The ROSICRUCIAN

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Contribute to Peace



When we survey the history of humanity from its very dawn to the modern day, we observe that it is littered with wars. Generally speaking, they are caused by vested economic, political or religious interests: for example, the goods belonging to one or another group of people are appropriated, a particular form of government is imposed, or people are forced to convert to a particular religion. Whatever the cause, the common factor is that the decision to conduct war and the waging thereof is people. People are responsible for the horrors they generate; it is not chance or fate, or even God. Throughout the ages, wars have caused the death of millions of men, women and children, plunging so many families into despair and chaos. Today, the situation is ever more disturbing now that humanity has the means to self-destruct on a planetary scale.

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My Contribution to Peace

I contribute to Peace when I strive to express the best of myself in my contacts with others.

I contribute to Peace when I use my intelligence and abilities to serve Good.

I contribute to Peace when I feel compassion toward all who suffer.

I contribute to Peace when I see all people as my brethren, regardless of race, culture or religion.

I contribute to Peace when I rejoice over the happiness of others and pray for their well-being.

I contribute to Peace when I listen with tolerance to opinions that differ from mine or even oppose them.

I contribute to Peace when I resort to dialogue rather than to force to settle any conflict.

I contribute to Peace when I respect nature and preserve it for generations to come.

I contribute to Peace when I do not seek to impose my conception of God upon others.

I contribute to Peace when I make Peace the foundation of my ideals and philosophy.

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Thousands of years ago, the golden age of Myanmar's Bagan empire created a skyline of awe inspiring monuments. The serenity of an eternal moment of peace is evocative of the atmosphere of a lineage of Buddhist devotion that has attracted pilgrimages to Bagan for centuries. Reflected in the sun's radiance over the waters of Inle lake are silhouettes, capturing the depths and breadths of the exquisite beauty of life on Earth within humanity and nature's existence together.

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Self Discovery

Find Your Deeper Self

by **Frank Donaldson**

It is not uncommon to find some people chronically worrying about the way they see the world changing. Global warming, the inevitable continuing decline of clean drinking water and habitat loss for many important species, not to mention the huge problems associated with plastic waste. They worry about the emaciated and impoverished future they have been party to in creating for their grandchildren and great grandchildren and feel helpless to do anything to stop humanity's headlong rush towards eventual extinction.

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Many such people have turned inwards for answers, and some have found not only the fundamental reasons for the current state of the world but also practical things that can be done to slow down and eventually even reverse the decline. And for these people there is optimism and a realisation that reliance on anything other than one's own *Inner Self* at this late stage is quite pointless.

An old esoteric saying states: *"The Neophyte must learn to stand alone".* This is the great problem facing the general public today, though mystics have been aware of it for many years. The great early to mid-20th century mystic and Rosicrucian Grand Master *Raymund Andrea* once wrote: *"Life itself is the great initiator."* But exactly how can the average person use the power of that inner *'sleeping giant'* to be initiated by life itself?

Defining Self

Perhaps the reason we have difficulties in life is the result of an incorrect understanding of who and what *'Self'* really is. A casual reference to the word implies, in the ordinary sense, a degree of *'selfishness'*. But there is much more to the Self than selfishness. The sages of Delphi inscribed over the great portal to their chamber of initiation at the temple of Apollo in Delphi: *Know Thyself*. This adage is just as applicable and timely today as it was in the troubled times when the great philosopher Socrates trod the streets of Athens.

What then is the Self? The dictionary defines the word as 'an individual distinguished from other persons or things'. It also means one's particular nature or personality, the qualities that make one individual, unique and different from all other people. Mystically speaking, every person is partly a unique, never to be repeated individual and partly the hypothetical *'I'* that psychologists refer to. But every person also possesses an unknown, supremely sophisticated quality that mystics refer to simply as *the soul.*

Generally speaking, people are far too selfish for their own good. In the truest sense of the word *'Self'*, however, we aren't all entirely selfish; we have simply not yet grasped the real meaning and import of our elusive inner Self, that same, eternal Self that Socrates no doubt dearly would have wanted us to know. Many of the modern norms of society—so many derived from social media outlets—are to blame for the hugely superficial interest that so many people display towards the gross underperformance of humankind in our ailing world. It is only through individual mystical practices that people can come to know their real *'Inner Self'* and thereby, in their own small ways, improve the condition and performance of humankind.



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A Personal Philosophy



The first step in becoming acquainted with our Inner Self must be the construction of a realistic and workable personal philosophy. There can be no real understanding of a so-called *'mystical self within'*, and certainly no realisation of the complexities taking place within and without us, if the main tenets of a personal life philosophy are not firmly rooted in deepest, most profound and serene recesses of one's own being. It is impossible for us to grasp the truths and revelations of *'Cosmic Illumination'* without familiarity and comprehension of some of the terms and conditions which are part of that illumination.

The first step in becoming acquainted with our Inner Self must be the construction of a realistic and workable personal philosophy.

A person seeking greater spiritual awareness invariably eventually finds a method or process by which she or he has at least some of that wish granted. That method or process is often prosaically referred to as *'the path'*. People who have found one or other such workable path invariably discover that anything dealing with philosophy or spirituality can be divided into three main divisions: God, or the ultimate cause of all things; Nature, or the world of phenomena; and the world of human interactions with all its subjective complexities. The word *'God'* is hugely problematical, for there is, frankly, no general consensus as to what the word means in precise terms. But for the majority of people the concept of *God* is a sort of supreme authority over all things, an ultimate source or origin of all things, the final arbiter in all affairs, and the cause and sustainer of all things at all times.

For people of relatively low intellectual and emotional development, God is a powerful being with emotions, gripes, loves and hates much the same as those of his adherents, and for most of them God is masculine. Although he is considered above human affairs and deals only with the preferred senior members of his clergy, he does, on rare occasions, also deal with *'ordinary people'*, though usually only under very exceptional circumstances, such as when the Red Sea needs parting.

For others, possessing broader intellectual and emotional development, God is not a deity *made in the image of man* but a God common to all faiths, even though the faiths themselves don't agree on that. God is certainly compassionate to all people, though in the end He too has His limits, beyond which eternal damnation in Hell or, at the very least, a long time of suffering in purgatory may be needed.

And then there are the spiritually motivated philosophers from all walks of life who see and feel the presence of their God not only in themselves but immanent in all creatures, even in inanimate things, and even as a gentle guiding hand in many of the milestones of life. Such people often *'see'* God as a personal

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perception of perfection in the universe and, for some, S/He amounts to the very laws of nature themself, from which all things emerge. As for the personal touch that this God undoubtedly has for some, a portion or aspect of this God takes human form and communicates with the person as a kindly father, mother, close brother or sister or some other form that the person trusts and loves above all other things in life.

But for all people, although God is believed to be the great cause of all things and the ever-present sanctity running through all of nature's works, God is also something that needs to be understood in intellectual terms at the very least, though best of all needs to be experienced first-hand.

Nature is neutral to our needs and balances them with the needs of all other things.

The natural world is commonly perceived to be raw, dangerous and unfriendly, though that is a misperception and merely highlights our lack of true understanding. Nature is neutral to our needs and balances them with the needs of all other things. Nature really is the *'great leveller'*, for she places us squarely in the niche in which we belong. It may be a bit deflating at times to realise that our niche is a great deal smaller than we thought we deserved. Most secular writers on the subject contend that Nature's works are random and mostly destructive; but the experience of philosophers and mystics show that she is far from mindless, random or destructive.

Then there is the question of the frailty of humanity. People need to understand their relationship to their God and Nature, and this is only achieved fully through mystical practice. In fact, humanity contains within itself a degree of what can best be described as *divinity*, for it has the qualities of our conception of God to the degree that we have evolved our mystical sense. This indwelling divinity is what masters and avatars of the past all tried to place within the consciousness of the masses. Such a truth is of course dangerous to some who seek to impose their will on others, and the tyrant seeks to stamp it out at all costs. Yet truth is necessary for self-dependency.

Think of Tomorrow

It is quite common for people to ignore their ability to visualise and see how things could be, how they could change and craft their futures into something better if they just did a bit of forward planning. Without carefully laid-out plans and visions for the future, progress is painfully slow. In a sermon to his disciples, the master Jesus once said: *"Take [therefore] no thought for the morrow..."* Taken out of context, it's a pretty



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shocking thing to say but, taken in context with the other things that Jesus said in conjunction with this sentence, it is clear that he did not mean the words to be taken literally. But ever since then the words have been taken as an excuse for lazy individuals to ignore the consequences of personal actions in the present, for they consider they have divine sanction to make no plans at all and to just coast along and leave the big decisions to God. Such an attitude is simply delusional, and we definitely do need to have thought of the morrow.

The mind has a remarkable ability to use past experiences to create new scenarios and possible future states; this is just one of the qualities of the Inner Self. When listened to carefully, its advice is always reliable, down-to-earth and practical in what it urges us to do, if we will but listen! There is a popular misconception that mystics possess mysterious powers which they use for good or ill, but the reality is far from this. While some highly advanced adepts certainly do possess powers exceeding what the average person has, they are also sufficiently experienced not to use those powers for anything but good. For such powers become possible only when a high degree of mastery over one's life has been attained. Even among those seeking higher ways of living, there are many different stages of accomplishment that have to be reached before any degree of psychic or spiritual power manifests.

...people seek to establish a balance between present realities, which are slow to change, and whatever future the person seeks...

Part of that journey to greater self-mastery also involves refinement of the intellect and a maturing of the emotional and spiritual aspects of the self. With time, effort and sincerity of purpose, such people reach higher than average levels of ease, poise and stability as a new and improved self emerges. One very important thing such people seek is to establish a balance between present realities, which are slow to change, and whatever future the person seeks to bring about and which also perforce takes a long time to engender.

Impatience with the slow pace of change, or unbridled outbursts of anger at what is perceived as a raw deal handed out by a cruel and unforgiving fate, have to come to a full and final end before any spiritual journey of self-discovery can begin. The quiet, serene, fully conscious presence of one's Inner Master cannot be reached without a high degree of control over one's emotions. And that means nothing less than that the emotions must come under the control of that inner Master-Self. The outer self must fully cede control over the destiny of this being to the most qualified part of it, namely the Inner Master, which in Rosicrucian ontological terms is nothing less than the expression in life, in human form, of the personality of that person's own soul.

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Aids to Self-Discovery

When aspiring mystics have devoted themselves to mystical philosophy and exercise for at least two or three years of their lives, they may indeed expect to receive wisdom and counsel from the Self within. Mystical literature and the sacred scriptures of all ages have given us examples of genuine mystics receiving answers to their questions and assistance in solving their problems, seemingly from within themselves, from their Inner Self. This is achieved in several ways.

We all know the old saying *'Sleep on it'*. In his book *Strange Story*, Bulwer-Lytton says that, for most of us, the first true spiritual initiation comes in our dreams. It is believed by sleep therapists that the deepest insights we get are made possible during the deepest stages of non-REM sleep, when the mind is fully lacking all aspects of objective consciousness. In such dreamless states, communion with the higher forces of the Cosmic (see definitions below) becomes possible, for all intellectual barriers have been temporarily laid aside. Such assistance from the Inner Self may be used when one is at a loss for the solution to an important problem. When a decision has to be made one should concentrate, in a focused though brief period, on the difficulties one needs resolved, and to do so just before going to sleep. Then, in an attitude of prayer, one should request with deep sincerity an understanding of the best resolution to the problem possible. Finally, without further thought, one then hands the matter over to the Inner Master to resolve.

This approach always works when one's motives are pure and fair for all concerned. The more selfish the intended results, the less chance we have of learning anything of true value because the Inner Self, through which all such information passes from the Cosmic on its way to our outer self, works in the interests of the wider world to which we are karmically linked as much as it works purely for our own interests. We are not islands, separate and apart from all else. We live in a virtual sea of responsibilities to other people, other animals and, indeed, even just the environment we perforce share with so many others. All these people, animals and other creatures are within what is known to mystics as one's personal *'karmic proximity'*, and whatever we do, however mild it may be, will impinge on some part of the universe that is within *'reasonable proximity'* to us.

When a matter difficult of resolution needs to be investigated, Rosicrucians go to a quiet room, preferably one in which they have regularly found peace and solitude, and there seek awareness of the presence of their Higher Self, the so-called *Master Within* . As they sit in a specially induced borderline state of consciousness, midway between full meditation and objective consciousness, they ask to have revealed to them a deeper understanding of the matter that needs resolving. Continuous, quiet and effortless petition for the answer will, when done properly, result in the information being sought flashing briefly before the objective consciousness, either in words or scenes and usually couched in allegorical terms—though, on rare occasions, it can be in very direct, almost blunt terms. Most of the time, though, the answers don't come



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during this borderline state but afterwards, maybe several hours or even days later, when the mind is busy with something completely unrelated to the issue at hand.

For the benefit of those who have not reaped such a state of development and would like to have a system of guidance, we can say that those who are interested in mysticism and who strive to follow a few simple rules, such as those given in this article, will little by little begin to notice in their daily lives a new direction in their material affairs. There will be higher guidance which will help to solve most of the problems of daily life, allowing us a greater degree of self-discovery.

The Christian Pietist mystic *Jane Leade* (1624-1704), in her book *A Fountain of Gardens*, suggested that when seeking advice on any matter the first thing needed is to thoroughly research the topic of interest, doing one's best to exhaust all avenues of possible information. That seems obvious to us today when so much information is available online, but it must have been orders of magnitude more difficult on the remote plains of Norfolk in Leade's day.

Second, she said, we should make a careful study of the circumstances and incidents of our daily life, becoming increasingly aware of the patterns of our personal behaviour associated with all challenges, trying to understand the causal threads linking our actions with the results that follow from them. That too is a very modern notion, and frankly something everyone should do without needing to be asked.

Third, she said, we should use good judgment and common sense always, being practical in our use of judgement, for seldom will things unfold in ways beyond our common-sense understanding. It is almost jaw-dropping how modern her writings are, from an age when science and the power of logic and reason were only just beginning to make a comeback after nearly two thousand years of dormancy since their last major manifestation during the period of classical Greek high culture and freedom of thought.

Fourth, when our Inner Self finally communicates with us, we must reinforce the messages we receive by putting into practical use, in our daily life, whatever impressions we have received from it. In other words, take the advice of the Master Within seriously and act on it. Valuable information that is not used in practical, productive ways is of no use to us if left to gather dust on a shelf.

...take the advice of the Master Within seriously and act on it.

This brief four-part bit of advice from a deep mystic of the 17th century is as modern and up-to-date with our present way of thinking as it was foreign to the superstitious minds of country folk during Jane Leade's life. One can but admire a mind as liberated and advanced for its time as this.

Although the words used in her advice are couched in deeply Christian terms, this should not cloud our minds to the nature of the real person, for it is very easy to read through her contemporary language and see the enlightened mind of a true, universal mystic. So true and universal a mystic was she that she was sought out and befriended, over a period of six months in London, by *Johannes Kelpius*, the leader of the group of people who sailed on the *Sara Maria* to Philadelphia in 1694 to set up the first community of Rosicrucians in the New World.

