

Rosicrucian Heritage

September 2021, Vol 28 No 2



Rosicrucian Convention
Abuja 2021



Theme
SERVICE

“Self Mastery for Service”

 **Abuja International Conference Centre**

 **November 4 - 7, 2021**

Special Guest of Honour

Fr. Claudio Mazzucco (Imperator)

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Cover spread

AFRICA: Ancestral nursemaid of modern human mind.





On Ecology

by **Claudio Mazzucco**
(Imperator of AMORC)

A few moments before starting to write this message, as I gazed out through the window of my office in the Italian Grand Lodge, here at Ornano Grande..., I saw the garden just prepared by one of our volunteer fratres. A simple hint from me on the advisability of having a small vegetable garden was enough for the frater and a soror, also always very present, to prepare the land, bring the small plants and arrange them in order on the small furrows. But what I want to talk about today, and reflect upon with you, is not the vegetable produce of the Grand Lodge, but how nature can reveal its intrinsic order to us; an order of which we are a part, and which we, as Rosicrucians, refer to as *"the Cosmic"*..., and how ignoring this

order has generated, among other things, the environmental problems we are witnessing. It is interesting to note how the word *"Cosmic"* stems from the original Greek word *"Kosmos"* meaning not only *'order'* but a form of order that has a form of beauty in it too.

Looking out from above (my office is on the second floor;) I was able to clearly appreciate how the Vital Life Force impregnates the planet and feeds life. Those plants that I now see in the garden are the result of processes fundamentally linked to photosynthesis. It is a wonderful way, *created* by nature, to imprison and use the positive energy radiated by the sun on our planet in the plant world. But if we looked with a lens on that small piece of land, where the various





vegetables will now grow, we could see a multitude of other living creatures, especially bacteria, but also insects and worms of various kinds. A living network with its own life processes..., interconnected in a harmonious whole. And, if I widen my gaze beyond our garden, towards the hills, the perception is clear: Life is spread over the entire surface of our planet, making it finally similar to a living being; a living planet or Gaia, as it was defined by the English chemist James Lovelock referring to the myth of Gaia. And as a *living being*, our planet has found its homeostatic equilibrium through an infinity of processes that are all interconnected.

As an example of how the planet is made up of infinite

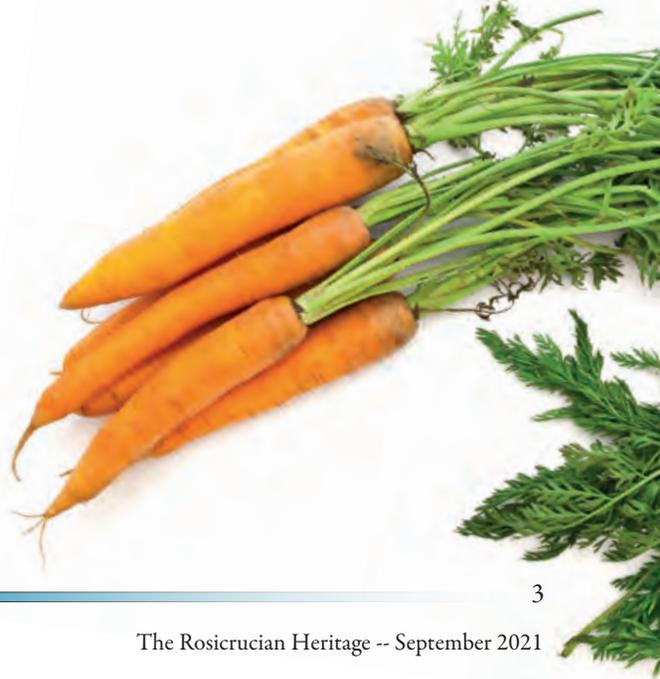
...as a 'living being', our planet has found its homeostatic equilibrium through an infinity of processes that are all interconnected.

processes that guarantee the maintenance of a balance such as, for example, the percentage of oxygen in the atmosphere or the average temperature, think of this cycle that I will now illustrate: siliceous rocks like granites and basalts, are decomposed by fungi, bacteria, and lichens, thus releasing the calcium and silicon of which they are composed. With the carbon dioxide (CO₂) present in the air, carbonates are formed, which are the main component of the structure of micro-algae and shells. When these algae and shells die, they fall to the bottom of the sea and form thick layers of carbonates. The tectonic plates then push these carbonates into the depths of the earth, where the temperature is very high. Finally, with this intense temperature, these carbonates decompose again, thereby producing the initial carbon

dioxide expelled from the volcanoes. Having returned to the atmosphere from where it came, the whole cycle starts again.

Observing all this life and these processes impregnating the soil, air and water of our planet, we realise that we are one of the results of this process. The atoms of which we are composed were generated shortly after the first moments of the Big Bang, corresponding to thousands and thousands of years from the beginning of the universe. And after a long journey of billions of years, these atoms formed our Planet about 4½ billion years ago. Then, following infinite combinations still not completely scientifically clear, the first living forms appeared around 3.7 to 3.8 billion years ago. Then multicellular organisms surfaced around 700 million years ago. The story of the appearance of our species on the planet is still being written. There are still paleontological and archaeological researches in progress that find skeletons of those who were the progenitors of the human species. But for the moment, we can say that about 3.2 million years ago, with the skeleton of Lucy, there existed a female hominid which walked erect. Finally, present humans emerged roughly 200,000 years ago.

Regarding the appearance of life on the planet, the discussion is still very heated. There are biologists and chemists who claim that it is the result of random combinations, a thesis supported by the famous book (*Chance and Necessity*) of the 1960's by the French biologist Jacques Monod. There are other scientists who have a very different idea. British mathematician, physicist, and astronomer Fred Hoyle (1915-2001) used a brilliant and provocative analogy to explain that the mere probability of a chance meeting of molecules is not enough to explain life. He says such a chance encounter would be tantamount to a hurricane hitting an old iron landfill and producing a fully functional Boeing 747.



We are formed from those same atoms born from the Big Bang and from others generated subsequently as a result of nuclear reactions in the various stars of the universe. These atoms are re-integrated into our body through nutrition and breathing because “*we lose atoms all the time.*” We are a bridge of passage of atoms that have belonged to comets, stars and nebulae, who knows..., and which now form plants, like the ones I am looking at, and my own body with its brain that looks. Atoms looking at atoms! In the cells of my brain, which I now use to write this message, there are atoms that have belonged to the earth, to some bacterium, to some insect, or

We are a bridge of passage of atoms that have belonged to comets, stars and nebulae, who knows...

even animal, to the water that evaporated from the sea, has travelled thousands of kilometres in the clouds to then fall in the form of rain, in a vital circle that connects all living species to the planet. The writer Primo Levi wrote a beautiful text on the history of the Periodic Table of the elements and the carbon atom, one of the atoms at the basis of life, illustrating the saga of this atom in an almost poetic way.

Observing this vital process makes us perceive how we are the part of the planet that thinks, feels, imagines and dreams. We are the planet, and this is an indisputable truth, although we have, most of the time, the perception of being something different and separate from it. In fact, with a certain presumption, we also consider ourselves superior to

the rest of living beings while, in reality, our life is intimately associated with that of all the other species of this planet and with the planet itself. Somehow, the Earth has generated us in the same way that our mother has generated us. This has caused many civilisations to refer to our planet as “*Mother Earth.*”

The ecology discourse of today has become of great importance, practically an emergency, even if we know that there cannot be a true ecological thought without a corresponding expansion of consciousness. In other words, it is one thing to make an ecological discourse well-founded from a philosophical and scientific point of view; it is quite another to live and *feel* according to what one claims to know. And this is perhaps the drama of the human experience on our planet. Many now rationally understand our link with it and with the life it contains, but, from here, to develop a renewed ethics, there is an abyss that can only be overcome through the experience of a ‘*spiritual nature.*’

When I use the word *spiritual*, I mean an integral, complete, marking and transforming experience. An experience of such a scope that once a person has experienced it, they no longer return to being as they were before, and it shows from the way they live. The person continues to do the same things they did before, but not as they did before. It is not necessarily an experience of a religious nature in the common sense of the term, because the spiritual experience precedes the religious one. It can certainly also happen through religion, but it is not the prerogative of any religion to produce it. A deep immersion in an artistic work, or being absorbed by a scientific problem, can equally generate the conditions for having this experience.

Do you not find it extraordinary, or rather amazing, namely, something that arouses both a sense of wonder and amazement..., that we are this particular agglomeration of



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“To say that man is made up of certain elements is a satisfactory description only for those who intend to use him as fertiliser.”

Hermann Joseph Muller

atoms, that in some way thinks, studies, experiments and experiences emotions; and that it now raises the matter of how all these atoms, in this arrangement that is us..., are capable of producing thought? But will an atom or a group of atoms ever produce thought alone, or will it be necessary to add some other non-material element for this purpose? Hermann Joseph Muller, 1946 Nobel Prize winner in Physiology, wrote:

“To say that man is made up of certain elements is a satisfactory description only for those who intend to use him as fertiliser.”

And what other human experience could ever connect the scientific knowledge we have now reached of this whole process to its deepest and most transcendent meaning if not the *mystical experience*? It is an experience that by its nature produces a sense of wholeness, of belonging to a Reality that overwhelms, is beyond all who experience it, but at the same time feel that they belong. Called the ‘*Oceanic Sentiment*’ by the 1915 Nobel Prize winner for literature Romain Rolland..., ‘*Cosmic Consciousness*’ by the Canadian psychiatrist Richard Maurice Bucke..., the *Tao* by the philosopher Lao Tzu..., and the ‘*Order of Nature*’ by the 1932 Nobel Prize winning physicist Werner Heisenberg.

We Rosicrucians have in our heritage the commitment and tools needed to create the conditions necessary for people to experience moments of harmony that allow them to experience this ‘*mystical experience*’ at different intensities.

Our teachings aim to expand human consciousness by expanding its vision to ever greater dimensions of reality. They are not intended to prepare us merely to make *‘good speeches.’* The time for speeches is now over. Furthermore, these teachings are obviously not a path for free hours or a system for obtaining powers of any kind. They are not an activity reserved for those who remain closed in their room and which ceases when they leave it to live their day. Rather, they are a new way of understanding life through various experiences, thereby developing new attitudes towards the events that compose it.

Our teachings aim to expand human consciousness by expanding its vision to ever greater dimensions of reality.

Let me recall in this reflection an important aspect of the mystical or spiritual experience relating to the *moral sense*. The word *moral* here should not be understood as a set of rules imposed perhaps by a religious culture or by social conventions. Rules which take no account of reality, and which are seldom respected by those who propose them, become more properly what we call *moralism*.

The moral sense here must be understood as the act



of listening to the voice of conscience manifesting itself in the inner silence..., making us perceive, time after time, to do what is right, engaging in *'right action'* so our existence benefits not only us, but also the lives of all creatures who share the environment with us. Let me quote the Italian philosopher Vito Mancuso:

"It feels like an indistinct but real call, and we are fascinated by it. And when we say yes to this mysterious call, we tend [to move] in its direction; and this sweet tension within us is called ethics."

This lack of listening is the tragedy of our experience as humans. Our particular deafness is much more than a simple hearing loss, it is a generalised drying up of perception today is stimulated by such violent and aggressive impulses that it then tends to no longer be sensitive to that subtle *'still small voice'* speaking within us when the conditions are propitious. The moral sense is that inner voice dictating to us rules of behaviour we could never transgress even if we were alone and no one could see us. It is a sense that gives to the life of individuals a refined quality to the extent that it removes them from vile, vulgar, dishonest, selfish behaviours, and at the same time elevating



them towards the perception of the harmony of nature and empathy towards living beings, inviting them to act with benevolence and justice. And this action is the foundation of true environmentalist thought.

At this point, we might ask ourselves if the moral sense can be developed, or if it is innate in humans. This important question has accompanied many philosophers throughout the history of human thought, and today it is also a topic of study in neuroscience. This is because, on simple observation, we can conclude that some people

...we might ask ourselves if the moral sense can be developed, or if it is innate in humans.

appear to be totally lacking such a moral sense, while others manifest very high and refined degrees of it. From the Rosicrucian point of view, this meaning corresponds precisely to what we call *'spiritual evolution.'* Indeed, it is a condition not characterised by the presence of extraordinary powers in individuals (although some may exist), but by a capacity for profound discernment, a refined moral sense and a high degree of empathy. It is a condition that can be achieved progressively, but which often appears fragile and at risk of being lost under the influence of the ego. In fact, its absence is easily recognisable because, despite the possible economic success of certain people, their failure as a humans will always stand out.

According to Rosicrucian thought, this evolution is one of the potentialities of the human being. We have an unshakable trust in it and channel our energies to favour the creation of the conditions in which everyone can experience, even if for a few moments, this voice within themselves.

"As we often say, civilisation is not a simple improvement of the environment in which humans live, or where they have easier access to material resources. It is also the perfecting of oneself, of the individual." -- Ralph Maxwell Lewis

In order not to remain on the theoretical level when we talk about a spiritual or mystical experience, I invite you to recall an experience that you will most likely have lived.





**We are the sea, we merge with it,
but we are also the blue sky above
us and the sand below us.**

You will certainly have tried, perhaps when you were a child, the experience of being carried away by the waves of the sea towards the beach. A bit like a surfer does, but without the surfboard, letting themselves be carried away by the flow of the wave. Or even just to be lulled by the waves before they break. In those precise moments in which we are *dragged* by the current, we experience a sensation of pleasure that cannot be described. There is no difference between us and the sea,

**Experiencing the sea is too
global, too mystical, to be
reduced to an intersubjective
interaction.**

and while we are being dragged, we only feel the desire, the deep desire, that the experience will not end, that the wave will drag us as much as possible.

The water touches our whole body with gurgling caresses, and we have a feeling of being the sea itself, because we temporarily lose our perception of the physical limits of our body. We are the sea, we merge with it, but we are

also the blue sky above us and the sand below us. It is a mixture of impressions that generates a perception of unity marked by a sense of happiness and a desire for it never to end, to last as long as possible. Well, perhaps this is an experience that in its childlike simplicity can suggest what is described by mystics of all ages, and which constitutes the initiatory experience par excellence, our spiritual destiny: to experience Unity. And like the wave that arrives on the beach and then disappears and becomes the sea again..., perhaps we too, in this experience of union with the Whole, will feel that we have always been in the Cosmic, thereby rediscovering our own eternity.

“Experiencing the sea is too global, too mystical, to be reduced to an intersubjective interaction. There is an essential difference between an intersubjective interaction, which takes place in a cultural space, and what one feels when one is alone at sea under a starry sky, moved by the splendour and immensity of the cosmos, with the feeling of being completely immersed in this global space, without being able to do anything but take part in it, without being able to find the words to describe it. At sea, I am no longer myself, I am the Cosmos.” -- H. Laborit (Biologist)





by Kenneth U Idiodi

*Grand Administrator for English speaking West Africa
of the Rosicrucian Order, and Director of the
Supreme Grand Lodge of AMORC*



Transcending Challenges Through Spiritual Development

The Rosicrucian Order is dedicated to Truth. Today, the world has become so blindfolded by falsehood that many are unable to recognise Truth even when it is right in front of them. It could be said that many people have become enfolded by the falsehoods of life which form an outer shell of darkness around them. But in the innermost part of their being, Truth is ever present. And when the conditions are right, the Truth that is within will emerge into the light of the day. The process by which this happens is what we call *“spiritual development.”*

The Seed Principle

For many people, *spirituality* is something ephemeral and perhaps better associated with dreams. This association is well placed if taken in the context of the wise saying; *“Life is the soil, our choices and actions the sun and rain, but our dreams are the seeds.”* We can simply replace the word *“dreams”* with *“spiritual development.”*

The principle of spiritual development is symbolised in the planting and germination of a seed. Within every seed, there exists a plant or tree in miniature form, called a plant embryo. Under the right conditions, this embryo

will emerge from the seed and become a full-fledged plant. When in an environment conducive for growth, the seed begins to absorb water. This makes it to swell until it bursts its outer coating enabling air to flow in. With the air, the embryo is able to burn the starch stored in the seed and generate the energy needed for growth. A root then begins to force its way downwards into the soil while a shoot grows upwards above the soil and moves towards the light and photosynthesis.

