

Rosicrucian Heritage



No:1-2011



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HEREAS LIFE ADMITTEDLY IS NOT always a perfumed rose garden, one can't help but notice how for some, it almost could be. For them, everything seems to flow so harmoniously, and whilst not necessarily materially wealthy, they radiate an inner wealth of happiness and peace which is the envy of all. So how do they do it?

Well, one thing they all seem to have in common is that they long ago dared to take charge of their destiny! Examining *needs* rather than *wants*, and true *values* rather than *passing fads*, such people realised that more than anything else, what they needed to learn was to rely upon their *own insights* rather than those of others, come to their *own conclusions* rather than accept the conclusions of others, and above all, to take their *own decisions* in life and for better or worse, *live with the consequences*.

The Rosicrucian Order AMORC assists people to find within themselves their own, personal "higher wisdom," something which exists as a potential in all human beings. Developing this inner understanding can lead to what sages and avatars of all ages have referred to simply as "Illumination," a state of joy, perfection and achievement beyond our fondest hopes.

Gaining this knowledge and experience is not merely an academic exercise; it is a *series of practical steps* needed in order to gain first proficiency and eventually mastery over our daily thoughts and actions. Instruction in the steps necessary to reach these goals is what the *Rosicrucian Order AMORC* specifically has to offer. Its approach to inner development has brought happiness, peace and success into the affairs of thousands of people in the past and you too can benefit from it if you wish.

To find out more about the *Rosicrucian Order AMORC* and its unique system of inner development, write to the address below, requesting a free copy of the introductory booklet entitled *The Mastery of Life*. Examine the facts and decide for yourself.

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ISSN 1118-0242

Published biannually by the
ROSICRUCIAN ORDER, AMORC
(Europe, the Middle East and Africa)
REGIONAL ADMINISTRATION
State Housing Estate, PMB 1220,
Calabar, Cross River State,
NIGERIA

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Issued free to members as an incidence
of membership

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Changes of address must reach us
by the first of the month preceding
publication.

Rosicrucian Heritage

Volume 18 - No: 1

CONTENTS

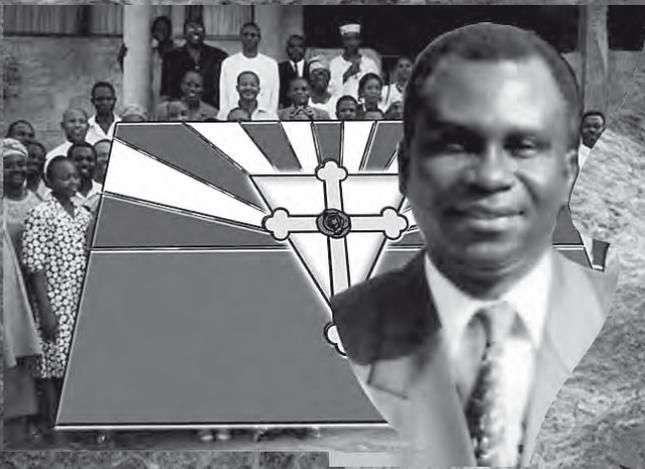
- 2 **Sanctum Musings: Expressing Personal Mastership**
- by Kenneth U Idiodi, FRC
- 3 **The Universal Heart** - by Anthony Hanley, FRC
- 4 **Gold, Silver and Lead** - by Joel Disher, FRC
- 7 **The Alchemical Fire of Suffering** - by Thomas Moore
- 8 **Peace Profound: The Challenge of Finding the Soul**
- by Sven Johansson, FRC
- 10 **A Pure Heart** - by Jean Pierre de Caussade
- 11 **Philosophy of Life** - by Joe M Okon, FRC
- 12 **Pythagoras the Teacher: Part 5** - by Mary Jones, SRC
- 19 **Mystical Quietitude** - by Raymund Andrea, FRC
- 20 **Fires** - by T M Edah, FRC
- 21 **Ancient Priesthoods** - by Rob Melon, FRC
- 28 **Imagination** - by Paracelsus
- 29 **Declaration of a Global Ethic**
- 30 **Kopan Monastery Kathmandu** - by Shirley Elsby, SRC
- 32 **The Rosicrucian Legacy of the Wissahickon Hermits**
- by Lucy Carroll, SRC
- 36 **The Egyptian** - by Affectator

COVER SPREAD

“Egypt the Eternal”



The Rosicrucian Heritage -- No: 1, 2011



Sanctum Musings



by Kenneth U Idiodi, FRC

Grand Administrator for English speaking West Africa of the Rosicrucian Order

Expressing Personal Mastership in the changing circumstances of life

FACED WITH RECENT POLITICAL AND socio-economic changes in the world today, some ask how the principles of personal mastership expounded by our Order may be applied for survival. Let us realise one thing: *there has never been any time in life when everything was alright for everybody*. No society has ever been so poor that rich people have not been spotted here and there. Conversely, every affluent community always has its share of poor ones. That is the nature of life and living, the manifestation of natural laws.

Our Order talks about Self Realisation and Self Mastery. Self Realisation has to do with being aware of the inner potentialities of man, while self mastery connotes using such faculties or energies for man's conscious evolution. Man, a living soul, is endowed with the ability to direct energy beyond the limitations of the physical so as to satisfy the demands of self.

Centrifugal Outlook

This is possible because man is nothing but patterns of energy in the ocean of universal energies. There are two distinct methods or approaches. In the first, the energy is centred on the outside and therefore *centrifugal*. Man identifies what he needs in his environment and directs all his energy to meet the realities of life, subdue them

and extract the resources desired. The question here is survival, a biological necessity. Therefore, whatever personal powers man realises he has, whether they are physical or intellectual, he directs these outward, imposing them upon the conditions of his world to master them. This kind of mastership is the subjecting, as much as possible, of the forces of nature or subduing all imaginable forces of opposition *to serve one's personal ends*. It is a kind of excellence in directing and controlling extraneous conditions, in forcing one's personal will upon the externality of one's immediate world.

From a pragmatic point of view, this kind of personal mastership is not dependent upon, or in any way related to any ethics. It is primarily objective. Success is achieved in terms of fulfilling the aggressive compulsion of the life force. Conduct or behaviour has value only as the individual finds that it, in some way, may contribute to the end to which he aspires. In this case, man just expresses the instinctive animate drives necessary for survival in primitive communities. This mode of expression is still very much evident in our so-called "civilised" societies where moral and ethical codes are left only at the doors of religious and philosophical societies. Corrupt individuals in governments, politics and business who resort to every means within and without the law just to gain personal advantages are seeking personal mastership in centrifugal



terms only. Energy is directed primarily towards extracting from the environment. Their aim is to harvest, not to sow; in some cases this results in rapid accumulation of material wealth by the individual to the detriment of the rest of the society. In the long run, nothing is gained and everyone loses in the rat race of survival of the smartest in terms of greed.

Centripetal Outlook

There is, however, the second approach which demonstrates those qualities that have made Homo sapiens, the thinking man, a truly animate being. It is not just formal education. It is not just intelligence. These cannot prevent a person from being nefarious and pitiless. It is what may be termed *Centripetal Mastership*: that which brings with it an evaluation of Self in relation to the outside world. It is a projection of the finer sensibilities of the Self outward to the external world. Personal feelings are extended to include others, leading to compassion, a sense of justice and the so-called impersonal love.

In this case, the person identifies what society needs and directs his inner powers and energies towards supplying those necessities of life. It is through this kind of service that he sustains himself and demonstrates real mastership. Since he is a part of the society he wants to

serve, all constructive forces of nature support him. Thus, his needs are met in diverse ways. His conscience gives him the applause needed and all the psychic forces of self are ready to extend themselves beyond his immediate being. He only needs to direct and use. It is here where real personal mastership is demonstrated, through strength of character, lifestyle and the determination to serve humanity.

Concisely, the *centripetal* personal mastership is one of self-discipline of the natural elementary animal urges of our being. It is that of temperance, of attaining a harmonious balance between the consciousness of Self and the demands of Self for physical expression and satisfaction. Energy is expended in sowing, for harvesting

must follow naturally. A Rosicrucian student learns to follow the middle Path. He would identify the resources that can be tapped from his immediate environment. Energy is directed towards

extracting such and using the proceeds to *provide facilities for the good of all*. The extraction process is done with care so that essential segments of the society are not ruined. All is done for the good of all. Thus, seeds are sown that can be harvested for several life times, irrespective of the apparent slow material progress that may be noticed at any point in time. Such is the application of Self Mastery as expounded by our Order. That is the key to overcoming hard times and sustaining good times.

Real personal mastership is demonstrated through the determination to serve humanity.

The Universal Heart

by Anthony Hanley, FRC



*We're all just a part
of the Universal Heart,
that's described and defined
by the omnipotent mind.*

*We're all just a scene
in an everlasting scheme that
becomes for some a nightmare
or an effervescent dream.*

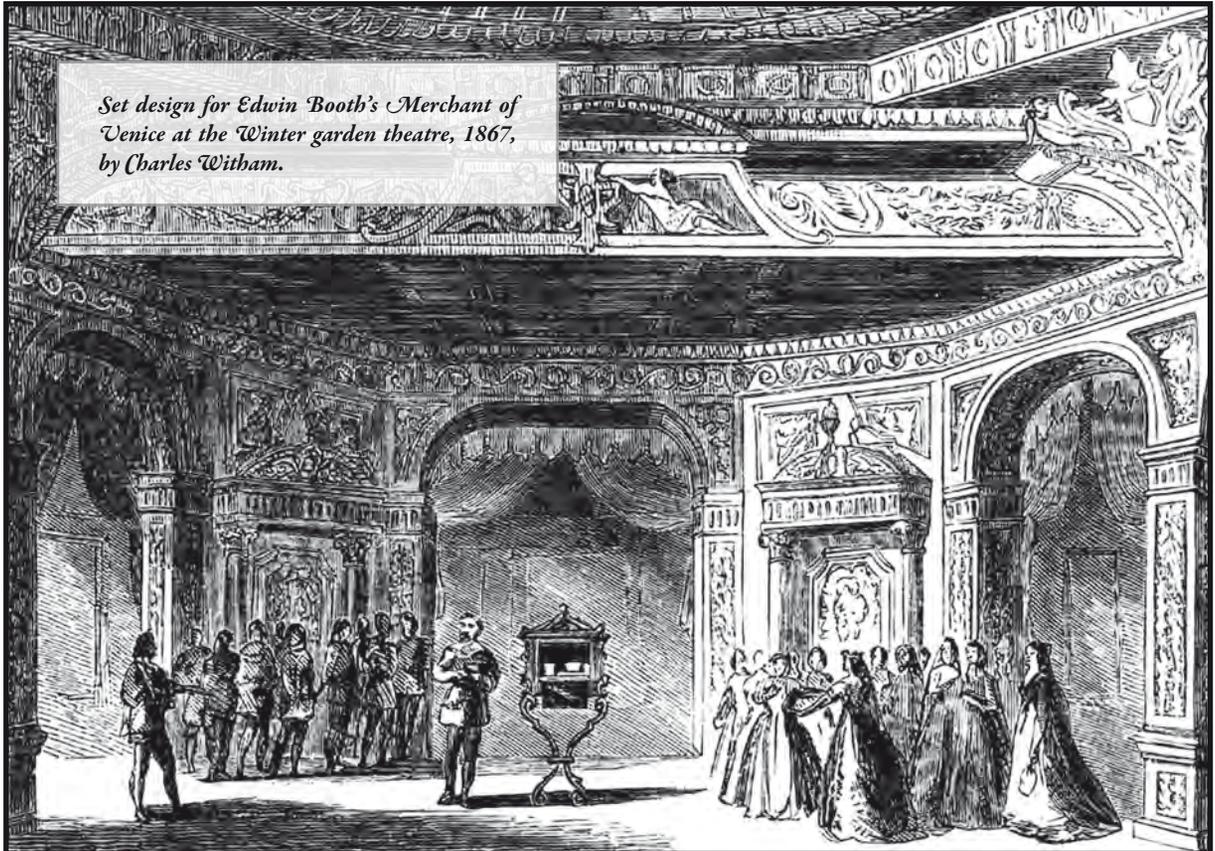
*We're all just a node
of an invincible abode
whose tendrils reach so low
in order that we might grow.*

*We're all just a blip
upon a cosmic sailing ship
whose ongoing journey through vast space
decides the future of the race.*



Gold, Silver & Lead

by Joel Disher, FRC



Set design for Edwin Booth's *Merchant of Venice* at the Winter garden theatre, 1867, by Charles Witham.

J THINK IT SAFE TO ASSUME that virtually anyone who knows Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice*, would say there is nothing alchemical about it. We might, however, make a connection to what has become known as "the casket scene." This is the one in which the suitors for the hand of the fair Portia come to match their wits against the curious stipulations of her father's will.

According to that will, which seems to be the final whim of an eccentric and doting father, the suitor who chooses a casket or jewel box, inside of which is hidden the portrait of his daughter, will be her bridegroom and inherit a fortune. There are three caskets: one of *gold*, one of *silver* and one of *lead*. On the gold casket are the words, "*Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire*" while on the silver, the words are "*Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves.*" The lead casket carries the warning "*Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he has.*"

So the would-be suitor has a single chance; if he chooses well, a bride and a fortune await him. If he chooses wrongly, he must leave immediately without revealing his choice to anyone. Many, we are led to believe in the narrative, have been unsuccessful and have disappeared from the play. But now, it seems, Shakespeare is about to relate a successful choice; here is how it comes about...

The first one, reading the words on the golden casket, thought he had worked out the father's subtlety: "*What many men desire*" was of course Portia. So he opened the casket only to find a scroll that read, "*All that glitters is not gold*" and a portrait, not of Portia but of a gaping skull.

The second suitor, perhaps more self-centred than the first, was unresponsive to the words on the casket of gold but very much taken with those on the silver one: "*Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves.*" Who more than I, he thought, am worthy of the hand of this fair maiden? He did not hesitate, and to his amazement



and mortification he came upon a cartoon of an idiot and a message that called him an ass.

