

ROSICRUCIAN BEACON

June 2020, Vol 29, No. 3

CONTENTS

Communicating - A Mystical Art	2
by Claudio Mazzucco, Imperator of AMORC	
Zaragoza - by Mary Jones	6
The Philosophy of Peace	12
by Ralph M Lewis, Imperator of AMORC (1939 – 1987)	
Nagarjuna, The Alchemist - by Fraser Lawson	18
Right Attitude - An Inner Posture for Mystical Development	21
by Sven Johansson	
The Cathars in History - by Bill Anderson	27
The Cumaean Sibyl - Famous Oracle of the Ancient World	36
by Maria Reynolds	
The Priesthood of Ancient Egypt - by Rob Melon	40

ISSN 0966-033X

Published quarterly by the
English Grand Lodge for Europe,
the Middle East and Africa of
THE ROSICRUCIAN ORDER®
A.M.O.R.C.®

Greenwood Gate, Blackhill,
Crowborough TN6 1XE
UNITED KINGDOM

Tel: +44-1892-653197
Email: info@amorc.org.uk
Web: www.amorc.org.uk

EDITOR

Bill Anderson

Design and Layout

Cloud White

Statements made in this publication are not the official expressions of The Rosicrucian Order or its officers unless specifically declared to be so.

All material published in this magazine is copyright of the Supreme Grand Lodge of AMORC and may not be copied or reproduced in any form without the prior consent of the copyright holder and the individual contributors.



Cover spread

Egypt, the Eternal



Communicating A Mystical Art

by **Claudio Mazzucco**
Imperator of AMORC



I don't speak English. Chaplin doesn't speak French. However, we communicate without the slightest effort. How can this be? What is this new language of ours? It is a living language, the most alive of all, born of the will to communicate at all costs; the language of mimes, the language of poets, the language of the heart.¹

-- Jean Cocteau --

I WOULD like to share with you some reflections on the ability of living beings to communicate at different levels: from a written speech to the silence of lovers' glances, from philosophical discourses, to a mother's fingers caressing her newborn. I recently read that even bacteria exchange genetic material by means of a certain type of microbiological communication, and that trees communicate with each other through structures located at their roots, even exchanging nutritive substances.

As far as we Rosicrucians are concerned, we understand very intimately the celebrated French writer's message. We witness it every time we build the conditions for the Eggregore of our Order to manifest itself. One large experience of this kind - large due to the number of members who experienced it - was our World Convention in Rome, in August 2019, at which some 2,400 members from 72 countries took part. Today, as I watch again the Convention's video and images, I vividly recall the atmosphere we breathed, the vibrations we felt, the climate



we built, and I am aware that we shaped a small Utopia. Every one of us communicated with gestures of affection, smiles, handshakes, hugs and a large number of mimic gestures. For us Italians that's easy, you know: they say we talk with our hands, that's true indeed.

However, I would like to underline the most important aspect of those four days; namely precisely the harmony we succeeded in building up and the resulting quality of communication. For harmony and communication between beings is not something that descends from heaven as a blessing, but a condition that must be built with commitment, effort, goodwill, energies and time. It also needs care, because building is a complex project, while dismantling takes very little time. Basically, what our Order conveys is precisely this: tools to construct harmony within and around us, instruments of dialogue with ourselves and with others.

**Building moments of harmony
in order to establish good
communication is neither an
obvious nor an easy task.**

It would be useful at this stage to define what we mean by "harmony", but this is a difficult task, perhaps even an impossible one. Let's try this image: Have you ever experienced moments you'd like to be eternal? Moments you wish never ended? So, if we may not define harmony precisely, we could perhaps deduce what it is, what special condition characterises it.

If we speculate on this aspect, we come to realise that building moments of harmony in order to establish good communication is neither an obvious nor an easy task. In particular, in the times in which we live, relationships are often characterised by the absence of listening, both internal and to the other. For example, political exchanges are characterised more by an attempt to be right, rather than by searching for and safeguarding a truth that defends the wellbeing of a specific population or, better yet, of all humanity. This is not only the case in the realm of politics, but also in interpersonal relationships. Often, while one person is speaking, the other thinks about what he will say as soon as the former pauses to take a breath. There's no listening. But what are the elements that allow for deeper and a more elevated quality of communication? What motivates people to meet and share thoughts, emotions, joys, and at times even pains of life?

Those who are used to trekking on mountain trails will already have noticed that when you meet another walker you greet them, even if they are complete strangers, in fact, often even with a smile or a hand gesture. On the other hand, none of us - or really very few - would dare to greet everyone they meet in the streets of a city centre; if we did this, we would probably be viewed with suspicion and perhaps even shock. Why this difference? What makes us behave so differently in both these situations?

My explanation is that we venture on a mountain trail to experience nature, practise beauty, breathe clean air, live moments of harmony. Therefore, we intimately know that those we find on this very trail are there for the same reason. We are bound by identical objectives, similar resolve. Therefore, to sum up this brief reasoning, we could say that "having common objectives promotes communication." Being aware that someone else is looking



“The universe may not be mindful of us, but it turned the bed down and put a mint on the pillow like it knew we were coming.”

Chris Impey *Cosmologist*

for the same things as we do, allows us to establish a relationship that leads to quality communication.

However, sometimes in this world of dualities it occurs that we are often convinced of the need to separate white from black, true from false, just from unjust, reason from non-reason, thus putting us in the condition of wanting to uphold views that appear to us more true, more rightful than others. We separate and clarify, define and correct, while being at all times convinced that we are right. In the dimension of objectivity, we are not able to perceive a third possibility that harmonises the apparent contrasts of human experience. To achieve this, it is necessary that this experience as a whole be perceived with a different, detached gaze, deprived of the eagerness to be right - this being the true element of discord. We must accept that there is always a greater truth than ours and that of our speaker, and that only by working together will we be able to highlight it. To see this, it is necessary to ascend, just as we ascend as we climb a mountain, thus revealing a new landscape that we had never imagined before.

I've used the word Utopia before. The word derives from Ancient Greek; experts in Greek history and language teach us that this language has the ability to express very articulated, subtle and precise concepts. It allowed the development of western philosophy as it alone was able to express the reasoning at such high levels of sophistication. Now the word utopia comes from “*ou-topos*” meaning “no-place”, namely a “place that does not exist.” So Utopia is a place that isn't there. We

Rosicrucians know from experience that this specific place, this Promised Land, does not really exist on a map, but has a real existence in the human heart. Every time humans tried to search for this site on a map, the result was devastating. Even today, two peoples are in a constant state of war and oppression since they are both convinced that the real Jerusalem is a city that exists on the map; so they are constantly shifting its boundaries, boundaries that really reside only in our minds, are mental constructions.

Many times we also hear the word Utopia used as a synonym for childish dreams, unattainable fantasies, but this is a gross mistake, since many of the conditions now achieved by humanity were considered utopias at some point in the past. For instance, during World Wars I and II, there were people in Europe who dreamed of a united and peaceful continent. A peace that would not be a simple armistice (a brief pause between two offensives to regain strength and start fighting again), but a true coexistence based on cooperation, exchange and cultural growth. This condition envisioned by those men and women is being realised today thanks to the commitment of many people. Walking in the direction of our own Utopia, our Promised Land, is perhaps the fate of every man and woman on our planet? Who knows.

Cosmologist Chris Impey stresses that “*The universe may not be mindful of us, but it turned the bed down and put a mint on the pillow like it knew we were coming.*”² This sentence encompasses all the experience that a “walker” builds up along a path of spiritual knowledge such as that of the Rosicrucian Order AMORC. It is essential that we



discover the meaning of life, the meaning of our presence on this planet, the purpose of family that we have, the purpose of work that we have, the conditions in which we live and the people we find along the way, even why we are reading this very article here and now. If we look at each of these situations separately they may not make sense, but if we view them in their entirety and articulation, we may discover that the events of life actually have a profound meaning. They reveal something fundamental to us because they are inextricably linked to our own lives.

Therefore, it is essential to uncover this meaning: the whole universe tells us that things make sense; hence, even the encounters we make in life are not random, far from it. And communication, with the exchange of affection and knowledge that characterises our species, must be fostered at all times. Have you ever noticed that when we see people who express high degrees of empathy and compassion, who live in kindness and bestow affection, we usually define them as being “very human?” This is precisely because we humans are characterised by the ability to communicate with affection, empathy, compassion and kindness. This is what it means to be human.

We are all harbingers of a Utopia in our hearts, for it is in the hearts of humans that this Promised Land exists; thus the journey that leads us there is an inner one. It is, in a way, our spiritual heritage. As we undertake this journey, this promenade along our inner path, it soon reveals those who share that same path, so we begin to greet them, because we understand how difficult it can be, the hardship with which each does everything they can to reach their ‘Ideal City’, as Plato called it - the mountain peak of our previous metaphor.

Robert Pogue Harrison, professor of literature at Stanford University, reminds us that for the 4th Century BCE philosopher Epicurus: *“There is no greater instance of human pleasure, no higher form of moral happiness, than intelligent, profitable and pleasant conversation between friends who know how to listen, inspire and enlighten.”*³ For us Rosicrucians it is essential to focus on this simple concept of listening and communicating with our heart, for we should never confuse a mystical and initiatic path like ours with a sterile form of intellectualism. We do not want to become erudite in philosophical and mystical thought, people capable of making cultured quotations from alchemical or airtight texts, but possibly unable to feel the Divine inside, in the other through us, in one word: everywhere. On the contrary, we yearn to feel in our hearts the Unity of all creation, the bond that unites us to all living forms of nature. That Reality is not merely of a sum of small realities, but a single Presence permeating the entire Cosmos, of which we are but one of the infinite expressions, since It is infinite.



Back to our metaphor: we must first of all recognise that walking can be tiresome, especially when mountain hiking. The path is more often than not uphill, and requires much effort at each stage. From time to time there are a few flat sections where we recover, sometimes even a few small downhill that make us believe that what is left will be easy; then, on the contrary, we start climbing again. However, we know that the mountains reward us with wonderful landscapes, inebriating aromas of rare flowers, fresh and pure air, animals and insects that we do not see anywhere else, and encounters with people, several people, since in the mountains it is good to walk in company, no one should be alone.

We are driven by the desire to reach the summit, where a wonderful landscape will finally be revealed to us. We don't know what it looks like because we haven't seen it before, but we're sure it's there, we feel it inside us: it's our Utopia. It's what animates us in the world, it's the harmony we feel in our hearts and the desire to attain it along with others.

We were born for a meeting, let's get ready for it.

1. *Mon Premier Voyage* (1936) – Jean Cocteau
2. *How it ends: From You to the Universe* (2010) - Chris Impey
3. *Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition* (2008) - Robert Pogue Harrison





by Mary Jones

Zaragoza

O SARAQUSTA, radiant city of ancient times, what wonders have you wrought, what wisdom lies silent in thy resplendent vaults? Situated in northern Spain on the broad Ebro river, the 'golden city' of Zaragoza is today the capital of the Autonomous Community of Aragón. Just over 1000 years ago it became the capital city of the northern *Al Taqr al-Ala* or the Upper March (border province) of the caliphate of *Al-Andalus*. After the fall of the Caliphate in 1031, it became the capital city of the *Taifa* kingdom of *Saraqusta*. Taifa is a term that we translate as 'principality' or 'territorial division.'

Within the city there is an ancient Roman bridge

across the river Ebro, and facing its northern bank, one can see the outline of the great cathedral where once a great mosque had stood and an entirely different culture and world view had existed. To the right, one can make out the impressive Aljafería palace on a low hill, the finest Islamic-era palace-fortress outside Andalucía. During a brief visit to Zaragoza many years ago, while sitting alone at the river bank, I fell into a quiet reverie and felt the presence of the life and times of Zaragoza's golden age, when it played host to *El Cid* and many great poets and philosophers. This, above all other places in the Iberian peninsula, was the premier gateway through which knowledge of the ancient world was added to by the greatest minds of the





The Caliphate of Al-Andalus circa 1000 CE.

Middle East, and inevitably filtered into southern Europe, eventually leading to a renaissance and rebirth of ancient Greek knowledge in the Western Christian world.

Beginnings

The *Sedetani*, a tribe of ancient Iberians who spoke an unclassified non-Indo-European language, like the Basques, lived in a region centred on a village called *Salduie* to the locals, and as *Salduba* to the Romans. When the Romans had conquered the entire Iberian Peninsula, what is today Spain and Portugal, the Roman emperor Augustus (63 BCE – 14 CE) founded the city *Caesaraugusta*, named in his honour, at the same location as Salduie in order to settle army veterans from the *Cantabrian wars* of 29 to 19 BCE. The city did not decline during the last centuries of the Roman empire as happened for several other towns throughout Iberia. Instead, it was captured peacefully by the *Visigoths* in the 5th Century CE, and became the focal point of the resulting *Christian Visigothic Kingdom*.

The Muslim conquest of the Iberian Peninsula between 711 to 788 CE, resulted in the destruction of this nominally Christian kingdom and the establishment of the independent Emirate of Córdoba under Abd ar-Rahman I (ruled 756–788), who completed the unification of the Iberian Muslim-ruled areas, known as *Al-Andalus*. The conquest marked the westernmost expansion of Islamic rule in Europe. Later, successive emirs proudly declared themselves *Caliphs* to rival those of Baghdad. The word Caliph comes from the Arabic word *Khalifa*, meaning a successor or descendant of the Prophet Mohammed.

Following the destruction of the Caliphate



Monument to El Cid in Burgos, the capital of Castile.

of Córdoba, the Taifa kingdom of Saragusta was established in 1018 as an independent Muslim state within Al-Andalus, with its capital at Zaragoza. However, the political decline and chaos that accompanied the creation of the new kingdom was not immediately followed by cultural decline. On the contrary, intense intellectual and literary activity grew throughout the kingdom, though especially at its focal point Zaragoza.

During the first three decades of this period, the city was ruled by the Arab emirs of the Banu Tujib tribe. They were replaced by the Arab Banu Hud emirs, who had to deal with a complicated alliance with the famous El Cid of Valencia and his Castilian Masters against the Moroccan Almoravids, who eventually managed to bring the Taifas under their control.

Cosmopolitan and Cultured Court

As the Islamic conquest of the southern and eastern fringes of Europe, there was a wave of translations of ancient Greek, Roman and Persian texts (see the March 2003 edition of the Rosicrucian Beacon for a related article on Jundishapur in Iran) ranging from philosophy to medicine, to astronomy and mathematics.

The Taifa king *Yusuf Al-Mu'tamin* (literally 'Trustee through God') was an accomplished mathematician whose father Al-Muqtadir was known for his deep interest in philosophy, astronomy, as well as translations of ancient Greek mathematical treatises, unfortunately none of which have survived to our day. At the height of the Taifa Kingdom in the 11th Century and again in the mid-12th Century, the emirs, with Zaragoza as their constant political and cultural centre,



competed among themselves, not only militarily but also for cultural prestige. And to this end, they recruited some of the most famous poets and artisans of their time, some of whom we will meet later in the article.

Following the 1492 fall of emirate of Granada, the last Islamic kingdom in Spain, there was a period of 150 years (at least) in which Western scholars claimed haughtily that their Islamic peers had merely translated the ancient texts, offering little or no intellectual development on the discoveries of the Greeks. It was later proven beyond doubt however that translators such as Avicenna and Al-Mu'tamin offered copious and revolutionary input into their expansion of ancient ideas which had influenced Western thought almost as much as the original Greek texts themselves.

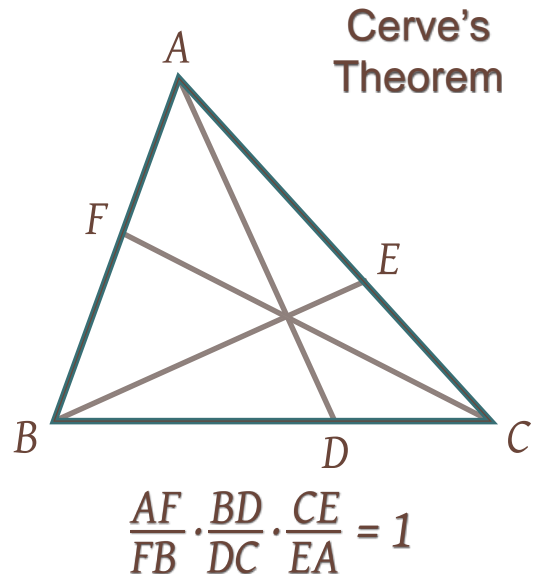
Book of Perfection

Yusuf al Mu'tamin is rarely mentioned in modern accounts of the history mathematics. But in his time he was well known as a great mathematician and astronomer. His *Kitab al-Istikmal* (*Book of Perfection*) was a compendium of the Greek mathematics of Euclid and Archimedes among others, but also contained the teachings of Thabit ibn Qurra, the Banu Musa and Ibn al-Haytham, and also introduced some original mathematical theorems. The Book of Perfection was later edited by the great Sephardic-Jewish Andalusian philosopher Maimonides (c. 1135-1204) and spread to Baghdad in the 14th Century, though with little influence in the Christian kingdoms for another 150 years.