In the germination process described, we may have noticed that the alchemical elements of Earth, Water, Air and Fire were involved at different stages. According to the ancient Alchemists, these were the fundamental elements from which all things came into existence. The ancient practice of alchemy involved a process of transmuting lead, considered a base metal, into gold which was classified as a noble metal. This was done by appropriately deploying the four alchemical elements of nature, especially the element of fire.

However, the philosopher-chemists were more interested in creating a gold-standard of purity in human expression rather than producing the gold metal itself. It was understood that the stages of transmutation for turning lead into gold corresponded to the stages required





to transform a human being from a level of baseness to a level of true nobility.

Transcending Challenges

The idea of transcending challenges through spiritual development is clearly demonstrated in the process of the germination of a seed. Like the seed, life encases us in limitations we must overcome or transcend in order to express our inner potentials.

Interestingly, the effort we make to overcome a challenge also serves as the training required to awaken a dormant aspect of ourselves. For example, among the materially wealthy people of the world are some who grew up in poverty. The financial struggles of their early lives awakened in them powers of creativity, willpower and discernment. These are powers that are invaluable to material success in life. Similarly, among those who enjoy good health in old age are many who once had serious health challenges. And the effort made to overcome these challenges had led them to the development of certain mental and physical qualities conducive to good health.

Beyond the material experiences of life, humans also have to contend with the spiritual phase of life. The Rosicrucian mystic is aware that the spiritual aspect of life is relatively positive and active, and rules over the material. When compared to our spiritual nature, our material nature is relatively negative and passive. Attaining our full potential in life is certainly beyond merely achieving material success. It implies living a life of prosperity,

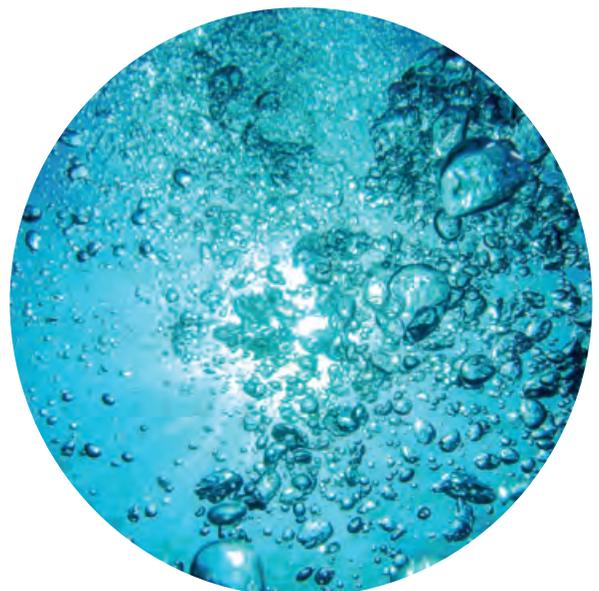
fulfilment, and security while enjoying an inner state of Peace Profound. We can only attain such a state by following a path of spiritual development.

Those who have not yet embarked on the spiritual journey to self-realisation are like dry seeds that are yet to germinate. Regardless of whatever they acquire in life, an inner emptiness and yearning remains within them. To fill up the emptiness or dispel the inner darkness, the flame of spirituality must be kindled in the human breast and fanned into brilliance.

The Four Alchemical Elements

Worthy seekers of Light are led to the portals of our Order and admitted unto the Rosicrucian path of Illumination. This is like a seed being planted in good fertile soil. This first stage corresponds to the alchemical element *Earth*, and the first requirement on the Rosicrucian path is to put aside all our preconceived notions. This is generally easier said than done. However, as we begin to do this, our mind begins to open up, like the swelling up of a seed as it absorbs water, which is second stage, which corresponds to alchemical element *Water*.

The teachings we receive in the Order are based on principles that are demonstrable and have withstood the test of time. The Rosicrucian teachings are not for intellectual or emotional entertainment. The student is expected to apply in practical situations what is being taught to improve the quality of life. Among other



techniques, the member learns and practices the art of concentration. This enhances the ability to contemplate deeply on any subject and understand its essence. And with the practice of meditation, the mind becomes more intuitive and receptive to inspiration from Cosmic Intelligence. This leads to a refreshing transformation in all aspects of life, much like receiving a breath of fresh air. This, the third stage, is like the inrush of air into the seed as the outer shell bursts open, and corresponds to the alchemical element *Air*.

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As the student continues along the Rosicrucian path, progress becomes marked by psychic initiations that open up new vistas of understanding and insight into the mysteries of the universe. In our seed-germination metaphor, this is like the oxidation of the starch stored in the seed which releases energy to the embryo. This energy is used to push a root deep into the soil and project a shoot above the soil. The small shoot then turns towards the light of the sun, develops leaves and begins the process of



photosynthesis. And this stage of psychic initiation, for the Rosicrucian, corresponds to the alchemical element of *Fire*.

The difference between an awakened Rosicrucian mystic and an un-awakened individual is metaphorically similar to the difference between a growing plant and a dry seed. Like the plant which reaches towards the sun and yet is firmly rooted in the soil, so too is the Rosicrucian well-attuned to the spiritual realm, yet well-grounded in the material world. The great spiritual personalities that we all admire have awakened faculties within themselves that are dormant within many of us. Every individual has the vast resources of the Cosmic within, just waiting to be tapped.

Societal Development

At a community or national level, this is also true. Every nation has a vast amount of human and material resources available to be tapped. The only barriers that stand in the way of national abundance are the limitations of ignorance and falsehood. These are strong challenges to growth, and every government should strive to tackle the challenges to the material and emotional wellbeing of its citizens.

The level of development of a nation is nowadays determined by what is referred to as the Human Development Index (HDI). This a number determined by an assessment of the healthcare, education and income available to the average citizen. It is a decimal number between zero and one. Countries that fall into the





category of developed countries generally have a HDI of 0.8 and above. In 2021, out of the 189 countries in the world, 66 have a development index above 0.8. The highest index is 0.954 for Norway in Europe, as the most developed country, while the lowest is 0.377 for Niger in Africa, as the least developed country in the world.

The only barriers that stand in the way of national abundance are the limitations of ignorance and falsehood.

However, the development index does not take into account the emotional state of the citizens. If this were to be considered, few countries if any would qualify as being developed. A country that has built sophisticated material infrastructure for its citizens while they suffer emotional anguish, cannot really claim to be developed. On the other hand, it would be wrong for the citizens

of a country to claim they are spiritually developed merely because they are constantly engaged in spiritual assignments and prayers. Such claims to piety without making the required effort to rise above the challenges of poverty and deprivation are totally misplaced. No nation should make claims to spiritual development while its citizens are living under despondent conditions.

However, national development is more dependent on the cultural norms of a society than on its government. Traditional and cultural practices that help to continually disperse seeds of ancient wisdom into the minds of the populace are always found in great nations. These seeds of ancient wisdom are the spiritual traditions handed down from generations past. They contain elements of Truth in embryonic form which germinate in fertile minds and provide the tools for transcending challenges. And these challenges are ever present. As we develop, they also transform, and in so doing bring our attention to new possibilities.

Hopefully, we will one day all come to realise that the challenges of life are really there to steer us towards a path of spiritual development. And perhaps also appreciate what the philosophers meant when they said *“Every problem has in it the seeds of its own solution. Without problems, you will also not have the seeds.”*



FIND THE GAP



by Amelia

If you've ever visited London you'll no doubt remember the Underground rail network. At each station, before the doors close and the train moves on, a polite woman's voice asks you loudly to "PLEASE MIND THE GAP." Of course you'll remember what gap she's referring to. It's pretty specific, the gap between the train and the platform, and you don't want to get your foot in it ever. There exists another sort of gap though, one that isn't a *'something'* like the gaps under London, but the very opposite of everything we know.

Have you ever noticed those *gaps of silence* lying between the words we speak or hear? Or the blank spaces between the words we write or read? They're ever so brief, but they're there, and there are literally millions of them that we're completely unaware of. They're like... nothing! We may

be subliminally aware of their existence but they're merely surplus to needs, a bit like ignoring negative numbers because they can't be seen in the same way that positive numbers can tangibly be *'seen'* through the physical objects we count or subconsciously associate with natural numbers.

It wasn't until well into the Common Era that negative numbers gained any tangible meaning, and even now we can't easily visualise negative numbers in the same way we subconsciously associate positive numbers with the physical things we count. Well it's the same with the gaps between words, they're *'non-entities'* for most people, surplus to needs and therefore nothing to think about.

But I must tell you a little secret: the gaps between words are in fact very important, often more important than those *'wordy'* passages of information we hand out



unasked for, or receive without being asked to receive. The true essence of spoken, written and thought words has to a large extent lost its original spiritual, almost 'magical' content; for our lives have become far too dominated by words, or more generally, information. We can view words, or information, as coming in three flavours...

- (a) The *spoken* words we hear from friends, the TV, radio, podcasts, etc., and of course the words we use when addressing others.
- (b) The *written* words we have on Facebook, Twitter, emails, browsing the web, etc., and of course the books, magazines and newspapers we read; yes paper is still important!
- (c) And finally the words we *think*. Many would object to this, saying they don't think in terms of words. There's some truth in this of course, but not much, for all of us to one extent or another use mentally formed words, or more usually, symbols capable of being described by words, to form the thoughts we have.

A Case of the Mumbles

It's quite surprising how many people go about their daily tasks either mumbling to themselves some imaginary conversation they're having with someone or thinking the conversation through, blow by blow, and becoming quite emotionally agitated because of it. And so often it concerns an argument, how right one side is and how wrong the other is.

Such '*inner dialogue*' takes the form of actual words spoken silently in the mind or mumbled. And even



when they aren't words, they're symbols, self-created symbols which represent whole sentences, paragraphs, maybe even whole volumes of information. When all is said and done though, all those symbols, sentences, paragraphs and volumes could conceivably be made up of sufficiently sophisticated words, every one of them. For they constitute information, and all types of information are at their most fundamental level purely mathematical in nature, and all languages at their most fundamental level are mathematical too.

We live in a predominantly information-driven, verbal society. Far greater amounts of information must be processed by us than our distant ancestors had to receive and make head or tail of. Go back just 200 years and imagine you're alone in a room. What do you do? Sit silently and hear your ears ring or feel your heart beat? More than likely when you're done with your usual tasks, your only option is to use words, either by listening to what others are saying in the street below, perhaps leaning out and talking to them, or reading a book, maybe making a few entries in your diary, writing a letter to someone, or maybe humming quietly a popular hymn, silently remembering the words that inspired and uplifted you some time in the past. There were lots of things to do back then, but frankly nowhere near as much as is available to choose from today.

Nowadays we regrettably reach over for the remote and switch on the TV to watch some rubbish, or with a push of a button fire up the PC to do a bit of catching up with emails or browse the web, perhaps listening to a few interesting though non-essential podcasts in the process. The possibilities are much wider, and the





'Because of the accelerating pace at which information comes at us, some of us are regularly overloaded.'

amount of information we have to process and make sense of is consequently hugely greater. Because of the accelerating pace at which information comes at us, some of us are regularly overloaded, regularly on the verge of desperation, just yearning to *'stop the world and get off.'* Without a doubt it has become more and more difficult with each passing year to find that *'quiet space-within'* where we can rejuvenate ourselves, sweep out our mental cobwebs, eliminate our mental addictions, and find the spiritual source of what we really are. That space-within, or what I prefer to call the *'inner silence'* or the *'silence of the soul'*, is what I mean when I speak of the *'silent gaps between words.'*

Words: Bits of Information

I know, technically I should be saying instead those silent gaps between 'bits of information', but it doesn't quite carry the same understanding does it? I'm sure you know what I mean though..., you wouldn't be reading this magazine if you didn't..., but just to hammer the point home, the gaps of silence are not 'nothing'; they are like the negative numbers mentioned earlier, 'things' that we can't really visualise, even though we know they're there; *'things'* that are useful, and yet completely and utterly different in nature to the 'words between the gaps', namely the information conveyed by the words. The gaps between bits of information are not like information itself. There is no quality in those gaps, those periods of 'inner silence' that even remotely resemble the information we receive through words. Yet

the gaps are crucial to our well-being, indeed crucial at times even to our survival.

The gaps are in fact the very source of the words we use, or abuse, and hence the source of the information we receive or give out. In earlier times, when granddad's granddad was young, and much before that too, life was a lot more sedate. Fewer deadlines and distractions to bother with, more time to just 'sit and stare', allowing the mind to process things silently as time passed by; the sort of mental tidying up that we have to rely on more and more nowadays from our sleeping hours rather than our leisure time, because we have so much less leisure time than before. Although for our ancestors there were of course terrible things happening just as there are today, things like wars, pestilence, hunger, the usual, I'm sure

it was nevertheless easier most of the time to find the human centre of silence, than it is in our current 24-hour nonstop society.

It's 2021 - Just Accept It!

But there I go again, complaining when I should be happy and grateful instead that it's 2021 at last and the awful Covid pandemic is at last beginning to subside. I have all the comforts and conveniences of living in an 'advanced' society, so why harp back to the 'good old days' when they're actually here in the present. Why should the distant past be viewed so positively and romantically and the present seem so bland and ordinary? Granddad's granddad, two hundred years ago may have had more opportunity and time to find those moments of inner silence, but it may not have been any easier for him to find them than it is for us today. Inner silence has undoubtedly in all eras been a vexing and difficult challenge, and maybe, just maybe, it is today precisely *because* of the buzzing, constant noise and activity we have to live with, that we really appreciate the rare moments we get to enter true inner silence.

So granddad's granddad and his friends probably didn't even know what the lack of time to enter the silence meant, whereas we know it now, and it really pains us that we can't or don't do more about it. So, let's be grateful for the present noisy, busy, bustling, challenging world, and accept it as it is. Each period in history had its particular challenges, and ours is to learn to identify and productively use the gaps of silence

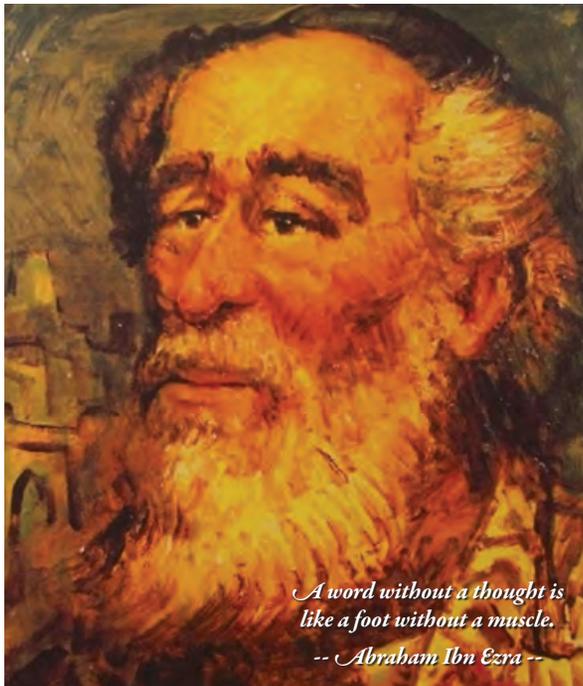


between words. There are precious few other worthwhile 'gaps' are there? I would say there are none.

