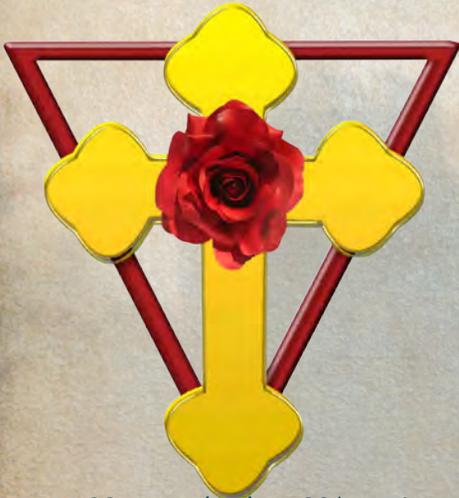


— ROSICRUCIAN —
BEACON 

June 2015, Vol 24, No. 3



Josiah Wedgwood
(1730 - 1795)



Calling All Rosicrucians

1915 - 2015

Centennial Celebration AMORC in America

2015 marks the 100th anniversary since the founding of the Rosicrucian Order in New York. To commemorate that event and the achievements of Rosicrucians during the past century, a Rosicrucian World Convention will be held in San Jose, California between Wednesday 29th July and Sunday 2nd August 2015. **This is your last chance to register. Absolute deadline for all bookings is 15th June. Please book in time.**

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

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

This centennial promises to be both a solemn and happy event for all participants. If you haven't done so yet, please reserve your hotel room/s and purchase your Convention ticket/s as soon as possible.



ROSICRUCIAN WORLD CONVENTION



ROSICRUCIAN BEACON

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Cover spread

Josiah Wedgewood

MASTER POTTER





The Tower of London Poppy Display

by *Michael Harvey*

LAST YEAR was the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of hostilities of World War I. In many places around the world, the event was commemorated in solemn and deeply moving ceremonies. I followed many of them and shed tears often; not willingly, as I am painfully shy about my emotions, but the tears came regardless, without restraint, on every occasion when I thought of the utter futility of that conflict and the even greater one that followed 25 years later as a direct result of it.

The one event though that brought home the destructiveness and pointlessness of war more than anything else was for me the display of poppies around the old Tower of London, once the fortified home of the kings of England, though more notoriously known as a place of suffering, torture and execution of many people we would in today's world consider innocent of any real crime.

Standing on the promenade before the now dry moat around the Tower were crowds of people at all times of the day, and well into the evening hours, watching and contemplating the important message that the world needs to get from history. It was unusual, almost surreal, standing in near complete silence. From any crowd one

normally expects a hubbub of voices, but not here. Instead, there was an extraordinary, respectful calm, and only the sound of traffic in the city behind us could be heard in the distance.

This highlighted how deeply moved most people were to be there, and how respectful they were of the lives that were lost in that senseless rush into war. It made me deeply aware of the enormous privilege it is to have life, and how fragile it ultimately is; especially so in our present era with so many low-level conflicts in progress, and some of them displaying the most barbaric cruelty imaginable.





*Let us pray for Peace.
Let us long for Peace.
Let us work for Peace.
Let us dream of Peace.*

But above all...

*Let us do something in
the cause of Peace.*





*by Christian Bernard
Imperator of the Rosicrucian Order*

WHETHER PEOPLE are aware of it or not, their ultimate purpose is to evolve toward perfection and to prepare themselves for receiving knowledge of the mysteries. How? By pursuing the path of Initiation, for this is the only path that leads one to true self knowledge. But what is mystical initiation? Where does it begin? Where does it end? What is its purpose? And what is its nature?

First of all, we must understand clearly that initiation is not something exact, nor is it an event fixed in time. It is

a *process* continuing from incarnation to incarnation that leads one to self-realisation, but only at the end of a very long period of inner development. This means therefore that each of our thoughts, words and deeds is an initiation in itself, because each contributes to the Great Work that has been going on within us since the dawn of time. From the moment we believe that the soul exists and that it evolves through the medium of the physical body, we are obliged to admit that every physical or mental activity we perform on this earthly plane is included in this evolution.



The evolution of consciousness is in itself an initiatory process which continues life after life. Consequently, we initiate ourselves daily into the purpose of existence through the medium of the things we think, say or do. Nevertheless, it is true that when we speak of initiation we generally refer to something other than the purely objective state of consciousness we experience over a period of hours. When the term initiation is used in the Rosicrucian teachings, it designates most often the exceptional experience which every mystic hopes to eventually experience on the path of knowledge. One of the most beautiful definitions of this mystical experience is expressed as follows: *“Initiation brings into the realm of reason the purpose, and into the realm of emotion the spirit of one’s introduction into the mysteries.”*



We are obliged to admit that every physical or mental activity we perform on this earthly plane is included in this evolution.

This phrase contains the keywords which enable us to meditate deeply upon the meaning to be ascribed to the initiatory process taking place within us. According to this definition, the process involves both the realm of reason and the realm of emotion, and shows that initiation as a whole is not limited to just one aspect of our being. We often have a tendency to think that mysticism applies solely to that which is metaphysical; in other words, to that which lies beyond the physical. However, it is important to have a clear understanding that mystical evolution operates within both the material and spiritual worlds.

Moreover, this is the reason why people cannot experience true happiness if they orient their lives towards one of these two worlds to the exclusion of the other. But first and foremost, Rosicrucian mysticism must lead us to the state of happiness, for this very state provides proof that we have understood the profound meaning of life. When Rosicrucians state that our purpose is to become aware of our spirituality gradually through initiation, it does not mean that we must set aside materiality. If we accept the principle that one of our goals is to prove to ourselves that mind has mastery over matter, it stands to reason that this mastery must apply to the material world.

Since the Cosmic has made earthly incarnation a condition indispensable to human evolution, it seems logical to think that the physical and objective aspect of our existence is a reality necessary for the realisation

of the Divine. Of course, the most important thing is to understand that the material world is only a means to an end, and not an end in itself, and that it is only the finite material out of which we build towards the Infinite. At our present level of spiritual evolution, we cannot function effectively on the earthly plane without experiencing and satisfying certain desires based upon the material aspects of existence.

This is the reason why asceticism is not a valid initiatory path in the realm of mysticism. Only the great adepts have attained a state of consciousness that enables them to transcend effortlessly the dependency we all have upon this world. When individuals are nearing the state of Perfection, their conscious activity is directed so much towards the higher planes of Cosmic Consciousness that they feel detached from all earthly desires. But we must fully realise that we have not reached this point yet and that such a detachment is the result of a natural evolution of the soul. As for most humans, it is absolutely impossible for them, from one day to another, to live on this material plane while denying all legitimate needs that must be satisfied.

The Goal that Initiation Enables us to Reach

This leads me now to define the goal which initiation must enable us to reach, and which is the basic experience that makes the definitive realisation of such a goal possible. Rosicrucian Tradition has always taught that this goal is to achieve the state of Perfection which the avatars of the greatest religions of the world have achieved upon Earth. Although this is a true goal, it takes a long time for, as just mentioned, we are still too far removed from this state to hope to attain it in this incarnation. Consequently, we must not pretend through our behaviour that we are very near to this state. Also, let us be modest and set for ourselves an initiatory goal that is truly in keeping with our abilities. It is the most effective way to evolve and avoid the snare of illusion.





The weight of our own cross is ample and it is our duty to lighten the burden.

Too many disciples of religious, philosophical or pseudo-mystical denominations have a tendency to pattern their behaviour after the lives of the great avatars of the past, as understood by them. Among other ideas they strongly believe that physical or mental crucifixion is a necessity upon the path to mystical regeneration. I am convinced that all who think this way and try to make others believe it are also mistaken. Only the Great Initiates have been granted the right and the strength to bear the karmic cross of humanity upon their shoulders. At our present level of evolution, the weight of our own cross is ample and it is our duty to lighten the burden as much as possible. A wrong interpretation of some religious texts could lead us to suppose that it is only out of suffering that the Light may burst forth.

Nothing seems to me further from the truth, for then the God of Love spoken of by the adepts of these texts does not exist. We know that Universal Love is a reality that many mystics have experienced through the process of initiation. Therefore, we are essentially right

We know that Universal Love is a reality that many mystics have experienced through the process of initiation.

when we declare that suffering, even if it is true that it has an initiatory purpose, has never been and will never be a cosmic requirement for evolution. In fact, I firmly believe that the day will come when humans, freed from ignorance, will experience more happiness than unhappiness.

Although suffering is a means of evolution, it is not compulsory in the process of initiation. It is true that the experiences that ensue are initiatory in nature, but the reason they are so is because of the increased awareness

they create within us, and not because of the fact that we experience them as suffering. To think otherwise would be tantamount to saying that people must necessarily experience war so as to learn that they are happiest when they live in peace. It is easy to understand that if the Cosmic had decreed that we should experience every possible kind of suffering to become initiated into the great truths of existence, it would have thereby decided to make self-destruction the fundamental principle of evolution.

Such an idea is absurd, for it is contrary to the basically constructive nature of natural and universal laws. We see therefore that those who make physical and mental crucifixion the basis of initiation are in complete contradiction with the overall plan of Creation. Their error lies in the fact that they try to apply a mystical state (on an objective plane) which can only be experienced on the spiritual plane and solely by those who have attained Christ Consciousness.

The State of Consciousness Through Mystical Initiation

It remains now to define the state of consciousness we should seek to experience from this moment on through mystical initiation. The desired state consists in having a conscious awareness of our soul; in other words, of our spiritual identity. We all know that a soul essence permeates all of our cells and makes us living, conscious entities. Yet simply knowing this is not enough for us to reach the heights of mystical fulfilment. We must experience it and be able to live consciously in this essence, independent of our objective faculties. Therefore, I believe that the first mystical initiation

Rosicrucians must prepare themselves to receive is the one which enables them to see and feel themselves no longer as a body animated with a soul, but as a soul animating a body.

What is emphasised throughout the Rosicrucian teachings is the importance of practising exercises geared to developing psychic centres. However, this is not done strictly with the goal of acquiring certain mystical powers, even though it is true that they contribute much to it. First of all, such exercises enable each of us to experience our own conscious duality and to prove to ourselves that we are definitely body and soul, matter and anti-matter, substance and essence. In connection with this, psychic projection, as presented by Rosicrucians, is primarily intended to reveal the state of consciousness which we



experience when our psychic body is separated from our physical body.

Such a state of consciousness enables the individual experiencing it to contemplate the realms of the soul without having to endure the limitations of the body. That does not mean that the psychic self and the spiritual self are entirely the same and that when we experience one we necessarily experience the other. But it does mean that any projection experiment initiates us into the existence of the soul, for the psychic body is an emanation of our soul essence, whether it is inside or outside the physical body. Therefore, it is impossible to experience consciously a separation between the physical and psychic selves without being initiated into the cosmic reality of the spiritual self.

Ancient Egyptian Initiation Culminates in Initiatory Projection

The ancient Egyptians understood this, and that is why the initiations enacted in their temples included a culminating phase when candidates experienced initiatory death, namely, projection. Such an experience caused these candidates to experience a conscious separation between their physical body and their psychic body, thus enabling them to acquire the intellectual and emotional certainty that they were truly a spiritual entity incarnated into a material individuality. Everything was planned so that this initiatory death and the ensuing symbolic rebirth would remain forever engraved in their minds and emotions.

Here we see the origin of mystical initiation, inspired by the Rosicrucian definition as discussed at the

beginning of this article. Once the Initiates had regained awareness of their mortal body, forever marked by what they had seen in the kingdom of immortality, they felt impelled by a desire to objectify to the fullest degree the state of consciousness they had experienced. From that day on, their initiation became the anchor of their life, and secretly, deep within their soul, they knew that mysticism would bring to them the revelation of the mystery of mysteries.

These Initiates were not all perfect and did not pretend to be so, but some among them have become perfect.

The Rosicrucian Order is the traditional repository of the Egyptian mysteries and the initiatory path we must follow to have access to them. This path has been set forth by all the Initiates who, with the passing of the centuries, have bequeathed to the Order the fruit of all the efforts they have made in order to make mystical initiation something tangible and transmissible. These Initiates were not all perfect and did not pretend to be so. But some among them have become perfect, for we cannot spend lifetimes sowing seeds of Light for others without one day picking the rose of our own Illumination.

Those Initiates are now an integral part of what is traditionally called the Great White Lodge. In addition to the great work they are doing in serving the collective soul of humanity, they are also the custodians of the Rosicrucian Tradition. This cosmic mission was not imposed upon them; they voluntarily chose it. For, by having made the Rosicrucian ideal the foundation of most of their earthly incarnations, they are the most qualified to ensure that this ideal remains in all its pristine purity and is accessible to all seekers of goodwill.

As stated above, the first great initiation Rosicrucians must prepare themselves to receive is the one that will enable them to experience their soul, with a clear conscience and full knowledge of the facts, in the silence of their sanctum or any other place conducive to cosmic attunement. Nevertheless, it is obvious that such an experience, however significant it may be, does not constitute the *summum bonum* of the initiatory process which we are following under the auspices of the Rosicrucian Order. We must acquire mastery over it afterwards and be able to repeat it as often as we wish, for it is impossible to some day achieve mastery if



The Initiate Ani before Osiris, Isis and Nephthys.





Some do not wish to see or to hear.

we have not learned how to act as easily on the spiritual plane as on the material plane.

The perfect Initiates I have just described have attained this mastery and thereafter work on the level of cosmic causes, whereas when it comes to us, we only act upon the earthly effects. Some will say that such beings do not exist, that they have never seen them, that they are only the product of an imagination that draws from the unreal the strength to support an overly weighty reality. To those people, I shall simply answer: *There are none so blind as those who do not want to see and none so deaf as those who do not want to hear.*

The Rose-Croix Bequeath Knowledge Through Illumination

Rosicrucians are convinced of the existence of these illumined masters, for they have bequeathed to us all the knowledge they have gained through illumination. From the intellectual standpoint, we rediscover in the Rosicrucian teachings all the knowledge they have accumulated on how Cosmic and natural laws work throughout Creation. From an emotional standpoint, they have bequeathed us the splendour of our convocation and initiation rituals. Lastly, they have bestowed upon us the right, power and duty to attune with the Cosmic planes where they are situated.

The preceding remarks now lead me to define what the Supreme Initiation is, towards which each Rosicrucian is heading. As adepts, we all belong to an Order that, since the day that our Earth was initiated into the Primordial Tradition, constitutes one of the



The Temple which lies within, which has never ceased to unite humanity with our Creator.



visible organisations to which the Invisible Masters of the Great White Lodge constantly lend their support and inspiration. The Supreme Initiation which we can and must receive during one of our incarnations will elevate us from the status of a Rosicrucian to that of a Master of the Great White Lodge.

There are none so blind as those who do not want to see and none so deaf as those who do not want to hear.

Having reached this state of consciousness, we will understand that all traditional movements are indeed only different crosses upon which the same rose must unfold. We will become one with Cosmic Harmony and from the plane of consciousness that will be ours, we will receive the power to express it upon Earth. The overall plan of Creation will be revealed to us and we will know the ecstasy of those who think, speak and act in the name of God and for the welfare of humanity as a whole.

The Temple in the Depths of Our Being.

The Temple in which we will one day receive this Supreme Initiation does not belong to this world. It lies within the very depths of our being, for it is within this Human Temple that the Ark of the Covenant, which has never

ceased to unite humanity with our Creator, rests forever. As for the one who will give us mastery, this is none other than our Inner Master, and the Supreme Officers who will serve this Inner Master will wear upon their hearts the symbol of all the virtues that we will have demonstrated in the world of humans. However, prior to receiving this wondrous Initiation, each of us must understand and realise that Rosicrucians, throughout the incarnations they devote to their mystical ideal, are at once the neophyte, the initiator and the initiate within the triangle of their own birth, life and death.

I shall close this article with a translation of the inscription on the tomb of Amenhotep, High Priest of Amun during the reign of Thutmose III, a pharaoh who played an essential role in our Order's traditional origins. I hope with all of my heart and soul that the day will come when each of you will rediscover yourselves as you read these words of wisdom:-

"I was named second Prophet and was able to contemplate the Holiness of the Master of the Gods. With my initiation I have known all mysteries because every portal has opened before me. The Guardians have guided my steps to allow me to catch a glimpse of God; for sincere was my mouth and skilful were my fingers until the time came for me to lie down in the tomb."