The third suitor, the poorest and having the most to lose since he had already become bankrupted, stood gravely before the caskets. His desire was not that of many men; he actually wanted more than he deserved. He could only “give and hazard” all he had, so he opened the casket of lead. There lay the treasured portrait along with this message:

*You that choose not by the view
Chance as fair and choose as true:
Since this fortune falls to you,
Be content and seek no new.
If you be well pleased with this,
And hold your fortune for your bliss.
Turn you where your lady is,
And claim her with a loving kiss.*

This scene has captured the romantic hearts of theatre-goers the world over, but does it have a deep and philosophic message? Is there any alchemical connection? A closer look may provide an answer.

An Allegory within the Play

Firstly, who could the author of so singular a Will be if not God whose ways are unknowable? Who could that daughter be other than that portion of the divine found in all of nature? In this, the father remains invisible, but the daughter is present in the sight of all men.

Francis Bacon has written that while nature is full of eternal laws and secrets and while we completely depend upon her, we cannot yet measure that dependence. We cannot fathom nature’s subtlety. It is threefold and can be likened to the three caskets in the play. The suitors for the hand of Portia may be thought of as the inhabitants of the world, responding to nature’s challenge according to their own desires. They are moved by their realisations, not by actuality.

Those whose desires are immature or undisciplined will be confused by life’s false glitter and make their decisions on the basis of “what many men desire.” This suggests the play’s intent: “*It is easier for a rope to be pulled through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into Heaven.*” Those who choose the golden casket must accept its reward..., death..., death of true aspiration, of real accomplishment, of lasting value. The casket of gold holds no portrait of the mystic’s bride.

He who passes the casket of gold and chooses the silver will get “as much as he deserves...,” the portrait of an idiot. He presumes too much. He believes his worth is greater than it is, proclaims his own worthiness and demands nature to reward him on the basis of who he is. He is a real fool,

for he thinks outer show is the same as inner merit. Only when he opens the casket and sees his own reflection does he realise the difference.

What of the suitor who is ready to “give and hazard all he has?” What does he find in the casket of lead? He finds the knowledge that the duller aspect of nature bears the mark of divinity. The sombre stone yields evidence of eternal law as valid as that found in the most brilliant star. The slimy pool turns the sun’s rays into colours as delicate as those on a butterfly’s wings. Nature is God’s laws made visible.

God in Nature

Finding God’s image implanted in gross matter we understand the oneness of Divinity and its all-pervading presence. It starts us on the path of discovery. That is the meaning, as I read it, of the beautifully conceived allegory of Portia and the three caskets. And, most certainly it is “a time-honoured dictum of Alchemy.”

In justice to our theme, this much more should be noted: Nature is far more subtle than the threefold character represented here by the gold, silver and lead caskets. These are actually symbols of only one of the three larger divisions of nature, but here made to stand for all three. Those divisions are usually referred to as kingdoms: mineral, vegetable and animal. When



Portia waits in trepidation while Bassanio ponders the choice between the golden, silver and leaden caskets. (From an 1892 lithographic print: “Portia and the Caskets,” engraved after the artist A. Cabanel).



The WILL of the FATHER	= Invisible GOD
PORTIA the DAUGHTER	= Visible NATURE

As an allegory the characters of the father and Portia represent God and the Universe respectively.

GOLD	= False glitter - Immaturity
SILVER	= The Fool - Outer show
LEAD	= Humility - Maturity

The Three Caskets

NATURE	Celestial - Animal	} M A C R O C O S M
	Terrestrial - Vegetable	
	Infernal - Mineral	

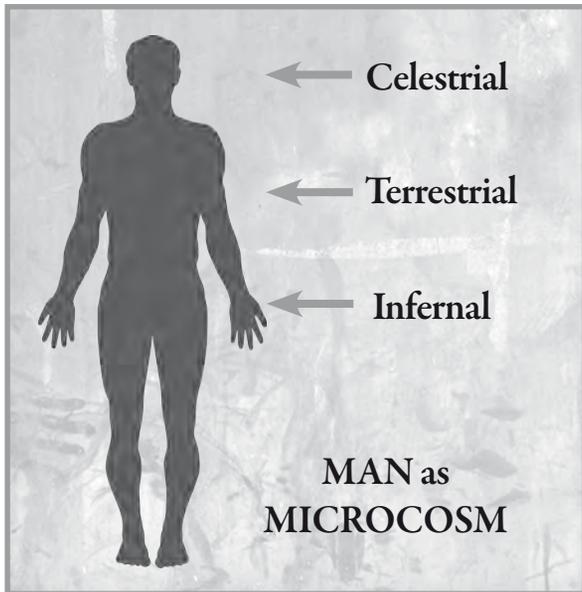
The Three Aspects of Nature

spiritually interpreted, they become the infernal, the terrestrial and the celestial.

Spiritual Alchemy

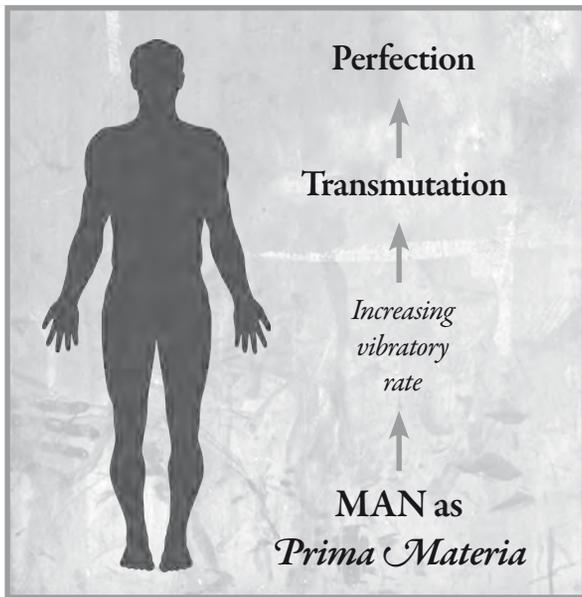
Our body is thought of as symbolising these three kingdoms: the infernal (mineral) is indicated by the abdomen; the terrestrial (vegetable) by the chest; the celestial (animal) by the head. In each, the Alchemist works with equal skill. Starting with the essence of divinity lowest in nature and increasing its vibratory rate, he raises it in the octaves of manifestation toward perfection by a process called *transmutation*. In explanation, the Alchemist points to gold as analogous in the mineral kingdom to the *perfection* sought in the celestial. The whole process therefore, has been historically spoken of as the transmutation of base metals into gold. And, let it be remembered that in Spiritual Alchemy the first matter is man.

How is this transmutation accomplished? By bringing to bear upon the first matter a trinity of elements for which salt, sulphur and mercury are the favourite cover words. From the mineral to the vegetable and so to



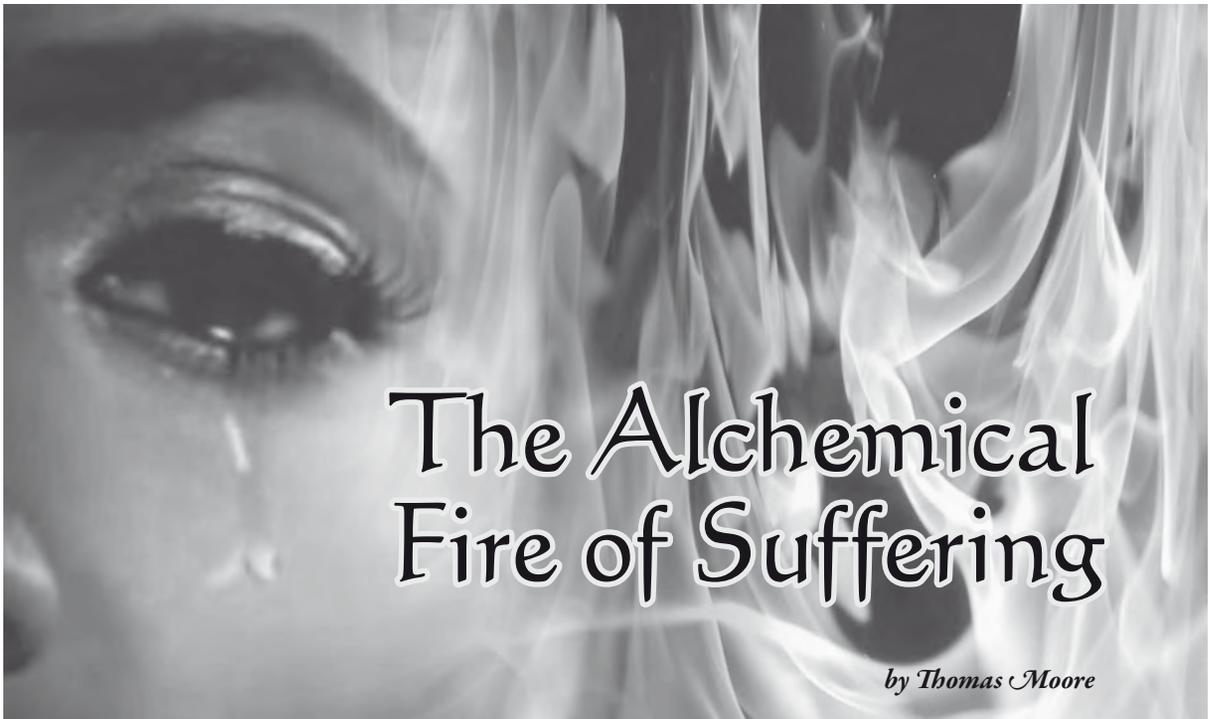
Man reflecting Nature

the animal runs the process, with the steps being labelled "gold-making," "compounding the elixir" and "producing the stone." Dissolve the sensuous, says the Alchemist of old, and you have the medial life. Dissolve the medial and you reach the divine. There are many ways of setting forth the alchemical process, and alchemists of the past were often fanciful. But real alchemy..., alchemy of the body..., remains genuinely a part of mystical disciplines today. But it takes a true adept to understand and work that alchemy for the elevation of that earthly manifestation of the individual human soul, the soul personality.



The process of Spiritual Alchemy





The Alchemical Fire of Suffering

by Thomas Moore

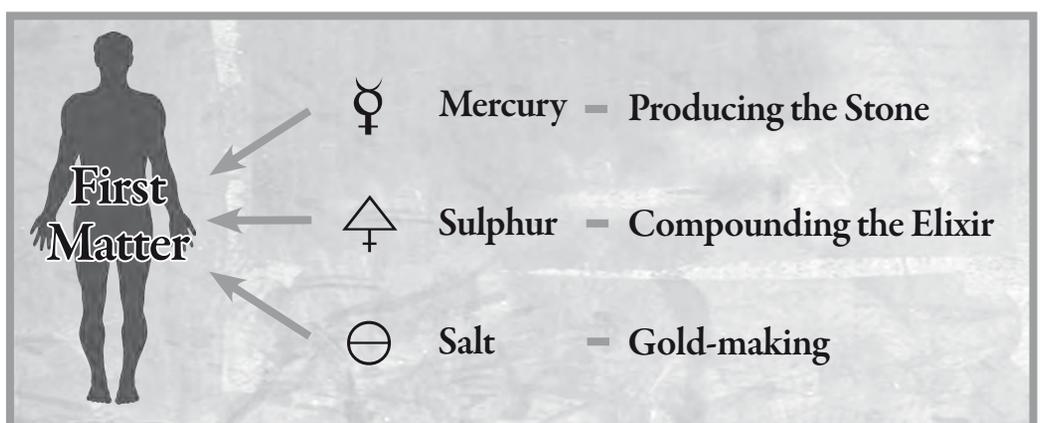
AN ALCHEMICAL FIRE TURNS BASE metals into gold. But, allegorically speaking, what's the fire, what's the dross and what's the gold? The answer is that *fire is suffering*, the dross is bad habits and *gold is perfection*. Really, you ought to be thankful for the coming of the fire, for without it the purification process is not active. Similarly, you should be thankful for the absence of the fire, for the rest and peace provided. You aren't meant to suffer continuously; only when necessary.

So, what's this fire of suffering and what's its purpose? It takes many forms: physical pain, mental discomfort, economic hardship and social disability, to name but a few.

As the Tibetan manuscript *Unto Thee I Grant* reminds us, the most severe physical suffering is the briefest, while the longer-lived variety is milder. Mental anguish is usually a sign that you're out of tune with the Cosmic Mind in a physical or psychic way. Economic hardship and social problems usually reflect the same conditions. Something is amiss. The fire is there to remind you that you can act to alleviate the pain it causes and remove the cause of your discomfort.

In short, the fire of suffering is Nature's way of reminding you about Cosmic laws. You are violating a law in some way, and the Cosmic is providing you with a lesson, the purpose of which is to help you progress toward the goal of ultimate perfection.

How is this transmutation accomplished? By bringing to bear upon the first matter (Man) a trinity of elements for which Mercury, Sulphur and Salt are the common cover words...



Peace Profound

the challenge of finding your soul

by *Sven Johansson, FRC*
GRAND MASTER



CHALLENGE IS NECESSARY FOR growth and evolution in life. Without challenge, life becomes stale and stagnant. But which challenges will we choose to meet..., those offered by society, or those offered by the “still small voice within?” From within? How absurd, you might think. Peace Profound may come from within, but challenge, tension and conflict are surely traits of the outer, not the inner world?

Peace, or rather the deep, all-encompassing serenity known to mystics as “*Peace Profound*,” is found in the wisdom of the soul. But gaining access to that wisdom and thereby experiencing the peace that comes with it, can only come about by facing up to the challenges that come from within oneself. We need to meet the tension, stress and conflict “internally,” face it, and successfully deal with it in the intellect and emotions first, before we can deal with those same issues externally. We can only truly achieve Peace Profound by first meeting the storm and turmoil of the unknown internally. In other words we must learn to bravely face what Rosicrucians refer to as the “*Terror of the Threshold*.”

Metaphorically speaking, if the inspiration that comes from the soul does not create a veritable inner battleground, if there be no wounds struck there by love and compassion, if there be no shattered bones brought about by the strong desire to forge ahead on the Path..., to be one with the God of one’s understanding and greatest

yearning..., then the knowledge of the soul is no home or haven. It is only a temporary shelter, a flimsy tent with gaping holes through which an icy wind passes.

For attunement with the soul to become a reality, the soul must be understood. It must be fought and struggled for, and our best must be given to it. Attunement with the soul is not a shelter we casually seek once a week or in times of extreme distress. We do not go to church, temple or mosque once a week, in the belief that this is enough to enable us to find the soul. If we are to allow the soul to merge with our outer daily living, and indeed to take over our volition and control, our attunement with it must be our constant guiding light. Nothing else can compare to the importance of this. Energy should be flowing through us at all times, as though we were a sun beaming its light and energy to all the universe. And this is possible only when we have reached at least a modicum of attunement with our own individual soul.