The Book of Perfection deals with irrational numbers, conic sections, quadrature of the parabolic segment, volumes and areas of various geometric objects, and the drawing of the tangent to a circle, among other mathematical problems. In the work appears an attempt to classify mathematics into Aristotelian categories. The classification includes a chapter for arithmetic, two chapters for geometry and two others for stereometry.

Al-Mu'tamin is the author of the first known formulation of Ceva's theorem, which only became known in Europe in 1678 in *De Lineis Rectis* by the Italian geometer Giovanni Ceva. The theorem can be stated as follows:

If three line segments are drawn from the vertices of a triangle to the opposite sides, then the three line segments are concurrent if, and only if, the product of the ratios of the newly created line segments on each side of the triangle equals one.



Ceva's theorem, discovered at the end of the 11th Century by al-Mu'tamin, only became known in Europe in 1678 in 'De Lineis Rectis' by the Italian geometer Giovanni Ceva.

Al-Mu'tamin divided his book it into five chapters. The first was about numbers and mentioned what Euclid wrote in the seventh, eighth and ninth books of *The Elements*, and also what Thabit ibn Qurra mentioned in his treatise on *amicable numbers*." The second chapter was on the properties of lines, angles and plane figures, not in relation to one another. In it he mentioned what Euclid wrote in the first, second, third and fourth books of *The Elements*, and he added as well some new problems. In the third chapter he wrote about the properties of lines, angles, plane figures and much more. He mentioned in it what Euclid wrote in what is known as the *Book of Data* and also as the *Book of Assumptions*. In the fourth chapter he mentioned what Euclid wrote in the eleventh book of *The Elements*. In the fifth chapter he mentioned the relation of solids with plane surfaces to one another.

Among the sources which al-Mu'tamin drew on are the following: Euclid's *Elements* and *Data*, Archimedes' *On the Sphere and Cylinder*, the *Conics* of Apollonius, the *Spherics* of Menelaos, the *Spherics* of Theodosios, Thabit ibn Qurra's *Treatise on Amicable Numbers*, Eutocius' commentary on Archimedes' *On the Sphere and Cylinder*, Ptolemy's *Almagest*, Ibn al-Haytham's *Optics*, the treatise by the Banu Musa on the measurement of plane and spherical figures, and others. It is interesting to know that such a good collection of mathematical works was available in north-eastern Spain at the end of the 11th Century.

Latin translations of some of these scientific texts were made from manuscripts that had once belonged to





Detail of the Aljafería palace.

the library of al-Mu'tamin, and it is clear that he had an important indirect influence on the development of science in medieval Europe, even though his own work, the Book of Perfection, was never translated into Latin.

The Aljafería

Al-Mu'tamin reigned during the golden age of Muslim Zaragoza, following the thriving period of his father al-Muqtadir. He continued his father's efforts and created around him a court of intellectuals, living in the beautiful palace of Aljafería.

He was also a scholarly king and a patron of science, philosophy and the arts who knew astrology, philosophy and more especially mathematics. The Aljafería palace, which still exists, is currently the seat of parliament of Aragón. The ground floor retains much of the original palace and is extremely beautiful, on a par with the better known Alhambra in Granada.

The palace, built mostly between 1065 and 1081, was ordered in the second half of the 11th Century by Al-Muqtadir as a symbol of the power achieved by the Taifa of Zaragoza. The emir called his palace *Qasr as-Surur* (Palace of Joy) and the throne room where he presided over receptions and embassies he called the *Majlis ad-Dahab* (Golden Hall). He composed the following words in dedication to this room:

Oh Palace of Joy! Oh Golden Hall! Because of you, I reached the greatest of my wishes. And even though in my kingdom I had nothing else,

for me you are everything I could wish for.

The general layout of the palace copied the castles of the deserts of Syria and Jordan in the first half of the 8th Century. They were square-shaped with semi-circular towers at the corners, with a central tripartite space, leaving three rectangular spaces of which the central one housed a courtyard with pools and, at the northern and southern ends housed palatial rooms and rooms for daily life.

In the centre of the northern wall of the interior of the Golden Hall was a blind arch, where the emir stood, in whose thread was a traditional geometric pattern imitating the latticework of the mihrab façade of the Great Mosque of Córdoba, which it sought to emulate. In this way, from the courtyard, it appeared half-hidden by the white columns of both the archway of access to the Throne Room or Golden Hall and those of the immediate portico, which gave an appearance of latticework, an illusion of depth, which visitors admired and lent splendour to the figure of the emir. It is a stunning part of the palace.



Interior of the Great Mosque of Córdoba.



Detail of the Great Mosque of Córdoba.

The palace as a whole offered an appearance of solemnity and majesty. In the north wall, the most important complex of buildings of the Banu Hud period was built, as it includes the Golden Hall and a small private mosque, located on the eastern side of the access portico that served as an antechamber to the oratory. In its interior it housed a mihrab in the southeast corner, whose niche was oriented in the direction of Mecca, as was the case with all mosques, with the notable exception of the Great Mosque of Córdoba.

The Golden Hall had at both ends east and west two rooms that were private bedrooms possibly for royal use. Today the bedroom on the western side has been lost, but it was once used as a royal bedroom and also used by the Aragonese kings until the 14th Century. Most of the stuccowork of arabesques, which carpeted the walls with decorative panels as well as an alabaster base of 2½ metres height and the white marble floors of the original palace, have been lost. The remains that have been preserved, both in museums and the few that still remain in this royal hall, nevertheless allow us to reconstruct the appearance of the polychrome decoration, which in its day would have been quite stunning.

Ceilings and their wood carvings reproduced the sky, and the whole room was quite literally meant to be an earthly image of the cosmos, clothed with symbols

of the power exercised over the celestial universe by the emir of Zaragoza, who thus appeared as heir to the caliphs. In order to remember the appearance of the palace at the end of the 11th Century, we must imagine that all the vegetal, geometric and epigraphic reliefs were polychromed in shades in which red and blue predominated for backgrounds and gold for reliefs, which, together with the soffits in alabaster with epigraphic decoration, and the floors of white marble, gave the whole an aspect of great magnificence.

Solomon ibn-Gabirol

Solomon ibn-Gabirol was an 11th Century Andalusian poet and Jewish philosopher who was influenced by Neo-Platonism and who moved to and worked in the court of the Taifa kings of Zaragoza. He published over a hundred poems, as well as works of biblical exegesis, philosophy, ethics and satire.

In the 19th Century it was discovered that medieval translators had Latinised Ibn-Gabirol's name to Avicbron and had translated his work on Jewish Neo-Platonic philosophy into a Latin form that had, in the intervening centuries, been highly regarded as a work of Islamic or Christian scholarship. As such, Ibn-Gabirol is well known in the history of philosophy for the doctrine that all



Ibn Gabirol statue in Caesarea, Israel.



things, including soul and intellect, are composed of matter and form.

Avenpace

Avenpace (c.1085-1138) is the Latinised form of *Ibn Bâjja* a medieval Andalusian whose writings include works regarding astronomy, physics and music, as well as philosophy, medicine, botany and poetry. His philosophical ideas had a clear effect on Averroes and Albertus Magnus. Unfortunately, most of his writings and books were not completed because of his early death. He had a vast knowledge of medicine, mathematics, astronomy, botany and poetry, but his main contribution to Islamic philosophy was his idea on soul phenomenology.

In his time, he was not only a prominent figure of philosophy, but also of music and poetry. His collection of poetry or *Diwan* was rediscovered in 1951. Though many of his works have not survived, his theories on astronomy and physics were preserved by Maimonides and Averroes, which influenced later astronomers and physicists in Islamic civilisation and Renaissance Europe, including Galileo. He was the author of the *Kitâb an-Nabât* (“*The Book of Plants*”), a popular work on botany, which defined the sex of plants.

Avenpace was born in Zaragoza around 1085 and died in Fez, Morocco, in 1138. The rulers of Zaragoza changed constantly throughout Avenpace’s life, but in 1114, a new Almoravid governor of Zaragoza was appointed called *Ibn Tifilwit*. The close relationship between Avenpace and Ibn Tifilwit is verified in writings. Avenpace enjoyed music and wine with his close friend the governor and also composed poems to publicly praise Ibn Tifilwit, who rewarded him by nominating him as his vizier.

After the fall of Zaragoza in 1118 to the Aragonese, the last emir of Zaragoza was forced to abandon his capital and ally himself with the Christian kingdom of Aragón under *Alfonso the Battler*, who reconquered the city for the Christians and made it the capital of Aragón. Avenpace sought shelter under *Ibn Tashfin*, another brother of the Almoravid Caliph in Xàtiba. He worked for some 20 years, as the vizier of Ibn Tashfin. But he was imprisoned twice. The details of these episodes are not well understood but it has been suggested they were due



Miniature of Avenpace.

simply to numerous episodes of falling out with royal courtiers. Despite being unwelcomed, Avenpace remained with the Almoravid empire for the rest of his life until his death in 1138. There has been anecdotal evidence suggesting that Avenpace’s death was by poison from his peers.

Courtly Love

The idea of courtly love started in Muslim Spain and spread through the Kingdom of Aragón and Catalan Barcelona and through them into Occitania in the South of France. Occitania was the land of troubadours and Cathars and was highly influenced by ideas from the south. Many are the ballads and poems of the *Sayyida* or Lady and her devoted lover from afar, accompanied by timeless slave girls and of course an old woman Ayah or nanny, particularly popular at the court of Zaragoza and reminiscent of the Tales of the *Thousand and One Nights*. One of the most prominent examples was the story of the *Three Maidens* (Muslim, Jewish and Christian friends who lived together in harmony), whose story was put to song and spread throughout the Catalan and Occitan lands.

If ever you get the chance to visit Zaragoza, take it. Wander through its streets, visit the Aljafería, have a coffee in its plazas and walk along the river and contemplate a city that was for a time the main gateway of culture and civilisation into a western Europe that was just emerging from the dark Ages.



Aljafería Palace.



The Philosophy of Peace

by **Ralph M Lewis**
Imperator of AMORC (1939-1987)



THROUGHOUT the world, the demands for widespread cooperation continue among nations. But before people can live and work in harmony, they must have a common understanding. Physically and organically people have much in common. Mostly, they react alike to the external forces of the environment. We know that the primary qualities of sense impressions are almost identical. Under certain circumstances we all experience coldness and moisture. Under other conditions we have the sensations of heat and dryness. We also react similarly to what we

call extension or space, that is, ideas of dimension such as length, breadth and width.

In the emotional and intellectual realms, however, we are quite diversified. One person may find amusement in an incident that will anger another. Another may see beauty in a painting that to someone else is merely a distorted blob of colour. Intellectually, one person may find an idea that inspires and may even seem profound, while another finds the very same idea dull or unintelligible. Words often prevent us from having a unity of thought. Words in themselves are supposed to be symbols of ideas, but



often they are a mere framework for a name. It is left to the individual to place his or her own construction upon these words.

Peace

Peace is one of those words for which there doesn't appear to be a universal understanding, although its use is very common. We know that it is cast about freely by the press and is often used in private conversations. To most of us the word peace is a *symbol*. It signifies freedom from strife, namely, the avoidance of any physical or mental distress. In this way then, peace is a *negative* kind of symbol. We say it is negative because to most people it is not a thing sought in itself. Rather, it is looked upon as a *state or condition where there is freedom on a mundane level from the aggravation of something else*.

Consequently, to millions of people today the word *peace* is just a negation, a doing away with undesirable things while in itself remaining empty. For analogy, peace to them is like darkness. Darkness is only determined by its absence of light or its diminishment. It is not a thing in itself. Any pleasures derived from peace seen in such negative terms, are like scratching an itch. When the itch is gone, so is the satisfaction that comes from the scratching.

Lost Meaning

Has peace, in the long course of history, lost some hidden or secret meaning which it once had? Did the word perhaps at one time convey to ancient people a point or principle which has been forgotten with the passing of centuries? The dream of peace, either collectively or as an individual experience, is as old as history. Even to people of ancient civilisations there appears to have been no general agreement as to the meaning of peace. It was used by them to explain feelings and conditions which are difficult to express in a modern paradigm.

Perhaps the earliest reference to peace comes from the Memphite mystery school of Egypt some 4000 years ago. Not far from the Great Pyramid of Khufu was the ancient city of Memphis with the royal cemetery of Saqqara. Memphis, or *Inebu-hedj* as it was known at the time, was a site of great learning. It is also the world's oldest centre of abstract metaphysics. Upon a tablet, which has come down to us from this remote period and from this old city, we find the injunction:

As for him who does what is loved, and him who does what is hated, life is given to the peaceful and death to the criminal.

What is emphasised in this age-old teaching is that when we are of a peaceful nature, our conduct draws to us the love of other people. To do what is in harmony with other people in society constitutes goodness. The good person then, according to these ancients, is the peaceful one. They neither offend nor disturb others by their conduct, and in return for such behaviour, they receive the pleasurable response of the friendship of those they come in contact with. Conversely, the guilty one, according to this ancient injunction, is the one who does what is hated and evokes a commensurate response from others.

Perhaps the earliest reference to peace comes from the Memphite mystery school of Egypt some 4000 years ago.

Now let us realise that these teachings of some 4,000 years ago were uttered before the use of such words as *good* and *evil*. At that time the concept of being *peaceful* was construed as the proper moral or ethical conduct for a member of society. A person's virtue was actually called a *peaceful man*. Such people made their lives and actions contribute towards the happiness of others in society and they responded in turn. Peace meant *mutual satisfaction* among people, *compatible behaviour* or just *fitting in* with others. No one therefore could know personal peace without first having the love and respect of others in their immediate community. This required them to be useful and accepted members of society.

Ptah-hotep was the vizier of an ancient Egyptian pharaoh of the 5th Dynasty, *Djedkare Isesi*, (*Tancheres* to the Ptolemaic Greeks) approximately 4,300 years ago. In a book of advice to his son, known to us today as "*The Instruction of Ptah-hotep*", an early piece of Egyptian '*wisdom literature*', Ptah-hotep said: "*Be a peacemaker rather than a judge.*" Here, definitely was an admonishment to the youth of the land that it is far more important to prevent the arising of a conflict than to decide later who is right in the conflict.

Among the ancient Hebrews, the word *peace* ("*shalom*") had two original meanings. Principally it meant *prosperity* and *health*. In fact, a regular ancient form of salutation was: "*Peace be unto you.*" The second use of the word by both the Hebrews and the ancient Egyptians, was psychological. It meant *peace of mind and of heart*. This signified a state of *personal welfare and repose* as opposed



“Be a peacemaker rather than a judge.”

Ptah-hotep



to *unrest and dissatisfaction*. For the Hebrews and ancient Egyptians, a love of peace was considered one of greatest of human virtues. Peace, however, was an attribute that needed to be individually attained. It was not something that descended from on high like the bestowal of a divine mantle. It was considered an exalted form of conduct which the person had acquired. In the *Torah*, the Hebrew name for the divine laws or construction of these laws, there appears this phrase: “*By these things is the world preserved: truth, judgement and peace.*”

Conflict

We can say that, in the main, people of ancient civilisations indulged in a sentimental dream of eventual universal peace for all humankind. Their principle of peace was conceived as the *avoidance of conflicts* which would disturb society and, of course, which would disturb the individual's repose. At the height of the Roman Empire, there existed an ideal state known as the *Pax Romana* or Roman Peace. But this, in effect, meant an enforced peace by the Romans, a peace as the result of the establishment of a strong empire bringing all cultures together and ensuring that they lived and behaved as Romans.

Actually, the Pax Romana was nothing more elevated than peace at the point of a sword, acquired through conquering people and subjugating them to the will of Rome. In the eyes of the rulers of Rome, if conquered

people were subjugated and showed no appetite for conflict with Rome, that was a sign that social and political peace had been reached. As history has shown however, unrest still raged in the hearts of many of those conquered people.

Does mere conformity to a prescribed method or regulation constitute peace in itself?

This engenders the question: Does mere conformity to a prescribed method or regulation constitute peace in itself? Do we experience personal satisfaction and contentment when we're compelled to conform to certain regulations and provisions that have been set up but for which we have no intimate response? As we have seen, emotionally and intellectually we are all different to some extent. That which our reason rejects and which may be emotionally or culturally displeasing to us never results in a personal peace, regardless of how it may have been legislated by society. Even the ancient Egyptians of forty centuries ago knew that peace had a dual character; it must provide for personal satisfaction as well as social and political unity.



