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Complete back issues to the year 2000 available at our website: [www.theosophydownunder.org](http://www.theosophydownunder.org)

All contributions on Theosophy or related subjects are welcome.
What is a Family? An advertisement for a new family car flashed across the screen of my TV one evening recently. It featured an adaptable seating design for as few as two, and as many as seven people, recognising that families these days can be anything from the traditional parents with two children, through multiple combinations of partners and their children, to single parents with children and/or “furs” (domestic animals)!

Beyond advertising opportunities, families are always big news. Look in the paper any day of the week and you’ll see aspects of family life featured by news writers, politicians and community opinion leaders of all kinds. Most often, the media feature the distressing aspects of family changes due to the pressure of economic circumstances, or the stresses of modern life leading to the disintegration of cherished notions of what family relationships should be.

Are the newspapers, right? What is the inner nature of this most fundamental human relationship from the perspective of the Ancient Wisdom?

Statistics of Australian Family Life:
Australian society is typical of most Western countries. The 2016 Australian Census indicates that contrary to popular belief, couple families with children remained the most common type of Australian family in 2016. However, the proportion of Australian families they make up has decreased over time. In 1991, 54% of families were couples with children, dropping to 45% in 2016.

The proportion of couple families without children and single parent families has increased since 1991. In 1991 32% of Australian families were couple families without children, increasing to 38% in 2016. The fastest growing family type is sole parent families as a consequence of increases in divorce in the past forty years. Single-parent families have increased from 13% of families in 1991 to 16% in 2016. Over 900,000 single parent families were counted in 2016 and over 80% of single parents were female.

The other major trend is to ‘de facto’ relationships with people being understandably more cautious about committing to marriage. More women are delaying having families until later in life and better educated women had fewer children and were more likely to remain childless. The 2016 Census counted 46,800 same-sex couples across Australia.
This was an increase of 39% since the 2011 Census, which counted 33,700 same-sex couples.
So much for the raw statistics which give us a very limited idea of the human side of marriage and the family in the early 21st century. The figures and trends don’t tell us much about the day to day realities of family life today. Parents trying to balance the competing demands of jobs and education with their responsibilities. Children often being left on their own or in the care of others for long periods outside the immediate family circle whilst parents work long hours for the increasing complex ‘necessities of life’.

Families are ‘Learning Laboratories’:
What then of the inner aspects of family, especially the possible practical application of this knowledge to help uplift the quality of family life. Teachers of the Ancient Wisdom tell us that families are no mere chance association of individuals. Rather families are ‘learning laboratories’ for individuals who share destiny and a long association over many past lives. When a reincarnating soul returns earthward after its period of rest in the heaven worlds, it is attracted to parents and family who can provide the appropriate lessons for the learning required for that life. The basis of this attraction may be love and similarity of traits and abilities. It can also be hatred and the need to reconcile disharmonious relationships of other lives thus explaining the pathetic situation of parent and child who repel each other.

Theosophical teacher Dr. G. de Purucker explains the inner attractions that bring souls together in families thus:
“The human egos awaiting incarnation are exceedingly numerous, so that there may be scores of entities which could become children of any one couple, yet there is always one whose attraction is strongest to the mother-to-be at any particular physiological moment, and it is this astral form which becomes the child. Many are the cases where the astral form, thus “rayed” in two directions, so to speak, finds its progress into physical birth stopped because the man or woman are either celibate or prefer no children, or for some other reason. In such cases, the astral form under karmic urge and natural law, tries again. Should the first environment prove a failure, the reincarnating ego may find itself drawn to another couple because of karmic relationships in other lives.
The reincarnating ego has in a sense very little choice in the matter, if by this we mean a deliberate selecting of one’s future family. Such a choice as we understand it is almost non-existent, because the reincarnating ego has but just left devachan and is sunken into the relative unconsciousness of the gestation period preced-
ing rebirth, and thus is in no condition to choose with self-conscious intent. It is karma, which throughout controls these things; and karma in the abstract is infallible in its action.” from *The Fountain Source Of Occultism*, p. 625.

**Life Before Life – LBL - (Inter-life) Research:** Since the 1960s, Dr Michael Newton and his Newton Institute of 210 researchers across 40 countries, in 27 languages, with 55,000 LBL sessions done to the end of 2019, and many other inter-life therapists using Hypnotic Regression Therapy*** have found similar realities during their researches of the after-death experience. One of the world’s leading authorities on LBL research, England’s Ian Lawton, says of all these reports: “… The underlying consistency of the interlife testimony from thousands of disparate subjects working with a variety of independently operating pioneers would seem to give it a great deal of credibility. Indeed, it is arguably one of the most profound sources of spiritual wisdom that has ever been made available to humanity. Its strength lies in its very derivation from countless ordinary men and women, with no fixed preconceptions, no pretensions as spiritual gurus, and no axe to grind…” – from *The Big Book of the Soul* 2008, page 151.

LBL researchers have discovered some remarkably similar features of the after-death states as described by Theosophy; in the religious traditions such as the ‘Bardo’ states (or ‘in between’ lives experience of the soul) of Tibetan Buddhism; and the after-death journey of the soul in ancient Egyptian religion. As described by Ian Lawton, they have found that all of us have a group of soul mates that we work with in varied relationships over many lives. Our time with this group is characterized by discussion about what we have shared, our reactions to each other, what we handled well, what we could have done better – we often replay and role play in this process of soul learning. We sporadically move to a different soul group to work on new lessons. ‘Soul-Learning’ means in the first place seeing both sides of ‘emotional lessons’.

Feeling joyous and, especially, painful experiences ourselves, but also to feel what it is like having them directed against us by others.

**LBL Research: Soul Groups:** Soul learning in earth life can become repetitive as we literally ‘bash our heads against a brick wall’ learning emotional lessons over and over until we start to move into more progressive patterns of behaviour characterized by ‘altruistic’ attitudes. Especially, we start to learn ‘altruistic skills’ such as healing, teaching, guiding and so on – which can be used in the world and the interlife as part of a soul group which shares the same skill set. Such altruistic souls as they progress increasingly choose to take lives which are more for the benefit and learning of others rather than themselves. The most obvious example of this is when souls volunteer for short lives ending in infancy and childhood. These short lives may be traumatic for the infant/child souls but are far more aimed at challenging
the parents and other close relatives to learn to cope with the myriad of emotions that surround such a tragic loss.

**LBL Research: Soul Group Planning for our Next Life:** Contrary to what theosophy tells us, LBL research indicates that before our return we usually engage in some sort of self-conscious planning for our next life. At the very least, this will involve an awareness of who our parents might be, where they live, their circumstances, and what sex we will be. Some subjects describe this process as being like watching a film that you can step into, or being presented with a choice of several different lives suitable for our soul learning from which we can choose.

As usual, our spirit guides and elders are present for advice, we may also spend some time discussing our plans with members of our soul group particularly what ‘triggers’ that will help us recognize them when we meet during life. Our planning for the next life indicates that, within the context of our need for ‘soul learning’, we have complete control over, and personal responsibility for, our lives. However, we should remember that any pre-life previews we glimpse represent major probabilities only. In agreement with theosophy, LBL research indicates our lives are NOT predetermined, and we have complete freewill to depart from our ‘plan’.

**LBL Research: Returning to Life and Joining a Family:** Returning once again into incarnation, we must make the decision of how much ‘soul energy’ to bring back. We may wish to leave as much as we can in the Light Realms, but we need plenty here in the world if we are to see through our life’s plan, especially if we have a difficult life. We make decisions about what proportions of specific emotions to bring back and continue working with, and even of past life strengths that we may need to help us through difficult patches. Recent LBL research indicates that this happens through a ‘relayering’ process, in which heavy emotions are taken on as if by putting on various layers of clothing. These specifics are not mentioned in theosophical literature I have read.

The return is complete as we find ourselves within the womb at any point from conception to just before birth. The process of merging our soul energy with the new physical body is a gradual and sometimes difficult one, involving matching the individual pattern and frequency of our soul energy to that of the developing brain. Subjects report that the stress of such activity is relieved by floating out of the body periodically for short periods and this continues even after birth. As our return progresses so there is a gradual weakening of our connection to the Light Realms, and the gradual lowering of a ‘Veil of Amnesia’.

The reason for not remembering the details of our previous lives self-consciously is twofold:
- If we knew all about our life plans in advance it would be like knowing the answers to an examination before we sit the test and we would learn nothing;
- If we remembered too much about
the bliss of the Light Realms, we would be constantly homesick and longing to return thus interfering with our duties and sometimes struggles of this life.