Most people have no idea how to find silence, silence of the inner sort of course, but they certainly instinctively know it's something desirable, and recognise its worth when they experience it. In this respect we're probably hard-wired from birth to recognise the only thing that truly opens up spirituality for us. So many people are looking for a map of return to the quiet sanity of a life of harmony and true creativity, a return to the original way of balance in nature and balance within themselves. On the many happy occasions I've given lectures about the Rosicrucian Order over the years, and explained how its teachings can transform lives for the better, I've been moved almost to tears at times when I've seen deep sincerity and earnestness burning in the eyes of a few in my audience who yearn to find something more, something better than the noisy rat-race they're in. And every time I mention the inner silence, using the analogy of the gaps between words, it is as if a light is switched on, a new understanding enters the room and eager questions follow.

So Where Are The Gaps?

Okay, so how do we find those precious gaps, and more importantly, how do we start using them productively? Of course we need to begin by intellectually re-evaluating the manner in which we receive and process information,



*A word without a thought is
like a foot without a muscle.*
-- Abraham Ibn Ezra --

and one very good place to begin with is to use our words better. Do we say things just for the sake of conversation, trying to be sociable? If so, think about it: is it really necessary? If they're spoken, as opposed to written or thought words, then an added level of complexity and refinement needs to be addressed.

Walter de la Mare said: *"Until we learn the use of living words, we shall continue to be waxworks of words by gramophone."* Although the quote dates back to the days of wax covered gramophone cylinders, the principle is the same today as it was a hundred years ago: Words must be spoken clearly, simply, sincerely, and above all taking into account the audience and current circumstances. Only when we get that intangible psychic connection with our listeners do we get across the importance of our message. Far better a live rendition than a staged, pre-recorded message on a stuffy old wax covered gramophone cylinder. A recording can never equal the life, vibrancy and psychic connection of the actual real-time, spoken word. And nothing can prepare us for the 'dynamic' presence of those gaps in the information we encounter when we manage to *'enter the silence'*, even if for only the briefest of moments.

Words are the most tangible expression that exists for our thoughts. They're like little envelopes, each containing a certain intangible though still meaningful thought born in silence. And each carefully selected word, and especially when constructed into beautiful, meaningful sentences, in turn assists us in establishing order in our communication with others, with nature, and ultimately with our higher self. I'm sure you've heard the expression: *"...it literally took my breath away."* Well maybe you, like me, have had moments when the words of a person, whether spoken or written, were so profound and moving that it literally stopped you breathing. Such are truly precious moments, and prove to me that well spoken (or written) words can only come from those brief moments of inner silence, the 'silent gaps between words' when we instantly 'get the message', totally, in one great gulp of inspired infusion. Abraham ibn Ezra (1089-1167 CE) wrote: *"A word without a thought is like a foot without a muscle."* It is limp, pointless, meaningless, devoid of life, and definitely does not come from the source of all spiritual revelation.

In general terms, finding the gaps entails, like so many other things in life, a bit of training. First of all we need to sensitise ourselves to the fact that gaps of silence actually exist in our lives. And we need to know that such interludes of complete inner silence are attainable. Once we know or accept this, we begin by attempting to enter moments





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of inner silence. The commonest technique is by learning to meditate, but it's not the only technique available, and spiritual teachers from all eras have found particular techniques that don't require sitting in the lotus position chanting mantras, but may for example require active, physical activity. The important thing is that you finally do enter the silence, no matter how you went about getting there. So go and find a way, and if it really proves impossible, learn how to meditate with one of the handful of proven techniques that are around, for entry to the silence of your being is guaranteed if you try long and hard enough. That then opens you up to experiencing the silent gaps between the bits of information that bombard you constantly; and what precious moments you will then have.

Word Environment

In the universe of verbal communication, so crucially important to us, we are literally bombarded almost constantly by a veritable deluge of words coming from all directions, all competing for our attention. The media, both printed and electronic, are a good example. The spoken word is currently being replaced by electronic communications on Twitter and Facebook for example where trivial one-liners *'shot from the hip'* so to speak are the rule rather than the exception; but also where one-liners of jaw-dropping beauty occasionally emerge. Words then, even in our computer dependant age with its spectacular visual animations, are still our primary source of communication and knowledge, and are, as with everything else, used for both good and ill. Some of those words and sentences come from the gaps, some don't.

So with words, all we need do is ensure that they come from the gaps of silence as often as possible if we are to use

them properly and maintain harmony in our lives. *Text-speak* from mobile phones has becoming an exceedingly popular form of communication, but one devoid of true human contact to such an extent that for some it has resulted in serious psychoses and deep loneliness. As one friend put it: *"paper spaghetti, not true spaghetti!"*

Whatever form your words take, spoken, hand-written, typed or texted, choose them carefully, find them from the

**We are bombarded almost
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directions...**

silent gaps between words, and use as few words as you can to get your message across clearly and precisely. Words are the outer form of your inner experience, so if you're going to reveal something that's private and sacrosanct, express your thoughts through essential words only. You want the essential essence of your ideas to come across, so give people *'real spaghetti'*, not *'paper spaghetti'*! Make your transmission of ideas clear, simple and precise, and that, believe it or not, requires surprisingly few words. As a Kabbalistic sage once said: *"Say little, do more."*

We are what we think, we are what we speak, and our words reveal our inner selves. So let's not pollute our environment with unnecessary talk. Words subconsciously call upon the inner self to reveal itself to others, whether we know it or not. The quality of our thoughts translate into words and become the expression of our inner truth. Guard your thoughts therefore, they have a habit of slipping off the tongue, or keyboard, a lot faster than you think.



Hone your ability to use the silence between your outpourings of words to instantly find the true meaning of what your deeper self wishes you to say, and the precise words you should use in order to do so. The silent gaps between words are as important as the wordy parts, in fact more important at times. A heightened awareness of the potential power of silence is essential for good delivery of words. A carefully sculpted and attentive use of words assists us on many levels, not only by making us more productive, but by making us understand things more rationally, as they *actually* are..., rather than as we may formerly have *believed* them to be. Words delivered well, precisely, economically and only when necessary, conserves the mental effort involved in speech or writing. And through our periods of silence we increase our potential to live harmonious, useful lives. The power of silence permits us, when we must speak or write, to benefit both ourselves and many others who hear us or read our words. I would like to illustrate this with an event that the author of an article I once read revealed from his childhood, illustrating the necessity of conserving the energy of words:-

My granddad's words have been of great significance throughout my life. *"Before you are born, you are given a certain amount of words to use in your lifetime, like a cosmic word bank, a word account. Be very careful therefore to use your words properly, in a measured tone, and expressing yourself correctly. Every word you use is out of your cosmic account. That is why you should turn your tongue seven times in your mouth before uttering a single word. Otherwise you may finish your quota early in life, and you'll be mute from then on!"*

This statement had a great impression on me and probably affected me so much that I unconsciously chose my artistic lifework to be in the 'theatre of silence.' It moulded my character, it calmed me down, it made me think before I spoke. And the knowledge imparted to me by the carefully chosen words of my grandfather is for me today an ancient knowledge, one found at the core of all worthwhile religions and philosophies.

Thoughts for Contemplation

From a number of sources, some contemporary, though most from old literature hoary with age, here are a few

thoughts for you to contemplate:-

- *"Before choosing a word, ensure that it passes the three tests of truthfulness, necessity and kindness. If it doesn't portray facts truthfully, if it isn't necessary under the circumstances, and if it isn't uttered with kindness, don't use it!"*
- *"Your words must be like arrows, speeding to their target with precision."*
- *"One word can start a war. Another can end it."*
- *"Words are like a potent drug. Used sparingly they may heal. Used liberally they may poison the patient."*
- *"The learned conserve words. Fools waste them just as they waste their ill-gotten gains."*
- *"Guard your tongue as you treasure your wealth."*
- *"Words emerge from your whole being, not only your brain. Be guided therefore by the inner wisdom and silent murmurings of your soul. Allow your 'Inner Master' to lead you on to the true healing of others through your words. A conscious, deliberate attitude in the use of words, whether spoken or written, becomes a path towards Light, Life and Love from which all creatures within your karmic proximity will benefit."*
- *"Be genuinely aware of the good your words can bring into the lives of others; and use your words only to transmit good."*
- *"Words before realisation are empty. Words after realisation are powerful, potent and healing."*
- And finally, from Lao Tzu, the founder of the Tao Te Ching of China. *"Truthful words are not beautiful. Beautiful words are not truthful. Good men do not argue. Those who argue are not good. Those who know are not learned. The learned do not know."*

And so, after all these words, remember...
don't just *mind the gap*,

FIND THE GAP !



Yalda

Winter Solstice
in Persian Culture

by Roshan Ushah



THE WORD “*Yalda*” is believed to be Syriac in origin, having been imported into the Persian language by Syriac Christians. It is taken to mean “*birth*.” The *Shab-e yalda* (*Night of Birth*) is celebrated in the northern hemisphere at the winter solstice on 21st December (mid-summer in the southern hemisphere). Yalda, in different guises, has been celebrated in countless cultures for thousands of years. The ancient Roman festivals of Saturnalia (after Saturn, the god of agriculture) and Sol Invictus (the solar deity) are among the best-known in the Western world.

In most ancient cultures, including Persia, the start of the solar year has been chosen to celebrate the victory of light over darkness and the renewal of the Sun. Light, day and sunshine were assumed to be the signs of order and the form of *Abura Mazda*; whereas night, darkness and cold, were seen as the signs of *Abriman* (the evil spirit). Watching the changes in the length of days and nights made people believe that light and darkness, or day and night, are in continuous battle. Light’s victory resulted in longer days whereas the victory of darkness meant longer nights. The increase of warmth and light of the sun following the first night of winter (the longest night of the year) was perceived then as the re-birth of the sun.





Persians would burn fires all night to ensure the defeat of the forces of Ahriman.

In The East

The Persians adopted their annual renewal festival from the Babylonians and incorporated it into the rituals of their own Zoroastrian religion. The last day of the Persian month of *Ázar* is the longest night of the year, when the

The word Yalda is taken to mean 'Birth'.

forces of Ahriman are assumed to be at their peak while the next day, the first day of the month of *Dey* known as *Khor-e ruz* (the day of the sun), belongs to Ahura Mazda, the Lord of Wisdom. Since the days are getting longer and the nights shorter, this day marks the victory of the sun over darkness. The occasion was celebrated in the festival of *Deygan* dedicated to Ahura Mazda, on the first day of the month of *Dey*.

Fires would be burned all night to ensure the defeat of the forces of Ahriman. There would be feasts, acts of charity and a number of deities honoured and prayers performed to ensure the total victory of the sun that was essential for the protection of winter crops. There would be prayers recited to Mithras and feasts in his honour since Mithras is the Immortal, responsible for protecting the light of dawn. He was the preserver of Truth and Cosmic Order.

One of the themes of the festival was the temporary

subversion of order. Masters and servants reversed roles. The king dressed in white would change place with ordinary people. A mock king was crowned and masquerades spilled into the streets. As the old year died, rules of ordinary living were relaxed. This tradition persisted until the Sassanid period, and is mentioned by the famous Muslim scientist *al-Biruni* (973-1048), amongst others, in his recordings of pre- Islamic rituals and festivals. Its origin goes back to the *Isinnu Akitu*, the Babylonian New Year celebration, which took place at the spring equinox. These people believed the first creation was order that came out of chaos. To appreciate and celebrate the first creation they had a festival and all roles were reversed. Disorder and chaos ruled for a day and eventually order was restored and succeeded at the end of the festival.

In The West

Ancient Egyptian and Persian traditions merged in ancient Rome, in a festival called the Saturnalia, dedicated to Saturn, the god of agriculture. The year ended with a great holiday of peace and goodwill that started on 17th December and lasted for several days. The Romans exchanged gifts, had parties and decorated their homes with greenery. Following the Persian tradition, the usual order of the year was suspended. Grudges and quarrels would be forgotten and wars interrupted or



The Romans exchanged gifts, had parties and decorated their homes with greenery.



postponed. Shops, law-courts and schools were closed. Everyone dressed in loose holiday clothes and wore soft caps on their heads, recalling the paper hats we wear at Christmas dinner. Rich and poor became equal, masters waited on their slaves at meals. There were merriments of all kinds. Parents gave toys to their children. Families went to the homes of friends and other family members. Candles and lamps were lit to chase away the spirits of darkness.

Another related Roman festival celebrated at the same time was dedicated to Sol Invictus (the Invincible Sun), originally a title of the god *Mithras*, whose cult was imported by Emperor *Aurelian* into Rome in 274 CE. *Sol* was made the state god with his birthday on 25th December. A world state needed a world religion and Aurelian wanted to weave together the main religious strands of east and west into a united, cosmopolitan and universal faith. However, with the spread of Christianity, the Christmas celebration became the most important Christian festival.

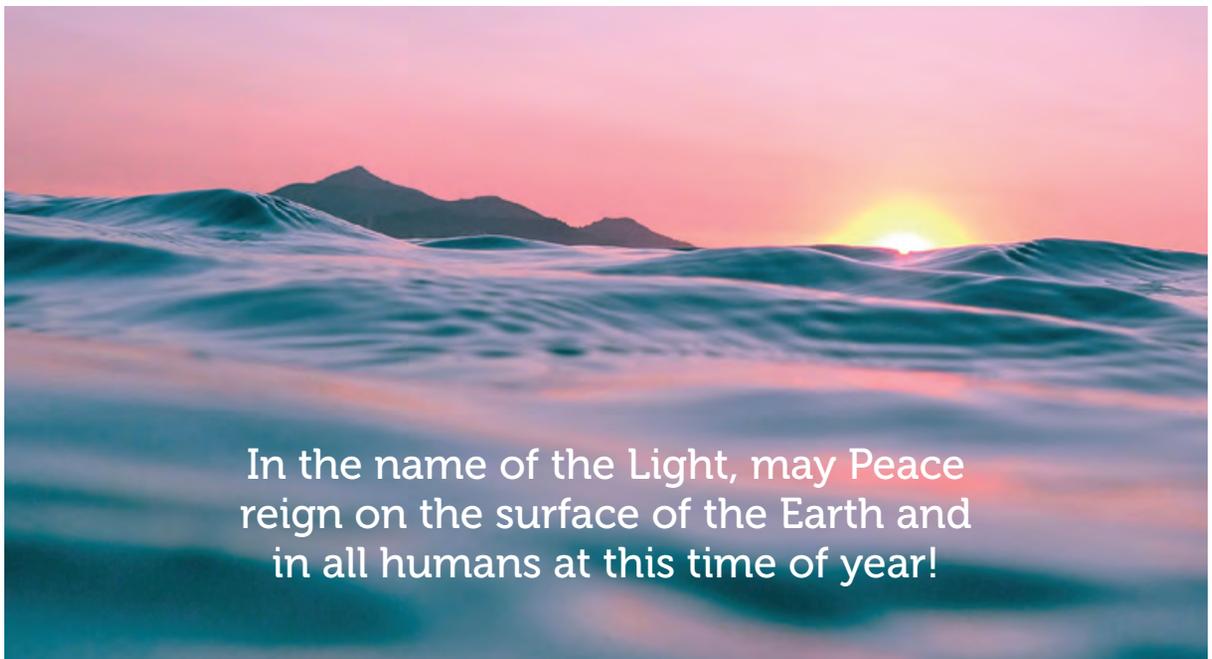
By the 3rd Century CE, various dates from December to April were celebrated by Christians as Christmas. January 6th was the most favoured day because it was believed to be Jesus' Epiphany (still celebrated by some Orthodox Churches as Christmas). However, in 350 CE, 25th December was adopted as Christmas in Rome and, gradually, almost the entire Christian church converted to that date, which incidentally coincided

with the winter solstice and the various pagan festivals, *Dies Solis Invicti*, *Saturnalia* and *Mithras*. Many of the rituals and traditions of these pagan festivals were incorporated into the Christmas celebration and are still observed to this day.