*When first I looked upon the face of Pain
I shrank repelled, as one shrinks from a foe
Who stands with dagger poised, as for a blow.*

*I was in search of Pleasure and of Gain;
I turned aside to let him pass, in vain;
He looked straight into my eyes and would not go.
Shake hands, he said, our paths are one, and so
We must be comrades on the way, tis plain.*

*I felt the firm grasp of his hand on mine;
Through all my veins it sent a strengthening glow.
I straightway linked my arm to his, and lo!*

*He led me forth to joys almost divine;
With God's great truths enriched me in the end,
And now I hold him as my dearest friend.*

My Friend

by Ella Wheeler Wilcox



THE ANCIENT EGYPTIAN GAME OF SENET



AND THE AFTERLIFE

by Paul Goodall



THE Ancient Egyptian game of Senet was invented more than 5,000 years ago, yet its structure and gameplay would not be out of place with modern equivalents. Although it appears to have been conceived as a secular pastime it eventually developed over time into a religious artefact pertaining to the passage of the human soul (Egyptian *ba*) through the Netherworld, as part of an evolving religious worldview. This was facilitated by the superimposition of Egyptian beliefs onto the game board itself and the specific moves within the game. By the 18th dynasty, around 1580 BCE, the game had become a direct metaphor for the Underworld with some of its squares representing major

gods and events in the Afterlife.

The oldest pictorial representation of the game so far is seen in the 3rd dynasty tomb of Hesy-re (c.2686 BCE), an overseer of Pharaoh Djoser, who ordered the building of the famous stepped pyramid at Saqqara. Images have also been found on the walls of tombs belonging to Prince Rahotep at Meidum (4th Dynasty) and the Nomarch, Kheni, a district governor, at el-Hawawish (6th Dynasty). Boards that resemble the Senet game are also found in Predynastic and First Dynasty tombs at Abydos and Saqqara dating around 3500-3100 BCE. Senet was very popular and the varieties of boards found indicate that its gameplay was not just reserved for the elite of society. It survived for an incredible 3,000 years until its eventual disappearance, along with its rules of play, during the rise of the Christian era.

Senet as a Bridge to the Afterlife

In short, Senet, a two-player game, involved the moving of five to seven pieces for each opponent along its board of 30 squares in a snakelike or a reverse 'S' shaped route determined through the casting of four specially fashioned double-sided throwing sticks. The object of the game was to clear the board of your pieces before your opponent, in a similar manner to the modern 'Snakes-and-Ladders'. The meaning of the ancient Egyptian word 'senet' was 'passing' and directly related to how the two players' pieces interacted with each other in the original secular game. In



terms of the religious and mystical association mentioned above, the movement of the pieces had connotations with the passage of time spent in traversing the Underworld and this is particularly reflected in the description of several critical squares that had to be negotiated by the players.

This development of the game from a purely secular pastime to one bearing a greater mystical significance is reflected somewhat in its pictorial history where earlier representations show two human players in contrast to that of later single player games depicted in the necropolis against an implied invisible opponent, which may well have been the soul of the deceased. This is especially true in 18th Dynasty artwork around 1580 BCE onwards.

The value of Senet to the modern Rosicrucian mystic lies in its metaphorical aspects. Understanding the moves and the thrust of the game might allow our modern minds to develop more than a superficial understanding of the core religious beliefs that the Egyptians had concerning the 'Afterlife'. The strategic moves of the players reflect, in this context, the manoeuvres and tactics employed by the gods (Egyptian *netchers*) to test the soul of the deceased as it makes its passage through the Netherworld.

On the purely physical plane, death for the ancient

Egyptian was an ever present event, being much more anticipated than it is today, and, as the game over the centuries evolved into a more religious artefact, the playing of it may have worked on the imagination enticing the player to think he might even influence the inevitable judgement of his soul in the Afterlife. This facet of the game is supported, not just through an analysis of surviving game boards with their inscribed or painted hieroglyphs, but also translations from tombs describing the passage of the spirit of the deceased through various stages of the Netherworld as if on the Senet game board itself. In the early 6th Dynasty there are some scenes that depict the deceased playing against a living person which appears to demonstrate that the game had developed into a means of communication between both realms. The following quote puts it succinctly:

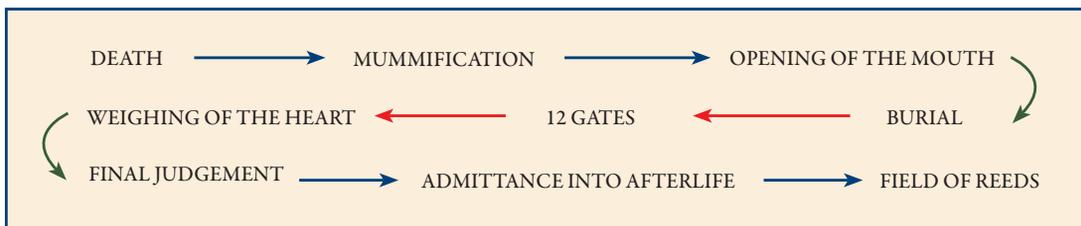
The fact that the game became a conduit of such communication indicates that it had acquired its own inherent religious meaning apart from any iconographic context in which it occurred. It was no longer merely a secular game played during a religious occasion, but was imbued with its own intrinsic religious significance.¹

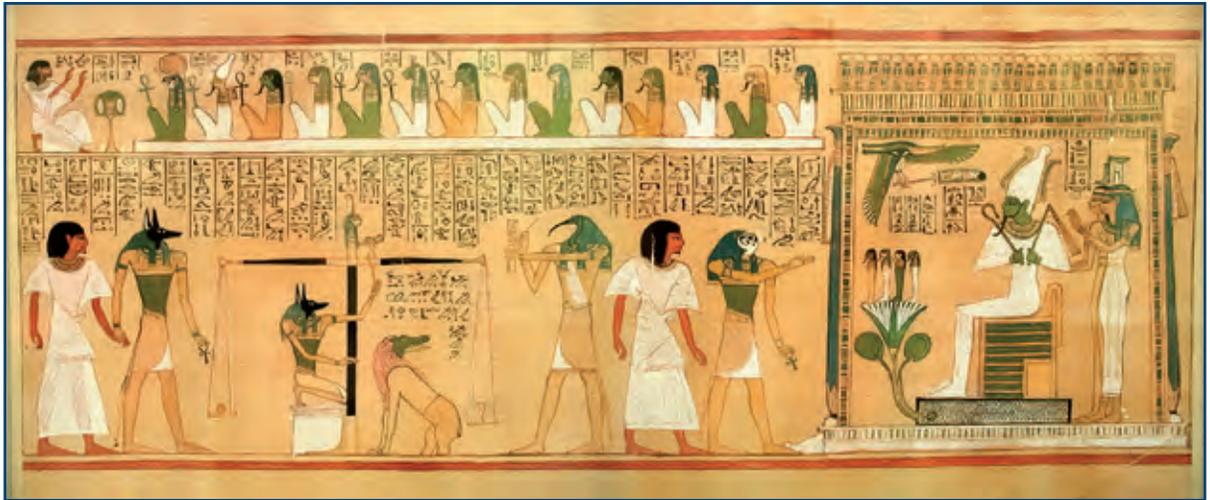
A diagram of the game board: the squares (artificially numbered here) were decorated in various ways throughout its history but this example shows those which have consequences for the player. Below that is a simplified schematic diagram of the journey taken by the soul of the deceased through the Netherworld. The reverse 'S' shaped route, whilst graphically aesthetic and designed to save space, and being unconnected to the Senet board, reflects the serpentine route actually taken by each player.

The Journey of the Soul in the Afterlife

The concept of an Afterlife, a realm that existed beyond the earthly plane, was indeed central to ancient Egyptian culture. It was perceived as an extension or natural continuation of one's earthly life. In early Egyptian history it was believed that commoners did not have the privilege of becoming part of the heavenly realm; only the Pharaoh

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21	22	23	24	25	26 ☪☪☪	27 ~~~~~ ~~~~~ ~~~~~	28 ●●●	29 👁️	30





The Weighing of the Heart and Judgement scene on the Book of the Dead papyrus specially made for Hunefer, a Royal Scribe of the 19th Dynasty, c.1310 BCE. To the left we see Anubis bringing the deceased into the judgement chamber. We also see this deity (netcher) supervising the weighing of the heart (conscience) against the feather of Maat, representing the order of things, uprightness. Below the scales awaits Ammet the 'Devourer of Souls'. Following a successful weighing the god Horus brings Hunefer before Osiris on the right. Osiris is seated on his throne of the waters and holding a sceptre and flail. Behind him are Isis and Nephthys. Before him stands a full-blown lotus standing on which are the four 'Gods of the Cardinal Directions.' Above hovers the winged wedjat, the Eye of Horus (an agent of action) holding the feather of truth and a shen ring symbolising eternal authority.

(being divine) would become part of the cosmic cycle of existence. Eventually, there was a universal hope that the ordinary Egyptian might continue their existence after death in the mythical 'Field of Reeds' as a reflection of their earthly lives. John Taylor, a curator at the British Museum has this to say:

The burials of poor people were usually similar to those of the rich in their main features, but with less expense – the body would be preserved in a crude manner and wrapped in cloth, and a few gifts would be put into the grave (food, drink, a few simple trinkets). So, as far as we can tell, they expected to go to the same kind of afterlife as the wealthy, but they would have to manage without the help of the 'Book of the Dead' and all the rich trappings of a high-status burial. How you behaved during your life was important.²

The standard texts describing the Netherworld and the post-mortem journey were the *Pyramid Texts*

of the Old Kingdom (2686-2160 BCE) intended for the Pharaoh, and the later *Coffin Texts*, an adaption of the mortuary themes from the Pyramid Texts, which were created for commoners to assist them on their passage through the Netherworld. One other major text which developed from the Pyramid and Coffin texts was the *Book of Coming Forth into the Day*, known today as 'The Book of the Dead', a name used by modern Egyptologists because the papyri found were placed on the bodies of the dead. These texts followed the same theme, giving knowledge, advice and power (through the use of spells) to the deceased, or more correctly the *ba* (soul), to safely negotiate the journey.

Following ritual mummification which was meant to ensure that the soul could reunite with the body after passing through the Netherworld the embalmed corpse was placed into the tomb and the journey began. It should be said that this process of mummification was available for anyone who could afford it; however, it was believed



A New Kingdom Senet board, c.1550-1295 BCE. (Image adapted from <http://www.cynningstan.com/post/1056/games-around-the-world-ancient-egypt>)



that those who did not have the means to pay for this process could still enjoy the afterlife although with more emphasis on a moral life rather than the correct recitation of spells for a successful transition. The essential premise of Egyptian belief concerning the Afterlife, although the narrative varies, was that the spirit of the deceased would join the sun god Ra on his solar bark as it set in the western horizon and be accompanied by him on a nocturnal journey through the twelve subterranean chambers or gates, one for each of the twelve hours of night, that made up the Netherworld, eventually uniting and rising with the sun god at dawn.

This exalted state allowed the deceased to comprehend life from the standpoint of Ra's paradigmatic journey. This outcome would certainly be the preserve of the Pharaoh who was perceived as having divine attributes and a privileged position. For the commoner the expectation was a continuation of life in the Egyptian equivalent of heaven called 'Aaru' or the 'Field of Reeds'. This was a perfect place to exist where there would be an abundant supply of food through fishing, hunting and farming along the River Nile.

The Netherworld journey itself was fraught with danger, the deceased having to negotiate a way through twelve gates guarded by demons; the protective spells and advice, as written in the funerary texts, were important here to facilitate a safe passage. This stage was followed by the weighing of the heart (*ib*) against the Feather of Truth (*Maat*). Failure at this point meant that the heart

was eaten by the demon Ammit. Once again, the advice of the *Book of the Dead* enabled a safe outcome.

Following this harrowing event the deceased was eventually led into the Hall of Judgement to argue his case before Osiris, the major god of the Underworld and the principle deity of regeneration and rebirth. The deceased would then be assessed before being admitted into the Field of Reeds.

The Senet Ritual

The above is, of course, a vastly simplified description of the whole rite of passage through the Netherworld in order to attain immortality in the Afterlife, but there is enough here to allow us to see how the game of Senet came to be so closely associated with this ritual. It has already been mentioned that Senet could act as a bridge between the realms of the living and the dead. The evidence comes from Coffin Texts such as the following example in relation to the deceased:

Let him sing, let him dance, and let him receive ornaments. Let him play senet with those who are on earth. It is his voice which is heard, [although] he is not seen. Let him go to his house, that he might visit his children forever and ever.³

In another tomb text from that of the 19th Dynasty artisan Sennedjem we read:

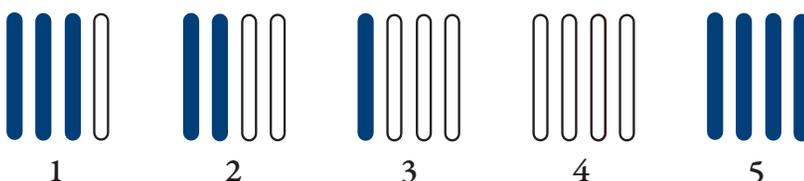
THE GAMEPLAY

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
20	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30

The board consists of 30 squares and is negotiated along a serpentine route from 1-30. The seven pawns for each player are lined up initially along the first 14 squares (or 10 if playing with five pawns each) in an alternating fashion, as shown.

The starting point is number 15, the House of Rebirth. The object of the game is to move all of one's pieces off the gaming board before the opposing player by casting four double-sided throwing sticks to determine how many moves one has in each turn.

Depending on what is facing up on each stick the player will have a certain number of moves to make.



THE THROWING STICKS AND MOVE VALUES



*'Beginning of the recollections and memories, the going out and, again, descending into the realm of the deceased. To be transfigured in the beautiful West, to change by day, to assume any form which he (the deceased) wishes, to sit in the booth and play the board game. Going forth as a living 'Ba like Osiris, the servant of the place of truth, Sennedjem and his sister [wife], the mistress of the house, Inyeferti, justified.'*⁴

A formal Senet gaming ritual had developed whereby the passage of the soul (the *ba*) could be influenced by the living (and the dead) in order for it to survive the journey through the Netherworld and also allow the *ba* to move freely between the realms of the living and the dead, thus ensuring immortality. By the 20th Dynasty the Senet game board had become a projection of the Netherworld itself, recreating the journey of the sun god Ra in his solar bark between sunset and sunrise. One player took on the role of Ra and the other being an 'unnamed spiritual enemy'. The winning of this particular ritual game facilitated the safe passage of the *ba* and union with Ra, and also ensuring the spiritual life of the player before their actual death.

Although undoubtedly the secular playing of Senet was an enjoyable pastime the ritual game allowed the Egyptian, in his mind and during his own lifetime, to have some measure of control over his personal future in the Afterlife. This sounds fanciful in today's world but the ancient Egyptian mode of consciousness did not function in the same manner as that of Western society today. There was a pervasive awareness of a different kind

of reality that existed after death, and one that interacted with the physical, translating itself in many areas of ancient Egyptian culture through its religion, daily and ritual practices, and architecture. Objects themselves were seen to be imbued with inherent power and this is true of the Senet game and its board. Indeed, the amuletic power of a Senet board may have been enough that merely depositing one in a tomb would ensure a successful outcome and eternity in the Afterlife.

Endnotes

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2. Taylor, John, <http://blog.britishmuseum.org/2010/09/22/what-is-a-book-of-the-dead/> (retrieved April 2015).
3. Coffin Text 405, 12th Dynasty: quoted in Piccione, op.cit., p. 59.
4. Quote at: http://www.osirisnet.net/tombes/artisans/sennedjem1/e_sennedjem1_02.htm (retrieved April 2015).

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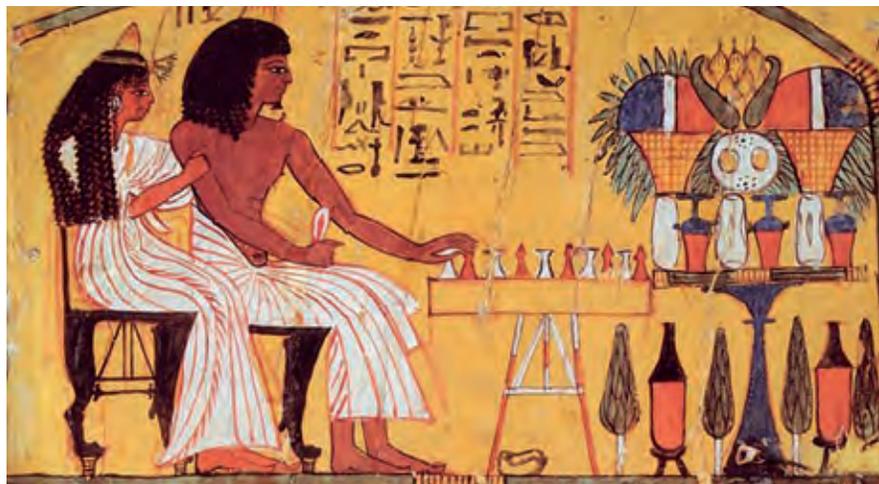
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From the tomb of the artisan Sennedjem who worked on the 19th Dynasty tombs of Rameses II and Seti I: In this scene, which is found on the upper portion of the inner side of the door, we see Sennedjem playing Senet with his wife at his side. He is depicted playing an invisible adversary which might be his own soul or Osiris. A rich variety of offerings are placed on a pedestal opposite.