Karma

Finally, a few words on the ancient Vedic concept of Karma. In addition to a judicious use of the intellect, as advised by Jane Leade, we need to take into account the results of past actions resulting in karmic consequences

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for us. If we ignore the irrational, fundamentalist streaks of thought that exist in sections of most religions today, it would probably not be far from the truth to say that almost every remaining person believes, in at least some form, in the process of evolution that exists in all living creatures, humans included. Any person involved in a serious mystical path of development will believe firmly in the so-called *law of Karma*, a term used by Rosicrucians to mean the workings of a fundamental law of compensation for past actions, whether good or bad.

The law of Karma (originating in vedic lore) and the law of evolution logically and of necessity point out the fact that if humanity is improving then it must, at some time in the past, have been less developed than it is at present. This means that, on an individual level, we each have a responsibility to work out our own karmic debt to all creatures within our *'karmic proximity'*, and that will include especially all people who are usefully contributing towards the collective spiritual evolution of humanity as a whole. Being aware of our karmic debt to society in general and to all living creatures on Earth, and working to pay it off at every available opportunity, is one of the most important things we do as aspiring mystics.

Too often we think only of ourselves rather than of the deep-rooted and highly interrelated community of individual souls in the world. Thinking only of ourselves, at the expense of acknowledging the existence of the close proximity to each other of all those karmic links, can in the end result in much unhappiness and unnecessary ill health. We can't escape the consequences of things and events of the past (and future) that lie within our immediate, closest and most important *'karmic proximity'*. If we are not clear on the details of the karmic debts we have and we do not know the specific details of what we need to do to clear our debts, then it is sometimes more productive to think of humanity as a single living creature, an egregore of conscious volition to which we owe a debt



Kindness goes a long way to clearing our karmic obligations, and it teaches volumes to those in receipt of our kind thoughts, words and actions.

of gratitude. And then we simply do as many helpful things as possible, to all people on our path, as often as we can. Kindness goes a long way to clearing our karmic obligations, and it teaches volumes to those in receipt of our kind thoughts, words and actions. Nothing has greater power than this in the advancement of our inner spiritual awareness.

To conclude, the word *'Self'* (usually with a capital *'S'*) denotes something far deeper than is ordinarily attributed to it. Through the wise use of certain powers of our intellect and emotions, and especially through living a life aimed at clearing our karmic debt wherever possible, we steadily acquire the ability to use the tremendous force of our *Inner Self* or, as Rosicrucians prefer to call it, the *Master Within.*

In the great struggle for survival and to *'get on in life'*, many of us, through the principles outlined in

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The Cosmic is the totality of the laws and phenomena which manifest throughout nature: the forces, energies and powers which account for the finite and infinite worlds.

this article, can acquire ever deeper knowledge of our inner higher Self. With sincerity of purpose and proper training, we can become conscious of the knowledge that the metaphorical heart is the seat of a great and benevolent power, one which our future depends upon utterly! The force of such a power is veiled from us by the many distractions and misunderstandings of the outer world. But once we have tapped into it, once we have opened up our private dialogue with our *Inner Master* (our soul), we will truly be working towards a true and final quest for self-discovery.

DEFINITIONS

COSMIC: Used both as a noun and adjective to mean the universe as a harmonious relation of all natural (and spiritual) laws. It is the divine, infinite intelligence of the Supreme Being permeating all things. It is not a place but is a state or condition of order and regulation. The Cosmic is the totality of the laws and phenomena which manifest throughout nature: the forces, energies and powers which account for the finite and infinite worlds. It is therefore a unity, and the particulars we experience are but partial expressions of that vast unity.

AKASHIC RECORDS: The term is a mystical and allegorical one. It refers to the indelible record of all events, occurrences and knowledge that is an integral part of the consciousness of the Cosmic, sometimes called the *'Divine Intelligence.* All things which have come to pass or which will be brought about already exist in the Akashic Records, for all things happen through natural law and in accordance with karmic obligations spun into a web of interactions of the past, present and future. When aspiring mystics say they will *'consult the Akashic Records'*, they mean they will seek to attune their conscious mind with the consciousness of the Cosmic and be imbued with its omniscience. The word Akashic is derived from the Sanskrit word *'Akasa'*, which, in *Sankhya* philosophy, means an indeterminate essence such as *space* or the 19th century concept of *'the ether.'*

KARMA: Also called the *'Law of Compensation'*. One of its principles is that for each sorrow or joy we cause another, we will have experiences in like degree and manner and at times when the lessons to be gained thereby will be the most impressive and useful for all beings concerned, especially us. This principle does not exact an eye for an eye or a life for a life, for there is no vengeance in the process and no intention to cause suffering. The sole purpose of Karma is to teach us lessons, to make us realise our errors and to evolve our understanding thereby. If some of those lessons are painful, then that is how some aspects of the law of Karma perforce must apply to us.

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Historical Mustansiriya Madras, Bagdad

The Bayt al-Hikma *of Baghdad*

by **Bill Anderson**

Following the death of the Prophet Muhammed (632 CE), the Islamic world was ruled by the four *'Rashidun'* or *'Rightly-guided Caliphs'*. They were succeeded by the *'Umayyad'* family, an Arab dynasty which ruled their growing empire, the *'Dar al-Islam'*, from Damascus, where they made extensive use of the native Christian Syrians in running their administration. For the first time since Alexander the Great, Egypt, the Middle East, Persia and parts of India, together with vast regions of Spain and North Africa, were united politically, administratively and economically under a single ruler.

In the countries they had conquered, the Arabs found developed civilisations with organised governments; advanced economic systems in agriculture, irrigation and industry; and well-developed sciences, such as mathematics, astronomy and physics. The resulting *Pax Islamica* (*'Islamic Peace'*) allowed the free flow of raw materials and manufactured goods, agricultural products, luxuries, people, techniques and skills and, above all, ideas and modes of thought which lifted the barriers between East and West.

Surprisingly perhaps, the Arab conquest of Syria and Iraq in the 7th century CE did not, on the whole, interfere with the academic pursuits of the great Middle Eastern centres

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of learning, such as the Syriac Christian schools at Edessa, the monastery at Qinnasrin, Nisibis, Mosul or the university city of Jundishāpur. Harran, in Northern Syria, was the home of a sect of *star-worshippers* known in Arabic sources as the *Sabaeans*, allegedly founded by Alexander the Great. At the other end of the Islamic world was the city of *Marw*, at the gates of Central Asia and also renowned as a centre of learning. Both cities were a focus of Hellenism and Zoroastrianism well into the Islamic period.

However, it was the city of *Edessa* in modern Turkey that played an important part in preserving science and philosophy and transmitting it to the questing Muslim minds. Scholars from all these centres could interact with each other and pursue their studies without the need to pay attention to any official dogma. This first dynasty of Caliphs ended in 750 when the *Abbasid* family, with their Persian backers, overthrew the Umayyads and killed all but one member of the family, who fled to Spain and founded the ruling dynasty of *al-Andalus*. The new Abbasid dynasty (750–1258) moved the capital from Syria to Iraq, the richest province of the empire and one that had traditionally been opposed to the previous dynasty.

Gift of God

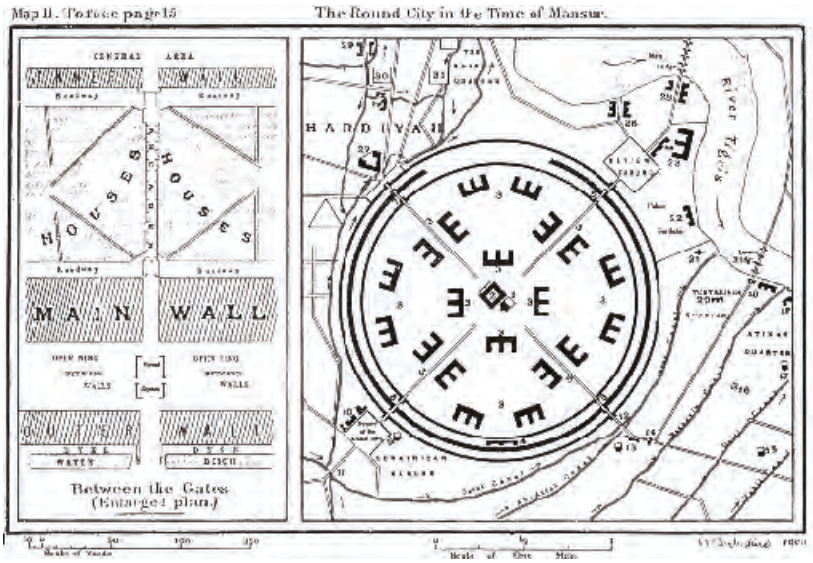
In 764, the new capital was founded by the second Abbasid Caliph *al-Mansur* (reigned 754– 775), close to the old *Sassanid* Persian imperial capital at Ctesiphon. Its official name was *'Madinat as Salaam'*, the *'City of Peace'*, but it became better known by its Persian name *'Baghdād'*, the *'Gift of God.'* By about the year 800 it had reached the zenith of its greatness and splendour under the famous *Caliph Harun al-Rashid* (r. 786–809), who is forever associated with the *Tales of the Arabian Nights.*

The 8th and 9th centuries were Baghdād's golden years, incorporating the material glories of the reign of Harun and the intellectual and literary glories under the reign of his son *Caliph al-Ma'mun*, who reigned from 813 to 833.

If we were able to travel back in time, we would see the two vast semi-circles, twelve miles in diameter, on both banks of the river Tigris, forming the circular



Caliph Harun al-Rashid (r. 786–809)



The Round City of Baghdad in the time of Caliph al-Mansur, with the Palace of the Golden Gate in the centre

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city of Baghdād. The city was surrounded by numerous suburbs covered in parks, gardens, villas, beautiful promenades, rich bazaars and finely built mosques and baths that stretched for a considerable distance on both sides of the river. At its height the population of Baghdād and its suburbs amounted to over two million people. The palace of the Caliph, with its famous green dome, stood in the middle of a vast park whose gardens were adorned with exotic plants, flowers, trees, fountains and sculptures and also contained a zoo and an aviary.

Here the Caliph held court with ceremony worthy of a Roman or Persian Emperor. Surrounding the palace, standing on the same side of the river, were the lesser palaces of the great nobles. Immense streets crossed the city from one end to the other, dividing it into blocks or quarters each under the control of a supervisor who looked after the cleanliness, sanitation and comfort of the inhabitants. Every household was supplied with water all year round and the streets, gardens and parks were regularly swept and watered. No refuse was allowed to remain within the walls. At night, lamps illuminated the main square in front of the palace and the surrounding streets.

Baghdād was a city of marble palaces and mansions, usually several storeys high, lavishly gilded and decorated and hung with beautiful tapestries and hangings of brocade or silk. The rooms were lightly and tastefully furnished with luxurious divans, costly tables, unique Chinese vases and gold and silver ornaments. For miles along both sides of the river you would find the palaces, kiosks, gardens and parks of the great nobles, with marble steps leading down to the river's edge.



The city of Baghdad at the time of the early Abbasid Caliphate.



The Abbasid Caliphate 750–1258

This then was the setting for a remarkable institution, the *Bayt al-Hikma* or *House of Wisdom*, said to be the Sassanid Persian word for library. It was founded by the seventh Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mun in 832, in imitation of the university at *Jundishāpur*.

With the foundation of Baghdād, the centre of world

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learning gradually moved to the City of Peace, becoming the heir of Athens, Alexandria and Jundishāpur as the new cultural metropolis of the Western world. It was also the setting of the *Tales of the Thousand and One Nights* (*Alf Layla wa Layla*), which was compiled during this period, based on the Persian tales of Indian origin called the *Hazār Afsān* (*One Thousand Tales*).



Abbasid Caliph al-Mamun sends an envoy to Byzantine Emperor Theophilos

Many of the stories in the book describe the soul's journey through life. The narrative tells the story of the king, the vizier, his daughter and her two maids, Sheherazad and Denazad. These tales reflect Indian ideas, such as reincarnation, and became popular in Baghdād. From there their popularity spread throughout the Islamic world. It is known that the Caliph al-Ma'mun entrusted Sahl ibn Harun with the translation of Persian books.



Scholars at an Abbasid library.

The Persian Connection

The story of how the Bayt al-Hikma came to be founded really begins during the reign of al-Ma'mun's great grandfather, the Caliph al-Mansur (r. 754–775), an autocrat who modelled himself on the great Persian sovereigns of the ancient Near East and whose interest was also in alchemy. It was at his court that a new office appeared, for the first time, in response to the growing complexities of running the ever-expanding commercial, political and military empire. This office was that of the *Vizier (wazīr)*. The first Vizier, Khālid ibn Barmak (705–782), was a Persian of Buddhist origin from Balkh in Afghanistan, who had served as counsellor and treasurer to the Caliph.

Khālid was a remarkable man and willing to help the Caliph reshape the empire in the image of the late Sassanian Persian Empire. He was praised by the scholar al-Masudi for possessing *'deep wisdom, energy, learning and forcefulness'*, while the historian Yezidi described him as *'generous, true to his word, pious, humane, firm and clever.'* His learning was profound and he was famous for his generosity to scholars and poets, characteristics that he passed on to his descendants. For many years his family, the *Barmakids*, enjoyed a power unequalled in the history of the Near East. It was thanks to the influence of this family and their Persian clients that the government of the Arab empire was gradually 'Iranianised'. Khālid was succeeded in

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office by his descendants, thereby creating a dynasty paralleling that of the Caliphs.

Nawbakht, the court astrologer, and his son Abu Sahl and other colleagues, such as al-Farazi and Umar al-Tabari, with many others sponsored by the Barmakid family, translated and promoted Persian texts into Arabic and Neo-Persian. They were all Iranians and aimed to incorporate Sassanian Persian culture into Abbasid ideology and to guarantee the continuity of the Iranian heritage.

Christian and Jewish learned families from Persia, such as the Bukhtishu and Hunyan families, were also great translators of Syriac, Greek, Persian and other language texts into Arabic. Both families had served at Jundishāpur University for generations. The Bukhtishu and Masawayh families spoke Persian, worshipped as Nestorian Christians in Syriac and translated books into Arabic, serving generations of Caliphs.



Baghdad was the setting for the Tales of the Thousand and One Nights (Alf Layla wa Layla), which was compiled during the Abbasid period and which originated from the Persian tales of Indian origin called the Hazār Afsān ('One Thousand Tales').

Barmakid Family	
Khālid ibn Barmak	d. 782
Yahyā al-Barmaki	d. 805
Ja'far al-Barmaki	d. 803
Fadl al-Barmaki	d. 808

The Barmakid family amassed fabulous fortunes, entertained lavishly, were extravagantly generous with their wealth and began to eclipse the Caliph in popularity and power.

In time, the administrative centre of Baghdād moved to the east bank of the Tigris, close to the palace of the Barmakids, where it remained until the beginning of the 20th century.

In 803, the Abbasid Caliph, Harun al-Rashid, decided to end the Barmakid family's power. After beheading the then current Barmakid Vizier, *Ja'far al-Barmaki* (767–803), who was his closest friend and son of the previous Vizier Yahyā al-Barmaki, he went on to wipe out the rest of the family and those closest to them.