Time of Renewal

With the conquest of Islam the religious significance of the ancient Persian festivals was lost. But it is still considered a time of renewal. Today, in Iran, Yalda is merely a social occasion, when family and friends get together for fun and merriment. Different kinds of dried fruits, nuts, seeds and fresh winter fruits are consumed. The presence of dried and fresh fruits is reminiscence of the ancient feasts to celebrate and pray to the deities to ensure the protection of the winter crops.

The winter solstice of 21st or 22nd December is the longest night of the year. In Iran, the night of *Shab-e yalda* celebrates the birthday or rebirth of the sun. This night may be considered unlucky in Iran, but from this particular day forward, Light triumphs as the days grow longer generating more light. Modern Rosicrucians also celebrate this time of year with their Festival of Light in December, where, following ancient tradition, we send positive thoughts to all mankind and visualise the deep bonds of friendship between men and women of all races and nationalities.



In the name of the Light, may Peace
reign on the surface of the Earth and
in all humans at this time of year!





Don't Short-Change the Cosmic

by Walter J Albersheim

It is common nowadays to hear people decrying the lack of moral fibre and integrity in society. Actually, I believe most people are honest in their personal dealings if given the chance to express the best in themselves. I've seen inadvertently dropped wallets handed back to their owners, and people giving back change at the supermarket when they've been given too much. Goodness is present everywhere in small though surprising ways.

Yet some of these same fair and honest people can be dishonest in other, seemingly small ways. For example, for some people it is an almost noble sport to try and evade paying their fair share of taxes. They don't see it as being dishonest; after all, *"everyone does it"* they say, so what's the big deal? It doesn't take much to persuade oneself that taxes are unfair or are used for unjustified military expenditures. But the deeper reasons for trying to slip by this universal obligation is the mistaken belief that an establishment as vast as a government can surely not be hurt by petty fraud. Oh what an error in that!

Democratic states amount (in theory at least) to the average will of its citizens. The tax or duty that one person *"gets away with"* by not paying his or her fair



share, undoubtedly increases the burden of all others, even if only by a tiny amount. The same difference in attitude applies to some people with fiercely held religious beliefs. Many devout believers who obey all commandments referring to human relations, deal at the same time unfairly with their God.

They constantly beg for favours without giving anything in return, and pray that their enemies be vanquished when those same enemies may be praying to the same God for the same things. It's illogical isn't it, to expect something as great as a universal Creator of all things to stoop to such petty human selfishness? In primitive minds, God is depicted as an immensely wealthy and powerful personal ruler who answers prayers according to "His" whim or grace, and in turn demands not just cooperation in furthering His ends, but a cringing chorus of adoration through songs of praise "Hallelujah in excelsis...", forever and ever ad nauseam!

To a mystic however, the Creator is nothing remotely like this. The "God of my heart", the "God of my understanding", or what to some is referred to simply as "the Cosmic", is not an individual superman but the totality of all substance, energy, life force, mind power and whatever else exists in the universe, and yes..., everything that may exist beyond it too! One might think that this universal supply can't be diminished, even if everyone used it forever without giving anything in return. Science however teaches that in our universe at least, the sum total of matter, energy and even information is limited but constant, and furthermore, that this is a fundamental law of nature. Our universe is like an island bubble within which everything we know or can know, had its genesis and will ultimately have its end.

So even when we consider the vastness of our universe, we must acknowledge that a grain of sand taken "here" must be supplemented with a grain of sand replaced "there." The word "Cosmic" suggests not just the immensity of the universe, but the universality of the law, order and harmony that comes with it. If our personal demands create imbalance and disharmony, they run counter to Cosmic (natural) law, and we will eventually have to compensate (karmically) in order to restore the balance at our own expense. Personal favours from God do not feature as a goal in any way for any true mystic. His or her highest aspiration is

simple..., oneness with the Cosmic..., no exceptions! Approaching the Cosmic like a beggar pleading for favours, sets up the "prince-and-pauper" relationship between an exalted "Lord" and a lowly "subject", and that surely isn't the highest and most noble we are capable of?

We become 'godlike' only by exercising compassion in striving to give and create at least as much as we receive. We may rightly aspire to wealth, beauty and health, but they aren't our primary motivations. If we accumulate wealth, we must pay our helpers a fair wage that enables them as well to enjoy comfort and dignity. If we live in beautiful homes, we must be careful to protect and nurture our environment. This principle of give-and-take, fair play, or in mystical language, upholding the law of AMRA, is less obvious when we seek physical and mental health. Life force is not a material thing, although our health may need physical assistance through medication or surgery.

But if we receive Cosmic help in health matters, we incur obligations both to ourselves and others. We really must try and live sensibly and not waste

away the divine gift of vitality.

We must also try to make available to others the same kind of help we've received. What we received was in response to a need and we know intimately what that unsatisfied need was like. We are therefore eminently qualified to help others to have similar needs satisfied, over and over again. One may argue that health is on the borderline between material and mental conditions, but the principle of give-and-take applies equally to purely mental pursuits. In the field of science, this is illustrated by the well-known cases of Newton and Einstein. Newton discovered the principle of universal gravitation; Einstein, that of universal relativity. In both men, the discoveries were preceded by recognising inner contradictions that existed in assumptions and theories. In each case there followed a prolonged period of inner search for a unifying principle. And this long labour was their personal contribution. As true seekers, they did not leave to the Cosmic alone what they might achieve through their own efforts. Both sought inspiration but did so as workers, not parasites.

And both were finally rewarded by a sudden flash of genius or illumination. The inner eye of each saw a new approach and immediately recognised it as

**Goodness is present everywhere
in small though surprising ways.**

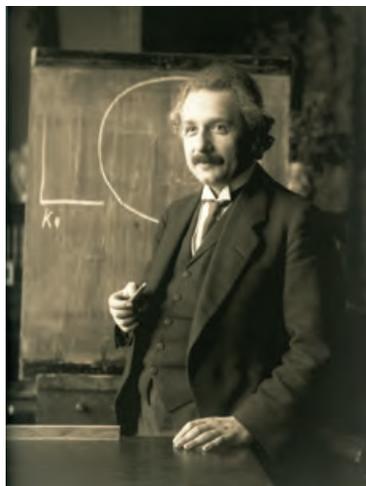


valid. The new vision however, did not end their labours and they both went on to leave priceless legacies for the world to benefit from. To outwardly express an inner vision in earthly, comprehensible terms may bring severe trials and ridicule. The first attempts at logical proof may be complex and seemingly abstruse, and it may take considerable time before the new mode of thought becomes so clear to the discoverer and their co-workers that they can make it intelligible to the majority of fellow scientists and even laypersons.

Finally, the new theory must be verified by application to specific practical cases. Thus, Newton showed that the same force that made an apple fall to the ground and a pendulum swing, also pulled the Moon through its orbit. Einstein proved that his refinement of Newton's law accounted for a slow rotation of the planet Mercury's orbital axis.

And through such arduous work before and after illumination, the creative scientist makes him or herself a partner of the Cosmic and helps to bring new light to humankind. The same interplay of human endeavour with cosmic inspiration applies in philosophy, statecraft and in the arts. In all these fields, even the greatest achievements are directed toward specific objectives.

Mysticism, however, knows of an even higher



Albert Einstein
(1879 - 1955)

level, where illumination is sought *for its own sake*, not merely the utility it provides. At this level the mystic meditates, not to seek gifts or revelations but to find within a profound sense of oneness with the Cosmic. This goal is so exalted and its attainment so overwhelming that we may seem as though we can't give anything of equal value in return. But this is not true. In reaching oneness, the mystic transcends mere partnership, for the bliss of such a union is not a relation between distinguishable persons. In the language of Eastern wisdom: *Knower*,

Known and *Knowledge* are *One*.

This fusion with the Cosmic takes place against the backdrop of eternity..., beyond time, space and individuality. Only after our descent to earthly life can we again feel a debt to the Cosmic and an urge to repay it through a life of service. We may become saints, lawgivers, philosophers, artists or scientists; or we may remain simple loving members of our family and community.

We may experience deep longing for a renewal of the supreme moment, or our experience may be just an abiding feeling of joy. Being transmuted, we will radiate light and inspiration by our mere existence. We cannot short-change the Cosmic, for our entire life is one continuous repayment.

Reflections in the Silence

by Judith Wolverson-Rymball
(1954 - 2006)

Beyond limitations,
Beyond time,
Beyond gender,
Beyond form,
Beyond definition,
Beyond description,
Beyond imagination,
Beyond words,
Beyond creeds,
Beyond division,
GOD IS.





Serenity

Reflections of Meister Eckhart's Doctrine of Justice

by **Avril Hugo**

The various doctrines of justice which have occupied political and legal thought over the millennia have come mainly from philosophers, lawyers and politicians. Theologians too have influenced such doctrines, but only to the extent that their relevant ideas fitted into secular frames of reference, enabling their ideas to be severed from their religious contexts and linked with the opposite philosophic tradition.

Johannes Eckhart, also known as *Meister Eckhart* (1260?-1328) established a unique doctrine of justice coming directly from the, by then relatively advanced, principles of medieval mystical thought. The doctrine he propounded stood at the very centre of medieval Christian mystical thought and he is quoted as having once said: “...whoever understands my conception of justice, understands all I have ever said.” Much of what Meister Eckhart said can be viewed as an attempt to offer *divine comfort* rather than *justice*, and if we are to view this divine comfort as justice, then it is not of the secular sort we are familiar with today, but of another sort that transcends the material, secular view of life.





Meister Eckhart.

Two main aspects of justice can however be distinguished in Eckhart's concept of justice: one is active, the other passive. As for its active aspect, justice requires that everyone be given his or her due (*suum cuique dare*), which corresponds to the

classical notion that the essence of justice lies in allotting to everyone what they deserve, or what is due to them (*suum cuique tribuere*). From the *suum cuique dare* precept, Eckhart derives that God ought to be given His due too, the angels and saints their due, and every person his or her due as well. God's due is to be honoured. People honour God through self-abnegation and self-transcendence, achieved by abandoning all that serves purely one's personal inclinations and interests. The due of angels and saints is to be given joy, for they rejoice over the good works performed by struggling people and over the good will which results from those good works. The due of our fellow humans is the help that they need and that we can provide.

As to the passive aspect of Eckhart's justice, this requires people to accept everything from God equally (*aequaliter omnia de Deo accipere*). It may be thought that the adverb *equally* in this precept has the same import that the adjective *equal* and the substantive *equality* have in conventional conceptions of justice. But this is not the case. "*Equally*", in the context of Eckhart's doctrine of justice, primarily imports the mystic's detachment from material reality, an attitude that every mystic of his day was expected to assume in his path to God. "*To accept equally*" in Eckhart's sense therefore did not raise the problem of how to ascertain measure, or match the value of distributed goods, services or whatever else was meted out. What was involved was the spirit of equanimity in which whatever was given had to be accepted without question.

To become capable of accepting everything from God *equally*, it was necessary to have a state of mind which Eckhart described as seclusion (*Abgeschiedenheit*) and abandonment (*Gelassenheit*). Literally, *Gelassenheit* meant a condition in which something had been left or given,

and in the present context meant the world as ordinarily encountered and experienced by the person. Hence we have Eckhart's rather untranslatable but telling play of words: "*wer gelassen hat, ist gelassen*" ("*he who has left [the world] is left [in tranquillity]*"). Leaving the world did not mean ceasing to care about one's everyday life. Rather, it meant transcending the world in one's emotive encounter with it, namely, accepting the real world as whatever it happens to be, in a composed frame of mind, with imperturbability and equanimity. His thoughts in this regard are hauntingly close to those of the greatest minds of the Far East during previous eras.

In Consonance with God

In this context, it becomes possible to meet a further requirement of Meister Eckhart's concept of justice, according to which the person must step completely outside his or her will. This was a widely assumed necessity for the attainment of holiness, and in modern mystical thought it is close to the mystical need of subsuming the will of the *outer self* to the will of the *inner self*. "*Stepping outside*" meant the abandonment of one's personal, objective will in favour of the "*will of God*."

Striving for ecstatic at-one-ness with God through immersion into the *seclusion* of the soul, mystics encountered the divine *spark* or *seed* and harmonised their outer will with the will of God. Hence the prayer adopted by Eckhart from the stoic philosopher Epictetus: "*Give me the will to will according to Thy will...*", a clear call for the subsuming of the human will to that of the divine. This



Image: Michael Sander / Wikimedia

The Meister Eckhart portal of the Erfurt Church.





adequation can transpire in the mystic's *Vacare Deo* in which the mind is cleared of all its contents so there is a mental void which can then be filled with a divine afflatus which produces a condition in which the individual can feel, think and will in consonance with God.

According to Meister Eckhart, people are characterised by disquietude and inconstancy. In contrast, God's nature is peace and permanence. The person in search for God is therefore searching for tranquillity and serenity, an aspiration to overcome what is transitory and to achieve what is durable. And the process of *Vacare Deo* is an essential phase in this aspiration. *Aequaliter omnia accipere* belongs to it as a precept whose observance promotes "the birth of God" in the human soul, which in turn is a precondition for the implementation and observation of the *suum cuique dare* precept.

So, the passive and active aspects of Eckhart's justice prove to be joined in a relationship of dependence, so only if we are able to accept everything with equanimity, are we able to know what due is. And only then can we will the giving of this due to all. At first glance, there seems to be a fundamental incompatibility between the active and passive aspects of Eckhart's doctrine of justice, an inconsistency which rocks its very foundation. For the *aequaliter omnia accipere* precept seems to import a fatalistic tenet of justice which may be rendered as "To everyone according to his or her destiny." This tenet seems to make it entirely pointless to do anything about giving a person his or her due and therefore seems to render the precept *suum cuique dare* vacuous.

On further investigation however, the incompatibility

between the two precepts proves to be unfounded once it is noted that *aequaliter omnia accipere* relates to the passive justice-subject (the grantee) but not to the active justice-subject (the grantor).

Equanimity

The finding that there is actually no inconsistency between the two precepts is reinforced by the circumstance that *aequaliter* in the relevant context refers to *equanimity* rather than to *equality* in the sense of conventional doctrines of justice. Eckhart's mysticism is anything but *quietism*; its essential message is the individual's active participation in the dynamics of the world. The deepest and most profound calling of any person is therefore to be God's co-operator and companion.

The *unio mystica* with God is achieved by the mystic leaving the *worldliness* of the world behind. But it is not meant to be a permanent state of mind, namely, a mind locked in seclusion. But rather, it is meant to be a passing inner experience which elevates the individual into companionship with God by becoming God's true helpmate in the execution of His designs. Since the frame of mind which results from following the *aequaliter omnia accipere* precept is a necessary condition for the human ability to apply the precept *suum cuique dare*, serenity precedes justice in Meister Eckhart's doctrine, for *justice flows from serenity*.

The acceptance of everything in equanimity (a) relieves receivers of the over-avidity of having what they may claim to be their due, and (b) relieves the renderers from over-anxiety in meeting the corresponding claims. In this way a more composed examination of any justice system is possible, and consequently, sounder judgments about what is to be accorded or what is to be withheld are possible.

This is particularly important in disputes about justice where some relevant factors are highly controversial. It is also important because when attempts to apply justice are made from the vantage of serenity, the passions which the actual or alleged failure to do justice produces, tend to shed their obnoxious effect so that subsequent efforts to remedy the situation in a reasonable manner, and ultimately to achieve justice, are more likely to be successful.

It is to be considered that people are liable to do injustice as a result of their very ardour to do justice



because of the unsurveyability of many justice situations in which the ostensible doing of justice to someone is liable to deprive someone else (existing here and now or far away, or not yet existing) of what is his or her due. Equanimity or *serenity* in the course of applying justice is therefore conducive to a more penetrating and broader assessment of the relevant justice-situations. We rely heavily today on the mystical concept of serenity, one which has undoubtedly existed for thousands of years, both in the West through the ancient Egyptian lineage, and in the East through the Vedic lineage.