**Karma and Family Life:** Karma and families are inextricably linked. This cosmic law of action and results brings people together again and again to work out the results of previous interactions. The experience of parenthood provides an environment for learning basic lessons about life, like love and tolerance, much more rapidly than other relationships allow. However, like all karmic opportunities, the lessons are there for the taking only if we choose to follow the positive aspects of the challenges family life presents, and alas, many turn away from these golden chances to learn more of life’s higher responsibilities.

**Family Karma:** We all know of the quiet heroism of many people when illness or some other tragedy strikes a member of the family and spouses or relatives rally round to help out as much as this is possible in these dark days of Covid-19. Conversely, many marriages and family break-ups occur because one or both partners fail to show tolerance or understanding towards others in the family, perhaps over seemingly minor matters. Sometimes marriage partners reach a parting of the ways in their evolutionary journeying – painful though this may be to realise at the time. It is up to us to flow with the opportunities towards positive attitudes and unconditional love in marriage and the family, or perhaps learn it later in future lives in even less desirable circumstances.

There are so many aspects to family karma such as the relationship of an individual’s destiny and those of the family, family and national karma, the disciplinary aspects of family life, the convergent karma of marriage partners, the natural ending of long-time relationships over many lives in divorce or family separation when it is necessary for the ‘soul-learning’ experience of the individuals involved. My concern particularly is with the impact of modern family patterns on the developing potentials of children. These days with the increase in single parent families and with both parents working in most families, many children are being raised in an atmosphere where the parents are too tired or have little opportunity to spend “quality time” with their children. Or, strangely in these days of the global pandemic, the strain of the opposite situation with lock-downs artificially forcing families together in an intense emotional atmosphere aggravated by high unemployment,
financial uncertainty, and extra responsibilities such as home-schooling unfortunately producing many cases of family disruption and even violence.

Leading authorities on child-rearing, such as Penelope Leach in her book, *Children First*, make an eloquent appeal for parents, especially mothers, to stay at home during their children’s early and crucially important development years. As Penelope Leach says to her huge readership of concerned parents: “If you give even five to ten years to this child-centred way of life, there is still an awful lot of time for you to be you.”

**Positive Attitudes:** So much for the catalogue of problems. Of course, the majority of families throughout the world provide a warm and stable environment for children, but these trends are alarming. They point to the importance of nurturing love and respect within individuals, toward family members of our immediate family, and outwards to the community – no matter how hard this may be, given today’s social problems. Such positive attitudes should be built upon and proper acknowledgment given, that there are greater dimensions and responsibilities in life than the material values of our popular culture.

Our churches, mosques, and temples used to provide the needed balance between the demands of the inner and the outer life and to provide simple and commonly accepted rules for social behaviour. This is no longer the case for many people as they reach, often blindly, towards new explanations for ancient questions or simply ignore the fact that human beings have one foot in the subconscious realm, and go on living as many do absorbed in the values of the outer world.

**Laws of Life:** Theosophical teachers have always taught the practical value of the Ancient Wisdom in all aspects of human life. An appreciation of the fundamental truths of brotherhood, karma and reincarnation expressed in the mythology and religions the world over, is basic to the structure of the longest-lived societies such as the Australian Aboriginal culture. They have helped to build the great civilisations of the past, and must do so again in the future. Today, especially with the Covid-19 health emergency, there is a great need for practical help for families in emotional and economic crisis. We all owe a great debt of gratitude to the courageous individuals of many philanthropic organisations who provide such help unrelentingly.
Beyond these physical measures, the pervasive power of a loving environment built on mutual respect between parents and children and ultimately upon knowledge of the responsibilities of the different stages and stations of life based upon Universal Law, is needed in our society. Those who have some knowledge of the Ancient Wisdom seem to me to carry an extra burden of responsibility to cast forth these powerful seed ideas at appropriate times into the consciousness of the nations.

How Can We Improve the Quality of Family Life in the 21st Century? Katherine Tingley, a former leader of the Theosophical Society (Pasadena), concentrated much of her work on the practical value of Theosophy to home life and social problems. Her words written 100 years ago, prophetically echo the challenges of the changing family structures in the 21st century: “The question naturally arises: What remedies must be applied to bring about a change for the better in the home life? What factors can be introduced to adjust it and bring it nearer to perfection? Theosophy answers that the parents should begin to study the science of life, self-evolution, and the greater responsibilities of fatherhood and motherhood even before marriage. Home should be acclaimed as the centre from which the higher life of nations should spring.”

– Katherine Tingley

The world stands in need of mothers and fathers with clear, quiet minds, to whom the home is the sacred centre of human life, where no disharmony is allowed to enter, where time is held too precious for many things that seem all-important to most of us, where duty to the self, to the children, to the race, is firmly understood and unflinchingly followed.

– Katherine Tingley

– The Editor.

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– The Editor.
**Life-Between-Life (LBL) research advocated by the Newton Institute and other Past-Life Therapists, depends upon hypnotizing people who are hypnotically regressed into what are interpreted to be their memories of past lives. It is important to note that Theosophy warns against being hypnotised for any reason as hypnosis means surrendering your will to that of another and this is potentially damaging to your spiritual progress as you need a strong spiritual will to cope with the trials and temptations along the path of spiritual development.

Secondly, knowledge of past lives through hypnotism may not relate to your past life, but rather be derived from the 'sea' of memories in the astral light. It takes a morally pure and skilled therapist to find their way through the morass of images in the astral light.

Thirdly, even if memories of past lives gained through hypnotism are correctly yours, then knowledge of them at an early stage on the spiritual path may be subtly damaging as they are from the past and therefore from a time when, logically, we were less spiritually developed than we are now. Therefore, it may be painful for us to know what we have experienced and less than edifying for us in looking to future possibilities. There will come a time far in the future for most people, when our past lives will be like an open book to us, but then we will have the spiritual maturity to place such information in proper context.

**FURTHER READING**

- The very best summary of this research that I have found is by Ian Lawton in his two books: *The Wisdom of the Soul.* Rational Spirituality Press, 2007 and especially, *The Big Book of the Soul: our many lives as holographic aspects of the Source.* Rational Spirituality Press, 2008.
- See also updated material on Ian Lawton's website: [http://www.ianlawton.com/](http://www.ianlawton.com/)
ZOOM Online Meetings: 
In June 2020, we inaugurated a series of online meetings using the ZOOM computer-conferencing system. They are available at 7.30pm-9.30pm each Tuesday night Melbourne, Australian time. Subjects are indicated on our website for each coming month at:  
www.theosophydownunder.org  
Please contact: andrewrooke@hotmail.com if you are interested in joining these online meetings.

Face-to-Face Meetings in Melbourne:  
all face-to-face meetings at our Library Centre in Melbourne were suspended in March due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. Please check our Theosophy Downunder Website at:  
www.theosophydownunder.org for the latest information and list of meetings when they become available. We hope to repeat the lectures we have missed when we are able to hold meetings once again.

Melbourne Library:  
The Theosophical Pasadena Library Centre is at 664 Glenhuntly Rd, Caulfield South. The library is currently closed due to the Covid-19 health crisis. A catalogue of all books in the library is available on our website arranged by subject. When the library is operating regularly, books are available for loan to regular attendees at our meetings and U3A students attending the Ancient Wisdom course (Tuesday meetings) or by mail to members. Newly added to our library: Edward Slingerland: *Trying not to Try: The Art of Effortlessness and the Power of Spontaneity*; Lesley Jackson: *Sekhmet & Bastet: The Feline Powers of Ancient Egypt*; Edward J. Watts: *Hypatia: The Life and Legend of an Ancient Philosopher.*

Rare Book Project:  
Jennifer Jaeger of Ankh Antiquarian Bookshop writes: In June 2019, the National Secretary of the Australasian Section of our Theosophical Society asked me to have a look at some of the older/rare books at our library in Melbourne. I have been a bookseller for the past 31 years and a Theosophist since 1986, so I was delighted to be able to assist the Theosophical Society Pasadena (TSP) in this endeavour. Most of the books were very worn with library stamps and covered in contact, however because of the content of these books they are still worth something. Some indeed are valuable and rare even in their current state. We still have many of the titles in the library in more modern form so this was an opportunity to raise some money for the TSP.

In July I had a stall at the ANZAAB (Aust & NZ Association of Antiquarian Booksellers) bookfair at Melbourne University where I sold a few titles and more recently before the current lockdown in Melbourne several more, although this year has had no bookfairs world-wide due to the Covid pandemic. Many people are looking at new philosophies and esoteric knowledge in a new light and have discovered the world of books, so a few hardy souls have ventured to find me on
Google and give me a call. These sales have recently enabled the TSP to purchase a new computer so we can run our online meetings efficiently. I’m sure we have all been unwittingly benefiting in our recent excellent Zoom meetings.