Too much emphasis has been placed upon peace in the collective sense and from a political point of view. Peace is primarily and individual, personal matter. Often it has been considered as merely a system of order and restraint which can be set up legally; but unless individuals experience this peace, it is non-existent to them. In fact, peace is principally a personal construction on the part of every individual. It is necessary therefore that we rid ourselves of any preconceived false notions about peace, and instead give it psychological consideration. Let us look at peace empirically, objectively, and see how intimately it touches each of us.

The Difficulty of Desire

Humans are creatures of *desire*, various inclinations and motivations. These urges compel us to both mental and physical action; indeed, our being is constantly active. For example, the body is nourished by replenishing itself. We are driven to this desire for replenishment by the aggravation and urges of our restless appetites. The mind is active through having its consciousness aroused in the form of sensations from which our ideas arise. Pleasure, then, is the gratification of both our physical and mental desires.

An excessive indulgence in most of our desires induces just the opposite of pleasure. Such excesses bring about states of abnormality, and in its wake, distraction. However, the commonest aggravations we experience are inadequate satisfactions, those that fall short of fulfilment. They are usually caused by obstructions to some gratification of our desires. This posits the question, and it is an important one:

Which is the most desired state of living..., the positive pleasures which stimulate and thrill our senses, or the negative pleasures which follow merely by avoiding conflicts which aggravate us?



We seek the fragrance of a rose; yet, in trying to pluck that rose and enjoy its fragrance, we risk pricking our hands on thorns.

For analogy, we seek the fragrance of a rose; yet, in trying to pluck that rose and enjoy its fragrance, we risk pricking our hands on thorns. Now the question is: Would it be preferable to forego the pain caused by the thorns or should we risk it for the pleasure of the scent of the rose? In general then, *peace is a negative state*, or as someone once said: *"It is the restfulness of a surrendered will."* In other words, by desiring nothing, by wanting nothing, we retreat from the reality of existence and any distractions that may come from it. We are required to construct our life in such a way that potential conflicts and distractions are lessened. We have run away from life in order to avoid disturbance.

Buddhist Viewpoint

The negative concept of peace is well expressed in the Buddhist doctrines. The first sermon of the Buddha, the *Dharmachakra Sutra*, followed his great enlightenment under the traditional Bo tree, also known as *Bodhi*, in Bodh Gaya, India. In this sermon the Buddha sets forth his famous *Four Noble Truths*.

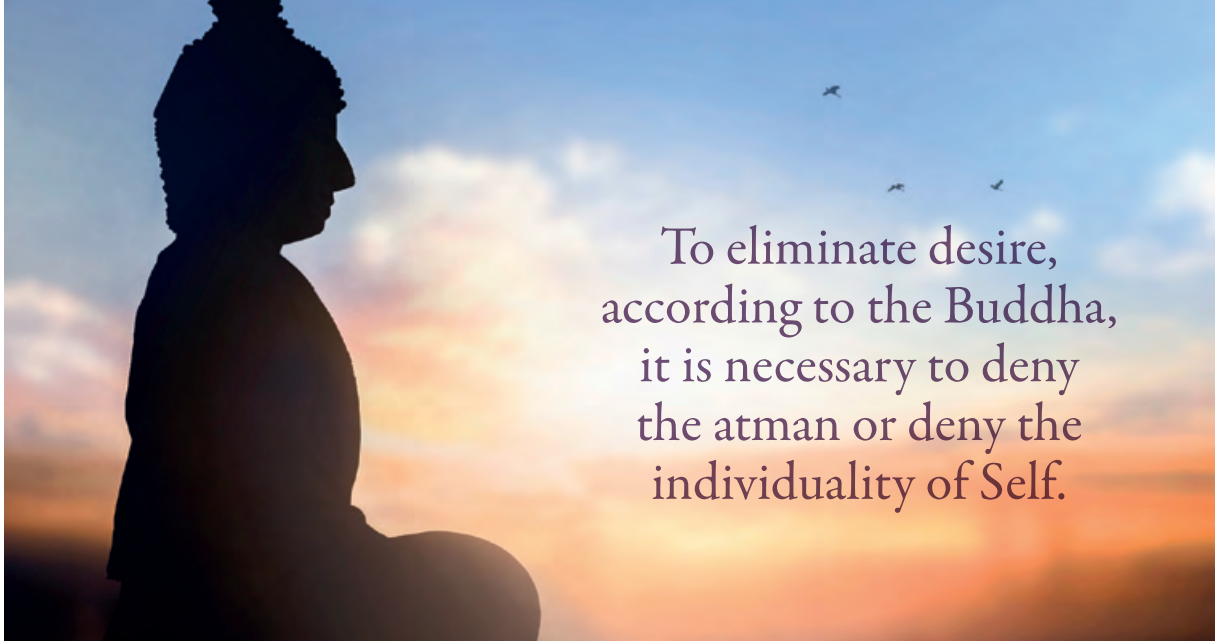
1. *The first truth* is that existence is suffering. Birth, disease, decay and death are suffering. Furthermore, to be separated from what we want is suffering and not to get what we want is also suffering
2. *The second truth* states that craving or desire (called *Karma* in Buddhism and Hinduism), is the cause of all suffering.
3. *The third truth* is that the cessation of suffering is the release from desire.
4. *The fourth truth* then expounds the *Eightfold Path* by which this freedom from desire is to be attained.

The Buddha has been called the world's first psychologist, for he makes certain ends in life exist within the human mind instead of in remote places or future periods.

He taught that the notion of *I* or the ego, and the word *mine*, give rise to the existence of desire. When we think of the *atman* (Sanskrit: *self, soul, breath*) of the Self as being independent, then we come to identify the body with this Self. Humans then have an everlasting love for this Self which is identified with the body and is forever trying to gratify it. To eliminate desire, according to the Buddha, it is necessary to deny the atman or deny the individuality of Self. When we think of Self as being separate, we also then conceive something beyond self. According to the Buddha, we are ever-after disturbed in trying to reconcile this individual self with something that we conceive of as being beyond it.

The Buddhist doctrine furthermore relates that the things of the world which we daily experience have no independence; that is, there are no particular things as they





To eliminate desire, according to the Buddha, it is necessary to deny the atman or deny the individuality of Self.

appear to us through our senses. If the Self has no separate reality, and the things of the world which the Self desires do not exist independently either, the craving of the Self for those things is but a useless illusion. “*Put down desire*” the Buddha exhorts, and thereby attain the state of Nirvana, a peace beyond all understanding.

Now, in these doctrines of the Buddha, the principal application of the personal will is to suppress one’s desires for the pleasures of the senses. In doing so, it is claimed, the individual will avoid the conflicts that come from pursuing these pleasures. Needless to say however, this cannot be carried out without major disruption to society, especially in our Western world. However, in a more conservative application, it will result in greater self-control or self-discipline.

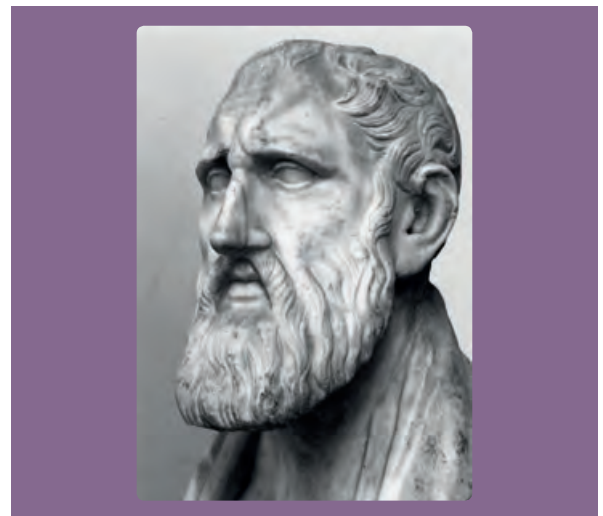
The Stoic View

The ancient Stoics also advocated a negative peace, that is, *withdrawal* from the worldly state of mind. The Stoics, the ancient Greek philosophers and the later Roman school, criticised sensual pleasures as being futile, considering them as resulting in distraction from the more important things in life. Seneca, the Roman philosopher, statesman and prominent Stoic, said: “*I am seeking to find what is good for man, not for his belly.*” The Stoics even believed that the emotions were a sort of disease. Compassion, sympathy and pity were viewed as weaknesses to be overcome, though assistance to people in distress were good, though emotions should not be involved. They took the position that emotions and sensual pleasures centred around desires disturbed the individuals sense of peace.

To sum up the Stoic philosophy in connection with peace: *happiness and peace were to be found only in imperturbability.* This is interpreted as avoiding anything that will perturb us, arouse our appetites or our emotions.

But this kind of peace is so negative that it robs us of our dynamic action and initiative. It would not permit us to create anything if such action were to disturb our repose.

Many people also entertain the fallacy that *peace is nothing more than ignorance of the future moment.* We all know people who don’t care much about planning for the future, and in extreme cases, don’t want to study or acquire any new knowledge. Any such activity is disturbing for them, depriving them of their peace of mind. Such people may be momentarily at peace because they insist on being ignorant of what lies around the corner. But they cannot escape the reality of their existence, a reality which eventually overtakes and descends upon them. At that time its effects are far worse because such people are wholly unprepared for them. Such a philosophy of peace is like closing one’s eyes in the belief that what one can’t see won’t affect one.



Zeno of Citium, the founder of Stoicism.

Image: Wikimedia / Paolo Monti / BEIC Foundation



The View of Aquinas

Mysticism is often declared today to be so abstract, so idealistic, as to be completely opposed to rationalism. On the contrary however, mysticism offers the most cogent and plausible approach to individual peace. *Thomas Aquinas*, the 13th Century theologian and philosopher, said:

Peace implies two things: first, that we should not be disturbed by external things and, second, that our desires should find rest in one.

It is the second part of his remarks which is the most important to us. Note that he does not deny the existence of desires, nor is he critical of the fact that people have desires. Rather, he requests that one rests one's desires in *"the one."* This can be interpreted as meaning focalising all our desires in a single impersonal ideal, a superior, transcendental love that constitutes that one of which he writes. It is like the drawing of the threads of all our lesser desires, the various aspects of ourselves, together to serve some superior, exalted end. For analogy, the candleholder and its candle and flame are all combined to bring forth light. The candle and its holder, and even the flame, are finite; they are limited, but the light that comes forth from their combination is infinite in its nature. The light reflects all objects which are exposed to it.

A Practical Approach

We will always have various desires, but the desire for peace must be above all other desires. It must be an all-inclusive desire, one that is Cosmically inspired, and surpasses all others in importance. The desire for peace must arise from the depths of the spiritual self and the end of such a desire is not negative. It means more than just avoiding some distraction or conflict; the desire for peace is positive. It is the seeking to bring satisfaction to the whole of humanity.

Referring to peace as *"intellectual repose"*, St Paul also

described it as *"peace in believing."* From a mystical point of view, this is the submerging of oneself in some ideal that is in harmony with life's activities and the demands which life makes upon us. In other words, conceive a mission for your existence, a reason why you are here, and then direct your whole self, not just your mental and physical being, towards that conceived end. As a mortal being, you will of course continue to experience certain external distractions and certain rebuffs from the vicissitudes of life. But when you have attained the supreme desire of peace in the spiritual, mystical sense, these rebuffs of life, these distractions, will then be considerably lessened in their effects upon you by the inner certainty and assurance you have attained.

The greatest causes of our anxieties and restlessness are not external forces. The cares and responsibilities that come to us are not necessarily the greatest disturbers of peace. The principal cause of these disturbances which we experience is the feeling of insecurity and lack of independence which we have at times. When we have an ideal which can be related to our inner self, that is, to the evolved self, we are never too deeply disturbed by things of the world. There is always an inner peace, no matter what the turmoil of the day. Self-confidence is born from an assuring knowledge of our inner harmony and free conscience. These are the first requisites of peace.

Inner peace, then, is the full activity of our whole being. The various disturbances and distractions we experience are a consequence of insufficiencies of some personal satisfaction. Ignorance is mental starvation; jealousy and envy are emotional starvation; moral degeneration and selfishness amount to starvation of the soul. There is no peace where the self is out of harmony with any source of its supply.

The symbol of personal peace which we should keep in mind is a balanced scale. It is never a scale at rest but one that is always active. It is the scale of compensation, of adjustment between the objective and subjective worlds, the finite and the infinite and between unity and diversity.

"Peace implies two things: first, that we should not be disturbed by external things and, second, that our desires should find rest in one."

Thomas Aquinas



NĀGĀRJUNA

~ The ~ Alchemist

by Fraser Lawson



IN THE West, names like Michael Maier and Paracelsus appear over and over in the history of alchemy, while in India and Tibet, the name *Nāgārjuna* is paramount. There, and even further east, his name inspires the same thoughts as do Aristotle, Galen and Aquinas in the West. Nāgārjuna is honoured as philosopher, mystic, physician, alchemist and saint.

He was born around the year 100 CE in southern India, in the Nalgonda district of the modern state of Andhra Pradesh. Like many early saints and mystics, details of his life are sketchy, many of them surrounded by mystery and legend. He was born into an upper-class Brahmin family but later converted to Buddhism. Many aspects of his life are still hotly debated by scholars, but whether we believe in all the legends or not, we can't doubt their impression on the minds of millions of people in Asia to this day.

The earliest datable biography of Nāgārjuna comes from Kumārajīva, a Buddhist missionary in China who lived in the 4th Century CE. He relates that as a youth, Nāgārjuna studied magic and became skilled in the art of invisibility. However, after a mishap involving the king's harem that resulted in a narrow escape, he decided it would be best to take the vows of a Buddhist monk.

Another story, the one most accepted by Tibetans, says that he became a novice monk while still a young boy, a common practice in Asia. The story says that when he was born, his parents took him to a seer who predicted that he would die in seven days. However, his death could be delayed for seven years if his parents would provide a banquet for a hundred monks. This was done and the baby survived. When the boy approached his seventh birthday, his parents sent him on a trip during which he met his future teacher, Saraha, who recommended that



the child be trained as a monk. It was believed that the karma from such an act would help the child avoid death.

Psychic Abilities

Under Saraha, Nāgārjuna became adept at both meditation and medicine, and also developed considerable psychic abilities. These abilities, coupled with his vast intellect, enabled him to make great contributions to Buddhist thought, and today he ranks among the greatest of Buddhist scholars to have lived.

Founding the Madhyamika (Middle Path) school of Mahayana Buddhism, his teachings focussed on the doctrine of the Middle Way, living a life between the two extremes of asceticism and indulgence and being a prolific writer.¹ There is an interesting story behind his name, *Nāgārjuna* which means “*Conqueror of nagas.*” *Nagas* are a class of beings who are half-serpent and half-human. They are supposed to dwell in or near watery places. These beings are believed by some scholars to have been the original mermen and mermaids of later European myth. Legend states that the Buddha (563-483 BCE) hid a number of treatises among the nagas which were to be discovered at a time when people were ready to receive them. These treatises were collectively known as the *Prajñāpāramitā*, a Sanskrit name meaning “*The Perfection of Wisdom.*” Once when the king of the nagas fell seriously ill, Nāgārjuna, who by this time was a famous physician, was sent for. He attended the king and cured him. In gratitude, the king let Nāgārjuna study the sacred texts. So the *Prajñāpāramitā* eventually came to the human world again, and Nāgārjuna acquired his name.

His teachings focussed on the doctrine of the Middle Way, living a life between the two extremes of asceticism and indulgence.

The texts discuss the path to enlightenment and in particular dwell on the concept of emptiness, becoming a cornerstone of Buddhist philosophy. Nāgārjuna spent many years interpreting these texts, and his work eventually became the basis for the most influential school of metaphysics in Tibet. In other fields, he also left his mark. As a physician, he is said to have been the chief redactor of the *Sushruta Samhita*. This book is still being widely printed in India and is considered one of the pillars of classical Indian Ayurvedic medicine. Its



Nāgārjuna was said to be the chief redactor of the ‘Sushruta Samhita’, considered one of the pillars of classical Indian Ayurvedic medicine. (Traditional preparation shown).

chapters range from surgical techniques to the diagnosis and treatment of varied diseases. Included are chapters on toxicology, paediatrics, mental disorders and theories on pharmacology.

Nāgārjuna’s Alchemical Work

Through his interest in medicine Nāgārjuna became involved in alchemy. Everywhere in the world alchemical traditions have seemingly had two concerns: changing base substances into noble ones and creating medicines that would promote youth and longevity. In different areas of the world one aspect may have been emphasised over the other, but both existed. In India, the emphasis was on finding an elixir of life. This aspect of alchemy was considered an important branch of Indian medicine, termed *rasayana*, a name that was applied to the transmutation of metals as well.