Eastern and Western Conceptions

In the West, justice differs fundamentally from the East in that in the Western [primarily Greek] tradition serenity arises from, rather than gives rise to, justice. In the Eastern tradition, it is the opposite.

In Greek mythology therefore, *Hesychia*, the deity of “*stillness resting in itself*”, was believed to have emerged through virgin birth from the essence of *Dike*, the goddess of justice.

Justice being conceived as an ascendant rather than a descendant of serenity, it is no wonder then that the endeavour to do justice in the West has so often been a motive force behind wars and other forms of violence.

Justice has often been invoked to justify the horror we have witnessed in the wars of the Western world. Meister Eckhart’s concept of justice, like that of the ancient Eastern world, shuns this role of the idea of justice. There are clear parallels here with the metaphysics and ethics of Eastern civilisations in which nonattachment, equanimity, serenity and all that belongs to a contemplative life have a pre-eminence among human and transhuman virtues. Despite the fact that Eckhart speaks of justice in religious terms or in similes from the Christian cannon, it is possible to lift his doctrine of justice from its Christian setting and perhaps even to demythologise and de-mysticise it entirely, without destroying the coherence and intelligibility of his principal message.

Eckhart was an unconventional, remarkable religious thinker. In his writings, Christ, the Calvary, the Bible, the Church and revelation play no decisive role. The God of whom he speaks does not appear to be what Christian theologians usually have in mind when they speak of

God. In his “*negative theology*” he even arrives at a denial of God as an existent being, with God subsisting rather than existing. Eckhart was a man of extraordinary insight and bequeathed to humanity at large and to our modern concepts of justice in particular, a great gift.

Mysticism

So in summary then, it can be said that Meister Eckhart’s doctrine of justice is only accidentally linked with Christianity, for it represents a mystical conception having no specific religious affiliations, and is as close to the Eastern world-view as that of the West. Mysticism has emerged from theistic, pantheistic, even atheistic backgrounds and, apart from Christianity, has also appeared in, amongst others, the great religions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and Islam.

It seems to be possible to catch mysticism from any characteristically religious idea altogether and to view it as an attitude to life and a way of life; a way of looking at external and internal

realities, and of approaching them and dealing with them in a manner whose essential trait is *serenity*.

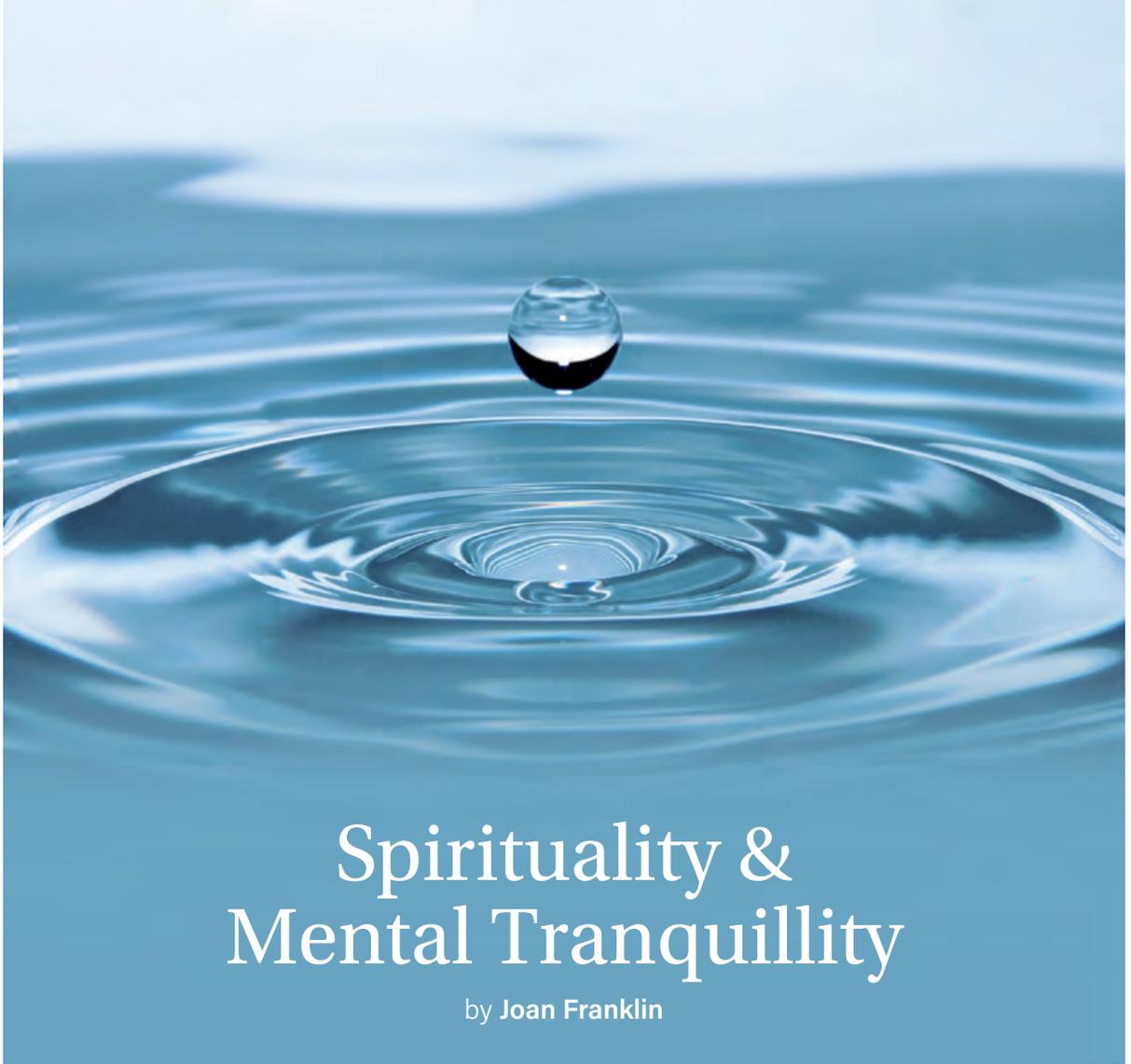
It is possible to create a doctrine in agreement with the essentials of Meister Eckhart’s doctrine of justice which does not depend on mystical notions or proceed from religious assumptions, and the gist such a doctrine could be stated as follows:

The active aspect of justice, which consists in giving everyone his or her due, depends on the passive aspects of justice, which consists of the *equanimity* of accepting whatever one is given. The diminution of our concern about what we get, consequent upon this equanimity, begets conditions in which efforts to do justice can take place without harmful struggle and other social evils which giving and not giving tend to produce.

The *serenity* in which we receive divisible assets engenders serenity in our contacts with people and things, a communion with them in which what we come to possess does not render us possessed. This serenity is instrumental in averting the danger of doing injustice when trying hard to do justice and thus in promoting durable and tranquil peace. It helps us to find the middle way between the extremes, which are vices, and, in avoiding excesses, to discover the Golden Mean.

...the endeavour to do justice in the West has so often been a motive force behind wars and other forms of violence.





Spirituality & Mental Tranquillity

by Joan Franklin

All manifestations of life are governed by various forms of Isaac Newton's third law of motion: "*For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.*" In its most general form, we could call it the "*universal law of cause and effect*", and it has a great bearing on how we find spiritual and mental tranquillity. As you sow, so you will reap. Or to put it another way, what you give to life is what you will receive from it. No one can escape the operation of this fundamental law, yet the sad fact is that very few appear to realise it.

We can't be healthy for any length of time if we transgress nature's laws. If we eat the wrong foods and fill our bodies with all sorts of the artificial things, we will suffer the consequences in the form of increasing waistlines, creaking joints, high levels of uric acid, cholesterol, gout, etc., and we

won't be terribly happy for it. Similarly, when we allow our minds to be filled with senseless violence from television, movies and online blogs, can we reasonably believe we can avoid starting to behave like the fictional characters we see on the screen or read about in hateful tirades in chat groups? Of course we will be affected, and painfully so.

We can't expect to be full of life if we don't exercise, if we don't have quiet moments to ourselves, if we never meditate, if we never indulge in creative things. And obvious as it may seem to us who are already on a path of inner spiritual development, it is not obvious to many billions on our planet that we can't manifest the joys of living if we allow ourselves to hate or intensely dislike others. Spiritual and mental tranquillity doesn't come for free, it takes effort and hard inner work to achieve such states of being, and here is how it can be done.





We can't be healthy for any length of time if we transgress nature's laws.

Forgiveness

Peace cannot enter the lives of people who are full of selfish motives, trying to 'get their own back' on others. We are all guilty of these negative emotions to some extent and need forgiveness, just as much as we need to forgive others. For we know that only when we have forgiven others, can we justifiably be forgiven ourselves. And furthermore, would it be reasonable to expect to be forgiven to a greater extent than we have forgiven others?

The great master Jesus often said to a sick person he was about to heal: *"Your sins are forgiven."* Why? What do sins have to do with being ill? Two thousand years ago in the Roman province of Judea, illness was believed to be the work of evil spirits, and if a person was possessed by such spirits it followed, by the logic of the day, that it was his or her own fault for letting them in. In the minds of primitive people, a sick person must have done something wrong to have become sick in the first place, to have allowed evil spirits in, and the first thing needed therefore was forgiveness for their perceived transgression.

Ridiculous as it may seem to us today, that a sick person could be perceived as being the guilty party, not only by society but by the sick person as well, Jesus' patient first had to be freed of all guilt before s/he could be healed. Let's face it, if a person is conscious of some personal guilt, s/he cannot find tranquillity until forgiveness has been fully and inwardly realised. And before personal forgiveness becomes possible, the sufferer must freely forgive others.

We are all blessed to some extent with an innate sense of natural justice, and that inner understanding mandates us to forgive others before we can expect to be forgiven by anyone. To live in a state of continual hatred or strife

towards anyone or any circumstance is to be in perpetual misery, and it is surprising that so many hate-filled people manage to survive as long as they do.

Moreover, we should not just forgive, but also give of ourselves as we do so. Forgiving is a mental and emotional outpouring of benediction, but giving of oneself in some material way is even more, and helps to cement the thoughts of forgiveness we hold. At the very least, we are able to prove to ourselves just how sincere or insincere our forgiveness is. A celebrated psychologist said that a well-adjusted person is one who has discovered that there is more happiness and fulfilment in the act of giving than in receiving. And what does that mean in practical terms? It means putting into practice the basic laws of your esoteric inner journey. Give and you will receive, forgive and you will be forgiven.

Forgiving is a mental and emotional outpouring of benediction...

The golden rule of *"do to others as you would have them do to you"* will always hold good. Don't automatically blame others; do a little self-examination instead and you'll find that you also make mistakes and need the forgiveness of others. A person who never errs is no longer a mere person, and we hardly ever find such unique people. Be honest with yourself and remember that in the sight of your highest concept of goodness, we are all equal. It is easy to be a hypocrite and not be aware of it, but it is much harder to be inwardly alert to our thoughts and true motives, and to control them before they control us.

True Spirituality

Many seek peace and inner tranquillity in a place of worship, and to be honest, entering a church, mosque, temple or sacred grove with deep inner conviction still works for many of us. But more and more are becoming dissatisfied with the outer rigid forms of formal religions, and see them as poor substitutes for true spiritual food.

People asking for 'spiritual bread', receive 'spiritual stones' in return..., hardly digestible 'spiritual food.' They seek the counsel of priests, imams, rabbis and gurus who often have a form of godliness outwardly only, and





Many seek peace and inner tranquility in a place of worship, but more and more are becoming dissatisfied with the outer rigid forms of formal religions.

purely because of the prestige of the high offices they bear. Seldom do such seekers of solace receive the inner relief they are looking for, and sadly, turn to cynicism of all religious beliefs instead. At their cores, all religions have precisely the deep spirituality that everyone innately seeks, though those centres are however hidden from view from all but the most determined and sincere seekers.

No wonder then that places of formal worship are so empty nowadays! Of course, bodies of people exist who show the fruits of true spirituality, namely, love, joy, peace, etc. But true spirituality is neither understood nor practised by the vast majority of religious adherents, for they do not understand what it means to 'be spiritual.' Spirituality is the practice of love towards all things in the universe, indeed love for the universe itself, and the holding of an inner attitude of confidence that love really does unite things that otherwise could never coexist.

To banish from the mind those things which are opposed to peace is to make an enormous stride towards true health and happiness, and most people need some help with this. What better way then to help them than to live your life in an attitude of peace and good will towards all creatures. The amazing thing is that with the correct inner motive, with the right blend of humility and positive action, help is always forthcoming if asked for with sincerity. Happy are those who have learned to let peace

rule their hearts instead of allowing their thoughts to be dominated by the chaos of greed, revenge and selfishness. The American literary critic and biographer Van Wyck Brooks wrote:

How delightful is the company of generous people, who overlook trifles and keep their minds instinctively fixed on whatever is good and positive in the world about them. People of small calibre are always carping. They are bent on showing their own superiority, their knowledge or prowess or good breeding. But magnanimous people have no vanity, they have no jealousy, they have no reserves, and they feed on the true and solid wherever they find it. And, what is more, they find it everywhere.

Little minds are wounded by hosts of little things that do not matter, while larger minds take it all in with welcoming arms, observing everything with impartiality and a sense of justice for all. And they are not injured or hurt by anything that life throws at them. On the contrary, they are grateful for the lessons they derive from all situations they find themselves in, whether pleasant or unpleasant.

Facing Adversity

Adversity is a great character builder. It is the abrasive that gives a sharp edge to courage. Pain and suffering have their virtues, for pain in the physical body is Nature's warning that something is wrong. By taking heed of the pain we may eliminate the cause which, if not removed, may result in more serious illness or even death.



Adversity is a great character builder. It is the abrasive that gives a sharp edge to courage.



Mental pain is also a warning that something is wrong with the way we are thinking. The remedy is to ascertain the cause of our inner pain and to remove it by the roots. In order to accomplish this, self-help and courage, together with self-honesty, are needed. And in accordance with a spiritualised version of Newton's third law of motion, we are always rewarded..., eventually..., for our sincere efforts. The process of betterment takes time and patience to manifest, but it surely does manifest in the end. The author of the following gem of wisdom is S.E. Kiser and is reproduced here with gratitude.

I'll start anew this morning with a higher, fairer creed; I'll cease to stand complaining of my ruthless neighbour's greed.

I'll cease to sit repining while my duty's call is clear; I'll waste no moment whining and my heart shall know no fear.

I'll look sometimes about me for the things that merit praise; I'll search for hidden beauties that elude the grumbler's gaze.

I'll try to find contentment in the paths that I must tread; I'll cease to have resentment when another moves ahead.

I'll not be swayed by envy when my rival's strength is shown; I'll not deny his merit but strive to prove my own.

I'll try to see the beauty spread before me, rain or shine; I'll cease to preach your duty and be more concerned with mine.

Humility

Many people long to be as good as, or even better than someone else they know. But few who say "*I am as good as you...*" really believe this in their heart. The claim to be as good as anyone else is made because in some way we feel ourselves to be inferior. Such a claim suggests a painful, smarting awareness of one's own inadequacies which one refuses to recognise.

To be hurt by an awareness of one's own inferiority engenders a dangerous state of mind both to the self and to others. We all have something in our nature that is inferior to the qualities in someone else. The cure is to be honest and to accept the facts without shame. It is hard to develop talents we do not possess, but we can all improve on what we already have. It is a satisfying course to find out what one's talents really are and to then concentrate upon them, thereby bringing out into the light of day, abilities we never thought we possessed.

The happiest people I have met have, with but few exceptions, been those who are poor in purse but rich in spirit.