I wanted the members to know that they are very welcome to phone me on 0419395782 or email on jennifer@ankhantiquarianbooks.com.au if they would like to make an appointment to come and view the collection, and wish to purchase any of the books. This would of course be when we are allowed to visit retail stores again. I am located in Melbourne in the suburb of Chadstone and the shop is by appointment. Most of the books are priced between $25-$60 and I will make sure that TSP members are looked after if they wish to buy several books.

– Jennifer Jaeger, Ankh Antiquarian Bookshop, Melbourne, Australia.

A New Continent is Emerging in the Indian Ocean:

the formation of a new embryonic continent has begun in the southern Indian Ocean. It is believed that the continental crust grows on the borders of continents and oceans in the so-called subduction areas, where oceanic rock plates sink into the mantle beneath the continent. When they are re-melted and mixed with the base material of continental plates, granite magma is formed, which creates the upper granite layer of the continents. From a geological point of view, this outer layer distinguishes the continents from the oceans: the relatively thin oceanic crust consists mainly of basalts formed in the process of the melting of mantle material. Meanwhile, the continental crust is thicker and has a granite composition.

The results of a study conducted by scientists on the Kerguelen Islands in the southern Indian Ocean near Antarctica show that granite magma, and accordingly the continental crust, can form not only in subduction areas, but also in the centre of the oceans.

The study suggests that this is how new continents emerge. The islands of the archipelago are in fact the peaks of volcanoes towering above the water, breaking through the oceanic crust of the Kerguelen Plateau. The basalts that erupted out of them had shaped the islands. But along with the basalts typical of the oceans, there is one intrusion of more acidic rocks of the granite family, found only on the continents.

Due to this intrusion, the crust in the Kerguelen Plateau region of the Island is thick, as on the mainland.

Based on the study results, scientists formulated the hypothesis that the massif of the Kerguelen Island is the embryo of the future continent, which will be a completely shaped continent in millions of years.

Theosophy tells us that continents rise and fall below the oceans on a cyclical basis according to cycles in the Earth’s, and therefore, in Human-
ity’s life over vast time periods. Perhaps we are seeing the rise of a new continent in the southern Indian Ocean as part of this cyclic process rising from the depths right there before our very eyes!

People Try and Do Right By Each Other – No Matter the Motivation – Says a New Scientific Study

People want to help each other, even when it costs them something and even when the motivations to help don’t always align, a new study suggests. In research published in June in the journal, Science Advances, sociologists found that people overwhelmingly chose to be generous to others—even to strangers, and even when it seems one motivation to help might crowd out another. It is the first study to examine how all the established motivations to be generous interact with one another.

The researchers said that this research helps us understand the remarkable quantity and diversity of prosocial behaviour we see in humans: “From an evolutionary perspective, it’s kind of perplexing that it even exists, because you’re decreasing your own fitness on behalf of others,” Melamed said. “And yet, we see it in bees and ants, and humans and throughout all of nature.”

This research indicates, as Theosophy tells us, that we are all part of one entity at a higher level of Reality than the physical, and that evolution proceeds mainly by cooperation rather than competition between different aspects of that entity. Theosophy says that this is why altruism is fundamental to the operation of the universe or as one theosophical writer put it: ‘Love is the Cement of the Universe’. More information available at: www.advances.sciencemag.org/content/6/23/eaba0504

There is no doubt that it is around the family and the home that all the greatest virtues, the most dominating virtues of humanity, are created, strengthened and maintained.

– Winston Churchill
HOW CAN I LOVE GOD?

The family is the basic unit of society. The father, mother, and the child in the Christian tradition find their equivalent in The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, forming The Christian Trinity of one substance with God. For nearly two thousand years this unit of the family was a strong bond in Christian societies. Strong family and kinship bonds held such societies together.

In the modern world, family life, traditional morality, and genuine relationships based on love, have suffered breakdown perhaps more than at any time in recorded history. This situation adds to the feelings of isolation often suffered by people living in today's highly individualistic society.

The need for transcendental union through meditation is felt for this reason as never before, though many seem to have forgotten God.

In this connection a story told of Ramakrishna, the great Indian spiritual teacher, philosopher, saint, and mystic may help:

A troubled woman came to Ramakrishna, saying, "O Master, I find that I do not love God."

So Ramakrishna asked of her, "Is there nothing then in life that you love?" To this she replied, "I dearly love my little nephew."

The sage said to her, "There is your love and service to God, in your love and service to that child."

What can you do to promote world peace? Go home and love your family.

– Mother Teresa.

– Hector Bonarjee, Calais, France.
FAMILY TREE
On a recent visit home to see family and friends after many years away, I sat bewildered at the dinner table on many evenings listening to the dinner-time conversation, vainly trying to work out who was related to whom. "Don't you remember Uncle Joe? He was always a bit 'funny'”, and, “What about Aunty Olive who could talk the hind-leg off a donkey”. In bewildered desperation I asked myself: “Who were these people anyway!”

After an extensive bombardment of such discussions one night, my uncle by marriage could see my efforts to understand family history were all in vain. “Don’t worry,” he said, “I’ve got it all written down in the Family Tree – see, you’re even here too!” I looked carefully to see that I was indeed listed down the bottom of the third page as ‘married to niece’ (!) What I also noticed was that from two people who were married in 1806, there were some 300 or more people, including myself, who were caught up in their web of destiny some 200 years later. Amongst their descendants were a bewildering array of soldiers, engineers, aviators, housewives, teachers, shopkeepers, and others who had made their mark, mostly in modest ways, upon several far-flung corners of the earth. These two people who married in 1806 had not been particularly notable in any way, yet their decision to marry and pursue quiet but honest lives had a vast influence on their hundreds of descendants. Not only had many of the children followed careers closely akin to their father’s (in this case an agricultural engineer), but most, with the occasional exception, were god-fearing, solid citizens in the mould of their ancestor.

Gazing upon the family tree proved to me how the small decisions of life, both good and bad, can have far-reaching and unforeseen effects through the generations. I’m sure it would be the same if you could look at your own family tree.

On our family tree two people had lived ordinary, verging on dull lives 216 years ago, yet the quality of their existence has affected hundreds of then unborn people. A few of these descendants did spectacular things in wars, commerce, and academia – their lives moulded, in part, by the qualities of their ancestors and the everyday decisions they made.

How important then are our decisions and the quality of our family life here and now for future generations who follow. Such ponderings bring to mind the theosophical teachings concerning the intimate intertwining of individual, family, national, and even global karma. Theosophical teachers, primarily Katherine Tingley, have always stressed the sacred trust of family life, and the karmic responsibilities of parenthood, no matter how seemingly modest and unspectacular our circumstances.

Any family tree clearly shows how decisions in the here and now can ripple outwards throughout our descendants to affect the lives of our family and even of the nation, for ages hence.

– The Editor.
I write the following from an intuitive perspective and therefore I can only trust that it resonates with others as they read this perspective.

Paganism is a religion; a spiritual path, whereby its followers generally seek to connect back to the One Divine Creative Principle as manifested in the Lord and Lady or the God and Goddess. It is an earth-based faith whereby ALL LIFE IS TRULY INTERCONNECTED.

As far as The Self goes, it is that part of ourselves which I believe gives us our own sense of the ‘I’ or that deep feeling that we are separate, though yet connected. That connectedness underpins the reason for our existence.

We talk of Community, of all life being connected, but I cannot help but feel that we humans, and of every other manifested life-form, is also ‘Separate.’ We all ultimately die alone – no one can follow us as we say our goodbyes or as we close our eyes upon this world for the last time. And yet The Self does go on for our own dying makes way for new births and new beginnings – speaking here future-wise – as we reincarnate into differing forms.

In the West, the Self is somehow seen to be of paramount importance and is that which causes us to "grab what we can" as we journey through life. It is our sense of The Self which, I believe, causes us to deny that all individual life-forms — be these of the mineral, plant, animal, human or elemental kingdoms — possess their own ‘Self’ or ‘Soul’ or that ‘Something’ which flows through each as a continuous thread which unites the past with the present.

The Self in Paganism should seek to rise above

Picture: The entrance to Newgrange, a prehistoric (3,200BC) ‘pagan’ monument in Ireland said by archeologists to be a tomb. But it also at some time in the past may have been a spiritual initiation chamber where candidates could pursue communion with their inner Self.
such petty interpretations of its own Self-Importance, and to respect the fact that all beings are imbued with that same attribute styled The Self, even if these beings are not aware of this Self.

