ROSICRUCIAN



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Find your Deeper Self

N THE depths of your being resides your deeper Self, an aspect of your being which breathes, in calm reflection, the very rhythm of the universe. It is in touch with all things and communicates with all that matters for life on Earth. It seeks to instruct and guide its human ward how to live a good life, and does so with care for its wellbeing. And above all, it does so with love and compassion for all expressions of life.

Your Self knows why you are here and what you are meant to accomplish. It knows what your chances are of attaining the goals you have set for yourself, and whether they are beyond your reach or fully attainable. And it assists you to reach those goals with care and attention to the smallest details.

Your deeper Self is a veritable slumbering genius, eager to help you express your hidden talents with greater refinement and sophistication than you've ever encountered. And the most productive thing we can ever do is to find and communicate with this Self.

For millennia, seekers of universal truths have known of the existence of a kernel of perfection lying dormant in every person, manifesting supreme confidence, calmness, maturity and wisdom. This deeper Self is called by Rosicrucians the 'Inner Master', for it has in abundance, qualities of refinement, high purpose and spiritual maturity we would expect only of the most accomplished of humans.

You can discover how to access this high level of achievement and embark upon the definitive, true direction of your life simply by learning how to contact and regularly commune with your deeper Self. If you're searching for a way of accomplishing the most fulfilling and rewarding things in life, in a fair and ethical way, then learn from the ineffable wisdom of that inner perfection.

To find out more about the Rosicrucian Order and how it can help you achieve your most treasured goals, visit our website or contact us for a free copy of our introductory booklet "The Mastery of Life."



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BEACON

March 2021, Vol 30, No. 2

CONTENTS

The Hesychast Schism - by Pensator	2
Know Thyself - by Leonard Ziebel	10
Einstein: A Quest for Oneness - by Marc Cornwall	20
Goethe and his Dramatic Story of Faust - by Gustav Siekmann	25
The Four Wives - by Amelia	30
The Ouroborus - by Paul Goodall	33
An Otomí Experience - by Bill Anderson	36
Incense. A Scent of Heaven - by Siobhan Russell	41
The Snowflake - by Ella Wheeler Wilcox	48
Imagination - by Paracelsus	48



Cover spread

Spring revival - nature returns in anticipation of a long, gentle summer.

The Hesychast Schism

The Holy and Great Monastery of Vatopedi on Mount Athos, Greece.

N JUNE 1341, in Constantinople, the Byzantine Emperor *Andronikos III Palaiologos* presided over a council of argumentative bishops. The main point of their argument was the orthodoxy or heterodoxy of certain monks, especially some on Mount Athos who were *Hesychasts*. They claimed to practise a method of prayer and contemplation which, in condition of *hesychia* or stillness, could induce an awareness, however brief, of the divine light of the Metamorphosis or Transfiguration of Christ. Mystics can appreciate the

imagery of a man of supreme accomplishment, high on a mountain, becoming radiant with Light through the agency of divine intervention as he is brought into attunement with the Divine.

Eisodos

The Byzantine Empire was a continuation of the Roman Empire. Its citizens called themselves *Rhomaoi* or Romans, even though they spoke Greek. The Byzantine emperor





considered himself emperor of all Romans and Constantinople, the capital of the Empire, was called New Rome. The state religion was what we today know as Greek Orthodox Christianity and listening to the sonorous chants of the Greek Orthodox liturgy can transport even the most hardened heart to a mystical realm of enchantment. The story is told that when the nascent

Andronikos III Palaiologos, Byzantine Emperor - 14th Century.

Russian state, based in Kiev, was seeking a state religion to unite the new state, Grand Prince Vladimir sent delegations to examine the various religions on offer at the time. The delegation that went to Constantinople was taken to watch the liturgy in St. Sophia and reported back...

We knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth. For on earth there is no such splendour or such beauty, and we are at a loss how to describe it. We know only that God dwells there among men.

The Byzantines were confident in their belief that they were God's chosen people, and Constantinople, with its *Sacrum Palatium* (Sacred Palace) and many glittering churches and monasteries, had been a centre of civilisation and culture for a thousand years by the time the Hesychast controversy broke out. Culturally and organisationally, the Byzantine Empire was more advanced, more organised and civilised than Western Europe at the time, but not for much longer. The men who ran the empire, whether competent soldiers or not, were generally literate connoisseurs, and some were scholars and theologians of note in their own right. The ruling classes of Western Europe however, had little talent except for war.

I remember vividly my astonishment at hearing the music of Byzantium from this period. While court musicians in Western Europe concentrated on plainchant, in the imperial court and literary salons of Byzantium, there was already relatively sophisticated *orchestral* music. In 1204, Constantinople fell to the predatory instincts of the Fourth Crusade and steadily over the next half century the empire went into a period of steady decline. However, from 1259 until 1453 when Constantinople finally fell to the Ottomans, the efforts of the last ruling family of Byzantium to reverse the trend of decline brought about a great cultural outpouring. This was the *Palaiologan Renaissance*, named after that last ruling dynasty. By the middle 1350s however, religious schisms within the Orthodox Church had divided the empire to the point of collapse. But the dying Empire saw a faint gleam of hope for itself, for the religious controversy which had torn the Church apart had ended in 1351 with the victory of the Hesychasts whose mystical doctrines went on to become part of mainstream Orthodoxy.

The Holy Mountain

The dispute over Hesychasm began in Thessaloniki, at that time the second city of the empire and currently the second city of Greece and seat of the current Greek Rosicrucian administration. Gregory Palamas, the bestknown proponent of Hesychasm, was born in 1296 CE in Constantinople. His parents were aristocrats from Asia Minor, but repeated Turkish invasions had forced them to flee to Constantinople, where his father became a respected member of the Senate. Gregory received the best of traditional education. Though Gregory's father had died when he was still young, the emperor Andronikos II promised him an important career in government and Gregory seemed destined to pursue it.

However, in 1316 he was encouraged to take up the monastic life, and despite the pleadings of the emperor, he took the Holy Orders and became a monk. As the eldest son, he was responsible for his whole family, including a large number of servants. So, he persuaded his mother, brothers and sisters, and many of the household staff, to enter the monastic community as well. Most joined



Emperor Constantine I presents a representation of the city of Constantinople in this church mosaic. Hagia Sophia, c. 1000.



Emperor Constantine I presents a representation of the city of Constantinoplein this church mosaic. Hagia Sophia, c. 1000.

monasteries in Constantinople, but Gregory and his brothers set out for Mount Athos, the Holy Mountain, the centre of monasticism on a rocky peninsula near Thessaloniki, which had been granted independence from imperial control by Andronikos II in 1312. Gregory lived near the monastery of *Oatopedi* for three years before moving on to the *Great Lavra*, the religious centre of Mount Athos.

His public life began when he decided to undertake a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and Sinai. Although the crusaders had been pushed out of the eastern Mediterranean, Muslim rulers were reasonably tolerant of Christian pilgrims and it has been suggested that Muslim Sufi practices had an influence on the Hesychasts. However, unable to take his plans to fruition, he ended up in Thessaloniki where he was consecrated a priest. He founded a small hermitage in nearby *Berrhoea*, where he stayed for five years, before returning to Mount Athos in 1331 because of Serbian raids in the neighbourhood of Berrhoea which had disrupted monastic life.

He withdrew to the hermitage of *St. Sabbas* high above the Great Lavra, but was soon appointed abbot of the large monastery of *Esphigmenou*. Within a year however, he had returned to St. Sabbas; but the peaceful monastic life did not last and soon he was faced with two series of events, one theological, the other political. Palamas had by then become the leading exponent of the doctrine of Hesychasm. He composed a *Tomos* or declaration, approved and signed by most of the leading monks on Mount Athos, which condemned *Barlaam of Calabria* and his sympathisers.

Barlaam of Calabria

Barlaam of Calabria, of Greek descent from Southern Italy, came to Constantinople in 1341 and won renown as a philosopher. *John Kantakuzenos*, the *Megas Domestikos* or Commander-in-Chief of the Army of Emperor Andronikos III, appointed him to a chair in the imperial university. A humanist and perhaps also a nominalist in his philosophy and theology, Barlaam quickly came to be known throughout the capital, and was well respected at court. He was given diplomatic missions to the papal court in Avignon, and wrote commentaries on a variety of religious texts.

Although entirely loyal to orthodox Christianity, Barlaam was deeply impressed by the secular humanism of the emerging Italian Renaissance. Philosophically, his belief in the

transcendence of God led him to deny the possibility of knowledge of God, which was the aim of the Hesychasts, and he found himself repelled by their practices, which promised such knowledge. He argued that meditation was useless and that whatever one could know of things divine had to come from a study of Nature.



Gregory Palamas, the best-known proponent of Hesychasm, was born in 1296 CE in Constantinople.

Hesychasm and Neoplatonism

The philosophy of Neoplatonism had made a contribution to the dogma of Hesychasm. The Hesychast *doctrine of the uncreated light* flowing from God and uniting all people with him, caused a controversy that was in some respects a contest between Platonists and Aristotelians.

Hesychasm was founded upon the theory of mystical contemplation which had affinities with the contemporary mysticism of the German theologian *Meister Eckhart* (1260-1328) and one of his disciples, the German mystic and Dominican friar *Johannes Tauler* (1300-1361). Certain monks of Mount Athos claimed to have found a method



Barlaam, Carrying a Shoulder Pack, Crosses a River. Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program.

of prayer and contemplation that enabled them, after arduous efforts, to reach states of unity with God and to see the uncreated light of the transfiguration of Jesus on Mount Tabor, as reported in the Bible. They were ridiculed by many Greek theologians including Barlaam, who equated them with the Bogomils, the Balkan version of the Cathars. Others like Nikephoros Gregoras and Demetrios Kydones believed the Hesychasts were nothing less than heretics, bad accusations in those times. But Gregory Palamas, by now the Archbishop of Thessaloniki, supported the Hesychast monks with an argument postulating a distinction between the essence of God, which remains unknowable, and the *energies* of God, which is modern terms might be understood as His *aura*, something which Gregory claimed could be directly experienced by created beings.

To Palamas, vision and union with God are two things offering humanity existential knowledge of God; and with these, any created being can possess real knowledge of God. He stated that the deifying gift of the Holy Spirit, manifesting as a mysterious light, transforms anyone receiving it into divine light. It not only fills them with eternal light, *"but also grants them a knowledge and a life appropriate to God."* In that state the receiver of such a gift would possess knowledge of God, though for how long, was never mentioned.

In reply to Barlaam's teaching that God was known only by the greatest contemplators, namely, the philosophers, and that knowledge of God transmitted *"by noetic illumination [was] by no means true"*, Palamas declared: God makes Himselfknown not only through all that is but also through what is not, through transcendence, that is, through uncreated things, and also through an eternal light that transcends all beings.

This knowledge, Palamas said, was offered as a pledge to those who were worthy of it, and anyone who disregarded such a vision of God which offered true knowledge, was, in reality, ignorant of God. Palamas pursued the methods of meditation cultivated by the great expounders of Hesychasm, including *St. Symeon* (949-1022). He preferred a life of retirement and contemplation, but again, as with St. Symeon, a combination of historical circumstances compelled Palamas to speak out for what he believed was the

quintessence of Christianity, giving a systematic account of St. Symeon's convictions and managing to make them the central plank of Eastern Orthodoxy.

Conflict Between Barlaam and Palamas

Barlaam of Calabria had stated that efforts at demonstrating the nature of God should be dismissed, since God, he believed, is ultimately unknowable and cannot be demonstrated to humans. He became aware of the Hesychast method of prayer and immediately began to criticise their *psychosomatic technique* and the possibility of material eyes physically beholding the immaterial God. A dialogue of letters followed between Barlaam and Palamas, with the monk and theologian *Gregory*

Akindynos acting as a mediator between Palamas, whom he knew from Mount Athos, and the often fiery and flamboyant character of Barlaam in Constantinople.

By the early spring of 1341 it was clear that the dispute would need to be resolved by a church synod. Barlaam, who had already unsuccessfully attempted to rouse *Patriarch John XIV Kalekas* to his cause, now demanded that a synod be held in the capital. Palamas



St. Symeon (949-1022)



View of Constantinople, painted by Luigi Mayer.

agreed and left for Constantinople, bringing with him several of his closest friends and disciples, including the Emperor <u>Andronikos III</u>, with whom he had grown up and who would soon support his childhood friend. Palamas arrived at the capital some seven months after Barlaam, who had already spent a lot of time and effort in convincing many of his case. Palamas decided to make this public and turned many to his own view during the spring of that year.

Barlaam's treatises against the views held by most monks since the time of St. Symeon were not simply philosophical innovations; they brought to the surface ambiguities and tensions which had existed long before the saint. Palamas understood that Barlaam's challenge forced the recognition and resolution of attitudes and conceptions which monks and ecclesiastical authorities alike preferred to ignore. The nature of eastern Christendom was at issue and perhaps only Palamas realised how great the risks were. Barlaam's critique of mystical practices was based upon an Aristotelian view that all knowledge is derived from sense experience. Given that *Dionysius the Areopagite* had taught that knowledge of God is utterly beyond sense experience and He is unknowable, Barlaam argued that mystical illumination could not constitute knowledge of God. If it had any value at all, it was only symbolical and, given what Barlaam had witnessed of Hesychastic practices, he doubted that there was anything more to it than psychic indulgence in their "prayers of the heart."

Palamas recognised that Barlaam's standpoint was not merely a scholarly stance on an abstruse topic; it challenged the Hesychastic core of orthodoxy and undermined the concept fervently taught by St. Symeon. Though Palamas had warned against contemplative practices undertaken without knowledgeable guidance, he defended meditation, reaffirmed the possibility of direct experience of the Divine, and held that the study of Nature was proper but that it could never furnish clues to spiritual reality.

Although he was opposed to the application of philosophical methods to religious issues, Palamas thought out his responses very carefully. He knew that the church could not accept an exclusively sensory conception of knowledge without destroying the Hesychastic view. But he also saw that the monks had an unclear idea of the concept of a *'knowledge of God.'* He read Barlaam's works carefully and saw that Barlaam, the philosophical empiricist, had no experience or first-hand knowledge of meditation, confusing one of the preliminary techniques, restraining of the breath, with the entire practice, thereby concluding that centring the mind in the heart was equivalent to binding the soul to the body. Palamas responded by explaining the purpose of contemplative exercises:

We regard it as evil for the mind to be concerned with mindings of the flesh, and not wrong for the mind to be in the body, for the body is not evil [...] If the soul would make proper use of the mind, it must be brought from its distraction and diffusion throughout the body to the condition of prosoche, or attention.