Below the illustration are 11 columns of hieroglyphs (not shown here). Columns 7-11 read:

"Whoever knows this book on Earth - or if it is written on his coffin, he shall go out into the day in any form, that he wishes, and step back in again to his residence unobstructed. Bread and beer shall be given to him and a great portion of meat from the offering altar of Osiris. He shall enter safely into the Field of Rushes, and barley and emmer shall be given to him there. He shall know how to command like he did on Earth, and he shall realise each wish, like the nine gods of the Netherworld."

(Translation and image source: http://www.osirisnet.net/tombes/artisans/sennedjem1/e_sennedjem1_02.htm)



Playing Senet Against an Invisible Opponent.



The Rules of Playing Senet

It is important to note that no formal description of the rules of senet on either papyri or tomb walls has ever been found. The detailed description therefore for how to play the game is conjecture. There are two workable versions extant: those of R.C. Bell which are more intricate and those of Timothy Kendall. The rules below belong to Kendall because they are much simpler.

At the beginning of the game the seven pawns per player alternate in position along the first 14 squares. The pawns move according to the throw of four sticks or later, one or two knucklebones. When using the sticks the points seemed to have been counted from one to five, so it will be one point for each side without a mark and five points if the four marked sides were present together. When a pawn reaches a square already occupied by an opponent pawn, they have to exchange their positions.

The special squares have the following effects on play:

- 15:** *House of Rebirth:* Starting square and the return square for the pawns reaching square number 27.
- 26:** *House of Happiness:* A mandatory square which cannot be passed until each pawn has landed on it.
- 27:** *House of Water:* Landing on this square a pawn has to restart from square 15. This square can also be reached by pawns located on squares 28 to 30 which have to move back when their throws did not allow them to exit the board. They also have to restart from square 15.
- 28:** *House of the Three Truths:* A pawn may only leave when a 3 is thrown.
- 29:** *House of the Ra-Atum:* A pawn may only leave when a 2 is thrown.

The winner is the first to move all of his/her pawns off the board.

by Leanne Grimshaw

The Light of the World

AT THIS particular period in the evolution of humanity, we stand at a crossroads. Can the majority of people lift themselves out of the mire and face the Light of their own potential Divinity? Those who have some awareness of what is happening feel the need to guide a rapidly changing world situation into positive, constructive channels.

We long to help, and one sure way of doing so is by working on our own understanding, our own realities. We can open up any part of the mind that has been shut off, its growth stifled, and allow the light of day to shine in. To initiate such a transformation takes courage, but once the process has begun, its benefits become apparent.

Help may be sought when the going gets tough and our newly flexed spiritual muscles are not yet developed and strong. "Ask and you will receive..." is as true today as it ever was. Help will always come from within, from the Inner Self. Help may also come from individuals who are attuned and capable of imparting the kind of assistance

needed, at the very time it is needed. There are of course others who will give well-meaning advice and sympathy. But if we look for compassion which marks the true servant and student on the Path, the exchange will not be one of simply giving and receiving, but a sharing of the Light of the Inner Self.

How does self-transformation help humankind in its hour of need? Progress, if it is to be lasting and worthwhile, must come through constructive evolution. By building steadily on firm foundations, namely, attuning with the wisdom within, we ensure that the Light we shine is pure and unsullied, an inspiration to those who are drawn to us, and with whom we come in contact. Often we may be unaware that someone has been touched by it, yet the contact has been made, the Light is shared and must be shared ever wider, for that is the law. Therefore be assured that the Light from that one 'candle' that is you, can expand to form a chain of Light that illuminates the whole world.



Five Steps to Resilience

by Catherine O'Neill



THE WRITINGS of the psychotherapist and author Amy Morin inspired me to enter a period of deep reflection one morning on the age-old issue of why some people succeed, survive and even thrive when others in similar circumstances fare far less well. We all face setbacks, we all face defeat at times, but why do some manage to overcome their failures while others don't? Here are some of her ideas:



1. Resilient people recognise that no matter how bad the circumstances, their situation could always be worse. Rather than being upset that their first attempt didn't work, they choose to be grateful that they had the opportunity to try. They remind themselves that many of their setbacks probably won't matter in the mid to long term.

As long as their life and health remain intact, they get up and continue their journey. The willingness of some people to seek a silver lining in every sad situation keeps their spirits up, their mood positive, as they continue behaving productively as before, even when things have repeatedly not worked the way they had hoped.

2. Resilient people look for the lessons they can learn. Rather than make excuses for their failures, they take active steps to try and learn from each unhappy situation. When anger, sadness and a morose attitude seems set to overtake them, they pull themselves up by their bootstraps and logically, rationally, try to see themselves from the perspective of an impartial outside observer.

They identify skills, ideas and life lessons that can be learned from each failed opportunity, and view failure as evidence that they have stretched themselves beyond their present limits. A weight-lifter tears a muscle if lifting more than he should. So too we have our limits and must know them well. Resilient people know that each stumble is proof positive they have stepped outside their safe zone. And being able to admit this immediately it happens is an essential component to self-growth.

3. Resilient people know the parameters under which their lives work best. Crucially, they get to know and respect their vulnerabilities and where their boundaries lie. They are never afraid to admit they have weaknesses and use failure as an opportunity to spot them. Rather than hide their mistakes, their approach assists them to develop strategies of becoming better people.

4. Resilient people acknowledge their strengths too, and use failure as an opportunity to help them recognise their positive attributes and reinforce them. Whether that means recalling skills they have used during hard times in the past, or acknowledging the skills that have helped them get to where they are today, they know their strengths. When they acknowledge their capabilities, they do so without arrogance. They acknowledge what they do well in a humble and objective manner, and use their strengths to overcome their weaknesses.

5. Resilient people create a plan to become better people. Instead of viewing failure as the end, they think of it as only the beginning. When their attempt to complete a project or task does not yield the results they seek, they pause to consider how to approach the issue differently the next time. Their self-worth does not depend on their achievements, and without deluding themselves as to their real motives in all situations, they learn how to feel good about themselves even when accomplishing less than their best. Their confidence allows them to face repeated failure with tenacity; for they know their resilience will in the end lead them to victory over themselves.

With hard work, we can learn to use setbacks as opportunities to grow ever stronger.





THINK LUCKY

by Shirley Elsby

LUCK CAN BE for you or against you but one thing is certain: *it isn't down to chance.* The more you look into the lives of people who seem really lucky, those who have the love, the lifestyle, the lucrative living and the lean, fit body..., the more it seems they brought it on themselves.

Many people carry lucky charms in the hope, or perhaps expectation, of attracting good fortune. I first enlisted the help of a Cornish pixie at the age of six after being charmed by the cheery character smiling on a neat little purse. I wanted to buy the purse with

pocket money but the shop was shut. This being magical territory I cast a sixpence into a wishing well and wished the shop open. Minutes later, when I went back, it was! It was the beginning of a lifelong friendship. To this day I keep a pixie in my purse, although not the same one. In various pockets, pouches and receptacles, my lucky army of helpers also includes a metallic angel named Faith, a scarab beetle, an ankh, various crystals and an assortment of talismans.

Of course in scientific terms none of these material objects have power other to attract anything but dust.



But luck is in the mind, not in the molecules. By carrying them and being aware of the concept, you remind yourself constantly to be receptive to lucky influences in your orbit. Even a momentary reminder gives a little lift to the day, subtly changing it for the better and perhaps making you a little more amenable. So, if you want to make your wishes come true, you can acquire your own charms in any of their myriad forms from the hands of Fatima to the feet of particularly unlucky rabbits.

But if anyone really believes that good luck just happens to happen to certain people as they sit passively by, they are probably not experiencing very much of it! Many actors,

musicians, writers and other successful people discovered relatively late in their careers the threadbare old joke: *"It took me 20 years to become an overnight success."* It takes a lot of effort and application to consistently attract good luck. It involves following a more proactive path than just buying a lottery ticket and yearning. There are many ways of bringing it on which have won the respect of the wider world, and even those who have no belief at all in the power of wishful thinking, even when bolstered by lucky charms.

With a little application it is possible to adopt an arsenal of habits and attitudes which seem to work to bring circumstances around to a favourable direction. Like any mystical manifestation, good luck starts in the mind. So, gleaned from far greater minds than mine, here are a few formulae that just might work like magic for you too. Try it, give it a chance!

Adopt a Positive Attitude

Being lucky is largely to do with having a good attitude to life. A good attitude is a positive, upbeat approach, a 'can do' attitude, an attitude which accepts possibilities for improving upon whatever situation you are in now rather than blaming other people, the economy, the planetary line-up, politicians or neighbours.

It's about refusing to settle for poor circumstances or feel that if those are what life is offering, you'd better put up, shut up and just be grateful. It's about taking responsibility for your life, seeing the possibility for improvements and working mentally, physically and spiritually towards making them happen.

Decide What You Want

This is so important! As the saying goes, if you don't know where you're going, you'll probably end up somewhere



Know where you're going.

else. And whatever it is you really do want, the core of it will be whatever your life's purpose is about. This is where you decide what you want to be, do and have, what really matters to you and what your dearest aims will be. Figure that out, follow it diligently and you'll be rejoicing in good luck and happiness until you take your dying breath, and beyond. It really is worth spending quality time pinning down what you want and why you want it.

When embarking on this process, vividly picture yourself experiencing the achievement or activity you have in mind and engage with the emotions you feel. Emotions are key to determining whether something is right for you or not. So, if your chosen image makes you feel hollow or unfulfilled, change it. Your true path, the route you are really meant to take, will make you feel energised, excited, joyful, motivated or any one of a million other delicious sensations.

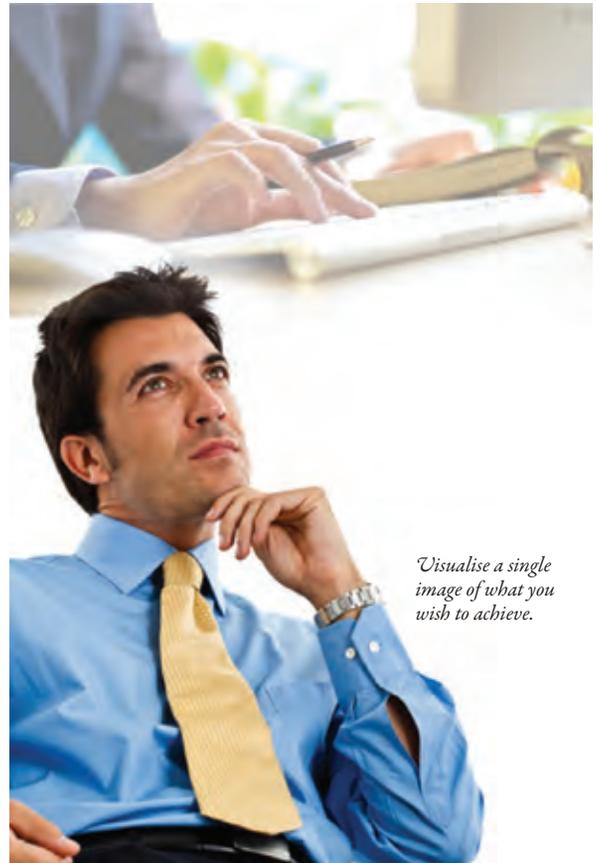
Visualise Your Dream

This is where you take a long, hard look at what you want to be, what you want to do, what you want to have, and what you subsequently intend doing. You plant these thoughts into your mind, 'the ether', and visualise them coming into being here in the material world. Done properly, the visualisation process can be very powerful. Some of the key elements associated with successful visualisations are as follows:-

1. **Be realistic:** Don't wish for the stars, don't aim for something that's clearly beyond your reach. Deluding yourself as to what you can reasonably achieve is a recipe for failure. You wouldn't aim at building your own spaceship to take you to the moon would you? So, scale down your ambitions into bite-sized chunks, and be sure you can comfortably swallow each bite without undue indigestion.



2. **Be specific:** Don't confuse issues. Have a single image to represent what you want. The power generated by aiming to accomplish one major thing at a time is a lot greater than aiming at two or more. Use symbols if they work for you, such as a computer, comfortable keyboard and word-editing software if you want to be an author. Or see a perfectly happy and affectionate dog or cat if you're aiming at starting a pet grooming business. Mentally associate your image with all the qualities you want your dream to address.
3. **Spread the benefits:** A dream life will always benefit more people than the dreamer. Think how your having what you desire will bring benefits to other people. Rosicrucians instructed in the technique of effective visualisation are taught never to appeal for something unless they fully intend to share the rewards of their efforts with others; the more, the better.
4. **Your dream must be fair:** A perfect recipe for disaster in any endeavour is for the whole basis of it to be unfair towards others, or worse still, if it may harm others. Rosicrucians are keenly aware of this and spend a long time pondering the potential consequences of having their dreams come true.
5. **Use the present tense:** If you pass all the criteria mentioned so far, then begin visualising your dream and bringing up in your mind's eye a strong and convincing image of the final result you wish to achieve. Your image should be as though the end result were in the here and now, not in a faraway future state. Make the colours gentle, real and uplifting, the aromas strong and appealing. Feel the ambience in which your visualisation exists, feel the three-dimensional depth of the space around you. Make your image move, make it real for you!
6. **Feel the emotions:** Really get into your imaginary world and experience those good, beautiful, wholesome feelings as deeply and amazingly as you possibly can. Feel inspired by what is being created, and especially how it will help others and not only benefit you.
7. **Keep the faith:** If you don't really believe your dream, then no one else will either, and your chances of success are next to nil. Without deluding yourself, being perfectly sane and rational about your aims, generate in yourself a strong and abiding confidence



Visualise a single image of what you wish to achieve.

in your ability to connect with the infinite power which ultimately says yes or no to your endeavour. Having this confidence, devoid of all delusion, is essential.

8. **Let it go:** Every visualisation must come to an end. And for the really powerful ones, that end must be both gentle and swift. Don't try and prolong a visualisation beyond the small reserves of inner strength you may possess. When done, consciously let go of everything relating to your visualisation, get up and go about your other daily chores, giving not the slightest thought to the image and ambience you've just left. You have put the finished picture of what you want to accomplish 'out there.' Now leave it be, let it grow by itself.

Of course the above procedure is not meant to be something you do once and then wait for the eggs to hatch. Repeat it regularly, do it once every few days, in fact do it every day if you wish. If there are any flaws in your dream, they will eventually emerge through your repeated attempts to perfect your image. The key is to be scrupulously sincere and frank with yourself and never allow yourself to be deluded as to your real purpose.



Set Some Goals

Goals should be *SMART*. The mnemonic is well used in business circles to ensure that progress is made. And progress is made if your actions are...

1. **S**pecific: Don't just say: "I want to be famous." Say instead: "I want to become an expert dog groomer, market gardener, plumber, electrician, etc."
2. **M**asurable: You need to know when the goal has been achieved, so work out a system whereby you will know when that the end-point has been arrived at. The first measurable step might be to enrol on a course in dog grooming, horticulture, plumbing, etc. And the second step is of course to pass the course.
3. **A**chievable: Nothing kills a dream quite so dead as feeling that things can never be anything different. If you don't know in your heart that what you're aiming for is attainable, then clearly this dream is not for you. So, create a more attainable dream instead! If you make sufficient progress with your new dream, you can always revive your original dream at a later date when you have evolved to a stage where you can truly feel in your heart that what you originally dreamt of is attainable.
4. **R**elevant: If you're over 70 and haven't become a mum yet, the chances are you won't, however much you might want it. It might be more relevant to you to learn a new skill or develop a radical health regime. So, be realistic and avoid aiming for things that aren't physically possible.



5. **T**imed: Don't leave things hanging in the air. Set a timeline and clear deadlines for when each stage of your dream should be reached. Without firmly abided by deadlines, projects drift, sometimes to the metaphorical ends of the earth.

Goals are targets to hit in order to propel you towards your overall aim. So, if you want to become a famous actor, the first goal might be to join a drama society, while the next goal would probably be to take some acting lessons. Write down the steps, arrange them in logical order, and then begin your in-the-present visualisation of the final outcome.

Start Taking Action - Get on with It!

And now you need to start working on your goals, whether you managed to make them *SMART* or not. It's the stage where you take them on a bit from being mere thoughts in the mind or on a sheet of paper, and put them into the solid reality of the world. Taking concrete steps to accomplish your goal is the fundamental act of breathing life into your dreams. This is how you start bringing them out of the cerebral realm and into the realm of physical reality.

