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A.M.O.R.C.®

Greenwood Gate, Blackhill,
Crowborough TN6 1XE
UNITED KINGDOM

Tel: 01892-653197

Fax: 01892-667432

Email: info@amorc.org.uk

Web: www.amorc.org.uk

EDITORS

Bill Anderson

Shirley Elsby

Design and Layout

Richard Bonwick

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Cover spread

Minoan Crete at it's Zenith.





Be a Thinking,
Active
and Responsible
Mystic!

*by Christian Bernard
(Imperator of AMORC)*

YOU WILL BE reading this magazine either because you are a member of the Rosicrucian Order or you are interested in Rosicrucianism. You are a present-day mystic therefore with your personal values, hopes and dreams. I put forward this article for you to reflect upon. It is taken from a message I delivered at a Rosicrucian Convention and has been adapted for this publication.

What does being a mystic mean? What is the place of mystics as the millennium begins? Can mystics of the 21st Century exist and resist the ever-growing pressure of materialism? Who are such people? What role can they play in society? Can they still peacefully experience spirituality in these crazy times? Some say the constant and rapid progress of science is making such an abstract quest unnecessary; others say our society and its dictates



are destroying our deeper values and stifling our mystical inclinations.

In the face of the breakdown in conditions, the unmitigated corrupting of moral standards, the deterioration of the environment and our way of living, is there still a reason for us to be mystics, and to conduct ourselves properly? I know you have your answer, just as I do, even if at some point in your life doubt, or a flicker of it, may have crossed your mind when you asked yourself this question.

Admittedly, what I'm saying is perhaps not going to tell you anything you don't already know, especially since all human archetypes and behaviours are inscribed inside us all, in our 'memory chromosomes.' At any moment, we can locate all the information we have registered in our present life and even in our previous incarnations, once we put ourselves into a deep meditative state. If we concentrate, tune into all our cells, and listen to the 'Master Within', it's possible for us to get in touch with the so-called 'primordial truths.' They are buried deep within us..., body, mind and soul..., and remain forever engraved inside the human 'computer.'

If we concentrate, tune into all our cells, and listen to the 'Master Within', it is possible for us to get in touch with the so-called 'primordial truths.'

In all periods and cultures, men and women have lived at the margins of their world, and have chosen to push back the frontiers of the commonplace, and break through into the mysterious. These individuals have asked themselves fundamental questions, the same ones which still occupy our minds. Where does Humankind come from? What is the reason for our existence? In what direction, and towards what goal, are we heading? Those who have asked themselves these questions have had what may be called a 'mystical opening up.' Such questioning has often been experienced, but is only rarely spoken of for fear of being judged, misunderstood, or even ill-treated. But on occasion it has managed to make real sense for those I call 'free souls', among them Rosicrucians, now just as in the past.

What is a Mystic?

But what is a mystic? Let's look first of all at an official definition: "*Mystic: A person subject to mystical ideas, with an intense religious faith and interested in the mysteries of religion. A person of fanatical character, whose ideas*



know no bounds." On reading this last sentence, there is certainly good reason not to want to be regarded as a mystic. Fortunately, as members of the Rosicrucian Order we have another concept of mysticism. We know that a mystic is neither a blinkered, sectarian visionary, nor a fanatic. Those who have crossed our portals with such a mindset, through ignorance of our ideas and the teachings our Order transmits, will have had their real motivation found out in time, and will have long since left us. I have known a number of people like this, unfortunately, and do not envy what has become of them.

True mystics are not sheep in a bleating flock, quite the opposite. They are first and foremost thinking, active, responsible individuals, whose thought processes are free from all bias. Within the Rosicrucian Order we see ourselves as permanent living question marks. That is all well and good, but only as long as we get answers, and in my view the best way to get them, as I was saying before, is to be thinking, active and responsible.

Think indeed, but think well! We must question ourselves about the soundness of what we do, what we say, what we feel. Thought is the foundation of the life we are constructing, now and in the future. We must know how to master our thoughts so as not to be on the receiving end of the destructive impact that inevitably results from negative reasoning and thinking.

While mystics are therefore thinking individuals, they must also be active ones. Fully aware of what the purpose of their lives are, their behaviour comprises service, tolerance, generosity, understanding, compassion and love, so as to set an example for Humankind. To be such good examples, and therefore positive testimonies to the principles referred to as 'mystical', mystics must throughout their lives seek within themselves all that needs to be strengthened and improved. We are all a long



way from perfection, but we can be radiant and show the way, providing we don't try to reform the conduct of others at any price, tempting though this may be when we see our fellow humans losing their way and embarking on dangerous paths. Being an active mystic can be straightforward. All that is required is first of all to be genuine with oneself and with others, to be true in all circumstances. And being true does not mean speaking brusquely or rudely, or showing a lack of politeness or tact; it means being a true reflection of what we are, and not playing on the feelings of others, or saying one thing and doing another.

Personal Responsibility

As well as being thinking, active individuals, mystics must in addition be responsible people. When they have understanding, when they know something, they have an obligation to use that knowledge responsibly. This concept of responsibility is absolutely vital. Mystics are aware of the consequences of their behaviour. They understand how deep the import of their thoughts, words and deeds are, and know the outcomes they will produce. The more we advance on the path, the more we will be participating, and the greater the responsibility we must bear. We have no choice other than to continue with our journey, for stopping would only defer our arrival, and in no way exempts us from the path to be travelled.

Mystics, or aspiring mystics, therefore have no alternative but to work harder and to become more aware. People who have not consciously embarked upon the path of life and its laws may, if they stray, hope for a certain leniency, particularly if they learn the lesson. But those who know, and who despite that knowledge act deliberately, are exposing themselves to more serious karmic consequences. While this does not exclude either side from being forgiven, the responsibility is evaluated in a different manner, along with the outcomes that result.

Where responsibility and understanding are concerned, we can take the well-known example of a car. It's a useful and even enjoyable means of transportation, but can become a thing of death and misery. It all depends on the way we drive, and this is what a sense of responsibility is.

In closing this most important concept of personal responsibility, I would like to tell you how much it shocks and saddens me when I notice in conversations or in correspondence that when misfortune comes their way, some members of AMORC, who have sometimes been on the Rosicrucian path for many years, are continuing to blame some person or other, neighbours, members of their family, colleagues, and so on; as if simply claiming

that an imaginary enemy is practising witchcraft can take away all responsibility from ourselves. Even young children, including babies, are being accused of being evil. Some are claiming that their wife or their husband is casting spells. And when it comes to mothers-in-law, is there any crime they are innocent of?

Behaviour such as this always alarms me, but you are aware of how much I endeavour to show a sense of humanism in all situations. Such instances often concern Africa and the West Indies, the traditions and ways of whose inhabitants I understand and respect, for do not think that I have any wish to stigmatise them. What goes for people in Africa and the West Indies also goes for far too many people throughout the world, including in the West. India, South America, certain parts of Russia and China, and many other regions of our planet are affected.

People who have many children shouldn't complain they're unable to feed them or give them an education. Children are not livestock we breed in order to be useful for us later on. Every single soul with whom we are associated through the little body of a child should receive our most careful attention. As in all things, it is quality, and not quantity, that must take precedence.

The churches have always advocated liberal reproduction; this has ensured a plentiful reservoir of the faithful and, until the recent past, a good supply of chattels, this nowadays being a lucrative godsend for those who sell armaments and medicines, the pharmaceutical laboratories, and so on. If you engage in extra-marital relationships, don't be amazed if your husband or wife is angry and leaves you, or if you contract an illness that might be fatal.

Why be surprised at being robbed or deceived financially if you are not vigilant and careful? Is a road accident so surprising if you are driving badly, or if the condition of your vehicles and roads is substandard? No, you will surely agree. I'm not being hard on you, but these are the facts. Road accidents are not caused either by voodoo, witches or by some wrong or evil thought. Why



Why be surprised at being robbed or deceived financially if you are not vigilant and careful.



for instance would this be more the case in Africa than elsewhere in the world? Certain situations in life are difficult, and will be for a long time to come, if we refuse to change. Many people have a vested interest in populations vegetating away, caught between superstition and ignorance: I am not one of them!

Take Your Destiny in Your Own Hands

The years pass by and I am getting older. The time will soon come when I will be leaving my post as an Officer within AMORC, and then, as long as possible afterwards I hope, will come the time of my transition. As I do not want to increase my karmic load, may I be reproached for not having made the most of the opportunity given to me throughout my term of office, in order to do good. As Emperor and as your brother, I implore you to evolve, and to take your destiny in your own hands; not by means of wars that bring delight to those who sell armaments, but by a revolution of consciousness, by bringing your thought processes under control, by refusing to be dragged downwards in the name of customs and traditions that are at times degrading.

Let us be modern, groundbreaking, innovative. How do we expect to benefit from progress if we simply think, speak and live exactly as our ancestors did? If we make a different choice though, let's accept the consequences of it; but let's also not be full of contradictions. I advise you to take on your responsibilities, and to stop transferring your mistakes to other people. Think clearly about yourself,



Be active and responsible to help acquire true understanding.

your capabilities, and your surroundings. Some of you are no doubt finding me very harsh, and are perhaps having negative thoughts about me, or at least not understanding me. As I was saying before however, I am getting to an age where I can not only speak to you as a brother, but also as a loving father. I would not be worthy of my office if I did otherwise.

Were I dishonest and of evil intent, it would be easy for me to take advantage of all of this and manipulate people's minds. Over the course of human history, so many people have exploited the weak and distressed, that I feel ashamed for them. Yet I feel the same for their victims, who have indeed been deceived, but who have also frequently displayed stupidity and irresponsibility. The famous poet Jean de la Fontaine concluded his fable *The Crow and the Fox* by saying: "Every flatterer lives at the expense of those who listen to him." The meaning of this is that we must master our ego, for when it finds itself being flattered, we lose all notion of reality and can then easily be tricked. Unfortunately this is what happens far too often, and while we should certainly retain within us that quality known as 'trust', we must not be gullible. In absolute terms, we can understand and even forgive all who are in a state of ignorance, and who deceive others or are deceived themselves. Whether you are members of the Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis or simply reading this magazine, you will most likely have learned about this and already know of it.

To sum up the three concepts in this message up to this point: Be individuals who are thinking, active and responsible. True mystics acquire understanding but do not wallow in superstition; not to be confused of course with history, myth or tradition. Mystics also have their feet on the ground, look directly ahead of themselves, and have their eyes wide open to reality. And mystics are free individuals who have very often been through confrontation in order to fully experience the freedom



The poet Jean de la Fontaine.



of conscience and faith that they carry deep within themselves. History is unfortunately filled with many examples of this.

Mystics vs Religion

In contrast to mystics, religious people are part of groups with defined beliefs. These beliefs are in the tight grip of dogmas that are often very limiting and constraining, and have their laws, prohibitions and taboos. And this is where we may ask ourselves questions about what is normal. Who is normal, and who is not? Where do people stand in relation to what is normal? So-called 'normal' individuals are apparently those who fit into a plan set out by the society in which they live. The moment people come out of this system and leave the established path to go in another direction, the moment they ask themselves questions and become interested in things other than the ones being presented to them..., they become abnormal, outside the norm.

When we look at the evolution of Humankind, it's clear that these so-called abnormal or non-conformist individuals are the ones who have moved things forward. Inventors, researchers, scientists, philosophers and artists don't conform with the classic model of their time. Mystics may also be said to be outside the norm. I'm not referring here to religious people. The mystic's path is less of a straight line, but so much more interesting and stimulating.

As this article is primarily about mysticism, I'm now going to differentiate two categories of mystic for you, even though there are almost as many categories as there are mystics, since everyone is on their own quest. There are those who are fully conscious of the esoteric enquiries they are undertaking; they have made considered choices and we might call such people conscious mystics. And then there are the unconscious mystics who don't even know they have the attitudes of mystics. How they act is natural, innate. Whether they define themselves as atheists or mystics, they feel within themselves a passion, an inner feeling, a sort of latent energy that only seeks to express itself at certain times, which may be very short-lived, or may last several days or weeks. Deep within us we feel a sort of passion that could be defined as an illumination, a call to the heights, a sort of ecstasy or energy that is only seeking to express itself. I'm sure that during your life you've felt this sort of emotion and inspiration. This state of mind brings with it a fulfilment, a physical and mental well-being, a longing for change, or the desire to give a new sense of direction to how we're living and what we're doing.

Throughout history, men and women have felt this inner passion, and it has led them to achieve great works. They have become guides for those of their times, and like beacons of light for succeeding generations. There is a profound significance in each achievement, feat, or concept that such men and women have left us, because these are works of their subconscious mind, of what we may call the inner being, the real and innermost self. This particular expression of the world comes alive and finds its outlet through their talents in the arts and many other fields. But it's not necessary to be an artist, poet, musician or painter in order to undergo this spiritual transformation. Neither do we need to be a philosopher, scientist or inventor to feel the fire within. Every person can experience this realisation, this positive change. Maybe

Inventors, researchers, scientists, philosophers and artists do not conform with the classic model of their time.

the transmutation or alchemy to which I'm referring has acted as a trigger for you, a key which gave you access to the Rosicrucian path, or at any rate to a desire for something else.

Coming to the Surface from the Soul

Once we've grasped this mystical concept and assimilated it through our own experience, we at times experience the strange and elusive feeling that the physical, material world is unreal, merely an illusion. We may even experience a loss of contact with the things of everyday life, though it is fortunately only short-lived. It's as though principles and feelings not connected to our material world were coming to the surface from deep within our soul.

In this mystical surge, doubts can creep in, leading to a questioning of certain established things: our sense of values changes, and we get their importance and benefit into proper perspective. We learn to ease off, to let go, to see life from another, more interesting, angle. An experience such as this can be a great step towards the acquisition of wisdom, and it's not as rare as we may imagine. There's no doubt that everyone experiences this type of deep feeling at least once, hears the inner call and is sure to be disconcerted by how peculiar it is.

Once again though we must accept it and be honest enough to acknowledge that we have received this blessing, and had this remarkable experience. This is what so-called atheists, who subscribe to absolute materialism, refuse to do. They believe that everything that can't be





It is as if the light, hidden away behind this door, would blind them forever.

worked out or measured by the sense faculties is only an illusion, whereas the person who is open to spirituality accepts every mystical experience and inner sensation as a reality. Faced with all the richness of a mystical experience, the atheist will conceal what they are feeling, and decline to open the door that is before them, for fear of discovering beyond it a truth that goes against their principles, the ones which have been inculcated in them since they were born, or which they have fashioned for themselves over time. And for an atheist, this truth would constitute a calling into question, an insurmountable inner upheaval which they could not bear. It's as if the light, hidden away behind this door, would blind them forever.

Those who have been bold enough to push on the door and cross over its threshold have experienced what may be called 'illumination'; this light will ever be in their mind and heart in this present life and, beyond time and space, will be in their soul forever. A mystical experience of this nature is both most fundamental and most wonderful, at the same time. The door to open and the threshold to cross are of course simply a state of perception that leads to a greater state, whose development comes about through a continuous expanding of consciousness.

This can be depicted by the idea that we as human beings are able to be in contact with God. This type of experience happens often during our childhood, but the feelings brought about by it remain asleep a long time in the secrecy of our heart, and either do not re-awaken, or emerge only much later. Every person is a mystic without knowing it, yet who is likely at any moment to find a door which leads to a field of consciousness that is the infinite.

This quest, often unconscious and not admitted to, can be difficult to complete on one's own, even if each individual is by definition single-handedly responsible for their decisions, thoughts, words and actions. It's something that members of the Rosicrucian Order recognise, for they have chosen to join with others journeying towards the same goal, under the protection of the same 'égrégoré.'

No Master and Pupil

In the illustrious Rosicrucian school, there is no master and pupil. There are just men and women who share the same ideal, and who have made the decision to open the door and move forward. Do we not say there is strength in unity? By virtue of your own journey, you can describe yourself as a mystic, because a mystic is someone who lives in harmony with their objective consciousness, intuition and feelings. Being a mystic does not mean being perfect; it merely means being aware of what needs to be done in order to become perfect.

As well as using our objective senses such as sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch, being a mystic is listening to our inner senses, and knowing how to use other forces and accessing other potentialities. How may someone become a mystic? Well, what interest has the person had in spirituality? Why, and through what sort of questioning have they been led to a dialogue with God? This may

It is as if the light hidden away behind this door would blind them forever.

have come about by means of specific circumstances that were pleasant and happy, but most often it's as a result of difficult or even tragic ordeals, which have brought about a change in state of mind and attitude within them.

Fear, suffering, pain, distress and illness are, like love, catalysts which mould people and temporarily close their objective consciousness. It is then that the miracle can occur and a fire, the sacred fire, can rise up from the deepest part of themselves and release their fervour, their creative power and desire for more, and for better. It's a bit like giving birth, for after the period of gestation there



comes life and fulfilment.

That's why it's said: "*the Word became flesh.*" Our mind will have become creator, and our thoughts will have materialised in a work that reflects our deepest aspirations: our true self connected to the universal consciousness. The putting into effect of these natural, universal laws results from the combining of straightforward actions and processes, as in the constructing of a building which is put up stone by stone. All we need is to know the laws and how to put them into practice.

This understanding and methodology is what

Fear, suffering, pain, distress and illness are, like love, catalysts which mould people and temporarily close out our objective consciousness.

constitutes the difference between a consciously mystical person and one who is not, or who is only occasionally consciously mystical, but not all the time, not being completely convinced. The conscious mystic experiences every thought and act to the full, whereas others put up with things and don't understand what is happening. Yet the cosmic laws are the same for everyone, whether they believe in them or not. The potentialities presented by the subconscious are so immeasurable, extraordinary, unlimited, that it's difficult or even impossible for our objective consciousness to have an appreciation of what they are.

