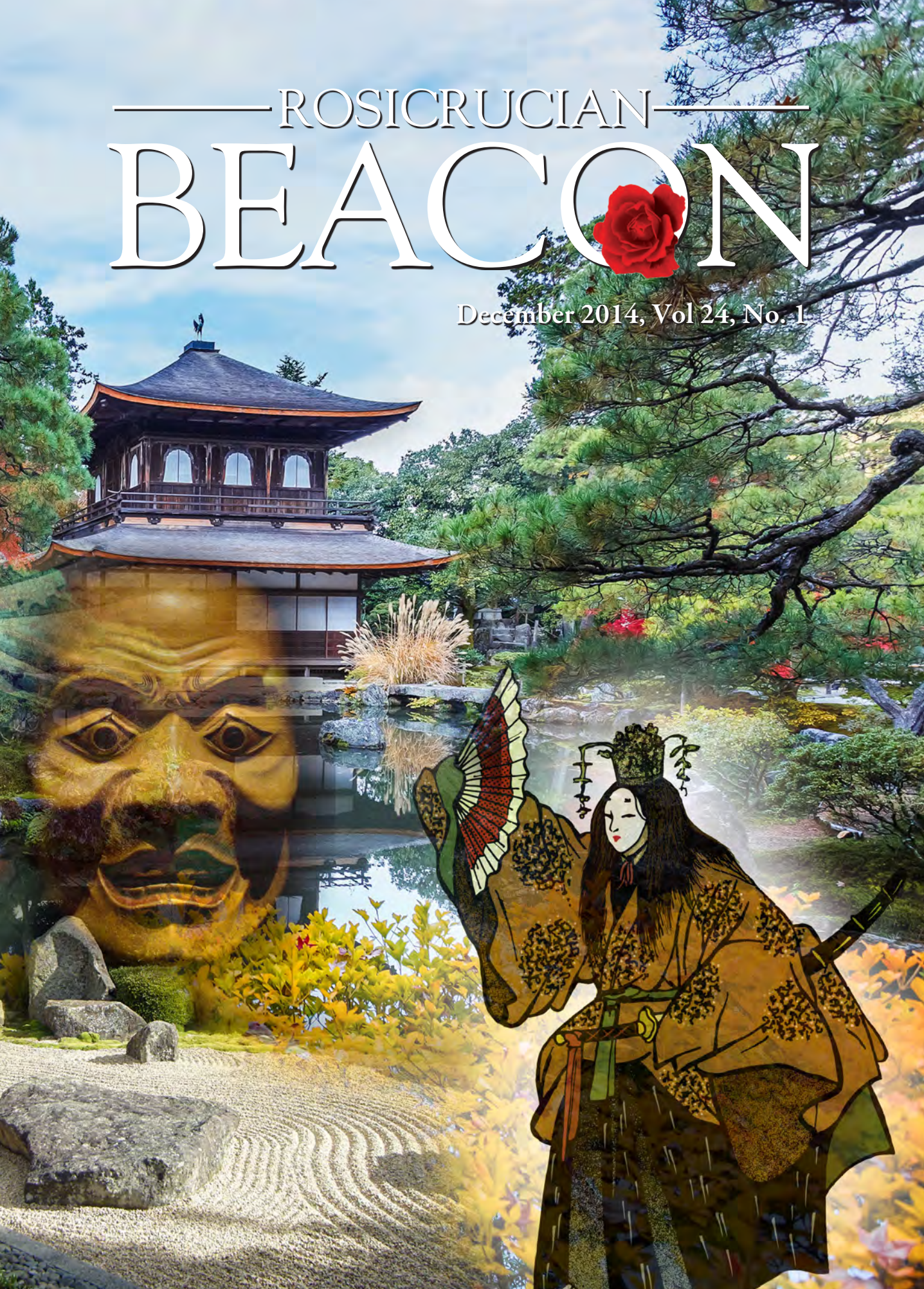


— ROSICRUCIAN —  
BEACON



December 2014, Vol 24, No. 1







# Calling All Rosicrucians

1915 - 2015

## Centennial Celebration AMORC in America

2015 marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary since the founding of the Rosicrucian Order in New York. To commemorate that event and the achievements of Rosicrucians during the past century, a Rosicrucian World Convention will be held in San Jose, California between Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> July and Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2015.

To register for the Convention, navigate on your web browser to... [http://www.regonline.com/amorc\\_2015](http://www.regonline.com/amorc_2015). Within that website you will find a link... <https://resweb.passkey.com/go/rosicrucian100th> where you can book a room at the Fairmont Hotel in downtown San Jose where the main Convention events will be held. There are of course many other hotels to choose from, but if you are planning on attending, please book a room soon.

The Rosicrucian Museum and Planetarium will be open for all to visit before, during and after the Convention, and there will be several other smaller events held at Rosicrucian Park itself, including special Convocations in the Supreme Temple, and classes of the RCUI.

This centennial promises to be both a solemn and happy event for all participants. If you haven't done so yet, please reserve your hotel room/s and purchase your Convention ticket/s as soon as possible. Absolute deadline for all bookings is 15<sup>th</sup> June 2015. Please book in time.



# ROSICRUCIAN WORLD CONVENTION





# ROSICRUCIAN BEACON

December 2014, Vol 24, No. 1

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### Cover spread

Reflections on Japan





# HIGASHIYAMA

## *East Mountain and the Origins of Japanese Culture*

*by Bill Anderson*

*Temple bells die out.  
The fragrant blossoms remain.  
A perfect evening!*

**T**HERE IS something very special about Japan; a mystery and subtlety running deep within the fibre of the nation, something quite unique to its culture. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century saw so much misery and destruction all around the world that we can be forgiven if we at times forget that out of so much hardship, something bright and good may yet emerge. In this article I will examine one tragic period of Japanese history in particular from which a much treasured culture emerged. This period concerns the life, times and aftermath of the disastrous Ōnin war.







Ashikaga Yoshimasa

## Background

The Ōnin War was a civil war lasting 10 years (1467–1477 CE) during what is known as the Muromachi period. The conflict began as a dispute over who would become Shōgun after the retirement or death of the Shōgun Ashikaga Yoshimasa. It soon escalated into a nationwide war involving the Ashikaga shogunate and a number of Daimyo (feudal lords) from regions all over Japan. Before continuing though, let me explain some of the terminology I'll be using.

Modern Japan has an emperor as a symbol of the state and the unity of the people. The imperial family is said to trace its origins back to the Shinto goddess Amaterasu. In the west we are used to thinking of emperors from centuries past as heads of state with supreme autocratic power. During most of Japanese history however, this was not the case. From 1192 to 1867, real power lay in the hands of Shōguns, (*sei-i taishōgun*) military commanders or generals like the Dictators (*Magister Populi*) of ancient Rome. At various times during this period, power passed between different families and for the period covered in this article, power lay with the Ashikaga family.

The Ashikaga, were a family of Daimyo who held the office of Shōgun between 1336 and 1573. Their headquarters and chief power base was the Muromachi district of Kyoto, at that time the capital of Japan, and the period during which they ruled is appropriately known as the Muromachi Period. The Daimyo were the powerful feudal lords of pre-modern Japan who ruled most of the country from their vast, hereditary land holdings. They were subordinate to the Shōgun, and quite separate from the emperor and the court hierarchy who lived in Kyoto. The Daimyo, often referred to simply as Lords, hired Samurai to guard their estates and they paid them in land or food. The officials working in a Shōgun's office or administration are known as the *bakufu*. They are the

ones who carried out the actual duties of administration while the Imperial court retained only nominal authority.

Shōgun Yoshimasa was planning the creation of his retirement villa and gardens as early as 1460. He planned as well that after his death, his retreat would become a Zen temple. During Yoshimasa's rule, and after he retired to his villa in the eastern hills of Kyoto (*Higashiyama* or East Mountain) – hence the title of this article, and which was famous for its beautiful scenery, Japan saw the growth of what has become known as the gorgeous and elegant Higashiyama Culture, famous for the well-known *Chanoyu* (tea ceremony), *Ikebana* (flower arrangement), *Noh* (drama) and *Sumi-e* (Indian ink painting). Higashiyama culture was greatly influenced by Zen Buddhism and saw the rise of Japanese aesthetics like *Wabi-Sabi* and the harmonisation of imperial court and

*Suddenly, just at that moment, it came to me.  
I realised what it was that had escaped me till  
then: all things are perfectly resolved in the  
Unborn. – Bankei Yotaku (1622-1693).*

Samurai cultures. Much of what is commonly seen today as traditional Japanese culture originated or developed during this period.

Yoshimasa's retirement villa in Kyoto became known after his death as the *Ginkaku-ji* temple, the Temple of the Silver Pavilion. It was the centre of the Higashiyama cultural outgrowth in a number of ways. The Silver Pavilion is revered for its simple beauty, the silver having never been added. The rock garden next to it is likewise one of the most famous in Japan, and praised for its Zen and aesthetics. It is an example of the concept that only a trained expert can recognise the subtle beauty within true art and architecture. The beauty of an object should not be emphasised, but gently hidden, revealing itself with subtlety and sophistication only to the initiated. The retired Shōgun invited many artists, poets and court nobles to his villa, encouraging the development of their arts.

## Wabi-Sabi

In its barest essence, *Wabi-Sabi* is the Japanese art of finding beauty in imperfection, profundity in nature, and of embracing the natural cycle of growth, decay and death. It is simple, slow, uncluttered, and reveres authenticity above all. Underplayed and modest, *Wabi-Sabi* is the kind of quiet, undeclared beauty that waits patiently to be discovered. It often reveals only a fragmentary glimpse





such as a branch representing an entire tree; *shoji* screens filtering the sun; the moon only partially revealed from an obscuring ribbon of cloud. There's a rich, mellow beauty, striking but not obvious, something one can imagine having around one for a long, long time. It's the peace found in a moss garden, the musty scent of geraniums, the astringent taste of powdered green tea, the time of decades of patience and centuries of tradition and the creation of something beautiful and deeply meaningful.

**There's a rich, mellow beauty, striking but not obvious, something one can imagine having around one for a long, long time.**

So, *Wabi-Sabi* represents a comprehensive Japanese world view centred on the acceptance of transience and imperfection, and referring often to beauty, not as a final state or end-product, but a process in the making, something that is always "*imperfect, impermanent, incomplete.*" It is a concept derived from Buddhist



*Ink Painting*

teachings, in particular Zen Buddhism. Characteristics of *Wabi-Sabi* aesthetics include asymmetry, roughness or irregularity, simplicity, economy, austerity, modesty, intimacy and appreciation of the integrity of natural objects and processes.

The words *Wabi* and *Sabi* do not translate easily. *Wabi* today means simplicity, freshness or quietness, and can be applied to both natural and human-made objects with an understated elegance. It can also refer to quirks and anomalies arising from the process of construction, which add uniqueness and elegance to an object. *Sabi* is the beauty or serenity that comes with age, when the life of the object and its impermanence are evidenced in its patina and wear, or in visible repairs to it.

Many Japanese arts over the past thousand years have been influenced by Zen and Mahayana Buddhist philosophy, particularly acceptance of and contemplation on the imperfection, constant flux and impermanence of all things. The following arts exemplify a *Wabi-Sabi* aesthetic:

- Traditional *Shakuhachi* flute music of wandering Zen monks.
- *Ikebana* or flower arrangement.
- Japanese gardens, Zen gardens and *Bonsai*.
- Japanese poetry, particularly *Haiku*.
- Japanese tea ceremony.

## Ink Painting

The goal of *Sumi-e* or ink and wash painting is not simply to reproduce the appearance of the subject, but to capture its spirit or essence. It's said that to paint a horse, the artist must understand its temperament better than its muscles and bones. To paint a flower, there's no need to perfectly match its petals and colours, but essential to convey its liveliness and fragrance. It can be regarded as a form of expressionistic art that captures the unseen.

In landscape painting the scenes depicted are typically imaginary or very loose adaptations of actual views. Mountain landscapes are by far the most common, often evoking particular areas traditionally famous for their beauty, from which the artist may have been very distant. Water is often included.

## Japanese Tea Ceremony

The Japanese tea ceremony is a cultural activity involving the ceremonial preparation and presentation of powdered green tea. Zen Buddhism was a primary influence in the development of the Japanese tea ceremony. Tea gatherings are classified as either informal or formal tea gatherings.







An informal tea gathering is a relatively simple course of hospitality that includes confections, thin tea and perhaps a light meal. A formal tea gathering is a much more formal gathering, usually including a full-course meal followed by confections, thick tea and thin tea, and the ceremony can last up to as much as four hours.

The tea ceremony evolved its own aesthetic, in particular that of the *Wabi-Sabi* principle. *Wabi* represents the inner, or spiritual, experiences of human lives. Its original meaning indicated quiet or sober refinement, or subdued taste characterised by humility, restraint, simplicity, naturalism, profundity, imperfection, asymmetry. It emphasises simplicity, the unadorned

**Wabi represents the inner or spiritual experiences of human lives.**

object, an architectural space rather than the object itself, and celebrates the mellow beauty that only time and care impart to materials.

*Sabi*, on the other hand, represents the outer or material side of life. Originally, it meant 'worn', 'weathered' or 'decayed.' Particularly among the nobility, understanding the Buddhist concept of emptiness was considered the most effective means to spiritual awakening, while embracing imperfection was honoured

as a healthy reminder to cherish our unpolished selves, here and now, just as we are..., the first step to enlightenment.

## Flower Arranging

More than simply putting flowers in a container, *Ikebana* is a disciplined art form in which nature and humanity are brought together. Contrary to the idea of floral arrangement as a collection of part-coloured or multi-coloured arrangement of flowers, *Ikebana* often emphasises other areas of the plant, such as its stems and leaves as opposed to brightly contrasting coloured flowers. It draws emphasis toward shape, line and form, as opposed to the sharp colour contrasts that are some common elsewhere.

Although *Ikebana* is a creative expression, it has certain rules governing its form. The artist's intention behind each arrangement is shown through the creation's colour combinations, natural shapes, graceful lines and the usually *implied* rather than clearly stated meaning of the arrangement. Another aspect present in *Ikebana* is its use of minimalism: an arrangement may consist of only a minimal number of blooms interspersed among stalks and leaves. The container is a key element of the composition, and various styles of pottery may be used.

The spiritual aspect of *Ikebana* is very important.







*Ikebana (flower arrangement)*

Silence is important during *Ikebana*; no radio blaring out the latest popular tracks, just silence and a harmonisation of the creator with his or her creation. It is a time to appreciate things in nature that people often overlook because of their busy schedules. One becomes more patient and tolerant of differences, not only in nature, but also in general. The practice of *Ikebana* allows us to feel closer to nature and provides relaxation for the mind, body and soul.

## Zen Garden

Zen Buddhism is designed to help those seeking a path to enlightenment. The 9<sup>th</sup> Century master Gensha is quoted as saying: *“...the essential message is that the whole universe is not vast, not small, round or square, not balanced or correct, not lively and active, not standing way out. It is neither birth nor death, neither coming nor going; it is both birth and death, both coming and going. Being thus, having in the past gone from here, it now comes from here.”*

The Japanese rock garden or ‘dry landscape’ garden, often called a Zen garden, creates a miniature stylised landscape through carefully composed arrangements of rocks, water features, moss, pruned trees and bushes, and uses gravel or sand that is raked to represent ripples in water. A Zen garden is usually relatively small, surrounded by a wall, and is often meant to be seen while seated at

a single viewpoint outside the garden. The garden was intended to imitate the intimate essence of nature, not its actual appearance, and to serve as an aid to meditation and contemplation upon on true meaning of life.

Zen Buddhism was introduced into Japan at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> Century and quickly achieved a wide following, particularly among the Samurai class and war lords who admired its doctrine of self-discipline. The gardens of early Zen temples resembled Chinese gardens of the time, with lakes and islands. But in Kyoto in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Centuries, a new kind of garden appeared at the important Zen temples. These ‘Zen gardens’ as they came to be known, were designed to stimulate meditation. *“Nature, if you made it expressive by reducing it to its abstract forms, could transmit the most profound thoughts by its simple presence”*, wrote Michel Baridon (1926-2009), a French author of books about historical gardens.

The first garden design associated with this transition to the new style is the *Saihō-ji* or “Temple of the Perfumes of the West,” also popularly known as *Kōke-dera*, or a “Moss Garden.” It began in the western part of Kyoto. The Buddhist monk and Zen master Musō Soseki transformed a Buddhist temple into a Zen monastery and built the gardens. The lower garden of *Saihō-ji* is a pond with several rock compositions representing islands. The upper garden is a dry rock garden which features three rock ‘islands.’ The first, called *Kameshima*, the “Island of the







Ginkaku-ji garden

Turtle”, resembles a turtle swimming in a ‘lake’ of moss. The second, *Zazen-seki*, is a flat ‘meditation rock,’ which is believed to radiate calm and silence. And the third is the *Kare-taki*, a dry ‘waterfall’ composed of a stairway of flat granite rocks. The moss which now surrounds the rocks and represents water, was not part of the original garden plan; it grew several centuries later when the garden was left untended, but is now the most famous feature of the garden.

The gardens of *Ginkaku-ji*, the Silver Pavilion, are also attributed to Musō Kokushi. This temple garden included the traditional pond garden, but it had a new feature for as well, an area of raked white gravel with a perfectly shaped ‘mountain’ of white gravel in the centre, resembling Mount Fuji. The scene was called a “sand of silver and open sea.” This garden feature became known as the “small mountain facing the moon” and similar small Mount Fujis made of sand or earth covered with grass appeared in Japanese gardens for centuries afterwards.

However, the most famous of all Zen gardens in Kyoto is *Ryōan-ji*, built in the late 15<sup>th</sup> Century where for the first time the Zen garden became a purely abstract

concept. The garden is a rectangle and placed within it are 15 stones of different sizes, carefully composed in five groups; one group of five stones, two groups of three and two groups of two stones. The stones are surrounded by white gravel carefully raked each day by monks. The only vegetation in the garden is some moss around the stones. The garden is meant to be viewed from a seated position on the veranda of the residence of the monastery abbot.

## Noh Theatre

Noh theatre originated in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century when it was introduced to Japan from China. At the time, it referred to various types of performing arts featuring acrobats, song and dance, as well as comic sketches. Its subsequent adaptation to Japanese society led to its assimilation of other traditional art forms.

One theory suggests that Noh theatre originated from outcasts struggling to claim higher social status by catering to those in power, namely the new ruling Samurai class of the time. The transferral of the shogunate from Kamakura to Kyoto at the beginning of the Muromachi





period (late 14<sup>th</sup> Century) contributed significantly to Noh becoming a courtly art form. Indeed, with strong support and patronage from the Ashikaga Shōgun Yoshimitsu, Noh became the most prominent theatre art form of the time.