Rosicrucians have a similar practice known as the overall body relaxation exercise. The Hesychasts would sit quietly, counting their breaths and focussing their attention on the heart, not the navel as Barlaam claimed. Only when real *'attention'* (focused concentration) was achieved, would a *prayer of the heart* be efficacious.

Having disposed of Barlaam's misconceptions regarding the nature of meditation, Palamas faced the formidable task of clarifying its purpose and result. All individuals of the right spirit were promised the possibility of knowledge of God, though only few ever sought it, and

mage: wikipedia/rawpixel

fewer still attained it. The prototype of this experience was the *Transfiguration* or *Metamorphosis* when Jesus became radiant with Inner Light before the disciples on Mount Tabor. Since God is transcendent, Barlaam had argued, His Light would not be visible to earthly eyes. The disciples could therefore not have seen the Divine in the experience on Mount Tabor, and their vision was therefore symbolical only.

Palamas was as willing as any Hesychast to draw a sharp distinction between the Creator and His creation, but he rejected an interpretation of the Transfiguration that would make deification nothing more than a symbolical event promising some future glory. For Palamas, as for St. Symeon, beholding the Light is the same as beholding the Divine. It is not symbolical in the ordinary sense of the word, nor even a symbol in the deeper meaning of the term used by *Maximus the Confessor* when he said that Christ on the cross is a symbol of the human body. Seeing the Light is therefore, according to Palamas, a direct experience of mystical union, the deified human entering the Divine Presence in this earthly life, not solely in some post-death period.

> Seeing the Light is, according to Palamas, a direct experience of mystical union.

The Triumph of Hesychasm

The Senate, judiciary, bishops and abbots in Constantinople met in a synod under the presidency of the emperor. Their meeting lasted only one day, and the vote went in favour of Palamas. During the meeting however, Emperor Andronikos III took ill and died four days later. As his son, John V, was a minor, Andronikos' wife, the Empress Anna, became regent. She could not however maintain a balance between the *Megas Domestikos John Kantakuzenos*, who supported Palamas, and Patriarch John XIV Kalekas who had sided with Barlaam.

After Kantakuzenos secured imperial approval of the synod's decision, he was ousted by the patriarch and a group of aristocrats. Palamas remained loyal to the Empress Anna as regent, but openly condemned the palace coup. In 1343 the patriarch arrested Palamas on charges of heresy; and when he refused to change his views, he



Byzantine Emperor John VI Kantakouzenos presiding over a synod. The Hesychast Council of Constantinople, 1351.

excommunicated him. Although the empress was afraid that Palamas was a political adversary, she respected him as a theologian. But the patriarch's arrogance was intolerable for her. While John Kantakuzenos started a civil war against the empress and her supporters, she plotted against the patriarch, who was trying to seize the regency.

In 1347 she convened a council that deposed the patriarch, and John VI Kantakuzenos came to the throne, ruling in the name of John V. Gregory Palamas was soon after consecrated archbishop of Thessaloniki, and Kantakuzenos appointed a Palamite as patriarch, thereby inaugurating a tradition that lasted for many years and ultimately made monastic spirituality the premier ecclesiastical viewpoint. In August 1347, a second synod was called with Emperor Kantakuzenos chairing it. Again, it vindicated Palamas. Civil war was about to break out between supporters of the new emperor Kantakuzenos, and the deposed patriarch and widowed empress over who should be regent for the young John V.

In July 1351, a final synod was held in the *Blachernai Palace* in Constantinople presided over by John VI Kantakuzenos as co- and senior emperor. Once and for all it declared that Palamas' doctrine was fully in keeping with the teachings and traditions of the church. Palamas had won his case with the Orthodox Church and Hesychasm was formally adopted into the Orthodox theology.

When John VI Kantakuzenos abdicated in favour of John V in 1354, he was already a revered religious authority and continued to be treated as an elder statesman. He became a monk and retired to join his son at Mystras in the Morea. The Morea is now known as the

Peloponnese in southern Greece, and Mystras will be the subject of a future Rosicrucian Beacon article about its influence on the Italian Renaissance. When the empire collapsed a century later in 1453, the church was largely unaffected and Byzantine civilisation continued to exert a powerful influence through it.

Exodos

As Archbishop, Gregory Palamas was well liked in Thessaloniki, for he fought social injustices of every kind, including the burdens imposed from the capital. Once, when travelling to Constantinople to appeal to the emperor, he was a passenger on a ship which was captured by the Turks. He spent a year in pleasant captivity, debating religious views with the son of Emir Orkhan in the hope that "a day will soon come when we will be able to understand each other."

Though a loyal citizen of Byzantium, Palamas clearly distinguished between the Byzantine church, whose truths he considered eternal, and the Byzantine state, which was temporal. When he was released, he returned to Thessaloniki, where this Master of Orthodox Mysticism died on 27th November 1359. Nine years later, in 1368, Palamas was canonised a saint by the Patriarch *Philotheos*, his friend and former disciple; and to the present day in Thessaloniki, Palamas is venerated second only to Demetrios, the patron saint of the city.

When the body is purified, the mind focussed and the soul filled with love, the whole individual is made one with divine action and knows God superrationally. This is possible because the essence of the mind is one thing and its activity another. The mind is not like the eye, which sees all visible things but

Modern view of Thessaloniki from the ancient walls of the castle.

does not see itself. The mind can see itself, and when it becomes wholly attuned to God, it becomes the divine energy and beholds it as Light within itself.

Final Word

Stepping aside from the details of this article and climbing up the proverbial mountain of history and hindsight to get a clearer view of the landscape, I would like to address the following broader implications of the harmful divisions in society that schisms of all sorts create for our world, most of them with entirely unintended consequences. Though comfortably ensconced in the third decade of the 21st Century, we may seem far removed from the deep religious divisions that plagued Europe and the Middle East for well over a thousand years, but which to some extent still remain with us. From a modern perspective those divisions may seem trivial to us, living as we do in an era where religious and political tolerance is enshrined in the governance of most Western countries. Yet, for the people of the day when those deep social, political, cultural and religious divisions existed, life was a serious matter and could be lived in only one way, their way! Have we changed much since then?

It is without doubt valuable to place ourselves in our proper place in history and understand that although all may seem bright and rosy for our future, there are some things which creep up on us slowly and steadily without our understanding what dangers may be lurking in the immediate years and decades to come. The damage to democratic institutions, moral and spiritual standards and notions of justice, and even unbiased scholarly research, that social media has increasingly been exerting over the past two decades or more, is a sobering reality we should all think about deeply.

The forces of history, the broad brushstrokes on the canvas of time which defy our philosophical speculations, our valued moral and spiritual values and our proud technological achievements..., these all pale in the face of the fundamental needs of life on earth to continue, despite our foolishness and arrogance as the most dominant and predatory species to have ever existed on this planet. The worldwide Covid-19 pandemic is a reminder of how easily a great society, in fact even a great species, can be brought to its knees in a very short time once a tipping point in history has been reached, as it has on many occasions in the past, almost all of which we have forgotten.

Civilisations have come and gone, some leaving magnificent contributions to our





Silhouette of Holy Mount Athos, Greece.

present comfortable lifestyles and cultural depth, while others, though flowering to great brilliance of creativity for short periods, are almost totally forgotten in our day. The former of the two is what I have addressed in this article, though we must remember that trivial as the Hesychast Schism of the 14th Century may seem to us today, it was an epochal catastrophe in its day. Yet, the world continued and new civilisations rose and fell, for the schism was, in terms of the wider world, a mere local blip on the tapestry of time.

Similar fundamental and almost unbridgeable schisms in politics, beliefs and technological advancement are with us today; but this time they exist on a global scale and are less survivable than the local nature of the issue that we, with the benefit of hindsight, would categorise the Hesychast Schism as having been in its day. Though individually, we are but mere small humans with little influence on world events, we would nevertheless do well to contemplate deeply our present place in history and what we can still do to avert a catastrophe of global proportions, one which is already well underway.

While our societal and civilisational futures may be in peril, changes brought about in those spheres may be survivable. What we may not survive though, is the permanent damage we're doing to the biosphere and very fabric of all life on earth..., life we depend upon for everything needed to continue living, thriving, loving and cherishing everything we value. That is my final word and plea. Let us live each day with the ardent desire to make a better world and specifically, to reverse the decline that our ailing planet so manifestly is already in.

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Know Thyself

by Leonard Ziebel



he view from the Delphic slopes was breathtaking. Cloud-capped Mt. Parnassos, with patches of snow still clinging to its highest peaks, towered over precipitous cliffs that ringed a natural amphitheatre on one side and dropped down to the seemingly bottomless *Pleistos* valley on the other side. Small rivulets of melted snow trickled down undulating terraces, creating the *Kastalian Spring* in a narrow crevice at the foot of the mountain.

Apollo consecrated *Kastalia* to the *Muses* and it was said that the spring could inspire the genius of poetry to those who drank her waters or listened to their quiet sound. An undisturbed view of the valley below offered an awe-inspiring spectacle that stretched to the peacock-blue waters of the Gulf of Corinth, 15 kilometres away, where the ancient harbour of *Kirrha* was situated. It was here that supplicants landed on their journey to consult the Oracle.

The Joyous Journey: 206 BCE

The easiest access to Delphi was through the gorge leading from the port of *Itea* that bordered on the Gulf of Corinth. Gradually, as the multitudes of visitors groped their way over the rough terrain, a winding, tortuous path was cut through the mountain leading to the Oracle, which was set at the top. This became known as the *Sacred Way* and processions of pilgrims, chanting holy songs and playing sacred music, climbed over the sharp, projecting crags upon which *Aesop*, the fable writer, had met his death. Finally the visitors reached the sanctuary.

One group from the city of *Elea* in southern Italy, whose most famous citizen was the esoteric philosopher Parmenides, joined the throng of pilgrims at dawn on the 7^{th} day of the month *Bysios* (February-March). *Phoibos*

Apollo, the great god of light, had returned a few days earlier from *Hyperborea*, his winter quarters north of Thrace, and now, on his natal day, the first oracular session of the year was about to begin.

Once per month, the

Pythia, who was the high priestess and oracle of Delphi, emerged with her retinue of assistants and priests and went through an intricate series of rituals to purify herself. First, she purified herself by bathing in the pure, sparkling waters of Kastalia This was the *outer purification*. Then the Pythia and her cortege walked ceremoniously up the hillside, through the sanctuary's terraced compound, drawing near to another spring called *Kassotis*, whose clear and cool waters she drank. This was the *inner purification*.

Zeus

The melancholic beauty and distinctly spiritual atmosphere created by the stillness of the surroundings, make it easy to understand why Zeus, the father of the gods, placed the conical-shaped stone called the *omphalos*, denoting the *navel* [of the earth], at Delphi. According to legend, to find the exact centre of the earth, Zeus released two eagles simultaneously from either end of the world to determine where the centre lay: they met above Delphi! Already for hundreds of years, Mt. Parnassos had been considered sacred and here a new temple was dedicated to Zeus' favourite son, Apollo, the god of harmony, order, light, prophecy, medicine and healing. He was also the patron of youth, beauty, music and colonisation.



Lycurgus Consulting the Pythia, the high priestess and oracle of Delphi, by Eugène Delacroix.



Pallas Athene Visiting Apollo on the Parnassus, by Arnold Houbraken.



Ruins of Athina Pronaia temple in Ancient Delphi, Greece.

Delphi is not only a major Hellenic sanctuary, it also possesses gymnasia, athletic games, music festivals, merchant stalls, guides, food vendors, hawkers of religious souvenirs and even a theatre. So much to see and do here!

But Chrysanthios and I had a single purpose, and after purifying ourselves in the waters of Kastalia, we followed the retinue up the Sacred Way to the portal of the temple, past the elegant porticoes and official buildings, past the statues and votive offerings to the great edifice where we prepared for our entrance to the temple proper. We had come to consult the Oracle and were full of awe and excited anticipation.

Delphi: 2006 CE

Delphi, in the modern Greek prefecture of *Phokis*, was revered throughout the Greek world as the centre of the universe. The great Panhellenic sanctuary of Pythian Apollo lay in the ancient Greek territory or *koinon* of Phokis. The Phokians, not a city-state, rarely figured in the major events of Greek history and Delphi, although within their territory, was not considered a Phokian sanctuary and was administered by a coalition of states called the *Amphiktyony*.

The name *Delphoi* could refer to the *delph* (hollow) or *delphos* (womb) and may refer to an archaic veneration of Gaia, an ancient Earth goddess at the site. Apollo is connected with the site by his epithet *Delphinios*, the Delphinian, namely, either *"the one of Delphi"* or *"the one of the womb."* The epithet is also connected with dolphins in the Homeric *Hymn to Apollo* (line 400), telling how Apollo first came to Delphi in the shape of a dolphin, carrying Cretan priests on his back. Further yet you went, far-shooting Apollo, until you came to the town of the presumptuous Phlegyai who dwell on this earth in a lovely glade near the Kephisian lake, caring not for Zeus. And thence you went speeding swiftly to the mountain ridge, and came to Krisa beneath snowy Parnassos, a foothill turned towards the west: a cliff hangs over it from above, and a hollow, rugged glade runs under. There the lord Phoibos Apollo resolved to make his lovely temple, and thus he said...

"In this place I am minded to build a glorious temple to be an oracle for men, and here they will always bring perfect hecatombs [sacrifices of cattle], both they who dwell in rich Peloponnesos and the men of Europe and from all the wave-washed isles, coming to question me. And I will deliver to them all counsel that cannot fail, answering them in my rich temple."

When he had said this, Phoibos Apollo laid out all the foundations throughout, wide and very long; and upon these the sons of Erginos, Trophonios and Agamedes, dear to the deathless gods, laid a footing of stone. And the countless tribes of men built the whole temple of wrought stones, to be sung of for ever.

The *Phaedriades* (Shining Ones) were the pair of cliffs on the lower southern slope of Mt. Parnassos, which enclose the sacred site of Delphi. The celebrated ancient writers *Strabo*, *Plutarch* and *Pausanias* all mentioned the Phaedriades when describing the site: a narrow valley

of the Pleistos formed by mounts Parnassos and Kirphis. Between them rises the Kastalian Spring.

Even today, at noontime, the rock faces reflect a dazzling glare, while at sunset the sides of the cliffs glow red with the reflection of the sun's rays. And the whole ravine of the Pleistos and the steep terraced olive groves in the valley leading to the rocky pass of Arachova are bathed in a warm, deep purple light. These cliffs form the eastern gate of the site.