Ask and it Will be Given to You

If you are reading this article as a Rosicrucian, you know that when you encounter a problem, you just need to put all the information or data concerning it into what I referred to at the beginning of this message as your personal 'computer', in other words, into your consciousness, and then ask your Inner Master to come back to you with the best solution. "Ask and it will be given to you." But we must be sure that we ask with conviction, and that we are ready to attentively listen for the reply. And to hear the reply, you also know that you must let go. For if you hold on to your thought, it will not be able to rise up and be 'received.'

If you follow this procedure properly, you will get a reply very quickly, in various and unexpected forms. For some, this might entail coming across someone apparently by chance. For others, it might be reading something, hearing a song, a vision of something, a dream. When things 'click' like this, the mind often thinks "Why didn't I think of this before?" Yes indeed! Everything seems easier

when we know that the accomplishing of something, even if something complex, can be split up like a jigsaw puzzle and then put back together again. For while life may be considered as a single whole, it's essentially a succession of simple acts. It's the mind, often convoluted and seeking over-perfection, that complicates what we experience at every moment of our existence.

Unfortunately, we are too frequently outside of the reality of the present moment. We either remain in the past, buried in our memories and regrets, or we project ourselves into an imaginary future that is completely out of reach. This is why it's always best to make the most of the present moment I just mentioned, even though we recall the past and contemplate the future. Let us not miss that which is all-important in our life. That is what being alive is. That is what being true is. That is also what being a mystic is.

But why is it, and how is it, that we have moved away from this crucial principle? Quite simply, it's that we have allowed ourselves to be taken over, externally and internally, by what in a general sense is called the 'consumer society'. We are enslaved to it, and in order to appease it we put a gag on our conscience, ordering the most positive side of our deeper self, of our very nature, to be silent.

Denying the importance of the material aspect of life is of course out of the question. It's necessary and is a reality which faces us at every moment. But alongside this constant and unavoidable preoccupation, we must also allow ourselves to be lulled not by the Sirens' song, but by the music of those virtues and emotions which bring about a love of one's fellow beings: kindness, courage, fairness, loyalty and a sense of sharing.

Taken Over By Silence

Let us again show we can allow ourselves to be taken over by silence, Peace Profound and inner joy. Let us be able to be in communion with God, with others, and with our Self. Let us use our intuition more, rather than blindly believing the sugar-coated words of advertising spiels which exaggerate and deceive in every sphere, whether in commerce, politics or spirituality.

Mystics apply the understanding they have acquired, and know that intuition is an internal expression of themselves. They stay on their guard and take care not to get lost in an illusory world that will sweep them away into a frantic and pointless race, leading them nowhere. To go where? To look for and find what? As perceived by a mystic, Utopia is not an illusion. It's a goal to be attained, a search for the absolute, a hope, and a wish expressed.



The text *Rosicrucian Utopia* serves as a perfect example of this. But we can do better than just hope. This may perhaps not come about in our current incarnation. But without waiting for better times, we can set in motion the forces which are within us, while living, as I said before, in the present. Let us be thinking, active and responsible, and not the puppets of decadent forces and the playthings of a society that is overly materialistic. Being a mystic also means cultivating intelligence and energy, even if this is done clumsily and imperfectly. As an expression that I like and often use says, we should be able to 'push onwards.'

Never forget that every time we move onwards, the whole of Humanity does so with us. Let us walk on into a life that is real, one that is not limited to our own, nor to the time that we have in this incarnation. Let us walk on into that infinite space where everything becomes possible. In the life that is 'real', we have unlimited access to a great universal power, an everlasting and more reliable 'package' than what the phone companies are selling us. Once we become aware of what this 'real' life is, we are holding the key that grants us access to all the answers we are looking for, as well as to happiness.

But here again this concept relates to each individual and is therefore a very personal one. While in a general sense we can say that happiness is a state of perfect inner contentment, joy is a feeling of fulfilment, a strong and delightful emotion that bursts forth like a spark from within the deepest part of our being. Joy and happiness are not outside of us. They are the reflection of a facet of

Everything that goes into creating its substance is returned to us, which is why we should show respect for our environment.

the Divinity that we carry within us, and there are several ways of feeling, experiencing, and manifesting them. Some people may be extremely happy to find themselves in good health after a long and difficult illness. Others experience immense joy on receiving an undreamt-of sum of money, enabling them to get themselves out of a difficult situation. The instances are many and varied. We must understand, accept and take on board the joy and happiness that comes our way, for they are nothing other than the outflowing of life's essence within us, which we become conscious of by living the moment.

Picture yourself in a desert, totally parched with thirst. Wouldn't the greatest treasure in the world for you be a glass of cool water? Wouldn't you give all your material goods in order to avoid a certain death? At such a time, nothing except this glass of water would be in your



Wouldn't you give all your material goods in order to avoid a certain death?

thoughts. But in your daily life, do you think of this when you quench your thirst? And yet this act is a source of a well-being, and leads to one kind of happiness.

The same applies to the air we've been breathing since the day we were born. Are we aware it is an ultrafine, subtle emanation of the Cosmic Consciousness? The air is a link that connects us all: men, women, animals, vegetables, minerals. The air and its vital energy take their sustenance from the Earth, the oceans, lakes, rivers and streams. Everything that goes into creating its substance is returned to us, which is why we should show respect for our environment. That too is being a mystic!

By becoming aware of the importance of water and air, we are paying tribute to our Mother the Earth, to the whole of Nature, to Life, to God. There is complete harmony between the natural elements and human beings. Avoiding separation of oneself from the great All is to be wise and to have a responsible mystical attitude. And being a mystic is living in harmony with one's three bodies: the physical body, the psychic body, and the spiritual body. And it is therefore to remain in harmonious communication with the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms, with the awareness that we are one and cannot be separated.

Our Daily Conduct

How should mystics conduct themselves in everyday life? This is both very simple and very complex. Being a mystic means being aware of and shouldering one's responsibilities in one's family life, working life and spiritual life. Thinking, active, responsible mystics do not feed on what is negative and unhealthy. They choose their



relationships, television programmes, websites, books, and so on. Nor do they make hasty judgments, and don't condemn without having tried to understand the why and how of things and events. The attitude of mystics is open, respecting everyone's right to be different and to exercise freedom of expression. They can give assistance, bringing calmness and speaking in a fraternal manner to whoever is in need of it. They accept philosophically, without becoming disenchanted, the tests they undergo during life; for mystics are not exempt from lessons, they just find it a bit easier to learn them.

Mystics know they are the architects of their own happiness and of what they become, and also of many of their troubles. In their 'active' part they are helpful and cultivate this quality throughout life in accordance with their age and abilities, for of course no-one is expected to do the impossible. Mystics do not live outside the world but in it, through it, and for it. There is not much in everyday life that distinguishes a mystic from others, other than their humble, thoughtful and kind attitude. Mystics pray, meditate and thank the God of their heart for their blessings and lessons alike. They have no fear, though it does not stop them from being prudent and sensible. They know that a day of troubles can finish with a blazing sunset; they know that change is the only thing that goes on forever, and that this can lead to something better. And if not better, then at least something else, a new adventure.

But the greatest change, an inevitable one that's frequently dreaded, is that of transition. It is in total peace of mind that mystics prepare themselves for this final initiation, which remains a painful mystery for those who do not know where this change, which seems like an end but is not, is leading them to. It is from ignorance and ignorance alone that people must free themselves, and push back the shadows, the boundary of the unknown, and fear. Being a mystic is therefore to have no fear of one's own death, and to prepare oneself for this state of consciousness which is to come. Having just referred to the fear and alarm which too often dwell within us, I would like to turn to an expression that will have escaped no-one in the last few years: the 'crisis!'

Ever since the world began, this concept has always existed and it will continue to exist, because everything is change, nothing goes on forever, everything passes. This famous 'crisis' does not really exist; we have put it in our minds ourselves, greatly helped by our politicians and the media. To speak of the crisis is to create it, to move into it. Why say to ourselves that catastrophe is irreversible and inevitable and is leading us to disaster, when what is going on is our continuous and natural transformation

as Humanity. Were things really easier for our ancestors? Will they be more difficult for our descendants? Nothing is certain, nothing is 'written!' The destiny of Humankind and of the Earth that shelters us is going to continue its cyclic evolution. It's difficult at the moment to predict whether things will be better or worse; but what we can say with certainty is that they will be different. Mystics are aware of this, and therefore do not wallow in self-pity. They observe, analyse, adapt, agree to question themselves, tackle things, create and move forward. They use their knowledge and energy to develop within society, and all without agreeing to simply put up with things.

Responsibility

That brings us back to the concept of responsibility which I went into earlier. This responsibility is what we require, for we alone make our choices, and it's a mistake to count on the help of others or society to get us out of our difficulties. It's vital to take charge of our own affairs, yet without neglecting the fact that it's our duty to abide

Mystics know they are the architects of their own happiness and of what they become, and also of many of their troubles.

by the concepts of solidarity, fraternity and sharing.

Mystics also use their intuition a great deal, and endeavour to see into the future and to look beyond appearances. They read the souls and hearts of others, and do everything they can to rise up above suffering and despair, going past the clouds and glimpsing the sun. Being both on their own and connected to the great All, they never forget that to accomplish great things we must first be able to do small things perfectly. Mystics know that duty well carried out is an act of love and of service, and that for service to have its full meaning, it must be selfless, it must be a gift of oneself to others, joyously agreed to, and not undergone as a great sacrifice. Love and giving should not be likened to suffering and renunciation, quite the reverse. Were this the case, it would no longer be a question of love, but of masochistic behaviour. True service only gives rise to good feelings, and expects nothing in return.

Mystics do everything they can to cultivate and maintain four primary virtues, thereby warranting being called mystics: *understanding, service, compassion, and love*. These virtues flow into one another and end up merging into a perfect unity, forming a single entity and thereby moving us closer to the state of the Rosy Cross. But the road is long, and the ascent an arduous one, with



its tests like so many stones on the track. Willpower, perseverance and trust are three further virtues that need to be manifested if we wish to achieve our spiritual elevation. We can do this together under the aegis of the sacred symbol of the Rosy Cross, and thanks to all the experiences, pleasant and unpleasant, that we have already lived through, and will continue living through. The choice is ours, for we have our free will.

Three Questions

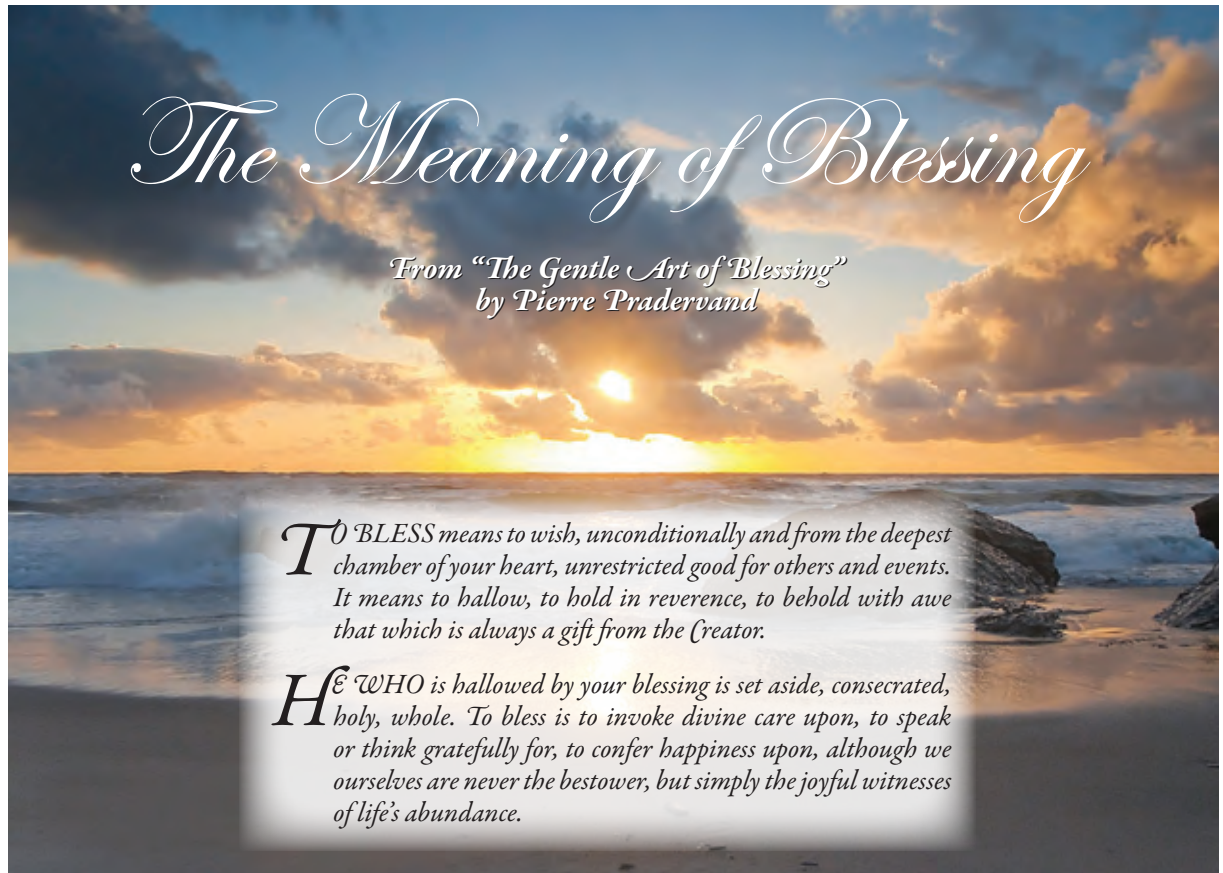
In summary and in conclusion, here are brief answers to three questions concerning what I have said.

- *Is it possible to be a mystic and to live in the 21st Century?* Yes, and not only is it possible, we have to be mystics. It's the only choice that presents itself to Humanity.
- *What are mystics seeking?* To merge their souls into the absolute, to live in permanent communion with God; not by running away from the world and what is happening, but by mastering their lives in everyday

things, even the most ordinary ones. Mystics allow the great light of their consciousness to illuminate their lives and actions. Their minds are not in a muddle, quite the reverse, they are lucid and clear. They have confidence in themselves and respond to problems by displaying courage.

- *How is a mystical person recognisable?* If you meet someone who is energetic, industrious in their work, compassionate, generous, respected by their friends, tolerant in religious and many other matters, able, through their approach and with a few simple words, to have you glimpse the cosmic splendour and power in all things, then you will have come in contact with a mystic.

Being a mystic is all of this, and more! Let us therefore be thinking, active and responsible! Let us also be enlightened and fraternal towards each other. And let us live in collaboration and in harmony with our fellow human beings, with Nature, the Cosmos and with God. With feet on the ground and head in the stars, let us be mystics!



The Meaning of Blessing

From "The Gentle Art of Blessing"
by Pierre Pradervand

TO BLESS means to wish, unconditionally and from the deepest chamber of your heart, unrestricted good for others and events. It means to hallow, to hold in reverence, to behold with awe that which is always a gift from the Creator.

HE WHO is hallowed by your blessing is set aside, consecrated, holy, whole. To bless is to invoke divine care upon, to speak or think gratefully for, to confer happiness upon, although we ourselves are never the bestower, but simply the joyful witnesses of life's abundance.





MINOS AND THE CRETAN ODYSSEY

by Jan Bloem

WE ALL KNOW Egypt, at least from TV documentaries. But also from the huge collections of ancient Egyptian artefacts in museums throughout the world, and the eager accounts of millions of visitors who until recently visited Egypt each year. Spectacular and detailed archaeological finds have been reported from time to time, and the predominance in some minds

of ancient Egypt as the premier source of western civilisation has remained unchallenged for centuries, until fairly recently. So much for the great and mighty Egypt, but how many know about the history of Crete? And how many of those few who do know about it, fully understand the pivotal role this small island once played in the genesis of western culture and civilisation?

Greek mythology records that Zeus one fair day



looked down on the world from his palace on the heights of Mount Olympus and saw the beautiful Europa playing by the seaside. He was instantly smitten, for no maiden had ever possessed such beauty and grace. Crafty old god that he was, he disguised himself in the form of a bull and won her affections through his gentleness and good manners. Little did Europa know that as soon as she climbed onto his back for but a short promised ride, Zeus the bull would jump into the sea and take her to a far off emerald isle called Scheria.

There he courted her, and they had a son who they named Minos, who it was prophesied would rule all people of the earth. Zeus apparently loses interest here and leaves King Asterius, the ruler of Scheria to raise Minos as his own son. Asterius marries Europa and creates a whole continent for her as a gift. And in return, as a token of her love for him, Europa bore him a daughter



and other parts of the Balkans, and of course the emerging stable power of Egypt.

Situated in Homer's 'wine-dark' Aegean Sea, its location offered the best of many worlds, and standards of living with technology that rivalled the best of any nation. By 1650 BCE, during the decline of Egypt's Middle Kingdom, Crete, with its rich cities and huge palaces, was the commercial hub of the western world. Her navy dominated the seas, guarding her outposts; and her merchant ships regularly visited every country bordering the Mediterranean, as far afield even as the coast of Portugal. Travellers journeying to or from

Asia Minor paused at Crete to rest, admire her natural beauty, and partake of the cultural activities of the locals.

Evidence of hominid existence in Crete date back to around 130,000 BP; a bit late for Homo Erectus perhaps, and probably too early for Homo Sapiens..., but hominids nevertheless they were, using fairly primitive Acheulean type quartz hand axes. And they could only have arrived there if they crossed the seas. It is incredible to imagine seafaring, deliberately or by accident, from such remote antiquity, but it must without doubt have occurred for hominids to have reached Crete.

Forget about *Raiders of the Lost Ark* or other films of that genre, they're tame in comparison to the jaw-dropping suspense of Homer's epics.

who they named Crete.