The Barmakids had used their power to introduce Iranian (Persian) culture, art and ideology to the other nations of the empire and to expand Iranian cultural influence. Known as a wise and generous family, they were admirable Viziers, wise administrators and, more importantly to the Caliphs, filled the public treasury. As a family they were strong and eloquent and gave good advice. For several centuries after their demise, the expression *'time of the Barmakids'* was used to signify all that was good, a golden age.

The Iranisation of the empire had an influence on Islamic thinking, feeling and writing, and the Arabic discovery of Sassanian antiquity and Hellenic

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thought at the same time added a fresh impetus. In the field of literature, there was a co-ordinated Iranophile movement called *shu'ubiya*. It consisted of a reaction against Arab domination, both political and cultural. The promoter of this anti-Arab opposition was *Sahl ibn Harun*, director of the Bayt al-Hikma, though before him there were pro-Iranian members of the Barmakid family. These great ministers were all famous for their broad tolerance. That their underlying motive was either coolness toward Islam or faithfulness to Iranian beliefs did not matter.

Harun al-Rashid had had two sons and, after his death in 809, the relationship between the sons deteriorated. The youngest, al-Amin, ruled until he was deposed in 813, and his brother al-Ma'mun then took power. It had been al-Ma'mun who had governed the vast eastern province of Khorāsān from the city of Marw before his father's death, and he was largely responsible for cultural expansion in this area. An Arab historian wrote of him:

> He looked for knowledge where it was evident, and thanks to the breadth of his conceptions and the power of his intelligence, he drew it from places where it was hidden. He entered into relations with the Emperors of Byzantium, gave them rich gifts, and asked them to give him any books of philosophy that they had in their possession. These emperors sent him all those works of Plato, Aristotle, Hippocrates, Galen, Euclid, and Ptolemy that they had.
>
> Al-Ma'mun then chose the most experienced translators and commissioned them to translate these works to the best of their ability. After the translating was done as perfectly as possible, the Caliph urged his subjects to read the translations and to study them. Consequently, the scientific movement became stronger under his reign. Scholars held high rank, and the Caliph surrounded himself with learned men, legal experts, rationalist theologians, lexicographers, annalists and genealogists.

The Early Abbasid Caliphs	
Abu'l Abbas As-Saffah	750–754
Al-Mansur	754–775
Al-Mahdi	775–785
Al-Hadi	785–786
Harun al-Rashid	786–809
Al-Amin	809–813
Al-Ma'mun	813–833

During al-Ma'mun's reign, one day a week was always set apart at court for literary, scientific or philosophical discussions. There are also many records of court debates on religious subjects between Muslims and men of other faiths.

The House of Wisdom

The Bayt al-Hikma, a research and translation centre often called the *'khizanat al-hikma'*, was founded and built in Baghdād by Caliph Harun al-Rashid and was given a new impetus under his son al-Ma'mun. The building complex, whose current whereabouts is uncertain, included a vast public library, an astronomical observatory and a bureau of translation.

The Bayt al-Hikma was to exert a considerable influence on the development of Islamic thought and culture. Its directors were Sahl ibn Harun and Salm, assisted by Sa'id ibn Harun, and it had an important staff of translators, of whom the most famous were the *'Banu 'l-Munadhdhim*, as well as copyists and binders.

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Source: http://www.livescience.com/27853-who-invented-zero.html

The Persian mathematician Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi (780–850) suggested that a little circle should be used in calculations if no number appeared in the tens place. (The Arabs called this circle *sifr* or 'empty', and it is still called that in modern Arabic and Persian.) Zero was crucial to al-Khwarizmi, who used it to invent algebra in the ninth century. Al-Khwarizmi also developed quick methods for multiplying and dividing numbers, known as 'algorithms', a corruption of his name.

This was an age of international scholars working in many different languages. Many of them were multilingual, equally conversant with Greek, Syriac and Persian, and gradually they were drawn to the court in Baghdād. Many Greek works, including those of Plato and Aristotle, were translated into Arabic. A world atlas was compiled and the sciences flourished. Among the other works translated into Arabic were the medical texts of Galen and Hippocrates, Euclid's *Geometry* and Ptolemy's astronomical writings. Later, in Spain, Ibn Rushd (Averroës, 1126–1198) wrote his commentaries on Aristotle, and these profoundly influenced such prominent western philosophers as the Catholic theologian, Thomas Aquinas.

The House of Wisdom's large library was enriched by the translations that had been undertaken. Scholars of all nationalities and religions were invited to work there. They were concerned with preserving a universal heritage that was not specifically Muslim and was Arabic only in language. The Caliph had the best-qualified specialists of the time come to the capital from all parts of his empire, and there was no lack of talented men. The rush towards Baghdād was as impressive as the horsemens' sweep through entire lands during the Arab conquest. The new intellectuals of Baghdād eagerly set to work to discover the thoughts of antiquity.

A significant result of the Arab conquests and the most important factor for the spread of knowledge was the introduction of paper-making by Chinese prisoners of war in 751. Paper quickly supplanted all other writing materials during the first decades of the Abbasid era. Almost all non-literary and non-historical secular Greek books that were available throughout the eastern half of the Roman Empire and the Near East were translated into Arabic. Many of the Greek writings that have reached us, from Hellenistic and Roman times to Late Antiquity, and many more that have not survived in the original Greek, were translated. These



Ptolemy's 'great mathematical syntax' (Megale Syntaxis) was translated and transmitted to the West by the Arabs and became known as the Almagest. It was an astronomical treatise positing geocentrism (an Earth- centred universe) as a harmonious and geometrical design along with mathematical trigonometry.



Ptolemy using a quadrant

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included works on astrology, alchemy, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music theory, Aristotelian philosophy, metaphysics, ethics, physics, zoology, botany, logic, medicine, pharmacology, veterinary science, handbooks on military science and collections of wisdom sayings.

Numerous works were translated from Indian languages, including the famous book on astronomy and mathematics entitled *Siddhānta*, i.e. knowledge, science and religion. The Arabic translation of the book appeared during al-Mansur's reign, under the title *As-Sindhind*, which is a modification of the original title. This book introduced Indian mathematics with the number symbols still used in Arabic, and the Arab science of numbers developed as a result. The Arabs added the cipher *zero*, without which the Arabic numerals would have been similar to other systems. Without it we would have been unable to solve various kinds of equations. The zero facilitated all arithmetical operations and freed the numbering system from complexity. The employment of the zero in mathematics led to the discovery of decimal fractions, as found in the book of *Miftah al Hisab* (*'The Key to Arithmetic'*), written by the mathematician *Jamshid ibn Mahmud Ghayyash al-Din al-Kashi* and completed in 1427. This discovery was the real prelude to detailed mathematical studies. The Arabic numerals that included a zero and decimal fractions were one of the greatest gifts of Islam to Europe.

The way in which al-Ma'mun kindled the enthusiasm of others is admirable. For example, three brothers (the sons of Musa ibn Shakir, an astrologer and astronomer) sought to distinguish themselves by giving fabulous sums of money to collect manuscripts and to bring translators together. The *Banu Musa* (*'Sons of Moses'*), as they were called, were themselves scholars who made advances in mathematics and astronomy.

The search for knowledge was supported by the entire elite of Baghdād society. It was not the pet project



Baghdad from a 14th century manuscript.

of any particular group to be used for their own agenda and it was subsidised by an enormous outlay of public and private funds.

In Part 2 of this article we shall explore further the Arabic thirst for knowledge that motivated teachers and students to travel throughout the Islamic territories and evolve their own body of philosophy, which they called *falsafa*.

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The POWER of Speech

by **Lucy Crawford-Sandison**

Communication between people—indeed, between all living beings—is an intrinsic and inseparable part of life. From the hauntingly beautiful call of a whale to the fungal networks in the roots of trees, each and every life form on our beautiful planet is striving to communicate with other living beings. Human communication is, of course, just a tiny fragment of a vast array of diverse types of exchange going on between life forms. Consciously or unconsciously, all are striving to be a part of the

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expression of Universal Soul, working together to increasingly fulfil a complexity of unimaginable proportions. Through these exchanges, in the blink of an eye, every relationship on our planet changes. In this grand symphony we call life, human speech is just one form of communication, but it has a very special and important role to play for the good of all living beings. As mystics, we deserve to give it our sincere attention.

But what is speech? According to common definition, speech is the verbal expression of thought and therefore a means of exchanging ideas and expressing emotions. Used collectively, speech extends to the group voice, such as in singing or chanting, while words laden with emotions create moods and 'atmospheres' that can be felt by others. Animals, with their natural instinctive senses, respond to these atmospheres; quite likely, so do plants. Of course, words can be spoken inwardly to ourselves, using our inner voice, or voiced outwardly for all to hear, using the larynx or voice box, which is a pyramid-shaped organ containing our vocal cords. The thyroid gland, shaped like a butterfly, is an important endocrine gland that sits directly below the larynx. Below the thyroid gland is the thymus, which is intimately connected with our moods.

What we often forget is that both our inner and outer voices are capable of being *heard* by others. The expression *"I could hear his thoughts"* alludes to this fact and is perhaps why the ancient philosophers invented *dialogue* as a means of honouring the audible expression of profound insights, those treasures of wisdom hidden in the deepest recesses of their innermost thoughts. At any given moment, the quality of our inner or our outer voice can be either refined or unrefined. Words might be inspired and enlivened through the influence of our soul before being spoken, or they could just be plain and fairly basic. I am not saying that we should all go around exaggerating everything we say, as if on a stage all day; rather, I am alluding to the intentions behind the speech and the measure we give to it.

We probably also all know that annoying, trivial chatterbox state of mind that can plague a person's inner world with restlessness, or the chatterbox-type of person who seems to whip up every thought into a whirlwind that others just have to grin and bear. If we're really honest, we know our ego is often eager to fill in the gaps far too quickly with trivial or thoughtless words when we'd be much better off just listening or being silent and being at peace with the so-called awkward silence.

Fully realising the depths of the power of mystical communication with another person perhaps ultimately lies in the ability to exchange with another the light of our soul, as well as a creative, life-filled 'warmth', and to be witness to some of the most refined expressions of universal love, for most noble and sublime forms of words arise from deep within our soul.

"...most noble and sublime forms of words arise from deep within our soul."

Sometimes, in rare moments, it is as if a profound creative wisdom enters our voice, as if it were able to sift out all the tiny details into just a few precise words, leading to a moment of humble yet noble communication with another. This wisdom allows us to say just what is most essential, most kind and most appropriate for the betterment of a relationship or a situation. It is a kind of *mystical art*. Poets yearn to master this creative principle and to capture the essence or 'atmosphere' of thought forms in just a few seemingly *magical* words. A more structured form of this is the power of ritual words and prayer, which increasingly enable us to commune with the Divine.

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In many situations, however, we find ourselves thinking or needing to say, *"I am lost for words"* or *"I am speechless"* because, at a certain point, the palette of words in any language is simply not evolved or complex enough to describe what yearns to be revealed by the voice of our soul. Fortunately, however, as any well-seasoned mystic knows, one of the aims of mysticism is to develop our ability to communicate not just verbally but also mentally with others. Knowing this extends our *palette of communication* with one another well beyond the spoken word. The power of speech therefore really lies in extending the keyboard of our mystical communication, as it were. It means not automatically resorting to a verbal exchange when we want to transmit an idea. In many situations, it is simply better to be silent and to transmit a thought mentally instead.

Of course, we cannot replace every conversation with thought transmissions. That would make us needlessly cut-off from one of the most beautiful gifts given to humanity: the gift of exchanging words with one another or, for that matter, with any living thing. Speech is a *spiritual inheritance* and a part of the creative constructive forces of the universe, so why not make good use of it? Speech is imbued with the potential realisation of some of the most profound forms of beauty, truth and goodness known to humanity.

"But the power of speech is, of course, a double-edged sword,"

But the power of speech is, of course, a double-edged sword, and both peacemakers and warmongers alike have used it intentionally ever since humans learned to form structured words. Very simply put, our words can be constructive or destructive. They can support the stable creation of harmonious atmospheres and be reflective of spiritual beauty; conversely, they can bring instability and disharmony or even be the conduit of mental poisoning, creating environments full of toxic, damaging thought forms. The Ancient Egyptians referred to these opposing qualities as the principle of MAAT on the one hand and IFSET on the other.

Maat, with her *feather of conscience*, was used to weigh up the heart of a deceased individual. She represented the embodiment of harmony, order and truth. Maat's counterpart, Ifset, was a force that could undo or bring chaos to the constructive forces of the universe in nature and between people, as reflected in foreign invasions, plagues, and conflict in the temples or society. Ifset was embodied as Apep (in Greek: Apophis), a giant serpent born from the sun god Ra's umbilical cord, and was not a primordial evil force but considered to be a product of the evil use of free will. In ancient Egypt, the Pharaoh's duty was to provide *harmony, stability and protection* to all of Egypt through his or her spoken word, reflecting the creative, constructive laws of Maat.

The work of the Japanese scientist *Masaru Emoto* has brought to the forefront a discussion about how constructive or destructive words affect living forms and the elements. Emoto claimed that positive words and emotions, classical music and positive prayer directed at water produce *beautiful crystals*, while negative words and emotions or crude music produce ugly crystals. The effects of constructive or destructive words not only affect living beings but quite likely all matter. This is because, as mystics well know, words correspond to thought forms whose vibratory nature exert an influence not only upon the persons who speak them but upon the individuals who hear them, as well as on other life forms and even our planet Earth as a whole. Everything we say puts into motion vibrations that contribute to harmony or create discord. Words

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are charged with the emotional or mental state and intention of the person who says them. Behind a spoken word is a whole hierarchy of vibrations on different planes of existence, including in the physical world, carried in the vibrations of air and on psychic planes.