Nothing is gained by waiting much longer. Once you've decided what you want, gone through the ethics and fairness of it, and all-importantly, you've applied a reality check to your dream, you must begin converting your thoughts into something alive and 'out there', rather than a static inside-the-head good feeling. You have to start where you are now, not where you'd like to be. So, if you want to change something in your life, you have to do something different from what you've been doing up till now. And that must be carrying out the crucial acts of externalising your dream and starting the process of bringing it into material reality. As a learned person once said: "Only a fool keeps doing the same things while expecting different results."

Be an Optimist

Lucky people are invariably optimists, even when they're unlucky! They expect things to turn out alright and they're usually right. For just as the *Wheel of Fate* depicts different things on different days in the Tarot deck, circumstances change continually and people experience both the upside and downside of life in the course of their lifespan. They may experience luck in widely different ways, with some seemingly well-placed on the power gradient and others steeped in poverty. But every life has its ups, downs and middles, and one of the great learning





challenges is to deal with the whole gamut and still keep not only our sanity but also our cheerfulness.

Being optimistic might seem mad to a pessimist, but actually it weights the scales in favour of a nicer life. People find optimists more pleasant to be around and they gravitate towards them. Equally they tend to avoid the grumps who they expect will rant and moan. They all enjoy the greater feel-good factor, picking it up just as one tuning fork vibrating will cause others to entrain with it. They 'feel the vibes' of optimistic people, and through the 'magic' of resonance try to become like them.

An optimistic personality by definition must feel better than a pessimistic one, so it's certainly worth cultivating optimism. If you're not naturally graced with an optimistic outlook, try practising the following habits which serial optimists indulge in...

1. **Accept things as they are:** Just as a famous old nun's prayer says: *"God grant me the grace to change the things I can change, accept the things that I can't, and the wisdom to know the difference."* If it's raining, take an umbrella. When there's a bus strike, get on your bike. Deal with it and be cheerful about it.
2. **Be flexible:** Optimists aren't unduly fazed by unexpected events like burst pipes, cancelled contracts, floods and burglaries. Even if the events are classed as emergencies, optimists have the confidence to know that if other people have coped with similar or worse circumstances, then they can too. The world is full of people who have survived and thrived after the most atrocious traumas.
3. **Live in the moment:** Optimists tend to relish what they're doing or experiencing at any given moment, rather than wishing they were somewhere else and otherwise engaged. If working, they give their full attention to the work. Or perhaps they're savouring the smell of fresh coffee and the snap of biscuits in a break. They pay attention to the moment and

therefore harvest far more of what it has to offer than the person who spends his or her time begrudgingly.

4. **Persist:** Optimists treat failures as the tools of tuition. They know that what pessimists term a 'failure' is actually a step towards success. If it takes 500 attempts before you can ride a bike, you need to try it 500 times and not give up at the 499th try. They know they could make it next time and keep trying until they succeed.

There are many people who became well-known for their talents, sometimes around the world, having first experienced being turned away by people who seemingly should have recognised their talent. The Beatles were refused a recording contract by Decca on the grounds that guitar groups were on the way out. J K Rowling's first book *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* was turned down by 12 publishing houses before being taken up by Bloomsbury.

5. **Feel gratitude:** Optimists are more likely to notice the things that go right, the pleasures that are to be had from what are often thought of as minor things, and the beauty, variety and richness of what is around them in everyday surroundings. They count their blessings, whether formally or not. They notice what is right with the world and appreciate the gift given to them daily, the gift of life.
6. **Be nice:** Optimists are much more likely to get on with people of all stripes and help them in countless different ways, large and small. They don't do it because they expect something in return. They do it because it is part of their nature and it feels good to them to do someone a good turn.
7. **Stay open:** As well as being an optimist, if you want to make your own luck, *stay open to new experiences and new people.*

Whether it's eating sushi or learning a new skill, lucky people are constantly adding to their complement of things they've seen, done or learned about. They work their curiosity and make the effort to satisfy it. They embrace different emotions rather than always steering down the middle road of the familiar and mundane.

Among the most important new experiences that foster the continuation of good luck are the ones that involve meeting new people. The saying *"...it's not what you know, it's who you know"*, acknowledges that it is people that lead other people to opportunities and the more of them you know, and the more circles and circumstances that you know them in,



the more likely it is that the connections will prove fortuitous in some way. It is simple logic, nowadays lived out by millions of people through their social media networks.



Live Healthily.

For many people the hope for good luck is that it will bring with it lots of money, enough to retire on perhaps, and to buy the finer things and experiences of life. But without good health, money is way less valuable. If you don't have the capacity to get out and about to spend and enjoy it, your money can buy you little more than a comfortable place in which to be miserable.

We all want to feel good in body and mind. The Rosicrucian Order teaches a path of moderation and of what are generally considered healthy ways to live, with a suitable amount of exercise, a diet majoring on fresh food, a lack of bad habits, a proper amount of sleep and good mental health aided by listening to your conscience and obeying it. On top of that it teaches a whole range of special techniques for healing, including special treatments, breathing exercises and the use of vibrations.

Trust Your Intuition

The psychic body is the intermediary between the spiritual and physical bodies and constantly feeds us with messages which help good luck to flow into our lives. Not everyone is blessed with an obvious sixth sense. But the good news is that like physical muscles, intuition can be strengthened by being worked.

As we exercise our intuition and then test the results and find them sound, we gain more confidence in it. Eventually we can get to a point where an iffy feeling in the stomach or a buzz of anticipation are all that are needed to make us say yes or no in all the right places to attract good luck and keep the bad sort at bay.

Expect Good Luck

Lucky people feel lucky and expect to be lucky, which is a large part of why they end up being lucky. Our thoughts

are like magnets, they attract the experiences we have. Some of the ways in which they do this can be tried and tested, observed and studied. They are to do with fleeting expressions of the eyes, slight inflections in the voice, body language, facial expressions, all manner of tiny but influential signals that the trained and astute will pick up, whether they know it or not. It is why we instinctively like or dislike people we don't know and why we find ourselves attracted to one and not another.

We also attract things and circumstances in their multitudinous forms when we're unaware we're doing it and have no idea even how to quantify it. This is because we are all joined inseparably at a deep level in the 'global soup', the non-stuff of the universe, invisible, intangible but always there and always matching like with like. The attraction brings about wonderful coincidences, links soul-mates, and makes friends of like-minded strangers. It is the master cook combining the same basic ingredients, those bizarre building blocks of the quantum world, into the solid stuff of physical existence, producing masterpieces, one after another. The power of thought, linked to this invisible Cosmic power, brings about reality as we perceive it and gives us our unique experience of the world.

We have the power to make that experience truly wonderful, thanks to our ability to choose and direct our thoughts in lucky directions. We can enhance that power and develop it once we have the awareness to do so and to choose it. Astrologer Evadne Price in the 1980s used to end her spot on an ITV Central news magazine show with a five minute forecast and the phrase: *"Think lucky and you'll be lucky."* She was right.

Things People Have Said About Luck

"You gotta push your luck at least once a day or else you could be walking around lucky and not even know it." Actor James Dean.

"The only good luck many great men ever had was being born with the determination and ability to overcome bad luck." Channing Pollock, magician and actor.

"The best luck of all is the luck you make for yourself." General Douglas MacArthur.

"I say luck is when an opportunity comes along and you're ready for it." Actor Denzel Washington.

"Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity." Seneca, Roman philosopher.

"If you think luck just happens to people as they sit passively by, you're probably not experiencing very much of it." Shirley Elsbey.





I thought

The Day I Died

by *Barry Hill*

IN THE EARLY summer of 2007, I was not feeling well for weeks on end. It started off as a cough and soon the usual flu symptoms arrived. I was in my mid forties and health-wise there were no issues I knew of, and I hadn't had flu in years. In fact I was in peak condition, so it was an annoyance not to be able to do my usual weekend cycling. I felt like a rag doll, hardly strong enough to make it up the stairs.

Thankfully the flu passed within a few days and I was well on my way to a full recovery when I accepted with pleasure an invitation to meet up with my sister and her children at a local coffee shop. I love the innocence and spontaneity of children and had a special bond of affection

for her twins of three years of age, one a boy, the other a girl, both very different personalities but bright, active, full of life and above all caring and affectionate towards each other.

The queue to place the order for the coffee and buns was long and my sister patiently took her place in it as her children met up with other children their age in the shop. The two with the family next to me were complete strangers to them at first, but with shy, friendly faces and actions to begin with, within minutes they were all best friends for life. It was a wonderful scene. Why couldn't adults be the same? All those wars, arguments and misery among adults when little children could meet up so easily and become friends almost immediately, how easy it would



be to banish conflicts for good if we could just become as little children again.

The shop was full of people, lots of talking and laughter. The ambience was relaxed and pleasant, good music was playing and I was overcome with a sudden feeling of gratitude to be able to experience life at its best again and especially now that I was feeling so much better. As I sat there in a comfortable sofa absorbing the scene, I put my head back briefly and closed my eyes. That must have been when I lost consciousness and everything suddenly ceased. I don't remember what happened, nor do I remember the way in which I lost consciousness, but I do remember suddenly being aware of silence.

I was looking down on everyone in the shop from what I estimate must have been close to the ceiling.

I was calm and under no discomfort except the disorientating view of concurrently seeing everyone in the shop as though from a great height above them, as though I were a thousand feet up in the clear blue sky and could see all that was going on in the shop, yet at the same time at ground level looking at people continuing their normal conversations. In an instant things changed again, and this time all was clear. I was no longer in two places at once. I was looking down on everyone in the shop from what I estimate must have been close to the ceiling. I saw everyone as though I were before them, everyone and everything simultaneously, including myself slumped to one side on the sofa. The silence remained as I watched with great clarity everyone continuing as normal.

I have no idea how long this lasted as I had no sensation of time and had no concept that I was somehow 'gone' or that anything was different. It was only long afterwards that I was told I had been clinically dead from cardiac arrest for at least six minutes. At one point I saw myself in great detail slumped to one side on the couch, with my head at an impossible angle and people standing around looking down at me. And then everything went blank until I awoke three days later in the intensive care unit of a hospital only a block away.

Initially I had no memory of anything that had happened and was repeatedly restrained from trying to get up. When I was told I had suffered a heart attack and been clinically dead for over six minutes, I knew there was a good chance I had suffered permanent brain damage. But none of that mattered; I was just grateful I was still alive and could see and speak and even move a bit. Life is at its most desirable when it has nearly ended, and for me, it was so good still to be here.

Under strong sedation, I fell asleep again, and in the early hours of the next morning I awoke again with the same

clarity as before. The memory of what had happened in the coffee shop returned in full, graphic detail. I remembered it all as far as the point where everything had ceased. I knew however that this time, this silent early hour, was altogether different and it was destined to be my last goodbye. From a point somewhere high in the room I saw two nurses rush into the room, lights going on and very quickly after them a doctor arrived and I was rapidly wheeled out of the room. That is when everything ceased again.

I had suffered another heart attack, this one more serious than the last and it was only due to the hard efforts of the doctor and nurses that I regained my life and am able to write these lines today. The memory of everything was clear when I finally awoke twelve hours later, after having undergone a bypass operation. And the memory is clear even today.

Did I die? Twice? I don't know, but the doctors were adamant I did and that I was fortunate to have survived both heart attacks. I certainly experienced something I've never experienced before or after, the sensation of being out of my body and seeing things perhaps as other dying people have seen billions of times in the past. The feeling I had in that intermediate state was one of complete calm, no fuss, no bother, no hurry, just an acceptance that things would unfold as they were meant to and that there was a 'place' somewhere, some time, where dear people from my past patiently await my eventual arrival.

However we understand the expression 'was meant to', for me, every second of these events was meant to happen to me, for it has left me a changed and I believe much better person because of them. Every day since then has been a precious gift, and the change for the better in my mind and heart that the experience brought about has been an immense blessing and release. Seeing myself slumped on the couch in the coffee shop, and again seeing myself and hospital staff when I was technically already clinically dead, and the supreme calmness and silence that accompanied both visions, has convinced me that there is a life beyond death.

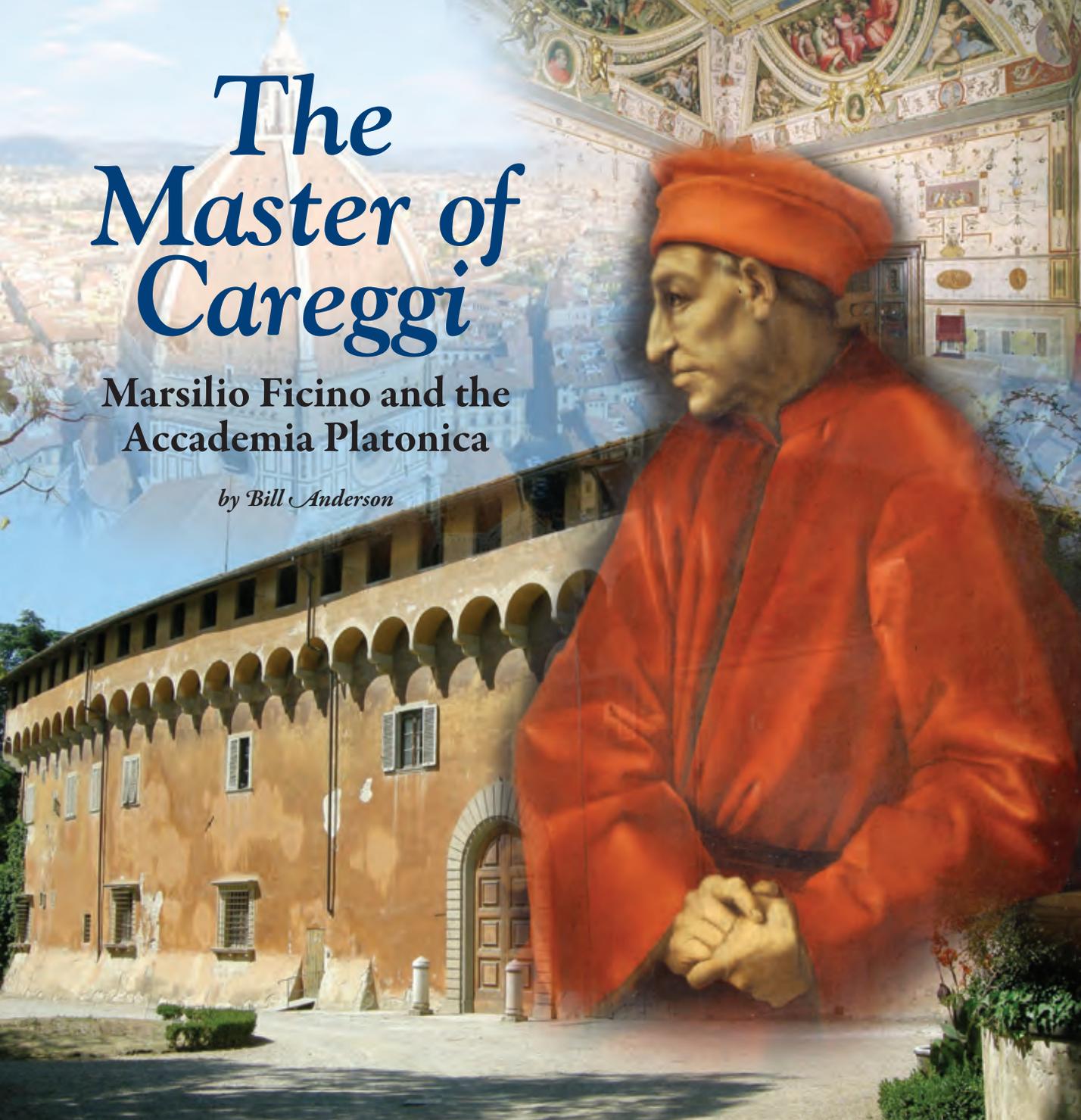
Being rational and a scientist by profession, I know this is only a belief. But it is one powerfully vouchsafed for by two experiences of such supreme clarity and serenity I cannot dismiss them as mere fantasy. They have drawn me closer with each passing year to an acceptance that when I finally leave for good, it will be to a place I was meant to go..., and it will, I am sure, be of the very essence of all that I love, cherish and know is good. When my time is up, it will be with much gratitude for the experiences life has afforded me, but especially for having been given a preview of what that passing may be like.



The Master of Careggi

Marsilio Ficino and the Accademia Platonica

by Bill Anderson



IN THE BOOK *Rosicrucian History and Mysteries*, the author introduces the *Academy of Florence* as follows: “...the impact of the Turkish conquest of Constantinople in 1453 drove Greek culture, in particular the works of Plato, who was only known from various extracts, to diffuse itself into Italy. Cosimo de’ Medici, the ruler of the city state of Florence, with his finger on the pulse, was aware of the opportunity this provided and so, in 1459, he created the *Accademia Platonica Fiorentina*, the *Platonic Academy*, headed by

Marsilio Ficino.” In this article we will take a closer look at this remarkable period in world history.