Benefits of Attunement

With the inspiration we receive from the soul, definite challenges quickly manifest, and they are almost all to do with ourselves; the manner we conduct our outer lives, the people we hurt, the small liberties and lies we engage in, the small bribes we accept, the less than honest appraisals we have of ourselves..., the list is endless!

The ideas we receive from the soul are not simply idle



thoughts, mere fantasies to mull about at the seaside on lazy days with a can of beer in hand. The impressions that percolate up from the soul are full of energy, dynamism and potential. They enthuse and compel us to move forward with a sense of urgency to the crucial and most important things we should be accomplishing in life. The soul is the forge from which we receive the force, power and energy that makes each of us move forward on the inner plane of awareness. And that “inner motion” inevitably translates in due course into outer motion as well, for we end up materially making great and important changes for the better to our lives in so many and varied ways.

The inspiration and energy necessary to succeed in our work, achieve harmony in personal relationships, and reach inner peace, are all found in the gentle percolation of wisdom and inspiration we receive from our own soul. In very mundane terms, answers to questions ranging from the simple “*what will I have for dinner tonight?*” to the complex “*what is the most important goal in my life?*” are found by listening to this inner voice of the soul. The true answers are there, and they can collectively serve as the guiding light of one’s life. So how do we work with this inspiration? What is the key to achieving this attunement with the soul? How do we make this knowledge a part of our lives?

In answer to these questions, we simply decide when, and to what degree, we will follow the course outlined and inspired by the soul. Attunement with the soul, along with its attendant knowledge and inspiration, has always been available to us, if we would but stop and listen properly for a moment. We are always given the opportunity to follow the guidance of the soul, but the real question is: when will we implement the guidance, the urgings, and the whisperings of the soul in the way it has been given to us and in the spirit and with the intent with which it was delivered?

The answer is simple. First come to the realisation that the promptings of the soul are always good for you, are for your

Attunement with the Soul along with its attendant knowledge and inspiration, has always been available to each of us.

personal good, and for the good of those nearest and dearest to you. You do this by following those promptings a few times to the letter of the law and observing for yourself what wonderful results manifest. Secondly, once you have built up confidence

in the advice and guidance you receive from the “still small voice within,” stop trying to analyse every impression you get from your soul; accept and follow the advice precisely as given. In accepting the advice of your soul, you are also accepting yourself as the new master of your destiny. Still hampered by



At times when your attunement flags and you are overly pulled away from attention to the needs of your soul, there will be periods of deep loneliness and indeed fear...

your frailties and inadequacies, you will however have the accurate guidance of the most capable and wonderful master guide you can ever know: the unlimited potential of your own soul. By the time you have reached this blessed state, you will have accepted that you are destined to become the shining reflection of your soul one day.

Be in no doubt that there still remains for you challenges piled upon challenges remaining for you to master as you struggle to retain the attunement with your soul. There will be tension, stress and inner turmoil; and at times when your attunement flags and you are overly pulled away from attention to the needs of the soul, there will be periods of deep loneliness and indeed of fear. But for as long as the connection with your soul

remains, as long as you heed the voice of your inner master, you will have periods of intense happiness, great tranquillity, and Peace Profound even under the most trying of outer conditions. You will experience clarity of mind and of purpose, an inner radiance that makes you understand that you are on the right path without the slightest shadow of a doubt. And you will be in complete harmony with the wishes of your soul, your inner master. These are things worth striving for: peace, love, understanding, compassion, achievement and power on a scale that only your inner master, the personality of your own soul, the God of your realisation, can ever know.

The Eternal Quest

Mystics are veritable knights in shining armour, fighting inner battles in the cause of good. The knight therefore, who would come to know the safety of the soul, must also experience the dangers of straying away from it. If you, the seeker, would explore with care and understanding the great wisdom of the soul, know that there will be periods of great fear and loneliness as well, as you approach the soul, become dependent on its wisdom and its kind and loving ways, yet still manage to stray away from its presence. Just as if you would know the love and compassion of another person, you must extend your hand in faith, truth and sincerity to your own soul and keep it



there, outstretched, regardless of your fear of rejection and failure.

The depths of the soul are discovered through the intensity of your desire to know it. And you receive in accordance with universal law, namely in accordance to your willingness to give first and to patiently wait for your just rewards, even if that wait takes more than one lifetime to come to fruition. Through your growing intimacy with the soul, you learn many new lessons. You come to know the Oneness, *your oneness* with all nature and living creatures, indeed with all things. Even seemingly inanimate things like streams, rocks, mountains, the sea, the stars and planets all have their special place in the reality of our existence, that incredible universe wrapped around you specifically for the benefit of your evolving self.

When your consciousness extends to all of this, you are one with God, with the part of God that you can perceive in this life..., what Rosicrucians refer to as the “*God of my Heart.*” The sun knows you as do the stars, for there is really only one corpus of knowledge, one final way of “knowing.” Subscribe to this knowledge with all your being..., your total being..., for in so doing you will come to know the challenge of attaining the soul..., the pain, the tension, and the stress of facing the seemingly unknown. Yet, you will come to know something greater and more everlasting than anything else you have ever encountered... Love. The harmony of all consciousness is precisely this..., Love. It is a requirement of and a condition that must be met before any person can fully experience the serenity and unbounded beauty of Peace Profound.



As our growing intimacy with our soul strengthens we come closer to what Rosicrucians call the “God of Our Heart.”

At this point on the Path, you will reach a new, higher realisation of the nature of yourself, those about you, the ground on which you stand, and the stars in the sky. You are one in nature, harmony, peace and strength, and will remain there for as long as you retain that open channel of communication with your soul. The challenge has brought tension and inner turmoil in its wake, but you have overcome these and now know total peace, Peace Profound, harmony in its most beautiful and profound understanding. That is the nature of the soul..., your heritage, your birthright.

A Pure Heart

by Jean Pierre de Caussade (1675-1751)

A PURE HEART AND GOOD WILL! The one foundation of every spiritual state! The pure heart could well say to every soul: “*Look at me carefully. It is I who generate that love which always chooses the better part. I produce that mild but effective fear which arouses such a dread of wrong-doing that it can easily be avoided. I impart that excellent understanding which reveals the greatness of God and the merit of virtue. And it is also I who causes that passionate and holy yearning which keeps the soul resolute in virtue and in expectation of God.*”

Yes, O Pure Heart, you can invite everyone to gather round you and enrich themselves with your inexhaustible treasures. There is no spiritual practice, no path to holiness, which does not find its source in you.”



PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

by Joe M Okon, FRC

THE ROSICRUCIAN PHILOSOPHY is an omnibus framework out of which we should be able to formulate our personal philosophy of life. Our philosophy should drive or enhance the achievement of our mission in life. To evolve such a personal philosophy, Rosicrucians must prepare codes of conduct or mission statements to daily guide their thoughts and actions towards the realisation of their respective goals. Unlike corporate mission statements which are typically brief, our personal mission statement should be comprehensive and stimulating enough to inspire our personal devotion to it. It must be something we truly believe in, and wish to devote our lives to.

My personal mission statement has proven to be a very useful tool for me and I would like to humbly share it with you. It might serve as a guide to a few of us who are yet to formulate a practical philosophy of life, and it may appear over-ambitious and unrealistic..., but it certainly can lay the foundation for the achievement of your mission in later incarnations (if not the present one). My ten points are:

1. Attain all-round excellence in the spiritual and mundane aspects of life.
2. Evolve a scintillating personality of humility, kindness, truthfulness, forgiveness, compassion, love, hard work and integrity.
3. Attain enlightenment in mind equal to the minds of the philosophers and sages.
4. Be an instrument of service to every human soul that may come my way, realising that I share a common bond with all humanity.
5. Foster and protect life as expressed in humankind, and all animals, birds, plants, insects and other living things.
6. Meditate, worship and adore the God of your understanding daily. Partner with Him and trust Him in all affairs of life..., realising that in Him I live, move and have my being.
7. Strive to be a model and mentor to my peers and the upcoming generations.
8. Labour daily for the expression of peace, love, happiness and tolerance in my immediate as well as my extended families. See myself as a trustee or instrument for their progress and well-being.
9. Daily cultivate new friendships, sustain old ones, and have the courage to drop those who will hinder the achievement of my mission.
10. Daily exude charisma, courage, calmness, confidence, poise, peace, love, harmony and serenity in all interactions and affairs of life.

SO HELP ME GOD!

I read this, my mission statement, daily
and devote myself faithfully to its application.



PYTHAGORAS THE TEACHER

Part 5

Pythagorean thought through the centuries

In this fifth and final article of the series we discover how the teachings of Pythagoras of Samos and his school survived down the ages through many of the great philosophers.

AMONG MANY OTHER AUTHORS, the Pythagorean School has been defined by Vincenzo Capparelli as *“the greatest school of knowledge in the Western world.”* Throughout the centuries it has exerted a great influence and helped to provide path co-ordinates in the search for mystical truth. Its inheritance cannot be grasped in its entirety because of its initiatory character which involved rigorous selection while being protected by the obligation of silence. For these reasons it is difficult to get to the heart of the teachings.

Following the dispersal of the School, many essential concepts were lost. But it is possible by investigating the various sources that have survived from ancient times, to trace the profile of this knowledge, which has spread its light outward ever since. The knowledge of the Pythagorean teachings that we possess at the present time has passed down from the ancient Pythagoreans through the biographies of Porphyry, Iamblichus and Diogenes Laertius.

The initiations taken by the Pythagoreans involved passing through several degrees. As the initiate progressed



through the studies, progress became increasingly more difficult as the culmination finally came in sight. At this point the candidate would have acquired skills which were rare among the rest of the initiates. This is understandable, and tradition relates that the most important and essential Pythagorean concepts were imparted in the final phase of the teachings. Those initiates who had crossed the final portal obeyed the sacred oath of silence. The obligation to remain silent about the real corpus of secret teachings of which so many sources speak was probably not difficult to uphold, for the knowledge was so difficult to understand that only the most intensively trained and dedicated initiates had any hope of ever comprehending it.

The Pythagorean School, as we have seen in previous articles in the series, had its centre in Kroton, from whence its teachings radiated out and spread like wildfire throughout southern Italy. Life throughout the whole of Magna Graecia changed as never before. Neighbouring non-Greek-speaking peoples such as the Lucanians, the Piceni and the Latin-speaking peoples, were eager to hear the words of the master. The teachings of Pythagoras even had a profound influence on the institutions of ancient Rome. According to Cicero: “*More and more, there are many in our leading institutes that [benefit] by them.*”

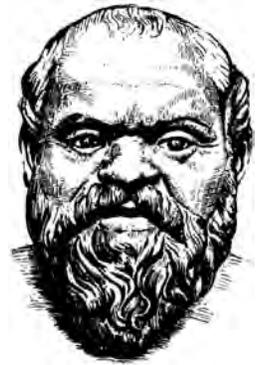
Plato and Socrates

Many of the teachings of the Pythagoreans have been lost through time, having been attributed to other philosophers of the past, including Plato and Aristotle. This came about following their dispersion by Pythagorean disciples, some of whom travelled to Greece and rallied around Socrates in Athens. This famous philosopher was born some 30 years after the death of Pythagoras, but he became the head of the Athenian Pythagoreans and made their theories part of his own. Socrates sought to improve on Pythagorean theory by eliminating their separation of the universe from the everyday realm of the senses, and he established the harmony of the universe and of individual things.

Plato, in his dialogues *Theaetetus*, *Parmenides*, etc., was clearly influenced by the Pythagorean teachings, and established his Academy specifically in order to continue the work of the Pythagorean School. Plato was driven by the desire to know the secrets of their initiatic knowledge and had access to those few remaining representatives of the Pythagorean School who had fled to Greece. Some of these had joined the Socratic Circle and it was from this small pool of Pythagorean initiates that he came in



Plato (429-347 BCE)



Socrates (469-399 BCE)

contact with the most advanced of their initiates.

According to Theodor Gomperz (1832-1912) in his book *Greek Thinkers: a History of Ancient Philosophy*, Plato finally made the transition from the Socratic method to Pythagoreanism. However, remaining true to the vow of silence, he rarely mentioned the Pythagoreans after his first trip to Italy. Gomperz saw in Plato's *Meno* and in his final dialogues the “*drowning of Platonism in the great ocean of Pythagoreanism.*” It took a significant step forward in his *Phaedo*, where we can listen to the last words of Socrates on the final day before his execution, when his disciples and friends were permitted to see him during which they discussed the immortality of the soul. Plato had no time for the followers of Heraclitus, the Sophists or the followers of Anaxagoras, his preference being for Simmias and Cebes, both Pythagoreans of the “Circle of Thebes.”

Aristotle

Aristotle was also influenced by Pythagoreanism and not only because he attended the Academy in Athens

for 20 years, but also for having participated intensely in Pythagorean meetings. His early work *On Philosophy* consisted

Many of the teachings of the Pythagoreans have been lost through time.

for the most part of the doctrines of the Pythagoreans and Plato, as well as his *Eudemian Ethics*, *Protreptic* and others. Vincenzo Capparelli called Aristotle one of the greatest connoisseurs of Pythagoreanism. In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle says:

“*Contemporaneously with these philosophers and before them, the so-called Pythagoreans, who were the first to take up mathematics, not only advanced this study, but also having been brought up in it they thought its principles were the principles of all things. Since of these principles numbers are by nature the first, and in numbers they seemed*





Aristotle (384-322 BCE)

to see many resemblances to the things that exist and come into being..., more than in fire and earth and water (such and such a modification of numbers being justice, another being soul and reason, another being opportunity- and similarly almost all other things being numerically expressible); since again they saw that the

modifications and the ratios of the musical scales were expressible in numbers; since then all other things seemed in their whole nature to be modelled on numbers, and numbers seemed to be the first things in the whole of nature..., they supposed the elements of numbers to be the elements of all things, and the whole heaven to be a musical scale and a number.