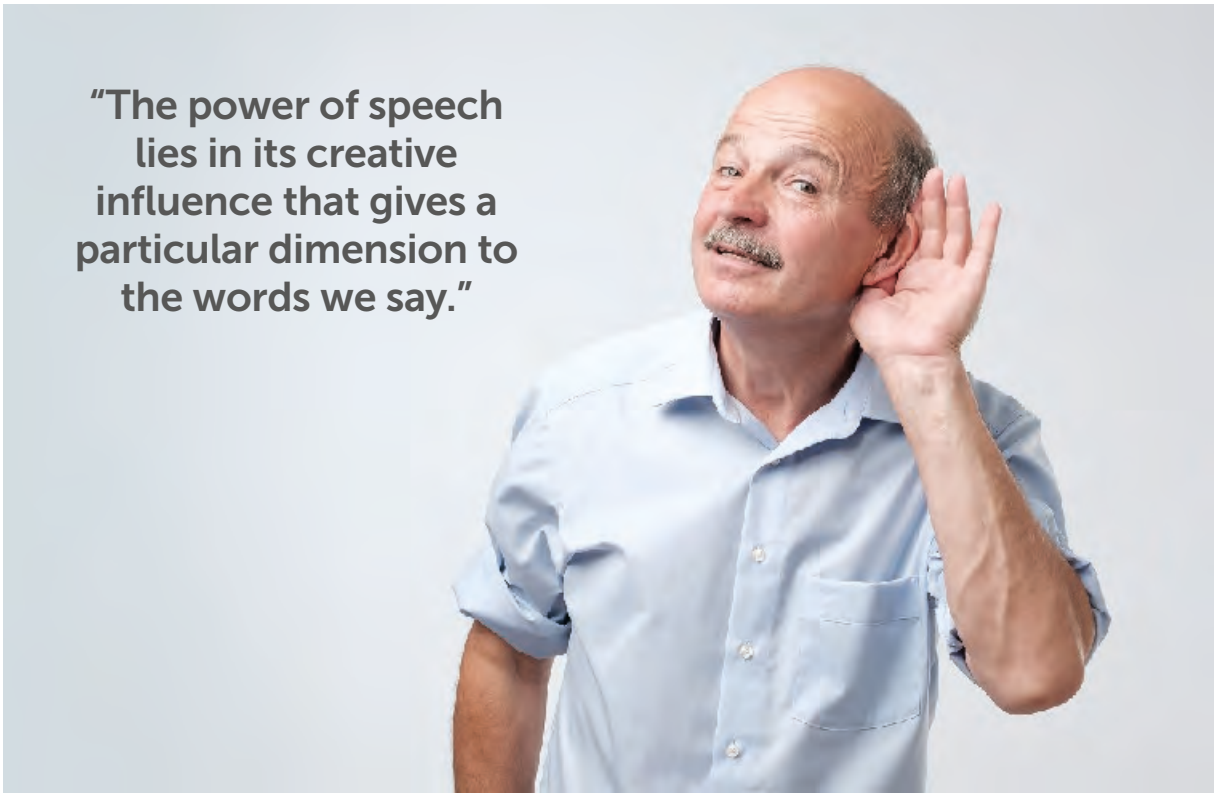
Individuals experiencing speech or hearing loss have been known to overcome those limitations with imagination or by tapping into the core underlying principle of vibration. Beethoven, for example, was profoundly deaf by age 30 yet wrote *Moonlight Sonata* and six other symphonies, as well as the opera *Fidelio*, by using these refined senses whilst barely able to physically hear voice or instrument.

As mystics, we should constantly observe the effectiveness of mental communication by using imagination and should learn to see the world as imbued with vibration. An aspect to observe is whether we have a different manner of speech for different situations. Habits can arise for speech in different settings. Do we have a phone manner or possibly even a Zoom manner? Environments may affect the way we speak, due to their atmospheres. Any environment that encourages a quietening of the objective senses, or the stilling of the 'chatterbox' frame of mind, is naturally a good place to learn to quieten the inner chatter. We need spaces that support attunement with the voice of soul. Ritual spaces are a good example of that and are places for training our manner of speech. However, ultimately, we must learn to be in constant contact with the voice of our inner self as often as possible, even when involved in the most mundane tasks or in the most distracting environments.

"As mystics, we should constantly observe the effectiveness of mental communication by using imagination"



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Coming now to the origins of speech, it is quite likely that it evolved from basic simple sounds, hums, cries and babble in pre-homo sapiens times to express fears and warnings or comfort and joy. Later, around 50,000–150,000 years, ago it probably reached a point of becoming self-generative, rapidly developing into different languages. Anthropologists agree that speech was a method of expression before becoming a method of communication. Early peoples would have developed simple words for expressing emotional exchanges, not only with one another but also with the natural world and, importantly, for appealing to their concept of God. Words were first used primarily to express an emotional state but, at some point, humans would have realised that an idea could be impressed upon another through the emotive power of words.

Ever since then, this knowledge has caused great movements both for peace as well as for war. It is well-known that, in the data-trawling exercises before elections, the power of speech to stir emotions is a key factor in winning. This cannot be explained by just conveying an idea to others—such as, "Pick me, and I'll give you a nice new road"—because every candidate gives lists of improvement ideas. More effective for the politician is the ability to impress ideas as being the best, even if plain logic and common sense would quickly show they are not. The power of speech lies in its *creative influence* that gives a particular dimension to the words we say.

Aristotle taught that a speaker's ability to persuade an audience is based on logos, ethos and pathos. Ethos is about establishing your knowledge or authority to speak on a subject. Logos is the logical argument you use to make your point, and pathos is your attempt to sway an audience emotionally. However, Aristotle would have regarded pathos as contributing to balanced speech. Rhetoric, for example, was designed to have a persuasive or impressive but also ethical effect. An

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imbalance occurs when pathos, the emotive element, is used in destructive ways, for example, to blind people into voting-in some of the most destructive dictators underlying the tragic side of humanity's existence.

Returning to a metaphysical viewpoint, the vocalised concept of a word captures the very essence of its meaning or 'idea' in a non-physical, spiritual actuality. Plato discussed this in his *Cratylus* (c. 360 BCE), in the form of dialogue. He called the metaphysical status of words 'spiritual essences'. In a way, he was saying that the whole of nature is *sound materialised*. Phonetic components of words, such as vowels, consonants and mutes, express universal principles or energies that are manifested in the natural and physical world. Therefore, word and symbol can go hand in hand in expressing a hidden essence.

Plato's outlook is similar to the Ancient Egyptian viewpoint concerning the origin and nature of language. The Egyptians likely regarded the spoken word as having a primordial ancestry, originating in the *Zep Tepi*. In all the principal creation myths a commonality is that the world was said to have emerged from an infinite, lifeless primeval cosmic sea when the sun rose for the first time, in a distant period known as *Zep Tepi*, 'the first occasion'. Similar are the Australian Indigenous myths of the *Alcheringa*, a long period of time when the Gods, or divine forces, were newly creating the world and the first laws for humans to abide by. In the Memphite version, the God Ptah, representative of craftsmen, is an intermediary bringing the creative mind of the all-one divinity, *Atum*, into manifestation through Ptah's utterings out of his enlivened heart. 'Divine speech' therefore enacts the creative principle of the unseen essence of creation.

> "...the vocalised concept of a word captures the very essence of its meaning or 'idea' in a non-physical, spiritual actuality."

> "Any vowel sound or mantra, when correctly intoned, vibrates in harmony with the most constructive forces of the universe."

In fact, the word *'hieroglyph'* comes from two Greek words meaning 'sacred carving' and 'divine speech'. There were a number of ways in which the Egyptians expressed this creative aspect of speech, for example, in the term 'effective' or 'effectiveness'.

'Thought-activity-speech' *(Akh/akhew)* was associated with the concept of 'magic' (*heka*). Magic was associated with creative or 'effective' speech through two components, 'perception' (*see-ah*) and 'annunciation' (*hew*). Perception was the magical ability to intuit what needed to be done, and annunciation was the power to make that something happen through speech. Mastery of the sacred art of writing went hand in hand with mastery of the inner perception of the word and making it 'effective'.

One of the best examples of the creative power of words is given to us through the mystical use of vowel sounds or mantras, which carry a vibratory energy that produces precise physical, psychic and spiritual effects.

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> "Everything we see, touch, feel, hear and taste...is the result of the creative power of the divine language on the invisible plane."

Any vowel sound or mantra, when correctly intoned, vibrates in harmony with the most constructive forces of the universe.

Rosicrucian ontology has a relationship with a primordial tradition that we can see reflected in the Ancient Egyptian and hermetic creation stories. Thus, Creation was conceived in the Divine Mind and then projected as the sound of '*the Word*', traditionally considered as the *Primordial Vibration*. Everything we see, touch, feel, hear and taste—in fact, all creation on the visible plane—is the result of the creative power of the divine language on the invisible plane.

Mystical poets and writers have been alluding to this for centuries. For example, in the metaphorical writings of C.S. Lewis in *The Chronicles of Narnia,* the lion Aslan creates the world of Narnia through his vibrational roar. Once it has been created, he is elusive and only appears at times of sincerity, nobility and innocence of heart shown by various characters. Lewis stated that Aslan represented an incarnation of the Christ-being, saying, *"Since Narnia is a world of Talking Beasts, I thought He (Christ) would become a Talking Beast there, as He became a man here."* Lewis clearly alludes to the Christian interpretation of the creative power of the word—the Logos—as Christ, the giver of God's word to humans. Such power of words is often lost to us but, if realised, has the power to create even a whole world.

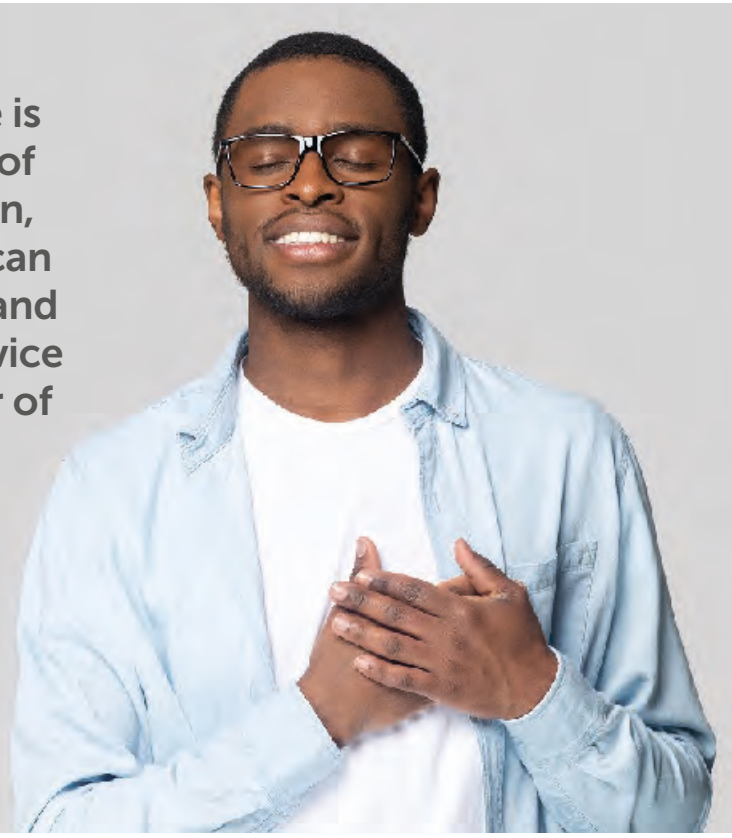
Let us therefore always remember that there exists a constant relationship between what we think and what we say. If our dearest desire is to truly be an agent of peace and inspiration, we should do all we can to master our words and put them into the service of the creative power of positive thought. By doing this, we will truly reflect the Word of the God of our Heart and be the instrument of the magnificent Cosmic plan that we are entirely fortunate enough to experience every day, even in the blink of an eye.

In closing, I would like to focus on a profoundly beautiful expression of the primordial word of God, which perhaps more than any other piece of mystical writing conveys this idea. It is from the *Gospel according to St John*. The text is given in English, and then the first two lines of that text are rendered in four other languages in an attempt to allow you to feel the vibrational quality contained within the words, regardless of your understanding of the language. The languages given below are just an illustration, but you can choose any other language to read this excerpt from the *New International Version of the Gospel according to St. John*, or another version of your choice.

In the beginning was the Word
And the Word was with God
And the Word was God.
The same was in the Beginning with God.
All things were made by Him
And without Him was not anything
made that was made.
All that came to be was alive with his Life
And that Life was the Light of men
[or of humankind].
And the Light shone in the darkness
And the darkness has not overcome it.

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"If our dearest desire is to truly be an agent of peace and inspiration, we should do all we can to master our words and put them into the service of the creative power of positive thought."



In Greek:

En árchí ín ó lógos
Kai o Lógos ítan me ton Theó.

In French:

Au commencement était la Parole
Et la Parole était avec Dieu.

In Latin:

In principio erat Verbum
Et verbum erat apud Deum.

In Hawaiian:

I ka mua ka Logou
Me ke Akua ka Logou.

Finally, again in English:

In the beginning was the Word
And the Word was with God
And the Word was God.
The same was in the Beginning with God.
All things were made by Him
And without Him was not anything
made that was made.
All that came to be was alive with his Life
And that Life was the Light of men
[or of humankind].
And the Light shone in the darkness
And the darkness could not master it.

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Reincarnation

by **Frank Hutton**

For many in the ancient world, particularly on the Indian subcontinent, reincarnation was the most logical and just conclusion they could come to about the possible continuance of life and consciousness after death. Today, in all countries of the world, though especially in civilisations rooted in one or other form of Christian ethic, reincarnation slowly but steadily is being accepted as an alternative to the stark finality of beliefs based solely on the Judeo-Christian-Islamic belief systems, the so-called *Abrahamic lineage.*

The taboo surrounding the subject of reincarnation in past times is all but gone today, and more and more people each year openly, and often in defiance of their religious faith, accept reincarnation as a more logical and certainly a more just system of belief than one which says that we have only one chance in this world to either make it to *'heaven'* or to be eternally damned to *'hell.'* As the penetrating light of mystical understanding spreads and illumines not only the darkened areas of the world but, more importantly, the darkened areas of the

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mind, humanity will sweep away those human-made restrictions, limitations and barriers placed in its path.

The collective philosophical reasoning regarding the purpose of life and the true nature of universal justice inevitably draws us to the subject of reincarnation. That still, small voice within tells us that this is a natural and logical explanation for the mystery of life. But the Western religious indoctrination and education we have received has haughtily assured us from childhood that reincarnation is a superstition of unenlightened and ignorant people; that if it were truth it would after all have been taught to us, just as all other truth is.

> Why suffer earthly trials when we have been promised eternal peace in paradise if we will but follow the rules of the church? Be careful, why gamble? This could be your only chance!

It doesn't seem as though one has much of a choice..., either believe what the church hierarchy says or spend the rest of eternity in the fires of damnation! Such a stark and devastating assertion is intended to shame us, and certainly it is intended to instil fear in us so we don't make the 'wrong' choice in life. But can we be sure that religious dogma is correct purely because it has existed for so long? Of course, long usage is no guarantee of truth, so we must rely on our own inner wisdom when deciding what to do.

Opponents of reincarnation consider the birth of each human being as being the first and only incarnation of that individual. People are created by God, fully formed and with all their physical, mental and emotional traits, like new cars coming off a production line. And they have only one chance of either making the best of this single life or completely messing things up and ending up in a place of eternal suffering. Where's the justice in that? It doesn't take a genius to see that such a regime is fundamentally flawed from the perspective of universal justice. If there is a God, then surely that God is impartial and, above all, upholds the highest form of justice that the human mind can conceive. Having one stab at living a life that is good in the eyes of the church, regardless of the conditions in which one was born, certainly lies far below the ideal of universal justice that even a child can conceive.

One really wonders how people can be so sure and dogmatic about their beliefs. In his classic text, *Mansions of the Soul*, Dr H. Spencer Lewis wrote:

> Whether we accept the doctrine of reincarnation or not we will continue to live in accordance with some law, some principle, some scheme of things.

And further:

> What we may believe, or think, in regard to reincarnation will not change one principle of the doctrine nor affect the laws involved one iota.



