyant gifts. Hartston remained his companion until his death at age ninety-one. Although Scott’s musical fame waned over time, Hartston encouraged him to continue composing, which he did until the last weeks of his life.

So often the value of musical compositions is recognized only after composers’ deaths.

Scott's music has enjoyed a revival during the last two decades, and a number of recordings have now been made. His legacy amounts to some 400 works, including two mature symphonies, three operas, three piano concertos, and four oratorios. Scott now is often hailed as the "Father of modern British music."

Cyril Scott shared his Libra sun sign, and its emphasis on beauty and harmony, with Howells, Ives, Liszt, Saint-Saëns, Schütz, Shostakovich, Stanford, Vaughan Williams, and Verdi. He established himself as a professional musician and composer in the late Romantic style. But Scott may be remembered best for his unique insights into the esoteric dimensions of music. He could speak with authority on both sides of the equation, and his writings marked a turning point in our understanding of the efforts of the devas, and even the Masters, to guide, inspire and teach us through the medium of music.

Interaction can be expected to increase when the Fourth Ray comes back into manifestation in 2025. We understand that the Master Serapis, head of the Fourth-Ray ashram, is presently "giving most of His time and attention to the work of the deva, or angel evolution, until their agency helps to make possible the great revelation in the world of music and painting which lies immediately ahead."³⁴ Scott reassured people who might find modern music difficult to listen to: "[M]usic of the near future will tend to become more harmonious than of recent years."³⁵ He was writing sixty years ago, and some of us may be wondering when the "near future" will arrive.

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¹ Eaglefield Hull (ed.), *Cyril Scott: Composer, Poet and Philosopher*, 2/e (London: Kegan Paul, 1916), 12.
² *Ibid.*, 12-14.
³ *Ibid.*, 151.
⁴ Allatini, who wrote under several pseudonyms, attracted considerable controversy for her fictional treatment of subjects like homosexuality.

⁵ Cyril Scott, *The Initiate: Some Impressions of a Great Soul* (London: Routledge, 1920), 5.
⁶ *Ibid.*, 97.
⁷ *Ibid.*, 158.
⁸ Cyril Scott, *The Initiate in the Dark Cycle* (London: Routledge, 1932), 65.
⁹ *Ibid.*, 84.
¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 85.
¹¹ *Ibid.*
¹² *Ibid.*
¹³ Charles W. Leadbeater, *The Masters and the Path* (Adyar, India: Theosophical Publishing House, 1925), 25. Leadbeater and many other esotericists spell the master's name "Kuthumi." "Koot Hoomi" is used herein because of Scott's preference.
¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.
¹⁵ The book is out of print, and the present author has been unable to locate a copy, reprint or facsimile.
¹⁶ Cyril Scott, *Music: Its Secret Influence Through the Ages*, revised edition (Wellingborough, UK: Aquarian Press, 1958), 31-32.
¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.
¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 58-59.
¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 118-119.
²⁰ *Ibid.*, 119-120.
²¹ *Ibid.*, 129.
²² *Ibid.*, 130.
²³ Dane Rudhyar, "Alexander Scriabin—Precursor of the Future Synthetic Art," *Christian Science Monitor* (May 19, 1923). Online: <https://www.khaldea.com/rudhyar/scriabinprecursor.html>. Last accessed Dec. 11, 2018.
²⁴ Scott, *Music*, rev. ed., 133.
²⁵ *Ibid.*
²⁶ *Ibid.*, 146. Italics in original.
²⁷ *Ibid.*, 147.
²⁸ Cyril Scott, *The Vision of the Nazarene* (London: Routledge, 1933), xi.
²⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.
³⁰ *Ibid.*, 77. "Tares" is a reference to the parable of the wheat and tares in Matthew 13.
³¹ Hull (ed.), *Cyril Scott*, 29.
³² Scott, *Music*, rev. ed., 51-52. In particular Scott contrasted Victorian glorification of sacred music with its prudery concerning other types of sensual experience.
³³ Published by Stainer and Bell, London, 1931.
³⁴ Alice A. Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar* (New York: Lucis: 1922), 60.
³⁵ Scott, *Music*, rev. ed., 147.