*The famous Zen gardens of the Muromachi Period showed that Japan had carried the art of gardens to the highest degree of intellectual refinement that it was possible to attain. – Michel Baridon (1926-2009).*

Noh theatre, when accompanied by a chorus and percussion ensemble, is a chanted drama; some have even called it “Japanese opera.” However, the singing in Noh involves a limited tonal range, with lengthy, repetitive passages in a narrow dynamic range. Melody is not at the centre of Noh singing. Still, texts are poetic, relying heavily on the Japanese seven-five rhythm common to nearly all forms of Japanese poetry, with an economy of expression, and an abundance of allusion. The music has many ‘blank spaces’ or intervals of silence between the actual sounds. It is these ‘negative sounds’ or silent interludes that are in fact

considered the heart of the music. The Noh percussion ensemble consists of four musicians: three drummers and a flautist.

## Epilogue

The era of the Shōgun Yoshimasa was a time of creative change, in fact the creation of the very soul of Japan as we recognise it today. Take a few moments to think of the abovementioned aspects of culture and aesthetics that are now seen as quintessentially Japanese which date to his time; they all began during or after the life of Yoshimasa. Although it was a time of war, stress and great hardship, it was also a time which brought forth one of the greatest contributions to refinement and culture in the history of our planet.

The following poem is ascribed to Yoshimasa himself:

*Today I recall with bitter regret,  
the sad world where I lived.  
My mind serene, I gaze  
at a moon free of shadows.*




*Noh theatre*





# Doorstep *Spirituality*

by Shirley Elsbey

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a black blazer over a white top, is smiling and looking towards a man. The man is seen from the back, wearing a blue and white plaid shirt. They appear to be in an outdoor setting with a light-colored wall behind them.

**P**SYCHOLOGISTS CAN gain insight into someone's personality by the way they interpret ink blots or link random words. Graphologists can probe the inner workings of a mind by looking at how their writing is fashioned. Dream interpreters can uncover everything from celestial messages to psychoses by what goes on in the mind during sleep. After two years carrying out surveys to gather people's opinions I now believe it's quite possible for serial door knockers to peek into a person's spiritual recesses by noticing how they react to unexpected callers arriving in their orbit.





Human behaviour is endlessly fascinating, and those in the know can pick out character traits from the most mundane activities. When eating boiled eggs, do we slice the shell with precision or smash its head in and plunge a bread soldier into its heart? When packing a suitcase, do we carefully think about our coming journey and pack accordingly, or do we quickly throw in clothes for every possible and even unlikely contingency from arctic cold to monsoon rain, to sundrenched beach? Every little action leaves clues about the internal workings of the owner, marking them out as introvert or extrovert, honest or devious, carefree or careworn, etc, etc.

Many of us like to think of ourselves as spiritual people. Pinpointing exactly what that means is a bit like sculpting water, though broadly it is to do with living out such virtues as love, compassion, harmony,

**The visible proceeds from the invisible, the seen from the unseen and action from thought .**

working on personal growth, and optionally, believing in a power greater than oneself. It's also to do with having consideration for others, from those who are in our lives all the time, to those we encounter only briefly, and of course everyone else in-between. It's about our attitudes to others and the values we apply in dealing with them, whoever they may be, and whatever the circumstances.

There is a 'mystical law' often cited in Rosicrucian philosophy and elsewhere, which says that the visible proceeds from the invisible, the seen from the unseen, and action from thought. The invisible, the intangible, always comes first and similarly, what occurs in the outer world or behaviour of a human comes from whatever processes are happening inwardly, in the thought processes. Apart from carrying out life-sustaining processes such as breathing, keeping the heart beating and sleeping, good things which occur more or less subconsciously, no-one can do anything they haven't thought of first.

From going door-to-door asking people to do opinion polls for the invaluable purpose of market research (for the purpose of this article I'll call it "Oping" and I'm an "Ope"), it's clear that many people are living spiritual values and displaying an admirable graciousness when confronted with the age-old question: "Knock knock, who's there", and the choice to *Ope or not to Ope*. Others are distinctly less spiritual in their inclinations.

Here are some of the behaviour patterns commonly encountered in the varied communities of the Midlands of England where I work, when calls are made unannounced on anyone within a given cluster of streets which changes week by week. The questioned clientele varies hugely;

from the affluent to the impoverished, the harassed working mums and dads to the relaxed retired, the fit 'n' raring to go, to the severely incapacitated, and from the rustic rural to the emphatically urban. Judge for yourselves which actions and approaches are spiritual or not and give yourself a mark on the scale from zero to 10. You can take into account mitigating circumstances such as having been in the throes of a divorce-making row at the time of the call, but realise one thing..., in your heart you really do know the score you deserve!

## Refusals

There's nothing wrong with refusing to submit to a survey, even without a reason. You don't need to explain, make excuses or concoct a week's worth of alternative activities which completely disbar taking 15 minutes out to do something unscheduled, although many people do. A simple: "*No thanks, I'm too busy*" or "*Sorry, I don't do surveys*", is quite sufficient, at least for me.

Sometimes the reasons given are quite lively, as in: "*My dog is fear aggressive*", implying it's likely to tear an Ope limb from limb if they cross the threshold, even if the mutt in question is wagging its tail pleadingly in hopes you will fuss its ears and come in. Able-bodied adults claim they can't unlock the door, can't answer questions because of a bad foot or have an impending visit from an electrician.

Tea time is the stock response. Mealtimes are curiously sacred occasions for many potential Opees,



drawing a sharp reprimand if interrupted. Likewise being on the phone or in the company of someone else, even if the someone else is an elderly, housebound person yearning for the chance of some mercifully different company just as much as the afore-mentioned dog.

For some parents it's impossible to have a child in the house and give opinions at the same time. Multitasking is beyond some. Some Ope opt-outs are truly lame, like the





strapping young man who said: *“Sorry but I’m just too lazy”*, and the many who find 15 minutes an impossibly long time to concentrate. All these though are acceptable forms of refusal, especially if accompanied by a bit of banter, laughter, a smiley face and general good cheer.

Less spiritual in nature are the surly, snappish and sneering, or those who treat their Opers to a lecture about how they shouldn’t be allowed on the streets and shouldn’t be knocking on doors after dark even if it is only 4:30 on a summers afternoon.

In my two years pounding the streets, many people have been curt but few have actually sworn. Only three have actually shut a door with such hostility as to threaten my nose and a single one demanded darkly that I had better take my foot off his step.

Anyway, for refusals, score 10 if you make them cheerfully or apologetically, or if you really do have a dying relative or a recent bereavement, and 0 for being threatening or uncouth. Scale the score according to mitigating circumstances such as having been in recovery from near-fatal dentistry at the time. Don’t forget now... in your heart *you really do know the score!*

### Refusing on Behalf of Someone Else

**In my two years pounding the streets, many people have been curt but few have actually sworn.**

Nothing, surely, is quite as disrespectful of a partner as cutting across them when they want to give an opinion and telling them they can’t. I have seen chilling scenes of aggressive husbands ordering their wives to come away from the door, or wives telling their husbands that if they have 15 minutes to do an opinion poll they can spend 15 minutes cutting the lawn instead. When one woman cheerfully asked me to come back after an hour when she would gladly participate in the poll, her husband appeared moments later warning me in loutish terms not to dare. One man who had been an opinion poll interviewer himself offered an appointment one evening, but when I arrived his wife cut across him at the door and told him in no uncertain terms that he was not going to be allowed to do it. He was genuinely cowed.

One teenager was chatting to friends and saw me leave his girlfriend’s house after making an appointment. He instructed me to *“walk away”* as his *“kid lives there”*, and suggested something



unpleasant might happen to me or my car if I didn’t. Piecing together the dialogue afterwards I realised it was not even his home, that he didn’t live with the mother of his child and yet he was still dictating what she should do. In many of these cases I have sensed real fear on behalf of belittled partners, and an unsettling belief that there was domestic abuse behind the door.

A spiritual approach to life requires that we respect someone’s right to choose what they do even if it’s not what we would do. And even if we feel it incumbent on us to persuade them otherwise, to do so thoughtfully and with reasoning. Score zero if you’ve committed any of the above, five if you’ve supported an interview taking place with your partner or adult son or daughter, 10 if you’ve gracefully accepted an interview happening even when you weren’t very keen, demonstrating love and respect above all.

### Notices on Doors

Many people have notices on their doors. Some are intended for security purposes and warn that CCTV is in operation, that a property is protected, that the householder never buys at the door and that identification will be required. The *“...if I don’t know you I won’t let you in”* attitude is a good enough response; there’s nothing wrong with such an attitude, especially if the sentiments are to do with self preservation. Bona fide callers from companies and charities will in any event carry identification that can be verified and won’t be put off by a cautious householder.

Sometimes they are funny: *“The Rottweiler can make it to the front gate in three seconds. Can you?”* or *“A lovely*





*lady and a grumpy old git live here.” or “Everyone passing through this door brings happiness, some by arriving and some by leaving.” Anything that raises a smile can be considered okay in the spiritual stakes.*

Others are intended to instil fear in door-knockers, often despite the ironic presence of an elaborate welcome mat. Most are aimed at sales people, evidently considered very undesirable characters, but many place half the human race in the list of those who will be rejected out of hand and wished out of existence. Is this the spiritual message you would like the world to receive from your welcome

**Often it is the animals which clinch it for me to get through the doors.**

mat? Score zero if you have any of those unwelcome, fear-instilling signs, especially if your husband/wife/partner didn't agree with it going up.

### **False Appointments**

I'm continually amazed by the number of people who can look you in the eye, smiling, make an appointment to do the survey at such-and-such a time the next day and then be deliberately out at the agreed time. There are many, many of them, more than 50 per cent of all the people who make appointments, with me at least. One man said he was busy feeding baby but if I came back in 30 minutes he would give an interview. Back on the dot I hung around bemused when he didn't respond to the doorbell. Later his wife arrived home with the baby and found him in the shower.

It can be quite dispiriting even to door-knocking veterans to have a succession of no shows to start off a day's work. The hope of a reasonable start dissipates like dew and they have to start all over again finding likely takers, but only after the requisite wasting of time, effort and petrol. There are a few appointment breakers for whom a real emergency arises of course, but not many. Often they told a time when they knew they would be at work. More frequently, spouses and friends talk them out of it, full of misinformation about dire consequences.

If you don't want to give an interview do the spiritual thing, be honest and say no, even if you don't want to hurt the Oper's feelings. Believe me many, many people manage to say no on every assignment. Score 10 if you do it with charm! If you would fake an appointment deliberately, score zero for causing raised

expectations to be dashed, false hope to be given and often considerable inconvenience to be caused. If you would talk or bully someone out of giving an interview that has been arranged by appointment, also take a zero. Shame on you!

### **Nagging Someone Who Is Giving an Interview**

Thankfully it's only rare that someone giving an interview has to contend with interruptions and badgering from someone who doesn't want them to participate. When it does happen it's usually because the other person disapproves of market research altogether or has the mistaken belief it will lead to unwanted phone calls and sales pitches.

When someone tries to refuse an interview on a partner's or child's behalf, it is thoroughly unspiritual, not to mention downright rude to the partner or child's position when they were quite happy for the interview to proceed. The worst case I've witnessed was when a 30-year old man was cheerfully taking part in a poll while off work with a broken leg. He was delighted to do the interview as he said he had always wondered where the information came from that was often featured on news broadcasts.

His wife was so incensed though that she interrupted half a dozen times, and when his mother arrived she launched into a verbal attack on me and "my kind", berated her son for such recklessness, and generally went on in a way befitting a TV soap. The poor man kept calm and completed the exercise but I'm sure he would have had good grounds for divorce, from his mum at least! A spiritual approach to life does not permit such treatment of anyone with whom you share your life. Score zero if you've ever behaved like this.





## Some Joys to Oping Too

Thankfully, Oping also brings with it many joys. Each assignment brings a succession of pleasant encounters for it goes without saying that everyone who does let me in is a quality human being, definitely more spiritual than not. Hopefully they gain something from the knowledge that they are helping humans to better understand themselves, helping in some small way to shape the policies and products of the future, and to change lives for the better by their contribution.

In the process we share the pleasure of human contact, conversation, warmth and congeniality. There are often dogs and cats involved in the interaction, and once a very nice little pot-bellied pig who thought he was a Labrador. Often it is the animals which clinch it for me to get through the doors, for they sense 'Ok person' and convey that to their owners. And while some people think door-knockers are a nuisance, there are many leading relatively lonely lives who welcome the chance of some different company, a new conversation and being asked what they think about things.

Many people simply relate to someone else trying to earn a bit of a living and go out of their way to help by giving an interview even if it's not particularly convenient to them and they have other things on their minds. I was deeply touched by an elderly couple who did an interview even though their daughter was critically ill in hospital and they were awaiting the most unwelcome phone call of their lives. They reasoned that their distress wouldn't become any greater from doing an opinion poll and it would help someone else out.

One man did an interview while water gushed from a burst pipe in his pantry, saying he may have to break off for a few minutes when the plumber arrived but that meanwhile he had already done everything he could about the leak, so why not help me out? For every one of the surly or ill-tempered encounters there have been a dozen more which have been full of wonderful exchanges of conversation, people sharing the highs and lows of their lives, learning or giving information and, of course, pondering the topics of the surveys, which may cover anything from how internet-savvy someone is to what symptoms are caused by diabetes.

People have offered me cool drinks on hot days and hot ones on cold days; been kind as to my comfort and related to someone doing a 'hard' job where refusals can sometimes almost exceed one's will to live. They have shared their interests, anything from wonderful collections to clever crafts, and yes, a significant few do tell me they let me in because they thought it was the spiritual thing to do.

Sometimes the encounter offers me a chance to serve a use other than that of the Oping assignment; the chance to provide a listening ear for someone in distress or add a nugget of liveliness to a day in the life of a widower which might otherwise follow a relentless pattern of dreariness. It is heart warming to find a need which is within your capacity to meet.

In every case the people who let me in gave of their time and shared a little bit of themselves. That, I think, is approaching a spiritual context; making and experiencing the invisible connection that exists between us all, whether we know it or not. When preparing this article I came across an article called "*Invisible Connections*" by Joel Remde on the website *yourdailylifecoach.com*. He wrote:

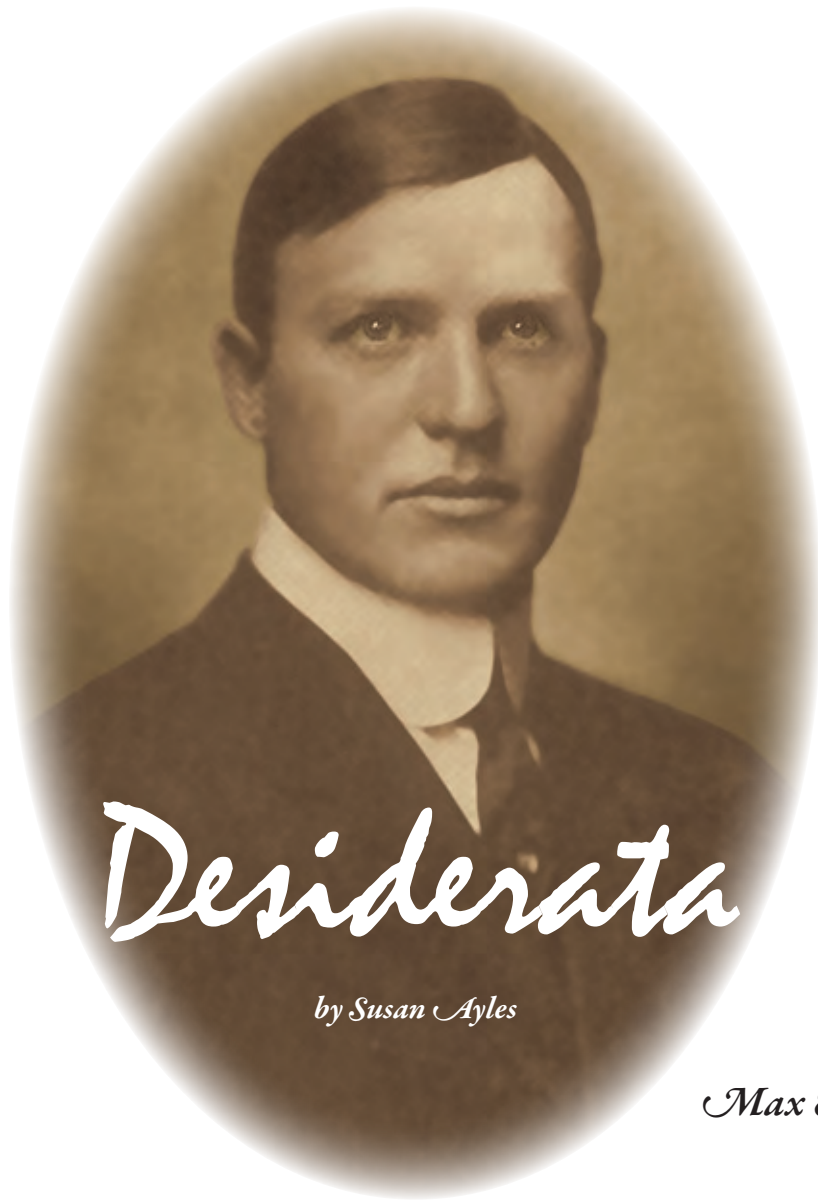
*"Why would we want to be more connected with other people, or with other living beings? Here are some reasons I came up with: \* To feel togetherness rather than loneliness. \* To make a difference for the other person or being. \* To share by giving and receiving. \* To experience the richness of life, and perhaps the joy of making a new friend. \* There's more strength in connectedness than in separateness. \* To feel part of something greater than yourself. \* To sense the interconnectedness of everything. Connection, like love, is a basic human need."*

That 'knock knock' or 'dring dring' at the door is always an opportunity to connect with another person, probably one you don't yet know. Who knows what reason the invisible power has for bringing you together, but this is one of the mysterious routes used to bring some sort of an opportunity for you to consider and for you to accept or decline as you will, with whatever karmic consequences that may generate. Every connection changes you, however subtly. It adds to you experience, leaves an impression, provokes a reaction. There is always an effect.

So, how will you react next time an Oper arrives? Not harshly, I hope! It's an opportunity, and like every opportunity, potentially a spiritual one. I hope you score high. And so I'm off again, Oping and Oping for yet another day of wonderful human connections.







*Who was  
Max Ehrmann?*

**M**ANY READERS will be familiar with the thoughtful poem *Desiderata*, which is reproduced often on greeting cards, posters and in other contexts where a person might seek to send words of wisdom and comfort to another in need. For years the rumour has persisted that the words were penned in ancient times, hundreds of years ago. Indeed, they do have a timeless quality about them, with a quiet profundity seemingly as relevant now as in days of yore. But it was by error that they were attributed to an unknown author of, in or before the 1640s.

The oft-repeated gaff was the work, it seems, of one Rev Frederick Kates, a clergyman of St Paul's Church in the American town of Baltimore, Maryland. In 1956 the well-meaning rector included *Desiderata* in a collection of devotional material which he brought together for the

use of his congregation. From Wikipedia we have: '*The compilation included the church's foundation date: 'Old Saint Paul's Church, Baltimore A.D. 1692.' Consequently, the date of the text's authorship was (and still is) widely mistaken as 1692, the year of the church's foundation.*'<sup>1</sup>

The myth of its ancient date was born swiftly afterward, possibly because it lent an extra layer of charm and poignancy to the text to think of it written so long before. It then persisted to grow legs for the next few decades as more and more people became enchanted by *Desiderata*, Latin for '*things desired*', or '*...to be desired*' or variations of like translation. The Rev is thought to have circulated only about 200 copies and yet it became one of the best known pieces to ordinary people who were not particularly literary, spiritual or mystical by nature.