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Natural Law

It seems obvious that natural laws are inviolate. We cannot change them for our own selfish reasons. We accept the tangible evidence of the laws of the physical world and, if wise, cooperate with them to our advantage. Many aspects of the physical world and indeed the universe still confound us, for our knowledge is very limited, but we still do our best to cooperate with the laws that we know and understand.

Of course, reincarnation is a belief system too, and, like all belief systems, it cannot be empirically verified by any scientific laws we know... yet! Unfortunately, this opens the subject to all kinds of unbridled speculation and consequent literary trash. So few people have made an effort to do any personal research on the subject for themselves that it is understandable there are more misinformed popular notions about reincarnation than there is correct knowledge.

Most writers on the subject have simply rehashed the already abundant erroneous material available. Yet, for those who truly think for themselves, there is much good, honest literature around, if one is prepared to search for it.

Evolution and Refinement

The *sincere* seeker of esoteric truths prefers to draw a line of refining distinction between the several popular terms used to describe reincarnation. The term '*metempsychosis*', we find, is derived from 'metempsychoein', or the Greek words 'meta' (over, beyond) and 'empsychoun' (to animate).[1] It has to do with the mythical phenomenon of 'spontaneous generation'.[2] The term '*transmigration*' has more accurately to do with soul force or a soul entity migrating from one animate vehicle to another. Such migration is conceived to be casual, if not chaotic, or, in other words, without plan.



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The term *'reincarnation'* derives from Latin and literally means to be embodied again in flesh. Mystically, it means also that the entity (the 'sentient thing') that re-embodies and reanimates a new body evolves itself to ever higher and more sophisticated levels of consciousness with each incarnation. Specifically, it precludes the possibility of retrogression from the human form to, for example, the form of some animal, as is understood in the concept of transmigration.

The term 'reincarnation' derives from Latin and literally means to be embodied again in flesh.

Since all the dominant religions of the East teach the doctrine of reincarnation, it must be admitted that the chief opponent of that philosophical doctrine has been the traditional Christian church. But why? There is evidence that up until a certain time even Christianity embraced the idea of reincarnation. The Jewish historian Josephus (37–100 CE), in his *History of the Jewish War*, wrote:

> ...they say that all souls are incorruptible; but that the souls of good men are only removed into other bodies.

In the Christian *Book of Revelations*, the last in the Christian Bible, we read:

> Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out. (Revelation 3:12)

This could be a clear reference to the end of the process of reincarnation in the true Christian individual.



Biblical References

> Did I not live in another body, or somewhere else, before entering my mother's womb? — St Augustine, *Confessions 1:6.*

None less than St Augustine (354–430 CE) himself wrote the above quotation, but if we expect reincarnation references in the Bible to be headlined as daring proofs we will be disappointed, for the subject was not mysteriously rejected in ancient times as it is by the church today. One must be capable of recognising references without the benefit of a headline or an index to the subject.

For example, in John 9:1–3 we have the following incident:

> As he [Jesus] walked along, he saw a man blind

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> from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'

Clearly, the disciples were aware of reincarnation, for, if they were not, they would not have entertained the notion that the man could have sinned before he was born.

In Mark 9:11–13 we have the following conversation:

> ...and they [Jesus' disciples] asked him, 'Why do the scribes say that Elijah must first come?' [i.e. be reincarnated] And he answered, 'Elijah verily comes first, and restores all things... but I say to you, Elijah has indeed come, and they have done to him whatever they wished...'

...the belief in reincarnation certainly existed with the early Christians.

There is clearly a reference here to reincarnation, and Jesus is saying that Elijah reincarnated as John the Baptist. That at least opens up the possibility of reincarnation within the Christian faith, even if not reincarnation by everyone.

In Matthew 16:13–16 Jesus says to his disciples:

> 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they [the disciples] said, 'Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'

Once again this is a clear reference to reincarnation and demonstrates that the belief in reincarnation certainly existed with the early Christians.

In the Old Testament, too, there are several references to reincarnation. Reading the Bible therefore with an open mind, one realises that reincarnation is not the abhorrent concept portrayed by the modern church.

Other Ideas

Among certain 'heretical' Christian sects, such as the Manicheans, Priscillianists[3] and Cathars, the doctrine of rebirth or reincarnation was no stranger and in fact played a part in their suppression and destruction. It is probable that in all of Christian history there have been those who, although sincere in their faith, have nevertheless clung privately to the concept of reincarnation because of the private experience of revelation that they underwent which proved to them that they had incarnated before.



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Rosicrucians have been asked in the past why they do not publish a list of thinkers and prominent people who have endorsed the doctrine of reincarnation. The answer remains that such a list would prove nothing about the truth of the subject. Throughout history, great numbers of people have often been wrong in their opinions. On the other hand, this does not mean that such a list is unobtainable. Most of the venerated Greek philosophers accepted reincarnation without question, as did the Neoplatonists and the Gnostics after them. Spinoza, Leibniz, Goethe, Hume and other philosophers of their time shared in their acceptance of reincarnation.

The delightful and beautifully composed epitaph for Benjamin Franklin, composed by him in 1728, although not used on his grave (as is sometimes erroneously stated), declares his belief in reincarnation. It bears repeating:

> The Body of B. Franklin, Printer; Like the Cover of an old Book, Its Contents torn out, And stript [sic] of its Lettering and Gilding, Lies here, Food for Worms. But the Work shall not be wholly lost: For it will, as we believ'd, appear once more, In a new and more perfect Edition, Corrected and amended By the Author.

The American philosopher and essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote:

> We are driven by instinct but have innumerable experiences which are of no visible value; and we may resolve through many lives before we shall assimilate or exhaust them.

And Thomas Edison and Henry Ford were two men, both of mechanical and practical bent, who fervently accepted the idea of reincarnation.

The last few decades have brought about a drastic change in the respectability of such subjects as reincarnation. In the past, courageous seekers and thinkers had to conceal their interest in reincarnation for fear of being ostracised from their church, family and friends..., indeed, for fear of being burned at the stake! How different it is today, where we have the freedom to discuss and express our opinions on many subjects. Few people realise how privileged they should feel to be able to think as they wish.

In the past, courageous seekers and thinkers had to conceal their interest in reincarnation for fear of being ostracised

The time has come, therefore, for everyone to give thought to the concept of reincarnation and to coolly and calmly compare it, in terms of its superior logic and justice, with the crude, illogical and unjust concept of one life in which we, by chance, by the roll of the *'Cosmic dice'*, either make it to eternal paradise or are condemned to eternal suffering in hell. Eternity is a long time..., only fools speak of it as though they understood it!

Footnotes

[1] Concerning metempsychosis, in the OED we read, *"...the supposed transmigration of the soul of a human being or animal at death into a new body of the same or a different species."*

[2] Ibid., *"...the supposed production of living from non-living matter as inferred from the appearance of life (due in fact to bacteria, etc.) in some infusions."*

[3] A Christian doctrine developed in the Iberian Peninsula (present day Spain) in the 4th century by Priscillian.

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Finding the Peace *of your Soul*

by **Amelia**

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 type of peace 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',

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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 the so-called '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 the stormy north wind passes.

Energy should be flowing through us at all times, as though we were a sun beaming its light and energy to all the universe.

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 in which we conduct our outer lives, the people we hurt, the small liberties and lies we engage in, 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, and they 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 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 that 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 your 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

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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?

> ...come to the realisation that the promptings of the soul are always good for you...

The answer is simple. First come to the realisation that the promptings of the soul are always good for you, are for your personal good, and are 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 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 remain for you challenges piled upon challenges 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. Therefore, the knight 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,

> The depths of the soul are discovered through the intensity of your desire to know it.

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.

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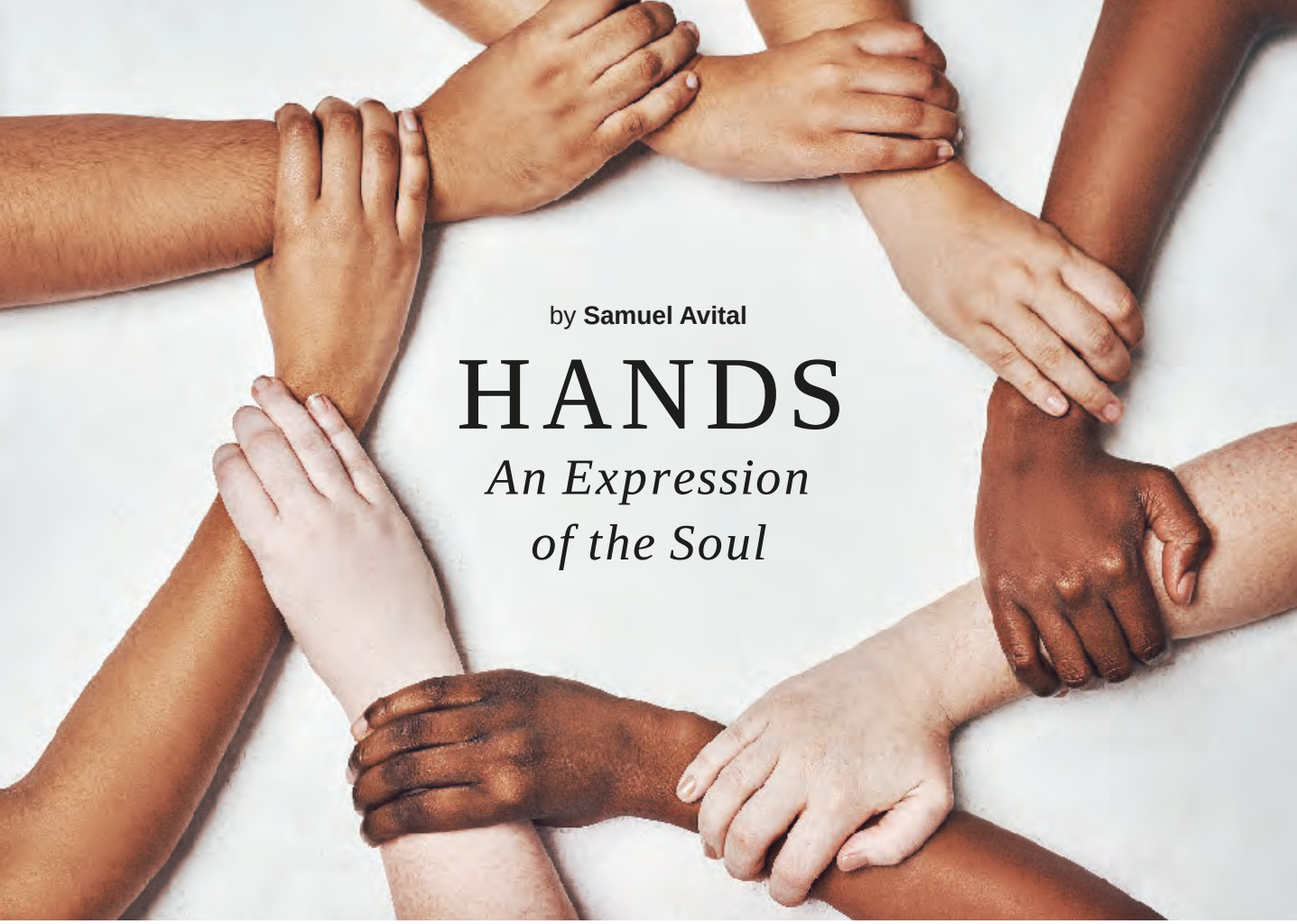


The depths of the soul are discovered through the intensity of your desire to know it. You receive in accordance with universal law, namely in accordance to your willingness to give first and to patiently wait for your just rewards, even if that wait takes more than one lifetime to come to fruition. 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, sea, 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 doing so 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 and a condition that must be met before any person can fully experience Peace Profound.

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.

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by **Samuel Avital**

HANDS

An Expression of the Soul

We all know the magnificent artwork by Albrect Dürer, said to have been sketched in 1508, of hands held in an attitude of prayer. A simple drawing like this brings forth a wealth of emotions, not only about the meaning of prayer itself but also the miracle of our hands. Inspired by a visit to the Musee Rodin and by the work of this great artist in general, I was particularly inspired by *The Cathedral*, Rodin's famous work of hands joined in the fervour of prayer, their slow movement rising like a song of praise to God. In viewing this inspiring work of art, one is drawn in heart and mind to the inner realm to acknowledge and appreciate the simplicity of these hands that serve us.

Visualise for a moment the hands of Rodin that shaped this beautiful sculpture, or the hands of Rembrandt while painting, or Michelangelo's hands

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while taming the stone to give it form. Visualise the hands of Arthur Rubinstein, or of Yehudi Menuhin, or Ravi Shankar performing on his sitar, and you will see how, through the hands of great artists, a human heart can come to appreciate and admire the work of God.

The creation of great paintings, calligraphy and hieroglyphs by the hands of men and women has preserved for us today the greatness of civilisations. It can be noted that nothing could manifest without the touch of the human hand. As the Kabalist sage would say, *"In touching, man wants to be touched"*, touched by the hands of the Creator and blessed by the hands of God.

In the language of the prophets, we find this common expression: *"...and the hand of God was upon me."* This expression does not necessarily mean that God has physical hands, but it does suggest that the power of God was upon him, upon his soul. The priest blessing the community with his hands outstretched, the knowing hands of the healer, these examples suggest without doubt the wonderful power that is within each one of us, manifested through our hands.

We are made in the image of God and express our gratefulness of being by giving with these hands, caressing the beloved. Hands hold a head to think, hands clap to express joy, hands form attitudes of prayer in the beautiful Indian mudras. Please note that in all these actions the hands are doing their work in a mighty and dignified silence.

If, for just a moment, we bring to the forefront of our awareness the human hand and meditate on how it serves us in our quest for self-knowledge and practical life, we come to acknowledge the hand's importance.

Our hands may seem common because we all have hands, and yet how often do we appreciate the sheer joy of having these hands at our service at any time to translate our thoughts into those beautiful creative actions of writing, drawing, sewing, cooking and playing. Look for a moment at these hands and see how they live freely, listening to an unknown command to serve you, to scratch your face or to brush your teeth in the morning, or even to be still. It is observed that the hand is most natural and expressive when it is not doing anything specific. When at rest, the fingers, slightly



Albrecht Dürer - Praying Hands, 1508



The Cathedral by Auguste Rodin

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bent, seem to surrender to the sheer joy of relaxing. And yet, when in action, they respond amazingly and immediately to our inspirational thoughts in a beautiful, awesome silence.

In mime and in dance, hands design the space and sculpt the air into a moving illusion, creating a beautiful dimension of reality. From one creative impulse the air is given movement, the space takes shape, and when the hands grab the rock we can climb the mountain. The silhouette of the hands is known to be an art form in the theatre of shadows. Hands become autonomously alive when imitating animals, human faces and other objects. When the spirit works through the hands, allowing their creativity the freedom to move, hands can mysteriously move us to laughter and tears.

The Instrument

In French, the word human is spelt '*humain*' (hu-main). *Main* is the word for hand. *Hu*, the divine sound, along with *Main* reads *'He is hand'*. Is it a coincidence, or does it mean that this *He* (God) is very near us through our hands?