Apollo

It is thought that the worship of Apollo, always depicted as an eternally handsome, beardless young man, came to the Aegean

area from Anatolia (modern day Turkey) sometime between 1100 and 800 BCE. Homer mentions him as being on the side of the Trojans, not the Greeks, during the Trojan War, which may bear out this supposition.

There are indications that he may even have originally been a Hittite or Hurrian divinity. He seems to have personified the power to dispel and ward off evil, which was related to his association with the darknessdispelling power of the morning sun and the conceived power of reason and prophecy to dispel doubt and ignorance.

Apollo is the light that illumines the arts of civilisation. He and his sister Artemis (Diana to the Romans) were born on the seventh day of the seventh month on a barren and inhospitable floating island that was incapable of sustaining life. At the very instant of Apollo's birth, a rooster crowed, heralding the dawn, and seven sacred swans circled the island seven times in waters that emitted a golden glow. At the same moment, a grove of golden olive trees representing the spiritual nature of the universe began to bloom, and the foundations of the island took root. Zeus was so proud of his son and of the events proclaiming his birth that he declared the island to be a sanctuary. He named it Delos, 'the Brilliant.' Birth and death were forbidden and those who were about to give birth or to die were rushed to another island in order to preserve the purity of Delos.

During his early years, Apollo dwelt in the mountainous valleys of *Pierra*, an area north of Mt. Olympus, where the nine Muses taught him the intellectual arts that give humanity an insight into the

eternal truths and frees them from physical bondage. Apollo was such an adept pupil that he soon surpassed his teachers, and Hermes, the chief messenger of the gods, presented him with the seven-stringed lyre which became a symbol of the harmonious union of the cosmic forces that pervade heaven and earth. When Apollo left Pierra to live among the gods on Mt. Olympus, Zeus placed a golden crown on his head, thereby vesting him with divine authority.

His skills and defence of human values made Apollo the most beloved of the Greek deities, and many legends were woven around him. It was told that after the death of his friend *Hyakinthos* through the jealous anger of *Zephyros*, god of the west wind, Apollo sought solace in the company of a beautiful mortal girl named *Marpessa*,

who was in love with the courageous and handsome *Idas*. Realising that he could not compete with the god in any contest designed to win the girl, Idas abducted Marpessa and sped away in a winged chariot that the sea-god *Poseidon* had made for him. Apollo, who was still grieving over losing Hyakinthos, was not willing to give up Marpessa and set off in immediate pursuit. The winged

chariot was no match for the swift steeds that pulled the sun through the

heavens and Idas was soon overtaken.

Knowing that his doom was certain, Idas nevertheless prepared to fight to the death for the girl whom he loved. As Apollo was about to strike, Marpessa threw herself between the two adversaries and declared

Apollo

13

The friendship of Apollo and Hermes, by Noël Coypel. her love for Idas. She pleaded with Apollo to spare Idas, reminding him that it was her right as a mortal to choose her own mate. Remembering the longing he felt for Hyakinthos, Apollo bowed his head in shame and asked to be forgiven for his selfishness. He wished the two lovers well and with a heavy heart, returned to his home in faroff Hyperborea.

Hyperborea was a paradisiacal island surrounded by the river *Okeanos* (from which we get our word *Ocean*). It enjoyed perpetual warmth and sunshine. Fruit grew so fast and so abundantly that they would be sown in the morning, reaped at midday, and consumed at sunset. Herds of graceful unicorns roamed the plains and many varieties of fish filled the waters. In the highlands, an assortment of unusual plant life covered the landscape, pollinated by swarms of various insects. Within Hyperborea's borders, sorrow was unknown, and its inhabitants chose the time of their death, which they celebrated by feasting and rejoicing, after which they were escorted in regal splendour to a high crag overlooking the river Okeanos and hurled into its frothy waters.

The river Okeanos was thought to be a limitless river encircling the world. Early Greek thought conceived this river as symbolising the current of energy that induced the dynamic forces and transitional states between solid matter and formless gas, and it was believed that all life germinated in these waters. From a metaphysical point of view, Okeanos can be regarded as the primordial sea containing within itself the seeds of all possible forms on one plane of existence, and Hyperborea personifies the ascent from exoteric darkness to esoteric light. The manner in which its inhabitants chose to leave the island is analogous to the descent of the soul from heaven to earth.

Python

After dwelling in Hyperborea for one year, Apollo returned to Greece only to learn that his mother *Leto* was being intimidated by the chthonic serpent *Python* which was terrorising the countryside around Mt. Parnassos at the place known as *Pytho*. Apollo rushed to her aid and a fierce battle took place, in which Python was mortally wounded by Apollo's arrows. Defeated, the serpent slithered to its lair, which lay beneath the mountain by the spring of Kastalia and died.

In this brief but significant allegory, the serpent represents the evil that humans must overcome, and Apollo's arrows are the shafts of light that, symbolical of human victory over the dark forces of the universe. In Greek, the word *pythein* means: *"to rot.*" The defeat of Python came to symbolise Apollo's (Light's) victory over the powers of darkness.

Kastalian Spring

On a hot summer's day, the crystalline springs from which people and animals could refresh themselves, shimmer and pulsate luminously. Delphi's abundance of water in pools and springs, as well as quenching the thirst, was an inspiration for poetry and prophecy. The cliffs and surrounding mountains kept it secluded.

The Kastalian Spring in the ravine between the Phaedriades is where pilgrims and the priesthood, the contestants in the Pythian Games and especially suppliants who came to consult the Oracle, stopped to purify themselves in preparation for entering the great





The Castalian spring at Delphi; the cavities in the rock are for votive offerings. (Detail) Etching by F.R. Hay, 1813, after E.D. Clarke.

temple. Two fountains fed by the sacred spring survive. The archaic (early 6th Century BCE) fountain house has a rectangular marble-lined basin surrounded by benches. There is also a Hellenistic or Roman fountain with niches hollowed in the rock to receive votive gifts to the nymph Kastalia. It was impossible to bathe in this spring as the water was covered and seven bronze spouts provided the water needed for the purifying rites.

After Python

Following the defeat of Python, Apollo challenged the god *Pan* to a musical contest in which the prize would be the gift of prophecy. Pan was defeated and Apollo tested his newly acquired powers on a shepherd who tended his flock of sheep in the shadow of the temple at Delphi. After Python had expired, vapours began to ooze out of the deep crevasses that were to be found on the hillside,

and Apollo caused the shepherd to become enveloped in their fumes. The herdsman soon began to jump about and act irrationally, mumbling strange phrases which later proved to be prophetic revelations.

As more and more people flocked to Delphi to experience the ecstasy of the intoxicating subterranean gases, the priesthood erected a shrine over the exact spot whence the vapours issued and installed a priestess called the *Pythia* to act as a mediator between the gods and men. Inside the shrine stood a large bronze statue of Pythian Apollo, crowned with a halo of laurel leaves that he fashioned to console himself after the nymph *Daphne* was spirited away from him by Gaia, the earth mother. Inscribed over the portico of the temple were the words *Gnothi Seauton*, *"Know* *Thyself*" commemorating the humble lesson Apollo had learned while serving King Admetos of Pherai in Thessaly.

In the temple at Delphi, aids to human life had been inscribed by the Seven Sages of ancient Greece. The Seven Sages visited Delphi and dedicated to Apollo the messages that have become proverbs, according to Pausanias in his *Description of Greece*. All the messages reflected a warning that worldly lies, passions and hypocrisy would not be tolerated within the shrine, and serious consequences would befall the individual who entered with unclean hands.

A typical example of how serious this warning was regarded is revealed when King Alyattes of Lydia fell ill after his army had destroyed a temple to Athena. He appealed to the Pythia for aid but was refused a reply until he built and dedicated a temple to Athena in place of the one his army had ravaged. So distraught was the king over the oracle's silence that he built two temples and sent an enormous amount of silver to Delphi.

Delphi became the spiritual centre of the Greek world.

The Oracle was consulted before cities sent out colonies to other parts of the world. Pythia was instrumental in the Greek colonisation of Asia Minor, Syracuse in Sicily and Marseille in France. As the overseas colonies prospered and the Oracle's fame grew at home and abroad, the Greeks increasingly viewed Delphi as central to their rebirth, not only spiritually but also physically. Delphi became the spiritual centre of the Greek



View of Delphi with Sacrificial Procession by Claude Lorrain.

world. It undoubtedly received its reputation as a religious haven because of its location. Situated as it is at the end of a formidable gorge and located in a cluster of rocky peaks sheltered by a circle of rugged mountains, it was difficult for enemy invasion forces to reach it.

As a sacred shrine where tribal leaders vied for the favours of the gods, Delphi became the centre of political intrigue and the Pythia, in her role as *'adviser*', played an important part in shaping the destiny of Greece. The trust and respect that were generated by her prophecies impressed a modicum of unity and authority upon the Hellenic mind that moulded the independent city-states into one great nation. She also acted as mediator between the various Greek states during their wars.

Over a period of 250 years, four Sacred Wars were fought to safeguard the independence of Delphi and to give free access to the Oracle and its sacred precincts. In later years, Delphi came under the influence first of Macedonia, and then of the Aetolian League (290-190 BCE) before yielding to the Romans in 189 BCE. Although the Roman general Sulla plundered Delphi in 86 BCE, there were at least 500 bronze statues left over to be collected by the Emperor Nero in 66 CE, and the site was still full of fine works of art when Pausanias visited and described it a century later.

> Delphi became the setting for the grandest displays of wealth and status of both individuals and communities.

Delphi became the setting for the grandest displays of wealth and status of both individuals and communities. Ironically, it was this accumulation of wealth that made the sanctuary a target. Along the wayside were treasuries in which the affluent would deposit gifts of gold or works of art. Those who had nothing to offer left two twisted fern stalks, as it was thought that the seed of this plant would enrich the possessor with an inexhaustible supply of gold. In one of these treasuries can even be found the first musical notes thought to have ever been written.

The temple proper consisted of three parts: the entrance hall or *Pronaos* was adorned with the maxims of the Seven Sages. Behind this was the *Naos*, the largest part of the temple, where was located the hearth of the goddess Hestia (Vesta to the Romans), the home of the eternal flame that burned in the name of all

Greece. The rear portion, the *Adyton* or inner sanctum of the temple was on two levels, consisting of a ground floor with the gold cult statue of Apollo, and a lower ground

floor which was divided by a thin partition into the *oikos* where the enquirer stood, and the *antron* to which only the Pythia had access.

The Oracle and the Pythia

The Oracle spoke only for nine months of the year. In wintertime, from November to February, Apollo left Delphi for the north, handing control over to his halfbrother the god Dionysos and his mystical rites.

Before a petitioner was allowed to consult the Oracle for advice, a ritual cake was baked and eaten, after which the inquirer would drink from the Kastalian Spring to wash away all impurities staining their thoughts. Outside the temple the body of a goat was then sprinkled with holy water. If the goat reacted by shivering and trembling, the petitioner was admitted into the sanctuary after removing all rings, as it was believed that a ring was associated with the binding of a body and could therefore interfere with the reception of the Oracle's message. The petitioner's question was given to the officiating priest who, in turn, would consult with the Pythia. The answer given was always in enigmatic verse. For instance, the Roman emperor Nero (reigned 54-68 CE) after being warned to beware of the 73rd year, was deposed by the 73-year old Galba, governor of one of the Spanish provinces, Hispania Tarraconensis.

The Pythian priestess was merely the medium of Apollo; she was not herself consciously the Oracle. She had to be over 50 years old but dressed as a young girl

Oracle of Delphi: King Aigeus in front of the Pythia. in memory of the earliest Pythias. There was also an association with virgin purity. After she was appointed, she had to lead a blameless life. If married, she was required to leave her husband. She had a residence of her own in the sacred enclosure and her life was dedicated to Apollo from the moment she took up her post.

> The Pythian priestess was merely the medium of Apollo; she was not herself consciously the Oracle.

She was not selected from any particular family, nor was she given any particular training. She was a very ordinary woman whose special gifts appeared only when she was inspired by Apollo. It is possible that she was selected from the female attendants of the temple whose duty it was to keep the eternal fire inside the temple lit with supplies of pine and laurel. There were a number of attendants working in shifts day and night. At the height of its power and influence, there were three Pythias, one of whom was always in reserve.

On oracle day, the seventh of the month, the Pythia

prepared herself by washing in the Kastalian spring and undergoing a purification involving barley smoke and laurel leaves. If the male priests of Apollo determined the day was propitious for prophesying, she entered the Adyton of the Temple of Apollo to sit on the tripod, where she chewed laurel leaves, gazed into a basin of Kastalia water and presumably sank into a trance. The enquirers had to think pure thoughts before consulting the Pythia. The questions presented to her received strange and garbled answers, which were then translated into hexameter verse by the priests. A number of the lead tablets on which questions were inscribed have been found, but the official answers to those questions were inscribed only in the memories of the questioners and priests.

A veil or curtain prevented the petitioners from seeing the Pythia. Her chamber was approximately square with the Pythia sitting on her tripod next to the sacred laurel tree in one corner. To her left was the grave of Dionysos and further to her left in another corner was a statue of Apollo. Between this statue and the curtain was the conical shaped stone of the *omphalos* with a golden eagle on either side. The omphalos was narrower at the top than the bottom and from here issued the fumes that filled the chamber and affected the Pythia. In the exact centre of the grotto, straddling a cleft from where the fumes also rose stood a tripod with a likeness of Apollo engraved upon it. At its base, a trio of coiled serpents writhed as a reminder of the source from where the maddening gas emanated.

Prophecies

Seated on the tripod, the Pythia soon succumbed to the fumes. Her body began to twitch in nervous convulsions, and she entered into a state of delirious incoherence, uttering words and phrases that only the *Prophetes*, the Chief Priest or the *Hosioi*, the holy men of the temple, could interpret.

The *Hosioi* were thought to be descendants of Deukalion, the king who was saved when the ark that he built came to rest on Mt Parnassos after the deluge that destroyed all mankind. It was the obligation of the *Hosioi* to translate and preserve the details of each prophecy uttered by the Pythia. Just what induced the

Pythia's strange actions has never been determined but one conjecture is that the laurel leaf she chewed produced a post-narcotic effect upon her nervous system, while another theory claims that the vapours themselves affected the priestess, producing a kind of auto hypnotic trance.

Those who questioned the validity of the Pythia's prophecies were soon convinced of their authenticity. Such a person was Croesus (560-546 BCE), the king of non-Greek Lydia in western Anatolia (modern Turkey). He tested the powers of the reigning oracle in many of the religious centres of Greece and Asia. He asked what he was doing on a certain day, and the only truthful reply came from Delphi. The answer so pleased the king that he presented the priesthood with two enormous wine bowls, one of gold weighing 500 pounds and one of silver with a capacity of 5,000 gallons.