“And all the properties of numbers and scales which they could show to agree with the attributes and parts and the whole arrangement of the heavens, they collected and fitted into their scheme. And if there was a gap anywhere, they readily made additions so as to make their whole theory coherent. For example, as the number ten is thought to be perfect and to comprise the whole nature of numbers, they say that the bodies which move through the heavens are ten, but as the visible bodies are only nine, to meet this they invent a tenth: the ‘counter-earth.’ We have discussed these matters more exactly elsewhere.

“But the object of our review is that we may learn from these philosophers also what they suppose to be the principles and how these fall under the causes we have named. Evidently then, these thinkers also consider that number is the principle both as matter for things and as forming both their modifications and their permanent states, and hold that the elements of number are the even and the odd, and that of these the latter is limited, and the former unlimited; and that the One proceeds from both of these (for it is both even and odd), and number from the One; and that the whole heaven, as has been said, is numbers.

“Other members of this same school say there are ten principles, which they arrange in two columns of cognates..., limit and unlimited, odd and even, one and plurality, right and left, male and female, resting and moving, straight and curved, light and

darkness, good and bad, square and oblong. In this way Alcmaeon of Kroton seems also to have conceived the matter, and either he got this view from them or they got it from him; for he expressed himself similarly to them. For he says most human affairs go in pairs, meaning not definite contrarities such as the Pythagoreans speak of, but any chance contrarities such as white and black, sweet and bitter, good and bad, great and small. He threw out indefinite suggestions about the other contrarities, but the Pythagoreans declared both how many and which their contrarities are.”

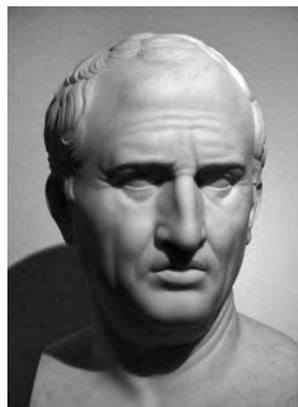
Alexandria

The Pythagorean School never re-emerged from the ashes of its destruction, but its echoes are found down through the ages. From Athens, the mystical doctrines



found their way to Alexandria, a city where the Western world came into intimate contact with the Eastern world. Pythagoreanism melded with Platonism and gave rise to what is now known as Neo-Platonism. But with this new concept of human destiny came the ardent aspiration for a renewal of nature.

In the vast melting pot of Alexandria, Pythagorean mysticism split into two: *Judeo-Alexandrian Pythagoreanism* and *Roman Pythagoreanism*. The latter is better known in our philosophical tradition than the other. Many concepts of Judeo-Alexandrian Pythagoreanism found a strong echo in the religious and moral concepts which gave rise to Christianity.



Cicero (c.106-43 BCE)

Cicero and Nigidius

The precise date when the Pythagorean movement was transplanted to Rome cannot be given with certainty but by the mid-first century BCE, a cult-like group flourished in Rome under the leadership of the Roman senator and Pythagorean, Publius Nigidius Figulus, (c.105 - 45 BCE) a contemporary and friend of Cicero,



who, in the Preface of his translation of Plato's *Timaeus*, stated that there was nobody better than Nigidius to renew the ancient discipline of the Pythagoreans, who seemed by that time to be extinct. Nigidius, like every true Pythagorean, possessed an encyclopaedic knowledge. Cicero called him "a particularly acute investigator of those matters which nature has made obscure." During his scientific investigations, the distinction between science and mysticism became blurred.



Virgil (70-19 BCE)

The Latin author Cicero, mentioned above, was particularly interested in the Pythagorean teachings. In his references to it, he analysed all its aspects and, undoubtedly, it is thanks to him that we can reconstruct the essentials of Pythagorean history and thought.

Virgil

We can see the influence of Pythagoras in the works of the great Latin writer Virgil. There are many elements of Pythagoreanism that according to the French historian Jérôme Carcopino are found in Virgil's 4th *Eclogue*; among these are:

- The theory of the Great Year, which forms the fundamental motive for the expected renewal of humanity.
- The Virgin, a symbol of justice, whose appearance heralds the end of the Iron Age and the advent of the Golden Age.
- The invocation to Apollo, of whom Pythagoras was considered to a reincarnation.
- Apollo, who will be the dominant god of this final century when the universe will transform itself during the Golden Age.
- The "young woman" who is destined to rule over the Golden Age, when all animals will live together in peace.

As in the 4th *Eclogue*, Book 4 of Virgil's *Aeneid* reveals the intensity of Pythagorean mystical thought.

Plutarch

Plutarch, the Greek writer and philosopher who lived around 100 CE was another believer in Pythagorean wisdom. He was one of the most influential of the small number

of philosophers who formed the future image of Pythagoras that has been handed down to us. In two short dialogues that he wrote, it is possible to discern the existence of a first century CE Pythagorean circle



Plutarch (c.46-120 CE)

where the teachings were still given under the seal of secrecy. In his other works, *De Genius Socratis*, *De Facie in Orbe Lunae*, and *De Isis et Osiris*, we also find the fundamental concepts of the Pythagorean School.

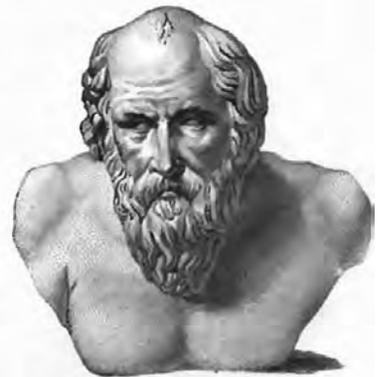
He states that the human soul [personality], with its imperfections and compelling needs, will continue to reincarnate until it achieves a pure life, having finally overcome its imperfect nature. Once all the dross has been eliminated, it will rise to the superior realms and direct contact with the gods and help other souls who have the desire for perfection.

Diogenes Laertius

The first author whose biography of Pythagoras has been preserved in full is Diogenes Laertius (c.200-250). In his work *Lives and Opinions of the Eminent Philosophers* he briefly describes the School and its Master:

"[Pythagoras] was the first person, as [Plato's] Timaeus says, who asserted that the property of friends is common, and that friendship is equality. And his disciples used to put all their possessions together into one store, and use them in common; and for five years they kept silence, doing nothing but listen to discourses, and never once seeing Pythagoras, until they were approved; after that time they were admitted into his house, and allowed to see him...."

"He is said to have been a man of the most dignified appearance, and his disciples adopted an opinion respecting him, that he was Apollo who had come from the Hyperboreans; and it is said, that once when he was stripped naked, he was seen to have a golden thigh. And there were many people



Diogenes Laertius (c.200-250)



who affirmed that when he was crossing the river Nessus it addressed him by his name.”

In another passage, specifying the confidentiality of his teachings, he adds “but until the time of Philolaus [480-385 BCE], none of the doctrines of Pythagoras were ever divulged; and he was the first person to publish the three celebrated books that Plato wrote.”

He was the only one who disclosed the thoughts of the Master. “Nor were the number of his scholars who used to come to him by night, fewer than six hundred. And if any of them had ever been permitted to see him, they wrote of it to their friends, as if they had gained some great advantage. The people of Metapontum used to call his house the temple of Ceres; and the street leading to it they called the street of the Muses, as we are told by Favorinus in his *Universal History*.”

Porphiry

In this brief historical excursion on the evolution of Pythagorean thought we cannot overlook the two most important sources, namely the writings of Porphiry and Iamblichus. Porphiry (c.234-305), a pupil of Plotinus, was a faithful follower of Pythagorean thought. Faithful to the doctrine of the School, he admitted that all life must strive for purification of the soul, the domain of the body, to overcome the passions in order to reintegrate with the divine. For this elevation to God, we must overcome obstacles generated by drives and impulses of matter, we must have the determination to divest ourselves of that “tunic and dark that hinders the soul.”

Porphiry highlighted the importance of health in the Pythagorean scheme.

In his work *De Abstinentia* (On Abstinence) Porphiry advocates against the consumption of animals, exalting the vegetarian diet and highlighting the importance of health in the Pythagorean scheme. In this treatise, Porphiry also explains his theory on sacrifices, referring to these acts as lower forms of worship and merely as the propitiation of evil demons. Only the philosopher, whom he

defined as a follower of Pythagoras, could refrain from these practices of witchcraft to consecrate themselves to God, since he is a scholar of Nature and also intelligent, modest, moderate and always concerned about his salvation.

In his work the *Life of Pythagoras*, Porphiry writes in adulation:

“When he reached Italy he stopped at Kroton. His presence was that of a free man, tall, graceful in speech and gesture, and in all things else. Dicaearchus relates that ‘the arrival of this great traveller, endowed with all the advantages of nature, and prosperously guided by fortune, produced on the Krotonians so great an impression, that he won the esteem of the elder magistrates by his many and excellent discourses. They ordered him to exhort the young men, and then to the boys who flocked out of their schools to hear him; and lastly to the women, who came together on purpose.’

“Through this he achieved great reputation, he drew great audiences from the city, not only of men, but also of women, among whom was an especially illustrious person named Theano. He also drew audiences from among the neighbouring barbarians, among whom were magnates and kings. What he told his audiences cannot be said with certainty, for he enjoined silence upon his hearers. But the following is a matter of general information. He taught that the soul was immortal and that after death it transmigrated into other animated bodies. After certain specified periods, the same events occur again; that nothing was entirely new; that all animated beings were kin, and should be considered as belonging to one great family. Pythagoras was the first one to introduce these teachings into Greece.

“His speech was so persuasive that, according to Nicomachus, in one address made on first landing in Italy he made more than two thousand adherents. Out of desire to live with him, they built a large auditorium, to which both women and boys were admitted. [Foreign visitors were so many that] they built whole cities, settling that whole region of Italy now known as Magna Graecia. His ordinances and laws were received by them as divine precepts, and without them would do nothing. They held all property in common, and ranked him among the divinities. And whenever they communicated to each other some choice bit of his philosophy, from which physical truths could always be deduced, they would swear by the Tetractys, adjuring Pythagoras as a divine witness, in the words: “I call to witness him who to our souls expressed the Tetractys, eternal Nature’s fountain-spring.”

Porphiry emphasises the figure of Pythagoras



Porphiry (c.234-305)



presenting him, in fact, like a divine being, with extraordinary powers, saying: *“He soothed the passions of the soul and body by rhythms, songs and incantations. These he adapted and applied to his friends. He himself could hear the harmony of the Universe, and understood the universal music of the spheres, and of the stars which move in concert with them.”*

With regard to Pythagoras’ teachings, he points out that *“His utterances were of two kinds, plain or symbolical. His teaching was twofold: of his disciples some were called *Mathematikoi* or Students, and others *Akousmatikoi* or Hearers. The Students learned the fuller and more exactly elaborate reasons of science, while the Hearers heard only the chiefheads of learning, without more detailed explanations. He ordained that his disciples should speak well and think reverently of the Gods, muses and heroes, and similarly of parents and benefactors; that they should obey the laws; that they should not relegate the worship of the Gods to a secondary position, performing it eagerly, even at home.”*

Iamblichus

Unlike Porphyry, Iamblichus (c.245-325) recognised the importance of Pythagoreanism in the perspective of a new and reinterpreted history of Greek thought, trying to revive Pythagorean philosophy. He considered it to be the greatest of all philosophies, referring to it as the *“aspiration to wisdom.”*

In his *On The Pythagorean Life* he says: *“Pythagoras is said to have been the first person to call himself a philosopher. It was not just a new word that he invented: he used it to explain a concern special to him. He said that people approach life like the crowds that gather at a festival. People come from all around, for different reasons: one is eager to sell his wares and make a profit, another to win fame by displaying his physical strength. And there is a third kind, the best sort of free man, who come to see places and fine craftsmanship and excellence in actions and words, such as are generally on display at festivals.*

Just so, in life, people with all kinds of concerns assemble in one place. Some hanker after money and an easy life; some are in the clutches of desire for power and of frantic competition for fame; but the person of the greatest authority is the one who has chosen the study of that which is finest, and that one we call philosopher. Heaven in its entirety, he said, and the stars in their courses, are a fine sight if one can see its order. But it is so by participation in the primary and intelligible.

And what is primary is number and rational order permeating all there is. All things are ranged in their proper and harmonious order in accordance with these. Wisdom is real knowledge, not requiring effort, concerned with those beautiful things which are primary, divine, pure and unchanging, and other things may be called beautiful if they participate in these. Philosophy is zeal for such study. Concern for education is beautiful too, working with Pythagoras for the improvement of mankind.”



Iamblichus (c.245-325)

Iamblichus relates that the key to healing in Pythagoreanism lay in the patient’s previous existence and as part of the caring process the memory has to be evoked of their previous life:

“He thought that the training of people begins with the senses, when we see beautiful shapes and forms and hear beautiful rhythms and melodies. So the first stage of his system of education was music: songs and rhythms from which came healing of human temperaments and passions. The original harmony of the soul’s powers was restored, and Pythagoras devised remission and complete recovery from diseases affecting both body and soul.

“It is especially remarkable that he orchestrated for his pupils what they call ‘arrangements’ and ‘treatments.’ With supernatural skill, he made blends of diatonic, chromatic

Iamblichus relates that the key to healing in Pythagoreanism lay in the patient’s previous existence.

and enharmonic melodies, which easily transformed into their opposites the maladies of the soul which had lately without reason arisen, or were beginning to grow in his students: grief, anger, pity; misplaced envy, fear; all kinds of desires, appetite, wanting; empty conceit, depression, violence. All these he restored to virtue, using the appropriate melodies like mixtures of curative drugs.”

We also learn from Iamblichus that Pythagoras could achieve the same effect in a different way..., not through instruments or vocals, but rather through a divine, ineffable and difficult to conceive power:

“He no longer used musical instruments or songs



to create order. Through some unutterable, almost inconceivable likeness to the gods, his hearing and his mind were intent upon the celestial harmonies of the cosmos. It seemed as if he alone could hear and understand the universal harmony and music of the spheres and of the stars which move within them, uttering a song more complete and satisfying than any human melody, composed of subtly varied sounds of motion and speeds and sizes and positions, organised in a logical and harmonious relation to each other, and achieving a melodious circuit of subtle and exceptional beauty.

“Refreshed by this, and by regulating and exercising his reasoning powers, he conceived the idea of giving his disciples some image of these things, imitating them, so far as it was possible, through musical instruments or the unaccompanied voice. He believed that he alone of those on Earth could hear and understand the utterance of the universe, and that he was worthy to learn from the fountainhead and origin of existence..., and to make himself, by effort and imitation, like the heavenly beings. The divine power which brought him to birth had given him alone this fortunate endowment. Other people, he thought, must be content to look to him, and to derive their profit and improvement from the images and models he offered them as gifts, since they were not able truly to apprehend the pure, primary archetypes.”