In Hebrew, the word for hand is *Yad* (יד). *Yod* (י) is also the tenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet. *Yod* (י), which is the first letter of *Yad* (יד) (remember, you read from right to left in Hebrew), designates the ten fingers, the ten Sephiroth. It is with our ten fingers that humans learn to count; our hands then are the basis of geometry and mathematics.

Yad (יד) numerically in Hebrew comes to 14, designating the 14 phalanges of the human hand. We have two hands, 14 and 14, which means in two hands we have 28 phalanges. This number 28 creates the word *Koah* (כח), meaning power or action, the power that we possess in our hands. Therefore is given to man the mighty power to create and expand.

And so comes the discovery that we have two hands, the right and the left. When both are grasping or working at something, they are in the act of creating. With a potter, for example, his two hands form the clay. Clay in the hands of the potter, directed by his intelligence, might become a useful container for our very life. A cup, it is known, is an imitation of the human hand. One cups one's hand to drink.

The right hand without the left hand is not complete. One complements the other and together they represent the polarities of our being, the positive and the negative. It is the left hand of the violinist which holds the strings and the right which draws the bow over the strings to create sound. Or it is one hand which holds the paper in order that the other hand can write upon it.

In prayer, these two hands resemble two branches on the tree of life, growing from the trunk's heart centre and reaching toward heaven with their finger leaves outstretched. In prayer, the hands and fingers reach out to master the ability to shape matter with their service; and by this they cause the raising of the consciousness of humans and unite it with the consciousness of the Cosmic through their work on the earth plane.

The Servant

What a miracle, this phenomenon that is taken for granted by many! The hand, a magnificent grouping of bones, muscle and skin formed in such a beautiful way, has as its ultimate goal the very purpose of life: to serve.

We do not separate the hands from the body and the spirit. There is a simple relationship that has been emphasised here, namely, obedience and silent service. The spirit makes the hand and the hand makes the spirit. That reveals a state of conscience in every action in which the hand is involved, even that of stillness. The hand organises the expression and the action directed from within.

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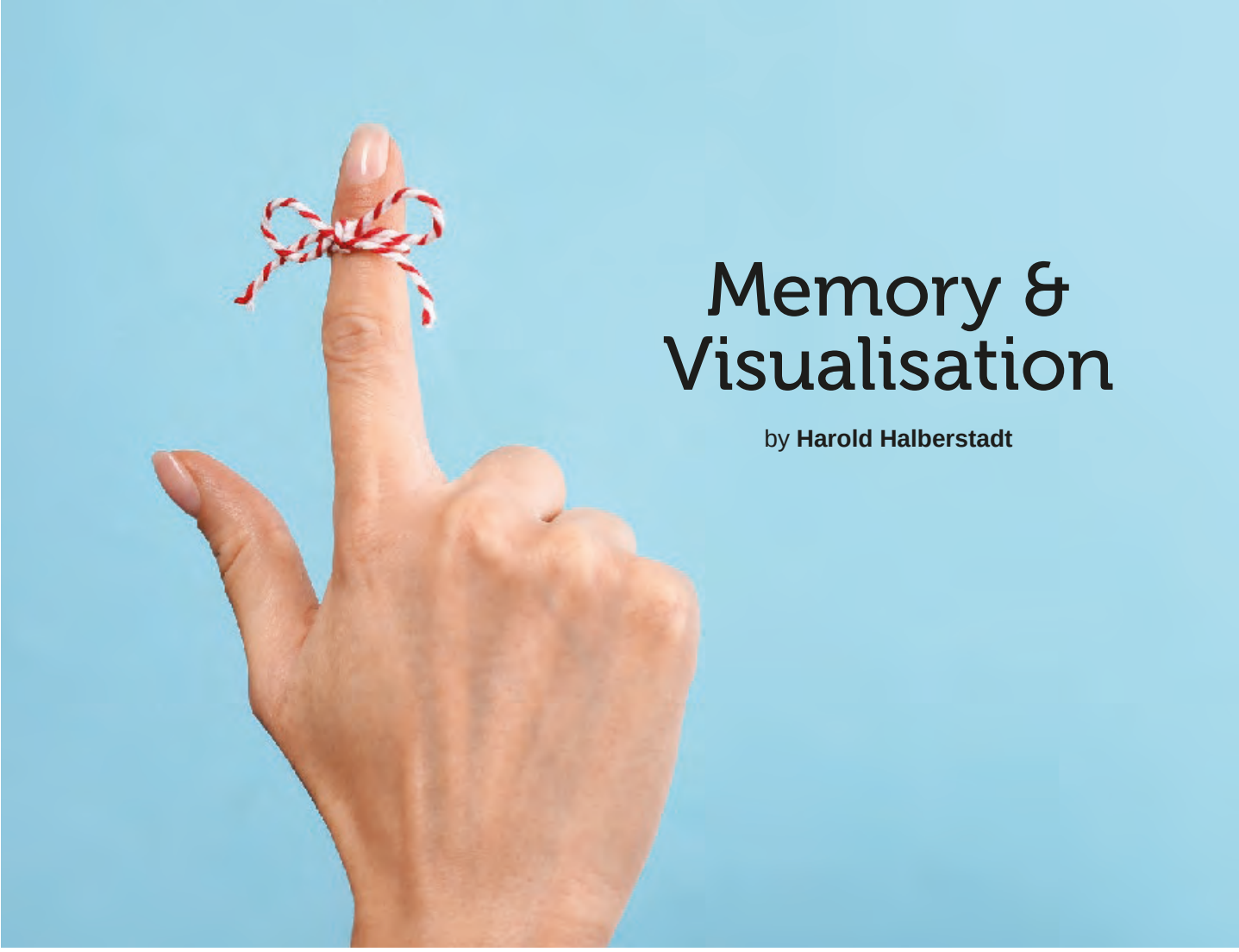
The gentleness and innocence of the small hand of the newborn baby, closed and suggestive of holding a secret in its tiny fist, seems as though it is saying: *"I have come to give; I have something in my hands."* The hands of a dying man are open, as if saying, *"I have given; my soul can now soar to other planes."*

In observing nature and its laws, the Creator in action, we find the truth that humans are the tool of God and our hands are the instruments through which creation is expressed. The human intelligence invents other tools, and a friendly relationship develops between them and man who, by mastering the gestures of the tool, can expand. The tool is being held by five fingers that adapt to it, while the tool serves to create. Visualise for a moment the hands of the scribes of old and their magnificent work. Even in our technologically developed society which seems to take man away from his nature, we still need these hands to operate the machines which are made in man's image.

The leader within each human, our will, has the ability to choose. We can direct our hands to do negative things, such as killing, or into positive channels, such as hugging our beloved ones. If humans are awakened to this realisation of choice, then we will use our hands to serve, to give and to work for the benefit of others as well as ourself. Just as the hands feed by bringing food to the mouth, so too are they fed. Therefore, the law of giving and taking is expressed in the same breath.

By constantly becoming aware of our hands and our fingers, we come to the thought that they are actually transmitters of energy and knowledge in which our fluid thoughts take form. If we but take this into consideration we will see a positive transformation in our lives. Every movement and gesture becomes of utmost importance to us. Poise is gained, and calm envelops all life within and without. We pray with these hands; we write our poems on the walls of history with these hands; and we build for humankind the continuity of our future being with His mighty hand.

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Memory & Visualisation

by **Harold Halberstadt**

Nowadays, with the advent of computers, having a good memory has declined in importance. Who needs to remember the absurdities of English spelling when we have Spellcheck? Want to know some fact or other? Why, of course..., ask Alexa! And if you're less lazy and want greater accuracy, look it up in Britannica on the internet. But there's one thing that's still easy to forget: that life wasn't always quite so simple. In the Middle Ages, most of our modern methods of collecting and storing information hadn't even been imagined, not even by a Nostradamus.

Forget about computers, memory chips or cards and similar high-tech approaches. Old-fashioned, mundane devices like filing cabinets and index cards were completely unknown in medieval times, and even paper was unheard of in the West; rather, parchment made from sheepskins was used. With a sheep, you could eat the meat, wear the wool as clothing and write on the skin, an obnoxious thought to modern susceptibilities. In those days, parchment was so expensive that it was often laboriously scraped clean after short-term use so that something else could be written on the same sheet.

Still, limits on material resources tend to bring out the more resourceful qualities of human nature. With few ways to replace or supplement memory, the educated looked instead for ways to amplify it, to learn how to use its strengths and work around its weaknesses, just as we work on our strengths to amplify

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our visualisations. In the process, the people of the Middle Ages made use of one of the most remarkable facets of medieval and Renaissance culture: The Art of Memory.

The Origins of the Art of Memory

The ancient Greek poet Simonides of Keos (556– 468 BCE), according to legend, invented the Art of Memory when he was hired to recite verses at a symposion following the food at a banquet. As was the usual fashion of the time, he started off with a few lines in honour of the gods, in this case Castor and Pollux, before settling down to the serious business of praising his host. The host, piqued at this diversion of flattery, gave Simonides only half the amount agreed upon and told him he could get the rest from the deities he had praised.



Simonides of Keos



Engraving by Charles-Nicolas Cochin (II) after a drawing by Jean-Baptiste Oudry representing the Simonide fable preserved by the gods of Jean de La Fontaine.

Shortly after, a servant came up to Simonides and told him that two young men on horseback had come to the door, asking for him. The poet went outside but no-one was there. As he stood looking around, puzzled, the roof of the banqueting hall collapsed behind him, crushing the arrogant host and all his dinner guests. Castor and Pollux, traditionally pictured as two young horsemen, had indeed paid their half of the fee!

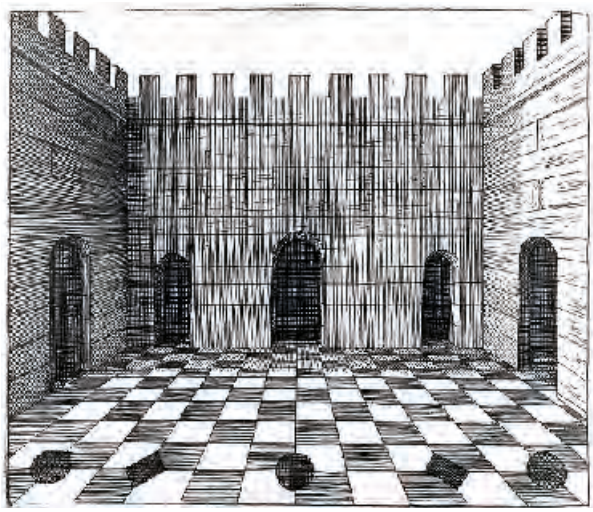
These kinds of stories were commonplace in ancient Greek literature, but this one has an unexpected moral. When the bodies of the dead were recovered, the story continues, they were so mangled that not even the victims' families could work out who was who. Simonides found, however, that he could picture the banquet hall in his mind's eye and remember the order in which the guests had been sitting. This allowed him to identify the dead and, as he pondered his aptitude for memorisation, it gave him the key to the Art of Memory.

Visual Images

That key is the use of visual images in an ordered, spatial arrangement. Human memory recalls concrete images far more easily than abstract ideas, and it remembers an ordered chain of associations more accurately than a random assortment. Just as Simonides could remember the guests at the ill-fated banquet by picturing them in the setting of the banquet hall, masters of the Art of Memory in the centuries that followed turned the information they wished to remember into striking visual images and arranged them against fixed architectural backgrounds in order to memorise them quickly and effectively.

These methods, which became part of the standard training for orators and scholars in ancient Greece and Rome, spread widely and reached dizzying

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The art of memory was debated and illustrated in publications throughout the medieval and early modern periods. This image from a book about mnemonics from 1619 by Robert Fludd uses the loci method of place to build a memory palace in the form of an imaginary classical stage with five entrances. Image: Wellcome Collection

levels of efficiency. History records that one famous practitioner, the Roman orator Hortensius (114–50 BCE), sat through a day-long auction and then recounted from memory the item, purchaser and price for every sale item of the day. Textbooks of rhetoric generally included a discussion of the Art of Memory, and it was by way of several of these books that the Art survived the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West.

During the Middle Ages, these techniques were revived and brought into widespread use. The practice of the Art of Memory was seen as an act of prudence, one of the seven cardinal virtues. Monks and friars, especially members of the Dominican Order, were encouraged to put it to work in countless ways. Later still, with the coming of the Renaissance, the Art of Memory became a common accomplishment of the educated.

In the hands of Renaissance practitioners like Giordano Bruno (1548–1600 CE), the traditional methods of memory gave rise to new and intricate systems. The arrival of printing and of cheap plentiful paper barely cut into its popularity and it was only with the coming of 17th century rationalism and the advent of true scientific enquiry that it finally fell into obscurity.



Giordano Bruno

A Different Way of Thinking

The techniques of the Art of Memory may seem strange to people today. This is a measure of the difference between modern and medieval ways of thought, between our current habits of thinking in abstract, verbal and mathematical terms, and the more symbolic, concrete and experiential consciousness of an age when written documents were few and visual images had a far more important role in communication. The idea of representing slander, for example, by the image of a woman being bitten by a snake that issues from her own mouth may seem bizarre nowadays, yet symbolic images of exactly this kind played a central part in medieval language and art, and in the Art of Memory as well.

When using the Art, the information to be remembered was turned into a striking symbolic image. That image might be beautiful, repulsive, hilarious or even shocking, but it had to be memorable and it had to contain a clear reference to the information being memorised. Puns, double meanings and every kind of wordplay could be put to use in this connection.

Another common habit was to devise an alphabet of images using either the shapes or the names of objects to refer to each letter of the alphabet. Thus, a figure representing a word beginning with the letter V might stand in front of a forked tree or carry a fox (in Latin, vulpes) under its arm. Each of these images was then placed in order against a known setting, usually the inside of a familiar building. Students would commit as many buildings to memory as they

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Mnemonic visualisations often portrayed quite complex philosophical ideas. Aristotle once queried whether man can be described as a biped even if individual men do not have two feet. This visualisation likely represents this idea through its depiction of a man with a wooden leg carrying a basket of arms and legs. Image: Wellcome Collection.

could and use each one to store a different sort of information. Each building would be divided up into loci or *'places'*, which were specific spots where a memory image could be put. Every fifth place might be marked with a Roman numeral V or a hand, every tenth one with an X.

As a point of fact, it's from the use of the Art of Memory in rhetoric that we still say *'in the first place'* when going over the points of an argument. So, once the images were placed in their settings, the practitioner of the Art simply had to walk through the building in his or her imagination, taking note of the figures there and recalling their meanings.

As the Art spread through medieval and Renaissance culture, this architectural approach remained the most common way to recall places, though other systems came into use as well. Some masters of the Art took the heavens as their architectural memory, placing figures on the different planetary spheres and the constellations. Others worked out ways of creating imaginary buildings for memory use or developed complex systems of rotating circles in which every position created a different set of loci.