The Self in Paganism allows us to walk the Path of the Old Ones as we seek our place in the scheme of life. It is in our understanding of our own individuality from that of how society may view us, which assists us in beginning to fully appreciate The Self in all the numerous life-forms around us. If one simply follows the herd, then how can they appreciate The Self in the other kingdoms for only their kingdom, the human kingdom, is privy to such as The Self.

How can we strive to be as the Gods if we selfishly walk over others and not respect that though each of us are individuals, there is a cord weaving itself through all life, thus creating a tapestry which—if we were to stand back—would allow us to see the unity of all these life-forms.

Sometimes I despise the push for community as it is often the case that it is the Community thinking which causes the most problems – witness the unrest of the world of late. Many see the old system collapsing as a good thing; I cannot, for in it I perceive the ‘herd mentality’ manifesting in a far more dangerous manner. The people believe they are being individuals striving for a common cause. To me they are mere automatons shouting, dictating and bullying others to accept a way that is the negative outcome of the West’s striving for The Self.

They talk of ‘Rights’ but they deny the ‘Rights’ of those who may not concur with their sentiments. I wonder how many extend ‘Rights’ to other life-forms? I meet very few people who truly care about the ‘pesky insect’ or the ‘annoying fly’ or the ‘incessant humming of the mosquito.’ And yet these too have ‘Rights’ for they too possess that attribute we call The Self.

The True Self is that which causes us to gently and respectfully seek for positive change for the good of all life-forms. It seeks for the greater good as often manifested in those fighting to protect Mother Earth, Her Children (here I refer to plant and animal rights as too human rights) and those who seek for a better way through the path of Spirituality. For me, personally, The Self allows us to accept our own limitedness as it moves us to humbly acquiesce to a Deity that is the cause for our own manifestation; our own genesis.

The Pagan Way – the Ways of the Old Ones, the Old Gods who once walked this once-beautiful earth — this is truly the Path of The True Self, for it embraces All Life at the elevation of The Self and yet, in so doing, it likewise embraces the reality of The Unity of All Life.

So Mote It Be.

- HeathclyffSt.James Deville, Melbourne, Australia

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“Let my worship be within the heart that rejoices, for behold, all acts of love and pleasure are my rituals. Therefore, let there be beauty and strength, power and compassion, honour and humility, mirth and reverence within you.”

- Doreen Valiente, Pagan author.
The Brotherhood of the Shadow: Just as there is a Hierarchy of Light trying to help humanity in their spiritual growth, there is also a Hierarchy of those beings who have deliberately chosen the Dark Side where Evil seems a flowery path and the fruits of selfish victory are considered as of larger worth than to walk with the Gods. Such is the Left Hand Path of the Brothers of the Shadow. This hierarchy is dedicated to directing Humanity into materialistic life – because that is what it knows and from whence it derives its tremendous power in this world. During the present Kali Yuga period when materialism holds an enormous attraction for everyday people, they have great power. Their activities involve seeding the ‘thought-atmosphere’ with thoughts and aspirations related to the material and sensuous life. They can only work by tempting people and leading them to fulfil their inner urgings toward evil. We can see the effects of their thought-forms in every field from popular entertainment through to our education system, recreational and prescribed drug addiction, even the ‘dumbing-down’ effects of popular technologies such as smart phones.

Russian mystic Helena Roerich’s, Agni Yoga teachings, written in the 1920s, which she claimed were inspired by one of the same Masters of Wisdom (the Mahatma ‘M’) who inspired the founding of the Theosophical Society in 1875, warn of the downside to our current fascination with technology and artificial intelligence and how this approach, blindly taken before by earlier civilizations (especially Atlantis), actually contributed to their demise:

“Technocracy should be regarded as a device of the Dark Ones. The
Dark Ones have often led people on to mechanical solutions, thereby hoping to occupy the attention of humanity, only to divert it from spiritual growth. Yet the problems of life can only be solved by the expansion of consciousness. It can be seen how mechanical hypotheses can easily ensnare the hopes of humanity. Such also was the Maya (illusion) of the ancients.” – Agni Yoga, The Fiery World 1, 349.

Psychic Epidemics: Teachers of the Brotherhood of Compassion of all traditions have warned us of the dangers of ‘Psychic Epidemics’ when the barriers between the physical and astral world have thinned and negative thought-forms from the lower astral have access to vulnerable individuals in the physical world. Now is such a time at the conjunction of several cycles, principally the dawning of the Age of Aquarius and the sunset of the Piscean Age. These energies can affect the physical, emotional, mental or spiritual states of people by breaking through their protective auric nets.

At the very least, this can cause distress for the affected person, perhaps physically in the form of headache, nausea, or tiredness, or emotionally, as in feeling temporarily depressed or anxious. At worst, such thought forms can propel a person into harbouring thoughts, speaking words, or committing actions – sometimes quite alarming ones – that they might not even have considered normally.

Theosophical teachers have warned us of these epidemics, eg: HP Blavatsky:

"Psychism, with all its allurements and all its dangers, is necessarily developing among you, and you must beware lest the Psychic outruns the [mental] and spiritual development.

Psychic capacities held perfectly under control, checked and directed by the [mind] principle, are valuable aids in development. But these capacities running riot, controlling instead of being controlled, using instead of being used, lead the student into the most dangerous delusions and the certainty of moral destruction." - HPB to the American Conventions 1888-1891, p34.

Agni Yoga similarly says: “…the danger of psychic epidemics is increasing. In the Puranas it was predicted that toward the end of the Kali Yuga, humanity would be driven to acts of madness." Perhaps the description of a ‘Mad World’ is not so far from the mark if these teachings have any credence!

Psychic Epidemics: Positive Effects: Grace Knoche, former Leader of the Theosophical Society (Pas-
Dena) in her book, To Light a Thousand Lamps, published in 2001 said:

“...The present thinning of the demarcation between the astral and physical worlds is proving of mixed value, and much depends on what we choose to identify with. At present, the astral light seems to be disgorging more than usual of its basest content; on the other hand, a greater number of persons are becoming responsive to energies from higher levels and, at times, receiving ideas and inspirations of sufficient worth to change many lives for the better.

All the more reason to maintain a balanced outlook and not give way to feelings of hopelessness – either about ourselves or about the future of humanity. The debilitating influences such moods have on us infects the vital circulations of thought energies through our planet. Too much is at stake for any of us to wantonly add negative thinking to the world karma...”

Effects of Ancient Karma: Why me? It’s the natural question when we feel the impact of this 'Mad World' in our lives. What have I ever done to suffer the way I do when so many people doing the wrong thing seemingly get away with it scot-free?

What Can this 'Mad World' be Teaching Us? No energy is wasted in Nature, so, there must be a reason, and there must be positives to be derived from the state of the world as it is. We know that the world is a classroom for spiritual development so difficult conditions must be there for us to learn and overcome.

As the old saying goes, “When the going gets tough, the Tough get going’ and ‘We don’t build our spiritual muscles from pushing against the air’.
These conditions of the Kali Yuga present us with numerous opportunities to learn, grow, and prove our sincerity in the spiritual search and helping others along the Path.

In India there is the saying: ‘The Chela’s (ie spiritual student’s) heart longs for the Kali Yuga’ (ie the Dark Age that we live in). Meaning when the opposition is greatest you can learn the most and proceed faster in spiritual evolution if that choice is made. The world will never be at peace until we are at peace with ourselves. The challenge then is not to stamp out personality but to refine and elevate it – to make it a fit vehicle for the Inner God.

What practical measures can we take here and now to achieve this and help transform this ‘Mad World’ of today into ‘Compassionate World’ of the future?

Practical Ways to a Better World: The Paramitas (Perfections): Spiritual growth is essentially converting our life experience into opportunities for letting the Inner God at the core of us shine in this world. All systems of spiritual initiation to attain this goal are basically putting what the Buddhists call ‘The Paramitas’ [literally the qualities we need to reach the ‘Other Shore’] or ‘Perfections’ into action in the reality of daily life.