Renaissance Italy

Long after these Neo-Platonic philosophers, further distinguished minds began to appear in what is now Italy. They were able to appreciate, recognise and deepen that knowledge that mysteriously disappeared in the chaos following the decline of the Roman Empire. The Italian scholar Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374), whom we know as Petrarch, had a large library of works of the classical period. But for all his love of learning, he was unable to learn Greek and lamented the fact that he would



Petrarch (1304-1374)

never arrive at the best understanding of philosophy because his Greek was not good enough. He referred to Pythagoras as: “the most ancient of all natural philosophers.”

With the great philosophers of the Renaissance came a re-evaluation of the Pythagorean

School. The humanist philosopher Marsilio Ficino acknowledged the influence of Pythagoras on Plato. In his villa near Florence, Ficino obtained the patronage of Lorenzo de Medici and set up the *Accademia Platonica* (Plato’s Academy) where he translated Plato’s works into Latin directly from the Greek. He went on to translate the works of Porphyry, Iamblichus, Proclus and Plotinus into Latin, thereby ensuring the continued survival of Pythagorean thought.



Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499)

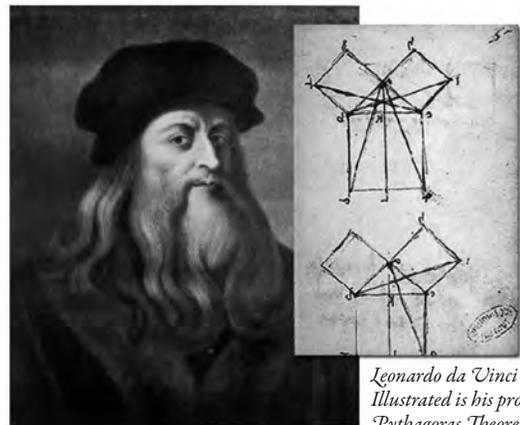
That great Neo-Platonist Giovanni Pico della Mirandola regarded Pythagoras as a Christian sage.

He equated the peace promised by Jesus with the Pythagorean peace “in which all rational souls not only shall come into harmony in the one mind which is above all minds, but shall in some ineffable way become altogether one. That is the friendship which the Pythagoreans say is the end of all philosophy.”



Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494)

Another one of his writings was the almost impenetrable *Fourteen Conclusions after Pythagorean Mathematics*. And Leonardo da Vinci, in his studies and researches, also held Pythagoras in high



Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519)
Illustrated is his proof of the Pythagoras Theorem



esteem, presenting his own proof of the Pythagoras theorem ($a^2 + b^2 = c^2$).

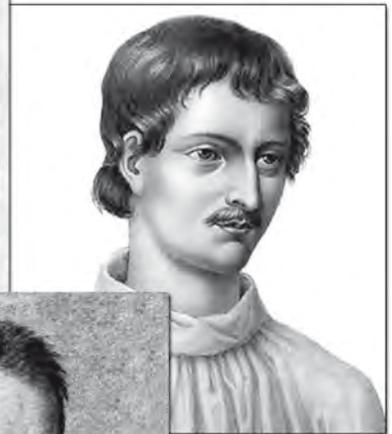
The hermeticist Giordano Bruno, in his *Dialoghi Italiani* (Italian Dialogues) said that “*best and purest is the world of Pythagoras, more so than that of Plato.*” Tommaso Campanella, author of the utopian work “City of the Sun” studied Pythagoras with love and presented himself as the continuator of that ancient tradition, and Galileo was able to restore the glory of the Pythagoreans in the scientific field.

Postscript

The Pythagorean school never re-emerged from the ashes of its destruction and the tragedy was that, for the most part, its wisdom was a great anachronism. Undoubtedly this was a major factor in its decline and the propagation of its teachings was continued outside the uninitiated. Indeed, Pythagoreanism fell under the weight of its own magnitude.



2.



1.



3.

Other figures from the early modern period that were influenced by Pythagoras: 1. Giordano Bruno (1548-1600), 2. Tommaso Campanella (1568-1639), 3. Galileo Galilei (1564-1642).

Mystical Quietitude

If there is any truth I would drive home to the aspirant, it is that the disciple I treat of is a thoroughly practical individual, with the same human nature and of like passions and infirmities as himself...

facing the same fears and oppositions of circumstances as he is, knowing in their full range and strength the difficulties and temptations which burden the whole human family...

and who nevertheless has made for himself the opportunities of entering into the life of the soul and imposing its higher rhythm and elevating influence upon the common human factor and taken a step forward in evolution.

He knows the sound qualities of discipleship at sight.

Mystical quietude is one of these qualities. It is born of knowledge and experience of self and circumstance. It is not gained from books, but from deep communion with the heart of life.

from Raymund Andrea, FRC

The Mystic Path



FIRES

by (Dr) T M Edah, FRC

THE JUDEO-CHRISTIAN BIBLE TELLS US that God “is a consuming fire.”

God made His presence known and spoke to Moses through a fire which burned but did not consume. At Pentecost, tongues of fire appeared on the heads of the disciples of Jesus the Christ when they were endowed with spiritual power.

Divinity may be revealed as fire!

There is the youthful fire of life, the Agni of the Hindus, the Sethian fires of ancient Egyptian mysticism. Life is a rejuvenating, a quickening force!

There exist the passionate fires of love or lust; of anger or hatred, of envy or jealousy.

We know of the warmth of friendliness, affection and kindness; the brimming enthusiasm at work, at play and in striving to release lofty ideals.

Is there a need to say more about the raging, destructive fires of religious bigotry, sectarian fanaticism and racial or tribal chauvinism?

We must be mindful of our fires!

With fire, required quantities or qualities of heat can be generated to serve useful ends. Instances abound with regards to cooking, boiling, baking, heat sterilisation of equipment or implements; the provision of a motive force for various vehicular and motor engines; and heat and radiation therapy for many medical conditions.

Fire has utilitarian value!

According to several sources, fire is useful in the transformation of the nature of a thing or specific qualities within the individual. It can be used to purify substances (e.g. gold ingots) or conditions.

Fire can also make a person's thoughts, concepts, motives and actions rarefied. This is true for a group or collectivity also.

In other words, there is a purifying fire, a transforming fire, a spiritualising fire!

An obvious relationship exists between the onset of a fire and light. Conversely, the appearance of a light may not necessarily be easily identified with any detectable, measurable fire or heat.

Consequently, mention may be made of the mellow enlightening flames of comprehension and the confident illuminating fires of wisdom.

The foregoing thoughts may incline the interested person to contemplate the significance of the chariot and horses of fire which “transported” the prophet Elijah into Heaven; the protective influences of fire; the corrective or restraining fires of conscience; and the baptism of fire and trials by fire as indicated in the New Testament of the Christian Bible.

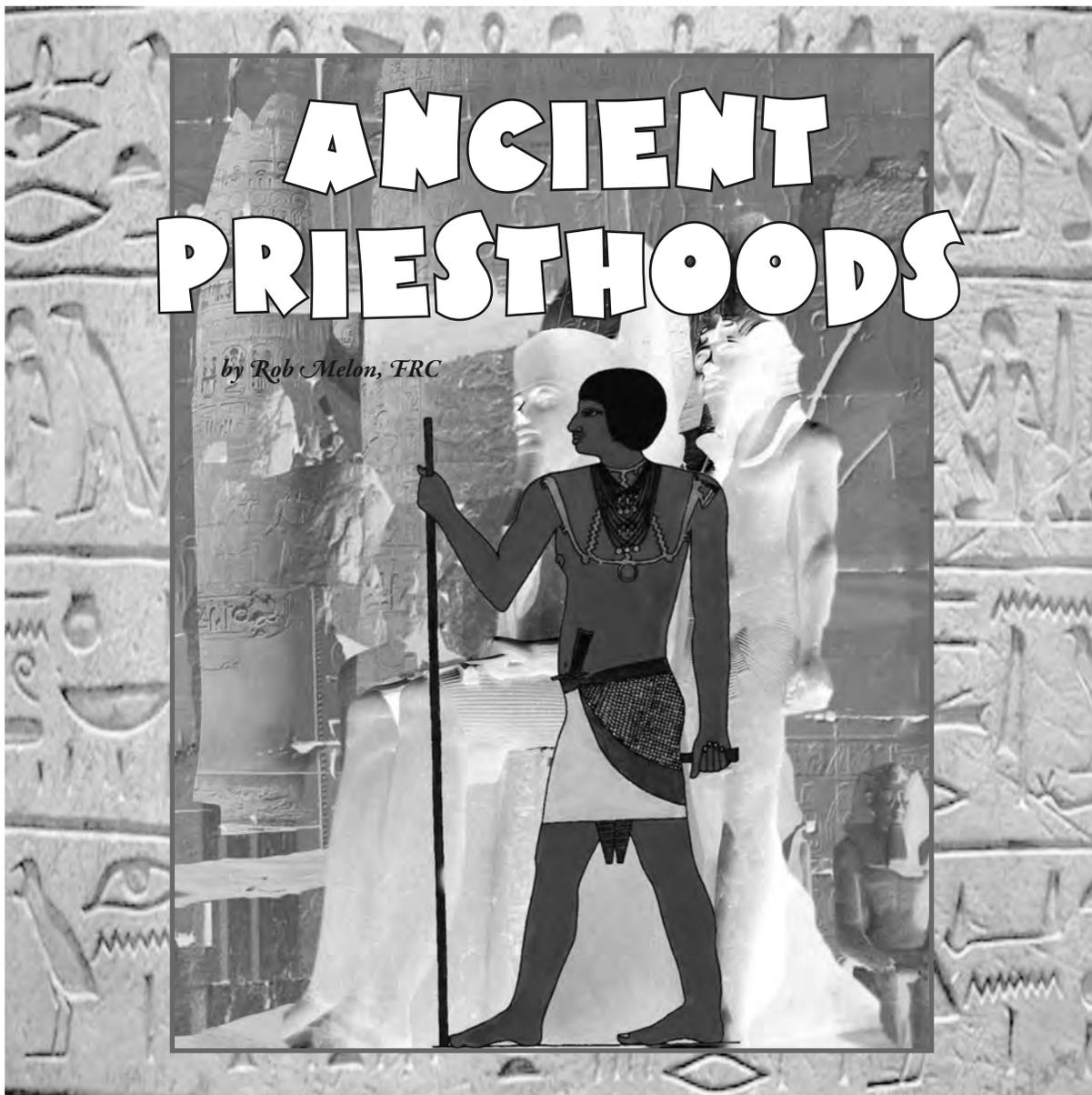
We may summarise by saying that fire is a vibratory essence, a creative principle and a transforming power that can be and should be used for constructive and beneficent purposes.

Let us be mindful of our fires!



ANCIENT PRIESTHOODS

by Rob Melon, FRC



THE ORIGIN OF PRIESTHOODS goes back to the very earliest of societies. The word “priest” does not do justice to what was meant though, for priests in those days were not representatives of organised religions as they are for example today. In the earliest of times, priests were what we would term sorcerers, magicians or shamans, dealing extensively with the realm of the psychic, and in some cases mastering the art of communicating with the so-called “afterworld,” the world of the dead. Ancient priests were a breed apart, a class of individuals who acted as mediators between people and supernatural powers which only they could communicate with. Without doubt, in some cases there emerged men and women of supreme psychic

accomplishment and amongst a few of them, some reached the highest regions of human spiritual attainment.

The Egyptian Priesthood

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





In early Egyptian dynasties, the pharaoh was the high priest, the highest earthly representative of the gods. The statue here is Senusret III (c.1878-1839 BCE) of the 12th dynasty.

beliefs and practices, some notable, many otherwise, we can see the syncretised development of the prominent priesthoods of today from such beginnings.

In early Egyptian dynasties, the pharaoh was the high priest, the highest earthly representative of the gods. He was primarily identified with Ra, the sun god of Heliopolis, though he was also heralded as the manifestation of Horus, the son of Osiris and Isis, and several other gods. The pharaoh was of course not able to perform both his administrative duties as well as officiate in the many sacerdotal requirements at temples throughout Egypt. It was physically impossible and he therefore deputised most of these religious duties

to various members of the priesthood. This delegation of power was on several occasions in the 3,000 year history of ancient Egypt to challenge the authority of the pharaoh.

There were two main classes of priests in ancient Egypt: (a) the Servant of the God, the *hm-ntr* (hem-netjer), who was of a higher category, (b) a lower class of priest called the *wꜥb* (wayb), meaning the “pure one.” From papyri inscriptions we know that these priests formed the staff of the temple in which they served. They were divided into four groups of service. In fact, we

note that the priests of the royal mortuary temples were divided into what the Greeks called *phylae*.¹ Each

phyle, or group of priests, served one lunar month. This was done by rotation. The papyri relate that each priest was afforded an interval of three months of non-service between two periods of service. An interesting papyrus from Illahun of the Middle Kingdom shows that each phyle, upon the completion of their term of service, drew up a complete inventory of temple property. This inventory was handed over to their successors: the incoming phyle.

An example of the administrative efficiency of these *phylae* is the fact that both parties certified the list. The

list had clay attached to it upon which was impressed a seal of the chief priest and the names of the members of the phyle. This same papyrus relates that there were certain permanent functionaries such as the High Priest or Overseer, the *hm-ntr-tpy* (hem-netjer-tpy) and the “chief lector” or reader, the *hry-hb* (kheri-heb) who was in effect an orator. A third class of priests known as the *it-ntr* (it-netjer) or “Father of the God,” walked in front of the cult image at processions, purifying the way by sprinkling purified water on it. There were of course several other lesser levels of priesthood, one of them being the *sm* (sem) or mortuary priests, whose function only came into prominent and crucial use for the upholding of order in the kingdom (the preservation of Maat), when they were called upon to embalm the body of the deceased pharaoh in accordance with the correct magical rites that would allow the pharaoh to pass through the underworld unharmed so he could eventually take his place among the fixed stars of the night sky.

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

beloved of the god.”

At Edfu in upper Egypt, the pharaoh was the incarnation of Horus while the priest was a son of the Horus, one whom the god loved because of his service to him.