All of these techniques may seem to us rather strange or even pointless, but in an age when few could read, the mind recalls images better than ideas, especially images with an emotional charge. Memory uses chains of association rather than logical order to connect one memory with another (such as mnemonic tricks like string tied around a finger), and memory follows rhythms and repetitive formulae. It is for this reason that poetry and music are much easier to remember than prose. By combining all of these factors with training and practice, the Art produced a memory that worked in harmony with its own strengths to make the most of its own potential.

The Art in Action

Out of interest and to make some sense of these strange, medieval techniques, let's look over the shoulder of a student of the Art as he begins the construction of a set of memory places and images.

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Imagine then young Brother Anselm as he stands one evening in the cloistered garden of the Abbey of St. Alban. A novice, he has just started the arduous task of learning Latin. The Art of Memory is also part of the curriculum and he has chosen to use memory to make learning Latin easier.

He turns slowly around, staring at the old grey stone of the cloister arches, the tiled roofs above, the herbs and flowers all about, committing the whole image to memory. There are seven entrances to the garden; a Latin noun can take seven different cases and remembering all of them has bedevilled his early lessons. He decides to begin with that.

First is the nominative case. He thinks of white-haired Brother Martin, easily the abbey's most devout monk, beginning the sign of the cross, "In Nomine..." That forms his first memory image; he imagines Brother Martin on his knees in the first entrance, eyes turned up to Heaven, to fix the picture in his imagination.

Next is the genitive case. The first image that comes to mind makes Brother Anselm turn bright red; he murmurs a prayer against sinful thoughts and replaces it with a picture of Adam and Eve, the progenitors of humankind in the Bible and Koran. This image he places at the second entrance.

The next two, the dative and accusative cases, are easy enough. Dative makes him think of the great calendar of saint's days in the abbey library. To suggest the initial letter, he puts this in the arms of thin and weakly Brother Daniel, who staggers under the burden. That makes him feel guilty, although not quite guilty enough to change the picture, and so for the accusative case he uses a lurid picture of the Devil, the accuser of humankind, pointing a clawed finger at him as if to remind him of his sins. And so on...

He runs through the images once again in his imagination, making sure he has remembered all of them, and then leaves the garden in time for Vespers. Every day thereafter, he walks through his growing collection of memory places in his imagination, noting the images to make sure that each one still calls its meaning to his mind. With practice, he finds that the images remain clear and meaningful for months at a time, even if he leaves them unvisited; he also finds that if he wants to use the seven entrances for something else, the seven cardinal virtues, for example, all he needs to do is construct different images in those places and visit that portion of his inner kingdom. By that time, though, he will be well on his way to mastering the Art.

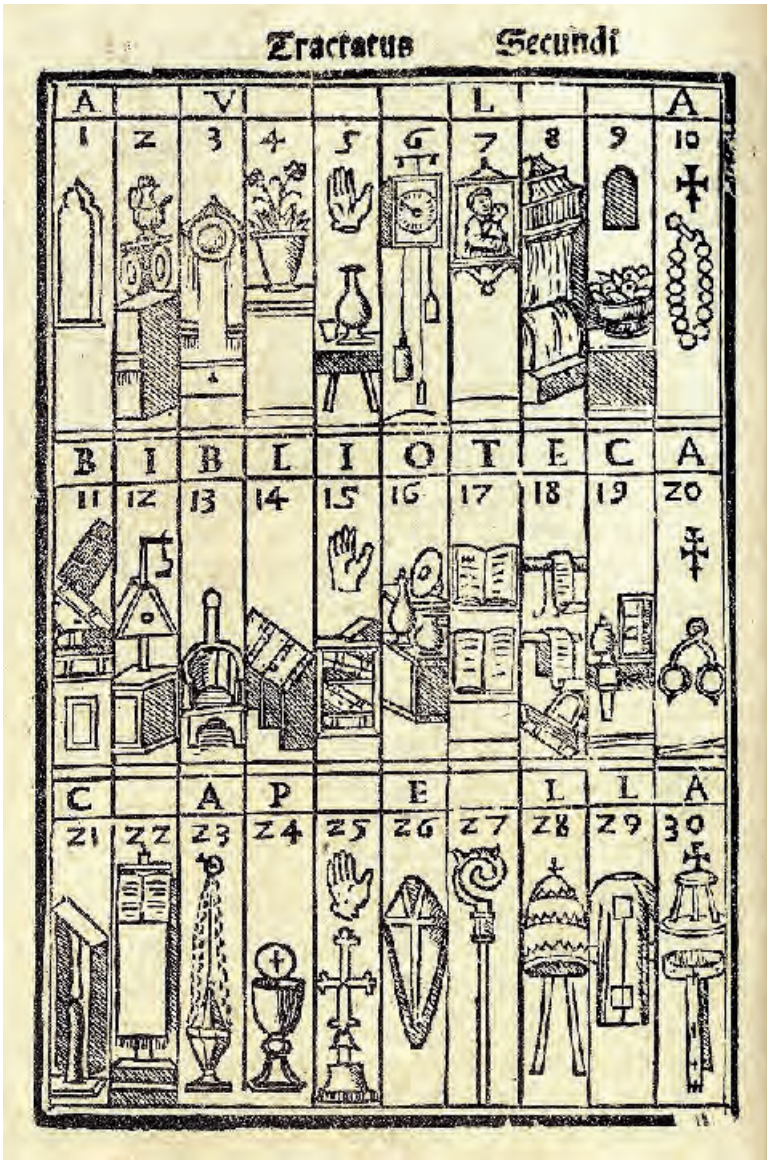
Memory

The human brain is a vital component in memory. It's said there's a distinction between short-term and long-term memory. If you think about it, most of our memories must be fleeting, but these transient memories are absolutely essential to the process of understanding the meaning of events. These days we refer to it as the working memory. Working memory has a crucial role in understanding spoken and written language.

Life would be difficult if we couldn't reliably store and recall lots of commonplace facts. During the Middle Ages, this was the reason why the Art of Memory took hold. Think of the Norse sagas which reminded people of their own or family history and events, and the effect they had on the psyche of people at that time.

The Art of Memory was a difficult skill to acquire but, once learned, was never forgotten. This is the skill we all need to obtain and practise when we begin our visualisation. The memories of two

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Johann Romberch, Congestorium artificiose, 1533. Wellcome Collection.

people experiencing the same event will be different, so during visualisation you must make your recalled memory as real as possible.

Can you help your brain stay healthy as you age by doing things that challenge your mind? Could that also help you avoid memory loss, or even prevent or delay dementia such as Alzheimer's? Scientists need to do more research to find out for sure, but a number of studies show there are benefits to staying mentally active.

Here's what we know about the impact of exercising your brain. Can brain exercises help delay memory loss or dementia? When people keep their minds active, their thinking skills are less likely to decline, medical research shows. So, games, puzzles and other types of brain training may help slow memory loss and other mental problems. One study involved more than 2,800 adults aged 65 and older. They went to up to 10 hour-long brain-training sessions for five to six weeks. The sessions focused on tactics for these skills:

- Memory
- Reasoning
- Speed of processing information

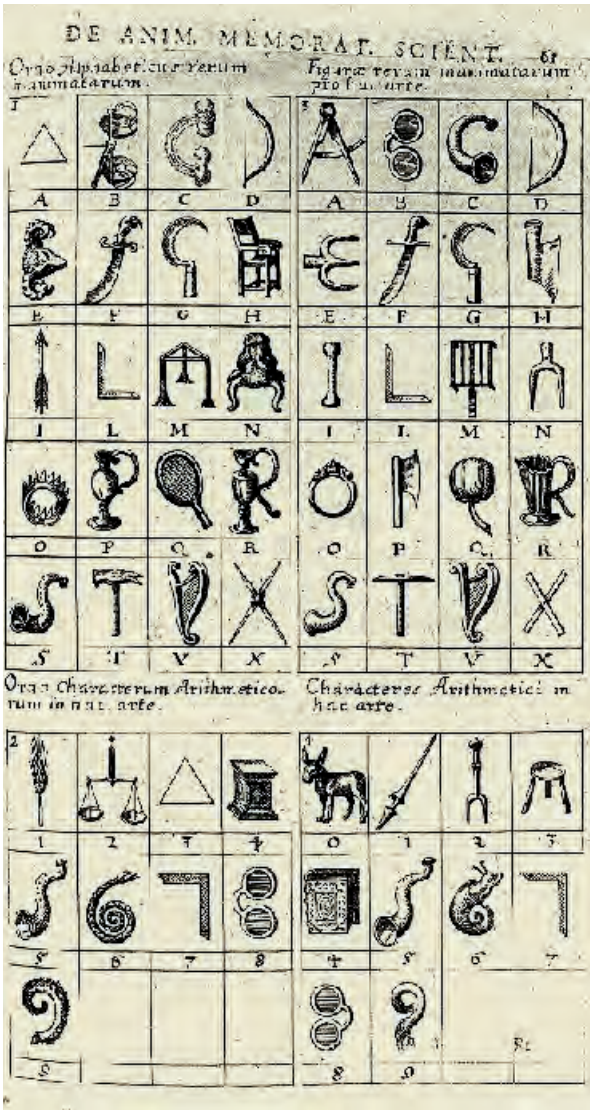
People who took the training showed improvement in these skills that lasted for at least five years. They also improved at everyday tasks. What types of brain exercises should we do? That varies from person to person, but the main idea is to keep your brain *active* and *challenged*. You could start with something as simple as the experiments in the monographs, which you should practice time after time. You can also:

- Learn something new, such as a second language or a musical instrument;
- Work on crossword, Sudoku or other kinds of puzzles;
- Play online memory games or video games; and
- Read, write or sign up for local adult education classes.

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The Uses of the Art

In today's world of terabyte hard disks, flash drives and million-volume research libraries, learning the Art of Memory may seem about as relevant as studying the best way to make clay tablets for writing. Still, the Art of Memory is one of the best ways there is to enter into the spirit and consciousness of the Middle Ages. To practise the Art even a little is to venture back into a world where living memory was the chief means of information storage, where imagery and spoken language made up the fabric of human communication, and where one person could quite literally store the sum total of human knowledge in his or her own head.



Visual Alphabet. Robert Fludd, 1574-1637
Image: Wellcome Collection



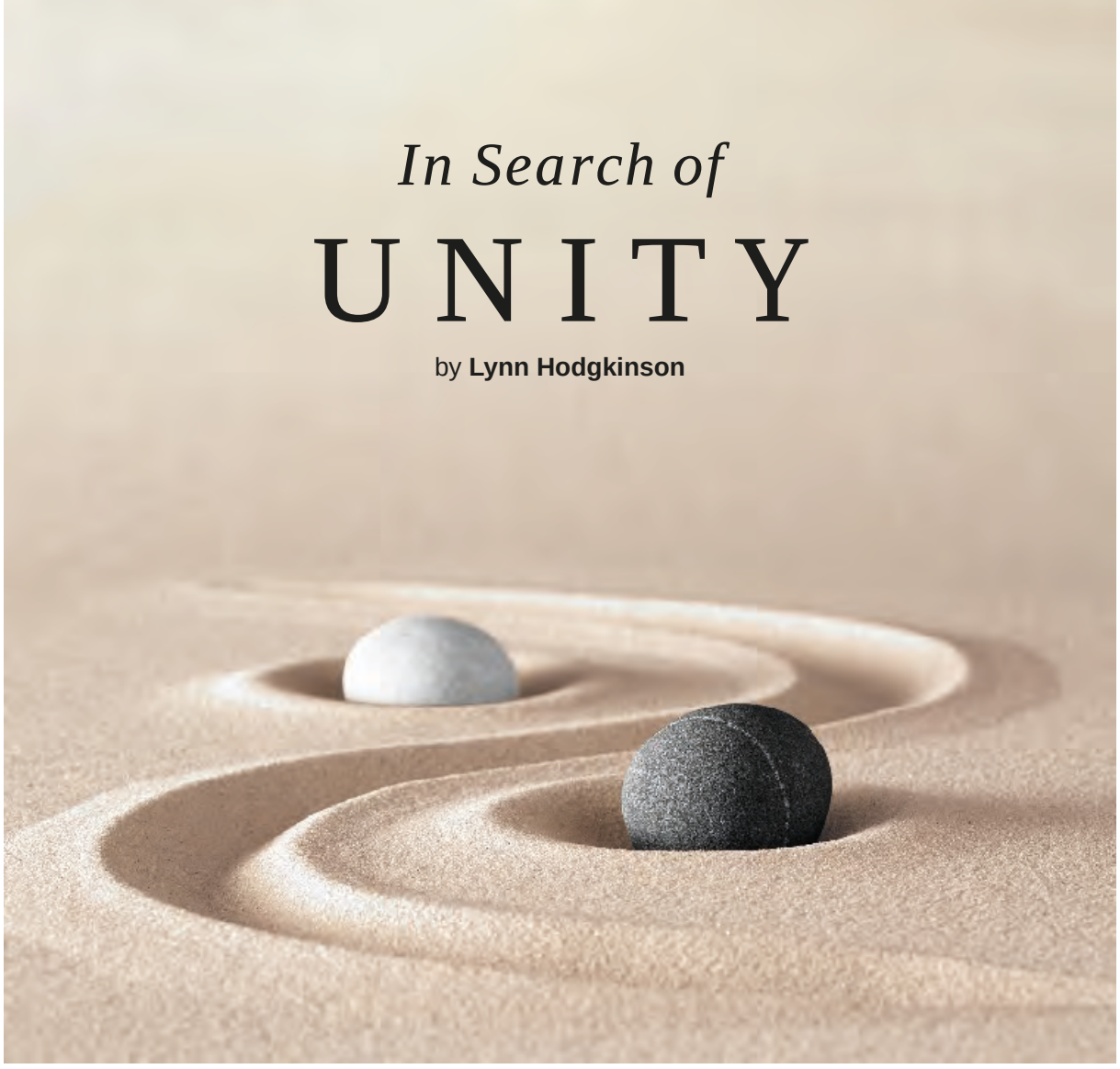
Writing aide-memoires was encouraged in the 17th century. This print depicts a man writing as a representation of the faculty of memory. Engraving, 1600's. Image: Wellcome Collection.

It also has its practical side. The methods of the Art of Memory work so much better than ordinary rote memorisation that even a little experience with the Art can make a startling difference. Anything from shopping lists to class notes can be remembered quickly and efficiently, and you aren't likely to leave your memory at home when you go to take a final exam! So, sit down, close your eyes and consider this popular medieval practice. See how useful it can be in helping with your visualisations.

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In Search of UNITY

by **Lynn Hodgkinson**



And a man said:
"Speak to us of Self-Knowledge."

And he answered saying:
"Your hearts know in silence the secrets of the days and nights. But your ears thirst for the sound of your heart's knowledge. You would know in words that which you have always known in thought. You would touch with your fingers the naked body of your dreams."[1]

Life is a journey. It is a quest, but for what? For thousands of years we have been looking for anything which affords some respite from daily vicissitudes. It is a personal search for something that will bring resolution to the conflict of circumstances which arise periodically throughout our human existence. One minute things are going well; the next, things change. There doesn't seem to be such a thing in life as living happily ever after. From the moment early humans tried to reconcile daily survival with the challenges of a seemingly hostile environment, right through to our present day scramble for satisfaction and fulfilment, the very same forces are still very much at work in our lives.

