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alex
grey

ALEX GREY

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Cover: "The Visionary Origin of Language" Alex Gray (Courtesy Inner Traditions)



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from the editor...

Namasté,

This spring saw the publication of the first Ashé collection released by Mandrake of Oxford. The book includes selections from the journal's first year of publication, spanning the first issue through 2.3. Presently the book is available from the Ashé Giftshoppe (ashe.mechanicaldiva.com), director from Mandrake (www.mandrake.uk.net) and Amazon.co.uk.

Several other spring publications involving friends and supporters of the Ashé project are of note. Amara dasa Wilhelm released *Tritiya-prakriti: Understanding Homosexuality, Transgender Identity And Intersex Conditions Through Hinduism*. The work builds on his research activities into Vedic literature and history that led to the founding of the The Gay and Lesbian Vasinava Association (www.galva.org).

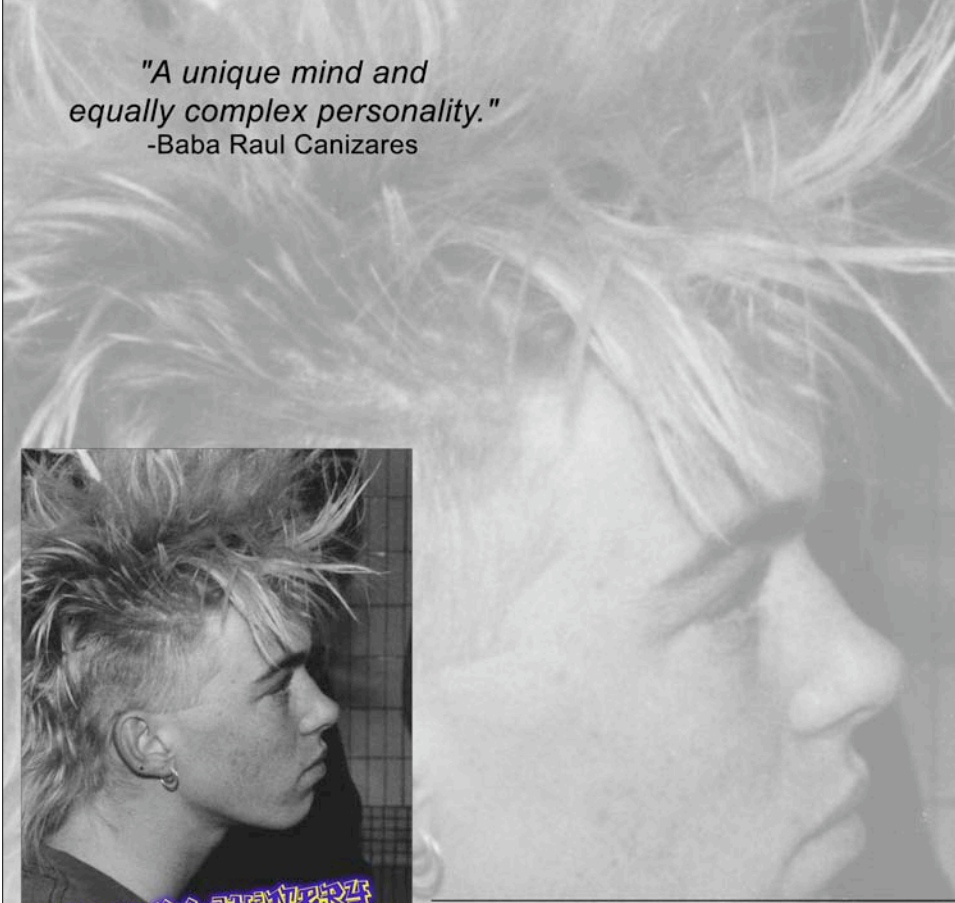
A review of *Tritiya-prakriti* will appear in the fall issue.

Ashé associate editor, Eric Lerner is featured in a new book by Randy Conner and David Sparks, *Queering Creole Spiritual Traditions: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Participation in African Inspired Traditions in the Americas*. An excerpt, interview and review will appear in the fall issue.

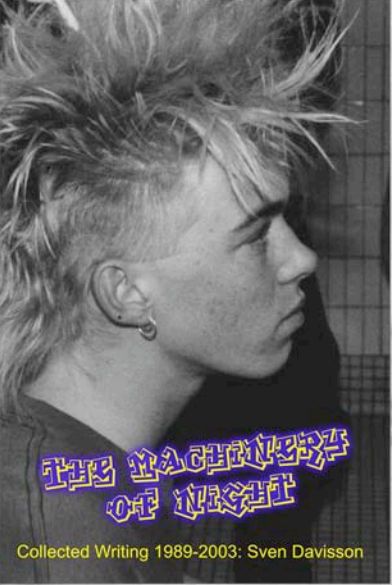
Love light laughter,
Sven



PS



*"A unique mind and
equally complex personality."
-Baba Raul Canizares*



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Alex Grey

Eric K. Lerner

Alex Grey's *Transfigurations* from Inner Traditions, soon available in paperback, is the most important volume of metaphysical art in recent memory. This sumptuous monograph features over 300 reproductions of Grey's work, as well as artist interviews and essay. Grey's work invites superlatives, as well as clichés and contradictions, in describing it. Trying to find verbal equivalents and values for a Grey painting is daunting. First, he depicts genuine visionary realms with extraordinary refinement. Secondly, he reveals "unseen" phenomena that coincide with the readily perceived world. Thus, I end up considering trite phrases such as "He shows what cannot be seen" or "He explores visionary realms." What bullshit! Haven't we all seen these types of descriptions bandied about for just about any artist who explore metaphysical topics?