In fact, the sage advice was penned in the 1920s by



an American writer Max Ehrmann who was born the youngest of five children to Bavarian immigrant parents in Terre Haute, Indiana, on 16 September, 1872 and passed away in September 1945. Ehrmann's sensitive and sensible words give the lie to anyone believing that lawyers have no hearts, for a lawyer he was, setting up practice in his home town after gaining an English degree from DePauw University, Indiana and then studying law and philosophy at Harvard University in the 1890s.



He spent two years as state's attorney in Vigo, Indiana, then worked in the family businesses of meat packing and overalls manufacture for 10 years, until he was 40. After that, he devoted himself full-time to writing and became prolific, acquiring the nickname Poet Laureate of Terre Haute. The website *desiderata.com* records: *'Toward the end of his life, during an interview, he told a writer, 'At DePauw, I contracted a disease which I have never shaken off. The disease was Idealism. I took it to Harvard with me where I studied philosophy. 'Because of it I did the thing in life I wanted to do—writing.'*"

The website continues: *'During his life, Max Ehrmann contributed great thoughts to our literary lexicons, blending the magic of words and wisdom with his worthy observations. His deep and abiding concern over social issues are reflected throughout his many works. Such poems as 'Complacent Women', written in 1918, and 'Washington, D.C.', written in 1924 about the oil scandals, are as relevant today as they were then. He searched endlessly for spiritual contentment, often turning to nature as in his poem, 'The Noise of the City and Away.' His philosophical writings are a search for social truth and peace, messages that never age.'*

He copyrighted *Desiderata* in 1927 under the opening line, *'Go placidly among the noise and haste'*, which struck such a chord with the public that it has worked its way into being one of the best known phrases in the English language. The poem was recreated as an Athena poster, finding popularity with the thoughtful public. Later it became a favourite of the 1960s Flower Power generation which famously set itself in favour of love, not war. Singer Les Crane ran into a copyright hitch in 1971 when he set the words to music, winning a Grammy for *Best Spoken Word Record*.<sup>3</sup> Having first read them on a poster he might have had a reasonable defence in assuming them to be in the public domain

and not subject to copyright, but it seems he did have to share the proceeds of his popular recording.<sup>4</sup>

Also in 1971 the poem was published without the Ehrmann family's permission resulting in court action against the publisher. The 7<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in 1976 that copyright had been forfeited because the poem had been authorised for publication without a copyright notice in the 1940s and that the poem was therefore in the public domain. Fair game therefore to be published and republished at will.<sup>4</sup>

Various famous people have been known to use the inspiring work for their own purposes. Actor Leonard Nimoy, Dr Spock in the hit sci-fi drama *Star Trek*, recited it on his 1968 album *'Two Sides of Leonard Nimoy'*. Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau quoted it after losing his majority in a 1972 election, reassuring the nation that: *'The universe is unfolding as it should.'* Adlai Stevenson, the Democratic hopeful for the American presidency, passed away in 1965 and was found to have earmarked *Desiderata* to be printed in his Christmas cards.<sup>5</sup> US Army psychiatrist Merrill Moore wrote in 1942 to Ehrmann that he used the *Desiderata* poem in his therapy work, and also wrote to Ehrmann in 1944 suggesting that the poem should be bottled and sold as *'Dr Ehrmann's Magic Soul Medicine.'*<sup>6</sup>

In 2010, Terre Haute honoured its literary giant with the unveiling of a life-sized bronze statue of him by artist Bill Wolfe, seated on a bench, notebook in hand. The sculpture is at the junction of Seventh Street and Wabash Avenue, a corner dubbed the *'Crossroads of America'* because it is the intersection of Highways 40 and 41, facing east-west and north-south respectively. At this spot, plaques carrying lines of the *Desiderata* are embedded in the footpath and the full poem is also displayed.<sup>7</sup> So, that is the history set straight at last. Read now the text of Ehrmann's beautiful text, reprinted with all its quiet wisdom.

If only everyone were able to follow this humanist advice to accept themselves and others as they are, what peace they and the rest of the world would experience. As far as I know Max Ehrmann was not a Rosicrucian, but expressing sentiments such as these, I'm sure he would have been at home within the fraternity. Below then follows Max Ehrmann's famous poem *"Desiderata"*, followed another equally edifying poem by him called *"A Prayer."*





# Desiderata

by Max Ehrmann

Go placidly amid the noise and haste and remember what peace there may be in silence. As far as possible without surrender be on good terms with all persons.

Speak your truth quietly and clearly, and listen to others, even the dull and the ignorant; they too have their story.

Avoid loud and aggressive persons, they are vexations to the spirit. If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain and bitter; for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself.

Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans. Keep interested in your own career, however humble. It is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time.

Exercise caution in your business affairs, for the world is full of trickery. But let this not blind you to what virtue there is. Many persons strive for high ideals, and everywhere life is full of heroism.

Be yourself. Especially do not feign affection. Neither be cynical about love. For in the face of all aridity and disenchantment, it is as perennial as the grass.

Take kindly the counsel of the years, gracefully surrendering the things of youth.

Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune. But do not distress yourself with dark imaginings. Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness.

Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here. And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.

Therefore be at peace with God, whatever you conceive Him to be. And whatever your labours and aspirations in the noisy confusion of life, keep peace with your soul. With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world.

Be cheerful. Strive to be happy.





# A Prayer

by Max Ehrmann

Let me do my work each day. And if the darkened hours of despair overcome me, may I not forget the strength that comforted me in the desolation of other times.

May I still remember the bright hours that found me walking over the silent hills of my childhood, or dreaming on the margin of a quiet river, when a light glowed within me, and I promised my early God to have courage amid the tempests of the changing years.

Spare me from bitterness and from the sharp passions of unguarded moments. May I not forget that poverty and riches are of the spirit.

Though the world knows me not, may my thoughts and actions be such as shall keep me friendly with myself.

Lift up my eyes from the earth, and let me not forget the uses of the stars. Forbid that I should judge others lest I condemn myself.

Let me not follow the clamour of the world, but walk calmly in my path.

Give me a few friends who will love me for what I am; and keep ever burning before my vagrant steps the kindly light of hope.

And though age and infirmity overtake me, and I come not within sight of the castle of my dreams, teach me still to be thankful for life, and for time's olden memories that are good and sweet. And may the evening's twilight find me gentle still.<sup>8</sup>

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Max Ehrmann





# The Indo-Europeans

## PART 1: Introduction

by Sven Johansson

*Parts 1 and 2 of this multi-part article do not directly deal with the hypothesised spiritual beliefs of the cultures descended from the original Indo-Europeans; but it lays the groundwork for an eventual investigation into those beliefs and how they have influenced the genesis and maintenance of many religious faiths. There are many spiritual concepts we take for granted as self-evident truths; but all of them began somewhere at some time by someone or more persons. And many trace their lineages back through ancient civilisations descended from the original Proto-Indo-European language speakers.*

*This series of articles is intended to encourage you to further investigate the origins of human cultures of any sort, but in particular the one that brought about one of the languages you speak, one that almost certainly descended from an Ur-language called Proto-Indo-European, also known as PIE.*

**I**N ENGLISH the integer lying between two and four is called “three”; in Welsh, Irish and Czech it is “tri”; in Dutch it is “drie”; in German it is “drei”; in French it is “trois”; in Italian, Albanian, Swedish, Danish and Norwegian it is “tre”; in Spanish it is “tres”; in Romanian it is “trei”; in Greek it is “treis”; in Lithuanian it is “trys”; in Russian, Bosnian and Serbian it is “tri”; and so on and so forth. And that’s for just one word; wait till you start investigating the many other words common to most European languages.

Moving East..., in Hindi, Punjabi, Bengali and Nepali “three” is pronounced like the word “teen”, made up of “tee” for “three”, followed by the (male) definite article “n” as in “*the* three.” In Gujarati it is “trana”, made up of “tra” for “three” followed by the (male) definite article “na”, once again for “*the* three.” And there are several other associated derivatives of “tee” and “tra.” But after that, the similarities between languages for the word “three” is clearly not related to this group of Asian and European languages. The verbal expression for the numeral 3 in these two large groups from





East and West all begin with a dental consonant, namely a consonant formed with the tongue against the teeth as in T, D, or TH, whereas in all other languages it does not. Within the group, nearly all words for “three” are followed after the first consonant by an R and for some the definite article “the.” And the vowel portion of these words are nearly all EE, EH, or AH, or a close variation of them.

The similarities among these terms for the same numeral reflect a fundamental relationship among the languages in question and clearly they are linguistic cousins. Along with a number of other languages, both modern and extinct, they are members of what is called the Indo-European language family. The modern representatives of this family are spoken by nearly all the inhabitants of Europe, north Asia, the northern and central parts of the Indian subcontinent, plus Afghanistan, Iran, Sri Lanka, and of course all parts of the world where derivatives of these languages have migrated to, such as Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Canada, the whole of Central and South America, as well as large parts of Africa. Collectively, the Indo-European family of languages contains today the native languages of well over half the world’s population.

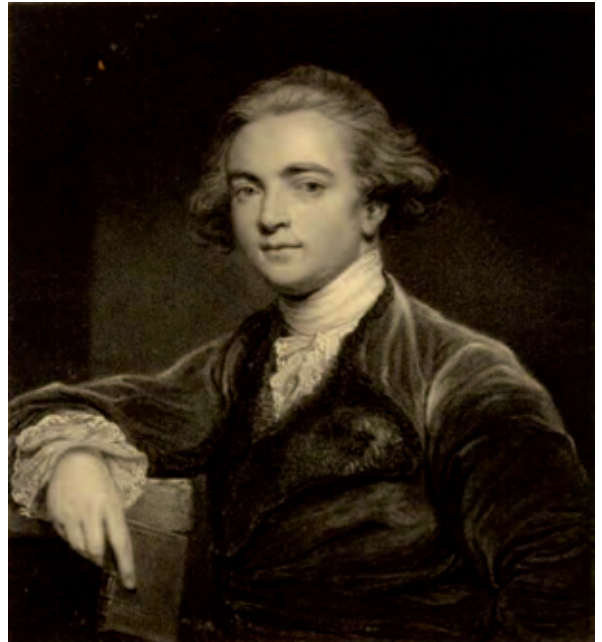
## William Jones

We owe our first formal awareness of this far-flung language family to the work of a British jurist in India, Sir William Jones who, while on assignment in India around 1780, set out to learn Sanskrit. His original intention was to familiarise himself with the principles of native Indian law, many of whose basic documents were written in Sanskrit, long a written language, though by his day all but extinct as a language spoken in daily affairs. Like many a well educated Englishman of the time, Jones had studied Greek and Latin, and much to his surprise he began encountering Sanskrit words showing clear similarities to words of the same or similar meaning in the languages of Europe.

Jones was by no means the first to have noticed the similarities between Sanskrit and the Romance languages,

**The Sanskrit word for “snake” was *sarpa*, surely related to the Latin word *serpens*?**

but he was the first to cause the links between languages we know today are of Indo-European descent to enter the world of serious academic research. Other contributors (before and after Jones) include *Thomas Stephens*, an English Jesuit priest in Goa (late 16<sup>th</sup> Century); *Filippo Sassetti*, an Italian merchant in India (same period), the Dutch linguist *van Boxborn* of the mid 17<sup>th</sup> Century; *Thomas Young* (c. 1815); and especially *Franz Bopp* (19<sup>th</sup> Century).



*William Jones (1746 - 1794) was not the first person to point out the similarities between languages of what later came to be known as the Indo-European language family. He was however the one who did by far the most to bring this grouping of languages to the attention of scholars and is believed to have coined the term 'Indo-European', though this is disputed by some and attributed to Thomas Young (c.1815) instead.*

What Jones noted in particular were the similarities between numerals in Sanskrit and their equivalents in the Romance languages. “Three” in Sanskrit is *trayas*, comparable to the Latin *tres* and Classic Greek *tria*. “Five” is *panca*, closely resembling the Greek *penete*; while the numbers “seven”, “eight” and “nine” are in Sanskrit *sapta*, *ashta* and *nava*, intriguingly close for Jones to their Latin equivalents *septem*, *octo* and *novem*. The Sanskrit word for “snake” was *sarpa*, surely related to the Latin word *serpens*? The word *rajan* for “king” seemed closer than chance would permit to the Latin word *regem*, and the word *devas*, meaning “god”, “gods” or “godly” resembled the Latin *divas* for “divine.”

These and many other similarities in both vocabulary and grammar, led Jones to a striking conclusion, which he presented in an address to the Asiatic Society in Calcutta on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1786. The Sanskrit language, he asserted, bears to both Greek and Latin “...a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and in the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed that no philologist could examine them all three without believing them to have sprung from some common source which perhaps no longer exists.” There were other less forceful reasons he said, for linking Sanskrit to the Celtic and Teutonic languages, the latter group of course including English.

Unwittingly, Jones had launched a revolution in



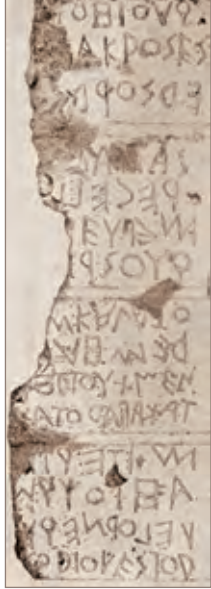




*Native languages descended from the original Proto-Indo-European language are today spoken in most parts of the world, as represented by the dark-blue regions. The light-blue regions represent areas where native languages are non-PIE related but where a majority of the population speak one or other PIE-descended languages. The light-grey areas represent areas where the majority native language is non-PIE descended.*

**PIE Grandchild.**

*Archaic Latin  
c. 200 BCE*



of Germany, Denmark and Norway. And of course there is a strong contribution to English from Latin as well, parent of all the Romance languages which was once a mere local dialect of *Latium*, a district of Italy immediately south of the river Tiber in ancient Rome. Similarly, PIE must once have been spoken by one or more tribes inhabiting an equally

linguistics which in turn opened up a whole new area of archaeological discovery. His brilliant linguistic conjecture has been confirmed by nearly two and a half centuries of research, and we now know that not only the languages he mentioned, but also the Slavic and two of the three Baltic languages, the languages of Iran and Afghanistan, as well as a number of less prominent languages and dialects, must all have evolved from a single ancestor in much the same way that the Romance languages (Romanian, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, etc) much later evolved from Latin. This common ancestor no longer existed in his day, and Jones had no idea what it would have sounded like. But over the past 250 years a lot has been inferred from its descendants and through painstaking research, a reconstructed version of it has been created that is today called *Proto-Indo-European*, or *PIE* for short.

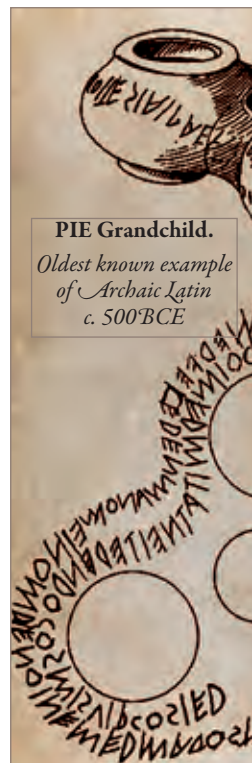
circumscribed area, after which their descendants carried the language in many variations East, South and West, though predominantly Westward.

We know, or can reasonably guess a good deal about the Indo-Europeans through some of the historically more recent Eastern and Middle-Eastern languages. From the cultures of the people who used those languages, we can come to certain broad conclusions about the original PIE tribe/s. Although PIE was never recorded in writing, linguistics have reconstructed much of its vocabulary, and through this proto word-list, surprisingly much can be inferred about the lives of those who spoke PIE. If we know some of the words the Proto-Indo-Europeans used, we can infer what their daily concerns were and are bound sooner or later to discover what they did, what they thought, the nature of the gods they worshipped, etc. And from fragments of poetry, images on pottery, and graffiti on walls, we have brief glimpses of the stories their bards spoke of and perhaps sang. Yet despite all this, we don't know with any certainty where the original PIE speakers lived, or when their language first evolved. And the disparity of opinion among scholars has in the past century been very wide, though that is to be expected from any serious form of enquiry where firm evidence is in short supply.

**An Indo-European People?**

If PIE once existed as a single, spoken language, it stands to reason that it must have been spoken by a people we could call the Indo-Europeans. English, now spoken on every continent, evolved primarily from a handful of Anglo-Saxon-Nordic invaders of the British Isles in the post-Roman era. The origins of these tribes were along the North Sea coasts

In various times, scholars have placed the original PIE speakers in Anatolia, Greece, Asia Minor, central Europe, eastern Germany, southern Russia, the north Caucasus and even as far afield as the northern shore of Lake Baikal in Siberia. They have dated them anywhere between 2500 to 8000 BCE, but there is still not a single potsherd, stone axe, bone fish hook or awl of which we can positively say: "this was made by an Indo-European." Artefacts tell us many things about their makers, including how they made them



**PIE Grandchild.**  
*Oldest known example  
of Archaic Latin  
c. 500 BCE*



**PIE Grandchild : Early Saxon Runic Alphabet**

*Elder-Futhark was the runic alphabet used by the first Saxon migrants to the British Isles in the early to mid 5th Century. This alphabet is descended from either a north Italic variant such as Etruscan or Raetic, or from "Ancient Latin" (Prisca Latinitas). Saxon was therefore a PIE-descendant language and contributed to the emergence of its distant grandchild, modern English.*



and the tools they used to fashion them. But we will never hear their makers speak or feel anything but the most rarefied presence of such ancient people.

Yet, recent years of genetic studies of people from Europe, the Middle East, Central and South Asia, have begun to yield some clues. Not directly as to the original PIE speakers, but concerning their ancient ancestors from central Asia between 15,000 and 37,000 years ago and the migration routes that were possibly followed in the peopling of the much later PIE speaking regions.

The search for the original Indo-Europeans therefore involves piecing together extremely fragmentary clues from a range of scholarly disciplines such as genetics, linguistics, geography, ecology, palaeontology and archaeology, and seeing if they can be manoeuvred into a plausible fit. Although genetics has yielded some remarkable results in very recent times, it has been primarily through linguistics that scholars have been able to reconstruct words that reveal the natural environment in which the original PIE speakers may have lived. Through geography and ecology, scholars have been able to circumscribe broad areas corresponding to that type of environment. And through knowledge of when certain technologies first came into use (agriculture, pottery, copper/bronze, boat and ship building), approximate timescales have been established.

Through archaeology, we can identify human remains, potsherds, post-holes, wall foundations, and other remains which give us a degree of understanding if the human culture, whose location, way of life and subsequent spread, matches what we have deduced about the Indo-Europeans. But even so, we will emerge with no more than a balance of probabilities, and caution and humility in such an enquiry is an absolute prerequisite. The time and place where our remote linguistic forebears first lived has been conjectured, and broad upper and lower limits have been agreed upon. But as certainty is lacking both in space and time, we will have to wait for better techniques and technology to assist us in narrowing down our conclusions. But that has not precluded scholars from arriving at certain firmly established conclusions, and the rest of this multi-part article will now discuss them in some detail.