In addition, he included golden



The priestess of the oracle at ancient Delphi, Greece, by John Collier.



The ancient stadium of Delphi.

vases, silver jars and a golden statue of a lion that was four and a half feet tall. Taking advantage, he asked if, having already allied himself with Egypt and Babylonia, the oracle felt it would be to his advantage to declare war on the emergent Persian Empire. The famous answer he received was: *"If (roesus crosses the Halys, a great empire shall be brought down."* The River Halys was the border between the two empires. Croesus was overjoyed and ordered his army to march. History has recorded that the great empire that was destroyed was his own. Pharaoh Amasis of 26th Dynasty also sent vast sums of money to Delphi.

The Pythian Games

Since a strong body and healthy mind was necessary for defence, the priesthood introduced the *Septeria*, which consisted of a series of musical contests and athletic games to celebrate Apollo's victory over the serpent Python. These events evolved into religious festivals and fairs during which concessionaires and carnival performers would set up booths and hawk their wares to noisy pilgrims wending their way to the sanctuary or plodding up the hillside to witness the games or gaze in awe at the breathtaking scenery.

The Pythian Games became so popular that all of the Greek states vied to participate, and they evolved into a regular event. Three months before the start of the games, envoys from Delphi went around Greece proclaiming a *"sacred armistice."* In each city they summoned people to take part in the games. These *theoroi* set off in a festive procession and were received everywhere with jubilation. During the trials, a truce between all warring states was

proclaimed and serious consequences were meted out to any state that mistreated or molested a traveller to the games. Only freeborn Greeks were allowed to compete, and these were elected by tribal elimination. The winners of the games were awarded a laurel crown and the honour of having their name linked with the city of their origin. As a result, bribes and other irregularities were practically unknown.

> Only freeborn Greeks were allowed to compete, and these were elected by tribal elimination.

The Games, which were instituted in 582 BCE, took place during the four-year cycle known as the Olympiad, which was one of the ways the Greeks measured time. The Olympic Games were used as a starting point, being year one of the cycle. The Nemean and Isthmian Games were both held (in different months) in year two, followed by the Pythian Games in year three, and then the Nemean and Isthmian Games again in year four. The cycle then repeated itself with the Olympic Games. They were structured this way so that individual athletes could participate in all of the games.

Nothing of importance was ever undertaken in ancient Greece unless the Pythia was first consulted, yet the Delphic priesthood made no attempt to impose Apollo as the supreme god over the Greek populace. They merely indicated that he was a manifestation of beauty, justice and divination. Their chief goal was to teach *Universal Oneness* and to emphasise moral and spiritual discipline, as well as to comfort those who were in need of solace.

The Falling Asleep of Delphi

Descending toward Parnassos from the direction of the Stadium, you can see the wide-open wound that divides the two Phaedriades from top to bottom in Kastalia and, even lower, to the depths of the ravine of Pleistos. One feels the awe of a wounded life that struggles in order to breathe, as long as it still can, in the light and rejoices that it is dawn and the sun is rising. Or, again, as night falls, when the weary cicadas become silent, a whisper can remind one of the stammering voices of the prophetess Cassandra. It may be the only authentic sound that resembles the unknown to us - I mean 'unprocessed' – 'clamour' of the Pythia. (George Seferis).

The Roman Emperor Hadrian restored many sanctuaries in Greece, including that of Delphi, but within two centuries at most, the oracle was silent. With the spread of Christianity, the ancient religion had no place in the new



Saint Ambrose barring Theodosius from Milan Cathedral, by Anthony van Dyck, c. 1620.



View from the town of Delphi, overlooking the towns rooftops.

state. Christian attacks against pagan temples continued, reaching a head when the Emperor Theodosius the Great ordered all pagan temples to be shut. The oracle declared to the emperor in 393 CE:

Tell the king: the fair wrought house has fallen. No shelter has Apollo, nor sacred laurel leaves; The fountains are now silent; the voice is stilled It is finished.

Within two years Theodosius was dead; the sanctuary lost its religious meaning and remained permanently closed. The oracle was abolished and a town was built over the ruins. Only in the late 19th Century did French excavators begin to uncover the site of the temple of Apollo, moving the town to its present location.

These days the hospitable people of modern Delphi take great pride in their town. They maintain a tradition of comfortable, small hotels. The modern town of Delphi has one main street, thick with restaurants and souvenir shops, with the entrance to ancient Delphi reached easily from almost any point in the town centre, at most a five to ten minute walk away.

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Einstein: A Quest for Oneness

by Marc Cornwall

N 16TH APRIL 1955, Albert Einstein, the most controversial and the most beloved of modern scientists in the past century, passed away. His work altered forever the way we view the natural world. Ever since then, historians and scientists have attempted to assess the heritage he left to humanity; and it is enormous. In this article that commemorates the 66th anniversary of the death of Einstein, a little known aspect of this great man's life will be analysed.

For many years, the name Einstein (1879-1955) was synonymous with scientific genius. He loomed over early 20th Century physics as its defining, emblematic figure, having given the world Special Relativity in 1905 and General Relativity in 1915, spending the remaining 40 years of his life searching for what we are still searching for today, a *Unified Theory of Everything*. While he failed in this last grand mission, he left us with two rigorous theories that have yet to be proven wrong. But he also left us with the memory of a man of *humble demeanour*, *profound insight* and *compassion* for all of God's creation.

His face was familiar not only to scientists but also to millions of ordinary people who neither understood nor cared about Relativity. "*Why is it*", he asked a *New York Times* journalist in 1944 "*that no one understands me, but everyone likes me?*" How did the obscure creator of an arcane cosmological theory become so well-known and loved? We remember his unruly shock of hair, gradually softened and bleached by age, overshadowing his features, frozen into an eternal question mark and covering a deep inner sadness. Only in the last photograph, taken a few weeks before his fatal illness, did loving-kindness ease the tenseness of dedication, while his tired eyes twinkled benignly over the rims of his glasses.

A Man and his Mission

His features tell the story of his mission. The questioning look stands for a life devoted to research. The lines of sorrow were etched by the heroic failures to which even this successful pioneer was subject in his scientific and humanitarian efforts; for Einstein was a great man as well as a great scientist, and his work was not limited to scientific treatises. Although he expressed himself in many fields, his endeavours were directed toward a single goal: to bring about unity, simplicity and harmony where others saw only diversity, contradictions and hostility.

In the science of Physics, he unified waves and particles, space and time, matter and energy, and attempted to unify electricity and gravitation. In human affairs he tried to reconcile races and nations, and socialism with freedom of the individual. In philosophy he tried to bridge the gap between science and religion, between determinism, human responsibility and moral law.

Let us first take a look at his scientific work. Doubted in the beginning, it is now part and parcel of every textbook, of every college or university course on fundamental Physics. He first hit world headlines in 1919 when an expedition to investigate a solar eclipse confirmed his *General Theory of Relativity*. He became an overnight media sensation. But 1905 was his *annus mirabilis*, when, during a single miraculous year, he produced not one but three world-changing papers, something only comparable to Sir Isaac Newton during the years 1665-1666. In recognition of this, the international physics community set aside 2005 as the World Year of Physics as a tribute to the century that had passed since the publication of Einstein's *Special Theory of Relativity* and the 50th anniversary since his death.

Einstein's first pioneering venture was a bold interpretation of photoelectric effects. By asserting that light is emitted in the form of bullet-like photons, he paved the way to the unification of waves and particles that was brought about, some fifteen years later, under the name of *Quantum Mechanics*. It is for this photoelectric research that paved the way for the acceptance of the dual nature of light as both particle and wave, that Einstein was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1921. A hundred years later, technologists are still finding new ways of harvesting novel inventions from his theories.

His greatest and most famous creative achievement was of course, the *General Theory of Relativity*. Its impact upon the physical sciences was enormous, in two widely separate fields. In the macroscopic field of astronomy, it corrected imperfections in Newton's laws. Hitherto unexplained changes in the orbit of the planet Mercury were accounted for. The theory also predicted the bending of light rays by the gravity of the Sun and the reddening





In the introductions to his papers on Relativity, Einstein hinted that he was spurred on to his deductions by a belief in the consistency and unity of nature.

of light emitted by very heavy stars; both predictions were soon confirmed. Relativity further asserted that space itself was curved so that the universe, although unbounded, might turn back upon itself and form a vast but finite cell. This view strangely resonates with some of the deepest and most ancient mystical cosmologies.

In the microcosmic field of rapidly whirling atomic particles, Relativity proved that a particle accelerated to high speed becomes heavier than when it is stationary; a fact soon verified by atomic physicists and cyclotron¹ builders. Conversely, by losing mass, a particle sets free large amounts of energy. This last assertion is the principle underlying the nuclear bombs and atomic power plants. But in addition to these material results, Relativity greatly affected the thinking and the philosophy of the 20th Century.

> Relativity greatly affected the thinking and the philosophy of the 20th Century.

Relativity's Axioms

Its first axiom was that space and time do not exist separately, only conjointly as a four-dimensional framework of observation, a framework that changes with the standpoint and motion of the observer. This may seem natural and sensible to Rosicrucians, who for many years have regarded time and space as human created abstractions. However, it aroused a furore with conservative scientists as well as with totalitarian politicians both Nazi and Communist.

Relativity's second axiom was the equivalence of energy and matter. This was accepted with less of a struggle than the first, because its practical proofs and consequences were undeniable. But from a philosophical viewpoint it was equally revolutionary, for solid matter could no longer be regarded as separate and distinct from light, for example, indeed from all other forms of energy too. The entire physical universe therefore had to be viewed as a vast ocean of vibratory energy, once again, in full agreement with age-old Rosicrucian tenets.

In the introductions to his papers on Relativity, Einstein hinted that he was spurred on to his deductions by a belief in the consistency and unity of nature. Underlying the harmony and symmetry of physical laws, Einstein sensed a Cosmic Intelligence, which he contemplated with rapture and awe. His lifelong search for Truth was a kind of mystical worship. It permeated his entire being and became embodied in the questioning look common to all his photographs.

Quanta and Beyond

Despite his great work and renown, his scientific opinions in the second half of his life were out of step with the trend of later physics. At his death, his lifework was unfinished possibly only in his refusal to entirely accept the validity of Quantum Mechanics. Although that refusal seemed stubborn in his day, and is still argued among the greatest thinkers of our generation, there is still no absolute proof that there does not exist a transcendental system of laws and order (deterministic in nature as opposed to stochastic and chaotic) at the base of Quantum Mechanics. Einstein is famously known for his anguished and exasperated words: "God does not play dice with the 'World."

It was, alas, this personal belief, unproven by research and opposed by his scientific peers which set him apart from most other scientists, but may one day prove him to have been greater than them all. As Quantum Mechanics developed further and further and eventually became an easily proven universal law, had he lived longer, his anguish may only have grown stronger. His *General Theory of Relativity* and the *Theory of Quantum Mechanics* are irreconcilable at the level of our human experience, but we know that both theories will one day be superseded by an even greater and more all-encompassing theory, which may surprise us all and lead to the grand unification of these Underlying the harmony and symmetry of physical laws, Einstein sensed a Cosmic Intelligence, which he contemplated with rapture and awe.

two great opposing theories that Einstein sought with such vigour.

Frustration and dilemmas beset not only Einstein's scientific work but also the social, philosophical, educational and political views that he expressed vigorously in many articles and lectures that he gave around the world. Although sensitive and modest, he did not hide in an ivory tower. In later life he involved himself with many social causes, being concerned with people individually and with humanity as a whole. He devoted himself to simplicity, elegance and mathematical beauty, wishing fervently that all of people could enjoy peace, economic security, political and religious freedom, and leisure to pursue the higher things of life such as science, art and philosophy.

In his younger years, he had been shocked by the oppressions, tortures and murders perpetrated by the

He devoted himself to simplicity, elegance and mathematical beauty.

Nazi regime in his native Germany. He had called upon the Western democracies to save humanity from this onslaught of a new Dark Age, by force of arms if necessary. And when the Second World War did break out, Einstein, by now living in the USA and researching at Princeton University in New Jersey, advised President Roosevelt to develop the atom bomb, lest Hitler should possess it first and use it to enslave the world. This led to the start of the famous *Manhattan Project*, the American research programme that produced the first atomic bomb.

The war was hardly over when a new danger threatened from the hostility between the USA and the USSR. However, by this time, Einstein had become convinced that victory by force of arms was futile. He spoke out bravely for reconciliation, for a strengthening of the United Nations and for the unity of all humankind. For these efforts he was honoured in 1948 by the 'One *World*' award which perhaps meant as much to him as the Nobel Prize. He spent his declining years concerned that the fruits of his own scientific research might help to bring untold suffering to the world, perhaps even to wipe out all civilisation. He once commented that although he did not know with which weapons World War III would be fought, World War IV would be fought with sticks and stones!

A third inner conflict that troubled Einstein was the schism between his humane instincts and mystical intuition on the one hand, and his scientific convictions. As a human being he believed in the overwhelming power of love, in moral law and in the progress of humankind. But as a scientist, he believed in strict determinism. But if determinism is a fact, he speculated, if it is true that every particle and every energy-ripple in the universe follows a fixed *'World Line'*, then it matters not whether their course is preordained by a capricious God or by an inflexible physical law. Do people struggle against a life that is already predetermined for them? Would it not be better then for all people to simply submit to the inevitable? What is the use of devoting one's life to the search for scientific truth unless one feels deep down that one's efforts are a service freely chosen, rather than deterministically forced upon one? Perhaps the expression of hopeless bewilderment so evident in many pictures of Einstein is due to this philosophical impasse.

Einstein and Mysticism

To an extent, Rosicrucian philosophy teaches a way out of this dilemma that baffles puritan scientists and believers alike. The particles and waves, for which relativity postulates rigid determinism, constitute only the negative polarity of an all-pervading vibratory energy. Over and above them is the positive domain of the *Life Force*, *Consciousness* and *Will*. This positive domain is neither limited by space-time nor by physical determinism.

Since Consciousness and Life can affect and direct matter (at least in our own bodies), we are entitled to believe in inner freedom despite outward necessity, and to believe in a moral law underlying physical laws. Perhaps the crowning scientific unification, the one that eluded Einstein, will consist of the discovery of the law that governs the interplay between material energy and conscious life force. That truly would be a watershed for humankind!

"Our task must be to widen our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty."