Possessions and some sort of attainment are the goals of most people, but possessions never bring true happiness; indeed they are often the cause of sorrow. The more we have, the more we want, and the more we have to lose! And the more we have, the more there is to worry about, the more responsibility we have to look after our possessions. The happiest people I have met have, with but few exceptions, been those who are poor in purse but rich in spirit.

On the other hand, seeking to attain something is good if what we aim for is high, noble and for the good of humanity and not only for the good of ourselves. We may fail over and over again, but there is virtue in rising up after every fall and going on living one day at a time. Living in the past is useless, for yesterday is dead unless we deliberately keep it alive in our minds. Worrying about tomorrow is equally foolish, for tomorrow has yet to come and we must surely love the present moment and not the past or the future? Tomorrow will take care of itself if we do our best today.

The hallmark of true mystics is that when they fall flat on their face in the proverbial mud of society, they do not wallow in self-pity, but get up forthwith, clean themselves thoroughly and continue on their chosen path, unhindered by the unpleasantness and nasty thoughts of others.

Good Thoughts

The human brain with its complex neurological tentacles spread throughout the body, is constantly changing. It

doesn't really have a choice for it must either adapt or die; it cannot remain still.

That change can be for the better or for the worse according to how we think and live. In a famous parable, the master Jesus said that what comes out of the mouth contaminates us far more than what we put into it. In other words, what we utter are verbalised thoughts, and evil words have the unpleasant habit of feeding back through the ears to the mind from which they originated. And there they 'poison' the speaker's mind as much as they poison the minds of others..., no, even more!

Good thoughts promote good deeds; they cleanse the mind and invigorate the body. It is quite easy to demonstrate the effects of misery and morbidity of mind on the physical body. For example, stand before a mirror and deliberately look miserable. Can you possibly imagine the face you observe in the mirror inviting peace and happiness? Maintain an expression of misery for any length of time and it is guaranteed that you will begin feeling exactly as you appear.

Smile before the mirror, spruce yourself up and look your best without being ostentatious. What a difference! Surely not the same person? Maintain that smile and continue looking your best, and if you are honest with yourself, you will become conscious of better feelings in both mind and body. Being a mystic means controlling how you feel about yourself. Mystics, above all else, make things happen; they don't simply wait for some unknown fate to make them happen. And that is what we must do with our lives.



The hallmark of true mystics is that when they fall flat on their face in the proverbial mud of society, they clean themselves thoroughly and continue on their chosen path





Living in the Present

The pioneering psychologist William Marston (1893-1947) in a landmark study asked 3,000 people what they had to live for. He was shocked and astonished to hear that 94% were simply enduring the present while they waited for something better to happen in the future. They never realised that all that matters is what is with them today, and contentment and tranquillity can't come about until we have learned to accept life as we find it! We must stop blaming others or *'fate'* for our misfortunes.

Why allow the bad conduct of someone to determine whether we are sad or happy? Self-possession is the best possession, for the self-possessed individual is in command of his or her life, and is *"greater than the one who takes a city."* All around there is fear, discontentment, rudeness, anger, greed, pessimism, lies and deceit, and by far the majority of fast paced action films are filled to overflowing with this negativity. But here and there one encounters a person who is above it all, and who possesses the quality of radiating the peace and contentment s/he has acquired through personal effort. Such is a happy person, a person at peace. Imitate that individual and do not allow yourself to be contaminated..., yes, *'contaminated'* is the word..., by the negative and destructive words of others. As the old nursery rhyme goes: *"Sticks and stone can break my bones, but words can never hurt me!"* and make that a daily affirmation.

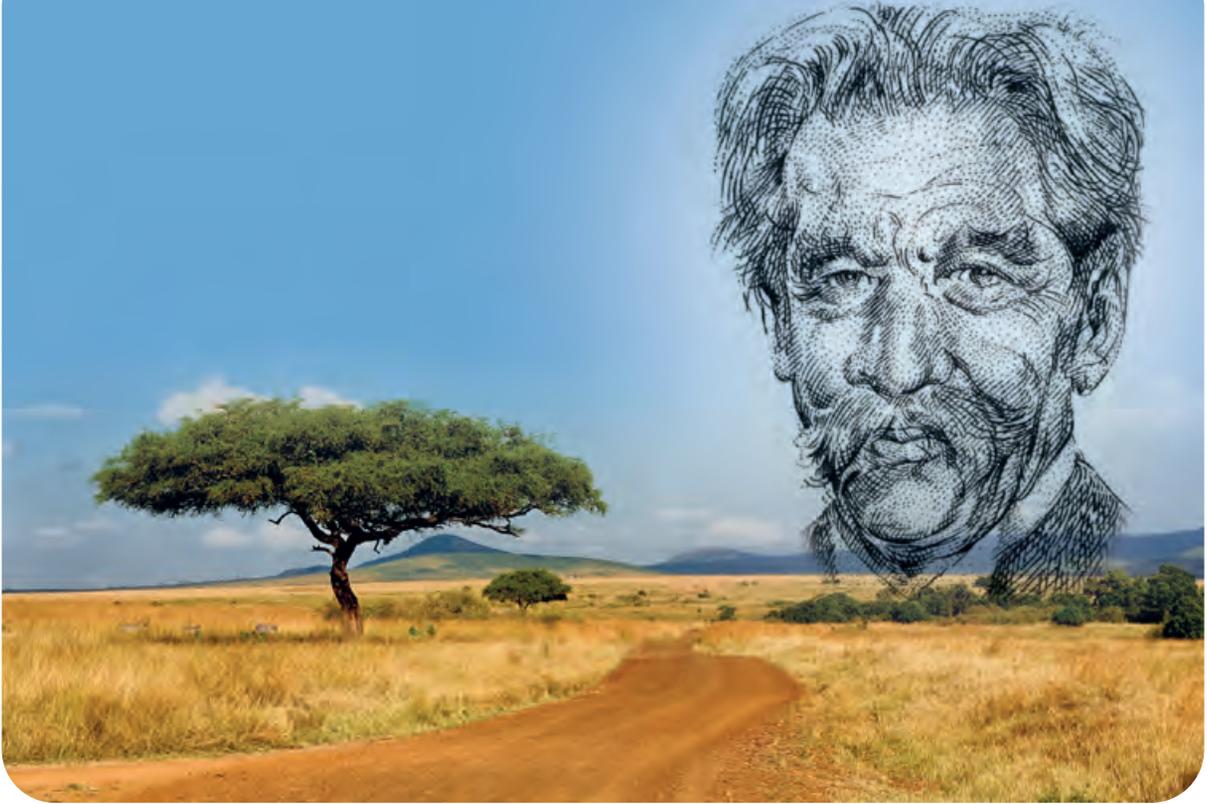
A person I once knew, after many years of self-inflicted illness, finally reached the stage where she gave up the struggle. An amazing thing then happened..., her

health started improving! Why? I can't be sure of course, but I suspect it was that she stopped fighting both herself and others. By *'giving up'*, namely, by releasing everything and allowing the inner spiritual forces to take charge, her mind became quiet and at rest, and her body, for the first time in years, had a chance to adjust itself to a reality she had fought against for so long.

It is the same with unquiet mental states: cease fighting, struggling, moaning and complaining and the mind will relax, things will start sorting themselves out and you'll find that all things are working together for the greater good. Remember the master Jesus' parable *"... consider the lilies how they grow. They toil not..."* The lily grows because it is not suppressed by having a negative, disease-producing mind. It grows because it obeys instinctively the laws of nature. It is up to us then to be transformed by the renewing of the mind. And the power and ability to do this resides in every cell of the brain and body if we will only allow this power to become active again.

In conclusion, it may be said that tranquillity is a most desirable state of both mind and body. But if mental and physical peace are desirable, we must be prepared to do something about it ourselves. To take medicines is not enough, for to obtain real and lasting tranquillity we must learn to dwell on thoughts that are true, honest, good and beautiful. Mystics, and Rosicrucians in particular, are alchemist of the mind – they make good things happen, and they don't wait until it is too late. And most important of all, they govern their minds and regulate the intensity and quality of all thoughts emanating from themselves.





ALBERT SCHWEITZER

Reverence for Life

by **Bill Anderson**

The modern west-central African country of Gabon is little known outside the Francophone world. It is bordered by Equatorial Guinea to the northwest, Cameroon to the north, the Republic of the Congo (Brazzaville) on the east and south, and the Gulf of Guinea and the Atlantic Ocean to the west. With its capital in Libreville, the country has nine provinces, and it is to one of the nine that we will turn our attention.

The longest river in Gabon is called the Ogooué, which gives its name to five of the country's provinces. The capital of the province of Moyen-Ogooué is called Lambaréné with a current population of over 25,000. What is so special about Lambaréné is that about 100 years ago a remarkable man built a hospital here and made it his home and life's work. His name: *Dr Albert Schweitzer*.

Oganga, the Giver and Taker of Life

In the late 1990s there was a TV series called "*The Adventures of Young Indiana Jones*." In the episode called "*Oganga, the Giver and Taker of Life*", set in January 1917, Indy and company on their way from East Africa to Port Gentil on the Gulf of Guinea succumb to disease, and are picked up by Albert Schweitzer and the orderlies from his jungle hospital. At first, resistant to being treated by a German, Indy soon begins to realise that Schweitzer is not interested in war, and his only wish is to cure people against all odds.

At one point we find Indy and Schweitzer journeying by boat up-river to attend to a sick patient in one of the local tribes. They have a conversation about the breakdown of civilisation of which the First World War was just a symptom and not the cause. Schweitzer asks



Indy if he would ever consider going into a stranger's home and slaughtering everyone he found there. Of course, Indy says no. To which Schweitzer replies:

When governments do this in a war, millions of people, just as moral and ethical as us, flock to the colours to do their ruler's bidding without a second thought. Why?

Indy says it's not the same thing to which Schweitzer replies that that is what Indy was taught to believe and that society only wants people to follow and not to think for themselves. It wants servants who do as they are told. People prefer society to do their thinking for them because it's easier. It takes away the need to make moral judgements. He continues:

Just imagine this world if no-one could rely on a country to justify its actions. And imagine if every person had to give a personal account for all they did. The hope for humanity lies not in nations,

governments, religions or even the stars. It lies only in the human heart.

Imperial Background

The last decades of the 19th Century saw various European powers attempting to carve out empires on the African continent, the so-called 'Scramble for Africa.' We term this Imperialism and Britain, France, Belgium and Germany vied with each other to extend their spheres of influence and exploit the riches they found there at the expense of the local people.

As Europe was engulfed in the First World War, the allies also attacked the German colonies in Africa: German East Africa (Now Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi), German South West Africa (now Namibia), Kamerun and Neukamerun (now Cameroon, with parts of Chad, Central African Republic, the Republic of the Congo, Nigeria and Gabon), Togoland (now Togo and part of Ghana). In this little-known theatre of war many people died on behalf of their imperial masters.

Early Years

Ludwig Philipp Albert Schweitzer was born on 14 January 1875 in Kaisersberg, in Upper Alsace (at the time a part of Germany, but now in France) into a world long since lost. Compared to the rest of France, Alsace enjoyed a climate of religious tolerance. Alsace had been part of the Holy Roman Empire until 1639, when most of Alsace was conquered by France under Louis XIII. It returned to German rule after the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71. At the end of this war, the German states proclaimed their union as the German Empire under the Prussian king finally uniting Germany as a nation-state.

The son of Louis Schweitzer and Adèle Schillinger, six months after he was born, his father moved the family to his wife's village of Günsbach and there became the pastor of the small Protestant community. The medieval parish church was shared by the Protestant and Catholic congregations, who held their prayers in different areas at different times on Sundays. This compromise arose after the



Relief Map of Gabon.

Image: Mysid / Wikimedia



Protestant Reformation and the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648). Albert spent his childhood in the approximately 100-house Alsatian village with his three sisters and one brother, where his father taught him how to play music. This tiny village is home to the Association Internationale Albert Schweitzer (AIAS) or the International Albert Schweitzer Association. Albert grew up in this exceptional environment of religious tolerance and developed the belief that true Christianity should always work towards a unity of faith and purpose.

There is a 1956 film (nowadays available on DVD) about Albert Schweitzer shot in the homely 1950s-style of American films which is narrated by Schweitzer himself. It won an Oscar in 1957. His accent was so like Swiss that it was a bit strange to the ear, if you are used to modern German. He talks about his life in Günsbach where he had a happy childhood. Being rather frail at the time, the fresh air and exercise turned him into a strong boy. He was in Primary School from 1880 to 1884 and describes himself as a quiet and dreamy pupil who had to make an effort to learn to read and write. He felt he didn't fit in at school and that the other children thought he was better than them because his father was a pastor. They made him feel like an outsider.

When nine years old his life changed, and from 1884 to 1885 he attended the Secondary School in Münster, further up the valley. He used to walk through the countryside alone, deep in his own thoughts and became acutely aware of the different seasons and their effect on Nature. He also became increasingly troubled by the amount of hardship and misery he saw around him: *"I never really knew the light-hearted youthful enjoyment of life."*



Albert Schweitzer's house in Kaysersberg.

He was particularly saddened by the plight of animals who suffered so much pain because of human carelessness and cruelty. Before bed, he said, he prayed for all beings, human and animal, and ask for them to be kept from evil and left to sleep in peace. He recalled an incident one sunny summer's day when he and a friend went out with slings to hunt birds. Just as they were about to let fly, the church bells rang out and into Albert's mind came the words *"Thou shalt not kill!"* It made a deep impression on him, one he remembered for the rest of his life.

At the school in Mülhausen where he was between 1885 and 1893, he received his *'Abitur'*, the certificate at the end of secondary education. He studied the organ during this time with Eugène Munch, organist at the Protestant cathedral, who inspired Schweitzer with his great enthusiasm for the music of the German composer Richard Wagner. In 1893 Schweitzer played for the French organist Charles-Marie Widor (1844-1937) in Paris, for whom J. S. Bach's organ music contained a mystic sense of the eternal. Deeply impressed, Widor agreed to teach Schweitzer without fee, and a great influential friendship began.

From 1893 Schweitzer studied theology and philosophy at the Kaiser Wilhelm University in Straßburg (later Strasbourg). There he also received instruction in piano and counterpoint from professor Gustav Jacobsthal and associated closely with Ernest Munch (the brother of his former teacher), organist of St William church, who was also a passionate admirer of J.S. Bach's music. Schweitzer served his one-year compulsory military service in 1894. He saw many operas of Richard Wagner in Strasbourg and in



View of Kaysersberg today.

Image: Taxitarcho228 / Wikimedia

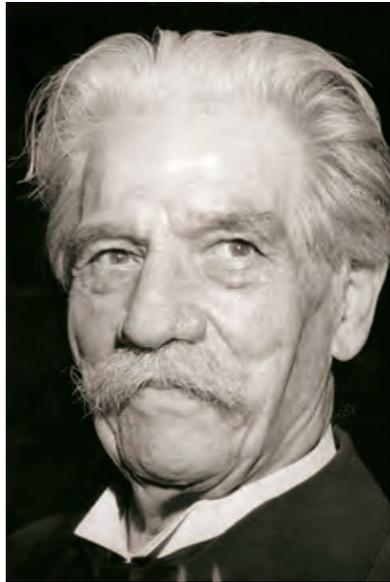


1896, managed to visit the Bayreuth to see Wagner's "*Der Ring des Nibelungen*" and "*Parsifal*", both of which deeply impressed him.

In 1898 he returned to Paris to write a PhD. dissertation at the Sorbonne on the religious philosophy of Kant, and to study in earnest with Widor. In 1899, he spent the spring and summer semesters at the University of Berlin where he met some outstanding representatives of the scientific and spiritual life of the time. At the turn-of-century celebrations in Berlin, he did not share in the general euphoria and optimism of the new century, but saw instead storm clouds on the horizon. He eventually received his PhD in theology from the University of Strasbourg and published his thesis at the University of Tübingen in 1899. Having decided to go to Africa as a medical missionary rather than as a pastor, Schweitzer began in 1905 to study medicine at the University of Strasbourg and received his MD from them in 1913.