Nāgārjuna had become a master of the medical aspect of alchemy, but he wanted to learn about the transmutation of metals as well. The story of his search, like the one concerning his name, has its mystical elements. Nāgārjuna had heard about an alchemist named Vyalī who lived on an island. Vyalī had the reputation of being extremely secretive, so Nāgārjuna thought he might have some difficulty obtaining the alchemist’s secrets. He therefore devised a plan which involved the use of two charms, which he prepared. He meditated and was led to the island where Vyalī lived. Once on the island, Vyalī wanted to know how Nāgārjuna had got there. Nāgārjuna showed him one of the charms and implied that he had used it to find his way. Vyalī agreed to teach Nāgārjuna alchemy in return for the charm. Vyalī took the charm, and believing that Nāgārjuna was now his prisoner, he felt free to reveal his mysterious art. After learning what he



could, Nāgārjuna meditated, and using the second charm as an aid, returned to his home.

As a master of the art of gold-making, he is said to have used his knowledge to provide for the needs of fellow monks at his monastery during a time of economic depression when it became burdensome to the people to support the institution. Legend also states that he considered making enough gold for all people to be lifted from poverty. He was dissuaded from this idea however, by the argument that creating so much gold would serve only to create more strife.

Nāgārjuna had yet another contribution to make. He helped to develop the then nascent practice of *Tantra*. Tantra is a meditational exercise involving the transformation of the meditator into the deity being meditated upon. It also involved the transformation of ordinary surroundings into divine ones. There were different grades and classes of Tantra, all involving initiation and proper training. Because of the transformation of the ordinary into the divine, the practice has been referred to by some Tibetans as “inner alchemy.”

Long Life

Because of his mastery of alchemy, Nāgārjuna lived for many years. The Chinese pilgrim Xuánzàng, who travelled in India in the first half of the seventh century, reported that Nāgārjuna’s knowledge of elixirs enabled him to live several centuries. Claims such as this, plus the variety of work produced by Nāgārjuna, have led some scholars to believe that there were two or more Nāgārjunas, but this cannot of course be authenticated.

Despite the good he did, Nāgārjuna’s life ended tragically. His friendship with the king of the region was as well known as his mastery of alchemy. Both the king and Nāgārjuna were long-lived and the rumour spread that somehow their lives were magically linked. It was whispered that if one died, so would the other. The crown prince, knowing that Nāgārjuna was an alchemist, believed that Nāgārjuna and hence his father as well, would live forever. As a result, the prince would never become king. The prince then devised a plot to kill Nāgārjuna and although Nāgārjuna knew of the plot, out of compassion for all beings and his non-attachment to his own life, he did not interfere with the actions of his murderer.

Legend has it that when the great Nāgārjuna died, all the trees in the area withered. Legend also states that his body is still preserved, being guarded by eight protectors until the day the Buddha Maitreya will appear in the future. At that time, Nāgārjuna will return to once again to spread his light in the world.



*Detail of artwork of Nagarjuna with
30 of the 84 Mahasiddhas.*

Footnote

Among the texts definitely attributed to Nāgārjuna are:
Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā – Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way

Śūnyatāsaptati – Seventy Verses on Emptiness

Vīgrahavyāvartanī – The End of Disputes

Vaidalyaprakaraa – Pulverising the Categories

Vyavahārasiddhi – Proof of Convention

Yuktiāika – Sixty Verses on Reasoning

Catustava – Hymn to the Absolute Reality

Ratnāvalī – Precious Garland

Pratītyasamutpādayakārika – Constituents of Dependent Arising

Sūtrasamuccaya – Compendium of Scriptures

Bodhicittavivaraṇa – Exposition of the Enlightened Mind

Subhlekha – To a Good Friend

Bodhisabhāra – Requisites of Enlightenment

Susbruta Sambhita – Redactor of Compilation Treatise on Ayurvedic Medicine



Right Attitude

An Inner Posture for Mystical Development

by **Sven Johansson**

WHILE we have times of seemingly rapid progress, offset by periods of apparent stagnation, these are but disoriented early realisations of an underlying process that is both steady and cumulative, but entirely meant just for us. Progress is only ever made through our own efforts, step-by-step, hour-by-hour, day-by-day. And as we metaphorically approach the awesome vision of our destiny, the footsteps we leave behind in the sand are the personal thoughts, feelings and actions that once were

ours, and which have brought us experiences that have contributed to the growth of our soul consciousness. The path we have chosen leads us towards an initiation into the very heart of our being, the soul personality itself, known to Rosicrucians as the *rose of the soul*.

Sincere travellers following one of the many mystical paths leading to illumination and intimate union with the soul, soon learn the futility of seeking shortcuts in an attempt to avoid necessary experiences. However, it's quite reasonable and even admirable for us to ensure that





“The decision to take the path comes first; the rest follows.”

we’re taking the most direct route, not to avoid effort, but rather to focus and concentrate our energies on productive endeavours. Nature is supremely efficient in its pristine operation, and so too should we do our best to follow the most direct and efficient route to our goal.

Attitudes

This most efficient and most direct route to illumination is built upon a specific set of ‘inner postures’ that mystics adopt. Just as practitioners of hatha yoga adopt outer, physical postures with the intention of honing the health of the body, so do mystics adopt specific inner postures to achieve inner ends. These inner postures are commonly known as *attitudes*.

Attitudes determine how we think, feel and act. In short, it can truthfully be said that attitudes *permit* awareness, *permit* realisations and *permit* the appropriate utilisation of the mystical techniques we’re using. Collectively, our attitudes are the gateway through which permissions are granted or denied, and because our attitudes are our own self-created thoughts, we don’t question the decisions that emerge from them. The inner posture of maintaining correct attitudes at all times, directly governs how we, as scholars of the so-called ‘*mystical life*’, try to master the tasks needed for the gradual evolution of our soul personality. First we decide what to do..., then how to do it..., and finally, we adopt the appropriate attitudes that will enable our being to reach our coveted goal. That is the mystic way.

Certain attitudes are fundamental, even essential, to the mystical outlook needed to develop and refine our skills at navigating ourselves through life without leaving

too much pain and suffering behind. But if we were to try and identify all beneficial attitudes in detail before even *starting* on our mystical journey, we would soon be totally overwhelmed by a jumbled and disjointed list far beyond our ability to comprehend, let alone to act upon. Yet there are a few very simple attitudes we can adopt, most of them so obvious they hardly need mentioning. Compassion, fairness, justice, responsibility for our own actions, etc., the list is not long, but a good start, and in the absence of any greater understanding than this, we must begin here. And even if we don’t have a clear appreciation of the need for even these most obvious of inner attitudes, they quickly emerge through insights we gain once we’ve deliberately taken the first steps along the path towards our inner liberation. *The decision to take the path comes first; the rest follows.*

Most insights are specific realisations meant just for us, and the great *Law of Karma* ensures that we get precisely the lessons we need most at any given time. They are very personal, sometimes painful, and often apply only to specific aspects of our, and no one else’s, life. There are however, a number of essential attitudes common to all travellers on the path, ones that are gained by everyone at some point on the journey and which can be shared with and understood by virtually everyone. In this sense they are universal and fundamental, so let’s consider the following six ‘*fundamental attitudes*.’

1: The Law of the Triangle

Rosicrucians have one fundamental law close to their hearts. It is called the *Law of the Triangle* and forms not only the basis of all mystical endeavour, but is





A plug fits into its socket, a key fits into its lock; not just any socket or lock; only the matching ones will do.

also recognised by science as the basis of all physical manifestations. It is essential that we deeply and indelibly impress upon our consciousness the concept that there are always two causes to every thing that happens. Every phenomenon necessarily results from an active and a receptive cause, being a product of the union of two qualities that we arbitrarily call 'positive' and 'negative.'

Of course, using words like *positive* and *negative* is done in a metaphorical sense only and there's no inherent *good* or *bad* implied in either word. The words are merely two points of a triangle, the third point being the manifestation of the union of these two points. There are two causes to every manifestation which, in turn, occurs at the precise place and time of the union of these two causes. As the saying goes, it takes two to tango, and it takes two causes for every effect. A plug fits into its socket, a key fits into its lock; not just any socket or lock; only the matching ones will do.

2: Causation

It is important to realise that all situations are the product of many concurrent phenomena, but crucially, the manner in which they are interpreted by our consciousness. Whether we realise it or not, we're constantly applying meaning to the causation we see about us. We do the interpreting, we apply the meaning. Without a clear understanding of the duality of causation however, we're apt to concentrate on one cause only, usually the most obvious one. And by doing so, we fail to discern the deeper levels of causation, the full range of the causal force behind an occurrence.

Furthermore, every cause has its own history, its own 'world line', and that history should be carefully analysed and understood. By neglecting to consider the fullness of causation and applying meaning and reality to only one of the pair of causes, and then again, only to the most recent of a whole stream of pairs of causes leading to the current state of affairs, we attach too much relevance to a single cause, and the result is a loss of perspective. So, causes come in pairs, and this is the principle behind the Rosicrucian *Law of the Triangle*.

When we know there are always two causes to every manifestation, we have a better understanding of self. Usually we'll be analysing something which has occurred in our own life, and will therefore be alert to the part we personally played in the event's causation, namely, *how we share responsibility for the event*.

3: Change

Another essential attitude also related to the first, involves change. We must understand and accept change not only intellectually, but intuitively as well. Sometimes, less 'head' and more 'heart' can help us immensely to separate the wood from the trees. Few things are so stifling to human creativity, as deadly to personal or social development, as that misplaced zeal for a "once and for all" situation, a "final solution." Dictators and tyrants love such solutions even when they hardly ever exist in the real world of complex situations.

Some people work their entire lives towards the goal of retirement, hoping for something special about being able to finally relax. But instead they find life empty and devoid of meaning when they finally get there. Others toil incessantly to create something, find their creation to be all they envisioned, yet remain dissatisfied. Too many believe that once they get things just as they wanted them to be, they can sit back and enjoy themselves. Not so: *Change is the law*, and about the only thing we can



Some people find life empty and devoid of meaning when they finally retire.



rely upon is the fact that change will be with us for as long as we live.

As pairs of causes constantly merge to produce ever new manifestations, so too must we continually explore and seek to understand an ever-changing world about us. Incidental to the hectic pace of modern civilisation is the realisation of the impermanence and instability of material and social creations. The flu vaccine we received last autumn is unlikely to protect us from the latest mutation of this potentially deadly disease, as indeed we've discovered with the flu-related Corvid-19 virus now afflicting millions

Of all people, mystics hold no expectation of a world where things stay as they are.

of people throughout the world. And that highlights in stark relief that change, and our ability to quickly adapt to changes in our outer lives, is fundamental to our inner lives too. Not only does our outer world constantly change, our inner world also changes, though those inner changes are almost entirely due to our attitudes.

Our aspirations, goals and desires all undergo modification as a result of the expansion and growth in maturity of our consciousness. A new being looks upon a new world every morning. Consequently, those who are serious about personal development don't fail to examine their personal philosophy each day in the light of new experiences; for they know that yesterday's principles of 'right living' may be inadequate for today's living. In our own special ways, we're all seeking ideals of perfection, while at the same time being aware that the very concept of perfection is itself evolving within us. Of all people, mystics hold no expectation of a world where things stay as they are. They're sufficiently self-assured to live comfortably and well-adapted in an ever-changing world with a constructive attitude towards each new day's problems and opportunities. Change is the law!

Those who fully understand this, welcome change as a vehicle for inner growth. In fact, by understanding change, they transcend mere acceptance of it, and actively seek to share in the process, guiding change for the benefit of their self and others. We won't find true mystics longing for the past; nor will we find them fighting change in defence of a static present. But we will find them fully immersed in the

active present while carefully and confidently working for a better, brighter future for as great a part of our Earth's precious biomes as possible. A true mystic is a willing, understanding and cooperative *agent of change*.

4: Self-Reliance

An ingredient of character known as self-reliance is a fourth essential attitude and it flows directly from our concept of self. Of course, self-reliance doesn't necessarily mean being egocentric, nor being uncooperative with our fellow humans. Nor does it mean we should be remiss in any of those social obligations that are incidental to 'good citizenship', however we may define it.

Self-reliance is more akin to things like courage, inner resolve and a deep sense of responsibility to, and connection with, all parts of Earthly life. True mystics know that no answer can come from anywhere or anyone except from within themselves, namely, from the 'still small voice within', that life-long manifestation of inner refinement and perfection that exists in embryonic form in all living creatures, possibly in its highest and most complex form in humans. They listen carefully to others, enjoy exploration and study with others, and share experiences with others, all in the cause of ever greater connection with the great life current of which they are a part.

To the extent that they're able to wisely choose and incorporate into their beings the positive and uplifting experience of others, valuable lessons are learned and their inner spiritual growth progresses. But the deep answers and profound changes for the better that they seek, can, in the end, only come from within their own spiritual depths. But observing others experiencing similar things, greatly eases the adoption and internalisation of such things.

Asking no one else for the realisations that must be



In our own special ways, we are all seeking ideals of perfection, while at the same time being aware that the very concept of perfection is itself evolving within us.





A candle simply radiates impersonally with no sermons, no advice, no judgment. It gives to all and we use its light as we wish.

earned, and not leaning upon anyone else, Rosicrucians look squarely into the face of the 'person' with the proper answers each time when seated before their *Home Sanctum* mirror, face-to-face with their *Inner Master*. Our *Self*, our *Inner Master*, is a 'portion' of, or an extension from, the *Divine Self*, that infinity actuality that some refer to simply as 'God', while many others have no name for what is ultimately incomprehensible, unnameable. Our *Self* is neither our body, nor our possessions, nor any wisdom we've acquired, nor any of our personal achievements. We *are* this *Self*, the deepest part of us, the part that passes from life to life, from one state of existence to another, an extension of the God-consciousness within.

While in human form, it is *only* through this precious *Self* that we can find and assemble a full appreciation of the true depths and refinement of our life-long reality as spiritual beings, temporarily manifesting goodness and compassion towards all living creatures from cradle to grave. A courageous philosophy it may be, but sadly it's not for everyone..., yet! Far too many seek others to lean on when they should instead be looking to their own deeper selves for the answers they lack. But the realisation of that inner core of perfection within every human being will undoubtedly be revealed to every person eventually, even if only many, many incarnations in the future.

5: Impersonality

Impersonality is a fifth essential attitude, crucially important though often frustratingly difficult to attain. Although the word *impersonal* denotes for some a person who is cold, aloof or uncaring, for a mystic it means something quite different and is more analogous to the wider perspective of seeing things *'in the whole'*, and having the ability to use that greater 'vision' for the greater good of both the personal self and others within its karmic proximity.

When acting in a self-centred ways, people often behave as though they were little gods, masters or gurus. Even when sincerely trying to help others, they take it upon themselves to control the recipients of their help by selecting the objects and means of assistance according to narrow, personal value judgments. In other words, they select who should receive their help and what form it should take. There's a tendency to decide what others *should* do, and tell them how it must be done. In the individual's 'great wisdom', it becomes too easy to attempt to force the evolution of the understanding of others, meaning of course, to make it more like their own. In all these things, is the helper not presuming too much?

In the broader scheme of things, it's far better to be impersonal, though always with compassion and understanding. To illustrate this, take the analogy of a simple candle. How unfortunate it would be for many if candles gave of their radiance only to those judged deserving or decided which of us needed light and warmth. Fortunately, a candle doesn't ask who we are, nor how we live, nor even our purpose in using its light. A candle simply radiates impersonally with no sermons, no advice, no judgment. It gives to all and we use its light as we wish. It simply gives, for that is its nature. The impersonal mystic also simply gives of his or her Light, and asks for nothing in return.

Impersonality is a fifth essential attitude, crucially important though often frustratingly difficult to attain.

When we act in a personal manner, we're limiting the assistance we can give to those we know are in need; and we're hampered to an extent by our emotional attachment. Of course there are times when personal efforts and emotional attachments are proper and even required, both in material and non-material ways. But our primary task is to respond to an appeal only when asked, or when we see intuitively that a person desperately needs our help, but is incapable of expressing any request in our direction.

Remember that asking for help is not always done with words. In fact asking is most often done purely with a glance, a longing look or an expression of pain and suffering. We should all in some measure treat the ill, comfort the unhappy and protect those who are trampled upon and can't help themselves. Most of our labours should be devoted to impersonal service, an offering of our all to the Cosmic, to be utilised wherever required and in whatever way is needed, without requiring that



we retain complete control, nor even that we require the assisted person to arrive at full, objective understanding of the source of the assistance they're receiving, or even of the success of our efforts.