These spiritual qualities are the enumerated and called by different names in the world’s mystery traditions but they can be boiled down to six qualities:

\textit{Generosity; Ethical Discipline; Patience; Joyous Perseverance; Meditative Stabilization; Wisdom.}

Why should we develop these particular qualities along the Path of spiritual learning? The great Tibetan Buddhist spiritual teacher Tsong-Kha-Pa (1357-1419) tells us in his: Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment:

“\textquote{To achieve the aims of others for spiritual understanding you must first help them with material goods as they won’t appreciate spirituality if they have an empty stomach!}"

Since no benefit will come from \textit{Generosity} accompanied by harmfulness towards living beings, you need \textit{Ethical Discipline}, which has great purpose for others; this is the state of desisting from harm to others and the causes of harm. To bring this to its full development, you need \textit{Patience} that disregards the harm done to you. You need to develop the ability to fix your mind on your ideals so you need to develop \textit{Meditative Stabilization}. Calmness and single-mindedness in the service of others lead to \textit{Wisdom}. None of this is attainable by laziness, so you need \textit{Joyous Perseverance} in pursuit of wisdom through service to others and so this quality is the basis of the other Perfections.”

\textbf{Positives: Learning to be More Compassionate:} Of course, there are many positives in the physical world resulting from the current Covid pandemic in addition to the obvious hardships. These would include:

- the reduction in pollution of all kinds with the reduction in travel and economic activity;
- the subsequent rebounding of life in the oceans and animal life of all kinds;
- a new community appreciation for professions such as cleaning, teaching, the health and helping professions;
• the extreme vulnerability of our economy and social inequalities of all kinds have been revealed;
But our focus is with the causes of suffering in the world from the viewpoint of the ancient wisdom. So, from this perspective, further positives to be taken from the current state of the world:

• Developing a sense of Empathy and Compassion through Suffering: Suffering is a necessary background to the development of empathy and compassion. When there are dramatic conditions in the world, by so much greater are our opportunities to show compassion and develop understanding.

• Modifying our extreme sense of Individual Entitlement in the Western world: The current state of Pandemic encourages us to overcome the extreme individualism and sense of entitlement that has become rampant in the Western world, especially in the USA and Australia. As the ancient wisdom tells us, at the higher levels of our being we are all in a state of Unity and eventually we must learn to forgo our individualism for the greater good of the One, or in our case, of the collective community. In our current situation, we have to work together to overcome the spread and control of the Covid virus. If we don't, we'll soon be forced to cooperate through lock-downs or increasing numbers of infected people. We have to learn about the practical aspects of Unity to truly respect others and cooperate with them for the sake of a better future for all of us.

• The Spiritual Hierarchy has not abandoned us: Don’t think that we have ever been abandoned by the spiritual hierarchy of light. They are constantly at work guiding and assisting our efforts to make a better world – but it is up to us to reach up to them as they reach down to us to help.

• Being Better People – Everyone of Us: We all have the opportunity to be better people no matter how outwardly humble may be our status in this world. We can add to the ‘reservoir of good karma’ which is all that the Masters of Wisdom can use to help us. What we are from day to day is therefore terrifically important.

• Spirituality is not just an Intellectual Exercise: This doesn't have to be an intellectual exercise – attending lectures, seminars, ZOOM online meetings, etc. but living a sincere and good life is equally, if not much more, important. It is as though we are living in a fog of negative thought with the Sun of spiritual reality shining above the fog. Intellectual effort and living a good life can equally poke holes in this fog. As Plato said: ‘Living the Good Life is a Work of Art’.

I'm gonna make my world a better place;
I'm gonna keep that smile on my face;
I'm gonna teach myself how to understand;
I'm gonna make myself a better man
– Keb Mo.

A Glorious Future: A More Peaceful World:
Bear in mind the glorious future of the world when it emerges from Kali Yuga into the next phase of the Earth’s life called by Hindus and Theosophists, the Satya Yuga (The Age of Truth).
The Earth will not always remain in its present state. But as embryo-gods, we have the ability to see through the illusion of separateness and to come to understand that we are all children of
the cosmic spirit, offspring of the one life, and that it is our duty to assist the upwards course of nature by helping one another along the spiritual path. But in order to realize our spiritual potential, an enormous number of lives are necessary. Most of us have a very long way to go before we can become a Bodhisattva. A Bodhisattva is one who has achieved spiritual liberation and earned the right to a long period of rest and bliss in Nirvana, but hears the voice of compassion within her or him asking:

‘Can there be bliss when all that lives must suffer? Shalt thou be saved and hear the whole world cry?’

But we can all make a real contribution to changing the world for the better by making every effort to correct our own faults, and by helping those around us with encouraging words, kind deeds, and uplifting thoughts. Every step along this path is a step towards a more peaceful and caring world for all.

– The Editor.
Letters to the Editor

Spiritual Students Often Experience Suffering – But Why?

We recently received an email with a question that many people are asking in these days of the Covid-19 Health Crisis: “…Why is it that good people who are trying their utmost to live a 'spiritual' life seem to suffer a lot more than those who have little or no sense of brotherhood outside of their own survival? Suffering often brings people to Theosophy to find explanations, but why should it continue once we have 'set our foot on the spiritual path'?...” The Editor replies:

Spiritual teachers tell us that when a person seriously commences their spiritual journey it throws outward many of our inner tendencies that otherwise would remain hidden and play-out over many lifetimes. This gives us the opportunity to deal with our bad habits built up over several lifetimes in a comparatively short time – though often at the price of outward suffering. Thus, such a person can be better fitted in a shorter time to serve humanity by being purified of these habits and having a better understanding of the suffering of others.

Buddhist monk, Sogyal Rinpoche spoke of these matters once when he said: “…Sometimes when you enter the spiritual path, when it really touches deeply, it stirs up a lot of things. That’s why I always tell my students that it’s very important to remember this process is a mere purification, and not to give up. I sometimes use the example of when you are taking a shower. When you scrub the dirt out of yourself, it becomes more messy than it was before. But if you stop in the middle, it becomes worse!

That’s why, when I wash dirty socks, I really love it when the dirt comes up, because I know it’s being purified. In the sense that all the suffering is seen, because we [ie Buddhists] see life not just as related to this life but always connected to the life before, whatever we have committed in the past, in that karma, or in this life, sometimes the truly powerful teachings stir it up and bring it to the surface. If you are really ready to face up and work with that in a meaningful way, actually you can finish with a lot of negative karma which you might otherwise be suffering or experiencing for many lifetimes. We can finish them. We see suffering as an ending of a particular pattern.”

Lest we think of the spiritual life as an inherently unhappy one, remember what our theosophical teachers have told us. An honest appeal to our inner divinity certainly stirs up negative
aspects of ourselves but it also calls upon the positive forces within to help us through these challenges. Channels are opened up by which the joyous influences of the higher planes of our being can flow into everyday life and new strength rewards each new effort, new courage comes from each new step forward. Let’s not forget that as well as the crimes of our past, we have a legacy of good deeds from other lives to call upon in our dark moments.

Theosophical teacher, William Quan Judge wisely advises us:
“So take courage, disciple, and hold on your way through the discouragements and successes that beset your earliest steps on the path of probation. Do not stop to mourn over your faults; recognize them and seek to learn from each its lesson. Do not become vain of your success. So, shall you gradually attain self-knowledge, and self-knowledge shall develop self-mastery.”

Where Did the Ancient Egyptians Come From?:

At one of our recent Zoom meetings the question was asked about where the ancient Egyptians came from considering their advanced knowledge of many sciences and their monumental buildings and statues. The editor replies:

According to Theosophy (G de Purucker) there were three waves of immigrants from the doomed Atlantis that formed the basis of the ancient Egyptian population:

1. The *primal immigration of Atlantean stock* before the Nile Delta had its present form. They left the sinking continent in what is now the Atlantic Ocean and settled in the Ethiopian highlands. From there they emigrated northwards following the Nile into Egypt.

2. The *second wave of Atlantean immigrants* about 100,000 years ago from the island of Posiedonis, an island about the size of Ireland, where there was an extensive Atlantean settlement described by Plato as just beyond the Gibraltar Straits. They settled in the Nile Delta and built the Great Pyramid 70-80,000 years ago. These settlers were of mixed Ayran and Atlantean stock.

3. Following the *sinking of the Atlantean island of Poseidonis* 12,000 years ago, Egypt was invaded by peoples from southern India of mixed Aryan stock from the north of India and Atlantean peoples from the sunken island of Lanka to the south of India of which today’s Sri Lanka is a remnant.
about 9,000 years ago by two routes – over the sea and then through Ethiopia; and by land across Suez these being referred to as ‘The Sons of Horus’ coming out of the East. These immigrants from southern India mixed with the original Atlantean Egyptians and thus produced the composite racial stock known to history as the dynastic Egyptians.