The Italian city of Firenze (Florence), the capital of Tuscany, lies on the river Arno. It is considered one of the most beautiful cities in the world and is a gem of the early Italian Renaissance. In the 15th Century, when great artists like Giotto, Ghiberti, Brunelleschi and Michelangelo worked there, they created magnificent examples of painting and sculpture that today still fill Florentine churches, civic buildings, grand palazzi and



The city of Florence today.



world-class museums such as the Uffizi Gallery. What we see today is a far cry from the ancient, provincial Roman city of Florentia (the Flourishing) founded in 80 BCE.

The provincial town had completely changed by the later Middle Ages and the dawning of the Renaissance. Florence had become one of the largest cities in Europe, and was rich, economically successful and became defined by the Renaissance. This is not to say that life was idyllic for everyone as there were great disparities in wealth. There were a group of families (oligarchs in modern terminology) that controlled the growing city vying for power and influence. Cosimo de' Medici was the first Medici family member to essentially control the city from behind the scenes.

Although the city was nominally a democracy of sorts, his power came from a vast patronage network along with his alliance to the new immigrants into the city. The fact that the Medici were bankers to the pope also contributed to their ascendancy. Cosimo was succeeded by his son Piero who was soon after succeeded by Cosimo's grandson, Lorenzo in 1469. Lorenzo was a great patron of the arts, commissioning works by Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and Botticelli. Medici Florence is considered to be the birthplace of the Renaissance, and has often been called "*the Athens of the Middle Ages.*"

The language spoken in the city during the 14th Century, the language of Dante and Petrarch was, and still is, accepted as *the* Italian language. Almost all the writers and poets in Italian literature of the golden age are in some way connected with Florence, leading ultimately to the adoption of the Florentine dialect as a literary language of choice.

These days it is easy to get to Florence by air, land or sea as it is well-connected with the rest of Italy and with

Europe. It wasn't always so. In the 15th Century, during the Renaissance, it was much more difficult and hazardous to reach the city. It was better to travel in a group as the countryside was frequented by thieves and undesirables. From the north, you had to cross the Apennine Mountains, though further east there was a good road, as there was from the south and Rome. The safest, but slowest route to the city was by boat up the river Arno from the sea, after landing at a port near Pisa; assuming you survived the sea journey with its storms and pirates.

Origins of the Renaissance

We know that much knowledge from ancient times was disseminated through the Arabic language, especially via the Caliphate of Al-Andalus in Spain, with its capital at Córdoba, and even after the Norman conquest of Muslim Sicily. Many Western scholars travelled to Córdoba or Palermo in Sicily to study this ancient knowledge and translate it into Latin, the *lingua franca* of the West at that time. Thus knowledge seeped into Western Europe. However, there was another route that is mostly forgotten.

After the Western Roman Empire dissolved in 475 CE, many people have forgotten that the Eastern half of the empire continued for almost another 1,000 years. Known as the Byzantine Empire, whose capital city was Constantinople (modern Istanbul in Turkey), it was a powerhouse of literature, art, theology, law and learning, and it remained a repository of knowledge until 1204, when an army of Western Crusaders, *en route* to the Holy Land, looted and pillaged this venerable Christian city, one of the largest in the world at the time, and hauled irreplaceable treasures back to the West.



In 1261, the Byzantines recaptured the city and it became once again the imperial capital from which the Roman Emperors of the new Palaiologos dynasty ruled. Then the slow decline began to set in. In contradiction, the recapture of Constantinople ushered in one of the brightest periods in world cultural history known as the Palaiologan Renaissance. The base of this brilliant flowering was the intensive revival of the spiritual life. The closing centuries of Byzantine culture were characterised by active creativity, a searching energy and heightened interest in art as the most important matter of life.

Why Florence?

To combat the increasing threat from the Muslim Turks, who had conquered most of the Byzantine Empire, a couple of the later Byzantine Emperors attempted a reconciliation by uniting the Greek Orthodox Church of Byzantium with that of Rome. It seemed to be a simple matter, since all the bargaining chips were in the hands of the Roman Catholic West.

Emperor John VIII Palaiologos, as the *de facto* head of the Orthodox Church ordered his Church to accept Papal primacy. He travelled to Italy to negotiate with the pope and the actual Union was ratified at the Council of Florence in 1439, when Cosimo de' Medici ruled the city, which the Emperor attended with 700 followers including Patriarch Joseph II of Constantinople and George Gemistos Plethon, a Neoplatonist philosopher influential among the academics of Italy. His clarification of the distinction between Platonic and Aristotelian thought helped to determine the philosophic direction of the Italian Renaissance.

In Florence Plethon presented a treatise *De Differentiis* ("On the Difference Between Aristotle and Plato"), to Florentine humanists and taught classes that



Emperor John VIII in Italy.



Map of Italy in 1494.

re-awakened an interest in Plato and loosened the hold that Aristotle had maintained over Western European thought for eight centuries. Plethon inspired Cosimo de' Medici to found the Platonic Academy, and initiated the enthusiastic study of Plato that characterised the Italian Renaissance. But few on Byzantium's side were impressed with the Union talks held in Ferrara and Florence, not only at the terms at which the Byzantine Orthodox Church had to stoop to, but also at the non-existent aid to Byzantium. The most notable effect of the Union was the increased resentment between Byzantium's populace and the imperial government.

Philosophers, like most people at the time had to find ways of bringing food to the table. The most common occupation in the Byzantine Empire would have either been agriculturally based or trade based coming about naturally through their own work. However Philosophers needed patronage in order to live, and the most important sort came from the Imperial court. Other sources were from minor courts of the noble families of the empire, from the rich and from the Church, if not from individual Church clergy. Of course, only Bishops had such resources.

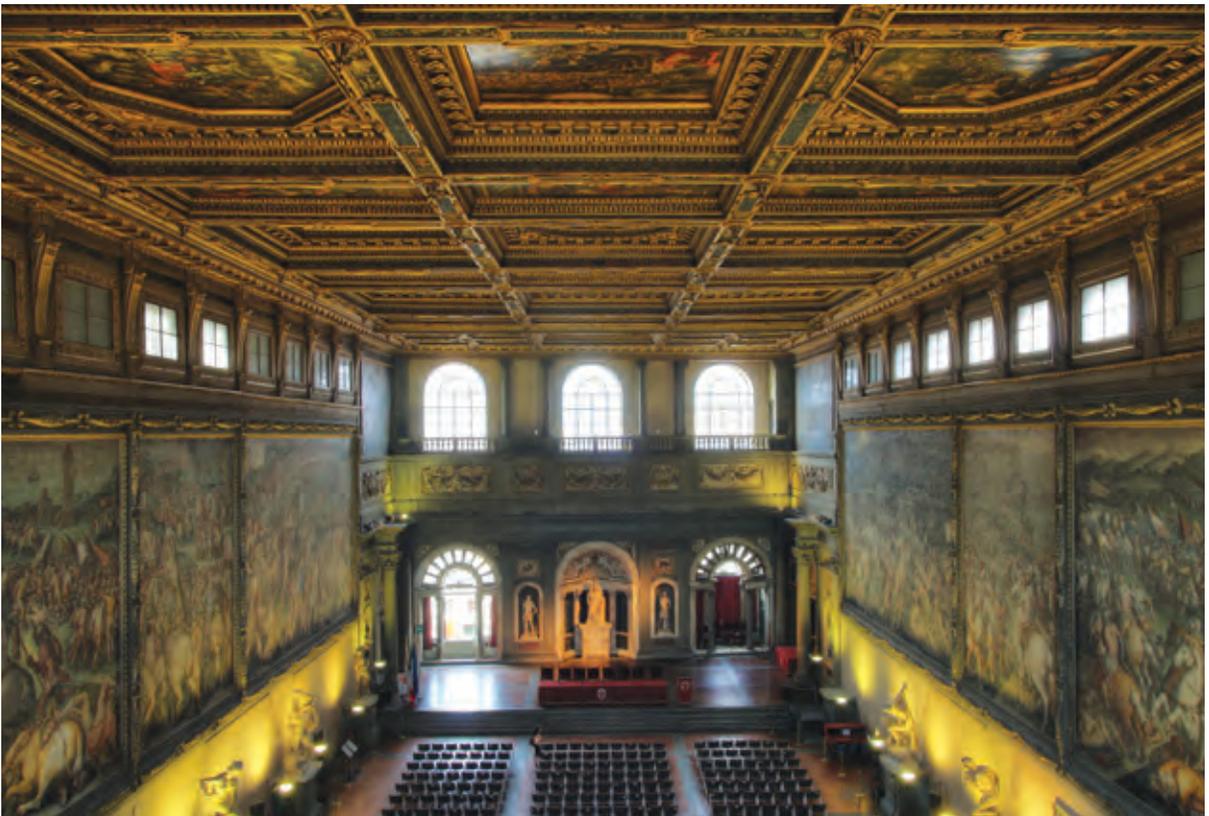
As the Empire descended into chaos, it couldn't spare





The Palazzo Vecchio or Palazzo della Signoria where the Florentine Town Council met. Note the copy of the Statue of David standing outside.

Below: The Palazzo Vecchio Grand Hall.



any finances in its efforts to defend her borders and so the need to study in the fields of science and mathematics would have naturally disappeared from the minds of those whose lands were raided and seized. It would be this lack of patronage that led to many of these scholars fleeing to the West. Remarkable travels were recorded by John Argyropoulos and Manuel Chrysoloras who between them had travelled to Florence, Pavia, Rome, Padua and Milan. It has been said that the end of the Byzantine Empire coincided with the beginning of the Renaissance, What little influence the Byzantine Church had over Rome was more than made up for by their philological preaching and mass conversion to humanism.

The Medici

At the beginning, the Medici family were simply one of several leading families in Florence. They controlled the Medici bank which at the time was Europe's largest bank following the demise of the banking empire controlled by the Knights Templar. And they controlled as well an array of many other enterprises in Florence and elsewhere. In 1433, the Albizzi family managed to have Cosimo de'Medici exiled. The next year, however, saw a pro-Medici Signoria¹ or town council elected and Cosimo returned. The Medici became the town's leading family,



a position they would hold for the next three centuries.

Florence remained nominally a republic until 1537, traditionally marking the end of the High Renaissance in Florence. But the instruments of republican government were firmly under the control of the Medici, whose money fuelled the Renaissance, and their allies. Cosimo and Lorenzo de' Medici rarely held official posts, but were the unquestioned leaders.

Cosimo de' Medici was popular among the citizenry, mainly for bringing an era of stability and prosperity to Florence. One of his most important accomplishments was ending the decades of war with Milan and bringing stability to much of Northern Italy. He was also an important patron of the arts, directly and indirectly by the influential example he set.

He was succeeded by his son Piero de' Medici, who died after five years in charge of the city. In 1469 the reins of power passed to Cosimo's 21-year-old grandson Lorenzo, who would become known as "Lorenzo the Magnificent." Lorenzo was the first of the family to be educated from an early age in the humanist tradition and is best known as one of the Renaissance's most important patrons of the arts. Under Lorenzo, the Medici rule was formalised with the creation of a new Council of Seventy, which Lorenzo headed. The republican institutions continued, but they lost all power.

Lorenzo was less successful than his illustrious forebears in business, and the Medici commercial empire slowly declined. He continued the alliance with Milan,

Cosimo and Lorenzo de' Medici rarely held official posts, but were the unquestioned leaders.

but relations with the Papacy soured, and in 1478, papal agents allied with the Pazzi family in an attempt to assassinate Lorenzo. Although the plot failed, Lorenzo's young brother Giuliano was killed. The failed assassination led to war with the Papacy and was used as justification to further centralise power in Lorenzo's hands.

The Renaissance or Rebirth

The Renaissance, according to the Swiss scholar Jacob Burckhardt, writing in 1860, was a new and distinct age in the history of human culture. As a cultural movement, it profoundly affected European intellectual life in the early modern period, and was deeply influenced by the ancient Greeks and Romans. Beginning in Italy with Florence as its hub, and spreading to the rest of Europe by the 16th Century, its influence was felt in literature, philosophy,



Lorenzo de' Medici.

art, music, politics, science, religion and other aspects of intellectual inquiry. Renaissance scholars employed the humanist² method in study, and searched for realism and human emotion in art.

Renaissance humanists such as Gian Francesco Poggio Bracciolini, best known simply as Poggio Bracciolini (1380-1459), sought out in Europe's monastic libraries the Latin literary, historical and oratorical texts of antiquity. The fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453, thereby ending the real Roman Empire, generated a wave of émigré Greek scholars westwards, bringing precious manuscripts with them in ancient Greek, many of which had fallen into obscurity in the West. It is in their new focus

on literary and historical texts that Renaissance scholars differed so markedly from the medieval scholars of the Renaissance of the 12th Century who had focused on studying Greek and Arabic works of natural sciences, philosophy and mathematics, rather than cultural texts.

In the revival of Neoplatonism, Renaissance humanists did not reject Christianity; quite the opposite, many of the Renaissance's greatest works were devoted to it, and the Church patronised many Renaissance works of art. However, a subtle shift took place in the way scholars approached religion, and this was reflected in many other areas of cultural life. In addition, many Greek Christian works, including the Greek New Testament, were brought back from Byzantium to Western Europe and engaged Western scholars for the first time since late antiquity. This new engagement with Greek Christian works, and particularly the return to the original Greek of the New





The Three Graces as part of Botticelli's painting Primavera (Spring).

Testament, was promoted by humanists Lorenzo Valla (1407-1457) who proved that the *Donation of Constantin*³ was a forgery, and the Dutch humanist and theologian Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus (1466 – 1536), known as Erasmus of Rotterdam, or simply Erasmus. And this paved the way for the Protestant Reformation.

Well after the first artistic return to classicism had been exemplified in the sculpture of Nicola Pisano (1220/5 – 1284) the Italian sculptor whose work is noted for its classical Roman sculptural style and who is sometimes considered to be the founder of modern sculpture, Florentine painters led by Masaccio (1401-1428, born Tommaso di Ser Giovanni di Simone) strove to portray the human form realistically, developing techniques to render perspective and light more naturally. Political philosophers, most famously Niccolò Machiavelli (1469 – 1527), sought to describe political life as it really was, to understand it rationally.

A critical contribution to Italian Renaissance humanism Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) wrote the famous text "*De hominis dignitate*" (*Oration on the Dignity of Man*, 1486), which consists of a series of theses on philosophy, natural thought, faith and magic defended against any opponent on the grounds of reason. In addition to studying classical Latin and Greek, Renaissance authors also began increasingly to use

vernacular languages. Combined with the introduction of printing, this led to many more people gaining access to books, though in the case of partial editions of the New Testament in the vernacular, this occurred only in secret and with great opposition from the church which stood to lose a great deal of authority if 'ordinary folk' were to gain direct access to their most sacred holy scripture.

Marsilio Ficino

Marsilio Ficino⁴ was born at Figline in the Val d'Arno on 19 October 1433, a day and a half's horse ride from Florence. His father, Diotifeci, was a doctor consulted by Cosimo de' Medici. Of his mother, Alessandra, we know little except that she was much respected by Ficino and appears to have had the gift of 'second sight.' She lived to an advanced age, dying only a year or so before Ficino. In later life Ficino lived with and cared for both his parents.

Little is known about his education except the names of his early teachers and that he studied under the Aristotelian, Niccolò Tignosi, at the University of Florence. It is not certain when Ficino first became attracted to the writings of Plato. But since Cosimo de' Medici had had an enthusiastic interest in Plato, at least since 1439, and Ficino writes that he had discussed philosophy fruitfully with Cosimo for more than twelve





Marsilio Ficino in later life.

years, it must have been at least since 1452. Late in learning Greek, he had at first to rely on Latin authors, and the few dialogues of Plato available in Latin. His first work the *Platonic Institutions* (1456 but now lost) was based on these sources, though after reading it, Cosimo told him not to publish anything until he could read the original Greek text.

By 1462 he was already producing his first Latin translations of Greek authors, which included the *Hymns of Orpheus* and the *Sayings of Zoroaster*. The following year he completed a translation of the Hermetic writings, which subsequently became his most frequently published work. He then resumed the translation of Plato's dialogues, which he finished by 1469. He was afflicted with illness and deep melancholy in 1468 and was then advised by his "unique friend" Giovanni Cavalcanti to cure himself by writing a dialogue on love. *De Amore* became his commentary on Plato's *Symposium*. In this work he explains how creation is brought into being, sustained and again gathered to its source through the flow of love. This movement was illustrated by the role of the *Graces* in Renaissance art.