Impersonally we serve all, known and unknown, who need what we can give. Best of all, while serving impersonally, we're not held back by worries about success, nor given over to pride by what help we may have given. Yes, true mystics simply give, not only because it is in their nature to give to all as the radiation of a light in a darkened room, but because it makes admirable good sense to give freely, unconditionally and without hope or wish for recompense. True mystics give first and foremost because this is part of their innermost nature, but they also give because it is a crucial part of their deliberate strategy to evolve their inner *Self*.

6: Determined Aspiration

The sixth and last essential attitude which will be considered, is simply put but requires great effort to accomplish. This attitude is the determination to operate at all times upon the highest level of which we're capable. It means keeping our conscious awareness elevated at all times, and to work at the highest level of awareness we can comfortably sustain. In layperson's terms, we aspire to interact with our inner Self with peak performance always.

Far too many spiritual seekers bemoan the fact that they can't become adepts overnight. They compare their puny achievements with the spectacular achievements of past great masters and avatars; and as a result, of course they feel utterly useless next to such radiant luminaries. And while preoccupied with such futile comparisons, they fail to use the very abilities they already possess and are meant to use. Feeling inadequate and not powerful enough to operate on a greatly elevated vibrational plane with ease and finesse, their response is..., to do nothing! What a poor excuse.

None of us can at all times be completely attuned and harmonious. We're human after all and have various limitations associated with our humanity, not least of all the biological needs of the physical body. Better for us to forget comparisons with masters and avatars, and with anyone else for that matter, and firmly resolve to operate upon the highest plane of consciousness open to us *at this moment in time*, in the present, not the future. In this way we will ever be at the upper limit of the *personal* range of mystical work we're capable of.

At those limits, we have glimpses of what lies even higher than what we've thought of. But we won't squander those glimpses with an over-eagerness to get there before we're ready. We'll aspire to reach those higher planes to be sure, and this aspiration will lead us on powerfully to their

eventual attainment. But it doesn't matter that the highest planes can't be reached today, tomorrow or even in this lifetime. More important is that we're always at the highest possible level within our present range of possibilities. A past Emperor of the Rosicrucian Order, Harvey Spencer Lewis put it like this: "*Prove you can be trusted with a match and you'll be allowed to hold a candle.*" In other words, do your best now, and greater things are sure to follow.

THOSE THEN are what I believe are six essential attitudes for travelling a productive path of spiritual growth through life. Although we can separate and discuss them individually, they are in fact tightly interwoven

Prove you can be trusted with a
match and you'll be allowed
to hold a candle.

with each other and form a mutually reinforcing single lattice upon which our futures are built. Attitudes have no direct power in themselves, but their implications are tremendous, for they exert their power through their effects on our thoughts, feelings and actions, and the consequences are literally life-saving. Positive, uplifting attitudes are the kick-start we need to get going in any endeavour in life, whether it's a new business venture, a new relationship, a new job or the start of a new inner path. Start with the right attitude and you *may* succeed. Start with the wrong attitude and you *will* fail.

TO SUMMARISE, if people were suitably grounded philosophically by the society in which they lived, there would be no need to even mention these essential attitudes, whose purpose is simply to psychologically orient any seeker of greater spiritual insight, to be able to move on more quickly with their task than they would otherwise be capable of on their own. Rightly understood, the above six essentials permit personal powers to grow more quickly and to be utilised in the work of spiritual growth throughout the world.

If you find good in these attitudes, I would urge you to adopt them as your own. Add them to your daily life and then evolve the details on your own, in your own specific, beautiful way. Maybe they'll be useful to you in your spiritual journey in years to come.

I certainly hope so!
I hope it will be the case for you!





The Cathars in History

by Bill Anderson

This is a sequel to the article "*Occitania and the Cathars*" which appeared in the March 2020 edition of *The Rosicrucian Beacon*.

Ruins of the Chateau of Montsegur



THE WORD Cathar derives from the Greek word *καθαρός* (*katharos* meaning “pure.”) Catharism itself was a gnostic and dualist Christian religious movement which appeared around the middle of the 11th Century in Western Europe and most famously in the *Languedoc* region of France, called *Occitània* at the time. The movement was branded by the Roman Catholic Church as heretical, with some authorities denouncing them as not being Christian at all. It existed throughout much of Western Europe, including Aragón and Catalonia in Spain, the Rhineland and Flanders, and Lombardy and Tuscany in Italy.

In the early 13th Century, the area of the Midi or southern France known as the *Lengadòc* (Languedoc) stretched from the Rhone valley in the east to the Garonne river in the west, and from the Auvergne in the north to the Roussillon in the south. This area had a cultural unity quite different from the north of France. It had different forms of land ownership and inheritance, and even a different language *Occitan* (the *langue d’oc*). And it was not part of the kingdom of France at the time.

As dualist Christians, the Cathars believed in Light and Darkness, or good and evil as absolutes.

The independent lords of the south strove to ensure that no single power could dominate the region. Nevertheless, one of them, the Count of Toulouse, who belonged to the St. Gilles family, was indisputably the most influential and powerful of them all. The domains and power of this family had grown through the 10th and 11th Centuries so that by the late 11th Century, Count Raimon (Raymond) IV had the resources to become one of the leaders of the first Crusade to the Holy Land. As the armies of the first Crusade passed through Constantinople, in her book *The Alexiad*, Princess Anna Komnene describes Raymond’s superior intellect, the purity of his life and how greatly he valued the truth. For these reasons her father the Byzantine Emperor Alexis I held him in high esteem.

The greatest rival in Occitània to the Counts of Toulouse were the Counts of Barcelona. They acquired the kingship of Aragón in 1137, the kingship of Mallorca in 1228 and the kingship of Valencia in 1238. The lesser nobles of the region, like the Counts of Foix and the Viscounts of Béziers, Carcassonne, Narbonne and Montpellier exploited the conflict between these great

noble houses by transferring their allegiance from one lord to another to maximise their independence.

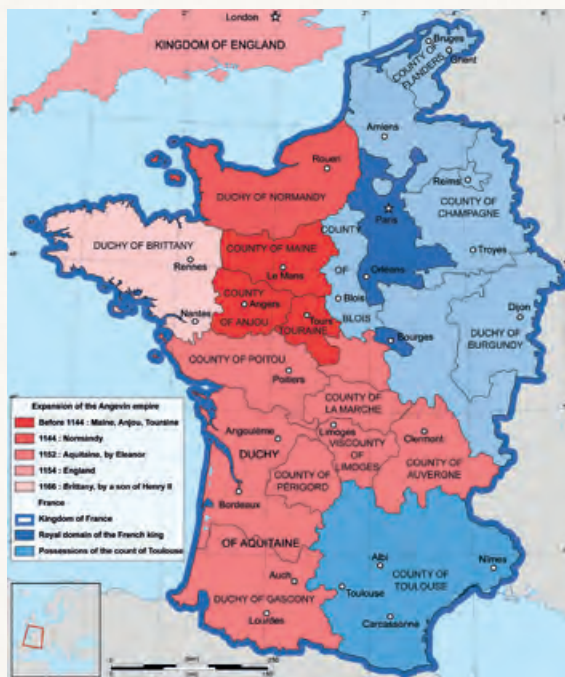
Monotheists

The Cathars believed in a sole unique God but admitted to the existence of two opposing principles which manifested as spirit and matter. As dualist Christians they believed in Light and Darkness, or good and evil as absolutes. Light, or the positive constructive principle, was opposed to the negative, destructive principle which the Cathars believed to be in the “*demon Roman Catholic doctrines.*”

Through matter, while imprisoned in a human body, the divine principle (the human soul) inhabits ‘Darkness.’ During that sorry time, it works upon its salvation and journeys towards ‘Light’ through successive incarnations in a series of human lives on Earth. Through suffering and the practice of love and charity, the soul slowly emerges from Darkness, from the delusion of matter, to eventually reunite with the Divine Light, the First Principle, the Supreme Creator, God.

Initiations

To assist each disciple in the slow and progressive unfoldment of his or her soul, Cathars performed initiations. But to be worthy of receiving those initiations, followers had to purify themselves through gradual



The County of Toulouse in 1154 and adjacent lands shown in blue, with the lands of the English and French kings.

Image: Wikimedia / Reigen





Carcassonne medieval city and fortress castle, in the Languedoc region of France.

asceticism, fasting, abstinence and a deeply sincere desire for perfection. Poverty was also considered as a means of liberating the self from worldly fetters.

Hell, in the form proclaimed by the Roman Catholic Church, did not exist for them. It was not a state reached only in the afterlife, but a state of existence on this very Earth. The fire of the lower regions of the 'powers of darkness' was what constituted true human suffering, here and now, and not in some afterlife. The souls of humans, they believed, could therefore be saved and redeemed through the trials and tribulations of these earthly incarnations.

Through concentration and meditation they tried to attune directly with the Cosmic Spirit, the Consciousness of Christ.

Although specific, the Cathar teachings were not dogmatic. The work of Cathar ministers, usually referred to as *Perfects* by the Inquisition, was not to impose a blind faith but to convince their followers through persuasion and living openly as shining examples of purity and probity. They were truly practising the highest possible spirituality, and deserved the appellation "*Perfect*" or "*Pure*."

To the Cathars themselves, they were simply called the *Bons Ômes* (Good Men), *Bonas Femnas* (Good Women) or simply as *Bons Crestians* (Good Christians). Such were the ministers, but there were of course more

humble followers, the great multitude of simple Believers who worked and prayed under the guidance of the Perfects, who instructed and tended them on the path of spiritual knowledge. The liberation of the soul from the bonds of matter and the love of others were the fundamental tenets of their doctrine.

Their leaders were well read students of philosophy and took an active part in all discussions and controversies that might enlighten them. But academic teachings were not their only source of knowledge: through concentration and meditation they tried to attune directly with the Cosmic Spirit, the Consciousness of Christ. To this end, they practised fasting before initiation as well as sometimes even after; and also before great religious celebrations.

The Consolamentum

The most famous of their rites was the laying-on of hands, called the "*Consolamentum*" or "*Consolation*." It was considered as a baptism. The Cathars did not recognise the church's baptism by water as established by John the Baptist; for them there was only one true baptism..., that of the Holy Spirit as practised by Jesus. Therefore, only the Divine Spirit of Life could penetrate the human soul, permeating and transmuting the grosser vibrations of matter.

The Consolamentum was considered a means of redemption and at the same time as a consecration of the condition of purity attained by the disciple after a long period of fasting and meditation. This rite was also performed upon the dying, to help the passing of the soul to the Great Beyond. In such a case, the Consolamentum could also be given by a member of the



family, or by a woman, provided he or she had already received the sacrament; that is, that the mediator be fully and spiritually qualified to bestow it upon a dying person

The ordination as a Perfect was also conferred by the Consolamentum, to both men and women, and the women were then consecrated deaconesses. Each community of Christian Cathars had at least one deaconess. In Western Europe, women were second or even third-class citizens at that time, but in Cathar society, they were equal to men.

The humblest of workers had as much right as their bishops to attunement with the Cosmic Spirit, and the only things that mattered were purity and perfection.

Cathars were individualists and believed there was no road to evolution except through personal work and personal effort. Whatever one's standing in society might be, noble or peasant, the same consideration was granted to all. The humblest of workers had as much right as their bishops to attunement with the Cosmic Spirit, and the only things that mattered were purity and perfection. The humblest neophyte therefore, could aspire to the highest spiritual development and attainment.

Cathar Beliefs

Their beliefs about marriage in particular were distorted by false reports and misunderstandings of their adversaries in the Inquisition. Some authors claim they were against marriage and preached abstinence and celibacy for all. But that is inconsistent with their belief in reincarnation, for how could people be reborn upon this Earth if marriage and the family were condemnable institutions?

Certainly they held the state of celibacy in high regard, but that was only for the Perfects, those who had already attained the required condition of purity as a means of liberation of the senses and of a lessening of their karma and reincarnations. For the men and women who had to live 'normal' lives however, they acknowledged the necessity of marriage, though the only valuable sacrament in such case was the true union of two souls.

Among married people, those who received the Consolamentum were at times authorised by husband or wife, as the case may be, to break the bond of marriage so they could devote the rest of their lives to greater

purification and more absolute asceticism. Such was their probity that the giving of their word was a sufficient bond and they refused to take oaths. In this regard they adhered strictly to the spirit of the 2nd and 8th commandments. This in particular was regarded as seditious, as oaths were what bound medieval society together, to feudal superiors and to the Church.

Occitània

The Occitanian civilisation of the south of France has all but faded into the mists of time. So successful were the papal crusades against the Cathars of the Languedoc that nowadays we find but faint echoes of a land of peace, love and civilisation that once existed where France and Spain now meet.

Here was a land where the blending of several races produced strong, independent individuals, and where the Cathar teachers found propitious soil for the spreading of their religious ideas. The sum of their knowledge was translated into Occitan. At this time Occitània had more in common with Aragón and Catalonia than it did with the north of France. Their language was very similar to the Catalan language. From now on, in this article I choose to use the names that they called themselves, rather than the French names you will find in most of the books about the Cathars.

This whole region had remained impregnated with ancient Roman civilisation and refinement. The nobles and knights, the Counts of Toulouse, the Counts of Foix and the Viscounts of Béziers, were learned scholars; and



Count Raimon VI of Toulouse.



the burgesses were distinguished and emancipated minds. Esclarmonda de Foix, a romantic figure of medieval legend, and sister of Raimon-Rogièr, Count of Foix was initiated into the Cathar faith, as was Raimon-Rogièr's wife Philippa. Count Raimon VI of Toulouse, though not adopting their religion, openly favoured them, even taking sides with them at times against the Roman Catholic clergy.

The first great centres of Catharism in the South of France were at Montpellier and Narbonne; from there they spread across the Pyrenees into Spain. Later on, Toulouse was their headquarters, and they had several bishops in Albi. In fact, it is from the name of that town that they were called *Albigenses* as well as Cathars, and the name Albigensian has remained attached to the persecutions they suffered at the hands of the Roman Catholic Church in many places such as Béziers, Carcassonne, Agen and Razès. To this day, one can feel the presence in this beautiful region of France of the unspeakable suffering that people here once had to endure for their gentle beliefs.

**The Cathars were, we may say,
socially and spiritually, several
centuries ahead of their time.**

The unusual purity of life of the Cathars was a great contrast to the appalling licentiousness and simony of the Catholic clergy of that epoch. While the Cathars were solely devoted to the welfare of the people, nursing and healing them, the Catholic clergy extorted tithes from the people, kept mistresses and sold all sacraments. Indeed, they were like the merchants in the Temple that Jesus drove out.

We have therefore on the one hand Cathar men and women, renowned as weavers, agricultural workers, doctors and educators, who conformed as closely as possible to the accepted Christian code of life, and on the other hand, we have a Catholic clergy of immense corruption and materialism. Moreover, the prelates of Rome were often temporal lords with considerable estates and wealth, caring more for power and for the good of their own dynasties than for the welfare and spiritual health of their supposed spiritual wards. The popes occupied the position of "*vicar of God*" much more for political reasons than for any defence of Christian principles, and it is not surprising therefore that so many ordinary people sympathised with the Cathars, while the

corruption of the clergy kept the mass of followers away from the Roman Catholic Church.

There was also a deep-seated antagonism between the clergy and nobility of Occitània, for the nobility extended help to those whose extreme purity of life and disinterest in material wealth had won their respect. Furthermore, whereas the Cathars were no threat to the nobility's temporal power, the Roman Catholic clergy most definitely was. The Cathars were, we may say, socially and spiritually, several centuries ahead of their time. One of the most renowned of their ministers was Guilbert de Castres, who was Bishop of Toulouse and whose preaching and popularity gave much trouble to the Catholic Church at the beginning of the 13th Century. He openly censured the corruption of the Catholic clergy and it was only a matter of time before things came to a head.

The Cathars believed that an unworthy person, namely, one who did not live the teachings of Christ, had no right to minister to others. Title was nothing for them, and they looked only to the intrinsic value of the individual. The poorest labourer, if his mode of living and spiritual standards were high, was more qualified to become a minister than a man who had been ordained a priest merely by fiat from Rome. Ordination meant nothing to them.

This type of preaching was therefore a direct attack against the mandates of Rome. The simplicity of the lives of Cathar mystics and their disinterestedness in temporal power were considered revolutionary. Their teachings were a most dangerous heresy, and a transgression against the established dogma of Roman Catholicism.

Condemned by the Pope

Condemned as Manichaeans, this was sufficient pretext for Rome to order a crusade against the Cathars. Pope



Pope Innocent III





Pope Innocent launched the Albigensian Crusade against the Cathars.



Seal of Philippe Auguste



Bust of Simon de Montfort

Image: Wikimedia / Ray9

Innocent III (reigned 1198–1216), in addition to organising the Fourth Crusade, which was supposed to go to the Holy Land, but instead attacked and conquered the Orthodox Christian Byzantine capital of Constantinople, was the driving force behind this.