A couple factors set Grey apart:

- He really gets it
- He gives modern form to ancient and eternal values
- He exhibits felicitous dexterity

Most folk don't have a clue when it comes to distinguishing true vision from gibberish. An artist can label his fantasies "visions," and not too many people will know the difference. Grey does not do that. There is substantial evidence to substantiate his integrity, including my own experience. Many of us in the West just are not used to seeing the world this way. A shaman does not have that setback. Grey shows us what shamans see. For instance, in "The Visionary Origin of Language" a fiery sprite dances on a mushroom. I've seen this type of spirit several times when I have entered semi-trance states to perform healing rituals. When I first saw that painting, I said to myself. "Wow, a wori-wori (That is a Yoruba designation for that type of spirit.) Grey's been there." I am not nearly as sensitive a shaman as Grey is. In my limited visionary experiences as an ordained Yoruba priest, I have seen things very similar to what he depicts.

The history of shamanism also supports Grey's veracity. One of the most widely discussed features of Grey's paintings is their x-ray detailing of the human form. Man's skin becomes transparent. Grey depicts bone, organ and nerve structure in textbook detail. Revelation of internal organs is characteristic of shamanistic art. There are ancient examples left by Pecos River Indians in "Red Monochrome" rock art. They left us a famous rendering of a skeletized deer, which also shows some of the quarry's internal organs. Huichol shaman-artists in their renderings of Peyote visions provide numerous



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examples of similar phenomenon in their weavings. The ability to envision internal anatomical details has been described by holy men and women from places as widely dispersed as Siberia and the Australian outback.

They substantiate the fact that Grey has entered and documented a universal visionary realm. The ultimate effect is startling. The contemporary Westerner usually sees the depiction of human innards in either the contexts of horror movies or medical documentaries. These presentations are made in the contexts of horror or scientific advances. These are far removed from our identification of spirituality. Grey takes us by surprise, because his art is both unexpected and beautiful. He integrates human anatomy with ribbons of transcendent energy creating intricate mandalas. He recognizes intertwined chords of light, energy and spirit.

Another example is provided by “Empowerment” (1985). Its subject is a man who provides a fulcrum for numerous levels of energy. He receives and transmits various energy patterns represented by light and flame. I am particularly struck by connected dot patterns that overlay his muscles and organs. They remind me of acupuncture points. Acupuncture is a practical expression of shamanistic knowledge that has been developed over thousands of years. Is it not unlikely that its earliest practitioners might have had visions similar to this one of Grey’s?

Grey writes of his work:

The light and energy I depict in my painting relates to the subtle visionary dimensions that I’ve seen during meditation or on LSD. My work gets called visionary, but the work is also aiming toward the integral because it bridges the different levels of reality; the physical anatomy of Western medicine interlaces with subtle energetic systems of Eastern medicine...(p. 104)

Grey recovers ancient metaphysical insights in his contemporary paintings. His work is original in two ways. First, his work is intimately linked to the very starting point of esoteric experiences and vision. It cuts through written language to the primordial source of insight. Second, he makes it seem new because far too many of us have forgotten how to see the world this way!





Courtesy Inner Traditions

“Empowerment”

His work is very modern, enhanced by the prowess of Grey’s draftsmanship. He has taught medical illustration on University level. Such anatomical realism grounds his esoteric subject matter. It provides the viewer a knowable point of reference. This makes spirituality pragmatic. It becomes something we can recognize, touch and feel. (Remember, to a shaman vision states are matters of fact).

In purely aesthetic terms, his workmanship achieves technical genius. One feature that particularly stands out is his handling of light. In *Transfigurations*, Donald Kuspit writes:

Grey is one of the great painters of light, in all its subtlety and intensity: his paintings are permeated, indeed saturated with – transfigured by – light in a way that is rare in art history. He has a unique feeling for light: for him it is not something that is added to enliven an otherwise pedestrian image, as occurs in much realism; nor is it naively given, that is, a simple matter

rs

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of physical fact, as in the positivism of Impressionism. Rather, light is something that flows through the image, giving it an uncanny resonance that makes the light seem to transcend the image. Light is something that seems to exist independently of the image, however much of it fills it. It is at once the backbone and flesh of the image. Grey's light has its own complex, subtle rhythm from the rhythm of the body it infiltrates and subliminally informs... (p. 50)