In 1469 Ficino began *The Platonic Theology or The Immortality of Souls*. This became his major life's work. It extended to 18 books and occupied him for the next five years. In proving the immortality of the soul he showed

the single source and unity of two fundamental elements in the life of Western civilisation; Judeo-Christian religion and Greek philosophy.

Ficino became a priest in 1473, and in the same year started writing *The Christian Religion*. This work emphasises, in addition to the divinity of Man's soul, the personal relationship between Man and God. Numerous short treatises followed *The Christian Religion*. From about 1484 to 1492 he was engaged in translating and commenting upon the philosopher Plotinus (204-270 CE), and his successors, Porphyry and Proclus. In 1489 he published the medical and astrological work *The Three Books on Life*, and in 1492 he completed his translation of *Dionysius*. Ficino had his letters published in 1495. In 1496 his commentaries on Plato were printed and in 1497 his translation of Iamblichus; his last extant work is an unfinished commentary on St. Paul's *Epistle to the Romans*.

Ficino's early 16th Century biographer describes his appearance and character: "He was short in stature, slim, and slightly hunched in both shoulders. He was a little hesitant in speech, and stammered in pronouncing the letter 'S.' On the other hand he was not without grace; his legs, arms and hands being well proportioned. The set of his countenance gave him a mild and gracious appearance. He was ruddy in complexion and his wavy golden hair curled high over his forehead."

Ficino's health seems to have been generally poor, although it improved after he turned 45. His biographer says that although Ficino was good company, he was melancholy when alone. In temperament, "...he was mild, although when moved by bile he sometimes broke out into swift anger which like a lightning flash quickly disappeared. He readily forgot an injury. He was never forgetful of his own duties. He was not at all inclined to sensual passion, but he was rapt in love, just like Socrates, and used to converse and debate with the young about love in the Socratic manner. Throughout his life he was content to have few clothes and household possessions. He had fine but not extravagant taste, for all indulgence was fundamentally foreign to him. He attended carefully to the necessities of life; although sparing with food, he obtained the most excellent wines."

To Ficino, discipline was essential to the spiritual life. Following the example of Pythagoras, he was a vegetarian who encouraged his followers not to eat cooked food, and throughout the year to rise with the sun, or an hour or two earlier. He led a life of abstinence and chastity, the importance of which he explained in a long letter in Book VIII. Yet although he believed in discipline, his mind soared beyond dogma. There could be many roads to the source even though the Christian one was the best. He writes in *The Christian Religion*: "Divine Providence





Zachariah in the Temple (detail), a fresco by Domenico Ghirlandaio (1486–1490) in the Tornabuoni Chapel, Florence, showing (L-R): Marsilio Ficino, Cristoforo Landino, Angelo Poliziano and Gentile de' Becchi or Demetrios Chalkondyles.

does not permit any part of the world at any time to be completely without religion, although it does allow rites to differ. Perhaps variety of this kind is intended..., God prefers to be worshipped in any manner, however unwittingly..., than not to be worshipped at all through pride.”

His Influence

Ficino brought a deep and lasting change to European society. From him and his Platonic Academy the Renaissance drew its most potent intellectual and spiritual inspiration. For Ficino the writings of Plato and his followers contained the key to the most important knowledge for Man: knowledge of himself, namely, knowledge of the divine and immortal principle within him. Not only does this knowledge appear from his letters to have been actual experience for Ficino, but he possessed the ability to make faith in this principle a living ideal for his age.

It is probable that in his 66 years he never set foot outside the territory of Florence and the record of his life is little more than the chronicle of his books. And yet, associated with his Academy and under his immediate influence was the most conspicuously brilliant group of men ever to have assembled in modern Europe. These were scholars who embodied the Renaissance: Lorenzo de' Medici, Leon Battista Alberti, Angelo Poliziano, Cristoforo Landino, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. Directly inspired by Ficino were the great Renaissance artists, Sandro Botticelli, Michelangelo, Raphael, Titian, Dürer, and many others. It has been said that the whole intellectual life of Florence in his time was under Ficino's influence.

It is hard to capture or define the elusive quality of

the spirit that not only bound so many great minds in Florence to Ficino, but attracted to him both in person and by correspondence leading statesmen, scholars and churchmen from all over Europe. Indeed the site of Ficino's Platonic Academy at Villa Careggi, among the gentle hills of Tuscany, became a place of pilgrimage both during his life and after his death. Ficino's letters provide four main clues:

1. The love he extended to all who approached him.
2. The wisdom which enabled him to see so clearly into the nature of his correspondents, and to touch on those points which could lead them to make the best use of their talents.
3. He seemed to understand clearly how the various activities of his correspondents related to the divine principle in Man and also to their function in the State.
4. His letters have such a quality of timelessness, that he seems to be speaking to us as clearly today as he spoke to his contemporaries in 15th Century Florence. Almost absent from them are accounts of the disappointments and satisfactions resulting from physical events, which render most letters out of date immediately they have been written.

Ficino was a true man of the spirit. Largely independent of the blows of fortune and misfortune upon the body, he imparted tranquillity and strength, like his own, to those who listened to him. For instance, a meeting of writers who were assembled to discuss a crusade against the Turks had become deeply depressed by the apparently invincible Turkish threat to Europe. Ficino, it is related, picked up his lyre and through his music immediately brought back to the company its confidence and strength. He seemed to understand the principles of every art and to embody in himself the Renaissance ideal of the 'complete Man.' Although primarily a philosopher, he was also a scholar, doctor, musician, priest and healer of souls. As a scholar, apart from his own original works, he translated into Latin as many of Plato's writings as he could obtain, and many of the classical writings in the same tradition. This he did with amazing speed and so well that his translations remained the standard editions until those published in national languages in the 19th Century.

As a doctor his skill was such that many, including



the Medici, called upon his services before any others. As a musician his main object was to arouse devotion, and in this his contemporaries recognised him as extraordinarily effective. Singing his Orphic Hymns to the lyre, Ficino enthralled Bishop Campano who was travelling through Florence. In a letter, Campano says it was “...as if curly-headed Apollo took up the lyre of Marsilio and fell victim to his own song. Frenzy arises, his eyes catch fire, and he discovers music which he never learnt.”

Not long after becoming a priest in 1473 he was appointed a Canon of Florence Cathedral. The priesthood was to him the highest function of all. When he gave sermons in the Cathedral, people flocked to hear him speak and were delighted especially by his sermons on the gospels. He was not afraid to write to the leaders of religious Orders and once to the Pope himself, urging them to fulfil their responsibilities at a time when corruption in the church was commonplace. He also wrote to men from a number of other disciplines, among them lawyers and rhetoricians. He wrote so authoritatively because he related all activity to the central aim of Man: *to return to his divine source.*

It is not surprising that even in Florence, the centre of so many men of genius, Ficino should have been selected as tutor to Lorenzo de’ Medici, who became the effective ruler of Florence in 1469 in succession to his father, Piero, and grandfather, Cosimo. Lorenzo was a man of versatility, an outstanding statesman and Italian poet of his day, and he was a life-long friend of Ficino. He also remained devoted to the Academy and Platonic philosophy, which he practised as a statesman and celebrated as a poet.

The meetings at the Academy must have been the main means by which Ficino taught philosophy to its illustrious members. Wealthy though they were, the 131 letters Ficino wrote, many to bare acquaintances, can only give a faint reflection of the discussions that must have taken place within its walls. They were a spiritual community bound together by a common bond of love to each other and to Ficino. He was their centre and they were the centre of the Renaissance

The Villa Careggi

“Shrouded in early morning mist, a stately cypress stands guard where medieval towns and solitary castles float on hilltops in a sea of wildflowers.”

Villa Careggi was among a number of Medici patrician villas. Bought by the Medici family in 1417, the villa, set among the gentle hills of Tuscany, was inherited following the death of Giovanni di Bicci dei Medici by his son



Statue of Lorenzo the Magnificent in the Uffizi.

Cosimo, who commissioned the architect Michelozzo di Bartolomeo Michelozzi (1396–1472) to renovate the property. A great deal of work was done.

The focus of the renovation was the loggia-enclosed trapezoid central courtyard. Michelozzo also created the loggias on the upper floors, opening the building up to the garden and surrounding countryside. The collaboration between Cosimo as client and Michelozzo as architect was fuelled by a common cultural milieu inspired by humanism and an aspiration for simplicity, a distinguishing trait in both men as Cosimo never flaunted his riches.

When Cosimo took the decision to allow the Platonic Academy to meet in the villa, several rooms were added for their meetings. They also made use of the covered walkways and corridors inside the building, rather in the manner of the original Plato Academy. We also know that they made extensive use of the gardens and held a special ceremony there on Plato’s birthday.



When Cosimo died, at Careggi itself in 1464, and his son followed him to the grave just five years later, Lorenzo the Magnificent became the head of the Medici family. It was to this villa, by then referred to as a palace, that Lorenzo brought his friends, members of the Platonic Academy, and here that he spent the last years of his life, until his own death in 1492. Marsilio Ficino died at the villa in 1499.

There is a letter written by the Duke of Milan Galeazzo Maria Sforza (1444-1476) who visited Careggi in 1459: *"I went to Careggi, the most beautiful palace belonging to Cosimo, and was shown all over the place, and was no less delighted with the gardens, which are altogether enchanting, than with the noble building."* Surviving descriptions of the garden as it was in the time of Lorenzo speak of vegetation composed of myrtles, olives, oaks, poplars, pines, plane trees, citrus trees and such exotic spices as frankincense and myrrh. The description suggests that the garden was in two parts, one for the cultivation of flowers and fruit and another 'wilder' part. After Lorenzo's death, the villa gradually began to fall into a state of disrepair.

The Platonic Academy

Cosimo de' Medici had decided in 1439 to establish the *Accademia neoplatonica*, usually referred to today as the *Platonic Academy* (despite its 'neoplatonic' name). He was moved to this decision by the arrival in Italy of George Gemistos Plethon, who had come with the Byzantine Emperor and Patriarch to discuss at the Council of Florence a proposed union of the Greek and Roman Churches. Plethon was so steeped in the philosophy of Plato that he seemed to contemporaries like another embodiment of the great philosopher. However, it was not until 1462 that Cosimo gave Ficino the Medici villa at Careggi, which became the headquarters of the Academy. It was situated on the southern slopes of Montecchie.

Ficino's Academy awakened Europe to the deep significance of the Platonic (and Neoplatonic) tradition. His letters to eminent correspondents all over the continent contributed directly to this awakening. They included John Colet (1467-1519, Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral and founder of St. Paul's School) in England. In his writings, Colet refers to the Italian humanists and Neoplatonists Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. He wrote to the humanist Johannes Reuchlin (1455-1522) in Germany (about the meaning of the Orphic hymns). King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary (1443-1490) whose royal library, the *Bibliotheca Corviniana*, was one of the largest collections of books in Europe and with whose patronage, Hungary became the first country to embrace the Renaissance from Italy, invited Ficino to his court to give personal instruction

in Platonic philosophy. It was an appointment that he politely declined but a function of which he filled through his follower, Francesco Bandini, who resided with the King for several years.

Ficino was not the first to revive the study of Plato and his followers. This had developed with the rediscovery of antiquity, which had begun at the time of Dante (13th Century) or earlier, and had increased in scope and depth with the growing knowledge of Greek and the accumulation of new classical manuscripts. He was not the first to show that Judaism and Greek philosophy had a single source, stretching back as he saw it to Moses, Zoroaster and Hermes Trismegistus, the sage of Ancient Egypt. But more than anyone else he established the equal authority of these two strands of European tradition, convincing his contemporaries that lawful philosophy is no different from true religion, and lawful religion no different from true philosophy. The most eloquent monument to his influence is the floor mosaic of Hermes Trismegistus in Siena Cathedral.

It was Ficino more than anyone else who took from Plato, Plotinus and the Hermetic writings the concept that part of the individual soul was immortal and divine, a fundamental concept of the Renaissance. For, from this, it followed that the soul had power *"...to become all things..."* and that Man could *"...create the heavens and what is in them himself, if he could obtain the tools and the heavenly material."*

In a sense this became the philosophy of the age, for in the century or so following Ficino's birth, more progress was made in the arts and sciences than in the



Floor Mosaic of Hermes Trismegistus in Siena Cathedral.





The Villa Careggi, site of the Platonic Academy.

previous millennium, while the voyages of discovery to America, to Southern Africa and the East mirrored the inward achievements in art and literature. Already Europe was on the threshold of the scientific age.

Ficino's belief in the immortality of the soul was particularly important in the revival of European religious belief during the next century. In the Middle Ages the doctrine had been neglected by Christian theologians, and it was through Ficino that it again became central to Christian thought. He showed every sign of carrying in his words the convictions of deep personal experience in the contemplations he described in his writing. A study of contemporary documents shows what a frequent subject for reflection the immortality of the soul became, and by decree of the Lateran Council in 1512 it was made for the first time part of the dogma of the Catholic Church. This emphasis on the individual soul led easily to the devotional step of a 'personal relationship' with God which became

A knowledge of ancient literature and history became the unquestioned basis of education in the West and remained so until very recently.

so characteristic of the reformers both within and outside the Catholic Church.

For Ficino the immortality and divinity of the soul was the basis of the dignity of Man, which the artists and writers of the Renaissance sought to express in countless ways. In time the expression of this ideal touched every aspect of life. Throughout Europe elegance became the object of riches. As the nobility moved out of their castles, they moved into houses that began to express the grace, proportion and light of the Renaissance. The forbidding towers and narrow streets which dominated many mediaeval Italian towns gave way to spaciousness and order.

The dignity of Man was not only reflected in architecture and art but had to be expressed in every field

of human activity. A new ideal for Man was set, the first and best model for which was Ficino's pupil, Lorenzo de' Medici. Noble, magnanimous, courageous, completely trustworthy, he could turn from war and affairs of state to philosophy, scholarship, poetry, music or art, and excel in them all. Equally at ease with his peers as he was with his people, his authority sprang from his nature, not his position.

The courtier who was successful without effort and impressive without ostentation, both in the arts and the traditional pursuits of war and hunting, was a marked contrast to the more limited noble of an earlier age. The new courtier became a model no longer confined to the noble classes. This was the character that for centuries English public schools endeavoured to build and it became almost the definition of a gentleman all over Europe. It required a more generous education than the somewhat restricted view of the seven liberal arts current in the Middle Ages. A knowledge of ancient literature and history became the unquestioned basis of education in the West and remained so until very recently.

The original impulse of the Renaissance, that the glory of Man should be reflected in all his activities, became in time a movement of general refinement, which lasted for centuries, affecting the taste and manners of the entire population of Europe. The improvement in manners meant more than learning to use a fork or how to make polite conversation. It was the adoption of a code of conduct by which consideration for others became a custom of society. In origin it was the reflection of 'Man's dignity' in his social behaviour.

The Platonic Academy, led by Marsilio Ficino was supported by the Medici family until the death of Lorenzo de Medici. It was never a formal group but the members considered themselves a modern form of Plato's Academy. Important members were Poliziano (Angelo Ambrogini), Cristoforo Landino, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, and Gentile de' Becchi. The academy would proceed to



translate into Latin all of Plato's works, the Enneads of Plotinus, and various other Neoplatonic works.

We can look into the mind of Ficino by reading his letters where find his definition of God: "God is not soul; God does not have sense or imagination, opinion, reason or intelligence. God is not intellect, not intelligence. God is neither spoken nor understood. God is not number, not order, not greatness, not smallness, not equality, not similarity, not dissimilarity. God does not stay, does not move, does not seek rest. He does not have power, nor is he power or light, life or essence, eternity or time, intelligible self-awareness or knowledge. He has no speech, no name, no consciousness, no shadows, no light, no untruth, no truth. He is the totally perfect cause of all things. He is the perfection of the one who is absolutely detached from everything and higher than all."

Pico della Mirandola became the first Christian scholar to master the Jewish mystical theology of the Kabbalah. He attempted to develop a form of syncretism whereby different systems of thought could be harmonised, based on shared elements of truth. He asserted that although Platonism and Christianity differed on some issues, they held common views on others. An important aspect of Pico's philosophical thought was his defence of the dignity and liberty of the human being, set forth in "On the Dignity of Man" (1486). Ficino also declared "...wake up yourself! Oh! You are God who took human figure." Both philosophers resurrected the humanistic views of ancient Greece, though the humanism of the Renaissance was more individualistic than the humanism of ancient Greece.

Some scholars have suggested that the Academy's seat at the Villa Careggi was largely symbolic; a symbol of the contemplative life removed from the affairs of the world. It appears that Ficino may simply have had a studio at the

villa and enjoyed the profits from the farm. He also had a house in the heart of Florence in the *Via Sant'Egidio*. His lectures on Plato were given in Florence mostly at the church of *Santa Maria degli Angeli*. It seems that Ficino wrote to Lorenzo in 1474 that he should take care of his health, for without Lorenzo neither his country nor the Academy could prosper. In this he was prophetic, for shortly after Lorenzo's death (1492) and the expulsion of his son Piero, the activities of the Academy were greatly reduced, although it continued into the 16th Century.