During the last two decades of his life, Einstein embarked on a solitary, unsuccessful quest to find a single unifying theory for modelling the universe. He did not achieve the scientific triumph of gathering all physical laws into one, the so-called *Theory of Everything*. He did not live to see the dawn of an age in which nations could unite in peace and fraternity and did not attain the Peace Profound of reconciling the finite laws of matter with the voice of Infinity within his soul. But, he earned and savoured the mystic joy of leading science and humanity a long way onward toward the goal of Unity. This is the heritage that Albert Einstein left to the world. Let us ever remember and cherish this.

A human being is a part of a whole, called by us 'universe', a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

Footnotes

1. An accelerator that imparts energies of several million electronvolts to rapidly moving particles.

Goethe and his Dramatic Story of Faust

by Gustav Siekmann



Faust and Mephisto by Anton Kaulbach.

OETHE'S enigmatic drama, *Taust*, might be described as a symbolic allegory of humanity's way of evolution from primeval beginnings through all the earthly and unearthly forms of life's experiences, toward Cosmic Unity, the ultimate purpose of Creation. Viewing Goethe's works from the vantage point of a mystic, we find that his presentation of the medieval story of Dr. Faust is similar to the literature of the Quest: humanity's search for a lost treasure which, when found, will endow all people with a sacred power to cope with all adversities and attain the mastery of life. It is a search for guidance along the cosmic path which, as we know, demands the unceasing effort of expanding our consciousness of the world around us in many forms, both tangible and intangible.

The same theme appears in ancient mythologies of Egypt and Greece; for instance, in the legends of Isis and Osiris, Orpheus and Eurydice, and especially in the Eleusinian Mysteries where Demeter, Mother of Earth, is in search of her lost daughter Persephone. In psychology, ideology or matters of the soul, faith, hope and love, we have the Quest of the Holy Grail, and in Rosicrucian tradition the finding of the Lost Word.

Faust, similarly, is an analogy of mankind's search for Universal Harmony, our inherent urge to *"detect the inmost force which binds the world and guides its course."* Through his experiences of life on Earth in its complex totality, Dr. Faust learns to understand the mysteries of nature manifest within his own Self. His story, therefore, is one of sequential initiations from lower to ever-increasing higher levels of consciousness.

Goethe's works are, on the whole, profoundly mystical and worthy of the attention of students of mysticism. For in the present time, when materialism seems to reign supreme, humanity's awareness of the non-material facts of life is also expanding. Within the over-all functions of the cosmic law of cause and effect, this awareness must expand in parallel with materialism, thus maintaining a harmonious balance between the physical and metaphysical structures of the world which is the indispensable and divinely ordained presupposition for Creation's convergence in the direction of a Cosmic Totality.

Expansion of Awareness

This expansion of awareness progresses slowly, and at present only subconsciously, among the masses, but consciously within those who have already found the right and true way. Goethe tells us this at the very beginning of Faust, in the *'Prologue in Heaven'* where the voice of the Lord God appears in conversation with *Mephistopheles*, the Devil's agent, who laments that humanity, the world's *'little god'*, as he calls man, has not evolved since the beginning and is not worthy even of his diabolical attention, being sufficiently involved in his own senseless devices. Though gifted by the Grace of God with a glimmer of heavenly light called Reason, mankind only uses it to be more beastly than the lowest beast.

"But there is Faust, the doctor, my servant" injects the Lord. In this opening scene, through a few words only, exchanged between the Lord and the Devil, Goethe the master of German literature, projects a flash view of humanity's position in the Cosmic. Placed between the two extreme poles, God and Devil, Heaven and Hell, Light and Darkness, positive and negative, and being dual in his own nature, man appears, as it were, suspended like a mass of electrically charged particles in a field of anodic and cathodic attraction. And the view is focused upon one who represents the archetypal qualities of the mystic clearly specified through Mephisto's answer:

Indeed! Faust serves you after strange devices; no earthly drink or meat the fool suffices. His spirit's ferment far aspireth; half conscious only of his craziness, from Heaven he demands the fairest stars and from the earth the highest raptures and the best. And all the Near and Far that he desires fails to subdue the tumult of his breast.

Now the cosmic forces are set into action upon this mystic man. The immutable principle of unidirectional cosmic evolution by which man, through all his earthly ups and downs, inevitably raises his soul personality to everexpanding consciousness, the process of individuation of C.G. Jung's terms, is assured in the Lord's words:

Though still confused his service is to me, I soon will lead him to a clearer morning; sees not the gardener in the budding tree flower and fruit the future years adorning.



Goethe in 1828, by Joseph Karl Stieler.

The Spirit Who Ever Denies

But Mephisto, 'the spirit who ever denies', feels sure *"that there is still a chance to gain him"* and requests the Lord's permission *"gently upon his road to train him."* Granting his permission, the Lord replies:

So long as he on earth shall live, so long I make no prohibition; man's errors urge his striving aspiration. Enough! What thou hast asked is granted; turn off this spirit from its fountainhead; to trap him, let thy snares be planted and he with thee be downward led. Man's active nature all too soon can weaken, unqualified repose he learns to crave. Thus willingly the devil I let tempt him, who works, excites and serves him like a slave; and who then stands ashamed and forced to say: 'A good man, through obscurest aspirations still has an instinct of the One True Way.'

Goethe's works convey every conceivable thought about humanity's being on Earth, the purpose of life, its fundamental laws, and the divine and mundane influences conflicting in the human mind.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was born in 1749 in Frankfurt am Main in Germany, at that time an Imperial City directly subordinate to the Holy Roman Emperor and not to a regional ruler or a local nobleman. He combined within himself the stern realism of his father Johann Kaspar, a lawyer and City Counsellor, with the sense for harmony and beauty of his lively and imaginative young mother Elisabeth.

Both parents had been highly educated but were of totally opposite natures. The distance between his father's intellectual and his mother's intuitive qualities was the cause of much inner emotional distress in young Goethe, which bothered him far into mature age and was the cause of severe illness in his younger years.

Storm and Stress

The literary climate in which young Goethe grew up has been described as one of *"Sturm und Drang"* (*storm and stress*), an expression of the emotional gap between factual knowledge and intuitive feeling among intellectuals of the time, who were torn between the old dogmatic teachings of the church and new knowledge which came in the wake of the Renaissance and of Martin Luther's Reformation.

This contrasting duality is presented in the character of Goethe's Dr. Faust with whom he identifies much of himself: *"Two souls, alas, reside"*

within my breast, and each withdraws from and repels the other." To some extent this conflict in Goethe's nature was reconciled by the influence of his maternal grandfather, also a lawyer and distinguished magistrate, who possessed the gift of second sight.

To young Goethe's delight, his grandfather's library contained books of travels, discoveries and natural phenomena. Through these books and the experience of his

grandfather's psychic gift, Goethe came early into contact with the occult or hidden mysteries of life and with all the immaterial qualities in which the mystic sees the true value of being. He had been described as the last man on Earth who comprised within himself the total knowledge, physical and metaphysical, that was available to mankind of the 18th Century. No human being after Goethe could or can possibly hope to be endowed with that title, because the factual knowledge available to us has since multiplied beyond human comprehension.

The Search for Unity

Goethe knew all that was worth knowing in his time; moreover, he made every effort to convey his knowledge as a whole to his contemporaries and to posterity. To become whole, "ganz werden", was the basic purpose of his life, to find the unity of being out of the triplicity in himself; an emotional triplicity in which he saw the basic cause of all human troubles. And the search for this unity is the theme of Goethe's mystical drama *Faust*. Ever since publication of the work as a whole, scholars of literature have tried to define this unity.

To present his views of humanity's evolution or of the sequential stages of initiation which lead along the way to Cosmic Unity, Goethe needed a background story and a villain. He found them in the medieval legend of the historical Dr. Johannes Faust, as related to us by Philipp Melanchthon, the reformer and friend of Dr. Martin Luther. Melanchthon had personally known the real Faust and depicts him as a most sinister character, a charlatan who had acquired the knowledge of some strange tricks by which he would impress the public and who made a business out of it. And the public of his time saw in him a man who was in contact with the devil. Legend soon

took over and proliferated into numerous versions.

In these legends, Faust is inevitably doomed to perdition, having signed his soul to the devil in payment for Satan's services. Goethe has used this story as a demonstration of our earthly desires and struggles, the joys and the inevitable trials of our mundane existence. But, as a mystic, he could not be content with the idea of final perdition. He had to convey the message of

salvation, the message that our unceasing efforts against all adversities, urged on by faith and hope and the light of expanding consciousness, will lead us up and on, through love to everlasting life.

Goethe needed all of 60 years to complete the two parts of his drama *Faust*. It is called *A Tragedy*, of which Part I was first performed in 1808. It was at once a great success, although it is a sad story of human misery caused by our own evil inclinations. If viewed from a mundane point of view, the first part on its own could leave the reader or spectator in a state of hopeless frustration,

Goethe's works convey every conceivable thought about humanity's being on Earth, the purpose of life, its fundamental laws, and the divine and mundane influences conflicting in the human mind.

for it is a diabolical mixture of sensations, emotions, temptations and inspirations; and yet it has a symbolic structure balancing wisdom against stupidity, sanctity against magic, knowledge against ignorance, love against hate. All this occurs on terrestrial and sub-terrestrial levels, that is, in the world and underworld.

But from the *Prologue in Heaven* we have been made aware, right at the beginning, that Part I is merely the introduction to a greater whole, and that a second part was to follow. This second part was Goethe's life-aim, which he reached 26 years after the publication of Part I, in 1831, only a few months before his own Great Initiation.

We are all somewhat like Goethe's Dr. Faust; we are only too aware of our ignorance and failings, and the more we work and study, the greater becomes this awareness.

Futility of Knowledge

Following the *Prologue in Heaven*, we find Faust in his medieval study, appropriately decorated with signs of astrology, alchemy and magic. In his famous first monologue he meditates upon the futility of all his learning: Having studied philosophy, jurisprudence, medicine, and, alas, even theology, he feels just like a fool, no wiser now than he was before; and he laments, *"I see that nothing can be known; that knowledge cuts me to the bone."* In his initial monologue, Faust is not only dissatisfied with the results of his scholarly learning but also reflects his passionate longing for direct and intimate communion with nature and for an understanding of nature's strange phenomena in which his contemporaries saw manifestations of frightening supernatural powers.

Faust, not afraid of hell or devil, but disillusioned by his recognition that mundane knowledge alone brings no joy or satisfaction, now takes to magic sources of learning. He opens *"this one book of mystery 'from Nostradamus' very hands' to guide him through spiritual lands"* and soon he is enraptured by the *Sign of the Macrocosm: "Was it a god, who traced this sign, with impulse mystic and divine? In these pure features I behold (reative Nature to my soul unfold."*

Cosmic Totality

Thus we are drawn to visualise a symbol of cosmic origin designed to create in us a view of the Cosmic Totality, a guiding plan for our own spiritual evolvement. This view of a symbolic map of Creation as a whole will help us find our position within it, to take our bearing on the Way, and to recognise our own Self as a part of the Whole.

We are all somewhat like Goethe's Dr. Faust; we are only too aware of our ignorance and failings, and the more we work and study, the greater becomes this awareness. As students of mystical teachings, we know very well that work and study will lead to nothing, unless we also spend time in meditation and experience its results. And here a symbolic image of Cosmic Totality can help to put us into a harmonious state of mind, capable of creative thought.

Part I ends tragically, leaving Faust heavily loaded with karmic debts. The unloading of these debts is the allegorical theme of Part II. Analogous to the theme of the Quest, Faust, still served and guided by Mephisto, is now in search of his soul, his true personality, which is so deeply hidden beneath the memories of his misdeeds and so difficult to reach while Mephisto dominates his emotions. Now we find a different Dr. Faust. No longer is he just the scholar in search of deeper knowledge of nature's mysteries; he



no longer craves just for *"the detection of the inmost force which binds the world and guides it in its course*", as he had expressed it in his initial monologue. This is far behind him. Now he has become a man of the world in the widest sense.

Faust appears a changed man who has conquered the exuberance of his "storm and stress" period. The inexhaustible cosmic forces, manifest through sun and Earth, awaken his own innermost strength and urge him toward a creative activity that needs none of Mephisto's magic. Now he consciously makes deliberate and rational use of Mephisto's resources. In his untiring striving toward perfection he develops an ever-increasing resistance to diabolical temptations; but he still allows Mephisto to lead him through the world, in space and time.

We find him at the Emperor's Court amongst the highest nobility; disgusted with these selfish, narrowminded, and all but noble people, he longs for contact with that truly pure and beautiful part of humanity that once before had been alive on Earth, the wonderful culture of ancient Greece.

Chymical Wedding

Goethe allows his Faust to experience that culture in those scenes where Mephisto's magic materialised Helen of Troy, the classical prototype of feminine beauty and human dignity. Through Faust's passionate love for Helen and their symbolic union, Goethe presents to us the mystical meaning of the Chymical Wedding, the alchemical concept of the "Mysterium Conjunctions" to which Jung has often referred, symbolising the reconciliation of opposites and harmonisation of disunities in the soul. The result of this union of Faust and Helen is Euphorion, their winged son. He represents the genius of poetry in its perfection, romantic passion, enthusiasm for worthy activities and classical beauty, and humanity's sacred right of freedom.

In Euphorion we see the desirable qualities humanity can attain when intellect, knowledge and wisdom are united with a sense for beauty and dignity to a harmonious whole of the highest aesthetic and ethical values.

In another scene we meet *Homunculus*, an artificial human replica made in a laboratory once belonging to Faust. Homunculus personifies our inherent striving for physical perfection, mundane knowledge and the sensual part of human life. Totally lacking a soul of his own, Homunculus represents Faust's subconscious mind expressing his unconscious longing for the highest ideals of beauty in poetry, art, science and the splendours of nature.

In these scenes we see Faust steadily growing up



Mephistopheles Over Wittenberg by Eugène Delacroix.

and away from Mephisto's suggestive attempts; we see how these experiences mature his urge for active contribution to humanity's wealth and happiness. Having found harmony within himself, he now strives to bring himself into the service of a great idea. He still needs Mephisto's assistance to acquire a vast area of wasteland, but through the energy within himself he now tries to really deserve and own what he has acquired: "What from your father's heritage is lent, earn it anew, to really possess it!"

Now Faust has grown to emulate this maxim. Under his guidance a great project is on its way; his wasteland will become a fertile district populated with happy people. Not affected by want and need, and no longer even by guilt, Faust's only concern now is care. Blinded at the end of his life, care alone remains with him, care for the welfare of other people.