Having finally received his medical degree, he sailed for Africa where he lived until 1917. On 16 April, 1913, he arrived at Lambaréné in French Equatorial Africa (later the Gabon). However, when World War I broke out a year later, he was placed under house arrest as a German citizen in a French colony. With much time to spare, in 1915 he started work on his "*Philosophy of Civilisation*", where his thoughts on "*Reverence for Life*" first appear. This phrase is a translation of the German phrase: "*Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben*", words which came to Schweitzer during a boat trip on the Ogooué River while pondering a way forward for humankind and searching for a universal concept of ethics for his time. He explains:

In that mental state, I had to take a long journey up river. Lost in thought, I sat on the deck of the barge, struggling to find the elementary and universal concept of the ethical that I had not discovered in any philosophy. I covered sheet after sheet with disconnected sentences merely to concentrate on the problem. Two days passed, and then late on the third day, at the very moment when, at sunset, we were making our way through a herd of



Albert Schweitzer

hippopotamuses, there flashed upon my mind, unforeseen and unsought, the phrase: "*Reverence for Life*." The iron door had yielded. The path in the thicket had become visible. Now I had found my way to the principle in which affirmation of the world and ethics are joined together!

Schweitzer made this phrase the basic tenet of an ethical philosophy, which he developed and put into practice. He gave expression to its development in numerous books and publications during his life and also in manuscripts, some of which have only recently been published. The main work was his unfinished

four-part "*Philosophy of Civilisation*" subtitled "*The World-view of Reverence for Life*." He also used his hospital in Lambaréné to demonstrate this philosophy in practice.

In 1917 Albert and his wife Helene were sent to a French internment camp as prisoners of war, first to Bordeaux, then to the Pyrenees and finally to Saint-Rémy de Provence. Released in 1918, Schweitzer spent the next six years in Europe, preaching in his old church, giving lectures and concerts, taking medical courses and writing "*On the Edge of the Primeval Forest*", "*The Decay and Restoration of Civilisation*", "*Civilisation and Ethics*", and "*Christianity and the Religions of the World*."

He finally returned to Lambaréné in 1924 and except for relatively short periods of time, spent the rest of his life there. With the funds earned from royalties on his books, and personal appearance fees at lectures, and with funds donated from all parts of the world, he expanded the hospital to 70 buildings which by the early 1960's cared for over 500 patients in residence at any one time. The patients and their carers would come by canoe as the hospital was close to the river.

At Lambaréné, Schweitzer was doctor and surgeon in the hospital and host to many visitors. The honours he received were numerous, including the Goethe Prize of Frankfurt and honorary doctorates from many universities emphasising one or other of his achievements. The Nobel Peace Prize for 1952 was awarded to him on 10 December 1953. He passed away peacefully on 4 September 1965 and was buried at Lambaréné.



Reverence for Life

Schweitzer believed that reverence for life is a concept that develops from close observation of the world around us. In his *“Civilisation and Ethics”* he expressed this in the following words:

Ethics is nothing other than Reverence for Life. Reverence for Life affords me my fundamental principle of morality, namely, that good consists in maintaining, assisting and enhancing life, while evil destroys, harms or hinders life.

James Brabazon, who wrote a biography of Schweitzer defined Reverence for Life as follows:

Reverence for Life says that the only thing we are really sure of is that *we live* and *want to go on living*. This is something that we share with everything else that lives, from elephants to blades of grass, and of course, every human being. So, we are brothers and sisters to all living things, and owe to all of them the same care and respect that we wish for ourselves.



Schweitzer hoped that the ethic of Reverence for Life would make its way in the world on the basis of his explanation of it in his books and talks, the example of his life and the force of its own argument based on its depth of fundamental thought.

He believed that ethical values, which could underpin the ideal of true civilisation, had to have their foundation in deep thought and be world- and life-affirming. He therefore embarked on a search for ethical values in the various major religions and world-views accessible to him, but found none that were able unequivocally to combine ethics with life-affirmation. It was not until two years after moving out to Gabon to establish the Albert Schweitzer Hospital that he finally found the simple statement which answered his quest.

In his autobiography *“Out of My Life and Thought”*, Schweitzer explains that at the beginning of the summer of 1915 he awoke from a sort of mental daze, asking himself why he was only *criticising* civilisation and not working on something *constructive*. He relates how he then asked himself what civilisation really is, and answered as follows:

The essential element in civilisation is the ethical perfecting of the individual as well as society. At the same time, every spiritual and material step forward has significance for civilisation. The will to [advance to] civilisation is the universal will to progress, [one] that is conscious of the ethical as the highest value. In spite of the great importance we attach to the achievements of science and human prowess, it is obvious that only a humanity that is striving for ethical ends can benefit in full measure from material progress, and can overcome the dangers that accompany it.



Image: Unknown/Oslo Museum / Wikimedia





The old Albert Schweitzer Hospital, Lambaréné, Gabon.

Philosophy of Civilisation

The “*Philosophy of Civilisation*” is a philosophical work of impressive scope and depth. Originally published in 1923, it contains Schweitzer’s most thorough and scholarly discussion of his ideas on ethics and the reverence for life. The term ‘civilisation’ referred to in the title refers not to mere political, artistic or religious structures, but to the entire *Weltanschauung*, or world-view, of society and individuals. Schweitzer first defends the idea that philosophy matters, and in fact defines the way people live and value their lives.

He explains why he feels modern philosophy, and therefore civilisation, is failing. He blames the lack of idealism and

optimism in philosophy on the abandonment of Rationalism. If all that philosophy does is tell the world what people don’t know, then what, he argues, are people to dream of, and why should they try and improve things for themselves? With thoroughness and amazing breadth typical of his scholarly works, he then reviews the major features of Western philosophy from Greece through to Rationalism, Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche.

The last six chapters present Schweitzer’s own

philosophy. Based on the will to live of all creatures, it is a corpus of ethics which accept that, in the experience of each living creature, its life is fundamentally important to it, and we should therefore not treat other living species callously or thoughtlessly. Each species of life should be revered, indeed there should be gratitude by humans for its existence. But this is not a life- or world-denying philosophy, leading to asceticism and withdrawal. Rather, it is a call to be conscious and considerate of the right to life of all creatures, but especially to find some way to help others of our own human species.

He blames the lack of idealism and optimism in philosophy on the abandonment of Rationalism.

Some are called to a lifetime of service to humanity, others are not. Schweitzer knew from a very young age that his calling was to serve others in

whatever way he could. Regardless of our circumstances, he argues, we are all called to some level of service to others and not merely to serve our own interests. All people are called to at least make conscious decisions about every one of their actions, thereby taking conscious responsibility for what they do.

All actions, he argues, are ethically dangerous, but he does not prescribe what people must do, for that is not his true interest. The key thing is that people must consciously make their own decisions in the full knowledge that every





decision has consequences, both good and bad. All people then, armed with the knowledge that their decisions affect the lives of others, must and do the best they can not to harm other lives, but ideally preserve and even improve them. Schweitzer quoted the following from the Roman philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca (4 BCE – 65 CE):-

No man is nobler than his fellows, even if it happens that his spiritual nature is better constituted and he is more capable of higher learning. The world is the one mother of us all, and the ultimate origin of each one of us can be traced back to her, whether the steps in the ladder of descent be noble or humble. To no one is virtue forbidden; she is accessible to all, she admits everyone, she invites everyone in: free men and freedmen, slaves, kings and exiles. She regards neither birth nor fortune; the man alone is all she wants. This, in fact, is the demand which is laid upon each man, namely that he works, when possible, for the welfare of many. If that is impracticable, then he works for the welfare of a few. Failing that, for the welfare of his neighbours, and if that is impossible, for his own.

Jain Thought

According to some authors, Schweitzer's thought, and specifically his development of the reverence for life theme, was influenced by Indian religious thought and in particular by the Jain principle of *Ahimsa* (non-violence). Indeed there was undoubtedly some influence and this is noted in his book *Indian Thought and Its Development*.

The laying down of the injunction not to kill and not to damage, is one of the greatest events in the spiritual history of humankind. Starting from its principle, founded on world and life denial, of abstention from action, ancient Indian thought -- and this is a period when in other respects ethics have not progressed very far -- reaches the tremendous discovery that ethics know no

bounds. So far as we know, this is for the first time clearly expressed by Jainism.

Epilogue

When in his early teens, Schweitzer twice went fishing with friends *"because they asked me to."* But...

This sport was soon made impossible for me by the treatment of the worms that were put on the hook, and the wrenching of the mouths of the fish that were caught, and I gave it up. From experiences like these, which moved my heart, there slowly grew up in me an unshakeable conviction that we have no right to inflict suffering and death on another living creature, and we ought, all of us, to feel what a horrible thing it is to cause suffering and death.

The concept of reverence for life was incipient in Schweitzer almost from birth, and this awareness affected him throughout his life, as when he would gently scoop a spider out of a hole it had fallen into before planting a seed there to feed his patients and their families who also worked on the hospital farm. He wrote that just as our existence is important to each of us, *"[a creature's] existence is significant to it. My relation to my own being and to the objective world is determined by reverence for life, a reverence given as an element of my will-to-live..."* And this will-to-live, he often stated, exists in all creatures and humans. As the highest and most intelligent of them all, humans should have no difficulty respecting the wishes of those less capable than them.

Dr Albert Schweitzer died on 4 September 1965 at his beloved hospital in Lambaréné. His grave, on the banks of the Ogooué River, was marked by a cross he made himself. The Albert Schweitzer hospital has been the primary source of healthcare for the surrounding region since it was founded in 1913 and remains so to the present. Its research laboratory is one of five leading facilities in Africa engaged in the scientific study of malaria. In



The Roman philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca





2017, it had 150 beds, an emergency room, a pharmacy, a laboratory and an X-ray unit, about 160 staff, 2 surgeons, 2 interns and 2 paediatricians, and around 50,000 people had benefited from its existence in that year alone. Diseases like AIDS and tuberculosis are also a major focus.

Schweitzer, his wife and several collaborators are buried in a cemetery nestled among the old buildings which are today a museum and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Those who thank God much are the truly wealthy. So, our inner happiness depends not on what we experience but on the degree of our gratitude, whatever the experience. Your life is something opaque, not transparent, as long as you look at it in an ordinary human way. But if you hold it up against the light of God's goodness, it shines and turns transparent, radiant and bright. And then you ask yourself in amazement: Is this really my own life I see before me? -- (from "Reverence for Life")

Postscript

On 11 December 1959, Dr Henry Friedman a close confidant and co-worker with Albert Schweitzer was awarded the *Rosicrucian Humanitarian Award* by the Southern Cross Lodge of the Rosicrucian Order in Johannesburg, Union of South Africa.

References

A moving documentary on Schweitzer's life can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gf4B9v0s0CY>

Each of the following books was written by Schweitzer or is an edited collection of his letters:

- The Africa Sermons.
- African Notebook.
- The Albert Schweitzer-Helene Bresslau Letters 1902 – 1912.
- Albert Schweitzer and Alice Ehlers: A Friendship in Letters.
- Albert Schweitzer Letters 1905 – 1965.
- Brothers in Spirit: The Correspondence of Albert Schweitzer and William L Mellon, Jr.
- Christianity and the Religions of the World.
- Goethe: Four Studies by Albert Schweitzer.
- Indian Thought and Its Development.
- The Kingdom of God and Primitive Christianity.
- Memoirs of Childhood and Youth.
- The Mystery of the Kingdom of God.
- The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle.
- On the Edge of the Primeval Forest and More from the Primeval Forest.
- Out of My Life and Thought.
- Paul and His Interpreters: A Critical History.
- A Place for Revelation.
- Peace or Atomic War?
- The Philosophy of Civilisation.
- The Problem of the Lord's Supper.
- The Psychiatric Study of Jesus.
- The Quest of the Historical Jesus.
- Reverence for Life (Sermons).
- The Story of My Pelican.



A simple concrete gravestone today marks the resting place of Albert Schweitzer at his hospital in Lambaréné, Gabon.



Juan de la Cruz

Poet of God

by Simon Cassar



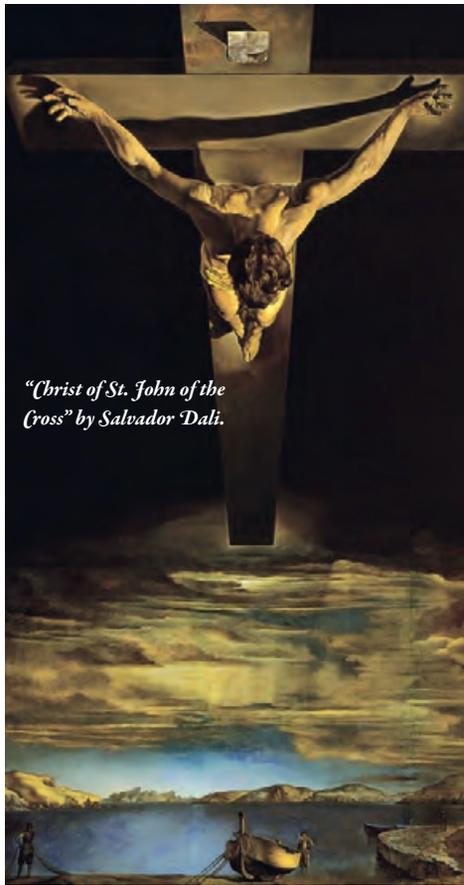
Sometimes inspiration comes at our darkest hour. During our most challenging times, surrounded by the harsh realities of life, great beauty may suddenly be revealed to us. This flash of creative beauty, that flows throughout our being, comes from a place deep within. Such was the case with the 16th Century Spanish mystic poet *San Juan de la Cruz* (St. John of the Cross).

Confined in a stifling cabinet-sized cell, and ill from malnutrition and torture, San Juan composed some of his most beautiful verses, clearly expressing a positive message of love, beauty and personal union with God. San Juan is now considered one of the foremost poets in the Spanish language.

San Juan was born *Juan de Yepes y Alvarez* in 1542. His father died when he was three and he lived in poverty with his mother in Medina. He attended a school for poor children and while there he was chosen to serve as an acolyte at a nearby monastery. In 1563, he entered the Carmelite order and took the name John of St. Matthias. The following year he took his religious vows and travelled to Salamanca where he attended a prestigious university, studying theology and philosophy. However, life was soon to change for San Juan after a meeting in Medina with *Teresa de Jesus*, a Carmelite nun who was seeking to reform the Carmelite Order and restore it back to a state of purity. This reform involved austerity, fasting, abstinence from eating meat and long periods of prayer, contemplation and seeking mystical union with God. San Juan joined with Teresa de Jesus and in 1568 set up a small monastery for men and changed his name to Juan de la Cruz (John of the Cross).

He worked hard for the reformed Carmelite order, which was called the *Discalced Carmelites* (barefoot Carmelites), setting up communities, and eventually becoming the spiritual director and confessor for Teresa and the nuns in Avila. During this time, he had





"Christ of St. John of the Cross" by Salvador Dalí.

a vision of the crucified Christ which led him to create his drawing "Christ from above", which many years later in 1951 inspired Salvador Dalí's work "Christ of Saint John of the Cross."

However, the work of San Juan and Teresa created tensions within the Carmelite order as many were opposed to the reforms. On the 2nd December 1577, a group of Carmelites opposed to the reform took San Juan prisoner. He was accused of disobeying ordinances of the Order and tried by a court of friars, who sentenced him to imprisonment. He was jailed in a monastery in a tiny cell 3 x 2 metres in size, was lashed regularly, and kept in isolation in appalling conditions. He remained there for nine months and during this time managed to write some of his most beautiful poetry on scraps of paper given to him by one of his guards. He eventually escaped and was nursed back to health by Teresa's nuns in Toledo.