Notes

1. The Signoria was the government of Medieval and Renaissance Florence. Its nine members, the *Priori*, were chosen from the ranks of the guilds of the city: six of them from the major guilds, and two from the minor guilds. The ninth became the *Gonfaloniere of Justice*. Immediately after they were elected, the nine were expected to move into the *Palazzo della Signoria*, where they would remain for the two months of their office.
2. Humanism is a philosophical and ethical stance that emphasises the value and agency of human beings, individually and collectively, and generally prefers critical thinking and evidence (rationalism, empiricism) over established doctrine or faith (fideism). The meaning of the term humanism has fluctuated, according to the successive intellectual movements which have identified with it. Generally, however, humanism refers to a perspective that affirms some notion of a "human nature" (sometimes contrasted with antihumanism). In modern times, humanist movements are typically aligned with secularism, and today "Humanism" typically refers to a non-theistic life stance centred on human agency, and looking to science instead of religious dogma in order to understand the world.
3. The Donation of Constantine (Latin, *Donatio Constantini*) is a forged Roman imperial decree by which the Roman Emperor Constantine I supposedly transferred authority over Rome and the western part of the Roman Empire to the Pope. Composed probably in the 8th Century, it was used, especially in the 13th Century, in support of claims of political authority by the papacy.
4. *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, Volume 1, 1975 Fellowship of the School of Economic Science, London.

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Celebration of Plato's birthday at the Medici villa in Careggi, 7 Nov. 1474; among the guest Pico della Mirandola, Leon Battista and Piero de Medici). Painting, 1862, by Luigi Mussini (1813-1888).



Josiah Wedgwood

by Trevor Holloway

J. Wedgwood



MOST PEOPLE probably think of Josiah Wedgwood as a master potter, a genius unsurpassed in shaping lifeless clay into objects of exquisite beauty and great utility.

But Josiah was more than a ceramics genius. He was a highly respected scientist, a great philanthropist, a social and industrial reformer, and a beloved employer ever concerned for the welfare of his workers. In the words of the 19th Century British Prime Minister, William Gladstone: *“He was the greatest man who ever, in any age or in any country, applied himself to the important work of uniting art with industry.”*





Wedgewood is best known for his blue Jasper ornamented with white designs.

Josiah was born in Burslem, in the “Potteries” area of Staffordshire, the 13th and youngest child of Thomas and Mary Wedgwood of the Churchyard Pottery. The actual date of his birth is unknown, but his christening on 12 July 1730, is entered in the Burslem Parish Church register. The Wedgwood family had been potters since the time of Shakespeare, when Gilbert Wedgwood (1588-1678) set up his “pot bank” in Burslem, a district rich in the clays then used for pottery making. But Josiah was mainly responsible for making the name of Wedgwood a household word and for revolutionising the potter’s art.

Two factors related to his boyhood were destined to exert a powerful influence on his future career. As a child he was keenly interested in fossils, shells and other curiosities, and was fascinated by nature, particularly its manifold and beautiful patterns and colours. The second major influence was that at the age of 14 he survived an attack of smallpox which affected the rest of his life. The disease affected his right leg, which years later had to be amputated. As a potter’s wheel in those days was turned by kicking with the right foot, Josiah could no longer use this technique.

For years afterwards he was subject to illnesses arising out of his disability, but he turned these periods of immobility to good account by concentrating on experiments and other work, particularly in matters of research and design. This store of knowledge enabled him to raise his standard of craftsmanship far above that of his contemporaries. Up to the early 18th Century only the wealthy possessed dinner or tea sets, and these were usually made of gold, silver or imported Oriental porcelain. Most other people used *trenchers* made of wood or a crude form of pottery.

Josiah changed all this. Although today he is best known for his blue Jasper ornamented with white designs based on classical themes, his great success was largely due to the production of useful wares such as plates, cups, saucers and dishes cheap enough to be bought by all except the very poorest of society. In this regard, he truly changed the world for the better.

After working with the family firm and other partners, Josiah set up his own business in Burslem in 1759, at the age of 29. For an outlay of £10 a year he rented two kilns, some sheds, workrooms and a small cottage. He was a perfectionist from the outset. In the design of his “useful” wares he ensured that spouts poured well, that lids fitted, and that handles were comfortable to hold. Furthermore, no new piece went into production until his wife Sarah had made exhaustive actual use trials in her own kitchen and approved the design. His wares were however not only practical to use, they were beautifully made.

It is said that Josiah made a series of over 10,000 experiments before perfecting his now famous Jasper, a stoneware similar in many ways to porcelain. It was from Jasper that he made the first satisfactory copy of the priceless Portland Vase which Joshua Reynolds declared to be a perfect imitation of the original. When the original was smashed by a madman in 1845, Wedgewood’s copy was used as a guide to its restoration.

It is interesting to record that while searching for the best materials for his Jasper, Wedgwood went so far as to send an expert to the American colonies in order to obtain samples of a particularly fine clay said to be used by the Cherokee Indians in making their clay pipes. Today a marker is placed at Franklin, North Carolina, near the pit from which the clay was obtained.

The second major influence was that at the age of 14 he survived an attack of smallpox which affected the rest of his life.

Josiah was far ahead of his day in methods of promotion and marketing, and before long his wares were being ordered from many parts of the world. In 1765, Queen Charlotte ordered a tea service from Wedgwood, and was so delighted with it that Josiah was granted permission to style himself “Potter to Her Majesty” and to name his ware “Queen’s Ware”, as it is known to this day. One of his proudest achievements was the execution of an order from the Empress Catherine of Russia in 1774 for a complete dinner and dessert service of 952 pieces, decorated with 1244 views of British castles, abbeys and famous houses, all hand-painted. A large corps of artists travelled the countryside, making the necessary sketches





The Wedgwood factory Etruria

before bringing them back to his workshop to be crafted onto the wares.

By 1766 Wedgwood had prospered sufficiently to purchase for £3,000 the Ridge House Estate, between Hanley and Newcastle-under-Lyme. There he built himself a house and a new factory of revolutionary design. He named the factory Etruria, after the ancient Italian province of Italy whose pottery and artistic achievements were just being rediscovered. Production continued at the Etruria works until 1950, when it was transferred to new works on a 500 acre estate near the village of Bralaston.

Artist and Scientist

Wedgwood introduced a wide range of apparatuses in ceramics for use by chemists, druggists, apothecaries and surgeons. In this field his greatest achievement was the production of the first stoneware mortar and pestle. There had been growing concern at the use of metal mortars with their possible dangers of contamination and fragmented metal. Wedgwood was invited to try to produce a ceramic mortar that would withstand abrasion and resist absorption of chemical substances. It took him six months of intensive experimentation before he perfected a stoneware version that met all requirements, and soon he received urgent orders from many parts of the world.



Wedgwoods ceramic mortar

Another of his scientific achievements was the invention of the pyrometer, an instrument for measuring extreme heat in furnaces and kilns. He contributed time and money freely to causes in which he believed, and his energy was a vital factor in the completion of the Trent-Mersey Canal, which vitally reduced transport costs by 75%. His championship of the cause of freedom everywhere led him to design a special Jasper medallion showing a slave in chains and inscribed "*Am I not a man and a brother?*" later adopted as the seal of Slave Emancipation Society.

Josiah gave unstinting approval to the French Revolution, writing: "*I know you will rejoice with me in the glorious revolution which has taken place in France.*" He also approved of the American War of Independence, writing "*I bless my stars and Lord North that America is free.*" And he reflected his liberal views in the treatment of his employees as well. Josiah was loved and respected by his employees, and their welfare was his constant concern. To work for Josiah was both an honour and a pleasure, for he was not only the "Father of English Potters", but the father to his work-force family as well.

If ever a man used his talents aright it was surely this dedicated seeker of perfection. He strove for the best in art and industry, but especially as a promoter of the fraternal bonds that unite people everywhere.



Portland Vase





A



B



C



D



E



F



G



H

- A. The first Wedgwood Museum opened on 7 May 1906 at the Etruria Works. The museum's first curator was Isaac Cook who was succeeded in the role by his son, John Cook.
- B. Since 1940, at the Wedgwood factory at Barlaston in England, modern technology combines with the ancient skills of throwing, modelling and decorating.
- C. Wedgwood's enduring appeal among the world's royal families and heads of state began with Queen Charlotte, who ordered a set of cream-coloured earthenware that pleased her so much that Josiah Wedgwood was granted permission to style himself "Potter to Her Majesty" and call his innovative cream ware "Queen's Ware."
- D. Throughout its history, Wedgwood has collaborated with the most famous artists of the day.
- E. Wedgwood today exports all over the world, with a commitment to creating premium, desirable and distinctively English home and lifestyle products to delight consumers, a fitting tribute to the memory of its founder.
- F. Wedgwood museum.
- G. Throwing pots in the Wedgwood Museum.
- H. Jasper, the most famous of Josiah's inventions, first appeared in 1774 after thousands of experiments. It was made in blue, green, lilac, yellow, black or white; sometimes one piece combined three or more of these colours.

Today, the Wedgwood collections are designed in England by the Wedgwood Design Studio.





Refinement of the Human Spirit

by Connie James

ARE YOU AWARE of the scope of your consciousness? Do you think there is a possibility that there could be more of you in the world than you realise? Is there some kind of mystical bond between us and all other things in nature? I'll discuss this idea in the hope of revealing something of the sophistication and refinement of the human spirit when allowed to blossom, something that often goes unnoticed.

It has been said that we experience two universes, one inside, the other outside of our being. The inner one, referred to by Plato as the microcosm, is the most intimate part of us, yet unbelievably entirely unknown to most people, even many who consider themselves seekers of spiritual revelation and who believe they know all the 'theory' behind spiritual revelation. The outer universe,

the one which enters our being through our receptor senses, is one we think we know well. But it has in fact to a large extent been entirely hidden from us by a dense wall of unnecessary and superfluous words, descriptions and irrational intellectual models built up through the centuries, and torn down at regular intervals and then re-built into new, improved, more inclusive forms. At no point have we known it all, and our understanding of this 'world on the outside' constantly changes.

We have carefully affixed labels to everything around us from the vascular system of a starfish to the twilight region between night and day that races around the globe at 1,000 miles per hour with definite biological effects on the living organisms it overshadows. But in broad terms, although we have the ability to manipulate the labels into



neat categories and ordered systems of hierarchy, how much real understanding do we possess, even after centuries of refinement of our understanding? What deeper meaning lies behind all this magnificence? Indeed does there even exist a meaning in any objective sense? What interaction, what connection is there between all these physical 'things'?

In simpler times we interacted and communicated with nature with far less true understanding of what is going on than we do today. But I'm convinced we were as happy with our world-views then as we are with our most modern scientific world-views today. What is paramount always is the satisfaction that our explanations of physical reality give us as to the veracity of our beliefs and our interpretations of physical reality.

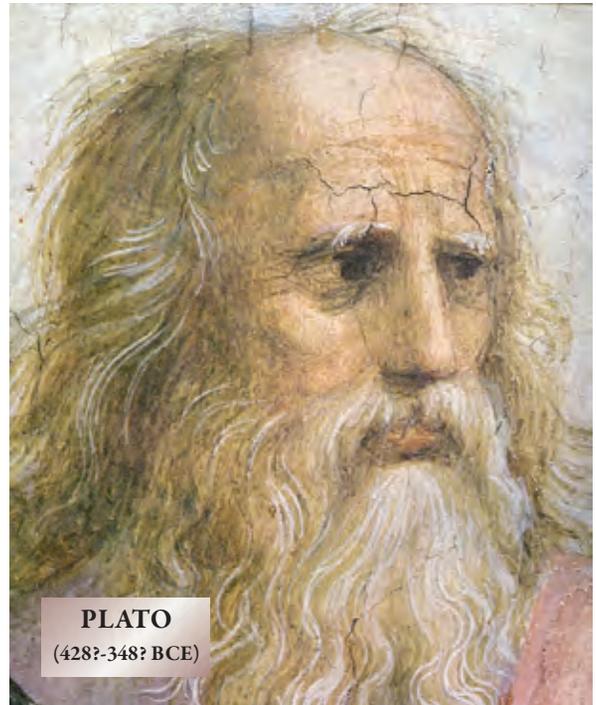
Sir Julian Huxley wrote of "...*Man's vast untapped possibilities.*" Among these, psychic powers are perhaps foremost among the powers that have already been proven to exist but for which science has few answers. That is not the same as saying that all science rejects the occurrence of psychic phenomena, merely that it has no better way of explaining it than we do. The potential power of humans to sometimes find ways beyond all reasonable odds to succeed is remarkable. A young man is today elevated from riding a bicycle to driving a car..., a big initiation. But years later he is initiated again when he flies a plane by himself for the first time. And then he experiences another initiation as he blasts into space to do groundbreaking research in near orbit around the Earth. These are outer developments, clear to see and quite attainable by almost everyone.

But what of the development of the human inner, metaphysical and intuitive powers? In this regard I would like to briefly mention a few great men taken at random, who faced physical obstacles in their lives and overcame them, yet also became aware of much deeper inner attributes in the human consciousness which left imprints in their consciousness like footprints in the sand saying "*Follow me and I'll show you the most precious thing in the universe.*" Now who could turn down an offer like that? Their thoughts have for centuries served as keys for others to use in opening previously closed doors of perception and understanding. So, here are a few of my favourites.

Plato

Plato is not the earliest Greek philosopher we should be looking at, though an arbitrary and earliest point in time for our enquiry does need to be established, and it may as well be with Plato, disciple of the great Socrates and who had as his foremost pupil Aristotle.

There is far more to these three philosophers than words alone can say, and the number of books and online articles on them is legion. Read them, for they form the very



foundation of all Western thought, even the attitudes and moral values we hold today. As a contemporary philosopher once said: "*European [thought] consists of nothing more than a series of footnotes to Plato.*" Here now follow are a few words from this old master philosopher:-

"Truth is its own reward."

"The first and the best victory is to conquer self."

"He who commits injustice is ever made more wretched than he who suffers it."

"The penalty good men pay for indifference to public affairs is to be ruled by evil men."

"Wise men talk because they have something to say; fools, because they have to say something."

"We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark; the real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light."

Marcus Aurelius

Probably the greatest of all Roman Emperors was the Stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius (121-180 CE) who ruled at the pinnacle of Roman cultural sophistication. There are many earlier, more well known and documented philosophers who outshine in literary excellence this



warrior who spent most of his time as emperor engaged in interminable battles to keep the Roman empire from falling apart. But Marcus Aurelius appeals to us through his humility and simplicity of life, despite his immense power as Imperator of the world's greatest empire.

Stoicism was originally derived from Middle Eastern wisdom and was established about 300 years before the life of Christ. It is deep, extremely so, and influenced early Christianity through its high sense of moral rectitude. Stoic theory held that the creative source of all being and within all things, was "Mind." The term "*Fire Mind*" was often used in this regard, for the creative source of 'fire', or the Vital Life Force as Rosicrucians term it, was an omnipresent force throughout the universe. Humans manifesting the highest form of this 'fire' belonged to a single universal brother and sisterhood of both perception and understanding, and brought to the world the great spiritual leaders and founders of religions. With ever expanding consciousness, this 'fire' acts as a sort of inquisitor or interrogator seeking out the truth in all matters, even the sometimes dark truths about our own blemished lives.

Marcus Aurelius described the world order of Stoicism as a unity made up of multiplicity: "*...all being is one, all law is one and all truth is one.*" How modern and inclusive such a statement is! All people had within themselves, he said, something higher and more godlike than "*...mere instincts*



Marcus Aurelius
(121-180 CE)

which move your emotions and twitch you like a puppet." He admonished himself to seek to know to what use he was putting the powers of his soul and asked himself: "*...how stands it with that part of me that men call the master...?*" There can be no doubt that Marcus Aurelius caught a glimpse of the deeper side of human nature and found as well his true place in the universe.

All people, he said, could 'borrow' some of the power of this Mind force as easily as they breathed the air which was free for all living beings to partake of. And he urged his readers to try and see the refinement of their deeper selves before it was too late and their lives were nearing the end. Having said that, he wrote not for an audience but for himself. His only "book", a collection of personal admonishments and reflections, was appropriately titled "*To Myself*", though in its modern form it is called "*The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius.*" And what simple beauty lies in his incisive observations. Here are a few samples:-

"He who lives in harmony with himself, lives in harmony with the universe."

"Your life is what your thoughts make it."

"Remember that very little is needed to make a happy life."

"It is not death that a man should fear, but he should fear never beginning to live."