And so, Faust's earthly life comes to an end. Mephisto still hopes to catch Faust's soul, but through his own spiritual evolvement, Faust has created the condition that the Lord predicted in the *Prologue in Heaven*: "A good man, through obscurest aspirations, still has instinct of the One True Way." Through his own efforts, Faust's deeper self has at last understood that the power of divine love is stronger than mundane attractions, and from then on, love is the only power worth seeking.



The Four Wives

HE EMIR of Baghdad, Nusrayn Al-Haqq heard of the arrival in his city of a man reputed to be the wisest of all. His interest was piqued particularly by this lowly peasant's claim that he had travelled for years and thousands of miles, enduring great danger and hardships through floods, droughts, icy winters and parched deserts with the sole purpose of reaching this palace, reputed to be the most lavish ever built, presuming he would be permitted to address the Emir, the most powerful man in all the world.

Being impulsive and brutal in the treatment of his subjects, he ordered the man be brought into his presence at once to prove his wisdom against that of his own conceited though eloquent advisers. The man was found by the palace guards in the poorest part of the city, put in chains and roughly dragged through the streets before being thrown before the Emir who haughtily said: My people claim you are the wisest of all, wiser even than these, the esteemed advisers of the greatest Emir of all. They have spent their lives in the acquisition of knowledge and you would claim to be wiser than them? Prove your wisdom to me and my counsellors or you will experience a death such as no man has ever endured.

Far from being afraid, the peasant, dressed in a torn and dirty robe boldly rose to his feet to the astonishment of everyone in the room, for it was palace protocol that everyone spoken to by the Emir should remain prostrate until ordered to rise. The guards raced towards him to force him down. but the Emir, flushed red in the face with rage, waved them away and icily spat: *"Speak peasant, for these may be the last words you utter in earthly life."* Undeterred, the peasant remained standing, cleared his throat and slowly looked around at everyone in the manner of a man of power who knew men's hearts and could grant their fondest wishes. Then he fixed his eyes upon the Emir and began.

Once upon a time my Lord, there was an Emir who lived in a country of many merchants and great riches. It was said that he was the wealthiest Emir who had ever lived and the opulence and beauty that surrounded him in his palace were a sight that rulers from far and wide coveted to see. He was content and happy with life and had four wives, betrothed to him all in strict accordance with the law. But his promise of treating them all equally and with the same care and attention that their dowries had bought, was not honoured.

The Emir loved his fourth wife Balqis by far the most and adorned her with the finest robes and jewellery. He treated her to the finest of delicacies, gave her whatever she desired and ordered his slaves to cater to her every wish and fancy. For Balqis was a delight to speak with, and was full of wit and humour to lighten the burden of ruling this mighty kingdom.

The Emir loved his third wife almost as much as his fourth and showed her off regularly to envious visitors from neighbouring kingdoms. Her name was Jamilah for she was the most beautiful of all women in the world. Her form, her grace, her laughter, her gentle caresses, were more than any man could hope for. However, the Emir feared that one day lovely Jamilah would leave him for another man; for many men of wealth and power desired her and he had heard it said that a great bounty had been placed on her capture by a great rival of his in a far off land.

The Emir was also fond of his second wife, for she was his most intimate confidante and was always kind, considerate and patient with him. Her name was Huda, and whenever he faced a dilemma he would confide in her and she would assist him to come to wise decisions. For Huda was astute in matters of wealth and was the main reason that the Emir could pay for the loyalty of the provincial chiefs of his kingdom.

The Emir's first wife Khalida however, was the most loyal of them all. Although she had made



great contributions in maintaining his health, wealth and kingdom, she did not have the wit and humour of the fourth wife, Balqis. Nor did she have the ravishing beauty and sensuality of Jamilah, the third wife. And nor did she have the financial acumen and astuteness of Huda, the second wife. The Emir did not love Khalida, indeed he hardly noticed her constant presence at his feet, despite knowing her valuable contribution to his success. Yet, despite this, she loved him deeply and served him loyally day and night. But for all her loyalty, she was treated no better than a slave, and was even derided openly by the Emir's esteemed advisers.

There was complete silence in the hall, broken not even by the usual heavy wheeze of the Emir's laboured breathing, caused by years of overindulgence. The peasant looked around at everyone with a sharp and penetrating gaze and finally rested his eyes on the Emir before him who stared back with bemused annoyance.

One day, my Lord, by the will of Allah the Almighty, the Emir fell gravely ill, and knowing that his time was short and that he soon would lose the luxury and delight of his opulent life, he said to himself: "I have four wives and a life of delight even the blessed of eternity would envy. Yet when I die, I shall be alone. I have but a few hours left in this world, so I will speak to Balqis, my beloved fourth wife, for surely she wishes to join me in eternity." Summoning his fourth wife he said to her: "Balqis, my beloved, I have loved you more than any woman, endowed you with the finest clothing and showered great care over you. Now that I am dying, will you follow me and keep me company?" "No my lord!" she replied. "You are old and must go alone, for I am yet young and love life more than I have ever loved you and will marry

your Vizier Abdul when you die." And knowing that the Emir was too shocked and weakened to even reply, she turned and walked away without another word. Her answer cut like a sharp knife right through his heart and he was overcome with grief, for this was the wife he had cared for with all his heart and material possessions, and she was not even prepared to accompany him beyond the grave!

But lovely Jamilah, his third wife, would surely follow him and grace him with her beauty in the hereafter. So the sad Emir summonsed Jamilah, his third wife and said to her: "Jamilah, my beloved, I have loved you all my life and honoured and adorned your beauty, making you the most desired woman in all the world. Now that I am dying, will you follow me and keep me company?" "No my lord!" she replied. "Life is too good! When you die, I will marry your lifelong enemy Emir Hussein, for he has offered me protection against poverty and a life as luxurious as you have led." As she turned and left, his heart sank into the depths of despair, and the chill of death touched his shoulder, for patience, as my Lord knows, is not a virtue of Death.

In desperation now, the Emir summonsed Huda, his second wife and said: "My beloved Huda, I have always turned to you for help and you have always been there to advise me rightly. When I die, will you follow me and keep me company?" "No my lord, I cannot" she replied. "I will help you to your grave, but no more than that", she said and walked away. Her answer came like a bolt of lightning, and he was devastated, for now, he thought, he was completely alone, without a friend to turn to, and without a companion to accompany him with Death who was by now right by his side.

Then a voice called out: "My Lord..., I will leave with you and follow you wherever you go." The King looked down, and there was Khalida, his first wife anointing his feet with oil. She was thin and bedraggled from malnutrition and neglect and stooped over from permanently bowing down to his every whim and fancy. Greatly grieved, the Emir said: "Dear Khalida, my beloved first wife, how I wish I had taken better care of you when I had the chance, for you are indeed the only one of my four wives who really loved me. How I wish I had known this before this fateful hour." The room was in stunned silence as the peasant added:

Indeed, my Lord, he should have known this, as indeed we should all!

And gazing around the hall as one who knows the deepest mysteries of all hearts, the peasant continued boldly to address the crowd:

In truth, oh followers of the path of comfort, we all have four wives in our lives: Our fourth wife is our body. No matter how much time and effort we lavish in making it look its best, it will leave us when we die. Our third wife is our possessions, status and wealth. When we die, they go to others who profit from our labours, and care not who we were, and may even have been our mortal enemies in life.

Looking back at the Emir he continued...

Our second wife, oh great defender of the faith, is our family and friends. No matter how much they have been there for us in life, the furthest they can come is to our grave-side. But our first wife...

he paused and looked around penetratingly and every person in the room...,

...is our soul. Often neglected in the pursuit of wealth, power and the pleasures of this world, the soul is the only thing that will follow us wherever we go, the only true companion we will ever have. Therefore, cultivate, strengthen and cherish your soul now, for it is the only part of you that will be with you always, indeed for all eternity.

No one stirred or looked up as the peasant bowed and waited for the Emir's response. But the great Emir of Baghdad remained silent, staring sorrowfully at the ground. A great gloom had descended upon him and he sat on his throne thinking of what the peasant had said for two full days before returning to his old ways. But there were others among his guests who were deeply touched by the words of this wise peasant and went away changed forever, with sorrow and contrition for their own disregard for their souls.

No one knows what happened to this peasant of wise words, for in the silence that followed his concluding words, no one, not even the Emir's guards and esteemed wise men, noticed as the teacher of hearts, the legendary *Mustafa the Wise of (ordoba* slipped silently through a doorway never again to be seen.



by Paul Goodall

F THE many elements that have been used to make up alchemical figures throughout the centuries, one of the most universal is that of the serpent or snake. This archetypal symbol is readily seen today in the composite glyph that is mundanely used to represent the medical profession; the caduceus of Hermes. Here is displayed the harmonious union (or resolution) of the dual polarities, male and female, represented by the intertwined snakes aligned to the winged staff of Mercury. Although there are many aspects concerning serpent symbolism and forms throughout esoteric literature and thought, this article is about one expression of the use of the snake, namely its employment in the symbol commonly known as the *Ouroborus*. This is depicted as a serpent (or often a winged dragon) doubling back on itself and grasping or biting its own tail to form a circle. The word in Greek means "tail-biter."

Origins

Evidence of the existence of this emblem goes back to antiquity indicating that it featured in many ancient cultures with Egypt (Fig. 1 overleaf) appearing to have the earliest record of it around 1600 BCE.¹ Nicolas Flamel (1330-1417) wrote of it in his *Exposition*:

These are the serpents and Dragons which the ancient Aegyptians have painted in a Circle, the head biting the tayle, to signify that they proceeded from one and the same things, and that it alone was sufficient, and that in the turning and circulation thereof, it made itselfe perfect.² From there it cropped up in Phoenicia before moving to the Greek sphere. One example also comes from the *Zhou* (formally Chou) dynasty of China around 1200 BCE where it is seen engraved on a bronze receptacle (Fig. 2).³ The later Hellenistic culture of the Greeks at Alexandria, perhaps plagiarising the Egyptian template, provided the form that is most common in medieval and early modern European alchemical manuscripts and documents (Fig. 3). An extract from the Alexandrian poet and writer Claudian (c.390 CE) highlights this:

Far off, unknown, beyond the range of thought, scarce reached by gods, the years' rough haggard mother, stands a primeval cave in whose vast breast, is time's cradle and womb. A serpent encloses the cave, consuming all things with slow power, and green scales always glinting. Its mouth devours the back-bent tail, as with mute motion it traces the beginning.⁴

It is also found in Norse culture where it is named *formungandr* from the myth of Yggdrasil and in that of India (Hindu) where the dragon circles the tortoise which supports the four elephants that carry the world.

Symbolism

So, the Ouroborus has been universally used throughout the ages, not just in the spiritual alchemical sense but also as a representative philosophical symbol with powerful metaphysical connotations. It is indeed, in modern terms, an archetypal and definitive figure typifying the eternal life cycle and for Rosicrucians, the cyclical evolution of the soul personality (renewal).

Primarily then, the idea of time is reflected in its form, though coupled with the added attribute of eternity. In the Gnostic example from *The Chrysopoeia* of *Kleopatra* (2^{nd} Century CE) during the Alexandrian period (Fig. 4), this is qualified by the placing of the Greek phrase "*en to pan*" (one is all) within the figure, allowing a metaphysical representation of the whole of creation. This is further enhanced by the addition of painting one half black and the other white, denoting the universal opposites, active and passive, in a resolved state, thus forming an androgynous whole. Furthermore, the distillation process in physical alchemy and the transformative process in its spiritual aspect are singularly conveyed by the circular nature of this symbol.

With its fundamental representation of the concept of time, we find other symbols closely related to it. One example is that of the zodiacal wheel with its twelve segments arranged around the circumference. The Greek derivation of its name is telling: *zoe* means *life* and *diakos* means *wheel*. Another is that of the personified Saturn who commonly represents time and who is also said to have devoured his own children.

In conclusion, it might be added that this symbol, so wonderfully constructed in the human imagination and so able to perform its task, cannot be surpassed since it is ultimately a product of the universal consciousness of which we are all a part.

Footnotes

- 1. References to this dating abound across the internet but with no accompanying evidence to validate it. It is included to give the reader an approximate idea of how far back secondary sources claim it to be.
- From Flamel's Exposition of the Hieroglyphical Figures His Secret Booke of the Blessed Stone called the Philosopher's. London, 1624 quoted in Lyndy Abraham's A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery, 2003, p.207.
- 3. http://www.spirasolaris.ca/sbb4f.html
- 4. From the second book of Claudian's poem On the Consulship of Stilicho quoted in Jack Lindsay's The Origins of Alchemy in Graeco-Roman Egypt, 1970, p.268.



Figure 1: Example from Egypt around the 26th dynasty.



Figure 2: The symbol appearing on a Chinese bronze receptacle.



Figure 3: From George Wither's A Collection of Emblems, Ancient and Modern, 1635.



Figure 4: The Gnostic form from The Chrysopoeia of Kleopatra 2nd Century CE.
age: Wikipedia / Djehouty

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Images clockwise from top left:

- First known representation of the ouroboros on one of the shrines enclosing the sarcophagus of Tutankhamun.
- 2. An ouroboros in an 1478 drawing in an alchemical tract.
- 3. Engraving of an wyvern-type ouroboros by Lucas Jennis, in the 1625 alchemical tract De Lapide Philosophico. The figure serves as a symbol for mercury.
- 4. (Section) Kings of the East, West, South, North. Cyprianus, 18th C.
- 5. Depiction of the Ouroboros found in Aurora consurgens.



Pyramids of the Sun and Moon on the Avenue of the Dead, Teotihuacan ancient historic cultural city, Mexico.

An Otomí Experience

NOTHER beautiful, sunny day dawned over Mexico City as I waited in the foyer of my hotel for my tour guide Daniel to arrive. Driving northwest out of the city sprawl past *Nauhcalpan*, we reached pine-clad mountains with miles of stunning scenery. At our meeting point, we noticed a red car parked a bit further down the road; someone got out and Daniel confirmed that it was Crisófero, our guide who would be with us throughout what he referred to as a *Temascal ceremony*.

All was ready, he assured me, and preparations had been made for me for the past 24 hours. This was what I had hoped to witness and, if possible, participate in, but there had been no certainty when I left Mexico City that morning that anything special had been prepared. We followed Crisófero's car to the *Finca La Venturosa*, a ceremonial complex built on to a hillside with luxurious modern chalets for guests to overnight in, a restaurant and two round *Temazcals* or native sweat baths, a smaller one and a larger one that would take up to 30 people.