### Pre-War Teutonic Delusions

Before we embark on our search however, an important point needs to be made:



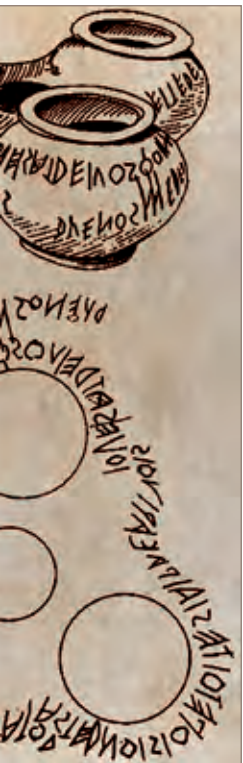
*The approximate distribution of PIE-descended languages in pre-modern times.*

Although PIE must once have encapsulated both the people and culture of those who spoke PIE, it is today a purely linguistic concept. Up to the end of the Second World War however, PIE was in certain quarters intermingled with notions of racial superiority. In the years leading up to the Second World War, there was a growing interest among certain German scholars in particular of an “Indo-European race” (more frequently referred to as “Aryans”) possibly still existing somewhere as a lost Germanic tribe, possibly even in the Himalayas.

Although the word “Indo-European” was used, it was eventually more common to hear PIE speakers referred to as “Indo-Germanic”, making the original PIE speakers none other than the master race of the Teutonic lands. That gave rather short shrift of course to the Greeks, Latins, Slavs and Celts, let alone other contributing cultures thousands of miles farther east and south.

The Nazis carried this linguistic nationalism to its illogical and tragic conclusion, identifying the Teutonic ‘race’ as the original Aryans, a term which had by then been conflated with PIE into referring to a race of superior humans defined by tall, athletic, blue-eyed people of north-European racial stereotype. The word *Aryan* properly applies only to a single sub-branch of Indo-Europeans who migrated into the Indian subcontinent somewhere between 2500 and 1500 BCE, far indeed from the shores of the Baltic.

We have no way of knowing for certain whether or not the original PIE speakers were a single ‘race’ or were an agglomeration of immigrant cultures or races that settled on a common language out of the necessity to communicate and cooperate with each other. But what is absolutely certain is that as their descendants spread across the world, carrying their variations of the PIE language with them, they encountered and interbred with people of the most







### Most Ancient PIE Ancestor?

*This skull, known as “Kostenski Man”, is currently the oldest human to have had his genome sequenced. His DNA reveals that he is the oldest ancestor of the European human lineage/s which separated some 5,000 years earlier from the Eastern human lineage/s. He is therefore potentially the oldest known ancestor of the much, much later Proto Indo-Europeans.*

diverse hues and features. As proof, one need only contrast the appearance of an Irishman, a Scandinavian, a Russian, a Greek, an Armenian, an Afghan and a Bengali. All of them are inheritors of PIE, yet none are wholly Indo-European by heredity.

Indo-European languages are a fact, and so perhaps are Indo-European cultural remains. But as far as Indo-European genes that anyone can positively identify, this still eludes us, though it may indeed one day be found when the field of genetic studies has advanced further. Who for example would have thought only a few years ago

that the genetic study of a single bone from a man who died around 37,000 years ago (“Kostenski Man” from south-west Russia) would have established with a strong degree of confidence the deep origins of Europeans and the approximate period during which the European and Asian lineages split? So, there is still hope that genetic studies may yet contribute to discovering the original home territory of the earliest PIE speakers.

## Tracing the Ancestry

So, let’s begin by examining the family tree of the Indo-European languages, living and dead. Like any tree, its structure is divided into a few major limbs. From these limbs we have many branches, and from the branches sprout many more twigs, namely the actual languages or dialects spoken. The full spread of these languages, from the Indo-Iranian limb in the east to the Germano-Celtic limb in the west, is shown in the chart on pages 20 and 21. It is not a comprehensive chart but includes the most important languages from antiquity to the present.

The present state of health of the various limbs varies greatly. The Anatolian languages for example, their best-known representative being Hittite, are all extinct. The Celtic languages survive only in a fringe along the Atlantic coast of Europe and include Breton, Welsh and the Gaelic of western Scotland and Ireland. Cornish however vanished over 200 years ago, while the Manx dialect of Gaelic

disappeared from the Isle of Man during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

By contrast, the largest and most vigorous limb is the Germanic, which in turn splits into three major branches. The eastern branch, now extinct, included the various dialects of Gothic; the northern branch includes all the modern Scandinavian languages, including Icelandic, along with their common ancestor, Old Norse. Its western branch includes German, Yiddish, Dutch, Flemish, Afrikaans, and English which became by the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century the world’s most important language in terms of both geographical spread and number of speakers.

During the past five centuries Indo-European languages have spread both east and west far beyond their previous extent. For philologists seeking to reconstruct the ancestral language, this spread is however irrelevant, and even the modern members of that family are of limited interest. Much more useful are the *oldest* recorded members of the various branches, which, being closest in time to the original common source, resemble it more than any of their descendants do. These Indo-European great-grandparents include Hittite, Sanskrit, Mycenaean Greek and Old Persian. From a later period come Old Latin, and still later



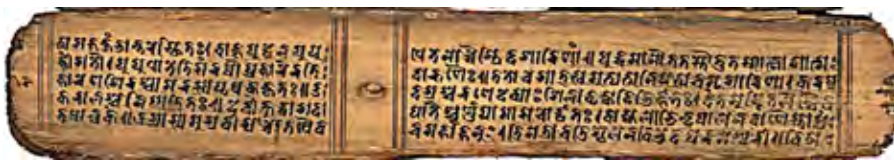
### PIE Grandchild: Hittite cuneiform tally of goats and sheep.

*Although not a spoken language for millennia, the Hittite language, more than any other (besides Sanskrit) has been carefully studied as one of the earliest known languages related to Proto Indo-European.*

Gothic, classical Armenian and Old Church Slavonic, all recorded in early translations of the Bible.

By studying and comparing words of the same or similar meaning in descendant languages, linguists have reconstructed the probably original Indo-European ‘roots’





PIE Grandchild: Classical Sanskrit.

*Above is the oldest known example of written Classical Sanskrit. Written on palm-leaf, it dates from the 11<sup>th</sup> Century CE. Ancient Sanskrit, the predecessor of Classical Sanskrit which emerged between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Centuries CE, was an oral-only Indo-European language of unknown genesis. It contained the largest and most ancient body of poetry known, far older for example than the *Odyssey* and *Illiad* of Homer in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century BCE and rivaling or possibly exceeding in age the famous Epic of Gilgamesh from the Third Dynasty of Uruk, c. 2100 BCE.*

of words. By similar comparisons they have deduced the grammatical rules by which the words were combined into sentences. They are certain for example that PIE was a highly inflected language like classical Greek, Latin and modern Russian. In other words, the function of a word within a sentence depends on which of various endings is added to a fundamental root. So, the PIE word *\*kerwos*, “stag,” (its English descendant is the archaic “hart”) consists of the root *\*ker-*, (meaning “horn”) plus a noun suffix, *-wo* (meaning “thing”) (giving “horned thing”) plus an ending *-s*, indicating that this particular stag was the subject of a sentence.

From here on, forms preceded by an asterisk (as in *\*kerwos*) are to be understood as *reconstructed* words, not necessarily actual words. In other words they are not found in ordinary writing. We find relics of this system in English verbs for example, like “go”, “go~es”, “go~ing”, and “go~ne.” Other Indo-European syntactic changes are indicated by a change in the root vowel as in “sing”, sang” and “sung.”

### New Words from Old

The Indo-Europeans created new words by combining existing ones, as have many of their linguistic descendants; e.g. “house~wife”, “strike~breaker”, “blue~eyed”, etc. Such combinations were specially common in Indo-European bardic poetry. Philologists have reconstructed some of these words: for example, *\*klewos ngwzhitom*, “imperishable fame,” and *\*isarom menos*, “strong-holy mind.” Many similar epithets crop up in Homer, such as “rosy-fingered dawn”, “wine-dark sea”, “swift-footed Achilles”, etc. The poet himself was a *\*wekwom teksos*, a “word-weaver” or bard.

Similar compounds were used for personal names as can be seen in many historic names from Indo-European languages. So we have the Greek *Sophocles* meaning “famed for wisdom”; the Slavic *Wenceslaus* (or *Václav*) meaning “having greater glory.” The name of the Celtic chieftain *Vercingetorix* who almost defeated Julius Caesar, appropriately meant “warrior king”, while that of the Persian monarch *Xerxes*, equally appropriately, meant “ruling men.” Similar examples are not uncommon in modern English (*Shake~speare*, *Gold~smith* and *Wain~wright*) and Irish (*Kenn~edy*, meaning “hideous head”).

More directly relevant to our search are PIE words that enable us to cautiously reconstruct the way of life and environment of the PIE speakers. We must be very careful though, for words change both their meanings and

pronunciations with time. And when the meanings have diverged widely it is sometimes impossible to be certain what the original significance was. So, although *\*teks-* meant to “weave” (English: “tex~tile”), it also meant building house walls through the process of weaving thin branches (English: “archi~tect”) and even “to fabricate” in various other ways (English: “tech~nology”).

However, when we find for example that the noun “plough” is *aror* in Icelandic, *ear* in Old English, *aratron* in Greek, *aratrum* in Latin, *arathar* in Irish, *arklas* in Lithuanian and *araur* in Armenian, it seems safe to conclude that the Indo-Europeans possessed ploughs of some sort, which they called something like *\*aro-trom*. The obvious conclusion that they were agrarian, and therefore post 8000 BCE, is strengthened by such reconstructions as *\*grmo-* (English: “grain”, “corn”), *\*mel-* (English: “mill”) and *\*yeug-* (English: “yoke”).

Yoking animals, presumably to pull a plough, points to domesticated cattle *\*gwou-* (English: “cow”). We also find words for “sheep” *\*awi-* (English: “ewe”), for swine *\*su-* and piglet *\*porko-* and small livestock *\*pekus* (Latin: “pecunia”; meaning “fee” or “money” in English). The horse *\*ekwos-* (Latin: “equus”; English: “equ~estrian”) was also known, but not necessarily domesticated. Perhaps significantly,

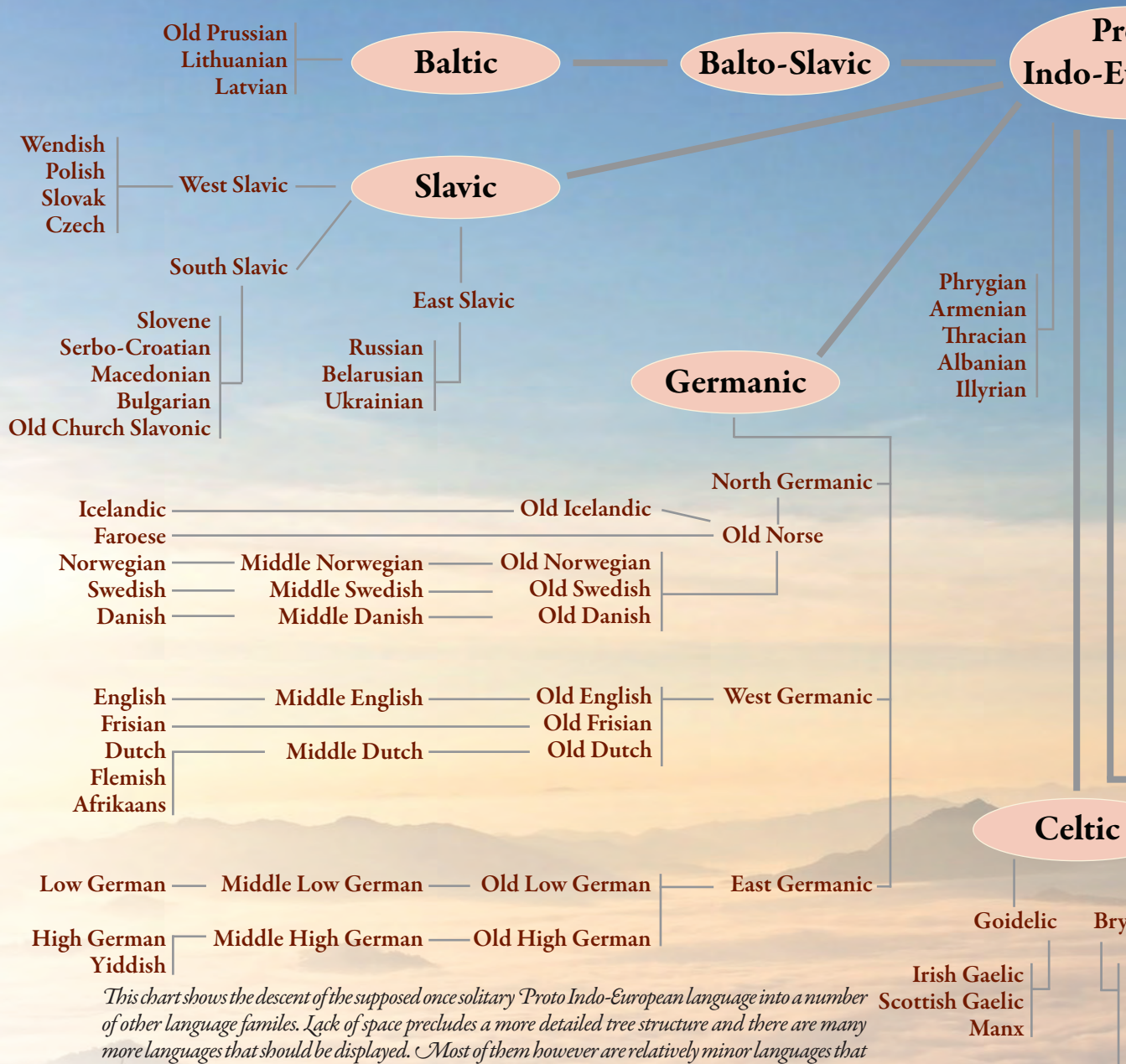
**There is still hope that genetic studies may yet contribute to discovering the original home territory of the earliest PIE speakers.**

the Indo-Europeans may not have had a specific word for “young horse”, for the words “foal” and “filly” come from the root *\*pu-lo-* which may originally have meant merely “young animal.” The dog *\*kwon-* (English: “hound”, “can~ine”) was present, most surely domesticated since the wolf *\*wklwo-* was also known. Less useful domestic animals were the *\*mus-* and *\*lus-*.

So we can reasonably infer that the original PIE speakers were agriculturalist, at least during parts of the year and therefore probably post 8000 BCE. They used horses, though possibly only as beasts of burden rather than human carriage, and may therefore have lived long before the estimated period of horse riding began. That would place the early PIE speakers definitely prior to 2500 BCE,







*This chart shows the descent of the supposed once solitary Proto Indo-European language into a number of other language families. Lack of space precludes a more detailed tree structure and there are many more languages that should be displayed. Most of them however are relatively minor languages that are now all extinct. What is represented though are the main language groups and their languages.*

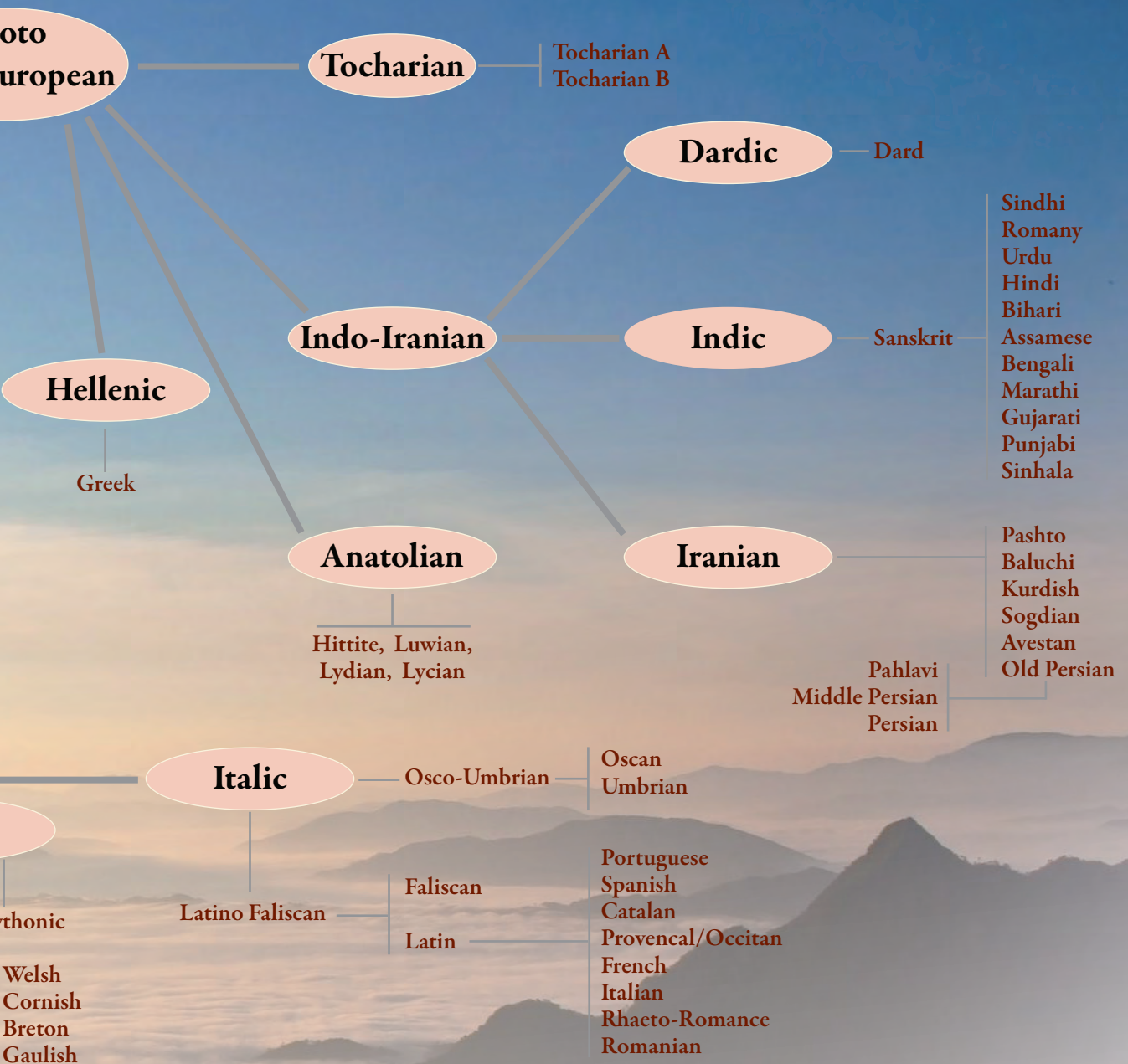
as horses were already in use by then as evidenced by horse bones in human graves of the Bell Beaker culture of present-day Hungary. But we may also need to push the date back as far as 4000 BCE due to evidence of horse usage from the Botai culture of present-day Kazakhstan, and almost certainly it is even earlier than this.