The Memphite priesthood was one of the most learned. Their god was Ptah, the patron god of artisans and craftsmen. The chief priest was known as “Chief of the Artificers.” Ptah himself was later revered as the “Architect of the Universe.” Also, in the ritual of the “Opening of the Mouth,” the high priest of Memphis is referred to as “he who is great in directing craftsmen.” The priests of Ptah were therefore the directors and instructors of craftsmen. Before their religio-magical doctrines evolved



The Sem priest was usually depicted wearing the leopard skin. His function was usually associated (in conjunction with that of other classes of priest) with the “Opening of the Mouth” rituals in the mortuary temple.

The organisation of the Egyptian priesthood influenced other priesthoods far and wide.



into a coherent philosophy, the rituals of the priesthood were regularly performed in the workshops of craftsmen throughout their working day.

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

The Role of Women

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

The chief priestess was in most cases the wife of the high priest and her duties included rattling the sistrum in a formal manner, no doubt accompanied by chanting and a form of sacred dance within the private confines of the temple. In the Middle Kingdom, women of noble birth bore the title of prophetess and served as functionaries in the temple. And by the New Kingdom, priestesses were divided into phylae as were the priests. The chief priestesses of these phylae were known as the *phylarchs*. Priestesses of the god Hathor bore the title, “Confidential Royal Favourite.” In Thebes (modern Luxor), religious see of the god Amun, a priestess was known as the “wife of the god,” and also as “worshiper of the god.” Although their main duty was the playing of musical instruments in the temple, priestesses were also required to pour



Sandstone statue of Khaemwaset, son of Ramesses II and High Priest of Ptah at Memphis. The Memphite priesthood was one of the most learned. Their god Ptah was the patron god of artisans and craftsmen.

libations to the god and the making of offerings and performing of mortuary rites or funerary ceremonies. They were required to meet almost the same qualifications of purification as were demanded of the priest, but never reached the levels of temporal power that the priesthood held.

A Position of Power

Priests were deputies of the king. The king was divine and a pure person. Therefore, the chief priest was often assigned a name that meant “pure.” The investiture or ordination of a priest was a highly solemn and dramatic event, many of the elements of which have passed into similar rituals today. Egyptian priests were however generally married and had children, and the priestly profession was often a hereditary one. Having passed through a ritual of lustration or rite of purification, the neophyte priest was crowned and solemnly conducted into a sanctuary or naos of the god, a innermost part of the temple where the effigy of the god was housed. In this ritual, he was “embraced by the god.” It was necessary, by sacred and symbolic gestures and acts, to show that he had been accepted by the god.

In ancient inscriptions it is stated that the priest, during the investiture of his office, “took communion.” In other words, at some point in the ritual, he was fed sacred food which had a symbolic relationship to the substance or nature of the god whom he was to serve.

An interesting account relates the investiture of the chief priestess of Amun. A silver container for the libation of milk, to be offered to the god, was held in her right hand.

It is related on a papyrus that the Queen’s principal duty in service to the god was to rattle the sistrum, a musical instrument, consisting of loose metallic rods in a U-shaped device. Pictured is Nefertari, the wife of Ramesses II.



In her left hand she held a silver sistrum. Hung around the neck of both priests and priestesses were their jewels of office, indicating their rank. The high priest of Ptah wore a curious chain which depicted his obligations, duties and powers. It suggests similar devices worn today by mayors in many parts of the world when officiating in some function. Although many priests acquired their office through heredity (from father to son), some were appointed from non-priestly families. All high priests however had to receive their appointment from the Pharaoh. In practice though, appointments were often discharged through the office of local governor who acted on behalf of the Pharaoh.

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

Priestly Service

In the loose collection of papyri and temple and coffin inscriptions collectively known as the "Book of the Dead," the temple is referred to as the "house of the god," a term still in use in modern Christianity for example. Consequently, priests were looked upon as domestic servants in this "house of the god." Tombs were referred to as the "House of the Ka," *ka* being one of the Egyptian words for soul. In other words, the tomb was a place where the soul dwelt until its journey into the after world had been completed. The mortuary priest was the servant of the *ka*, namely a servant to the soul of the deceased.

It was similarly the duty of the priest to sprinkle the god with water. This is the simulated bathing, referred to previously. This ceremony was no doubt derived from the custom of a servant bathing his master. The symbolic (and sometime physical) cleansing of the god was then followed with a rite of fumigation, that is, the burning of incense. After the anointing, the priest arrayed the image of the god in various ornaments. This custom too, with some modification, is perpetuated today in modern religions in connection with images of sacred persons. Part of the ceremony required the opening of the shrine housing the god's physical image, the ceremonial bearing out of the



Rituals were performed each day by the priests to maintain order from the chaos of existence. The centre of activity was on a statue of the temple god that was kept in a naos or bark shrine in the chapel of the temple's inner sanctuary. These statues were around 50 centimetres high and produced with only the most permanent or symbolically significant materials. Like the mummies of the deceased, once these statues were completed by the craftsmen, they underwent a ritual called the "Opening of the Mouth" which transformed the statue, allowing it to be used by the god to manifest itself and in which the divine ka and ba could take up residence. It should be noted that the statue itself was not the subject of worship. These were simply objects through which the gods could receive worship.

Pictured here is the Egyptian deity Ptah who had a strong priestly cult at Memphis (men-nefer) the early capital of Egypt. He is usually depicted as a mummified human wearing a skull cap with a straight beard and holding the djed and was instruments that symbolise stability and wealth. This statue dates from the reign of Amenhotep III c.1386-1349 BCE during the 18th dynasty.



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

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

Priestly Revenue

Hundreds of priests were engaged for the various sacerdotal and therapeutic duties involving the god. Most of them devoted their entire lives to the obligations of their office and contributed little to the material and economic welfare of the state. They therefore had to be supported from temple revenues. Ancient inscriptions reveal that the income for the temples came from two principal sources. First of all, every person who entered a temple was obliged to make an offering, which invariably entailed bringing something edible (such as a cow or sheep) or something of a pecuniary value. A portion of such "offerings" went directly to the priesthood. The second source of revenue, as for example in Thebes, came from the lands belonging to the god, Amun. The revenue from these sources was "divided into 100 equal portions." Twenty portions, or one-fifth, was received by the chief priest, while one portion went to each of the 80 priests serving under him. These were received as an annual stipend.

There were many advantages and special privileges associated with the priestly profession of ancient Egypt. Then, as now, it was a privileged and preferred occupation. Herodotus, the Greek historian, relates: "*they consume none of their own property and are at no expense for anything, but every day bread is baked for them of sacred corn, and a plentiful supply of beef and of goose's flesh is assigned to each, and also a portion of wine made from the grape.*" They were not allowed to eat fish, beans or pork but also paid no taxes whilst all other people in the Pharaoh's



Most of the priesthoods became very wealthy over time, particularly those of the temple of Amun at Karnak. This photograph shows a section of the great hypostyle of the Amun temple at Karnak.

realm paid for his upkeep. At a few periods in Egypt's history however, the temples were liable for imposts and had to furnish government officials and armies with supplies. That was no doubt because temple lands were so extensive and produced such a large proportion of the food of Egypt.

For example there is the royal decrees granting immunity to the temple of the god Min, at Koptos, in Upper Egypt. "*The chief prophet and subordinates, prophets of Min in Koptos, all servants of the activity of the House of Min, the acolytes, the followers and watch of Min,*



the people of the workhouse, and the two architects of this temple; my majesty does not permit that they be put upon any activities of the pharaoh, whether herds of cattle, herds of donkeys, any time, labour or any forced labour to be credited in the House of Min in the course of eternity."

Such concessions by the pharaoh to the phylae or staff of the temple, were political manoeuvres meant to win the support of powerful priesthoods. Most of the priesthoods became very wealthy over time. The priesthood of Amun of Karnak is an example. For a period during the New Kingdom, this priesthood became overly burdened with priests and temple property, and in the reign of Rameses IV especially, the annual incomes of the Temples were enormous, a clear parallel to conditions which existed in large parts of medieval Europe. Taxes imposed by the temples came in two forms. First were the agricultural taxes where income was measured in grain: "the grain of the taxes of farmers." And secondly there was income measured in units of silver, "silver in property and in labour of people given for the divine offerings." Further advantages of the priesthood were the rite of asylum, and exemption from the pharaoh's poll tax, a uniform amount levied on every living person, except of course priests and priestesses.

Teachings: Outer and Inner

The priesthood of Egypt were the most learned class in society. If anyone from any other class of society wanted knowledge, there was no better place to acquire it than from the priesthood..., indeed much as it was for centuries

in medieval Europe. The mystery schools, schools of religious drama and initiation into secret gnosis, were not however composed exclusively of the priesthood. On occasion, specially selected persons were chosen to receive the preserved, sacred wisdom without having to devote the remainder of their lives to the priesthood. Usually this was with the intention of allowing such initiates to transmit the Egyptian wisdom to parts of the world outside Egypt, as happened for example with Pythagoras.

The ethics of the priesthood were not all the same. Some manifested a greater discipline and higher principles and wisdom than others. There were priesthoods that had two presentations of doctrines.

The ethics of the priesthood were not all the same.

One set of doctrines was expounded for the people at large who attended the outer precincts of the temples. These were the teachings for the masses, immersed as they were in superstition and emotional appeal. They constituted the exoteric or outer teachings. Then there were the esoteric or inner teachings which included the secret revelations, the profound knowledge of the sciences and the arts of the time. This knowledge was extended only to senior members of the priesthood and to chosen initiates.

The most senior and accomplished priests of Ptah at Memphis, and those of Ra at Heliopolis, were undoubtedly deep philosophers of life and at times, they were as well representatives of the numinous heights of human spiritual experience. As with all organised methods of finding the Sacred, it is certain that in ancient Egypt, as today, holy men and women always existed in some strata of the priesthood, sometimes hidden from all others and at other times very much known and loved by many and even attaining the heights of temporal power. And at other times they would remain for the entire duration of their lives among the lower ranks of the priesthood whilst carrying out their special work of maintaining at those levels and amongst the common people, the high spiritual traditions of Egypt. Of course temporal power in the priesthoods were often controlled by men and women of far lower spiritual insight and accomplishment than this..., as indeed exists in several religions today.

At Memphis, when the god Ptah spoke his word "went forth," thereby objectifying his thoughts. This is very interesting and is almost certainly a precursor and ultimate source of the much later Christian doctrine



The ceremony of the "Opening of the Mouth" was an important function carried out by the priesthood. It enabled the deceased to breathe and speak.



of the logos. The principles of democracy also appear in what were known as the "Coffin Texts," a loose collection of spells found in various sarcophagi. A series of these relate to the utterances of the sun-god: "I have made the four winds that every man might breathe thereof, like his brother during his time." And again, "I have made every man like his brother, and I have forbidden that they do evil [but] it was their hearts which undid what I had said."

Herodotus relates that the priesthood were instructors in divination and astrology. "The Egyptians also discovered to which of the gods each month and day is sacred; and found how from the day of a man's birth what he will meet with in the course of his life, and how he will end his days, and what sort of man he will be." Herodotus further relates that the priests practised medicine. Each priest-physician was a specialist, "and treats a single disorder, and no more; thus the country swarms with medical practitioners."

The duties of the priests and their knowledge were of course not confined to temporal matters. Their responsibility also concerned the ka or soul and its trials and tribulations in the next world. In a group of texts known as *The Book of Opening of the Mouth*, and *The Book of the Liturgy of Funerary Offerings*, rituals and spells are enumerated which were believed to enable the deceased to breathe, think, speak and walk in spite of the fact that the body was bound in funerary linen wrappings. The second book of these books also contained spells for the continuance of the "life" of the deceased in the next world. During these ceremonies for the dead, the shaman-priest or *kheri heb* presented to the statues of the deceased offerings such as meat, drink, unguents and clothing. Literally translated, the title *kheri heb* means "the holder of the papyrus roll," and his knowledge and power were very great.

Personal Life and Power

The personal customs and dress of the priesthood demonstrate an interesting human touch to their otherwise exalted sacerdotal office. Herodotus informs us: "*priests shave the whole body, every other day, so that no lice or other impure things may adhere to them when they are engaged in the service of the gods.*" The priests were dressed entirely in linen. Their shoes were made of papyrus and it was unlawful for them to wear shoes of any other material. They were obliged to bathe twice every day in cold water and twice each night; "besides which they observe, so to speak, thousands of ceremonies." The priests personally inspect their foods and bless them. "If

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

Of course sections of the Egyptian priesthood often abused their power by exploiting the faith, ignorance and fears of the common people they were meant to serve. *The Book of the Dead*, a collection of funerary liturgies, mentions many charms sold by the priesthood to the people to protect them, and special spells could be purchased for set prices. This is reminiscent of the corrupt practices of Christian Europe of the middle ages and later, where the priesthood sold indulgences. The common people of Egypt, seeking security and protection from danger, were sold amulets and charms that had supposedly been infused with spells that would protect the wearers through the influence of one or other deity. As the people's confidence gave the priests the opportunity to exploit them for gain, more and more spells were formulated to sell to credulous buyers.

The influence of the priesthood, was all pervasive, extending over the entire community and even into the next world. It was believed, and the priests encouraged the idea, that they had the power of veto after death. A powerful enough priest could prevent the deceased from

The influence of the priesthood was all pervasive, extending over the entire community and even into the next world.

being buried in a properly consecrated tomb (the House of the Ka) and could instead consign the deceased's name to lasting infamy. In other words, if they wanted to, priests could refuse the equivalent of the Christian "last sacrament," and thereby consign the soul of the deceased to complete annihilation...., a terrifying thought for any average Egyptian.

The power of the various priesthoods as very real and dangerous political forces led Thutmosis III in approximately 1449 BCE to appoint the High Priest of Amun as the Primate of all priesthoods of Egypt, thereby uniting them into a single state religion presided over by a single high priest. Behind the sanctuary of Amun at Karnak, Thutmose III built a special "Temple of a Million Years," the *Akh Menu*, where it is related that special ceremonies of initiation were performed both during his reign and afterwards. The office of the Primate became the chief sacerdotal office of the kingdom but Pharaohs were increasingly from then on robbed of power and income



Behind the sanctuary of Amun at Karnak, Thutmose III built a special "Temple of a Million Years," the Akh Menu, where it is related that special ceremonies of initiation were performed both during and after his reign.



by the effective grip of the High Priest of Amun who exercised more and more power over the civil affairs and finances of the state. The priesthood managed its finances exclusively for its own affairs and withheld revenues from the Pharaoh, resulting in due course in the emergence of "a state within a state," an ulcerous condition which was stopped dead in its tracks for 17 years by the precipitate, though only temporary action of the Pharaoh Amenhotep IV, also known as the "heretic pharaoh" Akhnaton.