Greek mythology is incredibly rich with mystery, romance, infidelity, intrigue, betrayal and adventure in abundance. Forget about *Raiders of the Lost Ark* or other films of that genre, they're tame in comparison to the jaw-dropping suspense of Homer's epics. The Greeks certainly knew how to hold the attention of an audience, and all this because of the high culture and civilisation which emerged on Crete well over a thousand years before Greece came onto the stage of European civilisation in the 8th Century BCE.

Crete is the earliest cradle of European civilisation by far and preceded the classical period of Greece by well over a thousand years. The precursors of the Minoan civilisation existed already in the 27th Century BCE, roughly at the same time as the Egyptians were building their first pyramids. Situated in the Mediterranean due south of modern day Greece, Crete was from the earliest times of recorded history a veritable hub of seafaring and thrived on its trade with all lands bordering the Mediterranean. There is no doubt that she was a veritable melting-pot of cross-fertilisation between tribes and nations of the Greek mainland



Snake Goddess - Crete 1600 BCE.

Although the island has been inhabited since 9000 BCE or a bit earlier by a Neolithic culture, the Cretan saga that interests historians and archaeologists the most did not begin in earnest until around 4000 BCE when the first wave of Paleolithic settlers arrived by boat from Europe. From detailed DNA analysis of ancient Minoan remains, it was established by May 2013 with a high level of confidence, that the earliest settlers and most of those that followed after them in later millennia, came from western and northern Europe. The ancient Egyptians referred to the ancient Cretans as Keftiu, roughly translated as 'Sea People.' But modern historians call them Minoans, after their legendary and brutal king, Minos.

There is a land in the wine-dark sea, a fair land with many inhabitants and ninety cities, among them the mighty Knossos where Minos established his rule. The Minoans loved nature and worshipped her in the form of a chthonian Snake Goddess, signifying her bond with the underworld. She is portrayed wearing the fashionable flounced skirt and tight bare breasted bodice of the royal court. In her hands she holds one or several golden



serpents, symbols of wisdom and immortality. Governed by monarchs who were both supreme rulers and high priests, the Cretans developed a flourishing civilisation lasting well into the Bronze Age.

Eruption of Thera

The island of Thera (70 miles north of Crete) erupted in a gigantic volcanic explosion some time between 1630 and 1570 BCE. This may have been only one of several violent explosions, and the one which finally devastated the Cretan civilisation may have occurred up to a 100 years later. At one point however, there is evidence of a monumental tsunami smashing into Cretan shores from the north, causing the demolition of all of Crete's great seafaring cities, as well as open countryside up to 250 metres above sea level. Despite the utter devastation, there is still some archaeological evidence of dwellings on both Thera and Crete from before that final catastrophic eruption. Some believe the catastrophe formed the basis of Plato's much later account of the sinking of Atlantis.

"Then listen Socrates to a strange tale, which is however certainly true. Histories tell of a mighty power, an island situated in front of the straits which you call the Columns of Heracles.

"Now in the island there was a great and wonderful empire which had rule over the whole island and several others, as well as over parts of the continent. But there occurred violent earthquakes and floods, and in a single day and night of rain, the island disappeared, sunk beneath the sea."

With the destruction of the Minoan civilisation,



Pithoi storage jars.



Minoan Crete.

Crete was left desolate, its accomplishments lost to the world. As Crete's ancient written language is still indecipherable today, only legends carried to the Greek mainland by survivors remained to tell posterity of Crete's past glory and greatness. In 1900, the British archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans began his excavations at the mound of Kephala, situated in a narrow valley near Knossos, the heart of the Cretan civilisation and the capital city of King Minos.

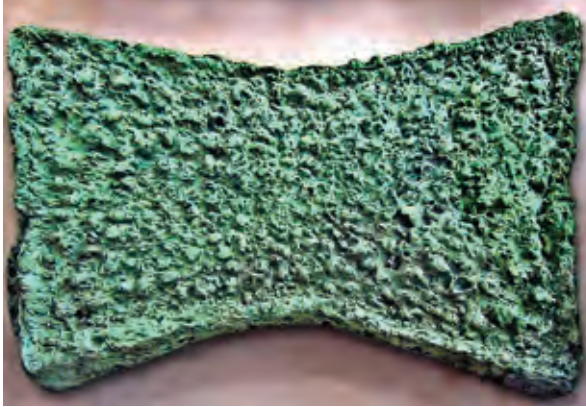
Six years prior to this, while exploring the cave of Psychro on Mount Dicte, 35 miles to the east, Evans had found some small polished stones with strange hieroglyphic markings cut into them. Upon close examination they proved to be ancient signature seals. Coupled with an earlier find of huge pithoi storage jars for olive oil or wine near the port of Herakleion, these stones furnished unmistakable evidence that the mythological stories of a vanished Cretan civilisation were based on prehistoric fact.

Evans recalled that having been wounded by Eros' arrows, the legendary Aphrodite hastened to these sacred slopes to gather the medicinal healing herb, *dictamnus*. Here too, on the altar at the cave's entrance, King Minos made sacrificial offerings every nine years, in conformance to the laws. And it was here that the great god Zeus in remote antiquity had been born.

Ancient Creation Myth

Soon after the formation of the world, Gaia (mother-earth) gave birth to the twelve Titans (nature's furies). With their father, Uranus (the overhanging heavens), they ruled the universe. One of them, Cronus (infinite time), married his sister, Rhea (mother-nature), and seized control of the world by murdering Uranus, whose blood fell to earth and mixed with the blood of humans. Fearing he would suffer a similar fate, Cronus swallowed each of





Minoan Copper Ingot.

his children as they were born. However, Rhea secretly hid their sixth child Zeus in the Dictaeon Cave overlooking the Plain of Messara on the Island of Crete. When Cronus demanded the child, Rhea shrewdly concealed a rock in swaddling clothes and handed it to him. He immediately swallowed it: Zeus was saved, Cronus was satisfied.

Upon reaching manhood, Zeus persuaded Gaia to give Cronus a mustard-and-salt potion that made him disgorge his five children, as well as the rock he had mistaken for Zeus as an infant. With the aid of his freed brothers and sisters, Zeus overthrew Cronus and the rest of the Titans in a fierce battle that made the earth tremble and the rivers boil. Following their defeat, the Titans were banished to Tartarus, the Greek underworld, and Zeus, now king of the gods, established his sanctuary on Mount Olympus. The rock which Cronus had mistaken for the infant Zeus fell on the high slopes of Mount Parnassus in

Greece, marking the centre of the earth. This spot Zeus named Delphi and appointed a priest called Python to guard it.

In this creation story, the Titans personify the chaotic forces that shaped the earth, and Uranus, Cronus and Rhea typify the life sustaining elements of the universe. The swallowing up of the children by Cronus and the rock which Cronus ate, believing it to be the infant Zeus, may signify the disappearance of the various Stone Age cultures, while the birth of Zeus signals the appearance on Crete of the first Greek settlers. The Greek underworld of Tartarus perhaps symbolises the buried cities of Crete, buried by the great tsunamis of Thera.

The battle of the gods represents the end of nature worship, and the establishment of Zeus on Mount Olympus symbolises the lofty ambitions of an evolving people. The setting up of the rock or *omphalion* (little navel) at Delphi suggests an umbilical link between Crete and Greece. This rock may still be seen by anyone who is fortunate enough to visit the sacred slopes upon which it rests.

A Lost Civilisation

After the accumulated mass of rubble from the site at Knossos was cleared, an immense multistoried complex of buildings, containing over 1,000 rooms joined by corridors, passages, staircases, arcades, and wide courts, emerged from the depths of the earth. Evans gazed in awe upon spacious storehouses, workshops, huge drainage conduits, and walls decorated with multicoloured frescoes.



Palace of Minos





Reconstructed Knossos Throne Room of King Minos.



Fresco from the Queen's Room.

He was positive that this maze of rooms and passages in which anyone could get lost, was the mysterious Labyrinth of the Minotaur that was built under the king's palace.

To ensure a successful harvest, Minos appealed to Poseidon (god of the sea) to send him a bull he could sacrifice. The animal sent by Poseidon was so handsome that Minos kept it in his herd and sacrificed another in its place. The wrathful Poseidon caused Pasiphae, the wife of Minos, to bear a son who was half-bull and half-man. And so was born the monstrous Minotaur. The sorrowful Minos and Daedalus, a skilled architect and inventor, constructed an underground maze of dark rooms and inescapable passages into which he confined the perfidious queen and her unnatural offspring.

Two Different Languages

During his excavations, Evans' first major discovery was a wooden box containing a number of clay tablets bearing pictographic characters. Eventually he realised that there were two different alphabets. One, which archaeologists have designated 'Linear B' and which contains 187 different characters, is regarded as a form of early Mycenaean Greek

The wrathful Poseidon caused Pasiphae, the wife of Minos, to bear a son who was half-bull and half-man. And so was born the monstrous Minotaur.

from the 15th Century BCE, and is known to be an early form of Ancient Greek. Linear B was finally deciphered towards the end of the Second World War.

The other alphabet is much older, and clearly belongs to Cretans of a much older era, possibly as far back as archaeological digs have taken us to date, around the 27th Century BCE. It is known as 'Linear A' and remains undeciphered. This, it is believed, is the

original language of the legendary king Minos himself, the first Minoan.

It is not known how the Linear B tablets arrived at Knossos, but it is likely they came with the Mycenaean from mainland Greece when they occupied Crete in the 15th Century BCE and presumably dethroned the Minoan king, replacing him with their own ruler. As the new king and his native subjects from Crete spoke different languages, it was perhaps decided to abandon the old Linear A alphabet in favour of the Mycenaean Linear B, though continue writing in the Minoan language but using Linear B. In the process, the original Linear A script was forgotten or deemed dispensable. This situation is understandable when we remember that although the Roman alphabet is common to many countries, the manner in which the letters are grouped comes from many different languages.

The Argonauts

Jason and his band of Argonauts sailed in search of the Golden Fleece. After many adventures they reached the land of Crete. Daedalus had built a giant bronze humanoid or robot called Talos who circled Crete thrice per day in search of pirates and invaders, spouting fire and hurling huge boulders at approaching ships, sinking them before they could reach the shore. His sole purpose was to protect Europa and her island Crete. The reference to fire and boulders

hurling through the sky no doubt came from the various volcanoes that the ancient Cretans were aware of from parts of the Mediterranean, not least of all being perhaps Thera, a mere 70 miles away, and certainly within clear sight during an angry eruption.

Through the use of guile, a small detachment of Jason's followers were permitted to land safely on Crete. They offered Talos a drink from the cup that contained





Fresco from the Queen's Room.

the *Wine of Immortality*. As Talos threw back his head to drain the cup, *Poeas*, the smallest of the Argonauts, pulled a bronze pin from the metal man's heel and released the *ichor* or immortal body fluid that animated him; for self-respecting robots of the broad screen we'd probably call it oil nowadays! As his life-force gushed forth, Talos toppled over and fell into the sea. Jason and his Argonauts swarmed ashore and were lavishly entertained at the court of king Minos.

Of all the chambers that Evans uncovered, the most intriguing was the Throne Room. Set in the centre of a long russet, beige and green wall, stands a curlicue high-backed alabaster chair with a hollowed-out seat shaped to fit the body of presumably a king, maybe king Minos himself. Flanking it on either side is a long row of alabaster benches. Decorating the wall above the throne are brightly painted red and blue frescoes depicting wingless griffins, mythical creatures with bodies of lions and heads of eagles, symbolising political authority. The eagle's head symbolised spiritual

authority, and the long serpentine tail represented power over the subterranean world. Evans was elated by this discovery, for he had unearthed the oldest European throne known to history.

A stone-lined pit below the Throne Room was dubbed the *lustral basin* by Evans, as he believed it was used for religious purposes, a prototype of the much later rite which came to be known as baptism. Broken oil jars, overturned ceremonial vessels, and other disturbances in the room suggested that at the time the palace was destroyed, a purification ceremony was interrupted by a brutal catastrophe. Throughout the palace, brilliantly hued frescoes decorate almost every chamber, emphasising a civilisation at the peak of its power and sophistication.

On a column in the so-called 'Queen's apartments', curly-haired, long-skirted dancing girls entertain, while schools of dolphins leap gracefully along walls highlighted by light blue ornamentation. On the staircase leading to the southwest portico, slim-waisted youths, with long curling side-locks hanging over their shoulders (reminiscent of the much later Hebrew tradition of wearing side locks), pour sweet nectar from slender triangular-shaped jars. Nearby,

The eagle's head symbolised spiritual authority, and the long serpentine tail represented power over the subterranean world.

a tall, slim, muscular priest-king, wearing a swallow-tail loincloth, a *fleur-de-lis* necklace, and a crown topped with blue and gold peacock plumes, demands obeisance. Other frescoed scenes depict the lively gaiety of family and social life: colourful birds, flowers, fish and beautiful women in charming poses. Not one fresco depicts war, bloodshed or prisoners, as is so predominant in Egypt or Assyria.

The Earth-Shaker

The 'cult of the bull', symbolising strength and fertility, flourished in Crete. Adorning one wall of the ceremonial gateway is a bas-relief of the head of a raging, snorting bull, and Evans found numerous statues and relics relating to this animal. Regarded as the 'earth-shaker' because it was believed earthquakes were caused by a huge bull that shook the earth on its horns, the bull was included among the underground deities. Homer alludes to this in the *Iliad* with the statement: "*In Bulls does the Earth Shaker delight.*"

Once each year, a festival was held in the royal arena to select the strongest and most virile bull to serve as the legendary Minotaur. A fascinating fresco, found near the Throne Room, shows two maidens and a youth engaged in the sport of bull-leaping, a favourite Minoan spectacle



Death of Talos - 4th Century BCE.





Fresco, found near the Throne Room, shows two maidens and a youth engaged in the sport of bull-leaping.

in which teams of youths and maidens competed against each other in feats of acrobatic skill. One girl is grasping the horns of an infuriated charging bull, forcing its head down as the youth somersaults over its back. Behind the animal, the other girl stands poised, ready to catch the leaper as he lands. Although no harm ever came to the bulls that took part in the contest, there is no doubt that the contestants must have suffered many casualties and fatalities from the sharp horns of the raging animals.

Anxious to prove his manliness, Androgeus, son of Minos, entered the games at Athens. He was victorious in every event and earned the envy of his Greek hosts. Minos was proud of him. Then, tragedy struck! In the company of several Greek noblemen, Androgeus was slain by the white bull of Marathon. "An accident" claimed the Greek King Aegeus. "Treachery" charged Minos, who then besieged the city of Athens and demanded a tribute of seven youths and seven maidens to be sacrificed to the Minotaur every nine years.

Theseus, son of Aegeus, offered himself as a martyr. He entered the labyrinth and encountered the Minotaur. At the sight of so fearsome a beast, with a dull-yellow leathery human body and the neck and head of a bull, he shrank back. The bellowing creature charged. Theseus sprang aside. The maddened monster charged again and again, until at last it began to weaken. Theseus seized it by the horns and agilely leaped upon its shoulders. Using the

Minotaur's horns for leverage, he forced the bullish head back until, with a sharp crack, the neck snapped. Then Theseus found his way out of the labyrinth by means of a magic string which he had obtained from Ariadne, the daughter of Minos, who had fallen in love with him.

Evans knew that a tremendous task lay ahead, but he never realised that he would be digging on the same site for over 25 years.

As more and more structural remnants emerged from the sands of antiquity, Evans realised that it was not just a palace he had discovered, but the marvels of a lost civilisation. Buried just a few feet under the earth was the ghost of an ancient culture that included townhouse architecture, terracotta plumbing, water-fed toilets, registered trademarks, written archives, and a calendar based on astronomical observations.

Evans knew that a tremendous task lay ahead, but he never realised that he would be digging on the same site for over 25 years. In his enthusiasm he restored many deteriorating structures and frescoes to their original grandeur, something modern archaeologists would cringe at today. But it brought to light a mighty civilisation that shaped the destiny of the western world more than any other influence, including I believe, that of Egypt.



Amphora with Theseus slaying the Minotaur - 460 BCE.



Commitment

Going from *I can to I have*

by Shirley Elsbey



NEW YEAR Resolutions season is past and the chances are, if you were optimistic enough to make any, they are now in the same state as the midnight fireworks of December 31st mere damp squibs and distant memories of a glorious but fleeting light show. One American study shows that a paltry 8% of people who resolve to change at New Year

actually do it, but the rest are still hauling their bad habits around with the added weight of feeling guilty.

Many a sage person has come to believe that the chief difference between success and failure is commitment. Commitment is a firm, fixed, unshakable determination to do whatever is decided. The 'whatever' can be anything from the trivial to the momentous, from writing a letter to





Commitment can be anything from the trivial to the momentous, from writing a letter to achieving enlightenment.

achieving enlightenment. It can be building a wall or living a dream, finding a fitness buddy or seeking a soul mate.

Commitment brooks no failure and accepts no excuses. It doesn't accommodate half measures and it doesn't leave the door open to intruders who would thwart the cause. Commitment is about taking one step after another all the way to journey's end, right through the speed traps and all diversions. As comedian Josh Billings put it a long time ago: *"Be like a postage stamp. Stick to one thing until you get there."*

When is commitment not commitment? When you're dithering about in two minds! Doubt is the big dream killer. You like the sound of the ultimate goal, the amazing career, the Tibetan trek, the wonderful, loving, life partnership and so forth, but you harbour misgivings about how much work, worry and hard-earned rearies it will take to achieve it; and your resolve is duly diluted in proportion to the anticipated hardships.

It doesn't accommodate half measures and it doesn't leave the door open to intruders who would thwart the cause.