### How they Lived

The early PIE speakers lived in houses *\*domo-* (English:

"dom~estic"), probably with walls of wattle daubed with mud mixed in with grass for bondage, and certainly there would have been a door *\*dhwēr-* (English: "door") though this term may originally have meant the gateway to the compound where the family or tribe with its livestock lived. Gathered around the domestic fire *\*par-* (English: "fire") they dined on cakes or porridge made from *\*grno-* (English: "grain", perhaps both wheat and barley), and on meat from their animals..., mainly no doubt their lambs, piglets and calves, the older animals being more useful for





ploughing, breeding and milk *\*melg-* (English: “milk”). As there is a PIE word for milk, one must assume that milk was either used for hand-rearing orphaned livestock, or for human consumption. If milk was used for human consumption then we can place a limit of 13,000 BCE as the very earliest possible emergence of the PIE speakers, since lactose tolerance in adults is believed to have first emerged around then, in the Urals.

On occasion, the PIE-speaker’s menu would have included fish *\*pisk-* (English: “fish” or “fisk” in Swedish),

including the *\*laks-* (English: “laks” or “lax” in the Scandinavian languages, and usually interpreted as “salmon”). For sweetening, wild bees *\*bbei-* (English: “bees”) provided honey *\*melit-* (English: “mel”, Latin for honey, and “mol~asses”), which was sometimes fermented into mead *\*medhu-* (English: “mead”) for ceremonial or celebratory drinking.

Clothing, or some of it at least, was made of wool *\*wel-*, spun *\*spen-* into thread *\*tretu-* which was then woven *\*webb-* (English: “webb”) into cloth that was sewn





\**synu-* into garments. Other garments may have been made from the fibers of flax \**lino-* (English: “lin~en”). The Indo-Europeans may have known copper, but probably as a rather rare, imported material, since almost no metallurgical terms have been reconstructed. Most tools were presumably made of wood, bone, or stone \**stoi-nō-*. Their lack of any name for copper would place the PIE speakers somewhere between 6000 and 3500 BCE.

The lord of the household was the father (\**pōter*). His wife was \**gwéneh-* (English: “queen”, “woman”, “wife”). Their son and daughter were \**sunu-* and \**dhugater-* respectively. The son’s sister was \**swésor* (Latin: “soror”), and her brother was \**bhréater* (Latin: “frater”). The father’s position is attested by several linguistic clues, among them the presence of more specific terms for the marital relationships of a woman than for those of a man; e.g. “daughter-in-law” \**snusós* (Latin: “nurus”). When a woman married she no doubt moved to her husband’s home, not vice versa. Moreover, in the mythology of all early PIE descended people who have left written records (i.e. 2500 BCE and later), the head god was invariably male. Sometimes he was known simply as \**dyeu-* (English: “Jove”; Latin: “Deus”; Greek: “Zeus”; Norse: “Tyr”;

The lord of the household was the father (\**pōter*).  
His wife was \**gwéneh-* (English: “queen”,  
“woman”, “wife”).

Germanic: “Tiu” memorialised in “Tuesday”). But he was also called \**dyeu-pōter* “god-the-father” (English: “Ju~piter”). Since \**dyeu-* also meant “shine”, this god must have personified the sun or sky as Jupiter, Zeus and Tiu indeed did.

The father \**pōter* ruled the mother \**mōter* and their son \**sunu-* and daughter \**dhugater-*. The chief or ruler \**reg-* (Latin: “reg~num”) ruled the clan or village “*weik-*, and with a shortened vowel, \**reg-*, also meant to “move in a straight line.” The \**reg-* therefore no doubt led the people with firmness (“in a straight line”) when concerted action was necessary, as in warfare or when the tribe moved its village to a new site. And moving from place to place may have been often before settled agricultural times, or when only part of the year was devoted to agriculture. But the \**reg-* / \**pōter* seems also to have performed sacred functions, mediating between \**dyeu-* and \**man-*.

## Where and When?

And now to the all-important question: where and when did the earliest PIE speakers live? They knew snow \**sneighw-* but had no words for “palm”, “lion”, “tiger” or

“camel.” That strongly suggests they were not originally from the hot steamy tropics, as in parts of central and southern India. Nor were they from the desert areas of present-day Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq or the Middle East generally, for there would have been ample lions and palms there. They also had no words for “vine”, “olive”, “laurel”, “ass”, “island”, and probably no word for “sea” either (the English word “sea” comes from a purely Germanic root). That would rule out the subtropical lands bordering the Mediterranean. On the other hand, the lack of terms for “spruce”, “fir”, “lemming”, “grouse” and “ptarmigan” seems to rule out the forested areas of northern Europe and Asia.

So much for environmental words that are missing. What words related to location were present? For animals, in addition to the domesticated species listed above, we have the horse (\**ekwos-*) wild or not, wolf (\**wklwo-*), bear, beaver (\**bhibra-*), and otter. For vegetation we have the birch (*bherag-*), ash (\**as-*), beech (\**bhago-*), oak, willow, maple, elm and alder. Not all these names are known with equal certainty, but collectively they add up to the type of deciduous forest or open woodland found in a broad belt between the Mediterranean and Baltic lands, and stretching from the Atlantic to the Urals. A much smaller area of similar vegetation lies north of the Caucasus as well. In very broad terms therefore, the original PIE speakers undoubtedly came from this area.

Before moving on, we need to consider a matter that has frustrated Indo-European studies for many generations: the “lox problem.” If \**laks-* indeed meant the Atlantic salmon, as many scholars have claimed, this would place the original PIE speakers in northern or western Europe, since the fish is found only in streams and rivers draining into the Atlantic and Baltic (rather than the Mediterranean and Black Seas). However, modern studies of European freshwater fish show plenty of salmon-like fish in these more southerly and easterly regions. One is the salmon-trout, whose many subspecies include the brown trout and the lake trout, both of which can reach salmon size under favourable conditions.

Another likely candidate is the huchen, found throughout the Danube and adjacent Dniester basins which drain into the Black Sea. It looks very much like a salmon, though possibly a bit more slender. Any of these fish could have been the original \**laks-*, whose name was then transferred to the Atlantic/Baltic salmon by the later Indo-Europeans who migrated into areas where true salmon existed. This is similar to early English settlers in South Africa applying their word “robin” to a bird in Kwazulu-Natal province which, apart from its reddish breast, is like the European robin only in that it has a



vaguely familiar beak and eating habits. Significantly, the Russians, who know the huchen, salmon-trout, and salmon, refer to them all as types of “losos” (лосось) a word which derives from \*laks-. The ‘lox problem’ therefore need not be a hindrance in our efforts to locate the origins of the first PIE speakers.

Summarising, we have placed the original PIE speaking farmer-herdsmen somewhere in or near the deciduous forest belt of Europe west of the Caucasus, though in the wetter conditions of pre-3000 BCE, this may have been a lot further East, though this is not as certain as the region west of the Caucasus due to the absence of agriculture until much later in history. We can narrow down the time span in which the PIE speakers occupied their homeland. Farming did not reach this environmental zone until around 6000 BCE when people and influences from the Middle East and Anatolia moved north-west into the Balkans and the Danube basin. Thereafter, farming spread further north, west and east, reaching the vast north European plain around 5000 BCE, Western Europe around 4500 BCE and the Volga-Don region of Russia at about the same time. All of these regions except Western Europe have been named as possible locations for the original PIE speakers. Clearly then, it is reasonable to assume that 6000 BCE is the earliest possible date when Proto-Indo-European culture, as reconstructed from its language, could have flourished.

## The Dispersal of PIE

Setting a latest possible date though is more problematical, in part because we have no datable events to guide us. At one time, the initial dispersion of PIE speakers from their homeland was viewed in terms of what later scholars called the “campfire theory.” A little less than a century ago, it was believed that early PIE speakers seated around their tribal campfire simply decided one day to say goodbye to each other and migrate away from their ancestral homeland. Gathering together their household goods they set off in all directions, thereby spreading PIE to all the lands where it ended up during antiquity (i.e. pre 2500 BCE). Realistically, this is highly unlikely to have happened. The dispersion must have been a much more gradual process, though still rapid relative to the supposed long evolution of the PIE language. So the question is: when did the earliest dispersals begin?

The only useful evidence available, and it is far less precise than one would hope for, is the degree of variation among various ancient languages that are definitely PIE descendants. As languages change with time, the degree to which they change reflects the amount of time they have

been changing. So, while most of us can read Hamlet (c: 1600 CE), albeit with some difficulty, the Canterbury Tales (c: 1400 CE) is an entirely different matter. There may be many familiar words but most of us would make little sense of it unless an expert assisted us in translating the treatise into modern English. And when it comes to

The earliest documented PIE descended languages are Hittite, Mycenaean Greek and Sanskrit.

Beowulf (c: 900 CE), well, we may as well be reading German or Old Norse; that’s how different is it from the English we use today.

Putting it another way, when two groups of people speaking the same language become geographically separated, their languages take divergent courses of evolution, eventually to the point where they are two mutually unintelligible languages. Consequently, the differences in grammar and vocabulary between two related languages measure very roughly how long ago their speakers became separated. We can see this process at work in the many differences in pronunciation and vocabulary between British and American English for example, even though the two peoples have been separated physically for only a few centuries and have remained in close contact throughout. The two languages are still mutually intelligible, but not completely so. Most British will easily converse with their American counterparts, but if they speak with strong accents on either side of the Atlantic, they will exchange information only with difficulty.

Another example is that of the Romance languages all originally descended from Latin. As Roman legionaries, officials and merchants spread across Europe, the process of separation must have begun no later than around 200 CE. As one would expect, the modern Romance languages are today pretty much mutually unintelligible; yet, anyone who has studied two of them, say French and Spanish, is aware that they are much closer to each another than either is to English, Dutch or German

The earliest documented PIE descended languages are Hittite, Mycenaean Greek and Sanskrit. Hittite documents written in cuneiform script borrowed from Mesopotamia date to around 1500 BCE or perhaps a bit earlier. The Greek texts in Mycenaean Linear B script date to around 1400 BCE. And Sanskrit documents written in a native script dating from much later than this, accurately represent the language spoken in northern India shortly after 1400 BCE. The reason for this is that Sanskrit was a ‘sacred language’, one which for a very long time attempted to accurately preserve teachings related to the Vedic religious tradition of the Indian subcontinent.





For both religious and cultural reasons therefore, it was preserved intact and unchanged for many centuries prior to the current oldest written Sanskrit texts.

So, we have three Indo-European languages of roughly the same age, and they are already very different languages, far more different in fact than the Romance languages are today. The obvious conclusion is that by 1400 BCE, these languages must already have been separated for considerably longer than the 1800 years that the Romance languages have been evolving more or less independently of each other. The smallest conceivable period then would be about 2000 years, and many authorities in Indo-European studies feel that double the Romance period, or some 3600 years, is not too long a time-span to account for the differences which emerged among these early PIE descended languages. On the basis of this reasoning, the Indo-Europeans most likely existed as a single people some time between 6000 and 5000 BCE but certainly no later than 3500 BCE.

## The Wheel

There is one possible snag in locating the PIE speakers this early: the existence in several branches of related words for “wheel.” These include the Greek *kyklos* (English: “bi~cycle”), the Old Church Slavonic *kolo*, the Sanskrit *cakra*, and the Germanic root of “wheel” itself. The wheel was first used somewhere between the Caucasus and Mesopotamia around 3500 BCE, but there is no evidence that it reached any part of the PIE speaking “environmental zone” much before 3000 BCE, too late for the time span we have bracketed.

However, the conflict may be more apparent than real, for the original meaning of the relevant Indo-European root for “wheel” *\*kwel-* seems to have meant

“to turn.” Derivatives in both the Germanic and Italic languages concern the neck, literally “what the head turns on”, and even “to dwell” as in “turning around in activity” in a locality. Another Italic derivative of *\*kwel-* is “col~ony”, a new place where people would “dwell.” It is possible then that the first PIE speaking group to encounter the wheel coined a name for it from this root “to turn”, and passed it on together with the wheel itself to other PIE related groups. History shows that new technologies carry their specialised vocabularies along with them more often than not. For example, “alcohol” and “alembic” both derive from Arabic, and suggest that the technique of distillation originated in the Arabic world (or before it), from whence it spread to Christian Europe.

Having eliminated the wheel as a potential problem in bracketing the period when the first PIE speakers began dispersing, we can now examine some archaeological theories of where they may have existed. The ideal would be to identify specific cultural remains as being from the PIE speakers’ homeland, but this, as will soon become clear, is not as easy as it sounds. Two leading theories are known as the *Kurgan-Steppe* and the *Danubian* theories. Although both are over 40 years old, they still have relevance to the ongoing argument of the origins of the PIE speakers. It would be useful therefore to take them in turn.

*In the next part, I will discuss the well-known Kurgan-Steppe theory and the lesser known Danubian theory. Both focus on the geographical region and approximate time when the first Proto-Indo-Europeans emerged. They both have strong arguments and need to be considered carefully.*



### Earliest form of the wheel.

*The Sumerian “battle standard of Ur” c. 2500 BCE. This is one of the earliest depictions we have of a wheeled cart drawn by wild asses. The wheels are solid and although the cart was clearly meant to have been used in warfare, it must have been a hugely clumsy and heavy platform.*





# Ups & Downs

*by James Wilson*



**I**T'S JULY 2014 and I'm walking the coastal path of North Cornwall. There's something awe-inspiring walking along the very edge of the country where land and sea more often than not kiss and embrace but can also occasionally do battle with one another, each trying to prove who is the stronger. It's as if I'm walking between two worlds, the solid and the fluid, the real and the unknown, feeling pinched between the two and never quite sure which holds the greater influence. The solid is the most familiar



certainly, but the fluid always draws me the most, as it is mysterious and potentially offers something more, something deeper, less tangible but very much worth discovering.

My journey on foot began at Land's End and I've been walking for several days now. I have some experience of walking long distances and I'm familiar with the pain that blistered feet, over-worked muscles and the burden of a heavy rucksack inevitably bring with them. My destination is Barnstable, over the border in Devon, nestled away neatly in the Taw estuary. It's a trek of nearly 200 miles and the way I'm feeling at the moment, I doubt I'll make it that far. Doubts and questions fill my thoughts too easily when alone with so much time to contemplate. Why am I even here? I was fully aware before I started the trip that back-packing long distances always offers me hardships; physical pain, cold and uncomfortable nights in a tiny tent, constant dampness from rain, early morning dew, sweat or condensation and the strength-sapping intensity of the summer heat. When planning such trips it's so easy to get lost in the romance and adventure of it all that the hardships ahead are often forgotten.

So why am I here? There are so many metaphors for life when walking paths and I'm reminded, when pondering this question, that life is never all plain sailing. There are always some, sometimes many, painful challenges. If everything was plain sailing, would there be any point being here, incarnated on this planet? Life will inevitably present us with the experiences we need, some that bring joy and pleasure, others that bring sadness and pain. Some experiences are very clearly of our own choosing, some more subtly so. Anyway I'm here of my own volition because I know there'll be much to both delight and challenge me on the way.

**Doubts and questions fill my thoughts too easily when alone with so much time to contemplate.**

It had occurred to me that walking this coastline might get monotonous eventually; but how could it with such breath-taking beauty around every corner? My senses refuse to tire of the endlessly changing contours of the land and the glorious sounds, sights and smell of the sea. The seemingly brittle and insecure cliff faces expose a palette of wonderful earthy colours and sustain a host of plant and bird life on the upper reaches. And yet the



lower levels are dark and menacing, almost all colour vanishes and life can't be supported. There are many caves in the lower strata, constantly pounded and sprayed by the waves and offering hidden and secretive worlds if one is adventurous enough.

### **Pain, Gain, Butterflies and Birds**

Each step I now take along this rocky and undulating coastline brings with it some pain, but it's bearable for the moment, and I try to forget it. I remember briefly the worn out saying: "*no gain without pain.*" As I lose myself in contemplation I realise that perhaps the most attractive aspect of walking and camping is the closeness to and intimacy with nature I feel at such times. As if to emphasise that thought, I see yet another pair of butterflies dancing deliriously above the path right in front of me. Butterflies have been my constant companions these last few days.

It's been a good year for them in spite of the excessively wet winter we had and I'm delighted to be sharing so much time in their company each day. Their beauty and frivolous flight never fails to enchant. Each





species has its own charm; the obvious beauty of the red admiral and tortoiseshell, the exquisite beauty of the blues, the subtle beauty of the ringlet, the sublime beauty of the fritillaries; so many adjectives and none of them adequately describe what I feel for these wonderful creatures.

The birds also favour me with their company. I'm an alien, an intruder, trespassing on *their* land, walking through *their* habitat, and yet they seem wholly indifferent to my presence, concerned only with their daily affairs. They seem secure and safe here on these cliff tops. Ravens, pipits, linnets, birds that are usually nervous and skittish, seem more relaxed in this environment, but I can't explain why. I wanted to bring my binoculars with me on this trip but decided against it since every extra gram of weight was a consideration. It turns out I don't actually need them since for some reason, I can get closer to the birds here than on any walk before, and I watch and listen and get really close to them without seeming to stress them at all. I'm in a small corner of heaven today and feel so privileged to be allowed to share these brief moments of intimacy with their lives.

Again, as if to give emphasis to this thought, a striking male stonechat perches prominently on the gorse just a few feet away and lets others know he's here

with his 'click, click' call that sounds as if two pebbles are being tapped together. Once the stonechat has moved on from his perch I continue walking and see in the distance another walker moving briskly towards me; clearly no sore feet with him! As the distance between us diminishes, I see that he is lightly clad in shorts and sandals and free of the burden of a rucksack. I feel a touch of regret that I'm not able to walk this path so freely and lightly, but I'm prepared for a much longer journey than he, and have to have the necessary equipment. It is after all my choice.

### Jehovah, Satan and Happy Feet

The stranger, smiling broadly, stops to chat for a few minutes and to enquire where I'm headed and from whence I came. I fill him in with the details and he's genuinely warm with his well wishing. When we part company my thoughts return to an incident that occurred a few days ago when walking through St. Ives. I was stopped by another smiling stranger as I passed his front garden. He too seemed interested in my journeying and also wished me well with great warmth. It was not long however before his motive became apparent as he thrust a leaflet firmly into my hand. As I strolled casually down the street I glanced at it.





The producers of this small treatise informed me that Satan's rulership is doomed – okay...; and that Jehovah is determined to bring Satan's control over mankind to an end – hmmm; and to learn about this intriguing stuff, all I had to do was come over for a chat with the local Jehovah's Witnesses who would be only too willing to enlighten me more. It was no hardship to decline the offer, but I felt quite saddened that this man's apparent friendliness was tainted with an ulterior motive from the start.