Crisófero led us into the restaurant, spread out a large photograph of the nearby Otomí Cultural Centre and started telling me about the various parts of that complex and the symbolism attached to each part. The Otomí people, whose language is strikingly different to the language of their successors, Náhuatl, spoken by the Aztecs, had lived in their land for over a thousand years before the Náhuatl-speaking tribes started arriving from the north and started settling in the Otomí region. The Otomí are an ancient people of Mexico, possibly direct descendants of the last remaining original large-scale tribes to have settled the central plateau of Mexico in postglacial times. Their presence long preceded the Aztecs and covered a wide area north and west of Mexico City on the Altiplano or Mexican Plateau.

Mesoamerican symbolism in general has a deep and ancient history and Otomí symbolism is no exception. I mentioned to my two guides that I could see clear parallels between some Rosicrucian symbolism and the symbolism of ancient Mesoamerica that I was now learning about. Although ancient Mesoamerica (Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras) had hosted a wide variety of tribes, each with their own language, there was nevertheless a remarkable uniformity in cultural ideas among all tribes. One could even call it a cultural *oikumene* (Greek for the *'civilised or inhabited world'*) as it covered such a wide area.

Our philosophical discussion at an end, Crisófero got up, and in a quiet, solemn voice asked me and my guide from Mexico City to follow him to a special place to which he had seldom taken anyone, and only then if he believed they would appreciate and respect what he was about to show us. We followed close behind him, a long walk, ever upwards, on and on though the fresh pine-scented forest, sinking into, and tramping over beds of soft pine needles everywhere. The wonderful aroma of the pine-trees was strangely life-giving, for the walk up the long, steep hill would normally have left me panting within minutes, but I felt no tiredness at all, just an expectation of being able to see something very special.

Arriving at a clearing, Crisófero pointed out the Otomí Cultural Centre far off in the distance in a neighbouring valley. I was astounded at how quickly we had ascended. We continued, now through waist-high grass, towards a rock in the distance. It turned out to be three large rocks, one on top of the other two. Crisófero stopped and explained that this trio of rocks had been



Map of Mexico showing approximate regions where the Otomi language is spoken.

sacred to the Otomí and that only certain people had been allowed to approach it.

Sacred Rock

The three of us clambered up on to the rock and sat down. Crisófero gave an explanation about something I had wondered about. There are many archaeological sites in Mexico, and we know that the Otomí lived in part of the ancient city of Teotihuácan (200 BCE - 750 CE) as well as other ancient sites. But unlike other cultures, we have never found any of their important temples. Crisófero said that the Otomí temples, like other Mesoamerican temples, were not like European churches but were represented by mountains where only the wisest and most qualified were allowed to ascend; a far cry from the much later stories of wild sacrificial rites that have come down to us.

To protect their heritage, the Otomí decided to hide their most sacred places from all who might despoil them...

I remembered the time I climbed to the top of a Mayan pyramid on a previous visit, which had only recently been cleared of vegetation. There was a peaceful ambience there as I took the opportunity to meditate. Sometimes, we need to look beyond the veil and see the real meaning behind these sacred buildings. Crisófero related a story about a council of Otomí wise men that took place. They were aware that the Aztecs were in the ascendant and would soon conquer them and incorporate them into their empire, but also that in later times another group of people would conquer them in turn. To protect their heritage, the Otomí decided to hide their most sacred places from all who might despoil them, and this they carried out.

Crisófero said that this particular rock had been used in antiquity as a place of worship and for attunement with the *Great Spirit*, something that in modern Western lexicons is today called '*God*.' There was something particularly special about this place, its massive silent presence, and a feeling of holiness and the whispering echoes of thousands of pilgrims having come with troubles but leaving with deep serenity of spirit. Crisófero asked us to remove our shoes and socks and place the bare soles of our feet on the rock. We all did and Daniel said how surprised he was to feel something entering the soles of



Statue of Huehueteotl.

his feet similar to the feeling he had got when I had done a brief Rosicrucian healing on him the previous day. He needn't have said anything, for I had felt from the start the same healing power he spoke of, entering through my soles.

On that rock we sat in

a triangle facing each other and discussed ancient Mesoamerican religious beliefs for nearly an hour. Crisófero explained that at Teotihuácan, what we now call the Pyramids of the Sun and Moon were not actually dedicated to those deities. They were names given to them later by the Aztecs who had inherited the sites of worship with little knowledge of their original meaning; for they had arrived in the area some 500 years after the much smaller places of worship had been abandoned for reasons unknown to this day.

According to Crisófero, what we now call the Pyramid of the Sun, which everyone can climb to the top of, was actually dedicated to the gods we now call Tlaloc and Huehueteotl. Tlaloc represents the masculine waters, the rain that falls from the heavens and fertilises the earth. Huehueteotl probably came with the survivors of the city of Cuicuilco which was overrun by lava when the Xitle volcano erupted in 245-315 CE, although some have suggested that it took place in the 1st Century BCE. Huehueteotl, means Ancient Energy, the suggestion being that *Teotl* was not God in the European sense, but rather an energy or force in much the same way as the ancient Egyptians regarded their Neteru. From its origins, Huehueteotl appears to have been associated with volcanoes and was for a long time regarded as the giver and taker of life. He was always portrayed as a seated old man with a flattened volcano on his back.

The Pyramid of the Moon, was said to have been dedicated to the goddess later known as *(halchiuhtlicue (fade Skirt)* who was the goddess of feminine waters..., lakes, pools, rivers and springs that came out of the earth. Her temple-pyramid mirrored the mountain behind it. At the foot of the Pyramid of the Moon and in front of it were 13 temples ranged around three sides of the plaza with the ruins of an enigmatic building called the Quincunx in the centre. That building drew my attention and I wondered about its function as it was so unusual.

It was fascinating to get this insight into the real



The Pyramid of the Moon is believed to have been dedicated to the goddess later known as Chalchiuhtlicue (Jade Skirt) who was the goddess of feminine waters. Her temple-pyramid mirrored the mountain behind it.



Vintage engraving of a Mexican temazcal.

Modern, though fully traditional native-American sweat lodge.

meaning of Mesoamerican religion, over which a European veneer was placed as they were incapable of comprehending the inner meanings. Before we left the rock, Crisófero told us to hit it. To our surprise it sounded hollow, not at all like a solid object. We then walked back through the tall grass and down the hill over the mat of springy pine needles until we arrived back at the Restaurant.

The Temascal Experience

It was time for the Temascal ceremony. The three of us made our way across the grass from the restaurant to the fire pit. Daniel and I changed into swimming kit and sandals in the larger of the two *'kivas'* for want of a better word. Now, for those who may not know, a Kiva in the American southwest was/is a room used by the Pueblo Native Americans for rites and meetings and used for spiritual ceremonies. They were usually underground but here these two Temascals were above ground.

The three of us gathered in a small open space near the Temascal and the fire pit, where Crisófero had laid out some objects on the ground, including an incense burner. It occurred to me that standing there we formed a triangle within this 'Pronaos' which really functioned as the portal to the temple or Temascal, if you like, and which in turn also formed a triangle with the Temascal and the firepit. During the outer ceremony, we raised our arms to each of the four directions and to the sky above and the earth below. Crisófero came to each of us in turn and censed us with the copal incense and then led us into the Temascal.

The Temascal is circular with a small entrance doorway. As we bent down to enter, I saw a pit in the centre, with a water basin next to it, in which were floating sweet-smelling herbs. A shaft of light shone through a hole in the roof and illuminated the pit. For a moment I thought about the rays of the Aten coming down from above, as in paintings from the time of Akhenaten. On the inside there was a cold, stone bench all around the wall. Again, we automatically split into a triangular formation as we sat in the room. Suddenly, the smoke-hole above us was closed, the only light now coming in through the doorway.

The two helpers outside started to bring in hot stones from the firepit where they had been heating up for some 24 hours. They were dark volcanic basalt from one of the many volcanoes in that part of Mexico. The stones were placed in the central pit, one by one until I counted 13. The number is significant in Pre-Columbian Mexico, for it relates to a 13-day period, called a Trecena, which was marked out in one of their two calendars. The 260-day Mesoamerican calendar, the *tonalpohualli*, was divided into 20 such Trecenas.

The doorway was then blocked up almost completely except for a sliver of light coming through the bottom of the door. We sat in complete darkness until our eyes became accustomed to a faint light around the stones in the firepit. Crisófero then proceeded to pour water over the stones and steam billowed up. What surprised me was that I did not feel the steam face on, but it seemed to go up to the ceiling and then down the walls so that my back was the first to feel it, followed soon afterwards by the rest of my body.



Over the course of the next two and a half hours,

Pictogram of an Aztec temazcal in the Codex Magliabechiano.

the doors were opened another two times and more hot rocks were added to the pile in the central pit. More water ensured that the whole steam experience continued. Sometimes we just sat there in silence with our thoughts; at other times, Crisófero would sing Mesoamerican songs or recite poetry. I asked him why he was singing in Náhuatl, which I have a small knowledge of, rather than his native Otomí. He replied that Náhuatl was more poetic, lyrical and amenable to song and chanting than Otomí and that was why he used it.

Although I have always found Náhuatl to be a beautiful language, it was not as important as the entirety of the whole experience that left such a deep connection in me with an ancient spiritual consciousness. It did not surprise me at all that the ceremony left such deep spiritual feelings in me, for no matter where one travels through history, one is sure to find at least some parts of the world where the search for a deeper spiritual awareness has a song, a chant, a ceremony or perhaps merely some beautifully spoken words which open the gates of our awareness to the sacredness of a long-lost place and time.

During my long periods of silent reflection, I



The original page 13 of the Codex Borbonicus, showing the 13th trecena of the Aztec sacred calendar. This trecena was under the auspices of the goddess Tlazolteotl, who is shown on the upper left wearing a flayed skin, giving birth to Cinteotl. The 13 day-signs of this trecena, starting with 1-Earthquake, 2-Flint/Knife, 3-Rain, etc., are shown on the bottom row and the column along the right side.

"...the entirety of the whole experience that left such a deep connection in me with an ancient spiritual consciousness..."

marvelled as I started seeing yellow stars over one part of the chamber which seemed to flash on and offlike fireflies. At another point, I saw about half the chamber filled with a violet light, which reassured me that all was well. After the third period was over, the doorway was unsealed and we emerged into the intensely bright sunlight again, collected our clothes and headed for a much-welcome shower in a nearby shower block. I can imagine that the ancient celebrants would have immersed themselves in a nearby river or lake, but the cold shower did just as well.

Reflection

When I had time to myself and was able to reflect on my whole experience, I found I was beginning to understand the mysticism that permeated the lives of the people of Mexico long, long before the entrada of the Conquistadores and the near destruction of the entire Mesoamerican civilisation and their ways of seeking and finding spiritual solace. In many cases their ancient intimate connection with the natural world around them was for centuries after covered by a layer of superimposed Christian ideas; but their connection to the universe that their ancestors had known intimately, was never completely severed..., even to the present day.

This daytrip, where I had no idea what was to come, made a deep and lasting impression on me. The opportunity to visit a secret sacred site followed by a ritual cleansing allowed me to take part in a spiritual journey which was followed by so many generations before me. It gave me an insight into a world that most people thought was lost, but, as we all know, nothing is ever truly lost, and we are still able to connect with it through out studies and meditations. It reminded me once again that no matter where we may be in this world, we are all connected. All in all, one of the most truly wonderful experiences of my life.

A Scent of Heaven

by Siobhan Russell

WAS walking along the 30-foot-wide causeway in the ancient Mayan city of Tikal in present-day Guatemala, when my guide called me over to the foot of a magnificent Ceiba tree which stretched high into the sky. At the foot were what looked like red berries about the size of red currants, the guide took a couple into his hand and let me smell them: a lovely, sweet scent which he told me was *Pom* to the Maya and *(opal* to the Aztecs.

We know that incense has been used since the most ancient times and we can only speculate how this came about. Was it when early humans were burning wood for their campfires and noticed that some woods or bushes had a more soothing, peace-producing, enchanting smell than all others? In fact could it be that such moments take us back to the very origins of modern humans 80 or more thousand years ago when our ancient ancestors pondered about and sought the abode of their deceased ancestors, a spirit world of knowledge of future events, and powers beyond human abilities?

The sense of smell must have been for our most ancient ancestors a far more dominant and sophisticated sense than it is for us today. Being able to smell where the next meal was, no doubt helped them to survive a lot easier than we would today if left alone in the bush. And being able to smell the presence of dangerous predators upwind, would also have been a decided advantage for survival with its constant imperative to get out of harm's way as quickly and quietly as possible. So, almost certainly, smell was for our early ancestors the most important of all five senses, as indeed it is for most mammals today.

Fast Forward

Fast forwarding tens of thousands of years to eras where



Ceiba tree

various forms of spiritual consciousness started to emerge, whether prehistoric ancestor worship rites or a developing sense of an immanent pantheistic spiritual presence pervading all things..., various definite religious beliefs began to evolve over the millennia, almost all of which we have no knowledge of today. Humanlike qualities were attributed to the gods, and the gods were the ones to love, fear and respect in equal measure because of their power to both help and hinder humans.

Whatever substances humans found gratifying, such as the pungent, mouth-watering smell of a roasting

Special foods, herbs, tree barks and plants with agreeable scents were offered to the gods in solemn rites.

sacrifice on an outdoor altar, or aromatic, pleasantsmelling incense, it was assumed that the gods would find such things as gratifying as their human subjects did. The gods were after all created in the image of humans and behaved most of the time no better than their worshippers, though usually with greater strength and pizzaz. And eventually it became the norm that if gods were to do anything at all for their worshippers, they would need to be placated with precious things that humans enjoyed, and aromatic woods and resins eventually became one of those things.

Special foods, herbs, tree barks and plants with agreeable scents were offered to the gods in solemn rites. If certain areas of holy sites were consecrated to the worship of the gods, such as the natural elements, the sky, the earth and stars, all of which were respected as supernatural beings, fragrant flowers were spread on the ground or placed on altars. This, it was thought, made the gods more conducive to their worshippers' appeals.

The original purpose of using materials with

pleasing aromas in an organised manner was almost certainly for use in religious rites. The bodies of the dead were scented with aromatic oils and decked with flowers. The oils were mixed with other ingredients to compose a form of perfume. The ancient Persians, for example, believed the evildoer was punished in the afterlife by being sent to a region of foul-smelling odours. In other words, what was offensive to the living was believed to be more so after death, as retribution for the evil deeds that had been committed during life. This equates with the concept of the evil-smelling odours and fumes said to exist as a form of punishment in the Christian concept of Hell. So, we find that incense was used as...

- an important part of various religious practices.
- a tool to counteract bad or disagreeable odours.
- a way to repel demons and evil spirits.