The doubt most frequently fatal to the dream is the one which wonders whether the goal is even possible. If that kind of doubt takes hold, it sucks the juice of sustainability right out of the fledgling dream and it will never take flight. Commitment requires unmitigated certainty that the desired end can indeed be reached, that it is indeed desirable and that the rewards will make the effort worthwhile. Only then does the whole human gamut of physical, psychic and spiritual faculties mesh into an unstoppable force dedicated to the purpose.

The German poet/politician Johann Wolfgang von Goethe is often attributed with saying: *"There is one elementary truth that ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favour all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamed would have come his way. Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it."*

Of course, the chances of success rise considerably if you are a devoted seeker of spiritual enlightenment, especially if you practise the exercises that come with any system of spiritual development. The Rosicrucian Order assists its members to hone their skills in this area, something which is invaluable to everyone, whether they consider themselves on a spiritual path or not. Mental disciplines such as concentration, contemplation, logic and reason, memory strengthening and autosuggestion, are all powerful aids to positive thinking and living. But the indispensable tool to bring to bear if you really want to achieve something worthwhile, is harnessing a single-mindedness of commitment to something.

Mastin Kipp, an entrepreneur who forged success in the social media, is quoted in Rhonda Byrne's recent book *Hero* as saying: *"If you have a dream, don't make a Plan B. If you have a Plan B you're going to end up at Plan B. You need to be all in on Plan A. All your love, all your faith, all your energy, all your determination."* He is so right; little of any value is achieved with a half-hearted approach.



In 207 CE, the Chinese military leader Xiang Lu reputedly launched an attack on the rival Qin army, and after crossing a river to attack, ordered his troops to destroy their boats and all but three days of rations, leaving them no option but to prevail against the vastly larger opposition force or die trying. They went on to achieve a notable victory. We are all familiar with the concept of burning our bridges behind us. It's often prefixed by the imperative *don't*, but actually it's certainly one way of ensuring that the only way is forward and if the intention is to get where you want to go, it's one way of ensuring that you don't back out for the sake of faint heartedness.

Too often, people listen to others rubbish their ideas or washing them with a tidal wave of warnings about why they're unworkable, ill-advised, pie-in-the-sky or plain stupid. Some of the world's most successful companies and inventions were brought into being by people who, thankfully, ignored the naysayers and went ahead anyway, including FedEx, radios, telephones and computers. Obviously one needs to apply some common sense and realism before setting out on a grand scheme, but numerous people have made their visions come true even when all the technology and evidence of the day said it couldn't be done and they can all bear witness to the virtue of forging ahead anyway.

Another factor which often gets in the way of a good idea is procrastination, putting off what needs to be done to bring it to fruition by allowing yourself to be diverted into other tasks, worthy or not. Commitment means you'll do what needs to be done regardless of other duties, other people and other possibilities which crop up. Not many of us enjoy the luxury of 24 hours a day to spend entirely on

our chosen mission. But actually, most people can work toward their goals quite comfortably alongside seeing to the necessities and other considerations of day-to-day living, including carrying out domestic chores spending time with family and friends and dealing with routine responsibilities. Many people, not all of them superheroes, manage to do all that and work towards several goals simultaneously, revelling in the grand variety of it all.

Yet another foe which often pits itself against the sincere resolutionist is the occurrence of the unforeseen obstacle. This is the googly which can be bowled by no less an adversary than life itself, the drop-everything-and-deal-with-this eventuality which requires a switch in priorities, perhaps from self-development to someone else's pressing interests. It's a genuine emergency like having to deal with fire or flood (much of that lately), take care of property matters or distressed relatives in the case of bereavement, or cope with redundancy, trauma or any number of other circumstances which can arise without warning. In these cases it may be the decent thing or feel like the only thing to do to drop the dream, at least for a while, although commitment will ensure that it is only set aside for a time, perhaps nurtured with enough to keep it going for a while and not abandoned altogether. Even in such situations, true commitment means that nothing and nobody will change the 'I do' for 'Sorry, I can't'.

New Year Resolutions are a January tradition in my part of the world, and a time honoured, fine one at that. They concentrate the mind, invigorate the soul and give us a map by which to plan our route and mark our progress, even if we sometimes deviate from the main roads. Personally I like to cross-match several across all spheres of life, from work to my spiritual pursuits, although it has to be said there's more movement along some than others, and a few remain stubbornly stuck.

When commitment is not all it was envisaged to be, January can be a dismal time at which to strike out anew, something to do with long, dark nights and dreary weather. For those who suffer from SADOS (Seasonal Affective Drop Out Syndrome) there is a remedy only a short distance down the calendar as in the spring equinox, and we're almost there!

This year on 20th March, the equinox which marks the Rosicrucian New Year, among other things, is an excellent time to make resolutions. Spring after all, is the time of resurgence in nature, of trees re-growing their foliage, milder weather setting in and, especially warming for Aries babies like myself, marking our birthdays, the parallel onset of new natural cycles. It's never too late to rescue a good resolution, but what better time could there be to pen those good intentions afresh and set about making them manifest with that real and magical power of commitment?



Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.



Find the Gap *by Amelia*



PLEASE MIND THE GAP”, we hear it every time we use the London Underground. And of course we know what gap’s being referred to. It’s pretty specific, the gap between the train and the platform, and you don’t want to get your foot in it ever. There exists another sort of gap though, one that isn’t a ‘something’ like the gaps on the London Underground, but the very opposite of everything we know.

Have you ever noticed those gaps of silence lying

between the words we speak or hear? Or the blank spaces between the words we write or read? They’re ever so brief, but they’re there, and there are literally millions of them that we’re completely unaware of. They’re like... nothing! We may be subliminally aware of their existence but they’re merely surplus to needs, a bit like ignoring negative numbers because they can’t be seen in the same way that positive numbers can be tangibly ‘seen’ through the physical objects we count or subconsciously associate with natural numbers.



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

But I must tell you a little secret: the gaps between words are in fact very important, often more important than those 'wordy' passages of information we hand out unasked for, or receive without being asked to receive. The true essence of spoken, written and thought words has to a large extent lost its original spiritual, almost 'magical' content; for our lives have become far too dominated by words, or more generally by information. We can view words, or information, as coming in three flavours...

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

A Case of the Mumbles

It's quite surprising how many people go about their daily tasks either mumbling to themselves some imaginary

conversation they're having with someone or thinking the conversation through, blow by blow, and becoming quite emotionally agitated because of it. And so often it concerns an argument, how right one side is and how wrong the other is.

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

Far greater amounts of information must be processed by us than our distant ancestors had to receive and make head or tail of.

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





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

then, but frankly nowhere near as much as is available to choose from today.

Nowadays we regrettably reach over for the remote and switch on the TV to watch some rubbish, or with a push of a button fire up the PC to do a bit of catching up with emails or browse the web, perhaps listening to a few interesting though non-essential podcasts in the process. The possibilities are much wider, and the amount of information we have to process and make sense of is consequently hugely greater. Because of the accelerating pace at which information comes at us, some of us are regularly overloaded, regularly on the verge of desperation, just yearning to 'stop the world and get off.' Without a doubt it has become more and more difficult with each passing year to find that 'quiet space-within' where we can rejuvenate ourselves, sweep out our mental cobwebs, eliminate our mental addictions, and find the spiritual source of what we really are. That space-within, or what I prefer to call the 'inner silence' or the 'silence of the soul', is what I mean when I speak of the 'silent gaps between words.'

Words: Bits of Information

I know, technically I should be saying instead those silent gaps between 'bits of information', but it doesn't quite carry the same understanding does it? I'm sure you know what I mean though..., you wouldn't be reading this magazine if you didn't..., but just to hammer the point home, the gaps of silence are not 'nothing'; they are like the negative numbers mentioned earlier, 'things' that we can't really visualise, even though we know they're there; 'things' that are useful, and yet completely and utterly different in nature to the 'words between the gaps', namely the information conveyed by the words. The gaps between

bits of information are not like information itself. There is no quality in those gaps, those periods of 'inner silence' that even remotely resemble the information we receive through words. Yet the gaps are crucial to our well-being, indeed crucial at times even to our survival.

The gaps are in fact the very source of the words we use, or abuse, and hence the source of the information we receive or give out. In earlier times, when granddad's granddad was young, and much before that too, life was a lot more sedate. Fewer deadlines and distractions to bother with, more time to just 'sit and stare', allowing the mind to process things silently as time passed by; the sort of mental tidying up that we have to rely on more and more nowadays from our sleeping hours rather than our leisure time,

because we have so much less leisure time than before. Although for our ancestors there were of course terrible things happening just as there are today, things like wars, pestilence, hunger, the usual, I'm sure it was nevertheless easier most of the time to find the human centre of silence, than it is in our current 24-hour nonstop society.

It's 2014 - Just Accept It!

But there I go again, complaining when I should be happy and grateful instead that it's 2014 at last. I have all the comforts and conveniences of living in an 'advanced' society, so why harp back to the 'good old days' when they're actually here in the present. Why should the distant past be viewed so positively and romantically and the present seem so bland and ordinary? Granddad's

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

granddad, two hundred years ago may have had more opportunity and time to find those moments of inner silence, but it may not have been any easier for him to find them than it is for us today. Inner silence has undoubtedly in all eras been a vexing and difficult challenge, and maybe, just maybe, it is today precisely *because* of the buzzing, constant noise and activity we have to live with, that we really appreciate the rare moments we get to enter true inner silence.

So granddad's granddad and his friends probably didn't even know what the lack of time to enter the silence meant, whereas we know it now, and it really pains us that we can't or don't do more about it. So, let's be grateful for the present noisy, busy, bustling, challenging

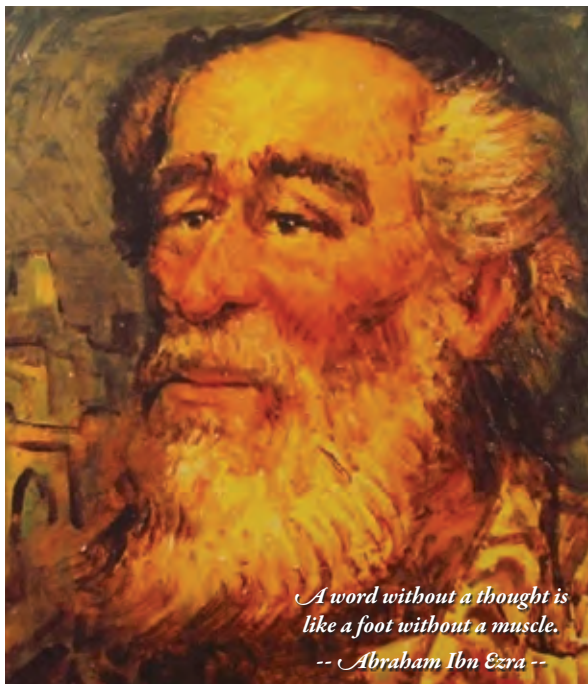


world, and accept it as it is. Each period in history had its particular challenges, and ours is to learn to identify and productively use the gaps of silence between words. There are precious few other worthwhile 'gaps' are there? I would say there are none.

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

So Where Are The Gaps?

Okay, so how do we find those precious gaps, and more importantly, how do we start using them productively?



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

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

Walter de la Mare said: "*Until we learn the use of living words, we shall continue to be waxworks of words by gramophone.*" Although the quote dates back to the days of wax covered gramophone cylinders, the principle is the same today as it was a hundred years ago: Words must

**Words must be spoken clearly, simply, sincerely,
and above all taking into account the audience
and current circumstances.**

be spoken clearly, simply, sincerely, and above all taking into account the audience and current circumstances. Only when we get that intangible psychic connection with our listeners do we get across the importance of our message. Far better a live rendition than a staged, pre-recorded message on a stuffy old wax covered gramophone cylinder. A recording can never equal the life, vibrancy and psychic connection of the actual real-time, spoken word. And nothing can prepare us for the 'dynamic' presence of those gaps in the information we encounter when we manage to 'enter the silence', even if for only the briefest of moments.

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

In general terms, finding the gaps entails, like so many other things in life, a bit of training. First of all we need to





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

Word Environment

In the universe of verbal communication, so crucially important to us, we are literally bombarded almost constantly by a veritable deluge of words coming from all directions, all competing for our attention. The media, both printed and electronic, are a good example. The spoken word is currently being replaced by electronic communications on Twitter and Facebook for example where trivial one-liners 'shot from the hip' so to speak are the rule rather than the exception; but also where one-liners of jaw-dropping beauty occasionally emerge. Words then, even in our computer dependant age with its spectacular visual animations, are still our primary source of communication and knowledge, and are, as with

everything else, used for both good and ill. Some of those words and sentences come from the gaps, some don't.

So with words, all we need do is ensure that they come from the gaps of silence as often as possible if we are to use them properly and maintain harmony in our lives. Text-speak from mobile phones has become an exceedingly popular form of communication, but one devoid of true human contact to such an extent that for some it has resulted in serious psychoses and deep loneliness. As one friend put it: *"paper spaghetti, not true spaghetti!"*

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

The spoken word is currently being replaced by electronic communications on Twitter and Facebook.

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



have a habit of slipping off the tongue, or keyboard, a lot faster than you think.

Hone your ability to use the silence between your outpourings of words. The silent gaps between words are as important as the wordy parts, in fact more important at times. A heightened awareness of the potential power of silence is essential for good delivery of words. A carefully sculpted and attentive use

“Before you are born,” he said, “you are given a certain amount of words to use in your lifetime, like a cosmic word bank, a word account.”

of words assists us on many levels, not only by making us more productive, but by making us understand things more rationally, as they *actually* are rather than as we may formerly have *believed* them to be. Words delivered well, precisely, economically and only when necessary, conserves the mental effort involved in speech or writing. And through our periods of silence we increase our potential to live harmonious, useful lives. The power of silence permits us, when we must speak or write, to benefit both ourselves and many others who hear us or read our words. I would like to illustrate this with an event that the author of an article I once read revealed from his childhood, illustrating the necessity of conserving the energy of words:-

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

“This statement had a great impression on me and probably affected me so much that I unconsciously chose my artistic lifework to be in the ‘theatre of silence’. It moulded my character, it calmed me down, it made me think before I spoke. And the knowledge imparted to me by the carefully chosen

words of my grandfather is for me today an ancient knowledge, one found at the core of all worthwhile religions and philosophies.”

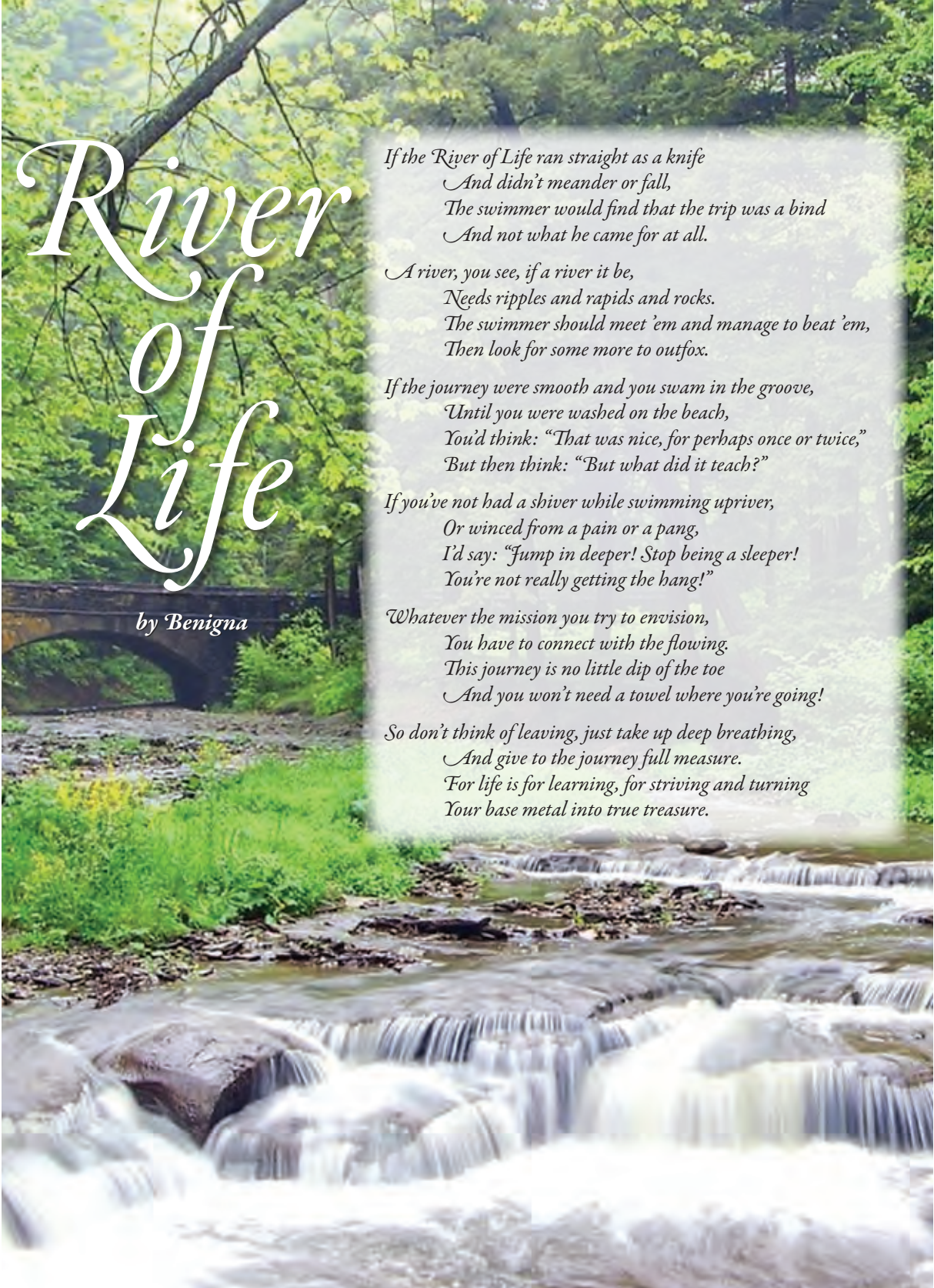
Thoughts for Contemplation

From a number of sources, some contemporary, though most from old literature hoary with age, here are a few thoughts for you to contemplate:-

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

So, don’t just “*mind the gap*”, find the gap!