While using coercive methods against the Cathars, the Pope also tried to convert them by sending in the Cistercians, who were famous dialecticians, to preach to them. According to the extremely rigid rules of their Cistercian Order, their monks had to live in absolute poverty. As ascetics they compared favourably with the Cathars, for they practiced many of the same virtues. However, the Cathars were deeply devoted to their beliefs and found little reason in the Cistercian's appeals to change their ways, even with the persuasion of such worthy adversaries.

Numerous books have been written about the barbaric persecutions that the Cathars subsequently had to endure, so this aspect will not be delved into here. However, some of the most salient points of the fight will help to throw some further light upon their history. From the middle of the 12th Century various church councils condemned the Cathars. These seem to have been a series of pre-meditated and well-orchestrated events and eventually the Pope formally requested the assistance of the lords of the South of France. They were in effect asked to take up arms against the Cathars, and in return the Vicar of Christ promised plenary indulgences as a reward. The Cathars were anathematised as heretics, and in accordance with the established norms of the day they were, in the eyes of the church, no better than the infidel of the East and had to be killed en-masse. At the same time as Innocent III was asking for the help of the Occitanian nobles and lords, he was also writing to the Archbishops of the South, trying to stimulate their zeal against the Cathars.

The papal legate, Pierre de Castelnau had been unable to convince Count Raimon VI of Toulouse to join him in the fight for the Church against the heretics. Raimon's fourth wife was Joan of England, the favourite

sister of Richard the Lionheart. Interestingly, Richard's wife was a princess of neighbouring Navarre, whose last king became Henry IV of France who later figures in the naissance of Rosicrucian ideals. The son of Joan and Raimon VI was Raimon VII.

Castelnau excommunicated Raimon VI, but when the Pope confirmed the sentence in brutally forceful and violent terms, Raimon VI quickly submitted to his authority. But his submission was not sincere, and after a stormy controversy in Saint-Gilles, Castelnau again excommunicated him. Some time thereafter, in January 1208, Castelnau was murdered, run through by a lance, and according to some, killed by one of Raimon's knights. Innocent III then appealed to the King of France, Philippe Auguste, who was the suzerain of the County of Toulouse, and to the "*barons from the North to come and fight against the barons of the South.*"

Philippe Auguste refused, and Innocent III had to take upon himself the burden of launching this wholly European crusade with only the help of the northern lords to whom he again promised plenary indulgences in addition to the hope he gave them of winning new lands and booty. Under the threat of invasion of his domains, Raimon VI was again forced to pay homage to the Church and to separate himself from the other lords of the South.

The 'Holy' War

According to historical reports, the crusader army, led by Simon de Montfort, was composed of 20,000 knights and some 200,000 *vilains* (soldiers or free peasants, whence comes the English word "*villain.*") Though the lords of the South were fighting for the Cathars on home territory, the odds were clearly stacked against them. It is not surprising therefore that Raimon VI, who was of irresolute character, once more submitted himself to the power of Rome. The Pope, although unconvinced of his sincerity, was only too glad to weaken his adversaries, and for the time being, contented himself in separating Raimon from the other Lords.





A depiction of Raymond VI at the Salle des Illustres in Toulouse.

The powerful crusader army pursued the *'heretics'* who, under the leadership of Raimon-Rogièr Trencavel, Viscount of Béziers and nephew of Raimon VI, took refuge in Béziers. Despite their courageous efforts, this town, and later on Carcassonne, was sacked. Before the carnage at Béziers, a knight asked Arnaud-Amaury the Abbot of Citeaux, the crusade's *'spiritual'* leader, how they were to know the Cathars from the other inhabitants. *"Kill them all;"* replied the Abbot..., *"God will know his own!"* An anonymous author wrote...

There was seen the greatest slaughter of all ages; neither old nor young people were spared, not even children at the breast; all were exterminated. When seeing such butchery, the inhabitants took refuge in the big Church of Saint-Nazaire. The priests of the church were to ring the bells when all the heretics were dead. But the bells were never heard for neither robed priest nor clerk was left alive; all were put to the sword; none escaped. The town was sacked, then burnt to the ground, and no living creature was left in it.

No doubt some crusaders believed they were helping the cause of Christianity by killing the heretics; but being given free rein to loot and sack the towns they took, was perhaps a more compelling reason for their enthusiasm. And of course not to be scoffed at, all their sins would be forgiven them for having taking part in the crusade. Rape, murder, torture and theft, all sanctioned by the church, and all sins *forgiven in advance*..., what more could medieval knights and knaves want?

Such was the spirit that animated the leaders of the crusade. The many crimes perpetrated in the name of God were quite literally done for God, or at least for his Vicar in Rome, the Pope. Participation in the crusade against



The Chateau of Montségur at the top of the mountain.

the Cathars was therefore a blessed path to salvation, just as killing the infidel in the East, no matter what the brutality, was a road to heaven. It strains the imagination to see any difference between such bestiality carried out in the name of Christianity, and similar unspeakable acts of brutality carried out in the name of Islam in recent decades by the likes of Al-Qaeda, Isil, Boko Haram and many other jihadist groups.

The many crimes perpetrated in the name of God were quite literally done for God, or at least for his Vicar in Rome, the Pope.

But there were some who, despite their persecutions of the Cathars, genuinely believed in their mission to stamp the Roman Catholic version of Christianity on all people, regardless of the brutality of the process. To them it was like taking a bitter pill..., swallow it quick, endure the bad taste and be done with it as quickly as possible. They were the monks of Citeaux, the Cistercians who were such devoted followers of their cult. Another was Saint Dominic, whose asceticism could only be compared to that of his enemies themselves.

It is one of the ways of intolerance, when the Powers of Darkness, with their subtle artifices, ensnare those who believe in their own righteousness, and blind them with false reasoning and misunderstanding.

Montségur

During the crusades, there were many changes of fortune in both camps. Some of the defeated Cathars succeeded



in escaping. Through the help of the people and the lords who had revolted against the cruel fanaticism of the Church, the vanquished Cathars would sometimes be hidden for considerable periods of time and continued converting people to their cause.

This state of affairs continued up to their final stand in the formidable *castèl de Montsegur*, the citadel better known as Montségur (Mountain of Safety), an ancient place of worship. A temple dedicated to a form of solar worship was said to have existed there several centuries before the Christian era, and in the Middle Ages the castle became the stronghold where the Cathars fought their last battle.

The Perfects would not lie or take an oath, so their fate was sealed.

Raimon de Perelha, Lord of Montségur, already as far back as 1209, sheltered refugees in his castle even before the worst phases of the crusade reached his doors. In 1232 he received there Guilabert de Castres, Cathar Bishop of Toulouse and one of the greatest Cathar minds, together with several other Cathar leaders. From then on, Montségur became the centre of the Cathar Church, and towards the end of the crusade, was their last stronghold when Raimon VII, who had succeeded his father as Count of Toulouse, under duress from the French king in 1243, was forced to help fight the last of the Cathars and destroy their final refuge.

On the 2nd March 1244, Montségur surrendered. There was a two-week truce. The terms seemed lenient: everyone could go free if they allowed themselves to

be questioned by and swore loyalty to the Church of Rome. For the Perfects, the choice was simpler, renounce Catharism or burn at the stake. The Perfects would however not lie or take an oath, so their fate was sealed. They spent the fortnight caring for their charges and arranging their affairs. Then something extraordinary happened. Twenty-one ordinary Believers asked to be given the Consolamentum during the final two weeks, some on the very day before the final battle, thereby becoming Perfects, and knowing full well what the result would be. This act was a great testament to the appeal and power of Catharism and its powerful message.

Following the truce to think the terms over, the knights and their families went free while 205 Cathars were burned alive on the morning of 16th March 1244. There were too many to tie to individual stakes, so a palisade was built around a pyre. The Cathars were shut inside and the fires were lit. A stela commemorates the spot where 205 beautiful souls passed into transition.

The Aftermath

After Montségur fell, a number of Cathar outposts managed to survive, at least until 1258. Pope Innocent IV promulgated the bull *Ad Extirpanda*, which allowed the torture of suspects, ordering the civil magistrates to extort from all heretics by torture a confession of their own guilt and a betrayal of all their accomplices. This gave the church another weapon. Throughout the second half of the 13th Century, the Cathars became increasingly isolated, and by the early years of the 14th Century, there were very few Perfects left who could administer the Consolamentum.

The horrors of the Inquisition however, which had become a recognised institution of Rome under the name of the “*Holy Office*” in about the year 1223, were such that in many places the people of the South rebelled against the fanatical domination of the Church. The Inquisitors confiscated houses and land from Cathars and encouraged people to pretend to be Cathars while all the time betraying their friends and family. Such, as we know, were the tactics of the Gestapo in other parts of France many centuries later.

For a few years towards the end of the 13th Century, some Cathars, under the leadership of the Autièr brothers, continued worshipping and practicing their faith..., until in 1309, when Pèire Autièr was arrested and burned at the stake. Their last known Perfect, Guilhèm de Belibasta (Belibaste), was also betrayed and burnt at the stake in 1321 in Vilaroja de Termenés (Villerouge-Termenès), after which the Believers fled, hiding in the wild region of Sabarthez until they all seemed to have disappeared,



Stela commemorating the death of the Cathars at Montsegur.





Stone plaque dedicated to the last known 'Perfect Guilhèm Belibasta

either because they had been killed, or because they had fled south into the Iberian Peninsula and Lombardy.

As for the County of Toulouse, after Count Raimon VII died in 1250, his daughter was married to the brother of the king of France, and after their deaths in 1271, the county was absorbed into the French royal possessions and the entire Languedoc finally came under royal control.

Martyrs

We can honestly say that the faith of the Cathars was of such a high quality that it can only be compared to that of the early martyrs of Christianity. Their doctrine was truly inspired by the pure spirit of the pristine Christian ideal, before misrepresentation and deformation through the sectarianism of the clergy of later times.

Many suffered dreadful deaths through fire with the high courage of the early martyrs during the Roman persecutions. And yet their doctrine was so deformed by the Inquisition that they were accused of holding the belief that suicide was a lawful act. In some cases, they submitted themselves to what they called the *Endura*, either before the sacrament of Consolamentum or after they had been imprisoned. In the former case, the Endura was only a very severe fast, not practised with the idea of committing suicide, but as a means of liberating themselves from the often-painful sway of the senses. In the latter case, when they were imprisoned, the Endura was undertaken in order to escape the tortures of the Inquisition or death by fire, and they would therefore allow themselves to starve to death, rather than pass through the great threshold between Life and Death with excruciating pain and agony as their only companion.

All epochs have had their contrast of Light and Darkness. In the darkness of the medieval ages, in a deeply humble manner, the sincere efforts of Cathars strove for inner liberation and shone with the light of pure

spirituality. This affirmed that however insurmountable obstacles may appear, the process of evolution continues its irrevocable motion throughout eternity. Evil may triumph temporarily, but for goodness and sanctity, final victory is always assured, even if that takes centuries to come.

Every action has its reaction, and the spiritual, moral and secular power of the Popes was thereafter greatly weakened. The massacres and acts of savagery that the pope had unleashed greatly diminished the authority of the church, and for a long time, these "*Vicars of Christ*" had lost entirely their spiritual authority over the countries of Europe. Their violent and fanatical suppression of all forms of dissent and difference of opinion through the actions of the Inquisition left a permanent scar from which the Roman Catholic Church has taken centuries to recover.

In conclusion it must be said that although Catharism may appear to have entirely disappeared following the crusade against them, some traces of their descendants still remained, and their doctrines and teachings were secretly preserved, and in fact may have been a precursor of the teachings of the Rosicrucians of later centuries. If we compare their traditions and teachings with those of modern Rosicrucians, one can't help but see that they are based on the same ancient fundamental truths deriving from the innate human, some would say primordial, sense of universal justice, and the ardent aspiration of millions upon millions of sincere people for spiritual revelation and ever greater inner maturation.

Epilogue

One of the greatest achievements of humankind is its adoption of various religious beliefs, many of which encompass within their teachings and rituals, deep, indeed profound mysteries. Paradoxically though, these same beliefs have historically also been one of humankind's greatest enemies. When organised religion becomes the bedfellow of secular power, it is a recipe for disaster. Each religion 'knows' it is better than all others; it's human nature, though all too often disastrous for the world!

I often wonder if the great avatars and teachers of the past would be horrified to see what had become of their teachings. The Catholic Church eventually reformed itself, so the Church portrayed in this article absolutely no longer reflects the present-day Church. At the end of the crusades, a whole way of life had been destroyed, along with the prosperity of one of the richest regions of France. But you can't entirely destroy an idea, and the story of the Cathars has survived despite all attempts to erase it from living memory.



The Cumaean Sibyl

Famous Oracle of the Ancient World

by Maria Reynolds



The Cumaean Sibyl by Andrea del Castagno

THOSE interested in the mystical aspects of ancient Greek and Roman history invariably become fascinated with accounts of the many oracles who lived in isolated places of pilgrimage where they used their psychic abilities to make prophesies of the future for mostly well-paying clients. The most famous of these was the Greek Pythoness at Delphi, who, legend relates, presided there for a thousand years. From Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, is a story in which Apollo offers the Pythoness 1,000 years of life if she will lose her virginity with him. She readily agrees but then reneges. As she ages, she shrinks and shrinks, until she's so small she's placed in a jar where she shrinks to such

a small size she can no longer be seen. But her oracular voice continues to be heard from the apparently empty jar. While Apollo granted her 1,000 years of life, he did not grant her 1,000 years of youth.

The oldest Greek oracle was at Dodona in Epirus, where priests read the future by examining the entrails of sheep. The priestesses of the oracle of Demeter lowered a mirror into a well and informed the sick of their outcome. At Telmessos, the oracles interpreted dreams, and at Aegria, the oracle of Hercules caused supplicants to throw dice while priests interpreted their meaning. And of course there was the oracle of Zeus-Amun at Siwa Oasis in the Libyan desert of Egypt, who was consulted



by Alexander the Great before he led his armies through Persia and on to India.

But of all the famous oracles, it is the Cumaean Sibyl who provides the most intriguing account of an oracle that has come down to us from the mists of antiquity. The word *sibyl* probably comes, via Latin, from the Greek word *sibylla*, meaning prophetess. The colony of Cumae, in South-Western Italy, was established around 750 BCE by Greeks from the city-state of *Chalcis* on the Greek island of *Euboea*. Soon it became so prosperous it established own colonies of its own, including nearby Neapolis (modern Naples). Old though Cumae was, the grotto of the Cumaean Sibyl already existed close to what later become the acropolis of Cumae, the strongest fortifications in the Greek world at that time. The Cumaean Sibyl is the oldest oracle we have mention of anywhere in ancient literature.

Archaeologists rediscovered the grotto in 1932. The cave we can see today consists of a *dromos*, or corridor, 144 feet long, nearly 8 feet wide and 16 feet high, ending in a rectangular chamber (the *oikos endótatos*) all hewn out of solid tufa rock. The stone chair of the Sibyl can still be seen in the *oikos*. Since few tourists come to the grotto, which is only a few miles from the city of Naples, visitors will usually find themselves alone on their visit. It is an awe-inspiring



Archaeologists rediscovered the grotto in 1932. The cave we can see today consists of a dromos, or corridor, 144 feet long, nearly 8 feet wide and 16 feet high, ending in a rectangular chamber (the oikos endótatos) all hewn out of solid tufa rock.

feeling to realise that you are sitting in the chair of a Sibyl, who was the most famous oracle in this part of the world for hundreds of years, satisfying her supplicants for at least that length of time.

The architecture is also remarkable in that it is Creto-Mycenaean, rather than Greek or Roman, and the size of the grotto surpasses anything known today in the trapezoidal style. There is nothing to equal it in either Cretan or Etruscan building. In short, the grotto of the Cumaean Sibyl goes back to at least the days of the Trojan War (c.1200 BCE). Indeed, Virgil, in his *Aeneid*, has Aeneas consult the Sibyl before going on to found Rome. The Cumaean Sibyl was therefore originally under the aegis of the Mother Goddess who presided over much of the eastern Mediterranean long before the genesis of the Greek Olympian male gods.

Later, as at Delphi, the priests of Apollo were to take over, and the ruins of the temple from which they dominated the grotto can still be seen at the top of the acropolis a few hundred feet from the entrance to the *dromos*. The temple still exists, though only because it was transformed into a Christian church in the 6th or 7th Century CE.

The Mysterious Sibyl

When each Sibyl in turn passed away, a new Sibyl was found and the former oracle was mummified and placed in a chair in the *oikos endótatos*. She was always present when the living Sibyl made her prophecies. The Roman



Apollo and Daphne by Antonio Pollaiuolo, one of the tales of transformation to be found in Ovid's Metamorphosis. Apollo lusts after Daphne and she escapes his attentions by turning herself into a bay laurel.