A Letter and a Poem from ‘Inside’ – LS

A fellow student of Theosophy, who is currently an inmate of a prison in the USA, has recently sent us some comments on Happiness and a Poem that gives us all cause for thought. In response to a question: “In this moment, what are you feeling? Allow your attention to go directly into that emotion, whatever it may be, and be willing to discover what else is here, underneath it:”

“What am I feeling now in the present moment? Happiness, for so many reasons. I am truly happy a lot of the time even while locked up here. Life is so great to experience that I’d rather feel alive than nothing, like some who choose to ‘medicate’ themselves with the same actions that got a bunch of us in here (i.e. prison) in the first place. I have chronic depression, but I’ve gotten a lot better at my coping skills to deal with it, plus using meditation helps. I’ve grown so much since being incarcerated this time that there isn’t much that gets to me anymore. I mean, yes, I miss my son and being physically free, but I deserved this punishment. I’m paying back my karmic actions while working on creating new, beneficial ones. – L.S., California, USA.

And a poem:

Renewal is Re-Knowing
Recognize the good you’ve done
And know that love radiates
Revel in the person you’re becoming
And know you are remarkable
Remember your past
And know growth is rebirth
Realize there will be setbacks
And know to trust your resilience
Reflect on your mistakes
And know insight is rewarding
Review your bad habits
And know they bend to your resolve
Reveal your good habits
And know there is joy in rhythm
Revitalize your love of community
And know it’s rational to rejoice
Reflect on your still, small voice
And know you are renewed.

…and from Peter A. another prisoner who has contacted Theosophy:

“Theosophy has enriched my life immeasurably and facilitated an understanding of life and my place in the universe. Theosophical study has been, and continues to be, an enlightening experience. Prison is a place of nihilism and negativity. Hatred and ignorance are prevalent. Theosophical understanding has helped me immensely to navigate through this base and cruel environment.”
Picture:
The Golden Temple
(Darbar Sahib)
Amritsar,
Punjab,
India.
Sikhism is the fifth largest religion in the world with approximately 30 million followers, 75% of them in the Punjab state in northwest India where the religion began. The religion was founded by Guru Nanak (1469-1539), who showed early signs of brilliance in philosophy as a child. He spent all his life redeeming the world from falsehood and blind faith. He taught his followers the attributes of The Divine; positive thinking, dignity of labour, equality of human beings and the importance of biodiversity. Guru Nanak described the creation of universe by One Divine – The Creator who permeates through everyone and everything. Therefore, he emphasised to live a life of coexistence in harmony with all.

Sikhism therefore believes in One God/Creator; that all people are created equal; human life is a precious blessing and opportunity to learn and practice the attributes of God; that we should live a life of service to the Creator and our fellow humans; that Sikhs are warriors of Truth; and, that the purpose of human life is to obtain salvation by performing good deeds. His teachings were followed and completed by nine Gurus who succeeded Guru Nanak till 1708. The 10th Guru, Guru Gobind Singh gave the title of Guru to the holy book of Sikh teachings - the Guru Granth Sahib, or the eleventh and final Guru with all the Divine wisdom.

Sikh philosophy is best summed up in the words of the Mul (or ‘Root’) Mantra or The Fundamental Principle

Ikk ōankār sat(i)-nām(u) kartā purakh(u) nirpā’u nirver(u) akāl mūrat(i) ajūni sepān gur-prasād(i)II

Translated: There is one supreme being, the eternal reality (true name), the creator, without fear, devoid of enmity, immortal, never incarnated, self-existent, (known by) the grace of the Guru.

This is the Mūl Mantar (‘Moola’ or ‘Root Mantram’), the opening words of the Sikh scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib. It consists of twelve words in the Punjabi language, written in Gurmukhi script, and are the most widely known among the Sikhs. They summarize the essential teaching of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism. The Mul Mantar is a succinct doctrinal statement of Sikhism.

Sikh: the word means ‘Learner/Student’. ‘Sikhism’ is a Western term referring to those who follow the Sikh religion. To Sikhs it is not a religion as such but more a way of life.

Based on Hinduism and Islam: The Indian state of Punjab where Sikhism evolved, is at the crossroads of what is now Islamic Pakistan and Hindu India. It is not surprising therefore that Sikhism combines the teachings of devotional Hinduism (Bhakti Marga) and mystical Islam (Sufi) teachings.

Monotheistic: Devotion/surrender to the One God, ‘Ik Onkar’ (‘One Creator), and ‘Wahe Guru’ (‘Wonderful Teacher’). All powerful God whose attributes can never
be fully described. Rejection of idol worship and the caste system of Hinduism. Devotion and intellectual understanding must go together.

Unlike other monotheistic religions, Sikhism does not seek to actively convert others to their faith. It stresses living their beliefs: **Sewa:** service to humanity; **Simran:** remembrance of God by repetition or recital of His Name or ‘Naam’ or attributes.

**Guru:** the keystone of Sikhism is devotion to a teacher, or Guru. Without a Guru as a guide you cannot reach Moksha or salvation/freedom from your bonds. This can be done by learning and practicing the Divine’s attributes.

**Maya (Illusion):** people live in a state of illusion or the Hindu concept of ‘Maya’, remote from their true God-like qualities due to the operation of the **Five Thieves or Five Vices:** Ego, Anger, Greed, Attachment, and Lust. These qualities divorce us from God. We are in love with the Five Thieves/Vices and have forgotten God. We must disconnect from Maya and reconnect with God. We need to look inward to find what we already know in the better part of ourselves – ‘**Akal**’ – the purpose of life – to reconnect with the Oneness of Truth. There is no Heaven or Hell. Release from this life of dedication to worldliness through reconnection with the One

ness. Sikhs believe that we should avoid the illusion of worldly values and behaviour (Maya); and in service to other humans, social justice and equality.

**Devotion:** Sikhism has a huge emphasis on remembrance and chanting of the Divine Name. Music is very important as all Sikh hymns are written and sung in the melodies. Sikhs should think of and practice Divine’s qualities and pray every day and be grateful under all circumstances.

**Service:** service to the community in action is what kills out Ego. Three types of service: **Tan:** Physical Service; **Man:** Service with true and pure mind; **Dhan:** Material or financial Service to the needy. Sikhism has a huge emphasis on social justice and helping people to live better lives.

**Family Life:** Sikhism believes in the equality of men and women. Sikhism rejects asceticism and expects all

*Picture: A Sikh temple, Nanaksar Gurudwara, in Richmond, British Columbia, Canada.*
Sikhs to marry and family life is central to Sikh culture: ‘Be in the world but not of it’.

Khalsa: refers to both a special group of initiated Sikhs, as well as a community that considers Sikhism as its faith. All Sikhs initiated into the Sikh way of life have the surname – ‘Singh’ (Lion) if a boy, and ‘Kaur’ (Princess) if a girl. Initiated Sikhs must follow the Five ‘K’s’:
- Kesh: Don’t cut your hair;
- Kara: wear a metal bracelet;
- Kanga: wear a wooden comb;
- Kirpan: carry a sword or dagger; and
- Kacchera: wear a special undergarment/shorts.

Holy Book: The Guru Granth Sahib: a collection of hymns and prayers. The holy book has a place of honour in every Sikh place of worship (Gurudwara). Guru Granth Sahib has the writings and compositions of 35 Saints and Bhagats. They include 6 of the 10 Sikh Gurus and the rest coming from the holy people of both Hindu and Islamic faiths. They lived around the period from the 12th-17th century and came from all over Greater India. Their ideology of theosophy was the same and they passed on a universal message of Truth and how to be one with the One Creator. That is why it is called the Divine Wisdom or The Eternal Guru. Most of the compositions are from the writings of Sikh Gurus but, Bhagat Kabir, and, Sheikh Farid, also have a very large contribution.

Readings of the hymns from the Holy Book take place every day. The complete readings of Guru Granth Sahib take place several times in a year in every Gurudwara and most homes.

The City of Amritsar in the Punjab: the main spiritual centre of Sikhism. The Golden Temple with a huge kitchen providing 100,000 to 1 million meals per day free of any charge.

Pilgrimages: Sikhism does not believe in pilgrimages to holy places or the use of priests to recite prayers or perform rituals for others. Every Sikh should be his or her own priest although these days most Gurudwaras employ community members who perform priestly duties.

Sects and Orders: there are several religious orders of Sikhs based on disputes over the succession of the gurus or points of ritual and tradition or politically created such as ‘Nirmalas’, ‘Nihangs’, ‘Namdhari’, and, ‘Nirankaris’. However, the fundamental definition of a Sikh remains as a follower of the 10 Gurus and Guru Granth Sahib – the holy book.