River of Life

by Benigna

*If the River of Life ran straight as a knife
And didn't meander or fall,
The swimmer would find that the trip was a bind
And not what he came for at all.*

*A river, you see, if a river it be,
Needs ripples and rapids and rocks.
The swimmer should meet 'em and manage to beat 'em,
Then look for some more to outfox.*

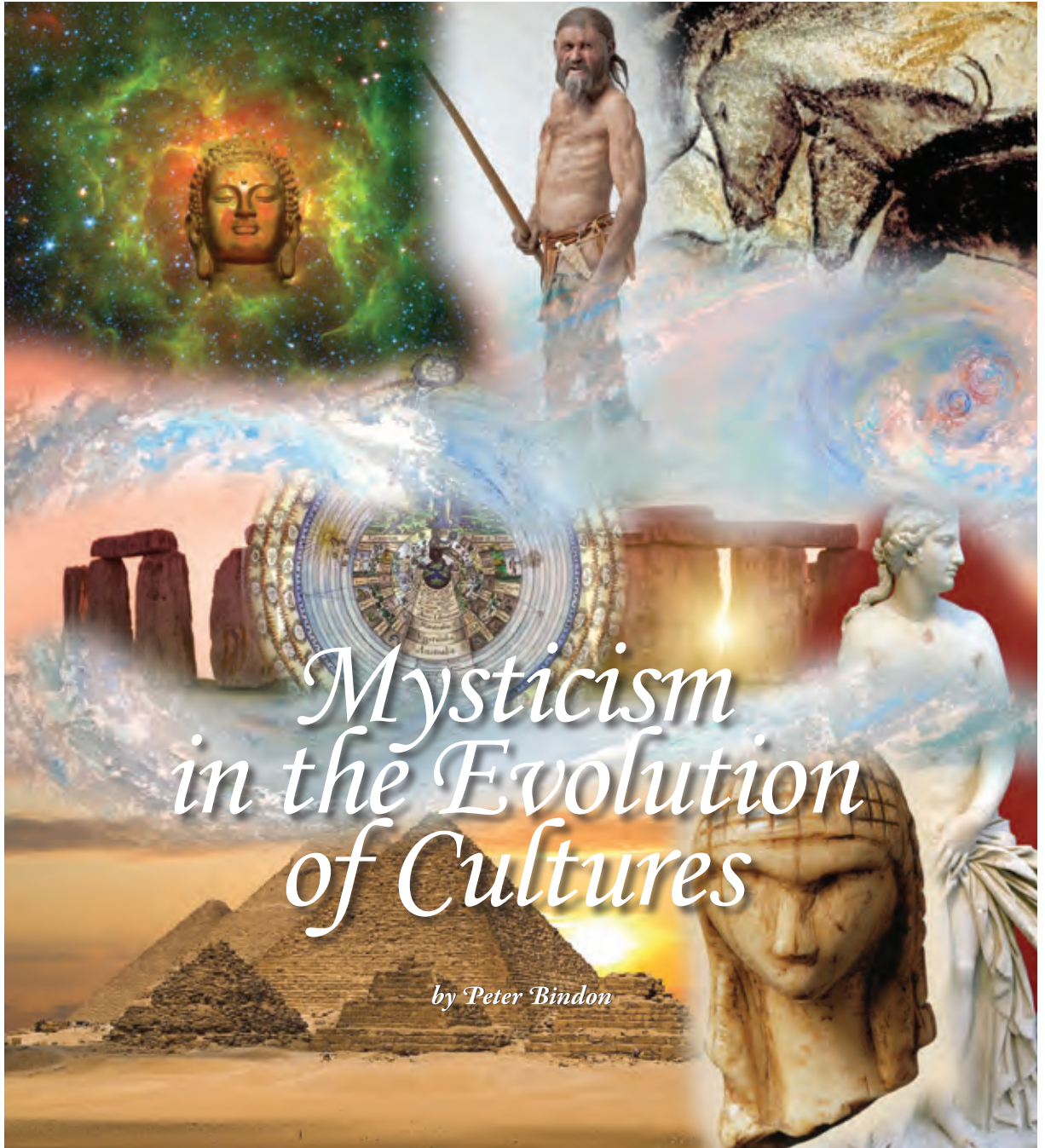
*If the journey were smooth and you swam in the groove,
Until you were washed on the beach,
You'd think: "That was nice, for perhaps once or twice,"
But then think: "But what did it teach?"*

*If you've not had a shiver while swimming upriver,
Or winced from a pain or a pang,
I'd say: "Jump in deeper! Stop being a sleeper!
You're not really getting the hang!"*

*Whatever the mission you try to envision,
You have to connect with the flowing.
This journey is no little dip of the toe
And you won't need a towel where you're going!*

*So don't think of leaving, just take up deep breathing,
And give to the journey full measure.
For life is for learning, for striving and turning
Your base metal into true treasure.*





Mysticism in the Evolution of Cultures

by Peter Bindon

ONE OF THE costs we have had to bear as a result of the all-too-fast technological development which followed on from the scientific and industrial revolutions, is the inexorable loss of our links with the earth, and more importantly, our alienation from our spiritual source.

To most of us, and perhaps in every age, progress is looked upon as synonymous with the improvement of material conditions. A civilisation that can produce

laser eye surgery, space travellers, super-fast railways, and atomic fusion is generally regarded as being advanced. But the enlightened few of every period in history have always recognised that true civilisation is something more than mere material development; and that 'something' is spiritualisation. They have recognised that material advancements are only instruments for providing the leisure and opportunity for the development of the spirit. The nearer the human race approaches to the Central



Spirit of the universe, to the Cosmic, the further it will have progressed.

During the rise of materialism, many of the world's cultures deeply repressed or even denied the organic processes that link humans with nature; these processes are birth, reproduction and death. Simultaneously, the spiritual awareness that once provided people with a sense of meaningful belonging to the cosmos was replaced by disbelief in a Cosmic force, or superficial religious activities of decreasing vitality and relevance. Happily, Rosicrucians have maintained their interest in a positive relationship with the Cosmic and are striving to be practical and constructive in offering something to the world that will assist each and every person to advance this spiritual quest. But, you ask, by what mechanism can humankind achieve this goal of advancement?

During the rise of materialism, many of the world's cultures deeply repressed or even denied the organic processes that link humans with nature.

The mechanism that advances civilisation towards spirituality is mysticism, of which Rosicrucians are probably all practitioners. And there are suggestions that outside the Rosicrucian Order an unprecedented renaissance of interest in the psychology of mysticism and the spiritual interrelationships that exist within all beings in the universe are developing among more and more individuals.

What is Mysticism?

So, what is mysticism and what are its origins? The non-theological use of the word 'mystical' in English, meaning "a hidden or secret thing", dates from about 1300 CE and arrives in English from Anglo-French where it is *misterie* (O.Fr. *mistere*). It came into French from the Latin *mysterium*, but its origin was from the Greek *mysterion* meaning "secret rite or doctrine." But mysticism itself is of course much older than this label for it, though it is clear that mysticism implies a relationship to mystery.

Many philosophers refer to mysticism as being either a religious tendency and desire of the human soul towards an intimate union with the Divinity or as a system growing out of such a tendency and desire. These contentions assume that the so-called Divinity, about which they speak, is the absolute and ultimate state of existence. This may or may not be so, but are mysticism and religion inextricably related? I think not. Mystical contemplation and spiritual expression can take place both inside and outside the realm of religious belief and dogma.

Usually a mystical experience is filled with intense feelings and may involve a dialogue or direct encounter with 'ultimate reality', what Rosicrucians term 'the Cosmic.' The 'mystery' here is defining the identity of the something or someone greater than human comprehension that has been encountered during the mystical exercise. In the West, it is only in the last 2,000 years or so that mystical experience has come to mean a direct experience of the divine. And since in theory at least Christianity is a religion of love, the Christian 'mystical' experience is spoken of as a 'spiritual marriage.' For myself, I believe that a successful mystical experience may depend less on the particulars of the given occurrence than on what happens because of it.

Mystical experiences are shaped by culture and tradition. Accounts of their experiences provided by mystics are inevitably influenced by the culture in which they live and by their professed religious tradition. In the first case it is because language and linguistic references and expressions are determined by culture, and in the second instance it is because most religions contain the language that is most called upon when referring to the 'ultimate entity' or the infinite.

In fact it is well-nigh impossible to examine mysticism in popular writings without also encountering religion, so intertwined have the two become since the advent of organised religion in the world. So, Western mystics rarely claim that their experience dissolved them into the being of ultimate reality because Western theism insists that human beings never literally become God, or the divine. On the other hand Eastern mystics often describe the ultimate state of their spiritual experience as involving complete physical and sensory union with what we might call 'Cosmic Consciousness.'

All mystical experiences therefore vary somewhat. Each is unique, but the uniqueness does not diminish or negate the claim for transcendence or touching ultimate reality. And this is despite the comment that the mystical



Re-creation of a Neanderthal burial from Shanidar in the Zagros Mountains.



experience itself is in part a function of what the mystic believes can happen. Many mystics say that speech breaks down and is entirely inadequate to describe their state, that silence is more appropriate, and that even silence cannot adequately describe what happens. This dimension of the mystical experience, although ultimately inseparable from the culture and personality of each mystic, transcends or rises above cultures, and applies to Christians as much as to Aboriginal people. And here lies a difficulty.

Looking Back

What prehistoric humans thought can never be known with certainty, for they could not write it down. The materials they left behind them, like tools, weapons, works of art, burials and the rest, can be interpreted in many ways, but even then we may not arrive at the actual interpretation.

At best, material objects comprise a fragmentary record of the many different human groups who have lived in a variety of physical environments over a period of time far longer than that of recorded history. And even after written records begin to appear, because describing spiritual ecstasy is so difficult, we have few documents that can tell us what previous cultures and civilisations thought about this activity.

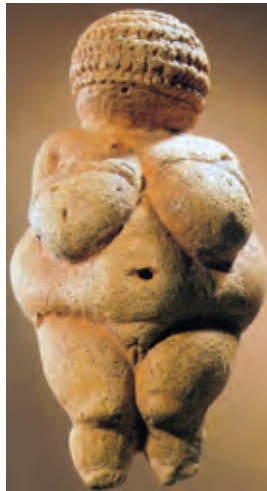
However, some deductions about what our ancestors thought about life and death, the two major concerns they had as we ourselves have, can perhaps be drawn from the burial practices and tools of a group of humans known as Neanderthals. These folk buried their dead with care, indicating their affection for the deceased. They included food and equipment in the graves which suggests they had a belief in an afterworld of some kind, in which the dead were not entirely cut off from the living. It also implies that they understood one factor which distinguishes humans from other animals: an awareness of their own inevitable death. This remains the basis of one of the great mysteries of life. And so, as we do today, they too understood that time passes, and inevitably results in death...; and then...?

In turn, a sense of time implies the concept of order, of events following one another in succession, suggesting that Neanderthals understood the pattern of birth, life and death that underlies human existence: that we are born, live for a time and then die. They must have observed that the same cycle is true of plants and of animals. Perhaps it was this understanding that brought these early humans to the conclusion that behind the order

of nature lay something beyond and above the plants, the animals and even above themselves. After all, the task of the shaman, the person who was perhaps more perceptive or spiritually inclined than others in their group, was to attempt to make contact with that supernatural something that lay beyond human knowledge. We might imagine that these early humans conceived of the supernatural 'something' as a sort of super-human that was in control of the order of nature.

Evidence of some sort of religio-magical cult, dating from about 100,000 BCE, has been found in caves in the European Alps where the skulls of bears had been placed on stone slabs in what looks like a ceremonial arrangement. First, this action suggests that these relics were set apart from the mundane and were considered special in some way. And secondly, it indicates that the cave itself may have been thought of as a sacred place. Does the selection of skulls for this arrangement demonstrate that they thought a creature's head contained the essence of its being? Certainly the intention of the rituals of later bear-hunting peoples was to appease some supernatural power for the killing of a bear, to ensure there would be no decline in the supply of bears for hunting. And so we discover the idea that an animating essence or spirit inhabits all aspects of Nature. The idea that every hill or stream or tree or living thing has a soul is one of the oldest of human beliefs.

People with limited control over their environment are likely to have tried to establish some kind of relationship with their own ancestors, from whom they have inherited such knowledge of the workings of nature as they possess. Their reason for this contact with their ancestors would most likely be to try to gain some control over the powers that give order to Nature. They needed to ensure that food supplies were maintained, that their animals were fruitful and that children were born. No doubt, they also needed to act in some way to appease Nature which sometimes disastrously fails to provide the necessities.



The Venus of Willendorf.

The Upper Paleolithic

In the Upper Palaeolithic period (between about 30,000 to 10,000 BCE), after the arrival on the scene of Homo Sapiens sapiens, as we like to call ourselves, burials become more elaborate and ceremonious, and there is strong evidence of the concern people showed for fertility in the 'Venus figures', small figurines of women, some highly stylised and others comparatively realistic, found in a number



of archaeological contexts across Europe. The swollen pregnant abdomens of many of these figures and their blank, featureless heads suggest that they were not meant to portray particular women but a more abstract idea of 'woman' in general, and especially woman in her role as mother. They may have been worn by women as amulets to ensure fruitfulness and they may have represented a 'Great Mother', the source of all life.

The Upper Palaeolithic is also the time when the magnificent cave art of Europe was produced. If the purpose of this art included a desire to promote fertility among the animal species portrayed, as well as to assist hunting, then we might conclude that the society in which the artists lived, believed in a supernatural order of reality that humans must try to influence in order that they and their quarry are to eat, live and procreate. Perhaps this also implies that these people had ideas of magical symbolism in which a real state of affairs can be influenced in some way through mimicry and simulated situations.

Neanderthals did not wear ornaments, so far as is known, but the later Palaeolithic peoples did. They made necklaces from animal teeth or cowrie shells for instance, and carved bracelets from mammoth tusks. It seems likely that ornaments contained an ingredient of magic, as they have tended to do ever since. The teeth may have carried with them the qualities of the animals from which they came, and in many times and many cultures the cowrie shell has been an emblem of the feminine and fertility.

The Neolithic

The so-called 'Neolithic revolution' which saw the gradual development of the cultivation of crops and breeding of



View of the entrance to Bryn Celli Ddu Neolithic burial site on the Welsh island of Anglesey.

animals, instead of gathering and hunting, originated in Asia in the 9th millennium BCE or earlier, and spread over most of Europe by about 3500 BCE. Our picture now becomes, if anything, even more obscure than before, and the course of the transition from what is known of the Palaeolithic to the religions of societies with written records is not at all clear.

It seems evident that as agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry are gradually established during the Neolithic period, the annual cycle of Nature becomes a dominating factor in human life and a focus of religious and magical attention. Unlike the aggressive hunter, the passive farmer relies more on the slow workings of forces which are still largely beyond human control. The

Unlike the aggressive hunter, the passive farmer relies more on the slow workings of forces which are still largely beyond human control.

perspectives of hunting are relatively short-term and those of farming much longer. The sense of an order behind Nature, of human dependence on it, and of the perils of disorder in the shape of drought, famine, destructive storms, pestilence, may have been strengthened by the longer perspective of farming communities.

There are scattered pieces of evidence confirming that agricultural people worshipped fertility deities. Seedtime and harvest were the two great occasions of the year, and likely to be celebrated with festivals and rites intended to ensure a good crop. And it appears that undertaking ceremonies and performing rituals that would ensure fruitfulness were among the basic concerns of prehistoric humans, and probably represent humanity's earliest religious ceremonies.

The sky also becomes important, because sun, rain and wind affect the growth of crops and because the calendar, which successful agriculture demands, is worked out by reference to events occurring in the sky. Reverence for the sky and its forces may easily have existed long before, though there is no evidence of sky worship in the Palaeolithic. But as we will see, the new emphasis on the sky will bring significant changes to the world.

Most Neolithic societies buried their dead with greater pomp and circumstance than previously, especially those individuals who had been powerful in life. Sometimes, as in megalithic burials in Europe, or pyramid burials in ancient Egypt, constructing the graves involved immense and extravagant toil implying a deep respect for





The Egyptian "Opening of the Mouth" ceremony.

the powers of the dead personage and probably the belief that they influenced the growth of crops from the earth in which they lay buried. Representations of the mother goddess are often found in burial places and she seems clearly connected with the earth.

Humans therefore arrived at a point where they realised they are and always will remain part of a universe. It is a living universe and is animated with what I will call Spirit; and that Spirit lies at the core of existence in the universe. It is a dynamic force which permeates the universe from its centre to its circumference. Each of us has it in ourselves and by it we are being continually acted upon. It burns within us, and we are bathed by its energy. But there are times when this force is peculiarly insistent and urgent within us. And there are times when it presses upon us with urgency from without too. And there are rare occasions when the urge from within and the pressure from without meet and correspond.

Then we have the ecstasy of mystical experience in its fullness as an interaction or connection is established between the individual self and the universal whole and during which the self enters into a new state of being. The most we can guess about what mystical practitioners were enacting or thinking at this point in prehistory is deduced from enigmatic paintings made by the artists of the time in caves and in secluded caverns.

Beginnings of Recorded History

As people began to master new techniques in their material lives, inventions and discoveries were fitted into a religio-magical context, though the people who made these discoveries recorded precious little about their spiritual lives. The discovery of yeast for example, made it possible to bake bread and brew beer, commodities which both had a long history of symbolic connections with the deities and the otherworld. The rise of metallurgy with the development of working in copper, bronze and iron gave



Bronze age necklace mid second millennium BCE.

the smith the uncanny powers of one who was as much magician as craftsman.