Incense is typically made up of an aromatic material that produces a scent and a combustible binding material that holds it together in a particular shape. The aromatic materials used for making incense are typically plantbased and can include a variety of resins, barks, seeds, roots and flowers.

Visions of Paradise

The idea that paradise has a pleasant odour is found in the Jewish, Christian and Gnostic writings. The abode of the gods must be a region, it was believed, pleasing to the sense of smell. The pleasurable state in the afterlife was therefore a reward. The Rosicrucian use of Moss Rose incense is a good indication of this.

Aside from their primary purpose as an offering to the gods, incense was used for practical, symbolic



Scented woods were used in cremation to neutralise the strong odour of the burning body or of burnt sacrifices, especially in hot climates, as is done still today for example in India and Sri Lanka.



Images of incense appear in ancient Egyptian imagery. Left - Ramesses III offerring incense. Right - section of the book of the dead showing the use of incense (far left of image).

and mystical purposes. Scented woods were used in cremation to neutralise the strong odour of the burning body or of burnt sacrifices, especially in hot climates. Where this is done today, as for example in India and Sri Lanka, the scent is usually the same in all cremation rites because of the customary use of similar materials. The odour is strong and, once experienced, always suggests the nearby burning of a human body. In fact, the scent has a cloying sweetness.

A further symbolic concept concerned the smoke ascending from the burning of aromatic plants and resins; it was thought to bear the words of prayer to the gods, who were pleased by the odour. Moreover, it was also believed that the soul of the dead ascended to heaven by the smoke of incense burnt on its behalf. It is psychologically interesting to note that early humans sought some tangible bond between their finite material substance and the infinite, or the invisible region where they believed the gods dwelt. The smoke at first was not symbolic but thought to be an actual medium for the transmission of the prayer.



Ancient Egyptian incense burner.

Incense in Egypt

In Egypt, incense offerings were made to the gods deep within their temples and on those special occasions when the god's statue left the temple so that the incense would *"draw the soul up to the heaven on the smoke of the incense."* Probably the earliest reference to the use of incense for any religious purpose appeared in the notice of a pharaoh of the 11th Dynasty, Sankhkara Mentuhotep III (c.2004-1992 BCE). He sent an expedition for aromatics across the desert and sailed south on the Red Sea to the *"Incense Land of Punt."* This land is believed to have been in the northern region of modern-day Somalia.

We believe that all the temples had incense trees or bushes planted either in their grounds or around them. For those who have visited the mortuary temple of the female pharaoh Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri on the west bank of the Nile at Luxor, it is known that in addition to the elegant ruins that remain, incense trees, brought from her expedition to the land of Punt, were planted in front of and at the sides of the ramps, and we can see this story displayed on the walls of her temple.

On the walls of other royal mortuary temples, on the west side of the Nile opposite modern Luxor, can be seen representations of kings offering incense. *"He holds a censer in one hand and in the other throws small balls of incense upon it, praying to the god to accept it and give him a long life."* During funerary rites, incense was used to purify the deceased; fine grains were twice offered to the mouth, eyes and hands, one for the North and one for the South.

The Egyptians believed that incense had a divine quality. It was believed the goddess Isis had a wonderful scent, which she could transfer to others. This scent had beneficial qualities as well as healing properties. Osiris was believed to be able to transfer his odour, and the power that accompanied it, to whomever he loved.

Apparently, the importation of the ingredients of incense and its compounding was quite a thriving industry in ancient Egypt. Immense quantities of incense were used. During the reign of Pharaoh Rameses III of the 20th Dynasty, it was reported that, 1,938,766 pieces of incense were used during the 31 years of his reign. Seemingly, all of the gods were delighted with the scents which were offered to them. Even the statues of the gods were censed with fragrant substances.

Incense in Other Cultures

The Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 BCE to 50 CE), relates that the four ingredients of Hebrew incense represented the four elements, namely, earth, air, water and fire, and therefore represented the entire universe. Herodotus, the ancient Greek historian (485-423 BCE), says that in Babylonia 1,000 talents of frankincense were offered on the great altar of Marduk, the god of Heaven and Earth, at his annual feast. Herodotus also referred to a land where incense was placed upon bricks. This probably refers to Babylon, as most of the great structures in that city were made of mud brick and bound with bitumen, an asphalt-like substance, which bubbled up naturally in that petroleum-rich land.

The incense was burned as a ritual, accompanied by prayers, and the predictions of oracles. Somewhat similar household ceremonies were held, with incense burned on bricks as an offering to Marduk, the sun, moon, stars etc.

Ancient Vedic priests used sandalwood as a

principal ingredient of their incense. They used it both in their temples and their homes in the performance of sacred rites. The fire was fed with the consecrated wood, sandalwood and other aromatic woods. Such is common practice today in India for cremation. Its odour can be detected out in the Ganges River when floating by the burning ghats (steps) at the river's edge where the funeral pyres are built. In the Hindu literary work, the *Ramayana*, the poet describes a solemn entrance into his grandfather's capital: "...the city was adorned with garlands and exhaled the odours of frankincense and sweet-smelling perfume." However, these were not indigenous to India but were brought principally from Arabia.

Among the Tibetans, the ritualistic use of incense was like that of the Roman Catholic Church. Tibet monks censed their altars while chanting, similar to the practice in Catholic churches. The incense and censer were also used in Tibet in connection with the initiation of a monk and in the daily rites of the monasteries. Early Buddhism was opposed to external rites and ceremonies. In fact, the later external development of ceremonies by one school of Buddhism, brought about a schism resulting in a different presentation of Buddhist teachings. In later times it became generally used in certain ceremonies. Perfumes and flowers are also placed before the image of Buddha.

The ancient Roman philosopher Pliny the Elder (23/24 to 79 CE) who died during the famous eruption of the volcano Vesuvius, wrote in his *Naturalis Historia* (Natural History) that the people of Greece only knew the smell of cedar and citrus, "*...as it rose in columns of smoke from the sacrifices.*" He added that the majority of fragrant substances



were the product of trees in Arabia that were held sacred. Later, it was more extensively used in varied rituals.

The Phoenicians, after the battle of Arbela (331 BCE), followed Alexander the Great in his march to India, solely for the purpose of trade. "*They loaded their boats of burden with the gum of the myrrh … which it yielded in such abundance as to scent the whole region with the fragrance.*"

Though many religious offerings of the Romans were sacrifices of living things, one of the most important of the bloodless sacrifices was incense. It eventually became an essential function of every rite and was burned on high altars or in braziers. When Christianity became the official religion of the empire the young church took over the use of incensing the holiest part of their sanctuaries.

Though incense is used extensively today in the

One of the most important bloodless religious offerings of the Romans was incense.

rituals of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, one of the early Church fathers, Tertullian (155-230 CE), inveighed against it. He declared: "*Not a penny worth of incense do I offer.*" And Athenagoras of Athens (133-190 CE), a Christian philosopher and Father of the Church, said that God did not require the sweet smell of flowers and incense. However, incense is now used by the Roman Catholic Church at the solemn mass before the *introit* (the first variable part of the mass) and also at blessings, processionals, burial rites and so on. It is also used ritually in many churches of the Anglican Communion, "*the symbolic rite typifying prayer.*"

Types of Incense

The specific ingredients used in incense can vary by region and manufacturer. Some specific examples of aromatic ingredients that you may recognise include:

- cinnamon
- frankincense
- musk
- myrrh
- patchouli
- sandalwood



Incense is used extensively today in the rituals of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches.

Gums and resins have been used as incense for millennia all over the world. In the Middle East frankincense is used liberally to perfume shops and homes. It too has a beautiful scent. The combustible binding material found in incense is what ignites, allowing the incense to burn and produce smoke. The materials used vary but can include things like charcoal or wood powders.

Scents, aromas, fragrances (however you describe them) can be used to trigger specific responses. For instance, to encourage relaxation, aid sleep, promote concentration, stimulate creativity, increase motivation. In addition, there are also a whole raft of religious, aesthetic and practical reasons. A further dimension is that specific fragrances or ingredients can be used for specific purposes.

Incense is an easy, quick and accessible way to cover unwanted household smells like cooking, pets, damp clothes etc. Cedar, Myrrh and Citrus scents will 'cleanse' the air, leaving behind a freshness and new beginning. Scents arouse significant responses in our brains and can instantly remind us of past events, people and emotions. We can be transported back to ancient Egypt, to Springtime in Japan – or anything within our own memory banks. The good feelings are just a moment away.

The effect of good aromas, generated from incense, has been shown to raise serotonin in the brain. As an alternative to taking drugs, non-pharmacological methods of raising brain serotonin may not only improve mood but does so without side-effects or dangers of addiction. Serotonin is considered a natural mood stabiliser and helps with sleeping, eating and digestion. Serotonin also helps reduce depression, regulate anxiety and reduce headaches.



Uses of Incense in Modern Times

The use of incense is suggested to increase focus. Burning uplifting fragrances when working or studying can increase focus and enhance concentration. Less intrusive than having music playing in the background, fragrances have a subtler effect of the mind and body, making them a perfect partner for work, study or engaging in a hobby that requires detailed focus. Insomnia is an increasing affliction, especially in our modern, always-on and interrupt-orientated society. Lavender is especially associated with an aid to sleep, as are Vetiver and Chamomile.

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If you want to relax and unwind light some incense, curl up on the sofa with a cup of tea, a book and some chilled-out music. Alternatively, run a bath and replace candles with an incense stick or two. Soft fragrances will further enhance this time, allowing you to give yourself time and space away from the hassles of everyday living. Frankincense, Sandalwood and Cedarwood are all 'calming fragrances', so work well for general relaxation.

Reducing stress and anxiety is a step up from merely relaxing, for it crucially reduces virtually all body activities, heart-rate and breathing being just two of many. Encourage your mind to stop worrying and racing from one thing to another, and for stress reduction, go for the purest and best quality Sandalwoods. Lavender and Rosemary are other great choices for this as well.

In meditation incense is used widely in many religious practices to deepen attention, heighten senses and uplift your spirit when practising meditation. Sandalwoods and Lotus are used most frequently for meditation – but you chose what suits you best. One that transports you to the place you need to be, without taking over your thoughts.

The burning of incense can act as a doorway to spirituality, formal or informal, recognised religion or secular. Incense is, and has been for thousands of years, in daily use in many religions of the world, notably in Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity.

Symbolism and Study of Incense

Aside from its practical uses as a means of dispelling offensive odours or for religious rites, incense perpetuates a mystical and esoteric symbolism. To the mystical adherent, the symbolism becomes an objective form of his subjective idealism and sentiment. The burning, the scent, the smoke have no import in themselves; they simply portray the spirit of the thoughts and emotions of the user.

The glow of the fire symbolically depicts the zeal

and devotion of the adherent to his cause. The fragrance, the agreeable scent, is symbolic of the harmony of transcendent pleasure. Finally, the smoke represents the ascension of consciousness and the projection of our finite human nature to the infinity of the Cosmic.

Incense has been used throughout the world for centuries, but does it have any benefits to health or wellness? There's limited research on the possible health benefits. Many of the available studies focus on the incense ingredients frankincense and myrrh.

Burning incense has long been associated with religious practices and meditation. But does incense actually have a calming or psychoactive effect? One 2008 study in cell cultures and mice identified a compound in frankincense resin that could cause a response similar to an antidepressant. Additionally, a response to this compound was seen in the areas of the brain associated with anxiety and depression. It also activated receptors

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associated with a feeling of warmth.

A 2017 study found that some compounds isolated from frankincense and myrrh resins, had an antiinflammatory effect in mice. Researchers isolated several compounds from the resins and found that some of them were able to inhibit an inflammatory response in mice, depending on the dose.

It should be noted, however, that the researchers in these studies worked with compounds purified from frankincense resin. Further studies will be needed to determine if they are present in incense smoke and whether they elicit the same response in people.

Making Your own Incense

All incense producers have their own techniques when it comes to creating these fragrant items, and the methods vary considerably depending on the traditions involved. However, there are certain basic principles that you can apply if you are ever tempted to have a go at making your own sticks or cones.

Firstly, you'll need to take high-quality natural ingredients to create your loose incense. You can choose



Sandalwood ground to a powder. One of the ingredients often used to make incense. Sandalwood is a calming fragrance, often used for relaxation.

from a variety of woods, resins, herbs and spices. Here are some examples of each type of ingredient:

- Woods: sandalwood, agarwood, pine, cedar.
- Resins: amber, myrrh, frankincense, hibiscus.
- Herbs and spices: vanilla, sage, ginger, cinnamon.
- Try to always use at least one resin or wood in your mixture.

Next, pulverise these ingredients into a very fine powder to aid the burning process. The resulting mixture can be combined with charcoal powder and a binding agent such as tragacanth. To this mix you can add makko powder, which is made from the bark of the tabu-no-ki tree. This is a combustible material that's also water soluble.

When added to the loose incense mix along with a little distilled water, makko allows for the formation of incense cones or sticks. The water should be added very slowly while you mix the ingredients. You want the mixture to become gummy and pliable yet still hold firm when it is moulded.

Once it's at the right consistency, you can form the mix into cones or apply it to sticks. If you're using bamboo sticks, make sure you get blank versions with no additives. Once you have made the items, leave them to dry. This can take a couple of weeks or more and bear in mind that cones tend to take longer that sticks. To see if cones are ready, turn them upside down and make sure that their undersides are all one colour. If they are darker in the middle, they need more time. All sheltered by the mother-cloud The little flake looked down; It saw the city's seething crowd, It saw the shining town.

'How fair and far those steeples rise To greet us, mother dear! It is so lovely in the skies, Why do we linger here?

'The north wind says the merry earth Is full of life and flow; I long to mingle with its mirth -O mother! Let us go.'

The mother-cloud reached out her arm. 'O little flake,' quoth she, 'The earth is full of sin and harm, Bide here, bide here, with me.'

But when the pale cloud-mother slept, The north wind whispered, 'Fly!' And from her couch the snowflake crept And tiptoed down the sky.

Before the Winter's sun his fleet Brief journey made that day, All soiled and blackened in the street The little snowflake lay.

The Snowflake

by Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Imagination

by **Paracelsus** (1493-1541) Imagination is like the sun. The sun has a light which is not tangible, but which nevertheless may set a house on fire. But the imagination is like a sun in man acting in that place to which its light is directed.

Man is what he thinks. If he thinks fire, he is fire; if he thinks war, then he will cause war; it all depends merely on that the whole of his imagination becomes an entire sun; namely, that he wholly imagines that which he wills.

The spirit is the master, imagination the tool, and the body the plastic material.

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People were always the limiters of happiness, except for the very few that were as good as spring itself.

-- Ernest Hemmingway (1899-1961)