Raymund Andrea wrote as follows about "*the opposition and struggle of forces within us on our journey through life...*":

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> If life itself from early years to late is not a conflict of opposites, I do not know what else it is. I think that the more you study your own life with insight and impartiality, you will find this conflict of the opposites operating right through it.[2]

How do we resolve the seeming conflicts in life, this endless treadmill of change sometimes offering happiness and sometimes posing challenges? We know deep down that there is a purpose to it all and that there must be a solution. Let us take a closer look at the nature of these forces that are at work at all levels of our existence and, in seeking to understand the dynamics of change and cause and effect, perhaps we can discover a place of resolution.

The Dynamics of Opposition

There are clues all around us. Nature expresses the same principles and laws that operate in our personal lives. Seeming opposites are actually part of one unity or, to put it simply, they are two sides of the same coin. In the following quotation, Jung uses the image of a natural symbol as a means of resolving opposites:

> In nature, the resolution of opposites is always an energic process: she acts symbolically in the truest sense of the word, doing something that expresses both sides, just as a waterfall visibly mediates between above and below. The waterfall itself is then the incommensurable third. In an open and unresolved conflict dreams and fantasies occur which, like the waterfall, illustrate the tension and nature of the opposites, and thus prepare the synthesis.[3]

Nature, the *Liber Mundi*, is a great teacher. It is rich in natural symbols. The clues to the mystery of our physical existence lie at the very heart of its operations. Equally, the laws of material science can be taken as guides in the comprehension of some kind of a universal plan.[4]

Take, for example, the concept of polarity, which is a broad concept that can be applied to many things: atoms and molecules, living cellular structures, electrical fields and electromagnetism. Atoms are

"The constant push and pull of opposites is the foundation of our entire vibratory existence."



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constantly gaining and losing electrons, fluctuating between being negatively or positively charged, attracting and repelling each other. As molecular structures change, energy fields are ever in a state of flux. Even a seemingly constant electrical current or magnetic field is produced by the constant interaction of charged particles, giving rise to forces of attraction and repulsion.

The constant push and pull of opposites is the foundation of our entire vibratory existence. Heraclitus said: "*War is the father of all.*" From grains of sand to the highest Himalayan peak, from a red blood cell to a distant galaxy, the same opposition of forces is taking place everywhere. It has been expressed by humans throughout the ages: we witness it in the passing down of creation myths and legends, classical stories of conflict and epic journeys, symbolic of the natural principles at work in the universe and of a process of transformation.

Opposition generates motion, change and a striving towards equilibrium. In music terms, we can express this in the passing of a discord into a concord during the course of changing harmony. This results in a release of tension, and a sense of remission. But such remission is only temporary.

How does this relate to our daily lives? We see the same principles at work in our human experiences. On the subject of joy and sorrow, Kahlil Gibran said they are inseparable:

> Your joy is your sorrow unmasked...Together they come, and when one sits alone with you at your board, remember that the other is asleep upon your bed...You are suspended like scales between your sorrow and your joy.[5]

Change is a movement from one thing into another. It is a constant alternation between something that is not, and something that is. It is a progression. It is movement.

> Being and non-being create each other.
> Difficult and easy support each other.
> Long and short define each other.
> High and low depend on each other.
> Before and after follow each other.[6]

We spend our lives trying to escape the endless cycle, the fluctuations in circumstances. We seek to understand, to gain some control over it all, some kind of permanence. In doing so, we set off chain reactions of causes and effects. We no longer continue along what Isaac Newton would call a continuing path of inertia. We begin to actively initiate change.

As long as we are breathing, living and conscious, time exists for us. It is our consciousness of time which makes us experience change without and within.

The Causes of Change

As long as we are breathing, living and conscious, time exists for us. It is our consciousness of time which makes us experience change without and within. Aristotle says, in his treatise *Physics*, that there is no such thing as empty time; it is not possible for time to pass without anything happening. In *Physics*, Aristotle explores the processes of change in nature. He acknowledges that there is something which remains constant, even though the form changes. Matter is simply changing the expression of its nature.

We see a baby grow into an adult, a seed grow into a mature plant, an acorn into an oak tree. It is as though the baby, the seed and the acorn were working towards their respective mature forms from the very beginning. Does this mean that the idea or the pattern of these mature forms are inherent in the child, the seed and

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the acorn? One wonders if the acorn dreams of being an oak tree.

Aristotle also notes that natural objects, as opposed to artificially produced ones, can cause change from within. Change rests in the potential of one thing to become another. It involves the contact between active and passive, the agent of change and the recipient of the impulse to change and move towards another expression.[7]

We are initiating and activating change when we seek answers. Something inside prompts us to act, to investigate. The ultimate end of our journey of change is understanding, for then the treadmill will stop and the oppositions of life will reach a place of resolution. We can begin by recognising the outer signs that speak to us in our lives.

Our experiences are generated through the law of cause and effect. We can go back to yesterday morning, or we can go back to the beginning of time: either way, we are journeying towards the unity and peace that we seek. Like the inner template that changes the baby into an adult, something inside us is guiding us to fulfilment. The *Tao Te Ching* perfectly expresses this:

> In the beginning was the Tao
> All things issue from it;
> All things return to it.
> To find the origin, trace back the manifestations.
> When you recognise the children
> And find the mother, you will be free of sorrow.

The Unity of One

We can reconcile oppositions when we recognise that they are part of the Whole. In that Eastern symbol of universal order, the mandala, all the parts and elements are unified into one expression. As we gaze at it, all form, movement, space and time are crystallised, and we are at peace.

As humans, we find ourselves upon a world stage. We are players and participants. Every event, every thought, word and action has relevance in our unique journey towards the Unity of Opposites that we seek. The first steps on that journey are taken when we recognise our connection with the rest of humanity.

Rudolf Steiner, in his book *Reincarnation and Karma*,[8] asks how we can find a way of mediation between the mysterious power within each person and the global conscience of humanity. He was quoted by Vaclav Havel, then President of Czechoslovakia, who spoke at the World Economic Forum at Davos, Switzerland 4th February, 1992:

> ...the human spirit is made from the same material as the spirit of the world. Man is not just an observer, a spectator, an analyst or a manager of the world. Man is a part of the world and his spirit is part of the spirit of the world. We are merely a peculiar node of being, a living atom within it, or rather a cell that, if sufficiently open to itself and its own mystery, can also experience the mystery, the will, the pain, and the hope of the world.[9]

Happiness Grows as We Grow [10]

In his introduction to *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Laurence Freeman relates that the Greek philosophers said it takes a lifetime to be happy. In India, there is a tradition where one must pass through all the experiences of life before entering the ashram.[11]

> The stages of life are not signs of decline and fall but of an unfolding capacity for fullness of being...we grow into happiness as occurring along a spectrum which begins in the totally outer-directed active life and arrives finally through solitude in the state of contemplation.[12]

The ultimate step on our journey is realising our connection with the entire Cosmos. As we rise

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"One wonders if the acorn dreams of being an oak tree."

above the ebb and flow of events, the rise and fall of harmonies and dissonances, we can recognise that it is all part of the same symphony. All change ceases when we contemplate what Aristotle described as the *'first cause'*, or the '*unchanged changer'* or *'self-changing changer'*. The endless succession of causes is no more, for here at last is a place of Unity.

> The Tao is called the Great Mother:
> It is empty yet inexhaustible;
> It gives birth to infinite worlds;
> It is always present within you;
> You can use it any way you want.[13]

Footnotes

1. *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran.
2. *'The Conflict of Opposites'*: 1960 Lecture published in *The Way of the Heart* by Raymund Andrea.
3. Extract from *CG Jung Collected Works 1955-6—The Conjunction* appearing in *'Jung on Alchemy'*, publisher Routledge 1995.
4. Erwin Watermeyer: *The Significance of Newtonian Mechanics* — Rosicrucian Digest April 1942.
5. *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran.
6. Tao Te Ching.
7. For a useful summary of Aristotle's *Physics*, books 1–8, refer to https://www.sparknotes.com/philosophy/aristotle.
8. *Reincarnation and Karma: Two Fundamental Truths of Human Existence* by Rudolf Steiner. Five Lectures in Berlin and Stuttgart, March 1912. Anthroposophical Publishing Co. 1960. Translation copyright Rudolf Steiner Press.
9. Vaclav Havel (1936–2011), statesman and playwright, was the last President of Czechoslovakia from 1989 until the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1992 and then as the first President of the Czech Republic from 1993 to 2003.
10. Quotation from Laurence Freeman's Introduction to *The Cloud of Unknowing*, original text rendered by Evelyn Underhill.
11. A special place of spiritual worship and meditation.
12. Quotation from Laurence Freeman's Introduction to *The Cloud of Unknowing*, original text rendered by Evelyn Underhill.
13. Tao Te Ching.

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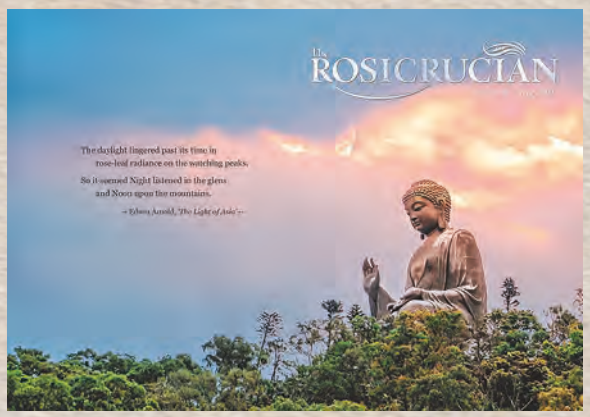
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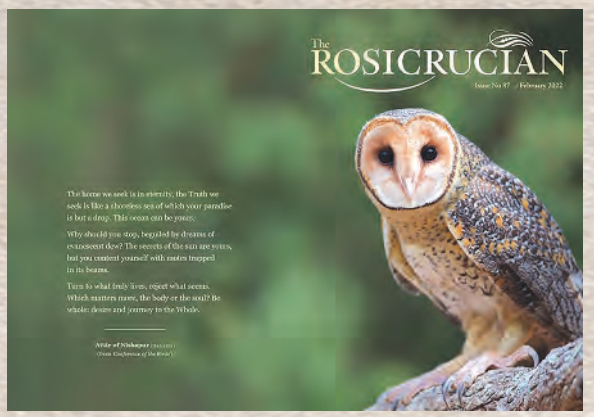
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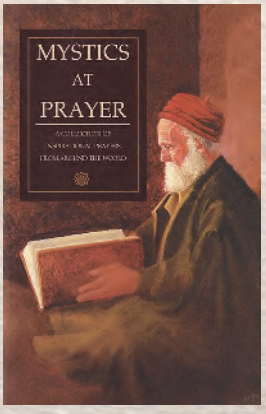


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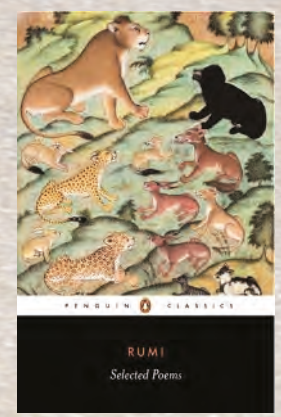
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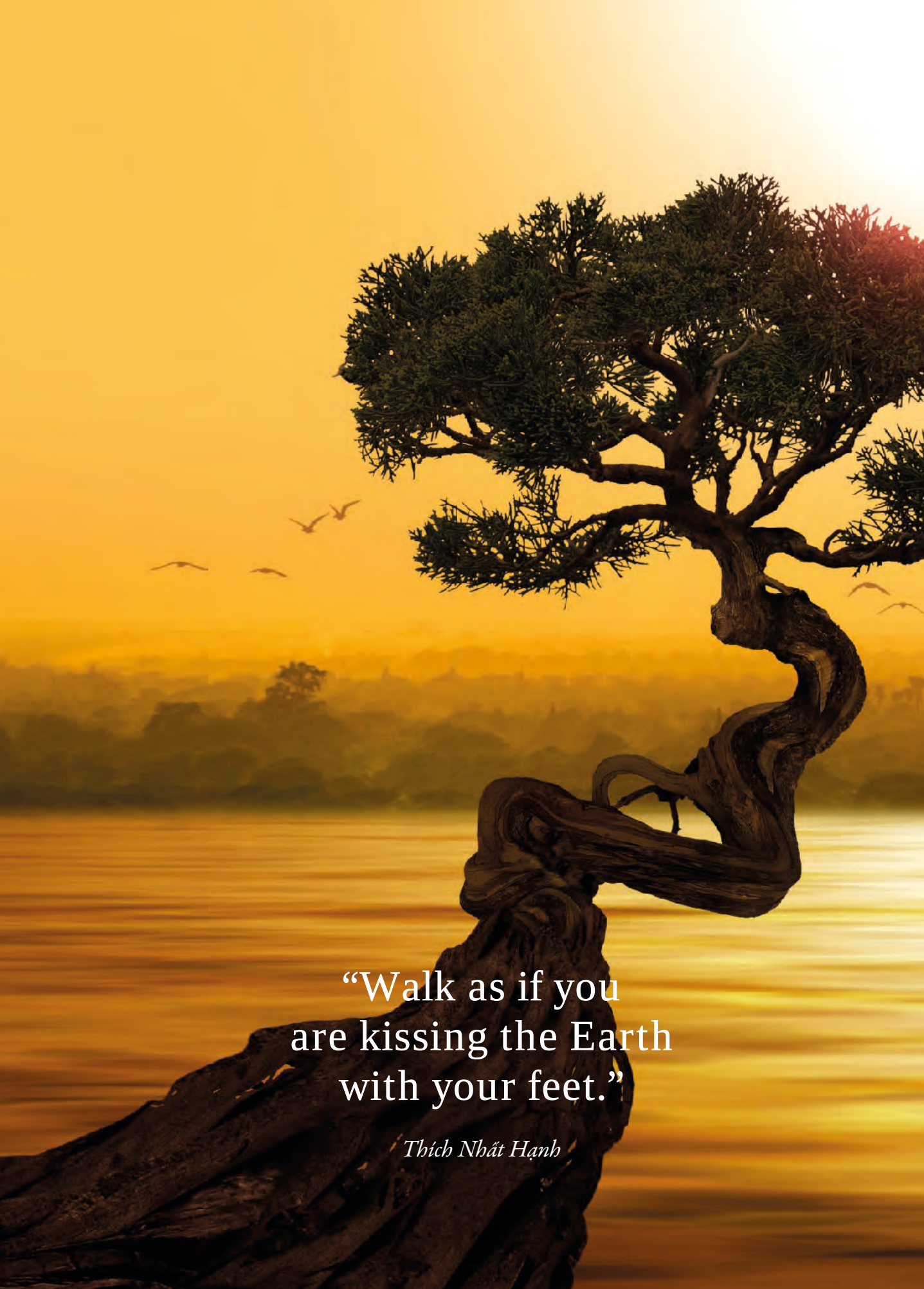
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are kissing the Earth
with your feet.”
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