Taking a break, I remove my footwear at every opportunity as the fresh air and bare earth revive my feet, at least temporarily. I remove my t-shirt also and try to dry it in the sun and breeze. One of the most unpleasant things about carrying a rucksack is a consistently wet, sweaty back due to the pack being in constant contact with the body. I sit as comfortably as I can and begin one of the Rosicrucian breathing exercises. It never ceases to amaze me how quickly such a simple technique revives me and gives me the strength to continue another few miles before I'll inevitably need to rest briefly once more. I'm immensely grateful for the cool coastal breeze on such a hot day.

My gaze falls on the calm sea and the soft, placid waves reaching the end of their brief existence as they disperse among the rocks. Just as the butterflies and birds have been my constant companions over the last few days, so has the sound of the surf, gently whispering its encouragement. The turquoise of the water is a perfect backdrop for the sea of purple heather that extends confidently to the very edge of the cliff. It's amazing how life always finds a way, and every possible place today has something beautiful and purposeful growing on it. I'm filled with gratitude to see life like this; vigorous, healthy and purposeful, oblivious of the stresses and strains I'll face again once the humdrum of work resumes.

After a short break I'm once again ready to continue, and reluctantly I say farewell to the moment and my thoughts begin their ceaseless activity again. What is it that drives me forward? Why am I here. There are so many easier, more relaxing ways of seeing what I've seen these past days. I could still enjoy the beauty of this coast without having to walk 20 miles a day over tormenting terrain carrying a temporary home on my back. The thoughts gleefully have a listener and sustenance as I begin to ponder the difference between stubbornness and perseverance.

The former is surely a characteristic of the ego and the latter a trait of the higher self. Which is it that impels me to continue now? Perhaps it's an uneasy fusion of the two? My ego seems to be telling me I'm *not* getting too old for this, I've no aches and pains to speak of yet, so I *must* be the man I once was! My better self is in disagreement





and urges me to consider my reasons for doing journey. I must persevere if I'm truly gaining something of real value; but I must be prepared to be sensible and be kinder to my body if I'm to make it all the way.

Thoughts satiated, I enter my walking silence gratefully for a while. Objectively, I know my reasons for such physical challenges have most definitely changed over the years. When I undertook my first long distance walk, *The Pennine Way*, almost 30 years ago, I was intent on reaching the end in fewer days than most who walk that path. It was a physical challenge, a contest, and the motivation was purely to do with the ego. Now, I'm happy to say, I walk *this* path for other reasons. The blessed silence my thoughts grant me reflect how deeply I've changed, and I'm grateful for the greater depth life has afforded me, despite the fact that I'm no wealthier, no healthier and only marginally wiser. Yet I'm happier in a most unusual and intangible way, but one I know rings true.

These days I seek a closeness to nature, to feel the sun, to put my fingers in the earth and nurture a plant, to feel the wind caress my skin, and even the rain has its special welcome feel. I need the solitude to think and contemplate. I want to enjoy the experience of walking for no other reason than to feel the simplicity of it. There may still be a part of me that wishes to cover the same

distance I used to cover in a single day, but this is no longer of much importance and I feel so much freer for it. There is also something liberating leaving behind, temporarily at least, all the comforts and distractions of home and living for a short while with only the bare essentials..., the way it was for most people in "this green and pleasant land" a mere 200 years ago.

### At Day's End

The evening draws in and I turn my attention to finding a suitable place to pitch my tent. This is not as easy as I was expecting, as the terrain is persistently rocky. But eventually I find a good spot. It's close to the cliff edge but not so close as to cause me any concern; after all, I haven't been known to sleep walk since I was a child! I love the flexibility and economy that wild camping offers. I also love the fact that at this time of day and being several miles from the nearest village, it is almost certain that I will not be disturbed this evening. I will be free to sit or lie on this naked ground, absorbing the healing energies of my great Mother Earth and feeling the satisfaction of a good days walking, enjoying these stunning natural surroundings without disturbance.

I have pitched my tiny tent, eaten a simple meal, freed my feet once more from the confines of my footwear,





massaged my calf muscles, completed another deep breathing exercise, and now I'm content to sit, watch, listen and reflect until weariness invites me gently into my sleeping bag. I rarely sleep more than a few hours at a time when I'm in a tent. There's the constant flapping on inner and outer tent lining even in the slightest breeze, and tonight it's raining and blowing gustily. And then there are certain sea birds who choose to fly in large numbers calling to each other right through the night, perhaps protesting my close presence; I'm the intruder I remember, so I don't resent their performance.

It has rained all night but I'm grateful the dark clouds have passed and I can at least pack my gear while it's relatively dry. Crawling out of the tent at 05:30, the day greets me with a spectacular sunrise. As I yawn deeply and try to stretch away my stiffness I'm lost in wonder and awe at the beauty and magnificence of all I see. In silence I say a prayer of gratitude for the blessing of knowing the privilege and peace of being here, in this place, at this time. What a rare treat, what a wonderful moment, and I try to absorb and commit to memory every fine detail of the experience.

After a frugal breakfast and some water I'm walking again by 06:00. It will be a few miles yet before my legs and feet start to trouble me again and I know from experience that walking during the early morning hours feels a lot better than walking later in the day; so I'll make the most of it while I can. As the light intensifies I once again begin to enjoy what nature has to offer. The path is very narrow, almost non-existent in places, and with a little imagination it's as though I'm treading virgin ground, the first human to step here. I know of course that this is a very ancient country and almost certainly every square inch of ground I walk on was walked on before me either last week, last year, last century or some other time maybe many thousands of years ago. Someone, some time in the past has walked precisely where I walk today.



## A Primeval Cousin Passed this Way

It's a humbling, almost primeval feeling, perhaps even a longing, to know that long, long ago, one of my distance and very ancient 'cousins' may have passed this way too, perhaps on the very same path even, though then the sea was much lower than it is today, much farther offshore too, and inland and within plain sight were the snowfields and great ice-sheet that stretched all the way to the North Pole even in mid-summer.

As I watch my feet on this decidedly balmier day, moving slowly but steadily beneath me, I'm thankful I've taken my time and walked slower than usual; for had I been just a bit faster, that slow worm that chose to cross my path this morning a minute before I arrived, would have met a quick and unnecessary end. Its metallic skin

**I will be free to sit or lie on this naked ground,  
absorbing the healing energies of my great  
Mother Earth.**

shimmers in the early morning sunlight as it exposes itself briefly and then rapidly clambers into the relative safety of the long grass. It's a beautiful and unusual creature and I hope it doesn't end up on the dinner plate of one of the many kestrels I've seen along this coast.

I'm not the only early riser. The first life-giving shafts of light and warmth gently embrace all around and stir all creation from its cycle of rest and inactivity and nature rouses! The skylarks are already displaying overexcitement with their song and flight. The black and scarlet day-flying cinnabar moth is abundant as is its larvae. The black and yellow striped caterpillars smother the leaves of the yellow ragwort on which they feed. I pass fields of bright red poppies and luminous golden corn marigolds with many other species of wild flower sprinkled among them. I see communities of russet coloured soldier beetles inhabiting the white heads of the cow parsley. What a tiny world they occupy compared to our own experience, and yet do we not also occupy a correspondingly infinitesimal world given the vastness of the universe? It's a humbling thought.

The morning has passed in a euphoria of delightful experiences and I'm happy, rejuvenated and content with life. I've reached the edge of another valley and I'm looking down on one of the many stunning ports and bays along this route. I have a steep descent ahead of me that will inevitably be followed by another steep climb. I'll rest a while here and also determine to try and find a cafe for lunch when I'm in the village; it makes good sense to stock up on a few provisions, so I get some. As I sit and watch



the crowds of holidaymakers from my vantage point I have an unusual feeling, a sensation that's familiar to me when watching crowds. I feel as if I'm not a part of this world, almost as if I'm watching an animated film or dreaming the experience, like an alien time traveller here on a mission of good, but not really of this world. The fact that I'm viewing everyone from a high vantage point amplifies this feeling. I am witness to all that happens around me but I'm not part of the scene. It is a curious feeling this, to feel I'm in the world, yet only temporarily a part of it.

When walking alone for long periods I'm often overwhelmed by a need to be back in the company of other people and to be in the perceived security of an urban environment. And yet, once there, back among the crowds and the buildings, there is soon an urge to get away from it all again. I've read about this experience with other long distance walkers and I completely empathise with it. There is another metaphor here; this is also a common experience among people treading a path of genuine spiritual unfoldment. It's a lonely path, a road less travelled, and there's a relentless temptation and desire to 'get back among the crowds' and live a 'normal' life. Yet, if we listen carefully to our higher selves and we are strong enough to do what it takes to enter into communion with it, there is always the need to continue alone on the narrow and little used path. Ultimately, even if daily in contact with many people, we are in the broadest sense always truly alone, just us and unfathomable depths and comfort of our spiritual self.

## Happiness is a Holiday Beach

As I descend the hillside and watch the people on the beach with their surfboards and holiday paraphernalia as they lounge around in the sun and children splash elatedly in the sea, I realise I don't fit in here today, definitely not now, and I resolve to make my stay brief. We're all trying to find happiness in our own way and I deeply respect the need of such enjoyments and distractions; but I wonder at times what gives meaning to the lives of so many people who live their lives from beginning to end without ever considering the purpose of it all. It's not a judgement, just a desire for understanding. Is it possible to find any measure of true happiness and satisfaction in life without a clear ethical, moral or spiritual goal of some 'higher' sort? Perhaps, but possibly only in the short term. I'm sure there are often many answers to a single question but understanding which answer is the correct one for me in every case, now that would do just fine for me. But I'm not there..., yet!

There's no café in this village but I find a small shop and manage to buy what I need. Although it's lunchtime, the heat has removed any appetite I may have had. I'm



much too hot and my feet are troubling me again. I'm not looking forward to the climb back up onto the cliff tops but I know I'll climb it anyway, along with several more climbs before the day is through. The ups and downs are necessary if I wish to walk this particular path. I opt for a 'home-made' ice cream for lunch. It's remarkable how a simple treat, if sincerely enjoyed and gratefully received, can really perk one's spirits up. I take it onto the crowded beach where I retire to a quiet spot at the base of the cliffs. It's cool and shady here as I take my footwear off and sit on a rock with my bare feet in a small pool of sea water.

The ice cream is delicious, the water and shade soothing and I say again a prayer of gratitude for these small but welcome comforts. The people on the beach seem to be enjoying themselves immensely, especially the children, and it gives me such joy just to see their happiness. It is a perfect day for fun on the beach and I'm once again struck with awe at how wonderful it all is; how 'something' so refined is so close to us always, if we will but ready ourselves for its entry. Schiller in one of his poems "*The Unending*", a word I find such a beautiful substitute today for another beautiful concept, 'The Infinite.'

It's not long before I'm back on the cliff-tops again. I look back westwards and can see, far in the distance, the ruins of the tin mines close to where I started my day's walking. Many of the ruins are presently being restored but as far as I can see will serve no useful purpose and I have to question the wisdom of this. We should learn from the past certainly, but we have a tendency of vehemently clinging to it. Not everything is worth keeping just because it is old. It's always astonishing when looking back to see how far I've travelled in such a short space of time and to see how much progress I've made. Another metaphor: On the mystic path, as in life generally, it is always useful to look back and see how far we have travelled and how much progress we have made, especially when such progress seemed so slow. Many small steps taken with care, gratitude and joy, a truly worthwhile life will make.





I turn my gaze northward and see dark clouds on the horizon bearing promise of more wet weather, and they are moving rapidly in my direction. The wind is picking up too, but I'm still hoping it will remain dry. Rain is a blessing for the earth but a nuisance for back-packer and unwelcome for people enjoying sunshine on the beaches. All too soon I reach another gully I'll have to descend and re-ascend the other side. I had read about the challenges of walking this coastline but I've still been taken by surprise at the number of valleys and gullies that have to be navigated. Yet, I view it positively; they add beauty and interest to what could otherwise have been a long and monotonous path. They are also serving to get me back in shape and I feel my excessive poundage falling away! All the same, I feel as if I need a little help with this climb, and my hankering for music finally gets the better of me.

### Dance Every Mountain

I spoke earlier of living with the bare essentials and yet I have with me my iPhone and iPod. The phone is a practical thing to have. It means I can report back regularly to HQ to an eager and loving voice on the other end, and I also have a camera and voice memo for making a record of my journey. The iPod is sheer indulgence. I can't live a full two weeks without music, it simply doesn't bear thinking about. I search the database for some suitable tracks to help me up the hill. ABBA will do fine; the lively tune and a strong rhythm is just what I need, and it works wonders. As I climb, my rhythm changes and I'm almost dancing up the slope in happy delirium. I intentionally accentuate my rhythm and realise that if anyone were to witness my performance I'd see a few broad smiles at first and maybe a few men in white coats after me sooner or later. As the final notes of 'Take a chance on me' fade and die, I reach level ground again..., made it!

I keep the headphones on a while longer and choose to listen to man-made melodies rather than the sounds of nature for a while. The wind has greatly intensified and I'm struck by how quickly a tranquil sea can turn into something far more menacing. My hopes of a dry day have vanished and I feel the first few spots of rain. I remove my headphones, wrap them up with my iPod and put them safely away in a pocket. It occurs to me that when travelling with so little, what a precious space a simple thing like a pocket can be. I stop and put on my waterproof gear, which, I learned earlier in the week, is no longer that effective in its ability to keep the rain out! But it'll do; at least I won't be completely drenched and I'm grateful for it nevertheless.

The rain comes strong and heavy and lasts a full two hours before the sun shows again its friendly face. Walking in driving rain is not particularly pleasant but

there's a strange sort of pleasure to this too, and certainly it's worth having endured it when the sun appears again in radiant glory, with wisps of steam rising from the grass and wet heather. As there's been no chance to shower for the past two days I'm increasingly aware of a strong odour following me about. I'm reminded of the saying "Cleanliness is next to Godliness", but today I fear that for all God's compassion, S/he would not want to be too close to me today without a clothes-peg over the nose! So I decide to try and find a B&B this evening where I can get cleaned up and have a really good night's rest. What hope would we have without the great mysterious period we know as sleep; a period after which we awaken feeling refreshed, stronger and repaired, ready to tackle a new day. What a God-given blessing it is!

This day too is drawing to an end and once again I reflect on my journey so far. I'm not quite half way to my destination and know, judging from my maps that there will be plenty more physical and mental challenges over the next few days, but also so much more to interest me and to enjoy. I'm so grateful to be here just as I know I'll be so grateful to be back home and even back at work when I've finished my walk. Life can offer us such a variety of experience, not all of it wonderful, granted, but all of it worthwhile and worth embracing.

Pain and pleasure, happiness and sadness, stability and change, sunshine and rain, solitude and company, mundaneness and profundity, uphill and downhill, all to be seized with gratitude; they are all part of the Plan. Yes I'm in more pain this evening, but I have so much to look forward to with every approaching mile! I wish you well on your journeying in its many outer and inner aspects, many of which I have found during this long and beautiful walk. Take a walk, long or short; every one can be a pilgrimage to happiness, peace and fulfilment. All it requires is that first step, followed by another, and another, and..., you know the rest!



# Mystics of Aragón

by *Mary Jones*



*View of Zaragoza in 1647, painted by J. B. Martínez del Mazo, though it is sometimes attributed to his master Diego Velázquez.*

**A**RAGÓN IS today (2014) an Autonomous Community in the north-east of Spain, coextensive with the medieval Kingdom of Aragón. It comprises three provinces: Zaragoza, Huesca and Teruel, with the capital in the ancient city of Zaragoza.

Zaragoza was originally settled by the ancient Iberians<sup>1</sup>, later becoming the Roman provincial city Caesaraugusta<sup>2</sup>. In 714 the Berbers and Arabs took

control of the city, renaming it Saraqusta, a corruption of the original Roman name. It grew to become the largest Muslim-controlled city of Northern Spain and was the main city of the Upper March<sup>3</sup>. From 1018 to 1118 Zaragoza was one of the Taifa<sup>4</sup> kingdoms, independent Muslim states which emerged in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century following the implosion of the Caliphate of Córdoba. Unlike the modern image of a Caliphate, this was a multi-ethnic and highly civilised state where there was







*Taifa kingdoms.*

freedom of worship for Christians and Jews alongside the majority Muslims.

During the first two decades of the Taifa period, 1018–1038, the city was ruled by the Banu Tujibi. In 1038 they were replaced by the Banu Hud, who had to deal with a complicated alliance with El Cid<sup>5</sup> of Valencia and his Castilian<sup>6</sup> masters against the Almoravids<sup>7</sup>, who managed to bring the Taifa kingdoms under their control. After the death of El Cid his kingdom was overrun by the Almoravids, who, by 1100, had managed to cross the River Ebro, which brought Aragón into direct contact with them. The Banu Hud stubbornly resisted the Almoravids and ruled until they were eventually defeated by them in May 1110. In 1118 the Aragonese conquered the city from the Almoravids and made it the capital of the Kingdom of Aragón.

## Spiritual Giants

For some people we are living in a society of ephemeral, short sighted values, which has giving rise to an extreme



*Almoravid Spanish Coin from 1116.*

form of egoistic individualism. We see selfishness and short-sighted goals every day, and shockingly in all strata of society, from the old to the very young. Is there a solution to this? Of course there is, but there is at present little appetite to undergo the changes needed to change the world into a better, more inclusive and humane place for all its many species to coexist.

There have of course been in all ages at least some men and women of high moral and spiritual stature who have left behind teachings and ways of living that have so impressed their peers that these ‘new’ and better ways of living have been adopted by a few, sometimes many, and thereby slowly raised the global level of human awareness above the more primitive urges everyone once possessed. The ethical, moral and spiritual principles passed on were overwhelmingly based on a single refinement of human

*Banu Hud Palace*





*Banu Hud Palace*



*Banu Hud Palace*

nature, something we treasure today above all other things: we call it 'Love.'

Love is the single, most cohesive power that exists in the universe. It ensures that the highest levels of freedom balanced with the most inclusive forms of justice and equality humans can think of are constantly not far from the forefront of daily thought, daily discussions and daily actions. People throughout the world have this 'way of living' or 'inner attitude' as an ideal to be strive towards; for it has demonstrated over and over again countless times its superior status to such an extent that there exists today a worldwide 'group awareness', and energy field or égrégoire that has gained traction to such an extent that we find it everywhere represented by ordinary people, from the wealthiest to the poorest.

Of course this group awareness did not emerge in a vacuum. It evolved over many centuries from millions of small good deeds, small good intentions, kind words and acts of compassion. And occasionally it received a brief efflorescence of knowledge (scientific, moral and spiritual) from the life works of a person who embodied in his or her life the very essence of goodness as represented by the spiritual principles embodied in the concepts of 'light, life and love' so cherished by mystics of all ages. People with a moral and spiritual maturity well beyond that of the average person of his or her age have existed in every era, though we certainly know of only a few of them today. By far the majority we must presume, lived quietly, bettered the lives of their immediate community, and died in anonymity.

In this article I will discuss three such personalities from Aragón who stand out as leading lights in the service of humanity. Of course they were not the only lights of righteousness of their respective eras, but history has ensured that they were the ones written about and therefore recorded for us to read about today. Although they were not saints in the standard sense of the word,

they were far ahead of their times and left legacies that have helped the world to advance itself to higher, more inclusive levels of civilisation. The three I will be briefly discussing are *Ibn Gabirol* (or *Avicembron*), *Ibn 'Bâjja* (or *Avempace*) and *Miguel Servet*.