The seasonal progression of the agricultural cycles was still disrupted by climatic variability, which less sophisticated people put down to supernatural interference. Although we have some evidence of ceremonies and rituals whose aim was to appease wrathful deities, we know nothing of the spiritual quests of individuals during these chaotic ages.

The advance of towns, states and armies in central Europe, with their male dynasties and priesthoods, tended to diminish the earthly Great Mother's status in

Humans therefore arrived at a point where they realised they are and always will remain part of a universe.

favour of male gods of the sky who came to dominate the civilisations of the ancient world. Egyptian, Greek and Roman stories told of the exploits of the sky-dwelling gods as they created the universe, made humanity, established order, and put down disorder. In far Western Europe the invasions and conquests of warrior peoples, whose deities were gods of the sky, also lessened the influence of the Great Mother.

The Classical World

Although we have little information regarding the attitude of peasants and labourers in ancient Egypt towards mysticism, the fact that they collected many prayers and invocations to be recited over the deceased in his or her coffin or even by the entombed deceased, demonstrates that some of the presumed results of mystical activity were certainly within their understanding.

There is little mysticism in the earliest schools of Greek philosophy, but it becomes important by the time of the philosophical system of Plato. It is especially evident in his theory of the world of ideas, of the origin of the world soul and the human soul, and in his



doctrine of recollection and intuition. The Hellenistic Jewish philosopher from Alexandria, Philo, who lived between 30 BCE and 50 CE, taught that people, by freeing themselves from matter and receiving illumination from the divine, may reach a mystical, ecstatic or prophetic state in which they become absorbed into Divinity. But the most systematic attempt at formulating a philosophical system of a mystical character was that by the Neoplatonic School of Alexandria, especially that of Plotinus, arguably the greatest philosopher-mystic the world has ever known, who lived between 205 and 270 CE.



Page from Plotinus' "Enneads".

In his *Enneads*, Plotinus sets out a system which has as its central idea the concept that there exists a process of ceaseless emanation and out-flowing from the One, the Absolute. He illustrates this concept using metaphors such as the radiation of heat from fire, of cold from snow, fragrance from a flower, or light from the Sun. This theme leads him to the maxim that "good diffuses itself" (*bonum diffusivum sui*), and concludes that entities that have achieved perfection of their own being do not keep that perfection to themselves, but spread it out by generating an external image of their internal activity.

The ultimate goal of human life and of philosophy is to realise the mystical return of the soul to the Divine. Freeing itself from the sensuous world by purification, the human soul ascends by successive steps through the various degrees of the metaphysical order, until it unites itself in communion with the One. Now, I am sure that you recognise some of our present-day Rosicrucian principles in there. It was Plotinus who gave us the image of the Great Chain, used in later times by our own Rosicrucian alchemists and theorists to draw symbolic spherical diagrams of up to twelve concentric spheres representing matter, life, sensation, perception, impulse, images, concepts, logical faculties, creative reason, world soul, nous and the One.

The development of a particularly masculine outlook in cultures occurred over long stretches of time and the details of its advance across the settled world are largely unknown, but there was inexorable continuity in its spread. Admittedly, the Earth Mother of prehistory, in her various local incarnations, did become the ancestress of goddesses of later societies, but it seems that her times were past. It is worth observing that although her world had been uncertain, the new era of the masculine sky gods was no more settled.

Mysticism Today

Essentially mysticism brought religion to the world. But despite perhaps being the carrier of mystical principle and methods, mysticism is not religion, nor as I have already mentioned is it necessarily religious. Mysticism belongs to the core of most religions and many commenced after their founder experienced a powerful and immediate mediate contact with the spiritual essence, their godhead. However, a lesser number of religions were prepared to allow their adherents to establish this kind of contact with the Cosmic for themselves, but rather kept this task firmly in the hands of a priesthood or appointed leaders.

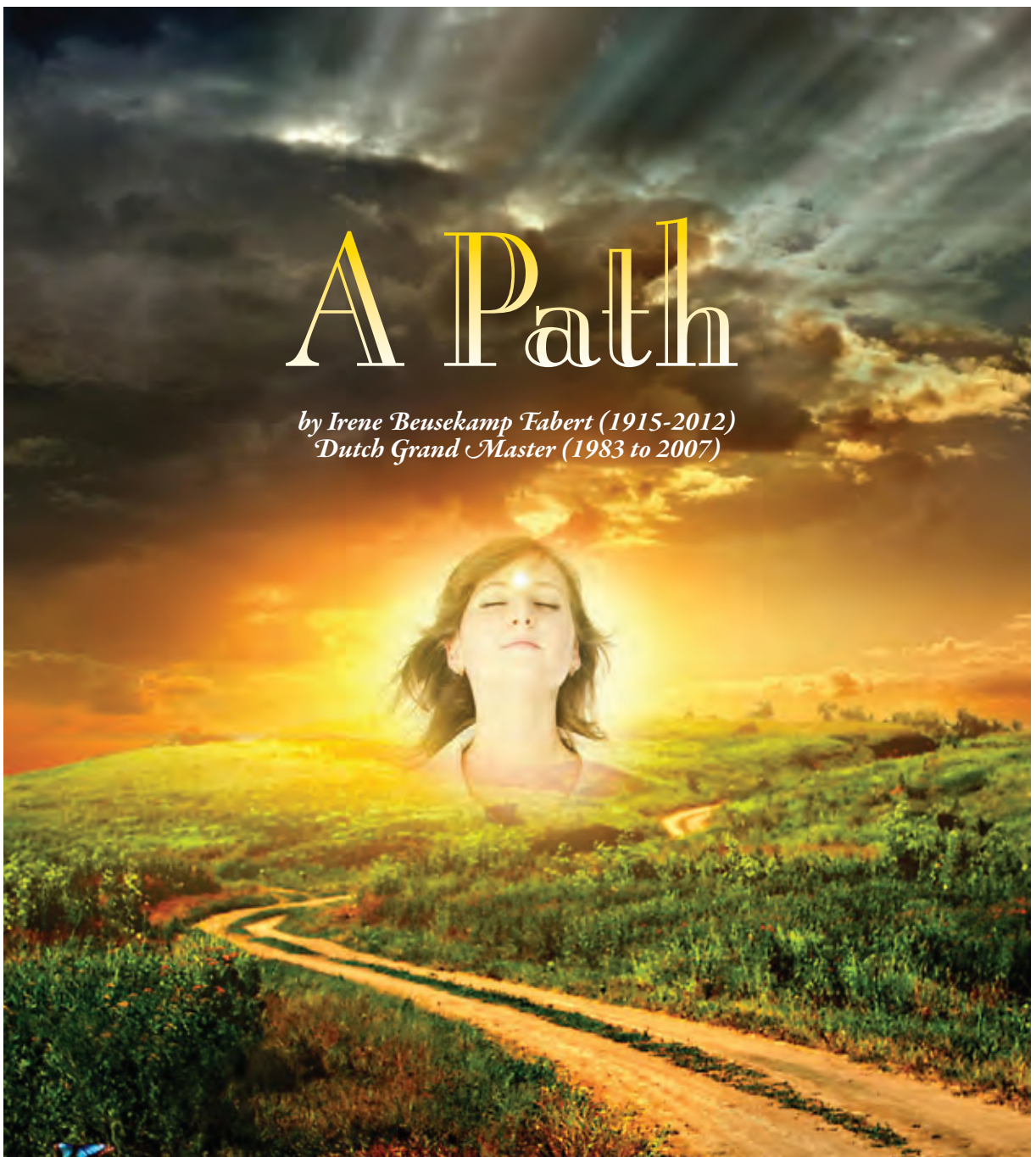
The Cosmic is also commonly called the One, and you and I are, in some sense, that One. This means that the inmost self of humans is identical with the Absolute, with the unchanging power against which the whole changing universe must be seen. One therefore lives not only with one's own life but also with the life of the whole universe. And this 'universal life' is founded in a changeless Being which is at the same time one's own eternity. It was this understanding which made it possible for the poet Tennyson to say that death was "*an almost laughable impossibility*."

These latter are some of the ideas that we have inherited from those cultures that have proceeded through history before us. We carry their heritage. Some of their ideas and concepts have been discarded as humans came to new understandings of how the many parts of this complex universe fit together. Some ideas and concepts remain relatively unchanged. As Rosicrucians we recognise that the final goal of all mystical experience is connection with that divine infinity which lies beyond matter and mind, but which can transform them. The approach to this ultimate state is through the power of discriminating thought and purified emotions and, as Henry More, one of the Cambridge Platonists stressed: "*God reserves His choicest secrets for the purest minds.*"



A Path

by Irene Beusekamp Fabert (1915-2012)
Dutch Grand Master (1983 to 2007)



THESE ARE LONG years that I have been in this world. I was five years old when I went to class for the first time. I learnt, studied, and studied more and more, and now I know so much that I no longer know what I know. And like the French writer Montaigne (1533-1592) I say: *Que sais-je?* What do I know?

The interpreters of Montaigne have for a long time thought that by voicing that rhetorical question he was

expressing his scepticism and disillusionment. He was only a young child when he was speaking Latin fluently. Later he studied philosophy and law, travelled widely and carried out public duties. But it was the phenomenon of 'being human' which increasingly held his interest.

And so it was that he eventually retired to his château where he devoted himself to the study of mankind. Perhaps because he lived alone, he became the object of his own observations which he recorded in his *Essays*. It





Montaigne (1533-1592).

was in silence that he found that which, for him, was the most important: his Inner Self, which he called his 'back shop.' In the form of essays, he produced a large volume of writings about mankind, and yet he professed he never knew who or what it is. "What do I know?" he said. In spite of many years of study, mankind remained for him a mystery. As for possible spiritual experiences in the depths of himself, he always kept silent about them.

My Own Experiences

If you don't mind, I'm now going to revert to my own experiences. Of all that I've learnt, I've acquired a fairly

Adepts on the Path, let me greet you with this eternal affirmation: The Kingdom of Heaven is within you.

extensive knowledge, but that which I really know doesn't come from what I accumulated in my brain, but from the most profound depths of myself, during the short or long moments of pure silence. Those moments where all is quiet in oneself, where it seems we're enveloped by an ethereal veil, and where all of a sudden our Inner Master manifests and confirms what the great Master said so long ago: "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you." The Master, the Inner Master, God. A while back I wrote a meditation of words, of expressions, of phrases that I used to read or that I used to hear, and which became engraved in my heart. Here they are:

Adepts on the Path, let me greet you with this eternal affirmation: The Kingdom of Heaven is within you. The current illusion of mankind is the overestimation of the intellect which has brought so much to us and which has made possible, thanks to some miraculous techniques a total change of our conditions of life. Humanity is under the influence of a technological development which seems unable anymore to come to a standstill. New discoveries

are being achieved in all fields. The universe is revealing its secrets to science and we're wearing out and using up all the treasures and resources of our Mother Earth.

The World is no longer in balance. While the western countries, greedy *To Have* (they no longer know how to conjugate the verb *To Be*) are pushed more and more to acquire totally useless products, the other part of the world suffers from hunger and remains deprived of what's most essential for life. Isn't it about time for us to realise the delusions of our intellectual evolution and commit ourselves to new ways, these ways which are emerging more and more and which from all time the wise men and women of all civilisations pointed out to be in the scope of one science: the science of the soul?

How odd that scholars know details about the tiniest of insects they can't see with the naked eye, yet don't even know the why and how of their own existence? Why do geneticists know so much about plants, animals and humans but don't look into the mystery of their own beings and into the characteristics of their own persona? How is it that mankind can cross the universe in all senses, even land on the Moon, but isn't able to find the path which leads us to ourselves?

"The Kingdom of Heaven is within you." Adepts of the path, permit me to repeat to you this age-old message. It's the message of the boundless smile of the Sphinx which rises up calm and serene on the sands of Egypt. It's the message formulated in different terms by the German mystic of the 13th and 14th centuries, Meister Eckhart: "God is at the centre of Man." St Thomas Aquinas and Jacob Boehme gave expression to the same thing in their copious

writings which aren't always easy to read, but based on genuine experience, an experience which is also possible for mankind in this new age.

Our era is precisely the one where divine values are gaining clarity and where the spiritual life is becoming as significant and real as the material life, the one where



The serene face of the Sphinx of Giza.





Meister Eckhart.

the term 'initiation' again finds its first significance: a beginning, a new beginning. And this is that which must be, since every creature is a part of the universal Spirit which is at the origin of our world, the Spirit where eternal Love, infinite Wisdom and indestructible Peace abides.

Initiation

In the Mystery Schools of the pre-Christian civilisations, initiation was considered an extremely important act. At the end of the ceremonies of the Eleusinian mysteries in ancient Greece, the last words that initiates heard were: *"May Peace be in you"*, after which they resumed their respective paths, souls peaceful and hearts filled with joy. Initiation was for them a profound awakening into that which is genuine. It was the supreme accomplishment of their spiritual life and whoever didn't make it to that experience was not a complete being.

If this interior experience was possible two thousand years before the Common Era, it should be possible two thousand years into the Common Era too. During these four thousand years, the fundamental nature of mankind has not changed, nor their search for themselves..., Adepts of the Path who aspire to meeting the Divine. In their true reality, the one which was and will always be, men and women are spiritual beings even though they live in material bodies. Our senses, which play tricks of all sorts on us, are the reason why we confuse our true Self with our material body. The Divine doesn't surround us only during our earliest infancy, but all through life. We don't know it yet or don't know it any more.

Behind the person we think we are, there is a second person we don't see: our real Self, which existed already before thoughts and desires took possession of us. Behind our body of flesh and blood exists a radiant and sublime conscience. Our true life flows out in the depths of our heart and has no place in the superficial mask of the personality we show to the world. Adept of the Path, you are the heir of a hidden treasure in the deep recesses of

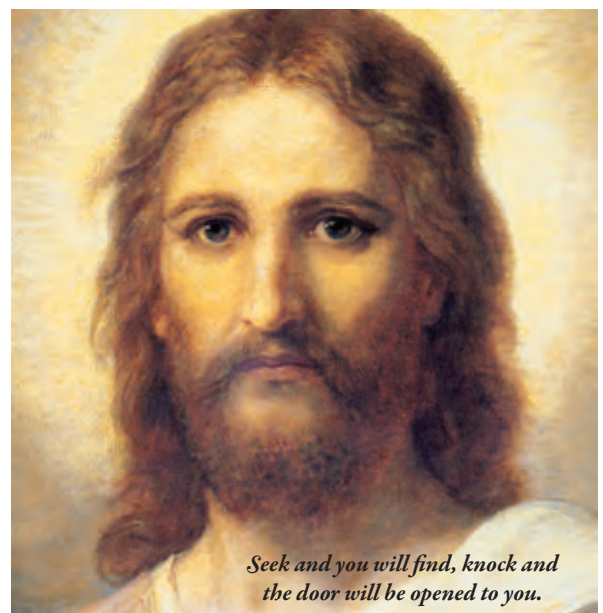
your own nature. The Kingdom of heaven is within you. Those who, secluded in their own silence set out to find themselves, are not dreamers. They are only doing what each one must do at a certain phase of their evolution.

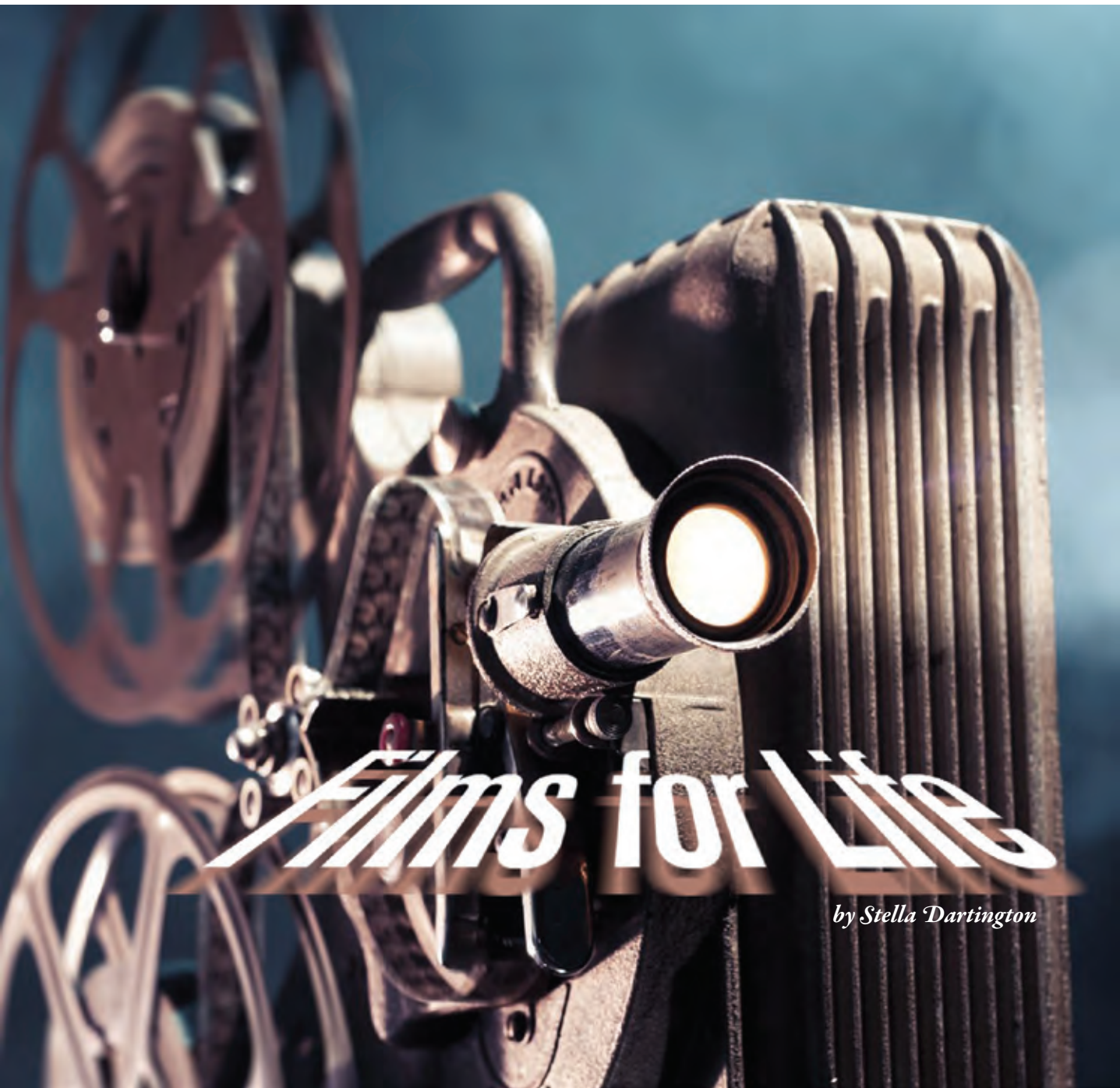
The way may be long or short, but they keep their spiritual eyes wide open and listen to the voice which speaks within them. One day, their great Self will be revealed to them, and they will be on the verge of Eternity. If the door of our soul opens itself for one second, one minute or one hour, the revelation will be complete. Neither bitter suffering nor a heavy burden can destroy this knowledge, a knowledge which cannot be translated into words. Anyone who, at one time, has felt their innermost being to be dissolved and to be merged in the infinite, knows that this cannot be expressed. It's the illumination of the spirit and of the heart, that which is

If this interior experience was possible two thousand years before the Common Era, it should be possible two thousand years into the Common Era too.

the most miraculous in the life of each man and woman.