Remains of the Temple of Apollo (Delphi, Greece).

Emperor Claudius (10 BCE to 54 CE) reported that when he consulted Amalthea, the reigning Sibyl, her predecessor was seated on a chair in an iron cage. Various accounts, including that of Claudius describing the rituals of the Cumaean Sibyl, have come down to us.

A supplicant first approached the priests of Apollo with suitable gifts. They were then taken to the *dromos* and began the long walk to the *oikos endōstatos* or *adyton*, the secret chamber at the end. The *dromos* was lit by six galleries opening to the

The nine books not only foretold the future of the city but also in what manner to meet each crisis that developed.

west. On the opposite side were three chambers, probably utilised for lustral waters and perhaps as living quarters. In more modern times Christians used them as burial chambers. Before receiving the supplicant, the Sibyl had bathed in lustral waters and had taken a quantity of *numen*, a drug which historians have been unable to identify but which was undoubtedly a narcotic and acted in much the same manner as the laurel leaves eaten by the Pythoness at Delphi. In this drugged state therefore, the oracle uttered her prophecies.

Supplicants posed their questions and in a trance, the Sibyl answered in incoherent gibberish, very similar to the procedure in Delphi. The priests took due note of this and returned with the seeker of advice to the Temple of Apollo. Here they disappeared for a while to interpret among themselves the meaning of the pronouncement, finally to return with the answers written in Greek hexameter verse.

It might be pointed out that these priests of Apollo were not ignorant charlatans but among the most intelligent

men of their time. Aside from the ability to write in one of the most difficult of Greek verse forms, they had to be thoroughly familiar with the politics and intrigues of their time, on a worldwide basis. This was absolutely necessary, as an oracle did not remain an oracle for long if her prophecies did not have a high degree of validity.

The Sibylline Books

The ancient historians Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Varro recorded the momentous encounter between the Cumaean Sibyl and Tarquinius Superbus, the last of the Etruscan kings to rule Rome. Herophile, the incumbent Sibyl, came up from Cumae in 511 BCE and demanded an audience with him. Her fame had preceded her and she was immediately ushered into the king's presence.

Two priests who accompanied Herophile bore nine books which she called the *Libri Fatales*. History now calls them the "Sibylline Books." They were crude in appearance with numerous verses in Greek hexameter written on palm leaves and then awkwardly sewn together. Herophile was described as wild-eyed and frantic in appearance. She informed the sceptical king of Rome that the nine books not only foretold the future of the city but also in what manner to meet each crisis that developed.

Tarquinius Superbus asked what the Sibyl wanted in return. She demanded a talent of gold, which would have



In the image above, the Greek goddess Amalthea, believed to represent the Cumaean Sibyl in this image, appears for the second time before the seventh and last of the legendary BCE kings of Rome, Tarquinius Superbus. She had come to him before this in order to sell the original nine Sibylline books, reputed to contain all knowledge of the city of Rome, and prophecies of its future for all time. On this second occasion she offered him six of the remaining Sibylline books. The king asked where the other three books were, and she replied she had burned them as he had deemed them worthless. The price she asked for the remain six was he same as she had asked for the nine, reputedly the king's entire fortune. He declined the offer, but when she burned a further three books, the king had a change of heart and bought the last remaining three in exchange for his entire fortune.





The Cumaean Sibyl by Domenichino.

stripped the Roman treasury, and the king refused her. It must also be remembered that Tarquinius Superbus, as an Etruscan, did not worship the gods of his Roman subjects, such as Jupiter, Mars and Apollo. The Roman populace however, were avid followers of Apollo, the god of oracles, and subsequently were up in arms over the failure to buy the books. Herophile returned with her books to Cumae.

The next year, the Sibyl came again, this time with only six of the books. Asked what she had done with the other three, she replied that she had burnt them. When the king inquired what she wanted for the remaining six, Herophile again demanded a full talent of gold. Enraged, Tarquinius Superbus turned her away and she returned to Cumae. And again the following year, the Sibyl appeared with but three remaining books, having burnt the rest, and demanded the same price. Public opinion grew so heated that Tarquinius Superbus finally relented. The books were placed in the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill and a commission of 15 men, the *Quindecimviri Sacris Faciundis*, was named to administer them. Included among them were two Greek interpreters, since the *Libri Fatales* were written in Greek.

For centuries the Romans abided by the dictates of the Sibylline Books. When a crisis involving the state developed, they were consulted. For instance, when the Carthaginian, Hannibal, crossed the Alps with his North African army in 218 BCE, he swept everything before him and in despair, the Romans consulted the Sibylline Books. The consul Fabius, inspired by the books, devised a strategy of resistance to the brilliant Hannibal. The Roman legions fought a delaying action, refusing, with their new Fabian tactics, to come face to face with the enemy. Eventually, after ten years, the forces of Hannibal were so eroded in strength that the Carthaginians retreated to North Africa. Still following the dictates of the books, the Romans advanced and defeated the Carthaginian army.

Fate of the Books

The temple in which the Sibylline Books were stored was destroyed by fire in 83 BCE. But by that time many of the verses had been copied and distributed around the Mediterranean. The Roman priests went about the task of reconstructing them, using verses found in Egypt, Phrygia, Delphi and elsewhere.

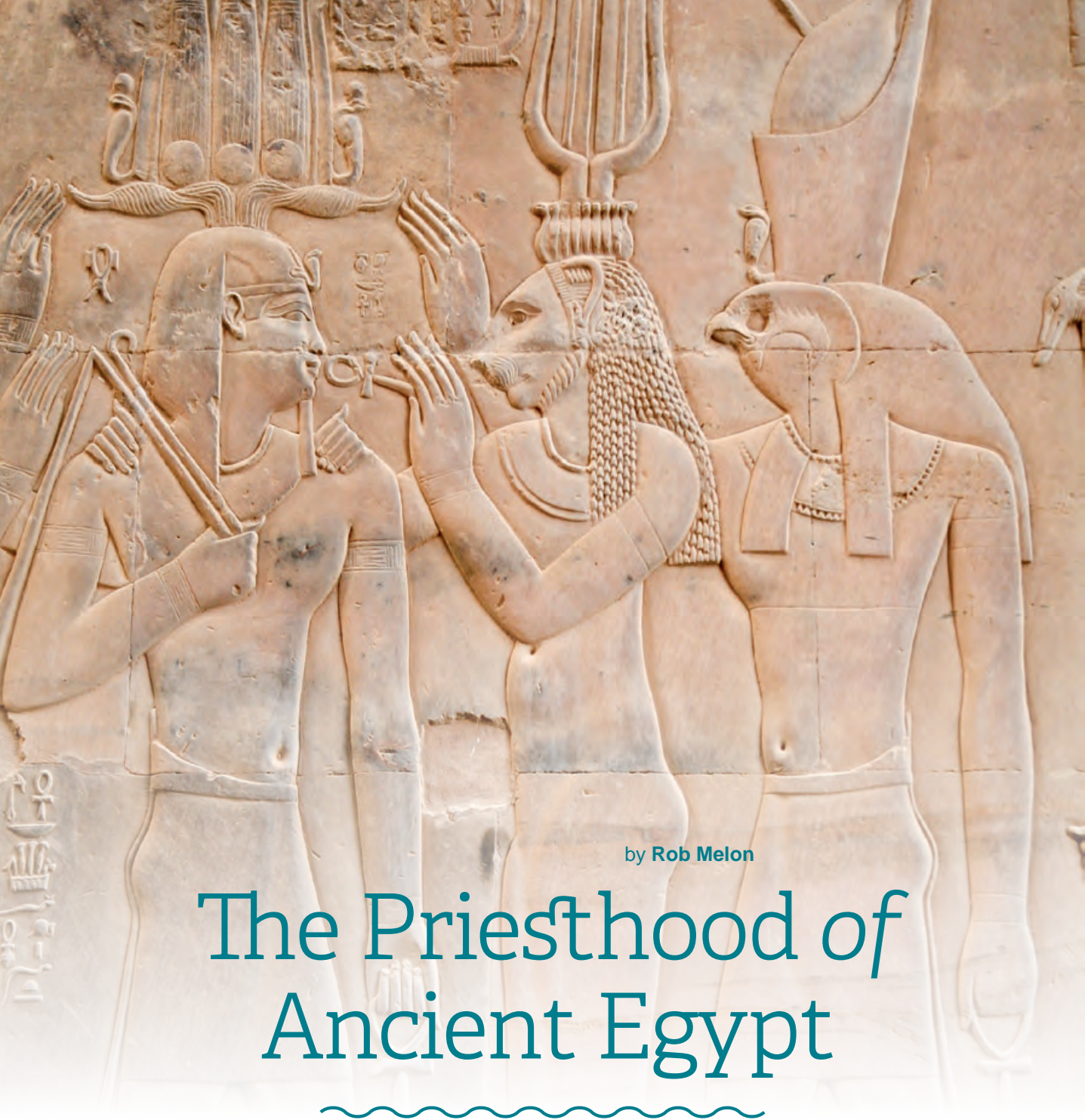
Sometimes these verses were suspect as to authenticity, and by the time Augustus became emperor he named a committee to authenticate those that Rome was to abide by. The new collection lasted until 405 CE when they were burned by the Roman General and Patrician Flavius Stilicho who was a Christian and regarded the books as pagan and therefore evil. It should be noted that they were still consulted a full century into the era when Christianity was the official religion of Rome.

Even today, some fragments of the verses exist. Robert Graves devoted two of his best known books, *I, Claudius* and *Claudius the God*, to several of the verses that have come down to us. They foretold accurately the reigns of the first six Caesars: Julius, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius and Nero.



Cumaean Sibyl by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel.





by Rob Melon

The Priesthood of Ancient Egypt

THE ORIGIN of priesthoods goes back to the very earliest of societies. The word “priest” does not do justice to what was meant though, for priests in those days were not representatives of organised religions as they are for example today. In the earliest of times, priests were what we would term sorcerers, magicians or shamans, dealing extensively with the realm of the psychic, and in some cases mastering the art of communicating with the so-called “afterworld”, the world of the dead.

Ancient priests were a breed apart, a class of individuals who acted as mediators between people and supernatural powers which only they could communicate with..., or so they claimed and believers believed. In some priesthoods, perhaps only a small minority, as today, there emerged men and women of supreme psychic achievement. And it is almost certain that some among them would have the highest regions of human spiritual attainment.



The Egyptian Priesthood

When we think of ancient priesthoods, Egypt readily comes to mind; for their priesthood reached a high state of development as an organisation which ultimately served the interests of the pharaoh in enhancing his magico-religious powers to control the Nile flood. The pharaoh's entire purpose was to preserve order in the world, in other words, to be the ultimate defender of Maat. The organisation of the Egyptian priesthood influenced other priesthoods far and wide, and in reviewing their beliefs and practices, we can see the syncretised development of the prominent priesthoods of today from such beginnings.

In early Egyptian dynasties, the pharaoh was the high priest, the highest earthly representative of the gods. Initially, he was primarily identified with Ra, the sun god of Heliopolis, though he was also heralded as the manifestation of Horus, the son of Osiris and Isis, and several other gods. The pharaoh was of course not able to perform both his administrative duties as well as officiate in the many sacerdotal requirements at temples throughout Egypt. It was physically impossible, and he therefore deputised most of these religious duties to various members of the priesthood. On several occasions during the 3,000 year history of ancient Egypt, this delegation of power was to challenge the authority of the pharaoh.

Ancient Egypt had two main classes of priests: (a) the Servant of the God, the *Hm-nTr* (*hem-netjer*), who was of the highest category, and (b) a lower class of priest called the *wa'b* (*wab*), meaning the "pure one." From



Inmetet and Ra from the tomb of Nefertari, 13th Century.

papyri inscriptions, we know that these priests formed the staff of the temple in which they served. They were divided into four groups of service. In fact, we note that the priests of the royal mortuary temples were divided into what the Greeks called *phylae*¹, with each *phyle*, or group of priests, serving one lunar month of 29 or 30 days. This was done by rotation. The papyri relate that each priest was afforded an interval of three months of non-service between two periods of service. An interesting papyrus from *Illabun* of the Middle Kingdom shows that each phyle, upon the completion of their term of service, drew up a complete inventory of temple property which was handed over to the incoming phyle.

An example of the administrative efficiency of these phylae is the that both parties had to certify the list. The list had clay attached to it upon which was impressed a seal of the chief priest and the names of the members of the phyle. This same papyrus relates that there were certain permanent functionaries such as the High Priest or Overseer, the *Hm-nTr-tpy* (*hem-netjer-tepy*) and the "chief lector" or reader [of hymns and magical spells], and the *Xry-Hb* (*kheri-heb*) who was in effect the orator. A third class of priests known as the *it-nTr* (*it-netjer*) or "Father of the God", walked in front of the cult image at processions, purifying the way by sprinkling purified water on it.

It is interesting to observe the similarity of titles conferred upon the ancient Egyptian priests to those assumed by modern sects.

There were several other lesser levels of priesthood, one of them being the *sm* (*sem*) or mortuary priests, whose function only came into prominent and crucial use for the upholding of order in the kingdom (the preservation of Maat), when they were called upon to embalm the body of the deceased pharaoh in accordance with the correct magical rites in order to ensure the pharaoh would pass through the underworld unharmed so he could eventually take his place among the fixed stars of the night sky.

It is interesting to observe the similarity of titles conferred upon the ancient Egyptian priests to those assumed by modern sects. The priest was believed to be a son (one among several sons) of the particular god he served and to whose temple he was attached. In the renowned liturgy entitled "Opening of the Mouth", of which more will be said later, the priest had the title,





Statue of Horus - Horus temple, Edfu, Egypt.



Ptah, the patron god of artisans and craftsmen.

“Son, beloved of the god.” At Edfu in upper Egypt, the pharaoh was the living, walking, breathing incarnation of the predynastic falcon god Horus, while the High priest was a son of Horus, one whom the god loved because of his service to him.

The Memphite priesthood was based at *Inbw-hdj* (literally *“white walls”*), which is today modern-day Memphis, just south of Cairo. They were among the most learned and well-organised priesthoods in Egyptian history. Their god was *Ptah*, the patron god of artisans and craftsmen, and the chief priest was known as *“Chief of the Artificers.”* Ptah himself was later revered as the *“Architect of the Universe”*, an expression used in both secular Freemasonry and in some modern-day mystical

organisations. In the ritual *“Opening of the Mouth”*, the high priest is referred to as *“...he who is great in directing craftsmen.”* The priests of Ptah were therefore the directors and instructors of craftsmen. Before their religio-magical doctrines evolved into a coherent philosophy, priestly rituals were regularly performed in the workshops of craftsmen throughout their working day.

The chief title of the high priest of the god Ra, the sun deity at *Iunu* (modern-day Heliopolis in Cairo) was *“The Great Seer.”* He was described as being *“...over the mysteries of heaven”*, or *“he who sees the mysteries of heaven.”* This signified that the high priest in his capacity as mediator between ordinary mortals and Ra, was blessed with an unrestricted vision of the mysteries of the universe. His ‘vision’ did not allude to physical sight but to inner vision, the faculty of prognostication, foreseeing future events. The high priest of the *Aten* at Akhetaten, the *“City of the Horizon”* at modern-day Tell el Amarna, was also called the *“Great Seer.”*

Although Egypt had several prominent gods during its 3,000 year history, the solar deity *Ra* was unique in that it was worshipped at set hours day and night at virtually all temples along the length of the Nile, regardless of what the main god of that temple was. Ra was the premier god of Egypt and revered in all temples, even though rituals for other gods sometimes took prominence due to local beliefs. The premier site of the worship of *Ra* was *Iunu* (*Heliopolis*), and it was here that the premier repository of ancient wisdom was supposedly kept right up to the final destruction and dismantling of *Iunu* in the 1st or 2nd Centuries CE.



Ptah and Horus bless the Pharaoh.



The Role of Women

Although not nearly as prominent as men, women also functioned as religious dignitaries in ancient Egypt and their titles and duties were recorded in official documents. Concubines were assigned to the temple of Amun where they served as *"wives of the god."* From the 5th Dynasty onwards, the Pharaoh was believed to be the physical son of the solar deity *Ra*. The queen therefore, was called *"the god's wife," Hmt-nTr (hemat netjer)*. A papyrus relates that her principal duty in service to the god was to rattle the *sistrum*, a musical instrument consisting of loose metallic rods in a U-shaped device. This rattling, we are told, was done *"before his beautiful face"*, alluding to the face of the god. Musician priestesses received the special title of *"playing with the sistrum in front of"* [the god].