### Ibn Gabirol / Avicembron (1021 – 1158)

Zaragoza and its surroundings were at one time an important part of Islamic Spain bordering the Caliphate of Al-Andalus<sup>9</sup>. After the dissolution of the Caliphate, Zaragoza became the seat of one of the Taifa kingdoms in the period between 1018 and 1118. It was in 1038 that the clan of the Banu Hud took over the kingdom and led it to the heights of power and glory. The period between the accession to the throne of Al-Mundhir II, of the previous Banu Tujibi clan and the occupation by Alfonso I 'The Battler', king of Aragón and Navarre, who made it the new capital of his kingdom in 1118 was one of the most brilliant in its cultural history.

Solomon Ibn Gabirol (c. 1021-1058), known in



*Al Andalus & Christian Kingdoms*





*Who could grasp your intensity  
In forming the radiance of purity,  
From the glow of your glory,  
From a rock the rock has hewn,  
From the hollow of a clearness withdrawn?*

*You sent the spirit of wisdom along it  
And gave it the name of soul,  
And formed it out of the fire  
Of intellect's ardour  
Whose spirit burned on inside it.*

*And you sent it out through the body  
To serve it and guard it.  
And you watch as it acts like a flame within it,  
Though the body isn't consumed,  
Which was formed from the spark of soul,  
And was brought into being from nothing,  
When the Lord came across it in fire.*

the West primarily as Avicbron, was born in Málaga (Málaga in Andalucía, southern Spain's Costa del Sol), but at a very young age moved with his parents to Zaragoza (northern Spain) where he was educated and wrote three parts of his major treatises, as well as poems and some 20 books. His ideas were so important they had a strong and lasting influence on the intellectual life of the city for several centuries. Crucially though, he is remembered as one of the first teachers of Neoplatonism in Europe.



His role has been compared to that of Philo<sup>10</sup> who served as an intermediary between Hellenic philosophy and Judaism. Nearly a thousand years later Ibn Gabirol restored Neoplatonism to Europe.

He was moved first and foremost by the Neoplatonic theological sense that God's reality infuses all things, and by the concomitant ethical and existential ideal of a 'Neoplatonic Return', namely the notion that we must strive through thought, word and deed to reclaim our own truest being and likeness the source of All. Ibn Gabirol's writing in this regard indirectly, though deeply influenced the Church and virtually every spiritual and mystical movement since his time. It wasn't until 1846 however that Avicbron / Ibn Gabirol, formerly believed to have been a Muslim poet, was identified positively as the Jewish scholar and mystic Solomon ben Judah.

Avicbron suffered from delicate health and acute sensitivity, which, combined with the death of his parents at an early age, caused him to mature very early in life. In 1045, aged 24, he wrote in Zaragoza his "*Book on the Improvement of the Moral Qualities of the Soul*". It is unfortunately the last date recorded from his life which ended 13 years later. As a poet he developed a fresh form of composition of Jewish poetry, creating an authentic school. However, his influence on religious poetry is more personal. Setting an example still emulated today, his religious poems are still used in Jewish ceremonies such as Yom Kippur<sup>11</sup> or the Day of Atonement. For part of his life he served as Cantor in a synagogue, and his religious sentiments are embodied in the rational thought, piety, mysticism and asceticism of the Zaragoza school.

Ibn Gabirol's greatest concern was in understanding the nature and purpose of the human being: "...we must understand what we are [our nature] so that we know how to live [our purpose]." And like many other Neoplatonists, he explored layers of cosmological and metaphysical realities in an attempt to understand how to live the best human life possible. Sadly only one of his philosophical works "*The Fount of Life*" based on an earlier Neoplatonic Arabic work called "*Fons Vitae*" has come down to us. The chief doctrines of the work may be summarised as follows:

- All created beings are constituted of "*form and matter.*"
- This holds true of both the physical and spiritual worlds, of which the latter is the connecting link between the "*first substance*" (the Godhead) and the "*substance divided into nine categories*" (the physical world).
- Matter and form are eternal and exist everywhere.



The main thesis of *The Fount of Life* is that all that exists is composed of form and matter. One and the same 'matter' runs through the whole universe from the highest limits of the spiritual realm down to the lowest limits of the physical world. The further this 'matter' is removed from its first source [the Godhead], the less spiritual it is. He insists forcefully, over and over again, that this universal matter is the substratum of all that exists, and nothing exists without it. The book, which is heavy going, is written like a Socratic dialogue in a dry and arid style in contrast to his poetry; but it expresses the same meaning 'the unease of Man' with his descent into gross matter, his transmutation, the



Ibn Bâjja.

longing for union with the one God, absolute and eternal, revealing an insight into the origin of the Universe, providing both a bridge and an avenue of return to God. In this context the ultimate source of the thoughts of Ibn Gabirol are to be found, at least in part, in the writings of Aristotle, Plato and the revised versions of Empedocles.<sup>12</sup>

Although based on the works of several philosophers of the classical period of Greek civilisation, *The Fount of Life* is still a unique and very original work, setting out three essential tenets as follows: (a) the aim of knowledge, (b) self-awareness or perception of the world and (c) the consciousness of God. His goal, reflected in consciousness, has to be accompanied by a devout and upright way of life. The pilgrim must continue ascending step by step, through many ever decreasing incarnations, until s/he arrives at the Soul, then arrives at the intellect, and finally attains enlightenment where union with the Divine is accomplished.

**Ibn Bâjja embodies in his writings the already well-known concept of the goal of all humankind as being union with the Godhead.**

At the beginning of this journey, the substance and nature of God remain a complete mystery to the neophyte and can only be glimpsed by mystical intuition. This concept places the Ibn Gabirol firmly in the strictest interpretations of both the Jewish and Islamic traditions. His enlightened approach, the logical and philosophical path he proposed, will culminate in the final mystical union.

*The Fount of Life* had a widely diverse influence. His ideas were picked up in the West by Bishop William of Auvergne and Duns Scotus<sup>13</sup>, but the Dominicans Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas consistently rejected them. As a final comment, I will quote one of the sayings collected among his writings: "I will ride through this life seeking the truth, although I do not know what destiny awaits me."

### Ibn Bâjja / Avempace (1085? – 1138)

Avempace is the Latinised form of his name Abû Bakr Ibn Bâjja. He was born in Zaragoza towards the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> Century, probably between

1085 and 1095; the date is uncertain. His grandfather and father were humble silversmiths, far removed from intellectual circles. He developed into an accomplished musician as well as a physician, mathematician, astronomer and philosopher. In the Jewish quarter of Zaragoza a small enclave of high culture had developed before his birth and a great philosophical school existed in which scholars and mystics were prominent. This cultural and mystical flowering is unfortunately hardly remembered today.

When the Almoravids conquered Zaragoza in 1110, the Almoravid Sultan appointed his brother-in-law as the new governor who, in turn, appointed Ibn Bâjja as Vizier<sup>14</sup>, an office he held for three years. Ibn Bâjja composed panegyrics for the new Almoravid governor who rewarded him lavishly. He also wrote poems that pleased him and they both enjoyed music and wine. In 1118 the Aragonese Christians occupied the city after a long blockade and set about persecuting the philosophers and scholars who had not fled. A notable exception were certain Jewish scholars who secretly kept the school.

It is not clear if Ibn Bâjja left before or after the fall of Zaragoza, but we do know he was for a time given sanctuary at the court of the governor of Murcia. However, soon after arriving there in 1118, some powerful and jealous men in the governor's court conspired against him and soon had him imprisoned. For nearly 20 years until 1136, we have no information on his life. We do know that in 1136, he was in Seville and from there he went on to Almería and Granada, then to Oran<sup>15</sup> and Fez<sup>16</sup>. He was assassinated and buried in Fez where his tomb still existed until the 13<sup>th</sup> Century.





Ibn Bâjja studied the work of Aristotle, Avicenna<sup>17</sup> and Al Farabi<sup>18</sup> in particular. However, the ideas of Aristotle held by Ibn Bâjja were a strongly Neoplatonised version. He reveals a mystical and aesthetic side to his nature that Thomas Aquinas later referred to. Ibn Bâjja is the one philosopher above all others who clearly defined the direction subsequently taken by Hispano-Islamic thought. And he was the first to directly influence Averroes<sup>19</sup>, Maimonides<sup>20</sup>, Albertus Magnus and Ramon Llull among others. His most celebrated works are the “*Rule of the Solitary*”, the “*Epistle of the Farewell Message*” and the “*Epistle of Conjunction of Intellect with Man*.”

Ibn Bâjja embodies in his writings the already well-known concept of the goal of all humankind as being union with the Godhead. To achieve this end, we must perfect our qualities and moral virtues. He introduced four steps to illumination, realised by the passage of three progressive states of consciousness: “*matter*”, “*acquired wisdom*” and “*insight*.” The Godhead contains both the vital life force of the universe and the greatest accumulation of knowledge ever known, with its unique, universal, essential, clear and eternal nature. Here the process of abstracting spiritual ideas and the three states of consciousness can be seen from the work of Aristotle, culminating in the contemplation of pure thought in the fullest meaning of Neoplatonism. Ibn Bâjja affirms that all philosophers agreed that the soul is a substance and portrays Plato as one of his sources:

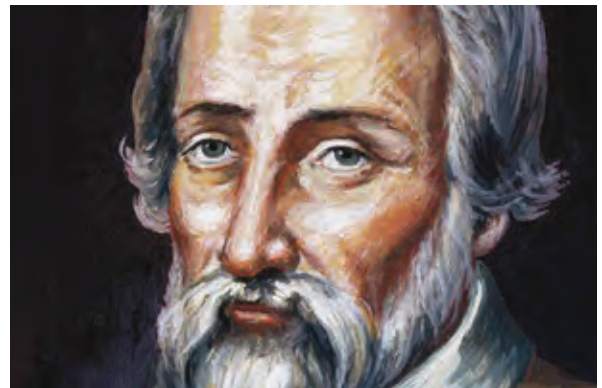
*“Since it was clear to Plato that the soul is assigned to substance, and that substance is predicated on the form and matter which is body, and that the soul cannot be said to be a body..., he fervently defined the soul in its particular aspect. Since he had established that the forms of spheres are souls, he looked for the commonality of all [souls], and found that sense perception is particular to animals, [but] that movement is particular to all, and therefore he defined the soul as ‘something which moves itself.’”* (Ibn Bâjja)

In the final stage, ideal mystics, as conceived by Ibn Bâjja, are revealed. However, the image of perfect mystics, although good in principle, always come up against the problem of human society and is frustrated by the historical and political circumstances in which they are obliged to live. This stands in the way of obtaining of what they most desire, their own perfection and Union with the Divine. To provide a solution to this perennial problem, Ibn Bâjja proposed a method for mystics to withdraw individually for a while in solitude from the world, subsequently returning to the community but keeping apart from it, and thereby avoiding being contaminated by its less desirable elements. This idea Kirkegaard<sup>21</sup> went on to develop several centuries later.

Ibn Bâjja composed a musical piece in Zaragoza, along the lines prescribed by Al-Farabi. He also read the *Encyclopaedia of the Brethren of Purity* and in the same city made the acquaintance of Ibn Al Arif<sup>22</sup>. The mystical influence of both these sources can be found in his writings and it is likely he was the first person (of intellectual stature) in the West to give detailed commentaries on Aristotle’s ideas. Even today, some aspects of his mystical philosophy would be ideal for people in the West to adopt, for they provide some genuine solutions in combating the effects of the extreme form of materialism and dearth of true spirituality that we face today.

*“Spiritual acts render him nobler, and the intellectual acts render him divine and virtuous. The man of wisdom is therefore necessarily a man who is virtuous and divine. Of every kind of activity, he takes up the best only. He shares with every class of men the best states that characterise them. But he stands alone as the one who performs the most excellent and noblest of actions. When he achieves the highest end, that is, when he apprehends simple substantial intelligences that are mentioned in the [Aristotelian] ‘Metaphysics’, the book ‘On the Soul’, and ‘On Sense and the Sensible’, he then becomes one of these intelligences. It would be right to call him simply divine, and he will be free from the mortal sensible qualities, as well from the [particular] spiritual qualities...”* (*Rule of the Solitary*, Ibn Bâjja).

## Miguel Servet (1511 – 1553)



Miguel Servet, disciple of the liberal sciences and a martyr to free thought, was born on September 1511 in Villanueva de Sixena (or Villanueva de Sigena in Huesca province of northeast Spain). He died in Geneva in 1553, burnt at the stake on the orders of John Calvin<sup>23</sup>. He was a Spanish theologian, physician, cartographer and Renaissance humanist, being the first European to correctly describe the function of pulmonary circulation. He was a true polymath, versed in many sciences: mathematics, astronomy, meteorology, geography,



human anatomy, medicine and pharmacology, as well as jurisprudence, languages, poetry and the scholarly study of the Bible in its original languages. Servet was a Hellenist, physician and philosopher who has earned the gratitude of many great minds for his scientific discoveries, his devotion to the sick and the poor and for his indomitable independence of thought and conscience.

There was much going on in Spain during this period to make a serious minded youth thoughtful about questions of religion. Ferdinand and Isabella the Catholic<sup>24</sup> were on the throne, determined to secure political unity in their new nation by compelling religious uniformity. A spirit of the most intolerant orthodox therefore controlled all aspects of life. In 1492, for refusing to deny the faith of their fathers and profess Christianity, 800,000 Jews had been banished from the kingdom. In the same year the Sultanate had been overthrown in Granada, and although for a few years Muslims were tolerated and allowed to continue with their faith, they were soon compelled to choose between converting to Christianity, being burnt at the stake or being driven from Spain.

A matter incomprehensible to the Church at the time, was the Muslim dilemma of having to accept God as a trinity rather than a single, overarching God of all creation. It was the most insurmountable obstacle for Muslims, for it contradicted for them the first and most important article of their faith, the undivided unity of God: that God is one, not three. During Servet's boyhood, some 20,000 men, women and children of all ages, Jewish and Muslim, were burned at the stake for refusing to deny their unitary concept of God. Despite the resistance of the liberty loving Aragonese, the Inquisition was set up among them to root out heresy, and these things must have made a deep impression upon the mind of the young Servet. The brutality and injustice of these events may well have laid the foundation for the main passion of his later life.

**He studied the Bible deeply and discovered that the Trinity is not even mentioned in its pages.**

At 17 Servet was sent to the most modern university of the time, the University of Toulouse in the South of France. There he indulged his passion for theology, and one idea in particular came to obsess him: the notion of the Holy Trinity as an obstacle for the understanding of three major religions, Christianity, Judaism and Islam. He studied the Bible deeply and discovered that the Trinity is not even mentioned in its pages. Although less orthodox than Catholic and Protestant Christians, he always firmly believed that any thought, once discussed, has the power to come into existence and remain thereafter as a canon



*Isabel the Catholic.*

of perceived truth merely because of that first discussion. His theological arguments were heavily criticised by both the Catholics and Protestants of his time as he rejected the threefold image of God as well as the rite of baptism. Interestingly, Toulouse was the centre of Catharism until 200 years before his time, and it is known that many Cathars left the Languedoc region of France and fled to Aragón where they found for a while a measure of protection. Servet's scientific contributions were equally notable, as he was the first to write about the circulation of blood through the body<sup>25</sup>, which he set out in his book: *Christianismi Restituto* (The Restoration of Christianity) published shortly before his death in 1553. In this work he argued for a more personalised perception of Jesus, as a divine entity willed into being by the God the Father. This concept, the direct precursor of the Unitarian movement, brought him into conflict with both Catholics and Protestants, forcing him to publish an article revising his ideas scarcely a year later.

In 1536, he returned to Paris to continue his medical studies. It was a wise decision, for he began to make a name for himself as a doctor and went on to discover that blood oxygenation takes place in the lungs and not in the heart.





But he made one small mistake by drawing a connection between medicine and astrology, and that was enough to have him expelled from the university. Although the inquisition absolved him of guilt, he was condemned by the parliament of Paris. So he returned to Lyon to practise medicine. His fame reached the archbishop of Vienne<sup>26</sup>, for whom he would even serve as a personal physician.

In Vienne he earned fame and fortune as a doctor and an editor. He even had time to rekindle an old and fateful friendship and started corresponding with John Calvin on the topic of the Holy Trinity. The situation was much different than the days in Paris. Calvin had become a top religious leader and would not accept criticism of his own ideas. Calvin had sent Servet a copy of one his books, and when Servet returned it loaded with corrections, Calvin cut off the correspondence and announced that if Servet ever showed up in Geneva, he wouldn't leave the city alive.

In 1546 Servet sent a copy of his most important work, the *Christianismi Restituto* to Calvin. On reading it, the outraged Calvin denounced Servet to the Inquisition at Lyon, and Servet had to hastily take flight. On a fateful leg of his journey to Italy via Geneva, he was detected, arrested and condemned to be burnt at the stake. His death provoked a furious outburst on the part of the Protestant population over the pronouncement of the death penalty on the grounds of heresy. How could Calvin, such an outspoken enemy of Catholicism, be in league with the Inquisition?

Over time, the historical figure of Servet has begun to gain recognition (the University Hospital of Zaragoza bears his name and there's a foundation named after him) and his role as a humanist has increasingly become known.

### Reflections by Servet:

- *'Faith lights the lamp which only the oil of love can ignite.'*
- *'The divine has come down to mankind so that mankind can ascend to the divine.'*
- *'If I love someone in an affectionate manner, I am dependent on her, she surrenders herself to me and leads wherever she wills.'*
- *'The tendency to trust impostors and godless men and not ourselves, is an inherent part of the human condition, as none can recognise his own faults.'*
- *'Nothing separates me from God but a still, small voice or a ray of sunshine.'*

### Quotes about Servet

- *'This man is wise and I think without any doubt he teaches the truth but he falls into the clutches of the devil.'* Take care this does not happen to you. William Farel, executioner and the right hand of John Calvin during his execution.
- *'To kill a man does not defeat a doctrine but only kills the man himself.'* Sebastian Castellion, French humanist on the execution of Servet.
- *'Miguel Servet, geographer, physician, physiologist has earned the gratitude of mankind for his scientific discoveries, his dedication to the sick and the poor, his indomitable independence of thought, his intelligence and his conscience. His convictions are irrefutable. He gave his life in the cause of truth.'* From an inscription engraved on the monument erected in 1908 in the French town of Annemasse, 5 kilometres from his place of execution.