With few exceptions from then on, and for several centuries, the priesthood, once a pious conglomeration of servants of the Divine, gradually enslaved the minds of the people through their rigid doctrines. The priesthood created for themselves a preferred class at the expense of social progress, on the pretext of assuring the security

of the soul of the individual in the next life. But it was a charade by then, even for the believers. But it was sufficient to preserve the power of the priesthood for several centuries to come.

Endnote

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

imagination

IMAGINATION IS LIKE THE SUN. The sun has a light which is not tangible, but which nevertheless may set a house on fire. The imagination however is like a sun in man acting in that place to which its light is directed

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

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

-- Paracelsus (1493-1541)





This declaration was presented at the 1993 Parliament of World Religions held in Chicago, Illinois, USA. It was signed by 143 leaders from all the world's major faiths, being offered to the world as an initial statement of a group of rules for living on which all religions can agree.

Declaration of a Global Ethic

WE DECLARE

1. We are interdependent. Each of us depends on the well-being of the whole, and so we have respect for the community of living beings, animals and plants, and for the preservation of Earth, the air, water and soil.
2. We take individual responsibility for all we do; all our decisions, actions and failures to act have consequences.
3. We must treat others as we wish others to treat us. We make a commitment to respect life and dignity, individuality and diversity, so that every person is treated humanely, without exception. We must have patience and acceptance. We must be able to forgive, learning from the past but never allowing ourselves to be enslaved by memories of hate. Opening our hearts to one another, we must sink our narrow differences for the cause of world community, practising a culture of solidarity and relatedness.
4. We consider humankind a family. We must strive to be kind and generous. We must not live for ourselves alone, but should also serve others, never forgetting the children, the aged, the poor, the suffering, the disabled, the refugees and the lonely. No person should ever be considered or treated as a second-class citizen, or be exploited in any way whatsoever. There should be equal partnership between men and women. We must not commit any kind of sexual immorality. We must put behind us all forms of domination or abuse.
5. We commit ourselves to a culture of non-violence, respect, justice and peace. We shall not oppress, injure, torture or kill other human beings, forsaking violence as a means of settling differences.
6. We must strive for a just social and economic order in which everyone has an equal chance to reach full potential as a human being. We must speak and act truthfully with compassion, dealing fairly with all and avoiding prejudice and hatred. We must not steal. We must move beyond the dominance of greed for power, prestige, money and consumption to make a just and peaceful world.
7. Earth cannot be changed for the better unless the consciousness of individuals is changed first. We pledge to increase our awareness by disciplining our minds through meditation, by prayer and by positive thinking. Without risk and readiness to sacrifice there can be no fundamental change in our situation. Therefore we commit ourselves to this global ethic, to understanding one another, and to following socially beneficial, peace-fostering and nature-friendly ways of life.





KOPAN MONASTERY KATHMANDU

by Shirley Elsby, SRC

THE FLOW OF THOUGHT HAD ceased as ripples on a pond which, with energy expended, had finally come to rest. The calm, still, clear surface remained, mirror-like and tranquil, within which the note of the roaring silence echoed throughout the familiar peace.

Somewhere in this timeless eternity, the gentle tinkle of the bell had rung. Sensations started to impinge upon consciousness once more, bringing their reminders of that other mundane material reality, the slight ache in the back and the tingling annoyance of a fresh mosquito bite on the exposed ankle. The evening meditation was over and around the room the others were also stirring to a similar reality. The heavy haze of incense smoke had thwarted all but the most determined and hungry mosquitoes.

“Poor females,” the Lama had said, “*all they need is food to make their eggs, and every living thing must feed.*” Smiling, he had stood before us, sharp eyes gleaming in the candle light, betraying an even clearer mind illuminated with a fiercely brilliant light. The saffron robed arms had dipped and swooped in demonstrative flight as he waxed philosophically. In enthusiastic detail, he had described the love that drove the desperate mother insect to brave death, time and time again, to gain those precious drops of blood. The monkey of the mind had grasped at a strange sequence of thoughts

originating from that idea. Did Mother Earth feel oil wells in the same manner? Do big fleas have little fleas? And so it had flowed, until the discipline of meditation had intervened to still the torrent.

Leaving the meditation room, we passed through the marginally too low portal with its ornately carved, but ill-fitting, wooden doors. Outside, the faded sign requested silence, a black and white Buddha’s head, with finger pursed against the stylised lips in the universal gesture of “*Silence please!*” High on the steep terraced banks of the central monastery hill, the nuns were chanting. The waves of rhythmical sound rolling down the hillside through the web of tangled prayer flags, now hanging limply for lack of vital breath of wind. Along the lower path-side edge, the clumps of bamboo speared the post sunset sky, their dark silhouettes forming a geometric pattern of nature’s mind against the sky bowl’s darkening blue. Here and there the first few brave evening stars punctuated the ether, while high above the bamboo spears floated the perfect silver orb of the night’s full moon.

The moonlight’s pale ethereal illumination gave a blue wash to the monastery and the beckoning rough stone path. Here and there the rhythmical iridescent flashes of fireflies weaved a dance above the path-side grass and through the nearby trees. Down on the plain below the monastery hill, a tapestry of electric sequins betrayed



the structures of man by their night-time illumination. Clusters of artificial ground-stars, plucked by science from the fruits of nature's storehouse, to brighten the often ignoble deeds of men. Beyond the sequined tapestry of the valley floor, the torn black outline of the encircling mountains ripped the edge of the darkening sky-bowl. On the far eastern edge of this bounded world, flashes of lightning played around the distant Himalayan peaks, testimony to a tumult of nature's forces, too distant for even the great peals of thunder to wash against these monastery walls. The monsoon season surely approached, when drowned dust would again receive the kiss of torrents of celestial tears.

The rhythmic AUM of the chanting nuns filled the ether of this magic space and moment. Far away, across the valley, a dog barked, to be answered briefly by another at some distant peasant farmstead. The AUM returned, the names of God filling the space and moment created by this brief cessation of mankind's activities. Up on the hill, a portion of the chanting separated itself in space from the main body of sound, as a seed detaches from its parent form. Crunching down the hillside path appeared two saffron robed nuns, one small child, accompanied by her older spiritual sister. Chanting as they walked, they passed alongside on their way to the nearby tin shack to answer the call of mother nature. With a screech of agonised metal, the doors opened, then clanked shut, as ill-fitting wooden frames collided with corrugated iron. The chanting continued, strangely resonant from the cubicle acoustics.

I walked on down the path, picking my way carefully between the various obstacles illuminated by the pale blue moonlight. Ahead, the pagoda roofs of the temple gompa stood proud above the bushes atop the path-side wall. Ornate gold and brass-work offered a dull sparkle beneath the silver moon, the solar embraced by the gentle lunar. The floating iridescent pulsations of fireflies drifted across the path, giving a moving depth to this tranquil sea of moonlight. Around the distant streetlight of the corner wall swarmed countless mosquitoes, dancing to the chorus of crickets and cicadas. Curled up on the concrete and basked in electric radiance was one of the monastery's dogs, asleep and murmuring in dog dreams. The ancient monastery jeep was parked in its usual place, the bubbles in its stained metallic silver paint betraying the ravages of hidden rust. The sooty dark stain on the stone beneath evidenced the wear and tear of engine oil seals and the lack of that all too unaffordable maintenance. A bald rear tyre rested



Flapping on the pole at the entrance to the temple gompa steps were two tall, thin, and frayed prayer flags, their printed prayers now faded on the cloth.

against a large stone and a bent bumper rounded off the picture completely.

Flapping on the pole at the entrance to the temple gompa steps were two tall, thin, and frayed prayer flags, their printed prayers now faded on the cloth. The prayer wheels stood in their brightly coloured cubicle beside the path, the legend "AUM MANI PADMI HUM" embossed in ancient script in their metal rims. Beside these offerings to spirit, the ancient, venerated 25-gallon white painted water drum rested on the capstone of the step-side wall. Around the drum, in uneven script was painted the legend: "Iodised for drinking. Good for thy mind, better for thy speech, best for thy body." It was here that the monks or nuns stopped to bend, open mouthed, below the refreshing drinking water tap.

It was here too, at this fount of the greatest of blessings, that this quiet, contemplative traveller stopped. Spiritual and physical thirst briefly merged into one, as the inner and the outer man stopped to drink beneath the shimmering moon. Across the silence, the Himalayas

tore at the sky, while the spangles in the night-sky twinkled at their lesser electric kin laid across the valley floor. Macrocosm met microcosm and there was peace profound. The

flow of thought had ceased, as ripples on a pond which, with energy expended, had finally come to rest. The calm, still, clear surface remained, mirror-like and tranquil, within which, the note of the roaring silence echoed throughout the familiar peace profound. And in the calm, still, clear water was reflected the secretive, smiling face of the night's full moon.

Aum Mani Padmi Hum

We are never more discontented with others than when we are discontented with ourselves.

-- Amiel --

The rhythmic AUM of the chanting nuns filled the ether of this magic space and moment...



THE WISSAHICKON HERMITS

THE ROSICRUCIAN LEGACY OF



by Lucy Carroll, SRC

The only depiction of Johannes Kelpius (1673-1708) in existence.



IN 1694 MAGISTER JOHANNES Kelpius led a group of German Pietists to North America to settle along the banks of the Wissahickon River in Pennsylvania, near Philadelphia. This settlement, known as the “Hermits of the Ridge,” the “Hermits of the Wissahickon,” the “Contented of the God-Loving Soul” (as they referred to themselves) or the “Society of the Woman in the Wilderness” (from the reference to Revelations) was the first known Rosicrucian settlement in the New World,

beginning the first cycle of Rosicrucian activity there, and leaving a priceless legacy to Philadelphia and the young country.

The Legacy of Kelpius

The Wissahickon settlement lasted from 1694 to the death of Kelpius in 1708. After Kelpius’ death, individual members remained in the area, continuing their study and teaching until the last surviving member, Dr. Christopher





The northern part of Fairmount Park containing what little remains of the Kelpius settlement. (From the 1876 International Exhibition)

Witt, died in 1765 at the advanced age of ninety years.

While the site of Kelpius' settlement is perhaps the most important in all of Philadelphia's Fairmount Park, it is the only one that has all but disappeared. No building remains there, no society and no living direct descendants survive. What then is the Wissahickon settlers' legacy? The Pietists who came to the sylvan beauty of the Wissahickon Glen left few documents and no monuments, but rather carried the flame of knowledge which they passed to those around them, charging them with responsibility to pass it on again and yet again. Indirectly, by their example, teaching and inspiration, they influenced the development and growth of many areas of study in the Philadelphia countryside.

The direct legacy of the Wissahickon settlers is, of course, seen in the presence of the Rosicrucian Order, AMORC. Also, today you can visit the settlement at Ephrata, Pennsylvania (part of which is pictured opposite) where, after the death of Kelpius, some few surviving members of the original group travelled to join Conrad Beissel in carrying on their mystical studies.

But there is much more to the

Wissahickon legacy than this. Some of the areas of expertise and influence demonstrated by members of the Wissahickon settlement included healing, astronomy, astrology, education, botany, creative writing, music, art, philosophic and theological study, and metaphysical arts.

Kelpius also hoped to unite the many differing sects in the young province into one common brotherhood. He did not succeed, but the ideal of one people thus united is a never-ending dream.

Somewhere on the 175-acre tract of land, probably under what is now Henry Avenue, was a large garden where medicinal plants and herbs were grown. The local *Unami* Delaware Native Americans bartered information on local plants for knowledge from the strange Europeans. When Dr. Witt moved into Germantown after Kelpius' death, he continued to keep a garden, expanding it to become the first botanical garden in America. Witt corresponded with naturalist Peter Collinson in London

and with the famed Pennsylvania Quaker botanist John Bartram. Witt was a strong influence on Bartram, whose garden may be visited today. It is the oldest extant botanical garden in America.

Dr. Witt's garden eventually fell into the hands of the Morris family. Perhaps the spirit or reputation of the man persisted, for two of the Morrises followed in his work. Elizabeth Morris (died 2nd February 1865, a century after Dr. Witt) corresponded with William Huttell and Asa Gray, and cultivated many rare plants. Margareta Morris (died 29th May 1867) discovered the life cycle of





Philadelphia's Rittenhouse Astronomical Society is named after David Rittenhouse. It was in the Wissahickon wilderness that the young Rittenhouse learned astronomy under the guidance of the Hermits.

the seventeen-year locust. She became the first and, for many years, the only woman elected to membership in the Pennsylvania Academy of Natural Science. Elizabeth Morris gave the family grounds to the Episcopal Church. The Morris-Littell House at Germantown and High Streets Philadelphia, where Dr. Witt had lived and worked, was finally torn down in 1914.

Astronomy

In addition to the garden, there was a telescope at the Glen, and both astronomy and astrology were studied. Copies of some early "nativities" or horoscopes cast there may be found in the books of the Pietist Dr. Julius Friedrich Sachse. This study of the heavens was regarded as decidedly curious by some of the neighbours.

The Rittenhouse family (Rittenhuysen, Rittinghuis, Rittenhausen) settled in the area in 1688. David Rittenhouse went on to become a statesman, astronomer and mathematician. Indeed, Philadelphia's Rittenhouse Astronomical Society is named after him. It was in the Wissahickon wilderness, that the young Rittenhouse learned astronomy under the guidance of the Hermits and Dr. Christopher Witt?

Education and Literature

One of the best things about the settlers was their desire for fellowship. Through herbal lore, healing and teaching they reached out to all their German, Quaker, Swedish and Native American neighbours.

The importance they put on education may be seen in this excerpt from an account of the early days, unsigned,

but possibly written by Daniel Falkner: "For we are resolved, besides giving public instruction to the little children of this country, to take many of them to ourselves so as to lay in them the foundation of a stable permanent character. With them the beginning must be made, otherwise there will be only mending and patching of the old people." (7th August 1694) The teaching continued under Seelig and Matthai.