"How much more grievous are the consequences of anger than the causes of it."

"Reject your sense of injury and the injury itself disappears."

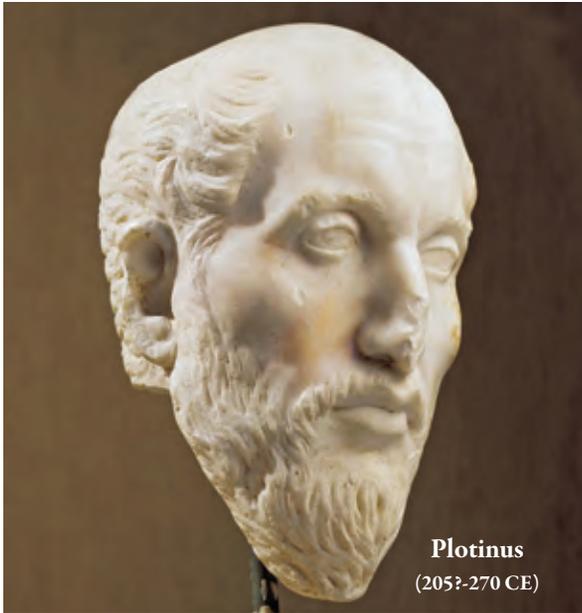
"Accept the things to which fate binds you, and love the people with whom fate brings you together; but do so with all your heart."

Plotinus

A little less than a century after Aurelius, Plotinus, (205?-270 CE) reached a spiritual height of consciousness seldom reached in human history. Although not widely read today, he realised the extent of his potentiality to such a degree as to achieve not only once but several times what he described as the soul's mystical return to the One. He was not a Christian, yet both the moral theology and cosmological basis of the Christian church right up to the late Middle Ages were profoundly influenced by this 'pagan' philosopher.

He said that while we can't *know* the One which





Plotinus
(205?-270 CE)

is beyond thought itself, we can possess it or become conscious of it. At the highest level of the soul, we enter the world of Mind. The philosophy of Plotinus is given in his one great work, the *Enneads*, which stands as a testament to his immense mental range.

“...some enter into life as fragments of the One, bound to that which is external to themselves: they are victims of a sort of fascination, and are hardly, or not at all, themselves: but others mastering all this..., straining, so to speak, by the head towards the Higher, to what is outside even the Soul..., reserve still the nobility and the ancient privilege of the Soul’s essential being.” -- from The Enneads.

One report lists Plotinus’ place of birth as Lycopolis in the Nile Delta, which has led to speculation that he may have been a native Egyptian of Roman, Greek, or Hellenised Egyptian descent. He took up the study of philosophy at the age of 27, around the year 232 CE, and travelled to Alexandria to study. He was however dissatisfied with every teacher he encountered until an acquaintance suggested he listen to the ideas of Ammonius Saccas. Upon hearing Ammonius lecture, he declared to his friend, *“this was the man I was looking for”*, and began studying intently under his tutelage.

Later in life, Plotinus began teaching in his own right. He taught there is a supreme, totally transcendent *“One”*, containing no division, multiplicity or distinction, beyond all categories of being and non-being. His *One* *“...cannot be any existing thing”*, nor can it be merely the sum of all things. But it *“is prior to all existents.”* He identified his *One* with the Classical Greek concept of *Good* and the principle of *Beauty*, something we can easily relate to as the concepts of *“God”* for ‘the Good’ and *“universal symmetry”* for the concept of ‘Beauty.’

The *One*, being beyond all attributes including being and non-being, is the source of the world, but not through any act of creation, wilful or otherwise, since activity cannot be ascribed to the unchangeable, immutable *One*. Plotinus argued that the *multiple* cannot exist without the *simple*. The *“less perfect”* must of necessity *“emanate”* or issue forth, from the *“perfect”* or *“more perfect.”* All *“creation”* therefore emanates from the *One* in succeeding stages of lesser and lesser perfection. These stages are not temporally isolated, but occur throughout time as a constant process. No initial Creation then, but a constant and eternal process of new creation in process. Here are a few quotes from his writings:-

“Withdraw into yourself and look.”

“I am striving to give back the Divine in myself to the Divine in the All.”

“This All is universal power, of infinite extent and infinite in potency, a god so great that all his parts are infinite. Name any place, and he is already there.”

“To make the existence and coherent structure of this Universe depend upon automatic activity and upon chance is against all good sense.”

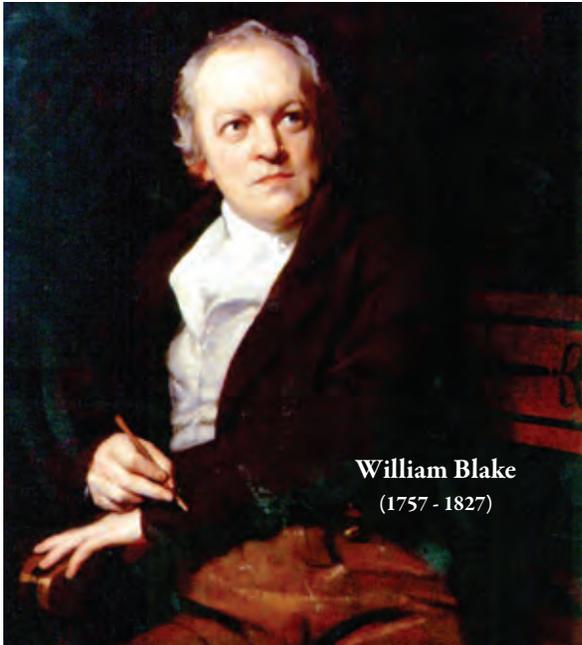
“When we look outside of that on which we depend, we ignore our unity. Looking outward we see many faces. Look inward and all is one head. If a man could but be turned about, he would see at once God and himself and the All.”

William Blake

From Greece we go to Britain and William Blake (1757-1827) who was an English painter, poet and printmaker. Largely unrecognised during his lifetime, he is now considered a seminal figure in the history of the poetry and visual arts of the Romantic Age. While Blake is often thought of more as an English artist than as a philosopher, this is an error. He wrote extensively in a mystical manner that is difficult to understand in places and therefore turns some readers away. Most people however are familiar with his breathtakingly beautiful lines...

*“To see a world in a grain of sand
And a heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour.”*





William Blake
(1757 - 1827)

Although considered mad by his contemporaries for his idiosyncratic views, he was held in high regard by later critics for his expressiveness and creativity, and for the philosophical and mystical undercurrents within his work. He claimed to have had visions throughout his life. They were often associated with beautiful religious themes and imagery, and may have inspired him further with spiritual works and pursuits.

It was Blake who also said that if only we would clean the doors of our perception, everything would be seen in its true infinity. Surely someone capable of conceiving thoughts such as these must have been close to knowing something of their true nature as well as their relationship to their world? Here are a few of his memorable sayings:-

*“A truth that’s told with bad intent, beats
all the lies you can invent.”*

“A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees.”

*“Love seeketh not itself to please,
Nor for itself hath any care,
But for another gives its ease,
And builds a Heaven in Hell’s despair.”*

*“The hours of folly are measured by the clock,
but of wisdom no clock can measure.”*

*God appears and god is light
To those poor souls who dwell in night.
But does a human form display
To those who dwell in realms of day.”*

Von Goethe

From Germany rises the towering figure of the poet philosopher, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832). All his life this man sought to understand human nature. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote of him that his failures were simply preparations for his victories in life, that he drew his strength from nature with which he lived in complete communion.

His later spiritual perspective evolved among pantheism (heavily influenced by Spinoza), humanism and various elements of Western esotericism, as seen most vividly in Part II of *Faust*. According to Nietzsche, Goethe had “a kind of almost joyous and trusting fatalism” that has “faith that only in the totality everything redeems itself and appears good and justified.”

The scope of Goethe’s realisation of human potentiality is shown in the diversified fields of thought seen in his works, ranging from the world-famous *Faust* to his diaries, novels, journals and thoughts on physics in the *Theory of Colours*. He looked for eternal laws in even the most trivial things and saw that all things were a part of one vast, infinite design. He described this thought in *Faust* in the line: “...How each the Whole its substance gives, each in the other works and lives.” He joins the previously mentioned thinkers in a conception of one Mind as he writes, also in



**Johann Wolfgang
von Goethe**
(1749 - 1832)



Faust: "If by the Spirit I am truly taught then thus: 'In the Beginning was the Thought.'"

Here are some quotes from his writings:-

"One always has time if one will apply it well."

"We are never deceived; we deceive ourselves."

"Kindness is the golden chain by which society is bound together."

"Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough; we must do"

"Freedom and life are earned by those alone who conquer them each day anew."

"None are more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe they are free."

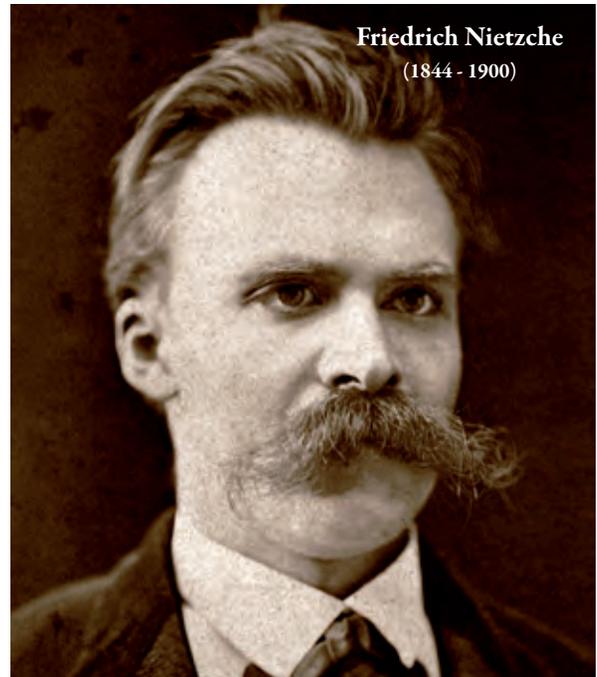
"Treat people as if they were what they ought to be, and you help them to become what they are capable of being."

Friedrich Nietzsche

Also from Germany came the strange, tormented genius of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), who walked close in history behind the great Goethe. Nietzsche dreamed and wrote of a superman who appears to be not so much a revelation of humanity manifesting a knowledge and control over the things of his world, but rather an enlargement of nationalistic and material qualities. Because of his evocative style and often outrageous claims, his philosophy generates passionate reactions. To this day his works remain controversial due primarily to misinterpretations of his work.

One of the key tenets of his philosophy is "life-affirmation" which embraces the realities of the world in which we live over the idea of a world beyond. It further champions the creative powers of the individual to strive beyond social, cultural, and moral contexts. Yet, regardless of how near he came to the true nature of humankind, Nietzsche takes his place among the other seekers of the hidden things if simply because of his expanded thought and manner of breaking down many of the barriers erected by society.

He was bitter towards most men whom he spoke of as rope-makers who *"...drag out their threads and always walk backwards."* And his personal philosophy clearly brought him no happiness. But he contributed to critical enquiry more than anyone before him in modern times. He once



Friedrich Nietzsche

(1844 - 1900)

wrote that he had crawled into the very heart of life and that he was able to perceive that *"...there are a thousand paths that have never been walked."* He also realised the necessity of overcoming the things of the senses as expressed in his line: *"You must climb over yourself, upward until even the stars are under you."* Whatever path or paths he traversed, he sadly never found the right one just for him. Yet he still left rare insights into the human condition that only those paths could bring him. Here are a few of his sayings:-

"He who will not obey himself will be commanded. That is the nature of living creatures."

"Insanity in individuals is something rare. But in groups, parties, nations and epochs it is the rule."

"The advantage of a bad memory is one enjoys several times the same good things for the first time."

"Whatever is done for love always occurs beyond good and evil."

"He who has a why to live, can bear almost any how."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

The American, Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), was an essayist, lecturer and poet, who led the Transcendentalist movement of the mid-19th Century. He is listed in almanacs as a *poet-essayist*, but this falls far short of his stature among philosophers and thinkers. A careful study

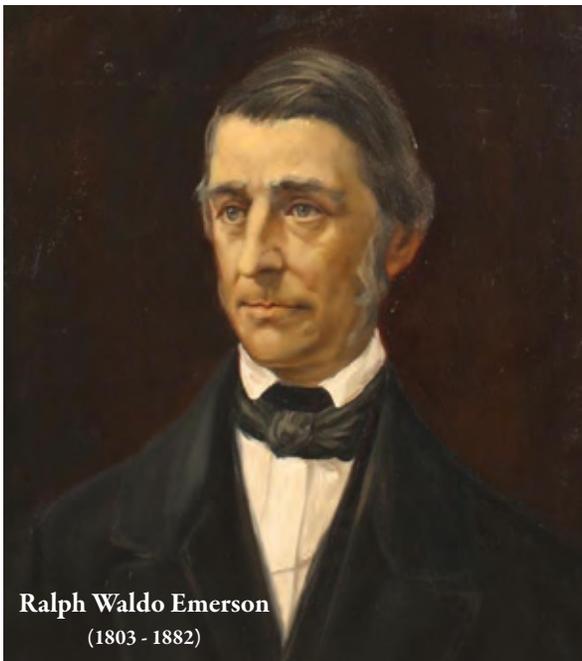


of his voluminous writings will reveal an amazing tapestry of humankind's relationship with the universe.

Emerson was familiar with Eastern thought and this is apparent in his work. His realisation of the unity of all things was expressed in the line: "*A leaf, a drop, a crystal, a moment of time, is related to the whole and partakes of the perfection of the whole!*" - from *Nature*. Humanity's relation to Nature was described at one time when he wrote that humanity first shares the life from which all things exist, then later sees them as only things in Nature and forgets that he once shared their cause.

He was well aware that the senses, while giving us a representation of something, do not reveal what in truth the things are in themselves. What profound beauty lies in the following words: "*The heart in thee is the heart of all; one blood rolls un-interruptedly in endless circulation through all men, as the water of the globe is all one sea.*" - from *Over-Soul*. The unlimited potentiality of the human mind is shown in the line: "*Before the immense possibilities of man, all mere experience, all past biography however spotless and sainted, shrinks away.*" - from *Over Soul*.

Emerson wrote on a number of subjects, never espousing fixed philosophical tenets, but developing certain ideas such as individuality, freedom, the ability for humankind to realise almost anything, and the relationship between the soul and the surrounding world. His "nature" was more philosophical than naturalistic: "*Philosophically considered, the universe is composed of Nature and the Soul.*" He is one of several figures who "... took a more pantheist approach by rejecting views of God as separate from the world." Here are a few of his sayings:-



"What lies behind you and what lies in front of you pales in comparison to what lies inside of you."

"The only way to have a friend is to be one."

"Every minute you remain angry, you give up sixty minutes of peace of mind."

"Our greatest glory is not in never failing, but in rising up every time we fail."

"Never lose an opportunity of seeing anything beautiful, for beauty is God's handwriting."

"Bad times have a scientific value. There are occasions a good learner would not miss."

"What is a weed? A plants whose virtues have never been discovered."

"You can never do a kindness too soon, for you never know how soon it will be too late."

Space does not permit of the inclusion of many other people who also caught some glimpse of the majestic place in life of the human being. Others are great men such as Giordano Bruno, Paracelsus, Berkeley, Swedenborg, Whitman and many, many others. Please search for them, read their works and glean the kernels of wisdom they left behind.

Reaching Understanding

The question may well be asked, at this point: "*How do we reach an understanding of the ideas we have just mentioned? How do we come to realise something of our inner potentialities?*" Daily periods of meditation are of the utmost importance as well as achieving a control over the activity of the mind so it can be concentrated upon any desired thought for at least short periods of time.

Moral purity of mind is essential for the development and utilisation of the inner, spiritual forces. We must further try to live in a state of *receptive awareness* in which we are ready to seize upon either an inner intuition or the most minute outer revelation of a universal law or an eternal truth when it presents itself to us.

Finally, let us try to open fully our psychic sense, so we can see the true splendour of our surroundings and realise our place in the order of things. Then we will discover for the first time the incredible refinement of humankind.



Find your Deeper SELF

Discovering who we really are and what incredible things we can accomplish is one of the few important things we should try and accomplish before our time is up in this wonderful world. It takes surprisingly little to understand the privileged state of our human existence and how precious our limited time on Earth is. How many people truly take time to treasure life, and use their hidden talents constructively for the good of all the inhabitants of this precious planet?

If you seek a closer connection with all that surrounds you..., if you seek a deeper appreciation of all things on Earth..., if happiness, peace and justice for all is what you seek..., then learn to commune with your deeper self.

By reading this magazine you have an open mind, and this message was meant for you! To find out more about the Rosicrucian Order contact us on...

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