### Footnotes

1. Iberians, were one of a prehistoric people of southern and eastern Spain who later gave their name to the whole peninsula. Waves of migrating Celtic peoples from the 8<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> Century BCE onward settled heavily in northern and central Spain, penetrated Portugal and Galicia, but left the much earlier immigrant population of Bronze Age Indo-European people of the south and east intact.
2. The Roman emperor Augustus founded a city called Caesaraugusta to settle army veterans from the Cantabrian wars (northern Spain). The foundation date is not known, but it is believed to lie between 25 and 12 BCE. The city did not suffer the usual decline so common throughout the last centuries of the Roman empire and was captured peacefully by the Goths in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century CE.
3. The three frontier regions of Muslim Spain were the Upper March, around Zaragoza, the Middle March around Toledo and the Lower March to the north of Lisbon.
4. A Taifa was an independent Muslim-ruled principality, usually an emirate or petty kingdom, though there was one oligarchy, of which a number formed in the Al-Andalus after the final collapse of the Umayyad Caliphate of Córdoba in 1031.
5. El Cid: Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar (c. 1043 – 1099) was a Castilian nobleman and military leader in medieval Spain. He was called El Cid (the Lord) by the Moors and El Campeador (the Champion) by Christians, and is a national hero of Spain. He was born in Vivar del Cid, a town near the city of Burgos. He found work fighting for the Muslim rulers of Zaragoza, whom he protected from the domination of Aragón and Barcelona, further bolstering his military record and reputation as a leader.
6. Castile: The Kingdom of Castile was one of the medieval Christian kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula.
7. The Almoravids were a Berber dynasty of Morocco, who formed an empire in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century stretching over the western Maghreb and Al-Andalus. Their capital was Marrakesh, a city they founded in 1062.
8. The Common Era abbreviated as CE, is an alternative naming of the



calendar era, Anno Domini, abbreviated AD. BCE is the abbreviation for Before the Common Era, an alternative to Before Christ, abbreviated BC.

9. Al-Andalus: also known as Muslim Spain or Islamic Iberia, was a medieval Muslim cultural domain and territory occupying at its peak most of what are today Spain and Portugal. At its greatest geographical extent, in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century, southern France (Septimania) was briefly under its control. The name more generally describes parts of the Iberian Peninsula governed by Muslims (given the generic name of Moors) at various times between 711 and 1492.
10. Philo of Alexandria (c. 25 BCE – c. 50 CE), also called Philo Judaeus, was a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher who lived in Alexandria in the Roman province of Egypt. He used philosophical allegory to attempt to fuse and harmonise Greek philosophy with Jewish belief. His method followed the practices of both Jewish exegesis and Stoic philosophy.
11. Yom Kippur also known as Day of Atonement, is the holiest day of the year in Judaism. Its central themes are atonement and repentance.
12. Empedocles (c. 490 – c. 430 BC) was a Greek pre-Socratic philosopher and a citizen of Agrigentum, a Greek city in Sicily. His philosophy is best known for being the originator of the cosmogenic theory of the four Classical elements: *Fire, Air, Water* and *Earth*. He also proposed powers called *Love* and *Strife* (the two sides of the much earlier concept of a primordial binary dualism) which would act as forces to bring about the mixture and separation of these elements. His speculations were part of a wider history of the universe which also dealt with the origin and development of life. Influenced by the Pythagoreans, he supported the doctrine of reincarnation. Empedocles is generally considered the last Greek philosopher to record his ideas in verse. Some of his work survives, more than in the case of any other Presocratic philosopher.
13. Duns Scotus or John Duns, commonly called Scotus or Duns Scotus as well (c. 1266 – 1308), is generally considered to be one of the three most important philosopher-theologians of the High Middle Ages
14. A Vizier is a high-ranking political advisor or minister.
15. Oran is a major city on the north-western Mediterranean coast of Algeria, and the second largest city of the country. Located near the north-western corner of Algeria, 268 miles (432 kilometres) from the capital Algiers, it is a major port and the commercial, industrial and educational centre of western Algeria.
16. Fez is the third largest city of Morocco, and was the capital of Morocco until 1925. It is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Al-Qarawiyyin, founded in 859 CE, is the oldest continuously functioning madrasa in the world. The city has been called the 'Mecca of the West' and the 'Athens of Africa'.
17. Avicenna: (c. 980 – 1037) was a Persian polymath who is regarded as one of the most significant thinkers and writers of the Islamic Golden Age. Of the 450 works he is known to have written, around 240 have survived, including 150 on philosophy and 40 on medicine.
18. Al-Farabi (c. 872 – between 950/951), was a renowned scientist and philosopher of the Islamic Golden Age. He was also a cosmologist, logician and musician, representing the multidisciplinary approach of Muslim scientists.
19. Averroes (1126 – 1198) is the Latinised form of Ibn Rushd. He was a medieval Andalusian Muslim polymath. He wrote on logic, Aristotelian and Islamic philosophy, theology, psychology, political and Andalusian classical music theory, geography, mathematics and the medieval sciences of medicine, astronomy, physics and celestial mechanics. Averroes was born in Córdoba, in present-day Spain, and died at Marrakesh in present-day Morocco.
20. Moses Maimonides was a preeminent medieval Spanish, Sephardic Jewish philosopher, astronomer and one of the most prolific and influential Torah scholars and physicians of the Middle Ages. He was born in Córdoba under the Almoravid Empire in 1135 or 1138, and died in Egypt in 1204. He was also a rabbi, physician and philosopher in Morocco and Egypt.
21. Søren Kierkegaard (1813 – 1855) was a Danish philosopher, theologian, poet, social critic, and religious author who is widely considered to be the first existentialist philosopher.
22. Ibn al-Arif (born 1088 in Almeria and died 1141 in Ceuta) was a famous Andalusian Sufi.
23. John Calvin born Jehan Cauvin (1509 – 1564) was an influential French theologian and pastor during the Protestant Reformation. He was a principal figure in the development of the system of Christian theology later called Calvinism. Originally trained as a humanist lawyer, he broke from the Roman Catholic Church around 1530. After religious tensions provoked a violent uprising against Protestants in France, Calvin fled to Geneva in Switzerland.
24. The "*Catholic Monarchs*" is the joint title used in history for Queen Isabella I of Castile and King Ferdinand II of Aragón. Ferdinand and Isabella are noted as the premier monarchs of the newly united Spain at the dawn of the modern era. Their primary goal was to conquer the Muslim kingdom of Granada and completing the Christian reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula.
25. William Harvey is credited with the first detailed study of the pulmonary circulation of the blood, but Servet came before him at least in understanding that blood circulated.
26. Vienne is a commune in south-eastern France, located 20 miles (32 kilometres) south of Lyon, on the river Rhône.

## *If We Could But Remember*

*by Grace G Clue  
(reprinted from "The Mystic Triangle", January 1929)*

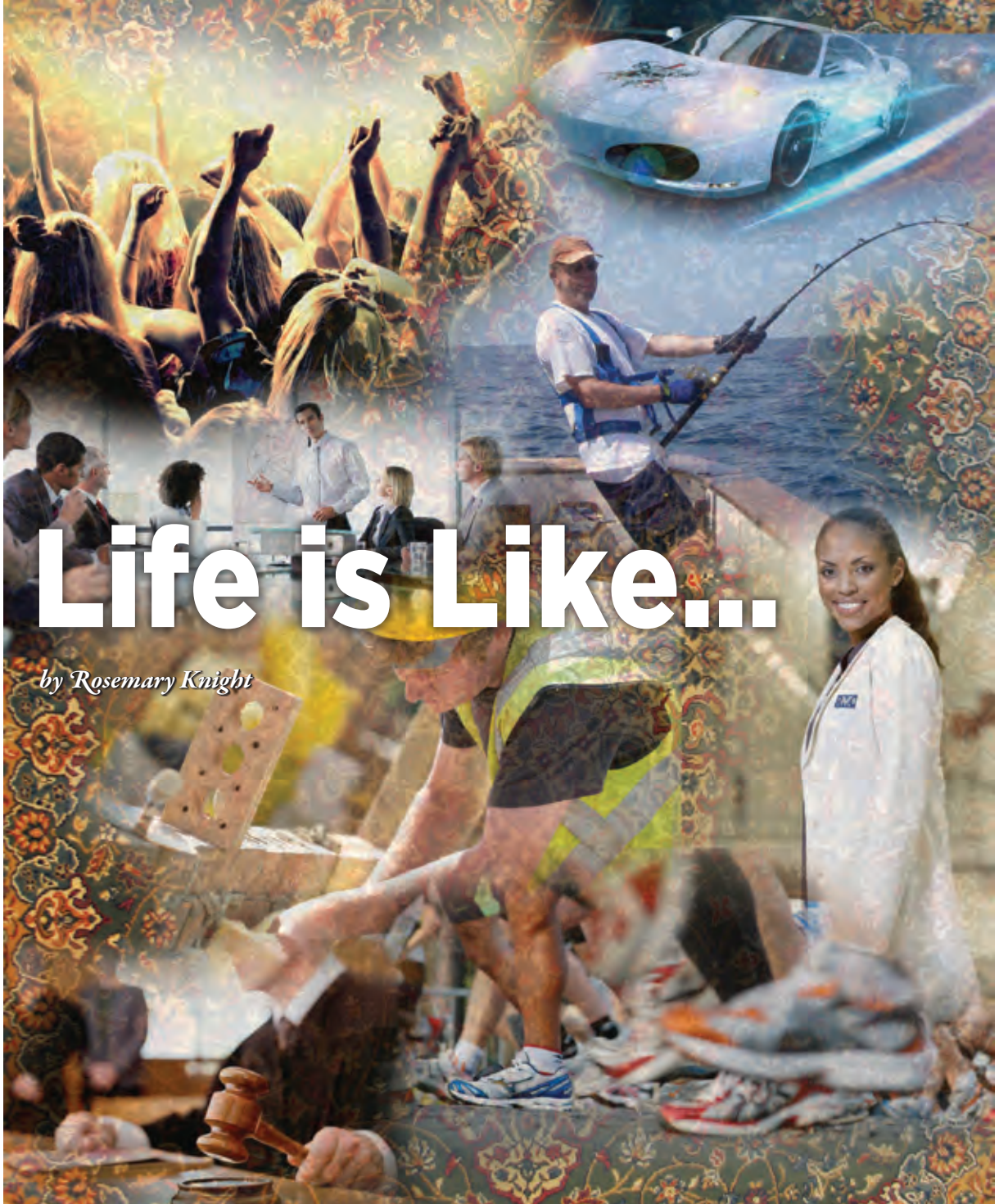
*If we could but remember,  
When the clouds hang thick and low,  
When our hearts are sad and weary  
And we falter as we go;*

*That the sun is ever shining  
And the stars send forth their light,  
That the day is ever dawning  
After the long, dark night;*

*'Twould make our burden easy,  
And with patience we'd toil on  
'Till the night of life has vanished  
And we greet the coming dawn!*







# Life is Like...

by Rosemary Knight

**L**IFE HAS been likened to everything from a trial to a rich tapestry, with myriad images in between. The metaphors range from the inane to the inspirational, but be aware that whichever you adopt will undoubtedly affect the quality of your experience here at ground level on planet earth. I've tried a few of those 'Life is like' similes in my time and am only grateful that like dodgy fashions, we can not only adopt them but drop them and swap them as we go along. I wouldn't want to be dressed in a cat suit or hot pants right now.

It's important to find a metaphor fit for purpose. Author Rick Warren likens life to a test, a trust and a temporary assignment. In his book *The Purpose Driven Life* (2002) he says: *"Your unspoken life metaphor influences your life more than you realise. It determines your expectations, values, relationships, goals, and priorities. For instance, if you think life is a party, your primary value in life will be having fun. If you see life as a race, you will value speed and will probably be in a hurry much of the time. If you view life as a marathon, you will value endurance."*



*If you see life as a battle or a game, winning will be very important to you."*

Some life metaphors are simply too elementary for the task. The inevitable ups and downs readily yield images of roller-coasters and elevators, but they're on a fixed loop and are not good places to be if they either scare you witless or bore you senseless. Helen Keller (1880 – 1968) became deaf and blind through illness at 19 months, but overcame her difficulties to become a powerful political activist championing causes from women's suffrage to workers' rights. "Life," she said: "is either a daring adventure or... nothing at all." It's a valid view, and one that made her very effective. But it is a bit unkind perhaps to those of us drawn to quieter qualities.

### The falls which followed the pride felt quite like sliding off the edge of the world.

The bowl of cherries idea sounds unpleasantly samey even to this devotee of the sweetly over-ripe black ones. The Israelites fleeing Egypt with Moses soon got fed up even of their divinely provided diet of Manna from Heaven when it turned up day after day, nutritious and plentiful though it was. That cinematic hero of war, adversity and true love, Forrest Gump, expanded the food metaphor with a touch more insight to say: "Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're going to get." I take his point, but the limits of the confectionary do not scan adequately for a lifetime of experiences with no two seconds the same. "Sometimes you're the pigeon, sometimes you're the statue," is more like it, and serves as a reminder to be philosophical about both our triumphs and our hardships.

### A Leviathan Sized Ego

Many people have likened life to a game of sorts, whether a strategic one like chess or a gamble, as in playing cards with the hand you're dealt, the sum total of all your skills, talents, inclinations and preferences. As a teenager I was fired up by the idea that life was a competition which yielded prizes to those with the tenacity and skill to win. Spurred on by a Leviathan-sized ego, I practised long and rigorously in the quest for sporting victory, first at high jumping, then discus throwing and finally basketball. I took myself and my early signs of promise extremely seriously.

After feeding the monster visions of excellence and applause it was bruisingly demoralising to discover that when the moments came to seize glory I would knock the bar off a foot below normal, lob the discus deep into the

safety netting or miss the simplest lay-up shots. The falls which followed the pride felt quite like sliding off the edge of the world. Leviathan would feed only on the choicest cuts and not the under-table scraps. He tormented me horribly for my failures and absolutely would not be satiated, prompting me to try yet harder and suffer yet more ignominious defeats.

Eventually it dawned on me that life was not about winning and losing. If it was, the losers would have no purpose. Nor would the winners once they too became losers. And I had to face it, how important can it be to chuck a discus a long way or jump over a bar a millimetre higher than someone else? Surely there must be some other outlook that would give life meaning? Evolution had begun, but like amphibians morphing into modern human form, only very, very slowly.

About this time I discovered that boys may be attractive not only as sporting partners, and I entered into enthusiastic pursuit. Leviathan was having none of it and soon sent them scurrying for cover. Cynics around this time coined the oft-quoted comment "Life's a bitch and then you die," and as a girl scorned more than a few times I agreed whole-heartedly and found a parallel life metaphor offered by John Bunyan's allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1698) when I slipped into "the Slough of Despond." I stayed there for quite some time, stuck and morose, languishing in the 'poor me' mode. The darkness prevailed on and off through several ill-fated relationships before, with the help of friends, I resumed a more cheerful attitude to the journey all of us must make, as Bunyan termed it, "from this world to that which is to come", and clambered out of the slime.

### Life as a Journey

The idea of life as a journey or a grand quest for some treasured reward has been adopted in many forms since Bunyan's pilgrimage story, always stressing the importance of learning along the path over the eventual arrival..., which of course is death to the present physical incarnation. The 19<sup>th</sup> Century American Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson said: "Life is a journey, not a destination." Irish author Oliver Goldsmith observed: "Life is a journey that must be travelled no matter how bad the roads and accommodations." Contemporary American author Marianne Williamson wrote: "The spiritual path is simply the journey of living our lives. Everyone is on a spiritual path; most people just don't know it."

Using the concept of a lifelong journey reflects several truths about the human incarnation, among them the idea that it is a continual, ongoing process of growth through experience, that it brings the traveller into contact





with a multitude of people and experiences, joys and trials, successes and failures, an infinite array of situations with which to interact and evolve. The scene is ever changing and therefore the challenges are too. The journey is also personal to each and every traveller, even when they follow someone else's footsteps. And they can change direction at any time in search of a more satisfying route.

Often in film, literature and real life, the journey is a quest or mission for some magnificent reward, such as the 'Holy Grail' or the 'Meaning of Life.' In many versions, such as Paulo Coelho's book *The Alchemist*, the hero goes through all manner of mysterious and life-threatening difficulties before finding that what he was searching for was back home where he had started, a modern take on a really old theme.

Spiritual teacher Ruth White wrote a watery metaphor for the spiritual journey in her 1995 book *The River of Life*, suggesting a range of inner journeys and meditations to help readers explore their lives by examining for instance how they see themselves travelling, who is steering their boat, where they are going and what hidden currents and underground streams are influencing what happens on the surface. For me, this early brush with New Age thinking became a fresh source of information and insight, and the river a life theme far more pleasant than others I had tried. It was a joy to dive in.

## The World's A Stage

In my dreams I find I'm often in a school or university, seeking out a classroom and then finding I'm in the wrong one. Navigation was never my strong point but the education theme often draws me as a metaphor for life, with lessons which are repeated again and again until you learn them. England's treasured playwright William Shakespeare famously likened life to a theatre in his work *As You Like It*: "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players. They have their exits and entrances, And one man in his time plays many parts."

The beauty of this metaphor is that it honours the multifarious roles that a person plays in a lifetime, as the leading actor in their own life story, effectively in the centre of the universe, in their own production, but also as an integral part of everyone else's productions, whether

as a major influence, a bit player or just a consumer in the audience. Gill Edwards explores this idea in her book *Living Magically*, saying that the world really is a giant theatre and not just an intriguing idea, a metaphor, but that it is literally true that our lives are an illusion and that we are all so absorbed in our roles we forget we are acting and believe it to be real.

"What is more, everyone writes, produces, directs and stars in their own production," she says. "Some might

choose a tragic script, perhaps *Hamlet* or *Anna Karenina*, while others select a romantic comedy such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or a visionary quest such as the *Search for the Holy Grail*. But if we don't like our script, we can change it." And therein lies an important truth. We can change our lives any time we like.

To Rosicrucians the world over, life is a process of evolution, an inner alchemical transmutation of their inner selves from base metals to spiritual gold, namely perfection. Key to the process is to gain control of one's thoughts, words and actions, learning to master them for the good of all and playing our part in bringing harmony and light to the world by aligning ourselves with the beneficial, constructive forces of the universe.

It's a process which takes place over many incarnations but inevitably ends in success because it lasts for as long as it takes. What a relief this is..., to know that however much we are tried and tested, whether we fluff our lines, drop the ball, pick the sour cherry, fall behind in our lessons or totally lose our way or fail to notice what is in our own back yard, we ultimately can't fail in this great, glorious quest!

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# Find your Inner Master



**F**OR MILLENNIA, philosophers and spiritual leaders have known that there exists a kernel of perfection within every person; manifesting as an 'alter-ego' with supreme confidence, calmness, maturity and wisdom. Rosicrucians call it the '*Inner Master*', for it has all the qualities of refinement, high purpose and spiritual maturity that we would expect of any true Master of life.

You can discover how to access this level of achievement and embark upon the definitive, true direction of your life simply by learning how to contact and regularly commune with this Inner Master. If you are searching for a

way of accomplishing the most fulfilling and rewarding you know, and happiness, peace and justice for all is what you yearn to see in our world, then learn to attune with your Inner Master and learn from its wisdom and spiritual maturity.

To find out more about the Rosicrucian Order and how it can help you to achieve your most treasured goals, visit our website [www.amorc.org.uk](http://www.amorc.org.uk) or contact us for a free copy of our introductory booklet "*The Mastery of Life*."

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Before the first step is taken  
the goal is reached.  
Before the tongue is moved  
the speech is finished.  
More than brilliant intuition  
is needed to find the  
origin of the right road.