As to the creative arts, very little has survived, but there are enough pages to indicate that creative thought flourished in Wissahickon Glen. Kelpius' *Diarium*, or diary, remains, with copies of letters. Also surviving is another description of the voyage from England possibly penned by Daniel Falkner. We have Falkner's *Curieuse Nachricht*, which spurred the increase of German immigration to Pennsylvania. There is still preserved a portrait of Kelpius by Dr. Witt. Also surviving the centuries is a collection of poetry in German by several members of the group, including Kelpius, Seelig and Koster, along with the remarkable manuscript of poetry and music, *The Lamenting Voice of the Hidden Love*. There also exists Dr. Witt's translation of Kelpius' *Method of Prayer*, along with a beautiful twelve-verse poem, very balanced and carefully fashioned, called "*Der einsahmer Turteltauben*" signed by Johann Gottfried Seelig and dated 1707.

Music in the Wilderness

Kelpius' *Diarium* tells us that the group "had prayer meetings and sang hymns of praise and joy, several of us accompanying on instruments that we had brought from London." Documents also explain that music filled the Tabernacle, the large meeting house built on the ridge. In addition, the group, dressed in academic garb, furnished the music for the dedication of Gloria Dei (Old Swede's) Church in 1700, and for the ordination of Justus Falkner there as Lutheran minister in 1703.

This early appearance of vocal and instrumental music in what was otherwise a primitive wilderness must have set an example for the community and established a cultural precedent for those who followed. Falkner himself addressed letters overseas asking for more keyboard instruments to continue this tradition.

Healing, Alchemy and the Mystic Arts

Healing was practised, and all were welcome. Kelpius also served as attorney for the fledgling community in Germantown. A document exists signed by Kelpius and





The so called "Hermit's Cave" used by Kelpius as a shelter and sanctum for his meditations.

The inscribed granite monolith pictured left was erected in 1961 by AMORC to commemorate his name and work.



witnessed by Claus Rittinghuis. This contract between Georg Jacobs and Gerhard Levering/Heinrich Frey is in Kelpius' handwriting and is signed 30th April 1700. Here then is a concrete example of Kelpius using his learning for the good of his neighbours.

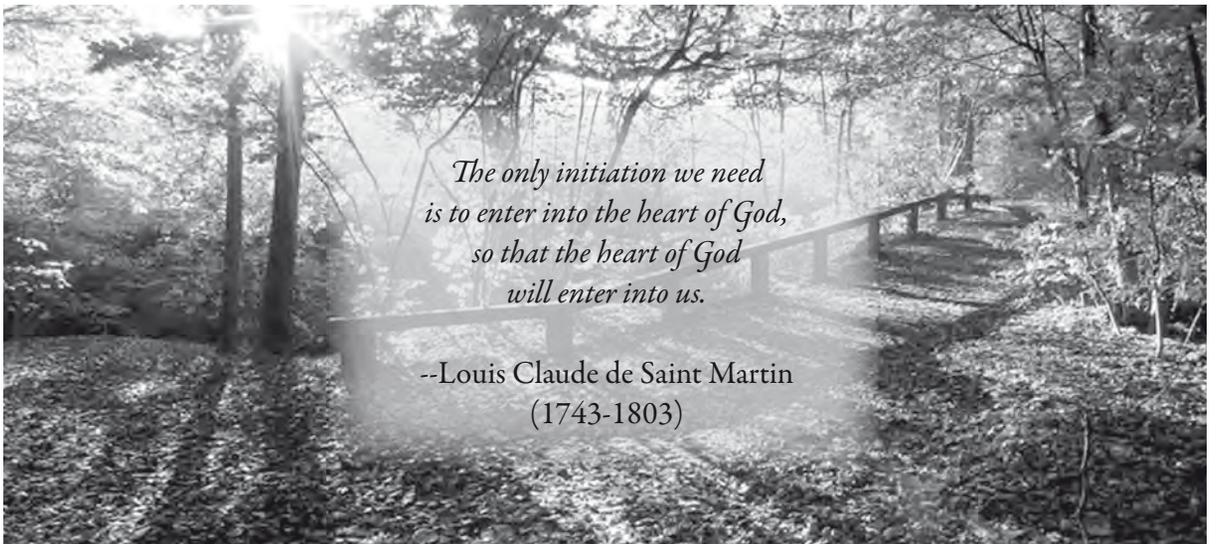
The mystic arts were also studied, and alchemical experiments conducted. Reference has already been made to the casting of nativities.

Some members of the group invoked medieval Germanic lore and made *Zauberzettel*: talismans or symbolic representations of paper or metal with assorted esoteric symbols. Perhaps these designs were the predecessors of the Pennsylvania German hex signs?

The Wissahickon settlement also contributed to local folklore and legend through their arcane practices. Settlers used divining rods, lit the St. John's Eve fire, released doves at burial to symbolise the release of the

soul, gathered herbs and held Rosicrucian rituals. As the Philadelphia area, and indeed North America, changed from being a colony to becoming an independent nation, it broke with the Old World tradition, and the stories of the Hermits passed into folktales.

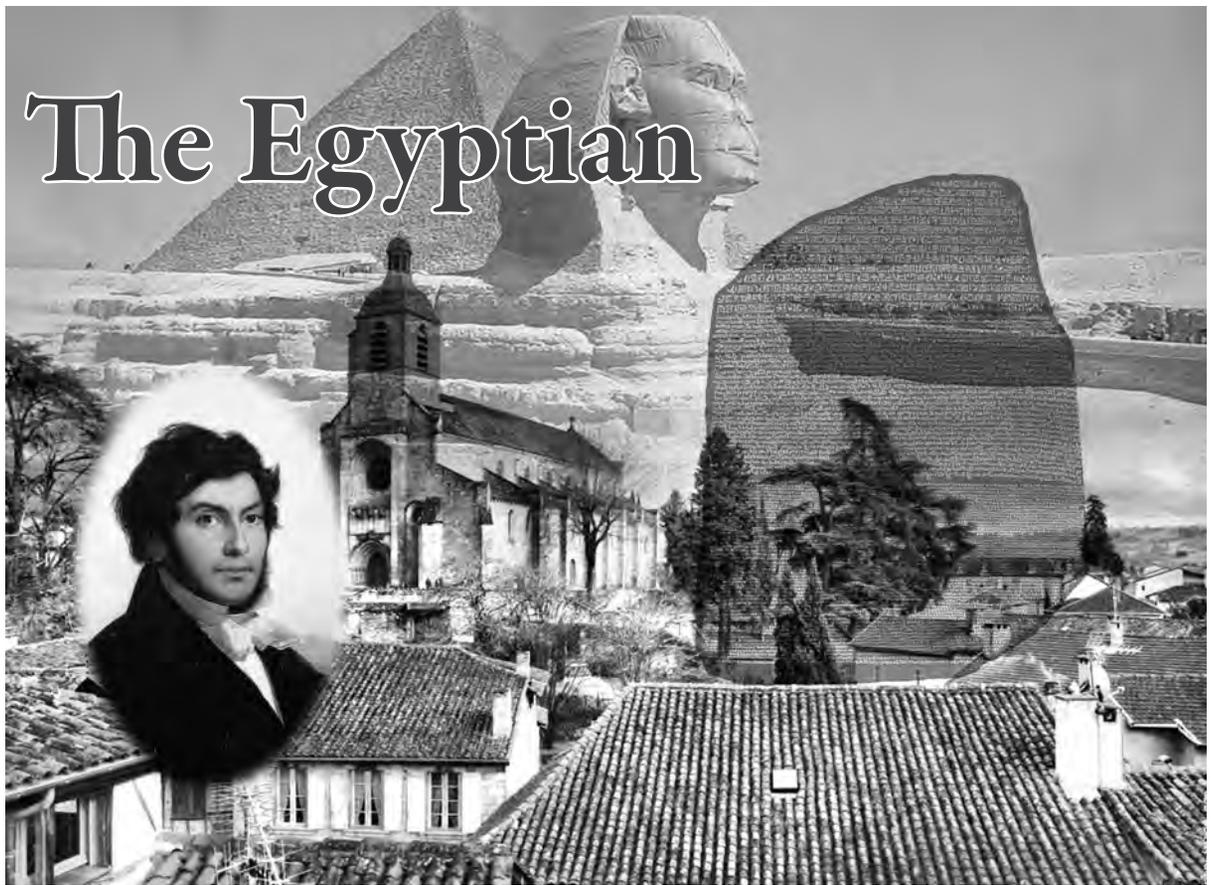
But the legacy of the Wissahickon Hermits is a real one; multifaceted and strong. It is the light shining in the Wissahickon wilderness which continues to illumine those who seek today.



*The only initiation we need
is to enter into the heart of God,
so that the heart of God
will enter into us.*

--Louis Claude de Saint Martin
(1743-1803)





The Egyptian

by *Affectator*

IN THE LITTLE TOWN OF FIGEAC in south central France, the wife of the local bookseller lay in bed unable to move. When orthodox means had failed, it is said that a magician promptly cured her and prophesied the birth of a famous son. At two o'clock in the morning of Thursday, 23rd December 1790, the son was born.

At five, this child taught himself to read, and at seven he heard for the first time what was to become for him a truly magical word: *Egypt*. His brother, already an archaeologist and classical scholar, undertook to educate him, and by eleven he was avidly studying Latin, Greek and Hebrew. At twelve he wrote his first book, *A History of Famous Dogs*. When he was thirteen, he began to learn Arabic, Syrian, Chaldean and Coptic..., all because in some way, they related to Egypt. He even turned to the study of Old Chinese to discover, if he could, a connection with Old Egyptian [Coptic].

In 1807, when he was just seventeen, this young man drew up the first historical chart of the kingdoms of the Pharaohs. A little later, he submitted to the school authorities his sketch for a book, *Egypt Under*

the Pharaohs. He read his introduction to them, and they were so taken with his maturity and logic that they immediately made him a member of their faculty.

With his brother, this remarkable young man went to Paris, for in this city there was a plaster copy of the now famous Rosetta Stone, which scholars in France, Germany and England had so far been unable to decipher. And decipher it this young man was determined to do. Speaking Coptic and Arabic and looking so foreign that people called him *the Egyptian*, he broadened his language studies to include Sanskrit and Persian.

Finally he came face to face with the Rosetta Stone and promptly reported to his brother "the correct values for a whole row of letters." He was then eighteen and seemed to be confirming the judgment of a well-known Swiss phrenologist who had exclaimed on seeing this youthful scholar's head: "*We have a linguistic genius!*"

Such briefly are the unusual circumstances of the life of Jean François Champollion, the successful decipherer of the Rosetta Stone and as much the conqueror of Egypt as was Napoleon.



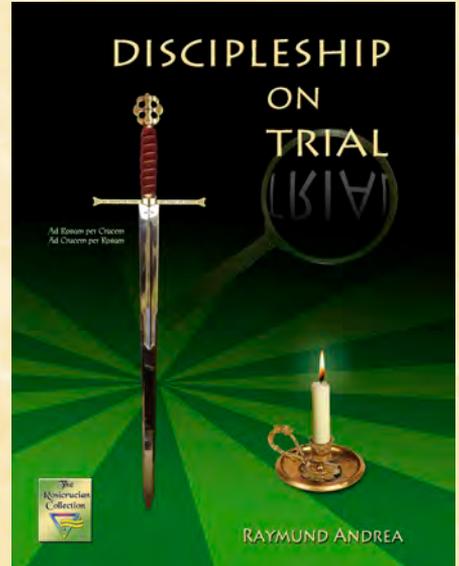
Discipleship on Trial by Raymund Andrea

THIS BOOK WAS written against the backdrop of the darkest days of the Second World War, when cities across Europe were being bombed from the air each evening. The momentous events of two world wars in the space of twenty five years had markedly affected the psyche of nations and brought humanity to a crossroads in history.

What was also facing a crossroads was “discipleship,” a concept the author eloquently develops in this book. No longer could spiritual and esoteric orders remain safe behind their outdated traditions and theoretical musings. A time for radical transformation had arrived, but few had embraced it.

During the two great conflicts of the period, statesmen led the way in adapting to a rapidly changing world while many esoteric aspirants were tied to worn out slogans of esoteric philosophy and secrecy, and proving themselves utterly incapable of bringing about the changes needed.

Forcefully advocating a disciple “warrior spirit,” Andrea does not imply militancy for its sake alone, but encourages a “fighting mentality” to be used in the service of others.

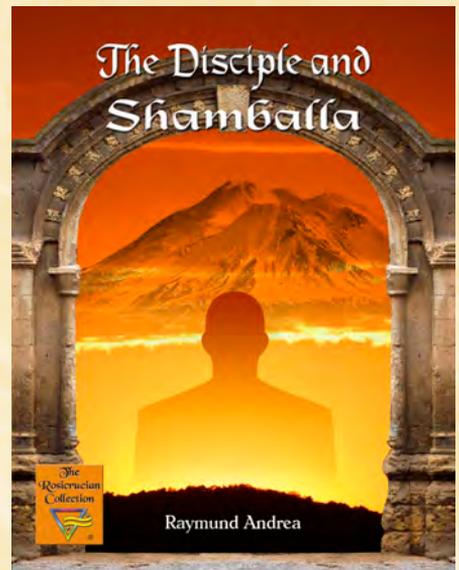


The Disciple and Shamballa by Raymund Andrea

WRITTEN IN 1960, Andrea's last major work gives an unsurpassed account of the highest altitudes of the "mystic way," the universal path of spiritual enlightenment. One cannot help but be moved by the gentle urgency of his spiritual devotion to the highest realms of holiness.

Through proximity to the spiritual realm of Shamballa, the humble soul overcomes the "nemesis of Karma" and draws upon the source of infinite creative power to accomplish a remarkable transformation. Andrea outlines the life of the advanced student who has passed through a hidden portal to a secret inner life of instruction, far from the comforts of the armchair mystic. The living experience of such a person is replete with trials and tribulations that serve as catalysts for ever greater advancement and achievement.

Mental creation through visualisation and the application of will is a crucial part of the technique of spiritual advancement given by Andrea. When applied correctly, an inner alchemy is begun as the student increasingly comes under the numinous influence of Shamballa. The student's life from that moment on is redirected wholly and exclusively in accordance with the holy will of inner Master.



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