Look for your Self, find your true Self and you will know the sense of life and the mystery of the universe will be revealed to you. Think about the words of the Master of Galilee: *"Seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you."* Discover that you are one part of an infinite Life which expresses itself in Light and in Love. *"He who knows his own nature, knows Paradise"* said a pupil of Confucius. In other words: *"The Kingdom of Heaven is within you."*





Films for Life

by Stella Dartington

MUCH IS WRITTEN about diet and exercise and its effect on our physical bodies, but just as important is the material we feed our minds. While fitness fiends will doubtless recoil, I'd like to recommend a hefty input of time in front of telly and immersed in books to lift the spirits skyward and coax the soul awake.

The Rosicrucian Order of course offers much to achieve these worthy goals in the form of advice about lifestyle, strong emphasis on meditation and an

inexhaustible supply of uplifting texts in its written teachings, magazines, rituals and discourses. But just as nutritionists steer us toward fresh fruit and veg, and personal trainers recommend aerobic work-outs, this article advocates frequent extra helpings of input from the worlds of film and literature to boost the emotional immune system against modern maladies like depression and downheartedness.

What is recommended is not a focus on game shows, soaps, reality contests and murder



investigation series, although popularity proves that they have their place. As for the news, nothing sends the energy plummeting quite so quickly as the 24/7 round of misery currently majoring on slaughter in Syria and Central Africa, alleged sex crimes by our entertainment icons, phone hacking scandals, political infighting and people's difficulties with everything from debt to weather damage. When it comes to news, if you want to keep your psyche in good shape, partake sparingly and fast frequently!

The kind of viewing, listening and reading that serves the good of the soul includes anything which draws attention to the marvels of nature, the ingenuity of human innovators and the work of great minds. They carry the stories of people who have used their God-given time and talents for worthy purposes, fulfilled lofty aspirations and triumphed against adversity in their personal lives or in the pursuit of great causes such as freedom and equality. They include those who have explored and brought light to our understanding of the mystical meaning of life and the rewards to be won by those who seek eternal truth.

Great films bring with them the advantage of catharsis, the effect of being able, in a sense, to live the great swathe of emotions and experiences available to humankind from the sanctuary of the sofa, without undergoing the actual danger or deprivation enacted in the action. Great books bring the wisdom of the writers into the living room and offer it safely for the scrutiny of that wonderful attribute of human consciousness, imagination.

Biopics and biographies offer some of the richest pickings for enhancing the soul personality and having us, for a few hours, relate to the action as if we are participants. Here are 10 of the best offerings which the present writer has found to be wonderful sources of consideration, contemplation, inspiration and sheer enjoyment.



A Beautiful Mind: The extraordinary mathematician John Nash was beset by paranoid schizophrenia, which peopled his private life with hallucinatory characters and took him to terrifying depths. Unwilling to submit permanently to the drugs which dulled his brilliant mind, he learned to recognize

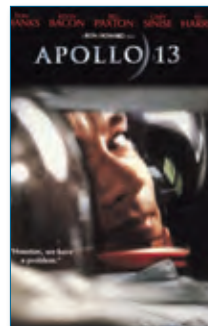
and live with the delusions in a way which enabled him to resume his academic teaching career and earn a Nobel Prize in Economics for his revolutionary

theory of human dynamics: Game Theory. Russell Crowe plays the lead.



The Aviator: The story of billionaire Howard Hughes, another remarkable man troubled by severe mental illness, in this case an extreme form of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). Determined to an almost unbelievable degree, he pursues his twin dreams of making the biggest movies and flying the fastest aircraft ever built against

the debilitating paranoia of his illness and on the way breaks the Pan Am monopoly on international air travel. Leonardo Di Caprio stars.



Apollo 13: One of the most remarkable true-life survival stories ever, this film tells how a rocket took off for the moon but suffered an explosion which threatened not only the mission but the lives of the three astronauts on board. Through the calm leadership and ingenuity of captain Jim Lovell, played by Tom Hanks, coupled with the

'no failure acceptable' attitude of mission controller Gene Kranz (played by Ed Harris) in Houston, the spacecraft makes it back to earth against all odds and with a memorable sequence of squaring the circle, making a box fit a tube with unlikely ingredients to filter poisonous air.



October Sky: Continuing the space theme, this is the story of a boy from the backwoods of a small American mining town who draws inspiration from Sputnik and his enthusiastic class teacher to design his own rocket, aided by his pals. Overcoming numerous obstacles including that of a stubborn and small-minded father, he and the

boys launch their rocket, win a national science prize, and lead character Homer Hickam (played by Jake Gyllenhaal) makes himself a real-life career with NASA.

Erin Brockovich: Julia Roberts plays possibly one of the most single-minded women ever born, using a



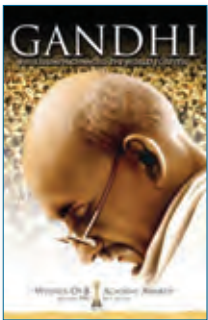


remarkable affinity with people to amass evidence that a powerful company has contaminated water supplies, leaving the locals with an appalling legacy of illness and childhood disability. Aided by her lawyer boss she takes on the company and wins a remarkable settlement for the afflicted community.



Silkwood: Karen Silkwood, played by Meryl Streep, suffers exposure to potentially lethal radiation at the nuclear plant where she works and discovers that photographs showing weaknesses in the plant are being doctored and covered up. As a trade unionist, she puts danger aside to pursue evidence that the company is cutting corners and

putting the workers at risk. Just as she feels she has sufficient evidence to make her case in court, she meets an untimely end in a car crash.



Gandhi: The iconic champion of non-violent protest, Gandhi rises from being thrown off a whites only train in South Africa to lead India's fight for independence from the British Empire. The lead role is played to Oscar-winning effect by Ben Kingsley and charts the trials, tribulations and triumphs of a great and successful campaign.



Invictus: Not really a sports film, despite appearances, this is the story of how Nelson Mandela (played by Morgan Freeman) used the white South African rugby team captained by Francois Pienaar (Matt Damon) to mend relationships between the white and black populations. Released after 27 years as a political

prisoner he decides instead of dismantling the Springboks as expected, to encourage support of the team in the upcoming world championships and so accomplishes a great feat of unifying the country after decades of racial tension.



The Song of Bernadette: Made in 1943, this is the oldest of the selection and tells the story of St Bernadette, whose as a sickly 14 year old sees visions of Christ's mother Mary in the surroundings of a filthy town rubbish dump. Her obedience to apparently humiliating instructions of Mary to dig in the dirt leads to the founding of the legendary healing waters of Lourdes which attract countless pilgrims to this day. The lead is played by Jennifer Jones.



Schindler's List: The horrors of the Holocaust have generated some of most harrowing but also inspirational stories of all time because of the will of some people's desire to survive and of others' to save them. Oskar Schindler, played by Liam Neeson, plays a resourceful but imperfect German businessman who saves Jews from the Nazi

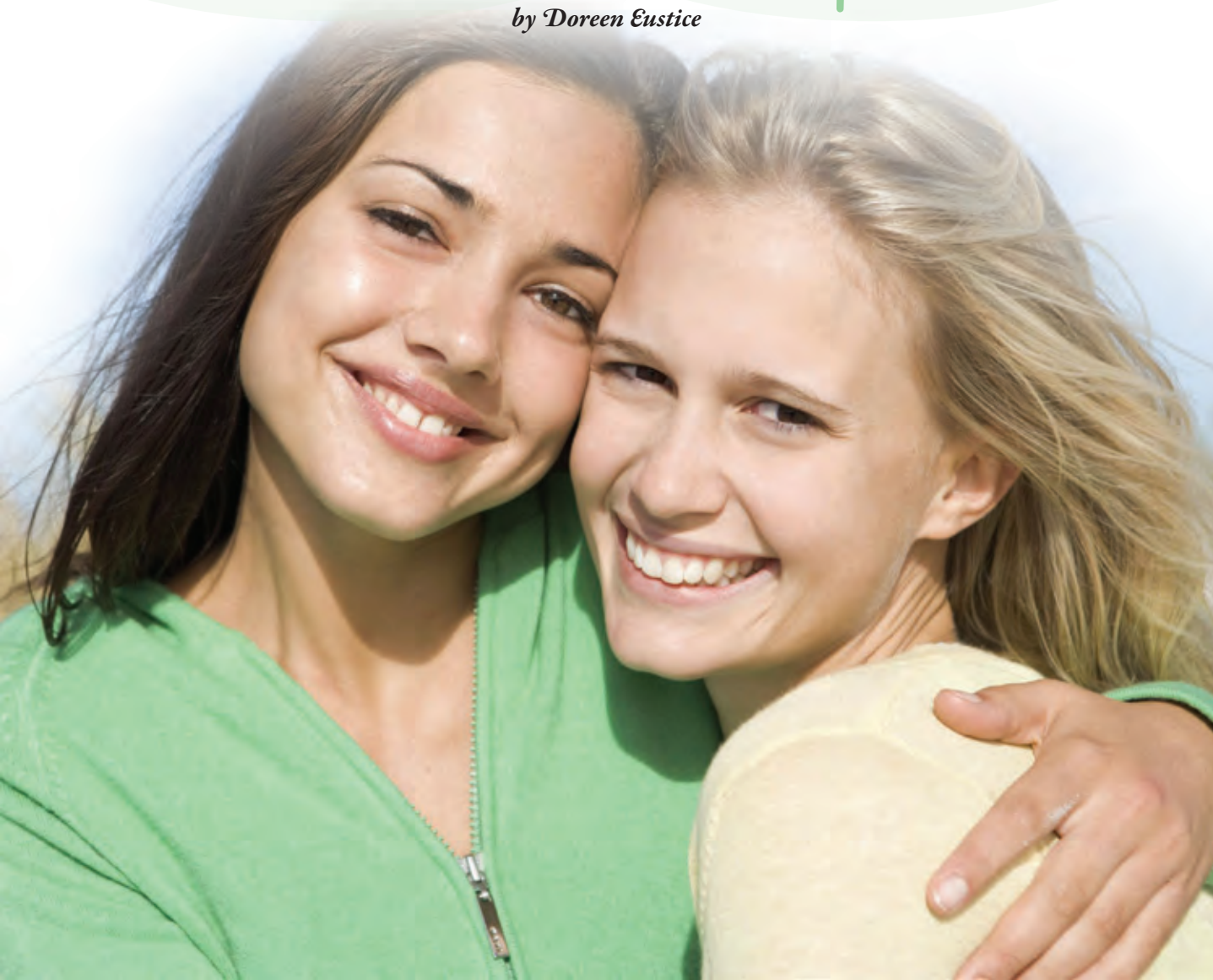
death camps by employing them in his pan-making factories. As the threat of the Final Solution grows stronger he makes a list of those he must save and uses his fortune to bribe the Nazi officers for their lives, so saving more than 1,000 from certain death.

There are many, many more inspirational stories out there, most available in high street film shops and all of them by a little ferreting around on the internet. Never worry that they are out of date or old fashioned. Just as wisdom never grows outmoded, one of the marks of a great film is that you can watch it again and again, even when it comes from a past era. Perhaps you as a reader may like to draw up a list of your own inspirational favourites..., and of course, enjoy the luxury of watching them afresh.



True Friendship ♡

by Doreen Eustice



TRUE FRIENDSHIPS are wonderful treasures to be found on Life's highways and byways, nuggets to be nurtured and valued for the richness they bring to our souls. Unfortunately, few of us are perfect at tending them properly and giving them the time they need to flourish and thrive. They frequently wither from neglect as we set them aside to shoulder the sundry responsibilities and

pressures which beset people of all generations, especially family commitments and careers.

One of the chief reasons many good friendships wilt is the appearance of a 'life partner', possibly a 'soul mate' but definitely a distraction. When that happens, many of us succumb to the charms and put them first, last and throughout the middle of who we want to spend time with. And those who have been faithful companions, the ones



we can gossip to on the phone or book a three coffee lunch, are abandoned to the new 'Great One' in our lives. It was a great piece of advice from the author of a book on Celtic Runes, Ralph Blum, to "let the winds of heaven dance between you." Unfortunately the newly besotted rarely do!

A while ago an old friend I had long since shelved came to my door with a covered bowl and announced she was presenting me with a friendship cake; a German friendship cake who goes by the name of Herman and has been circling the globe much like a chain letter since..., probably not long after time began. The bowl contained a hunk of dough and a handwritten list of instructions for Herman's future welfare, to be carried out over the ensuing 10 days.

We giggled as I read out the sheet beginning with the warning: "My name is Herman. I am a sour dough cake and I need to be kept on your worktop for 10 days without a lid on. I will die if you put me in the fridge! I will die if I stop bubbling." The rules demand Herman should be placed in a two litre bowl and covered with a tea towel. He needs stirring well on days two and three, and must be fed specific amounts of flour, sugar and milk before being stirred senseless and put back to sleep again under his tea towel blanket.

In a heartless moment of resolute decision I tossed Herman mercilessly into the bin along with the contents of the vacuum cleaner.

Days five, six, seven and eight requires more vigorous mixing to keep the dough alive and sticking. On day nine he gets hungry again and requires more flour, sugar and milk to curb his appetite. At this point you divide the goo into four equal portions, give three away to friends with copies of the instructions and add to the portion you keep an array of cake contents including eggs, spices, oil, chopped apples, nuts and raisins before baking him out of his old life and serving him up in the new, adorned with fresh cream.

For the first two days I was charmed, but on day three I forgot him entirely and on the fourth day found myself rescuing him from a dying breath at the 11th hour, literally 11pm, with the top up ingredients. Cutting a 10 day story by half, I decided I didn't like Herman much at all. It was like being in charge of a tyrannical virtual pet, like a Tamagotchi of the sort that were frequently banned from 1990s British classrooms because frustrated teachers were having their lessons disrupted by students



feeding and exercising their electronic wards. I didn't like the responsibility of looking after him, pandering to his needs or the space that he was taking up in my modest kitchen.

I might have wanted to hang him – out for the birds, possibly – but did I really want to draw and quarter Herman and distribute him to my friends? And did I later want to add

a tenner's worth of ingredients to his slobby, mish-mash, squish-squash body for a dish days hence, marginally less appealing than tripe with custard? Before you answer, bear in mind that the last time I cooked a cake I had pigtailed and a school uniform and I'm now drawing a pension.