The chief priestess was in most cases the wife of the high priest and her duties included rattling the sistrum in a formal manner, no doubt accompanied by chanting and a form of sacred dance within the private confines of the temple. In the Middle Kingdom, women of noble birth bore the title of prophetess and served as functionaries in the temple. And from the New Kingdom onwards, priestesses were divided into phylae as were the priests. The chief priestesses of these phylae were known as the *phylarchs*. Priestesses of the goddess Hathor bore the title



Nefertari, wife of Ramesses II, holding a sistrum.

"confidential royal favourite."

In Thebes (modern Luxor), the religious see of the god Amun, a priestess was known as the *"wife of the god"* and also as *"worshiper of the god."* Although their main duty was the playing of musical instruments in the temple, priestesses were also required to pour libations to the god and the making of offerings and performing mortuary rites or funerary ceremonies. They were required to meet almost the same qualifications of purification as were demanded of the priests, but never reached the levels of temporal power that the priesthood held.

A Position of Power

Priests were deputies of the pharaoh who was revered as the earthly incarnation of the Deity. He was therefore reverentially referred to as *"divine"* and a *"pure person."* As the Pharaoh's personal representative in the temple duties, the chief priest was therefore often assigned a name that meant *"pure"* as well.

The investiture or ordination of a priest was a highly solemn and dramatic event, many of the elements of which have passed into similar rituals today. Egyptian priests were however generally married and had children, and the priestly profession was often a hereditary one. Having passed through a ritual of lustration, namely, a rite of purification, the neophyte priest was *"crowned"* [the meaning of this is not fully understood] and solemnly conducted into the sanctuary or naos of the god. This was the innermost part of the temple where the effigy of the god was housed, and in this part of the ritual, the priest was *"embraced by the god."*

It was necessary, by sacred and symbolic gestures and acts, to show that he had been accepted by the god. In ancient inscriptions it is stated that the priest, during the investiture of his office, *"took communion"*, namely, partook of the offerings of food and drink meant for the deity. In other words, at some point in the ritual, he was fed sacred food which had a symbolic relationship to the substance or nature of the god whom he was to serve.

An interesting account relates the investiture of the chief priestess of Amun. A silver container for the libation of milk, to be offered to the god, was held in her right hand. In her left hand she held a silver sistrum. Hung around the neck of both priests and priestesses were their jewels of office, indicating their rank. The high priest of Ptah wore a curious chain which depicted his obligations, duties and powers. It suggests similar devices worn today



Amun and Mut sitting together (Luxor museum).

In ancient Egypt, the every priestess, though particularly the high priestess, bore the titles "wife of the god" and "worshiper of the god."



by mayors in many parts of the world when officiating in some function. Although many priests acquired their office through heredity (from father to son), some were appointed from non-priestly families. All high priests however had to receive their appointment from the Pharaoh. In practice though, appointments were often discharged through the office of the local governor who acted on behalf of the Pharaoh.

In religious matters, the Egyptian priest was a human representative of the god.

In religious matters, the Egyptian priest was a human representative of the god. His functions were numerous, highly structured and adhering strictly to tradition. He was an attendant of the god in a physical sense, laying before the physical carving of the god the symbolic sacred food. If this seems primitive, recall where similar symbolic rites are performed in modern Christian churches. The priest was also required to dress and bathe the image of the god. Although the priest's primary duty was to the deity, his secondary duties were ministering to the needs of the people of the Pharaoh's realm. He was a physician and counsellor of men, an intermediary between the divine realm and the earth.

Priestly Service

In the loose collection of papyri and temple and coffin inscriptions collectively known as the *Book of the Dead*, the temple is referred to as the *"house of the god"*, a term still in use in modern Christianity for example. Consequently,



Ceremonial fumigation is perpetuated today in modern religions, for example the Roman Catholic Church.

priests were looked upon as domestic servants in the deity's house. Tombs were referred to as the *"House of the Ka"*, the *ka* being one of the Egyptian words for the *soul*. In other words, the tomb was a place where the soul dwelt until its journey into the after world had been completed. The mortuary priest was the servant of the *ka*, namely the servant to the deceased's soul.

It was similarly the duty of the priest to sprinkle the god with water. This is the simulated bathing, referred to previously. This ceremony may have originated from the custom of a servant bathing his master. The symbolic (and sometime physical) cleansing of the god was then followed with a rite of fumigation, namely, the burning of incense. After the anointing, the priest arrayed the image of the god in various ornaments. This custom too, with some modification, is perpetuated today in modern religions in connection with images of sacred persons within the Roman Catholic Church for example, but in religions of the East as well.

Part of the ceremony required the opening of the shrine housing the god's physical image, the ceremonial bearing out of the god's statue to various stations within the temple, and then ceremoniously placing it back in its shrine. An inscription alluding to this relates that the priest was *"performing the ceremonies for him with two arms."* This was not much unlike the parading for example of an image of the Virgin Mary on various feast days in some Catholic countries.

What took place in each sacerdotal event was recorded by the temple priest-scribe. It was his duty to keep all important records. Also officiating were the lectors or orators who directed the chanting of the sacred words. The mortuary priesthood had the responsibility of ensuring that the *ka* was prepared for the great judgment hall of Osiris. Priests performed ceremonies in the temple and would then accompany the body of the deceased pharaoh to the tomb where the last rites were performed. According to records that have come down to us from some scribes, the oldest temple or shrine for which the deity is reported is the goddess Neith, during the reign of Menes, the first king of the 1st Dynasty around 3100 BCE. And the earliest sanctuary specifically mentioned is that of Horus, in the 3rd Dynasty.

Priestly Revenue

Hundreds of priests were engaged for the various sacerdotal and therapeutic duties involving the god. Most of them devoted their entire lives to the obligations of their office and contributed little to the material and economic welfare of the state. They therefore had to be supported from temple revenues. Ancient inscriptions





Rituals that were considered vital to the perpetuation of Egypt, were performed daily by the priests in order to separate and uphold “order” from the “chaos.” Chaos was what existed before the world and all within it was created. Order was what conformed with Maat, meaning “truth”, “right order”, “correct governance.”

The centre of activity was focused on a statue of the temple god that was kept in a naos or bark shrine in the most private, innermost sanctuary within the temple, the very abode of the earthly representation of the temple deity, a place from which all power needed to keep the sacred land of Egypt from descending into chaos emanated. Caring for and carefully propitiating this deity was central to the survival of the state, and with it, all people in Egypt.

Statues of deities were around 50 centimetres high and produced with only the most permanent or symbolically significant materials. Like the mummies of the deceased, once these statues were completed by the craftsmen, they underwent a ritual called the “*Opening of the Mouth*” which infused the statue with the power and life of the celestial deity, thereby magically bringing that deity into the midst of human affairs, with or without the deity’s acquiescence. The deity’s divine *ka* and *ba* “took residence” in this ‘graven image’ and was placed in the service of protecting Egypt from all evil. For the few illumined members of the priesthood, such statues were not in themselves subjects of worship. But the principles represented by them, namely the qualities of the particular god that each statue represented, was of inestimable value and worthy of their utmost veneration.

Pictured here is the Egyptian deity Ptah who had a strong priestly cult at Memphis (mn-nefer) the early capital of Egypt. He is usually depicted as a mummified human wearing a skull cap with a straight beard and holding a djed column, an instrument symbolising stability and power. This statue dates from the reign of Amenhotep III c.1386-1349 BCE during the 18th Dynasty.

reveal that the temple income came from two principal sources.

First of all, every person who entered a temple was obliged to make an offering, which invariably entailed bringing something edible (such as a cow or sheep) or something of pecuniary value. A portion of such “offerings” went directly to the priesthood. The second source of revenue, as for example in Thebes, came from the lands belonging to the god *Amun*. The revenue from these sources was “*divided into 100 equal portions.*” Twenty portions, or one-fifth, was received by the chief priest, while one portion went to each of the 80 priests serving under him. These were received as an annual stipend.

There were many advantages and special privileges associated with the priestly profession of ancient Egypt. Then, as now, it was a privileged and preferred occupation. Herodotus, the Greek historian, relates:

...they consume none of their own property and are at no expense for anything, but every day bread is baked for them of sacred corn, and a plentiful supply of beef and of goose’s flesh is assigned to each, and also a portion of wine made from the grape.

They were not allowed to eat fish, beans or pork but also paid no taxes, despite their sometimes vast wealth, while all other people in the Pharaoh’s realm paid dearly for his upkeep. At a few periods in Egypt’s history however, the temples were liable for imposts and had to furnish government officials and armies with supplies. That was no doubt because temple lands were so extensive and produced such a large proportion of the food of Egypt. For example, there is the royal decrees granting immunity to the temple of the god Min, at Koptos, in Upper Egypt.

The chief prophet and subordinates, prophets of Min in Koptos, all servants of the activity of the House of Min, the acolytes, the followers and watch of Min, the people of the workhouse, and the two architects of this temple; my majesty does not permit that they be put upon any activities of the pharaoh, whether herds of cattle, herds of donkeys, any time, labour or any forced labour to be credited in the House of Min in the course of eternity.

Such concessions by the pharaoh to the phylae or staff of the temple, were political manoeuvres meant to win the support of powerful priesthoods. Most of the priesthoods became very wealthy over time, and the priesthood of Amun of Karnak is a prime example. For a





Most of the priesthoods became very wealthy over time, particularly those of the temple of Amun at Karnak. This photograph shows a section of the monumental "Hall of Columns" at Karnak.

period during the New Kingdom, this priesthood became overly burdened with priests and temple property, and in the reign of Rameses IV especially, the annual incomes of the Temples were enormous, a clear parallel to conditions which existed in large parts of medieval Europe.

Taxes imposed by the temples came in two forms. First were the agricultural taxes where income was measured in grain: *"the grain of the taxes of farmers."* And secondly there was income measured in units of silver, *"silver in property and in labour of people given for the divine offerings."* Further advantages of the priesthood were the rite of asylum, and exemption from the pharaoh's poll tax, a uniform amount levied on every living person, except of course priests and priestesses. In a word them, they had it good.

Teachings: Outer and Inner

The priesthood of Egypt were the most learned class in society. If anyone from any other class of society wanted knowledge, there was no better place to acquire it than from the priesthood..., indeed much as it was for centuries in medieval Europe. The mystery schools, schools of religious drama and initiation into secret gnosis, were not however composed exclusively of the priesthood. On occasion, specially selected people were chosen to receive the preserved, sacred wisdom without having to devote the remainder of their lives to the priesthood. Usually, this was with the intention of allowing such initiates to transmit the Egyptian wisdom to parts of the world outside Egypt, as happened for example with Pythagoras.

The ethics of the priesthood were not all the same.

Some manifested a greater discipline and higher principles and wisdom than others. There were priesthoods that had two presentations of doctrines. One set of doctrines was expounded for the people at large who attended the outer precincts of the temples. These were the teachings for the masses, immersed as they were in superstition and emotional appeal. They constituted the *exoteric* or outer teachings. Then there were the *esoteric* or inner teachings which included the secret revelations, the profound knowledge of the sciences and the arts of the time. This knowledge was extended only to senior members of the priesthood and to chosen initiates.

The priesthood of Egypt were the most learned class in society.

The most senior and accomplished priests of *Ptah* at Memphis, and those of *Ra* at Heliopolis, were undoubtedly deep philosophers of life, and at times they were as well representatives of the numinous heights of human spiritual experience. As with all organised methods of finding the Sacred, it is certain that in ancient Egypt, as today, holy men and women always existed in some strata of the priesthood, sometimes hidden from all others and at other times very much known and loved by many and even attaining the heights of temporal power.

And at other times they would remain for the entire duration of their lives among the lower ranks of the priesthood while carrying out their special work





Judgment scene from the Book of the Dead.

of maintaining at those levels and among the common people, the high spiritual traditions of Egypt. Of course temporal power in the priesthoods were often controlled by men and women of far lower spiritual insight and accomplishment than this..., as indeed exists in most religions today.

At Memphis, when the god *Ptah* spoke, his word “*went forth*”, thereby objectifying his thoughts. This is very interesting and may be the precursor and ultimate source of the much later Christian doctrine of the *logos*. The principles of democracy also appear in what were known as the “*Coffin Texts*”, a loose collection of spells found on various sarcophagi. A series of these relate to the utterances of the solar deity *Ra*:

I have made the four winds that every man might breathe thereof, like his brother during his time.

I have made every man like his brother, and I have forbidden that they do evil... [but] it was their hearts that undid what I had said.

Herodotus relates that the priesthood were instructors in divination and astrology:

The Egyptians also discovered to which of the gods each month and day is sacred; and found how from the day of a man’s birth what he will meet with in the course of his life, and how he will end his days, and what sort of man he will be.

He further relates that the priests practised medicine with each priest-physician being a specialist in a particular disorder...

...and treats a single disorder, and no more; thus the country swarms with medical practitioners.

The duties of the priests and their knowledge were of course not confined to temporal matters. Their responsibility also concerned the *ka* or soul and its trials and tribulations in the next world. In a group of texts known as *The Book of Opening of the Mouth*, and *The Book of the Liturgy of Funerary Offerings*, rituals and spells are enumerated which were believed to enable the deceased to breathe, think, speak and walk despite the body being bound in funerary linen wrappings.

The second book of these books also contained spells for the continuance of the ‘life’ of the deceased in the next world. During these ceremonies for the dead, the *kheri-heb* or magician-priest presented to the statues of the deceased offerings such as meat, drink, unguents and clothing. Literally translated, the title *kheri-heb* means “*the holder of the papyrus roll*”, and his knowledge and power were deemed to be very great.

Personal Life and Power

The personal customs and dress of the priesthood demonstrate an interesting human touch to their otherwise exalted sacerdotal office. Herodotus informs us:

priests shave the whole body, every other day, so that no lice or other impure things may adhere to them when they are engaged in the service of the gods.

The priests were dressed entirely in linen. Their shoes were made of papyrus and they were forbidden



to wear shoes of any other material. They were obliged to bathe in cold water twice during the day and twice during the night: The priests personally inspect their foods and bless them.

If the animal is pronounced clean in all these various points, the priest marks him by twisting a piece of papyrus round his horns and attaching thereto some sealing clay which he then stamps with his signet ring.

Inevitably, sections of the priesthood abused their power by exploiting the faith, ignorance and fears of the common people they were meant to serve. The *Book of the Dead*, a collection of funerary liturgies, mentions many charms sold by the priesthood to the people to protect them, and special spells that could be bought for set prices. This is reminiscent of the corrupt practices of Christian Europe of the middle ages and later, where priests sold indulgences.

The common people of Egypt, seeking security and protection from danger, were sold amulets and charms that had supposedly been infused with spells that would protect the wearers through the influence of one or other deity. As the people's confidence gave the priests the opportunity to exploit them for gain, more and more spells were formulated to sell to credulous buyers.

Sections of the priesthood abused their power by exploiting the faith, ignorance and fears of the common people they were meant to serve.

The influence of the priesthood, was all pervasive, extending over the entire community and even into the next world. It was believed, and the priests encouraged the idea, that they had the power of veto after death. A powerful enough priest could prevent the deceased from being buried in a properly consecrated tomb (the *House of the Ka*) and could instead consign the



Thutmose III

deceased's name to lasting infamy. In other words, if they wanted to, priests could refuse the equivalent of the Christian "*last sacrament*", thereby consigning the soul of the deceased to complete annihilation..., a terrifying thought for any average Egyptian.

The power of the various priesthoods as very real and dangerous political forces led Thutmose III in approximately 1449 BCE to appoint the High Priest of Amun as the Primate of all priesthoods of Egypt, thereby uniting them into a single state religion presided over by a single high priest. Behind the sanctuary of Amun at Karnak, Thutmose III built the *Akh Menu* or *Temple of*

a Million Years, where it is related special initiation ceremonies were performed both during his reign and afterwards. The office of the Primate became the chief sacerdotal office of the kingdom but Pharaohs were increasingly from then on robbed of power and income by the effective grip of the High Priest of Amun who exercised more and more power over the civil affairs and finances of the state.

The priesthood managed its finances exclusively for its own affairs and withheld revenues from the Pharaoh, resulting in due course to the emergence of a state within a state, an ulcerous condition which was stopped dead in its tracks for 17 years by the precipitate, though only temporary action, of the Pharaoh Amenhotep IV, also known as *Akhnaton*.

With few exceptions from then on, and for several centuries, the priesthood, once a pious conglomeration of servants of the Divine, gradually enslaved the minds of the people through their rigid doctrines. The priesthood created for themselves a preferred class at the expense of social progress, on the pretext of assuring the security of the soul of the individual in the next life. But it was a charade by then, even for believers, though it was sufficient to preserve the power of the priesthood for several centuries to come.

Endnote

1. From the Greek, meaning an organisation based on kinship, constituting the largest subdivision of an ancient Greek city-state.