Current Issues: The most important issue, besides various political disputes with the Indian government, is the rejection of Khalsa tradition by the younger generation of Sikhs – cutting of long-hair and shaving beards and gradually relapsing into Hinduism. The many attempts to revive the Khalsa tradition have met with limited success.

—- Compiled by the Editor with the kind assistance of Dr Preet Singh.
A Review Article
of Edouard Schure's
Classic Study
- Reviewed by Geoff Pascoe.
he Great Initiates, by Edouard Schure, first published in Paris in 1889, has been read by many people throughout the years since then. Whether they have agreed or not with everything they find in it, the book has almost certainly made a very strong impression on them. In his descriptions of the experiences of these individuals he calls the initiates, he provides a deep exploration of the place of humanity in the cosmos.

The Initiates are individuals such as Krishna, Hermes, Moses, Pythagoras, Jesus. Their initiations range from visions of spiritual beings imparting knowledge, alone in a forest or mountain, to structured initiations in a temple. The basic story of the book, then, is the development, or evolution, in mainly Western civilization, of the knowledge of the human soul and its destiny, told through the lives of these initiates.

Much of the inspiration for the book came from Schure's meeting with a woman, Margherita Mignaty, who was a kind of seeress, and who had some extraordinary inner vision of the spiritual history of mankind, but the writing, he says, required ten years of strenuous work. After he'd written it he met Rudolf Steiner, and the two shared much in the way of spiritual ideas.

Schure considered Steiner an example of the initiates he wrote about in the book.

There is a great deal of knowledge in the book about ancient cults and religions, and readers have enjoyed the many poetic touches, and descriptions of the visions and ritual dramas which were part of the initiatory experience he focuses on, and which became in time the underlying impulses of great art.

RAMA: The story begins with Rama, at a time when, as Schure sees it, the spiritual insights and values first came into being which lead to modern religions. This is thousands of years ago, after the last great flood. Previous continents and civilizations had been swept away, and a number of races were on the earth, some being the remnants of those previous races. Some of the nuances in the descriptions of the races in this early part could make the reader perhaps somewhat uncomfortable.

One can only, as this writer does, read through these bits with the inner conviction of the brotherhood of man, and read on. Various cults, involving contacts with ancestors and other-worldly beings, had come into existence around Africa, Asia, Europe and Iran. There was, in the forests of Scythia (modern day a Central Eurasia), a young Druid priest named Rama. Using legendary material, the story unfolds of this man Rama.

Among these tribes in the forests there were at that time some cruel and self-seeking practices, such as human sacrifice. Rama sought to cure his people of this brutality which ran through their lives, and he introduced new practices, doing away with human sacrifice, replacing it with the cult of the sacred
fire, and inner purity, and elevating the position of women in their society. After the vision of a figure representing Divine Intelligence, he led his people east into Asia. There he founded what Schure calls the true Aryan religion. It spread through Central Asia, Iran and Europe, but the clearest picture of it is to be found in the Vedas of India. In the practices of this ancient religion is a presentation of esoteric science, and also there is to be discerned the figure of the rishi, the wise man, the initiate, the Holy Man.

**KRISHNA:** The life of Krishna is introduced with a description of the background scene of India of that time – according to Schure's understanding about 3000BCE, around the beginning of a Kali Yuga. The status of the various races is implicit in the social organisation, and there are two opposing forces in the political powers: that of the ‘solar dynasty’ and that of the ‘lunar dynasty’. This, according to Schure, was the underlying theme of the Mahabharata. Eventually the powers of Light were to prevail through the aid of a group of men who personified the spirit of India – the anchorites – who often lived in retreats in the forests and mountains. They were the real masters of India. The story of Krishna, which is quite a saga, involves palace intrigues, a black magician with a giant reptile, a wicked king and princess with smouldering ambitions, Krishna's mother's experience of the conception – on a spiritual level – of the great soul, the assassination of an anchorite master, Krishna's visions of those who loved and guided him, the attachment of the Gopis (female devotees) for him, the giving of the Bhagavad Gita to Arjuna, and Krishna's death at the hands of those who feared him.

In his teaching to his disciples, and in the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna gives an explanation of the constituent parts of the human being, of the immortal soul and its rebirths, and of the possibility of a mystic union with God. The soul which has found God, he taught, is freed from rebirth and death. Schure points out, too, that his students regarded him as their master more so for his charm and kindness than for his awesome power. Finally, Krishna gave his life as an act of willing sacrifice to win over the souls of those who opposed him. Schure acknowledges that all the details in his story are drawn from traditions and epics; however, a great man is always involved in the origin of a great institution. Nietzsche thought along similar lines. His researches lead him to the conclusion that the 'poeticizing soul of the people' is rather overly-regarded – behind all great ideas and movements was an individual of genius.

**AFTER KRISHNA:** the solar god – Mithras, Horus, Apollo, and others – became prominent in other parts of the world, and also the Messianic idea which will reach its culmination with Jesus. The light of Rama passed into Egypt and became the Law of Amon-Ra. From the Vedic times (in Theosophical
understanding, the first subrace of the fifth, Aryan, root race) to the Persian conquest and Alexandrian age. Egypt was the stronghold of pure and exalted teachings. According to Schure, these teachings provided the essential knowledge of Moses and then Christianity. A considerable number of books of esoteric science are attributed to Hermes. The figure of Hermes represented the priesthood, and even in some respects a god, and also the celestial initiation, or the initiator. In the temples the priests taught a vast body of esoteric doctrines and science. Initiation awakened the soul and lead to spiritual perception. A man could then become a seer.

MOSES: Schure gives us a picture of initiation in the age of the Rameses II (nineteenth dynasty, 13th century BC). It was during that time that Moses and Orpheus were alive, and knowledge of the temples of Egypt could be accessed by seekers from surrounding lands. This initiation takes place in a temple of Osiris, such as at Thebes or Memphis. We are taken through the various trials and ordeals which the seeker passes through, and the visions which he might have had, the knowledge imparted by the hierophant and by a guiding spirit whose name is Osiris - who reveals the Divine Word and the understanding of the cosmos - and the path of the soul into incarnation. As an initiate he becomes aware of a mysterious counterpart of himself, the ‘celestial self’.

The esoteric teachings of Egypt, however, at this time had never passed out of the sanctuaries. It was through Moses that the Mysteries of Egypt came out of the depths of the Temple and entered the course of history. As Schure sees it, the establishment of the universal religion is the true mission of Israel. The Hebrews before Moses were a nomadic tribe, by nature opposed to stone idols, and pre-disposed to the monotheistic cult presented by their leaders who derived their religious ideas from visions and dreams. Moses himself was a member of the Egyptian royal establishment, and a priest of Osiris, who early on had a private sympathy for the proud Hebrew workers who did not easily suffer themselves to be ordered about. After murdering an Egyptian guard Moses fled to Midian, beyond the Red Sea, where he went through trials involving deep sleep for days, even weeks, in which he took a journey to the afterlife for souls, in order to explicate his crime of murder. As well, in the home of the High Priest, Jethro, he found books on cosmogony, dealing with the ancient cycles of humanity, and he wrote what became the early chapters of the Bible. ‘All the images of Genesis are like doors which open with the keys of initiation.’ During this time Moses had other transcendental experiences, in the crypt of Jethro’s temple and on Mount Sinai, where he came into contact with angels and Elohim, and his mission was communicated to him. Later, during the Exodus, there are the
scenes to do with the receiving of the Ten Commandments which are vividly described, and there is a description of the Ark of the Tabernacle and its special role and power. On his deathbed Moses claims that another prophet will arise from Israel in the future and the Lord will put his word in this prophet’s mouth.

**ORPHEUS**: as an initiator of Greece, was the teacher of music and poetry as the revealer of Truth. In Greece at the time of his birth, in the main population centres, people preferred the feminine goddesses, such as Demeter who represented nature, rather than the austere universal male gods such as the Delphic Apollo. Orpheus was the creative genius who reconciled these elemental forces, whose masculine soul vibrates with love for the Eternal Feminine who responds to him.

At a time when the lunar cults were gaining popularity – the temples in the valleys and forests were about nature and voluptuous practices – Orpheus was born in Thrace, the son of a priestess of Apollo. The cult of Hecate, with its wild, frenzied activities, had gained supremacy. As a young man he fled to Memphis and spent twenty years passing through the Mysteries. Orpheus returned to Thrace and assumed leadership of a Temple of Zeus. He created a religion for the initiates and the people with a blending of the religion of Zeus with that of Dionysius, which gave out a sublime truth under the veil of poetry and enchanting festivals. Schure gives us a description of an initiation ceremony for a young neophyte, with Orpheus as the High Priest. Orpheus reveals to the neophyte the secret of the worlds, the essence of God, the mysteries of the human soul coming into incarnation, and the path of the soul to the Divine World. Then there is a ritual drama in which the god Dionysius is revealed to a disciple of Delphi. Also, in these chapters on Orpheus, there is a picture of the story of Orpheus and Eurydice as an experience of initiation.