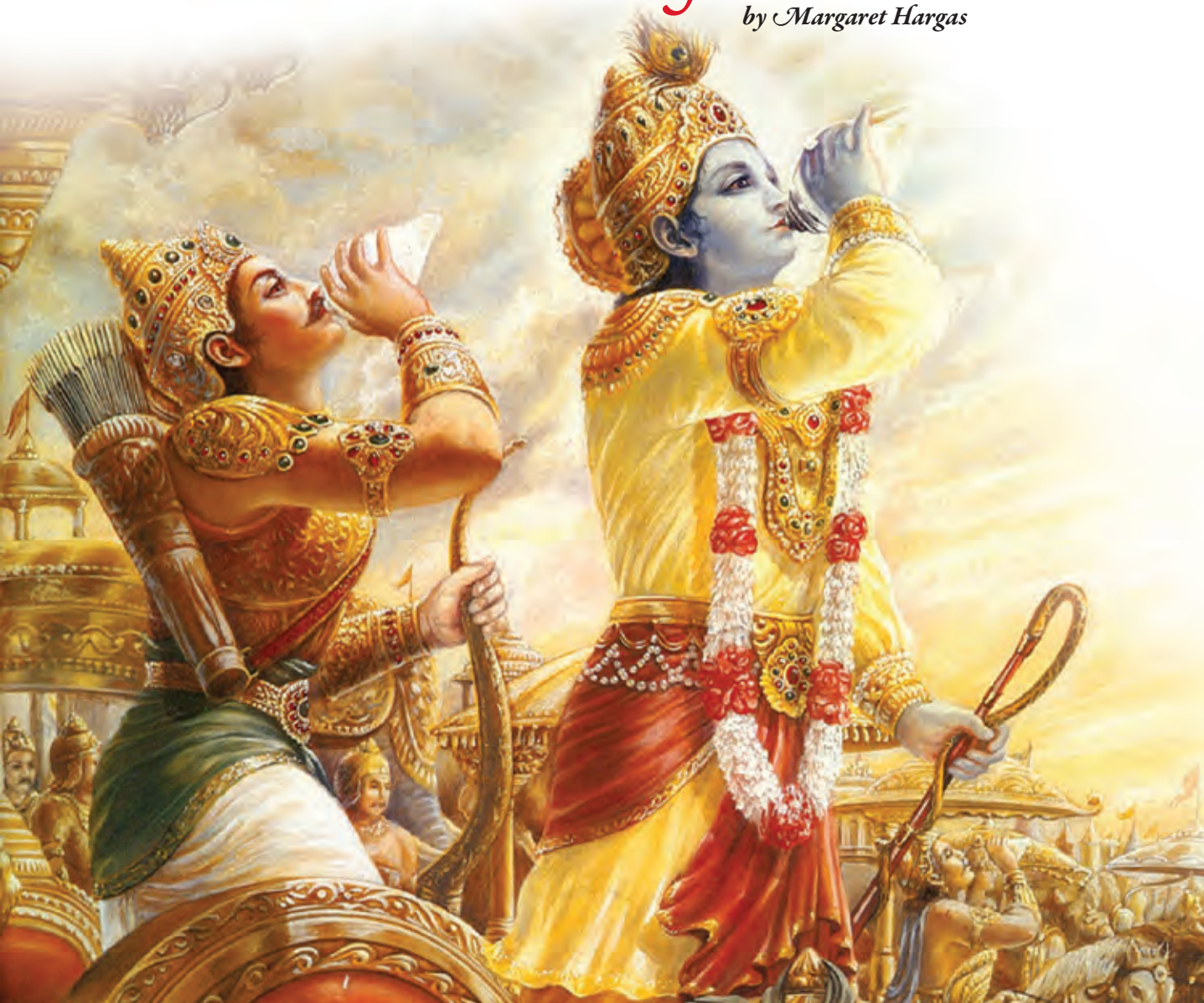
In a heartless moment of resolute decision I tossed Herman mercilessly into the bin along with the contents of the vacuum cleaner. Herman bit the dust, his final bubbles were burst. But Herman lives on in the kitchens of countless victims of unfulfilled friendship, and online too at the touch of a search engine. Look him up if you'd like to make his acquaintance. I won't be responsible for his actions by giving you the recipe.

Friends, readers, I can tell you from experience: if you like someone and value them, then give what really shows what they bring to your life. Give them time, a conversation, a listening ear or a gift that comes with no responsibilities and no guilt trip attached. Give them a call, write them a letter, send a card. Ask them out to lunch. Invite them to share a convivial bottle of wine, and debate enthusiastically the things that matter in life, or the things that don't, particularly! Share an outing, share a meditation journey, share whatever you've got in your pantry that cooks in 20 minutes and disappears with the washing up. But whatever you decide to do to foster this amazing faculty we call friendship, don't give them a *Friendship Cake!*



On the Field of Dharma

by Margaret Hargas



IN THE FULLNESS of time, knowledge is attained and knowledge is lost. All knowledge is present for all time, but with the passing of time, truth may be manifest or it may be concealed. Our world scriptures are a tangible repository for truth and knowledge, and one of the most beautiful and lyrical of these is the *Bhagavad-Gita*¹: *The Lord's Song*. On one level the Gita is the story of a great battle occurring between the related families of the *Kurus*

and *Pandavas*. The *Kurus* represent the forces of evil, and consist of the *Hundred Evil Sons* and their army. The *Pandavas*, representing the forces of good, are cousins to the *Kurus*, and are led by the warrior *Arjuna*. The imminent battle is however not the obvious conflict one expects. What actually happens is much more personal and profound.

Arjuna, as a member of the warrior caste, has a sacred duty or *dharma*², to protect his family from aggression.





Dhritarashtra, father of the Hundred Evil Sons.

How does he overcome this essential conflict of dharma when the threat against his kinsmen actually springs from another group of his relatives, his own flesh and blood? The thought of killing his uncles and cousins sets Arjuna's mind against his heart, temporarily paralyzing him with doubt. He must reject one of just two options: retreat or attack. Whichever option he chooses, no quarter will be spared by the victor. So here is the battle, Arjuna's dharma which must be faced and fulfilled.

Levels of Dharma

The Gita opens as the blind *Dhritarashtra*, father of the *Hundred Evil Sons*, asks his charioteer *Sanjaya* to describe the scene. *Sanjaya* who is clairvoyant and clairaudient, is considered an impartial witness and what he says is trusted. Chapter One opens with a dialogue: "*Dhritarashtra said: 'Assembled on the field of Dharma, O Sanjaya, on the field of the Kurus, eager to fight, what did my people and the Pandavas do?'*" That first line, "*Assembled on the field of Dharma...*," forcibly calls to mind the depth of the issues at play.

What is this concept of dharma? Does it, like the impending battle, have subtle layers yet to be found? Do we all have our own dharma to fulfil? Very simply, dharma means *duty*..., one's individual, accepted obligations.

Arjuna's duty is to protect his family, if need be through violent defence. This gross level of dharma however is merely the tip of the iceberg, so to speak. It is *relative dharma* of the relative field of life, and its mechanics constantly change as the relative field of life changes.

But there is also the *dharma of Being* which is not relative to anything and remains eternally unchanged. Being infinite, eternal and established in and of itself, the dharma of Being can only be attained through the slowing down of the 'Wheel of Life', the symbol of relative dharma. When this is accomplished, or rather, when the wheel of life is completely stopped, the cycle of death and rebirth is broken and enlightenment is reached.

Sandwiched between *relative dharma* and the *dharma of Being* is another form of dharma called the *dharma of evolution*. This can be described as the guiding principle of life, how we arrive at our own decisions in structuring and directing our lives and goals. It is our personal spiritual priority, and each of us must come to our own conclusions according to our individual level of evolution. The dharma of evolution then, is the very thing that supports and directs evolution and discourages all that is harmful to our evolving spiritual awareness.

Understand though that the dharma of evolution is as individual and personal as relative dharma, simply because it is dependent upon the individual's personal level of evolution, namely the breadth, scale and inclusiveness of one's consciousness. The Gita warns: "*Better is death in one's own dharma, than the dharma of another which brings danger.*" In other words, follow your own inner voice of conscience, and don't try to live the life of someone else, no matter how worthy they may be in your opinion.

Follow Your Inner Voice

People who try to live according to the spiritual imperative or dharma of another, are making a mistake; for by so doing, they are diverted from the path of evolution meant for them, and can as a consequence no longer live or evolve as they are 'meant' to. Take two extreme examples: a pre-

The thought of killing his uncles and cousins sets Arjuna's mind against his heart, temporarily paralyzing him with doubt.

schooler is hardly going to benefit from studying quantum mechanics, and a university student won't gain much from reading children's bed-time stories. Such tasks are out of step with the individual's dharma, and little is gained by following someone else's path. Nothing therefore can be





gained by trying to emulate the spiritual austerities of another for which one is unprepared.

Imitation may well be the sincerest form of flattery, but it can also be a serious deterrent to one's own progress on 'the path.' Attempting to follow the dharma of another person has certain clear dangers, and leads to confusion and dislocation from one's own dharma, thereby postponing the evolution that one's karma requires if one is to evolve one's spiritual consciousness. In Vedic lore, death holds no such threat, for it represents merely a brief pause of the 'Wheel of Life', followed by further progress. Action taken in harmony with one's own spiritual priority or dharma promotes prosperity in both the manifest and unmanifest fields of one's existence. And it is this level of dharma which keeps the 'Wheel of Life' turning.

Returning to the Gita, how does Arjuna resolve his dharma? Along with the Kurus and the Hundred Evil Sons representing the forces of evil led by the blind Dhritarashtra..., and the Pandavas, or forces of good led by Arjuna, and their respective armies..., we find on the battlefield, the *Field of Dharma*, Krishna and his army. *Krishna*, an earthly incarnation of the god Vishnu, incarnates in times of darkness in order to restore light to the world. And on this occasion he has given the Kurus the choice of his support or the support of his army. The Hundred Evil Sons have chosen his army, so Krishna himself stands with Arjuna against an impending massacre by the now massively reinforced army of the forces of evil.

Viewing the scene of the impending battle, Arjuna hesitates when he sees many of his kinsmen and friends lined up on the opposing side. Although it will be a just defence against the evil aggression of the Kurus, Arjuna

painfully realises the cruelty of war, and is cast into doubt. When Arjuna is overwhelmed with sorrow and unable to take action, Krishna advises him, "*Be without the three gunas, Oh Arjuna, freed from duality, ever firm in purity, independent of possessions, possessed [only] of Self.*" In other words, rise above the Wheel of Life Arjuna, separate yourself from the three forces of creation, preservation and destruction, and do what your dharma requires of you, namely, engage in battle heroically in the interests of good, and never give up the path [dharma] that is yours to complete.

Viewing the scene of the impending battle, Arjuna hesitates when he sees many of his kinsmen and friends lined up on the opposing side.

No problem is ever solved at the level of the problem. One must go above the problem to get the vastly broader bird's eye view. Or rather, one needs to go within and seek the silence of one's personal Inner Master, the supreme knowledge of one's own higher self. Self-realisation is the path of harmony where righteousness and love merge. And when self-realisation is attained, Arjuna's conflict, the battlefield, the armies, the anger, the aggression, the impending doom, all disappear in an instant.

Footnotes

1. The *Bhagavad Gita* is a 700 verse scripture forming part of the Hindu epic the *Mahabharata*.
2. In Hinduism, *Dharma* refers to modes of behaviour that are in harmony with 'right order', and which make all things, including the universe itself possible. Dharma includes one's personal duties, rights, laws, conduct, virtues and the 'right way of living.'





Journey and Destination

by Johan Arnesson

REMEMBER THE Apollo space programme of the 1960s? Of course you do, and what exciting times they were. The Apollo programme was created for one reason only: to send a man to the surface of the moon and to return him safely to earth. It is a welcome testament to changing times that in those days there were only ‘hims’ when it came to spaceflight, while by now, thanks to the Space Shuttle, we’ve had many outstanding woman astronauts too.

Whether it’s Neil Armstrong bouncing around on the moon or Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay

reaching the summit of Mount Everest for the first time, they each prepared for a journey, took the journey, and finally reached their goal. The goal is often touted as the be-all and end-all of any major mission, when that shouldn’t be the case. What about the time before the final moment of glory? To be honest, much more thought needs to be given to the preparatory stage, and especially the *journey* to the summit of achievement that deserves our greatest accolade, not just those final moments when the summit is reached.

Think of the athletes at the recent Winter Olympics.



Every one of them came to compete fiercely and to win medals. But the years of long, arduous training that preceded the final performances that took them to victory must surely be more relevant than the actual feats of winning themselves? Those years of toil and tears were the real victory, for without the hundreds of little details and techniques that had to be mastered, there would have been no victory. And inevitably, when the excitement of the race is over, questions no doubt sometimes arise: *“Is that it? Is that all there is? I spent years training just for this and it was finished in just a few intense minutes. Apart from my brief moment of glory, I’m still the same person. What’s changed?”*

During the time of greatest effort in perfecting one’s skills, the overriding goal was to accomplish the final task, to reach the end. And then the end came and it wasn’t quite as one had expected. There was an initial euphoria and sense of relief at the accomplishment, but not long after, on the bus back home after the farewells and the long flight home, a sort of gender-neutral version of post natal depression set in. Was it really worth all the time and effort? Were those years of sacrifice worth just a measly bronze medal? It’s a physical thing for sure, so say the doctors; just a natural reaction to a sudden release from long-term stress. But it doesn’t feel that way when one’s in the dumps.

What do we find at the destination that we can’t find at any point during the journey, or for that matter even at the starting point?

Don’t Confuse Things

Are we confusing the goal with the effort needed to reach it? Yes we often confuse the *destination* with the *journey* getting there, those intense years of training and sacrifice when it would have been so easy to give up and choose an easier life. By emphasising the destination to the almost complete exclusion of the journey that’s so crucial to our success, we’re missing a fundamental point: the journey is often, *indeed most of the time*, more important than the destination itself. Success may appear to us as an illusion, but we know, sometimes painfully, that the journey was far from illusory.

We’ve all had small goals we want to reach, whether it was a better job, a financial windfall, a better house, etc. But when those goals were reached, were we really happy with the outcome? More than likely the feeling of satisfaction was welcome to begin with, but it dissipated with time, and before we knew it, what we had yearned for previously became what we expected life to give us.



A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

On each occasion, the destination was a glimmer of light in the distance, but once reached, it was quickly forgotten.

An intense focus on the destination, while almost completely ignoring the process that allows us to reach our destination, causes us to diminish the value of the journey and its capacity for bringing about real and long lasting beneficial change to ourselves and our attitudes. There is the potential for great value in any journey, if only we are prepared to learn from the lessons that directly flow from it.

What do we find at the destination that we can’t find at any point during the journey, or for that matter even at the starting point? Thinking of the winter Olympics again, we may win and bask a moment in our years-in-the-making achievement, holding the medal up high, but by the next day our ski tracks will be gone, and as far as nature is concerned, we were never there. Given that the euphoria of victory is so transient, surely there’s room for other moments

of transient euphoria with every passing day on the journey to the win? The finale is only a small part of a piece of music, the epilogue only a fraction of a book, the destination only a step on the path to the destination.

The First Step

An old Chinese proverb begins: *“A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”* Every journey begins with that first step, and every step on the path can be considered as important as the first one, provided it is taken as deliberately and seriously. It’s easy to stop when the destination is all we’re striving for and the goal seems impossibly far away. The journey begins, progresses and ends with every step we take, and the journey is nothing short of a long series of small triumphs, each one as important as the rest, each one linearly leading to the next. We never really fail, but we do from time to time stop trying. And we stop trying when we have nothing to strive for but a distant goal, barely seen.



The Path of Life

Preoccupation with the end causes us to overlook the excitement, the challenge, the satisfaction and importance of each step, each question, each minor discovery. It is the thrill of possibility that spurs us on, an excitement fed by the power and momentum of the journey itself. We can't get on with it until we don't keep going. Once started, we must see the journey through to its completion.

"I'm an idealist," wrote the poet Carl Sandburg. "I don't know where I'm going but I'm on my way." Sometimes you just have to get moving, even when the way is not clear. Anticipation and the excitement of progress will keep you going, but it takes a spark to light the flame, like that first ignition of the spark plug that starts a car engine. *Every step should be a first step!*

Self Realisation

Former Secretary-General of the United Nations Dag Hammarskjöld once wrote, "*The longest journey is the journey inwards of he who has chosen his destiny, who has started upon his quest for the source of his being.*" The journey, any journey, any project, is a journey toward the realisation of self; and such a journey is strewn with pitfalls, obstacles and resistance. The search for self-worth and self-understanding is painful but necessary, part of the process of becoming a whole, integrated person.

Every project, every process, every striving is a step inward, a plunge into the depths of individual personality, a thread woven into the fabric of the human being. When a journey ends, we will have learnt a bit more about our possibilities and limitations, our abilities and inabilities. And we are eager to press ahead, to know more, to start again, to begin the next worthwhile journey. The late Peter Boardman, an outstanding British mountaineer, wrote in his book, *The Shining Mountain*: "*Today's frontiers are not of promised lands, of uncrossed passes and mysterious valleys beyond. Only the mountaineers' inner self remains uncharted.*"

The journey is an attempt to scale the spirit of a mountaineer, to ascend the summit of inner knowledge; and it can be a lonely trip. People are often insensitive and intolerant of those who pursue the road apart from the crowd, who travel a path that veers from the common thoroughfare. The question they often ask is: "*Where can that path possibly lead? It seems to go nowhere.*" But that is their perception, and it is limited by a lack of sufficient understanding, a myopic view of another's destination. Every journey has by default a destination, and every step takes us a bit closer to the end. Once underway, the goal is to press on, and at all times hold the vision of the destination in mind. But don't do so at the expense of the steps in-between.

Like the protagonist in Herman Hesse's mystical novel, *The Journey to the East*, we all eventually come to realise that the main journey we take in life, is never ending. In fact it is our very life itself. The journey is a process of becoming, not a single assault on a single goal or mountain. Though the journey never really ends, it



T S Elliot

sometimes brings us back to the place where we began, with a new appreciation or a deeper understanding, causing us to, as T S Elliot put it "...know the place for the first time." You never conquer a mountain, you never conquer your Inner Self; you seek it afresh every day, every step along the way.

Tomorrow there will be another goal, another challenge, another journey. The next one may be harder, take a bit longer, be less accessible. But the true seeker knows the goal will eventually be reached, and knows intimately the road leading to it. Every destination is the starting point for another journey. Every chapter completed means a new chapter or a new book must begin. We can't be content with the destination alone. We can't rest forever on the results of that one big project.

None of this is to say that goals and destinations are unimportant. The summit is one of the reasons for climbing the mountain. It provides us with another view, another perspective. If our intention is not the absolute top, we will not progress very far along the way. The destination is the culmination of the adventure, the pinnacle of triumph,

The summit is one of the reasons for climbing the mountain

the final, and sometimes most difficult, step along the way. We need not feel a sense of emptiness, disappointment or disillusionment when the present project or journey has ended, not if we've worked hard along the way and learned the lessons of the journey.

The destination can be sweet, the accomplishment pure, and the mountaineering spirit challenged if we understand the purpose of the journey and the value to us of the destination. It is a part of the reward for coming this far. We can climb the mountain and peer over the ridge with a sense of satisfaction. We can take time to reflect and determine the course of the next chapter, for the triumph of reaching the destination is but the prelude to another.