There was much contrast in San Juan's life. A deeply introspective mystic, he was also a practical reformer much acquainted with pain and suffering, as

well as the great beauty, found in the world. He was well educated, though his keenest insights came not from any learned institutions, but from periods of deep introspection and meditation. He lived as a celibate monk, but his vision of joy and ecstasy went far beyond the narrow views of the Church. And these contrasts come through in his breathtakingly beautiful poetry.

His poetry tells of the Soul's journey through the darkest night and into the light of higher understanding, and eventually to mystical union with Absolute Being. To express this journey of the Soul toward mystical union, San Juan used the allegory of physical love - the coming together of lovers. He spoke from the perspective of the female lover describing the ecstasy of union. As with any journey, the poems are filled with the energising excitement of the journey ahead and a longing for journey's end - the goal. This is how one of San Juan's most important poems *Noche Obscura del Alma* (Dark Night of the Soul) begins:

*On a dark night, kindled in love with yearnings – oh,
happy chance! I went forth without being observed,
my house being now at rest.*

*In darkness and secure, by the secret ladder, disguised – oh,
happy chance! In darkness and in concealment, my
house being now at rest.*

*In the happy night, in secret, when none saw me, nor I
beheld aught, without light or guide, save that
which burned in my heart.*

The poem goes on to describe in glowing terms the coming together of lovers in darkest night. Through his symbolic poetry San Juan presented a joyful and beautiful description of the Soul's journey into mystical union - the mystical marriage.

Have you ever awakened to the kind of morning when everything feels right? The sun is shining, birds are singing, flowers are opening to the sun, and colours across the landscape are bright. All nature around you seems to be celebrating the arrival of a new day. You breathe deeply and feel the energy pulsing through you, and through all nature. And you realise that it all makes sense. You feel whole and complete, and in union with all about you. And then you realise that love is the law, the geometry, at the base of all creation.

It was this feeling of the ineffable joy of union with all creation, with God, the Cosmic, that Juan de la Cruz



was expressing through his mystical poetry. It was to the mystical mind that this great Spanish poet dedicated his verse - lines so alive with feeling, joy, and love of life, that critics have called these poems the most intense and luminous poetry in the Spanish language.



"Christ from above" - sketch by St. John of the Cross.

Strange, perhaps, that such lyrical poetry was composed by a priest in an age when orthodox religion was taken so seriously, and was in fact a matter of life and death. Strange, too, that although much of this poetry has such an earthy sensuality to it, it expresses an individual's highest feelings regarding beauty, love and union with Absolute Being. But this sensual love, enraptured by pure beauty, is the vehicle used by the poet to convey the soul's rapture with God. And there is suffering too, for the poet himself knew suffering and also the terrors of the obscure night before day's bright dawning.

Turning from a rigorous, cold, intellectual approach to theology, San Juan's poetry exhibits fire, energy, passion and profound yearning. His *Spiritual Canticle*, one of his most powerful poems written while in captivity, was based on the Old Testament Song of Songs, which in his day had just been directly translated from the original Hebrew (much to the chagrin of the Church) by the Spanish mystic and humanist *Fray Luis de Leon*, for which he was later imprisoned. The first two stanzas of this beautiful poem are below:

Where have You hidden Yourself, and abandoned me in my groaning, O my Beloved? You have fled like the hart, having wounded me. I ran after You, crying; but You were gone.

O shepherds, you who go through the sheepcots up the hill, if you shall see Him whom I love the most, tell Him I languish, suffer, and die.

The Spanish writer, poet, and dramatist, Garcia Lorca (1898 – 1936), praised Juan de la Cruz for his use and understanding of *duende* - the fiery, mysterious, sustaining creative power behind all great works of art. To the Andalusian mind, *duende* is "profound, human, tender, the cry of communion with God through the medium of the five senses..." This is perhaps seen most clearly in his poem *Living Flame of Love* which is sometimes considered to be his best and most mystical poems:

Oh, living flame of love that tenderly wounds my soul In its deepest centre! Since you are not oppressive, perfect me now! If it be thy will, break the web of this sweet encounter.

Oh, sweet burn; Oh, delectable wound; Oh, soft hand; Oh, delicate touch; That savours of eternal life and pays every debt; In slaying, thou hast changed death into life.

Oh, lamps of fire, in whose splendours the deep caverns of sense which were dark and blind with strange brightness, give heat and light together to their Beloved.

How gently and lovingly thou awakenest in my bosom, where thou dwellest secretly and alone! And in thy sweet breathing, full of blessing and glory, how delicately thou inspiritest my love!

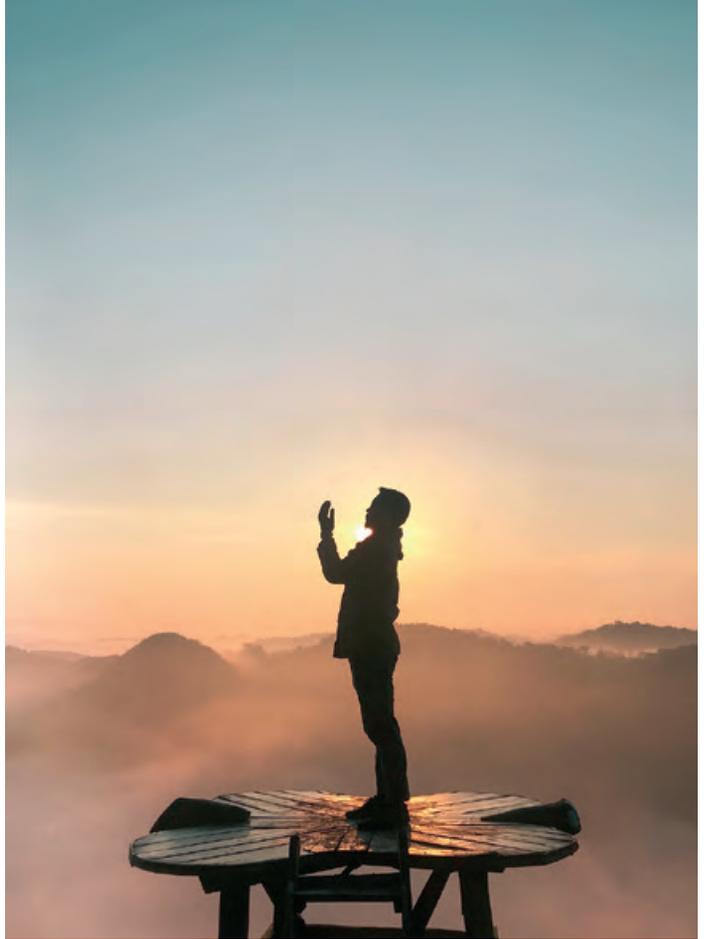
But, perhaps most important of all, Juan de la Cruz was a mystic - someone who saw beyond the structure, hierarchy and dogma of the Church into the core of what is Sacred. To the mystic the true spiritual union is a personal one between humanity and the Cosmic, Absolute Being, God. It is the intimate awareness of God through the domain of the subconscious. The mystic's ideal is the ultimate attainment of conscious union with the Absolute.



Listen Up!

Reflections on Prayer

by Sarah Plait



Visitors wandering into a city cathedral to admire the stained glass windows, monuments and architecture came upon a young woman in ardent, vocal prayer and tip-toed away from the area so as not to disturb her.

Twenty minutes later a cleric quietly approached the five sight-seers and invited them to join the evening service taking place a few minutes hence, leading them up stairs to elevated seats directly overlooking the woman who continued her evidently urgent business with the Almighty 10 feet below, seemingly unperturbed and even unaware of the intrusion. She carried on, her voice rising and falling dramatically as she offered up and repeated forcibly the details of her discontent, pleas for divine intervention and direction and *“please, please, please.”*

The five watchers sat in the kind of discomfort they might have felt had they stumbled upon a confessional where someone was disclosing the most terrible transgressions, or into a doctor’s consulting room during an intimate examination. Their awkwardness was great, yet it would have felt unseemly and rude for them to move, having been placed by a cleric clearly delighted to have extra listeners at her spoken prayers.

The woman continued on and on until the vicar intervened, inviting her to shut up or ship out, although somewhat more politely phrased. She then left, having apparently been so deeply one with her outspoken and heartfelt expression of prayer that she hadn’t noticed the visitors, despite their bustling entrance, embarrassed



throat clearing and hushed conversation. She doubtless felt she was engaged in the deepest of divine conversations. Yet, despite asking for numerous answers and solutions from on high, she never once stopped talking. She wouldn't, couldn't have discerned God's guidance if he had addressed her from the pulpit in a voice of thunder.

Prayer is a special form of communication and it is a two-way process. One part is the praying person saying, mentally or out loud, what they want to say to God. The other part, totally indispensable and vital to any kind of positive outcome, is listening. It may be worth remembering here the old saying that we have only one mouth but two ears, all the better to listen twice as much as we speak. I'm sure we have all had conversations where we felt we couldn't fit in a word without a hammer and chisel, and where the other person wouldn't hear a syllable even if we hammered all day. How much more important it is to keep the channel of communication clear and free when approaching the Divine, so as to hear the response when it comes.

In Rosicrucian circles we tend to use the term '*meditation*' a lot more often than prayer. This is not because there's anything wrong with prayer, it's just that

the word has become so commonly used that it doesn't mean the same thing to all people, whereas meditation is, well..., known to be a quiet and sacred affair. Except for purests of course, who can accurately distinguish between the two, for most people meditation is a form of prayer, though a great deal less personal and much more universal than common prayer. But for the non-purists, the two terms are interchangeable as they involve an individual deliberately contacting the universal consciousness which is responsible for all creation, is all-seeing, all-knowing, ever present and basically has all the answers, no matter what question, problem or dilemma we may have.

The key necessity for communication to take place is for the praying person to come into attunement with Divinity (the Cosmic), just as they need to tune in a radio to pick up the signal for the channel selected. Unfortunately there is all manner of interference which can block this Divine contact..., anything from rowdy children outside to a distracting inner nag about the waiting '*to do*' list, especially as Divinity speaks to us almost always only in the hushed tones of the '*still, small voice*' of our deeper self, the always patient and mostly silent '*Master Within*.'

Attunement requires that we lift our own consciousness to a level where it escapes the confines of objective reality, the reality which is largely governed by our five dominant senses of hearing, sight, touch, smell and taste. In so transcending the mundane world, we allow the connection to be made, and enter a fertile mindscape in which we may plant our prayer with the certainty that it will be responded to in the fullness of time.

Like working a muscle, the process is made easier, quicker and more effective through practice and repetition; hence the reason that one of the first tasks suggested to anyone joining the Rosicrucian Order is to mentally create their own personal sanctum sanctorum where all things sacred can be dealt with in a calm, unhurried and undisturbed manner. This is an individualised, beautiful and serene environment outside the troubles and concerns of the material world, a fitting and sacred place in which to contact our concept of the Divine and provide the conditions for a fruitful outcome.

There are two important phases to communication with the Divine. One is the active phase in which we articulate as clearly as possible our prayer, wish, request or message. The other is the passive phase in which we need to be quiet and inwardly receptive to the response which will come. Theologians have categorised some of the most common prayers as follows:-



1. Intercessions, in which we ask the Divine to intercede or step in on behalf of someone other than ourselves. It may be a plea for a better outcome than seems likely for a person suffering illness, poverty or some other challenging condition; or it may be for a group, a nation, all people with a particular anxiety or indeed all humankind, as practised frequently at Rosicrucian meetings.
2. Petitions, which are prayers for the things we personally feel we want or need, whether material belongings, opportunities, good outcomes or the qualities we need to develop as spiritual beings, as in the ubiquitous but anonymous: *“Pray not for lighter burdens but for stronger backs.”* Our visualisations for desired circumstances may be seen in the light of structured prayers, vividly imagined and then released to the Cosmic.
3. Confessions, in which we seek forgiveness for what we have done that we shouldn't have, or not done that we should have. We seek the cleansing of heart which comes when we are shown the way to make recompense, mend our ways or salve our conscience.
4. Consecrations, when we dedicate something such as ourselves, our belongings or perhaps particular places, to God's purposes, as we do when we first create our home sanctums.
5. Thanksgiving or praise, which are genuine prayers of worship which acknowledge the goodness of God in its manifold versions with no intention or request to receive anything back in return. The Psalms of David in then Old Testament contain some of the best known, as does the Hermetica, the body of wise and beautiful hymn/poems attributed to the Egyptian sage Hermes Trismegistus.

The Rosicrucian teachings offer many measures to ensure the efficacy of our prayers, including those of preparing properly by washing our hands and drinking water to signify the specialness of the contact to come, ensuring that there is always at least some unselfish element in our prayer that will result in a good outcome for others and won't benefit only us. And of course it

goes without saying that we must be sincere and truthful in all we say.

It's clear though that not all our requests are granted, even when they're for what seem to be undeniably worthy causes. We don't yet have anything approaching a state of world peace, and our loved ones succumb to all manner of unpleasant conditions and circumstances however much we wish it otherwise. Being on a path of spiritual development however, we acknowledge freely that we don't always (or even often) know best; what we think would be good could frequently be damaging to us, both in material terms and in the realm of karmic consequences.

Frequently it turns out that the things we felt hardest to bear or most difficult to handle offer the greatest learning or benefits we never dreamt of enjoying. Similarly, situations we thought we'd welcome turn out to be horrendous. Ask anyone who has followed the path from true love to disastrous divorce, been promoted beyond their capabilities into a state of stress or won the lottery only to find themselves forced out of home by bags of begging letters.

Even when prayers are answered, the outcomes don't usually arrive as a sudden and complete package like a genie granting a wish or a fairy godmother turning a pumpkin into a carriage. Certainly they can transform lives and situations in what seems like a magical fashion, sometimes very quickly, as numerous biographies can attest, but generally there is a time-lag and a requirement for action, and vitally, a change of heart and mind. Something changes in the heart of the person praying or the people prayed about. Something changes in their understanding of what is being prayed for and what can reasonably and equitably be expected.

We receive an influx from the highest form of Divinity we are able to reach, and we are given an appropriate form of enlightenment which then inspires and instructs us on how to effect the changes needed. And those changes can relate to anything from healing ourselves or others, to calming down a worrisome neighbour with whom we have no option but to coexist. When we bring ourselves in line with our spiritual path and purpose we're given the means to change everything.

What we can't do is upend natural and karmic laws and generate different outcomes from the same attitudes and behaviours which brought about the situations in the first place. Many notable people have said words to the effect that *“...all prayers are answered when one realises that sometimes the answer is no.”*



Find the Deeper YOU

You are much much more than you think, and discovering who you really are and what incredible power you have, is one of the great things you can accomplish in this life. It takes little to understand the privileged state of our existence on earth, and how valuable our limited time is. But how many people truly make the effort to treasure this time and use their hidden talents for the good of all on our precious planet?

If you seek a closer connection with all that surrounds you..., if you seek a deeper appreciation of all things on earth..., if happiness, peace and justice for all people is what you seek..., then learn to commune with your deeper self. To find out more about the Rosicrucian Order contact us at...

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Africa

Oh ancient continent, genesis of all nations, vast plains of life diverse..., you are the cradle of humankind, ancestral nursemaid of modern human mind. Myriad are your children through the world today, though divided into nations, races and religions are they. Through suffering, pain and misery, has life renewed, refreshed and made us see, the holy blessings we have found, gratefully accepted, eternally bound.

May the blessings of our Creator rain down upon all in this ancient land; and on their cousins, long since dispersed, now forming all nations of our troubled Earth.

Oh Great Father of all we see, may hearts and minds turn towards Thee, and allow Thy peace to at last descend and bring our great sadness to an end.