Finally, Orpheus, as we know, was attacked by the Bachantes – as those of the cult of Hecate came to call themselves – and killed. The ‘Orphic word’, however, filtered mysteriously into the veins of Hellas by way of the hidden sanctuaries of initiation.

The Greece of Orpheus, however, that pure spirit and doctrine guarded in the temple, began to be threatened in the Seventh Century BCE. Morality had declined, the commands of Delphi were no longer respected, and tyranny had established control over the population. So, it was necessary that esoteric teachings and wisdom should be presented...
in some way to the people to lift the quality and purpose of life.

**PYTHAGORAS (570-495BC):** Schure presents Pythagoras, in responding to this need, making an enormous contribution to human knowledge. The school he founded produced an organized body of teaching, a coherent system which could be communicated beyond the temple sanctuaries.

Pythagoras grew up on the island of Samos in the Sixth Century BCE. He was a gifted child who soon turned his mind to the search for some unifying conception of nature, the human soul, and the divine, celestial world. First, he went to Egypt, and his initiation at Memphis lasted twenty-two years. After that he spent time in Babylon, where he found himself among a mixture of people, languages, cults and religions. These groups included the ancient Chaldean priesthood, the survivors of the Persian Magi, and the elite of the Jewish captivity. All these religions, he came to see, were rays of the one truth.

Returning to Greece he lived at Delphi for some time. Then, after instructing the priests there in all the secrets of his teaching, he departed, and established his school at Croton in Southern Italy.

The Pythagorean school taught to students the harmony of the soul, mind and universe. Any person could study and be initiated there even if they weren't part of the priesthood. There is a detailed description in the book of a novice undergoing initiation. There novices were given an understanding of the value of morality, of magic, numbers, musical notes, the order of the cosmos, astronomy, reincarnation.

Eventually a mob, incited by those who held a grudge against Pythagoras and his school, attacked the school. The buildings were set on fire and Pythagoras and many of his chief disciples perished. The
ideas and traditions of Pythagoras and his school, though – the uniting of morality, science and religion into one vast system – still live on to this day.

PLATO (428-348BC): Plato is next. He was born in Athens, lived during the Fifth and Fourth Centuries BCE, and as a young man was noted as having an inner strength and character, and a sense of an awareness of eternity. As he grew up, he was attracted to the arts, and poetry in particular. By the age of 27 he had composed several tragedies. Then he met Socrates, and thereafter he renounced the beauties of poetry and the theatre to devote himself to the path of Truth and Justice.

Plato was initiated into the Mysteries of Eleusis. As well, after Socrates’ death, he travelled in search of knowledge, to Asia Minor, to Egypt and the initiation of Isis, and to the Pythagorean school in Italy. Returning to Greece, he established his school, the Academy.

Due to the vows of secrecy of the Mysteries, he couldn’t reveal publicly what he knew of esoteric knowledge. However, the Dialogues have this in disguise. The writing has indeed a singular charm: ‘in addition to the ecstasy of Delphi and Eleusis, here one enjoys marvellous clarity, Attic wit, the malice of the good-natured Socrates, the fine, winged irony of the sage.’ As well, in the teachings he presented, he created the concept of the Ideal, which replaced the ‘organic’ initiation for centuries. In Idealism the soul finds divine truths by its own inner senses and voices. This opened the path to salvation for millions of souls who couldn’t attain direct initiation.

As for those actual initiations, Schure does nevertheless give us, in the chapters on Plato, a very detailed description of the Mysteries of Eleusis, which were regarded with special veneration at that time. The ritual drama is presented, with all their characters and their dialogue.

JESUS (4BC-33AD): Finally, we come to Jesus. He appeared during a time when the Mysteries had deteriorated. Society was full of egotism, materialism, tyranny and brutality. However, in Palestine, even after three hundred years of occupation and oppression by Rome, the Israelites had preserved their faith. The vision of Moses, of a single God, held firm. This was due, Schure says, to the prophets, the institution of the prophets, which had become an organised brotherhood in the time of Samuel. The brotherhoods preserved the science of Moses, with its sacred music, occult therapy and the art of divination. The prophets also had a faith in a Saviour or Messiah.

Jesus, according to Schure, was dedicated to a prophetic mission by his mother – such children were called Nazarenes. When he had grown up, he was initiated by the Essenes. The Order of the Essenes constituted the last remnants of those brotherhoods which preserved the traditions of the prophets, together with their way of living. Jesus joined the Esseen centre at Engaddi, by the Dead Sea. There he learned the vast cosmogony in
the Book of Genesis, and knowledge of the Divine Word passed down through Krishna, Osiris, Orpheus and Pythagoras, and the science of esoteric healing. Also, he learned about the Messiah, the Chosen One. Schure describes how during one of the higher initiations Jesus was given knowledge of his prophetic mission, and the ordeals he would suffer in undertaking to save the souls of his fellow humans and bring them peace and love.

We follow the story of the gathering of the disciples, and his teaching to them and to his other followers, leading to his persecution. We read how, near the end, he withdrew to a mountainside in Northern Israel to pray, and he beheld the Divine World, and received from the highest levels confirmation of the role which lay before him. The Last Supper which was to follow, was a form of initiation communion as practised in Egypt and Chaldea.

Coming to the end of the chapter on Jesus Schure explains how the Messianic drama came to a climax with the Crucifixion, but esoterically the Resurrection was the crowning of his work. It involved ‘the purification and regeneration of the sidereal (astral?), ethereal and fluidic body, which is the very organ of the soul’. Summing up, Schure says that Jesus was able to reveal a unity of ethics and metaphysics – a guarantee of eternal life, and the need to begin it on earth in your work and love.

THE GREAT INITIATES: The quality of the Great Initiates lies in its quite detailed descriptions of the spiritual processes of initiation, as Schure conceived them, with its attendant visionary experience, and the place of poetry, art and beauty in the development of higher consciousness. It could be said that there were various other movements and bodies around the world at the time covered in the book that are not looked at in the work. We now know much more about some ancient societies, such as Gobekli Tepe in Turkey, the Sumerian civilization, or the Mayans, which could have played into the story if the knowledge had been available at the time. There is the on-going influence of Eastern mystical movements – some readers might think that Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha) deserved a place in the book (Schure explains his decision not to include him). As well, hidden or secret societies such as The Great White Brotherhood, or the Sarmoung Society mentioned by Gurdjieff, are held by some to be important players in the game.

However, what is there in the book covers enormous ground, and is very well written. The reader is free to incorporate these other areas of knowledge, which they see to be left out, along with the Great Initiates, into their total picture of the evolution of higher consciousness in humanity. One can be quite confident that all seekers after knowledge and wisdom will find themselves at home in this book.

– Geoff Pascoe, Melbourne, Australia.
A LIBRARIAN’S REVELATION

On Friday, when I was covering books with sticky clear plastic contact covering material - I experienced a sort of 'librarian's revelation! The transparent, yet highly materialised sticky plastic book-covering material got snarled up slightly when I was struggling with it to put a protective covering over some new library books. I thought: "The more I struggle with it, the more snarled it'll become". As I meditated upon this seemingly mundane problem, I became aware that the sticky transparent plastic could be an analogy for our human Astral Body which Theosophy tells us bears the imprint of all our actions and their reactions when we leave this life. These actions and reactions remain there when our 'life-atoms' come back on "re-entry" (Reincarnation) to the world after our "Pralaya' (after-death state) in "Heaven" (Devachan).

I began to think that this very same process also applied to the creation of the Universe, after Its Pralaya (rest time), with the imprint of all the world’s karma, and all of sentient life's actions and their reactions - like the folds in the sticky plastic covering paper needing to be straightened out during the next period of manifestation (Manvantara). So, my mistake with the book-covering plastic, when corrected, taught me a great deal about the inner meaning of Life. I realised it was in my hands to change my ways and outlook providing I was prepared to accept the backwash of what I had done and accept the consequences. I ceased my meditations, straightened out the tangled covering plastic and realised that I still had to finish covering the new books! But I had learnt a valuable lesson, that even simple, some might say 'boring', everyday tasks can lead to a wider spiritual understanding depending on the way we look at them. I resolved to go on my 'long, long journey' of Life in the spirit of Peace and Love.

– Amanda F. Rooke, Melbourne, Australia.
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