Grey's dexterity commands our attention. He substantiates his art's value by communicating integral and substantial information about mankind and his role in the cosmos. This is work that needs to be seen. Fortunately, *Transfigurations* provides an overview of Grey's development as an artist. It contains early childhood pieces. These are not only striking because of Grey's technical precocity. They indicate his early preoccupation with death and shadow realms in drawings of cemeteries and Grim Reapers. They hint that early on, Grey sought out to transcend the physical boundaries of the mortal coil. *Transfigurations* also documents his early performance art, which seems to extend Theatre of Cruelty into the world of the mortuary and biological functions. Also, Grey's work with cadavers a la Davinci is fully illuminated. Grey learned medical anatomy hands-on. We can appreciate how Grey began his quest to know the cosmos through confronting the human boundary of death. Quite a bit of the early work seems just as fresh and relevant as Grey's later more polished presentations.

The reproductions of Grey's work are beautiful. The large format encourages the viewer to perceive intricate details of the paintings, such as sprites inhabiting the edges of compositions. These could easily get lost in smaller copies. The luminescence of the paper adds to light's subtleties in the compositions and enhances the vivid colors. It is a sumptuous volume to behold. The essays from Albert Hoffman, Stephen Larsen, Donald Kuspit and Ken Wilber add to the reader's appreciation of Grey's work. Plus there is more than adequate commentary from the artist himself. All of this makes *Transfigurations* a must have for anyone who is serious about either modern art or the development of contemporary consciousness.

In reviewing Grey's work, I feel that there is little that I can add to *Transfigurations* in terms of traditional art criticism. It should be obvious that I am in awe of his accomplishment. I do not feel that the Ashé reader is going to gain much more from a flurry of praises.



Grey is truly a man of the cosmos, as any cursory examination of his art indicates. His work and life deserve to be examined in light of that. This type of investigation is best accomplished through astrology, the science of evaluating the effects of stellar bodies on mankind. The most accurate form of astrology available in the West is Cosmobiology. (I am aware that Hindu astrology is well renowned for its diagnostic accuracy. I am not trained in it. However, I look forward to reviewing *How to Practice Vedic Astrology* by Andrew Bloomfield (Destiny Books) for an upcoming issue of Ashé.)

I will explore key events in Grey's life:

His birth

His twelfth birthday

Meeting his future wife and trying Acid

His daughter's birth

Analyses of these dates provide startling testimonies to the accuracy of Cosmobiology. (The directions and progressions did not require use of an orb of greater than one degree, and their midpoints generally any more than 30 minutes or less!)

These hallmark dates in Grey's life give recognizes a dramatic exchange and ultimate balancing of Yin-Yang energies. The positive and negative forces of the cosmos intertwine in relevant ways at these times. The interplay of specific masculine and feminine currents show up with such frequency that I run out of descriptions for them by the time I examine Grey's daughter Zena's birth! Hopefully the following chart helps the reader appreciate the poles of this dynamic.

Yang	Yin
Sun	Moon
Male	Female
Ascendant	Midheaven
Ego in relation to others	Ego Consciousness of self
Gives	Receives
Mars	Venus
Positive	Negative
Pillar of Mercy	Pillar of Severity
Solar Arc Direction	Tertiary Progression

None of these entities are precisely the same as another sharing space in the same column. However, the type of relationship each has with its mate in the opposite column is similar. They intertwine with their partners in intricate patterns throughout Grey's life. The powers merge and converge in a manner akin to Grey's visualizations of intricate



mobius strips and mandalas. Grey's art and purpose illustrate the principles of the cosmos. Grey is an artist of the integral and his horoscope is a powerful testament to this. In this way, his art becomes an expression of the cosmos itself.

Today, computers transmit knowledge through binary coding. In Grey's horoscope, the universe provides information in a similar way. Based on the premise that basic influences of positive or negative, the universe emits a steady stream of information about the complex exchanges of force constantly taking place through Grey's life. His horoscopes vibrate in tune with higher powers. This could be said of anyone. However, what makes Grey's case so astounding is the constant dynamic which takes place between positive and negative. It is uncommon to constantly have precise contacts between sun and moon, Venus and mars, especially such that involve the personal angles of Ascendant and Midheaven, show up with such remarkable frequency at key moments as they do for Grey. Grey himself is a fulcrum of cosmic energies. It is no wonder that he is such a gifted interpreter of them!

Now, before going further, I'd like to take a moment to explain my methodology. The cosmobiologists may omit this section. For dates after Grey's nativity, I examine events in terms of solar arc directions and tertiary progressions. Energetically solar arc direction represents positive development, tertiary progression negative. Solar arc directions measure time according to the movement of the sun. Each year of life corresponds to one day of solar movement relative to the time of birth. Hence, the position of the sun on the 12th day of life corresponds to the 12th year of life. The degrees of movement made by the sun during the twelve days are added to the position of each astrological body in the radix (natal chart) to determine solar arc direction. Astrologers regard this as representing the development of the soul. Tertiary progressions measure time and development according to lunar months. One day is equal to one lunar month. Hence, for the 12th year, we would look at planetary positions for the 166th day of life, which is based on 13 lunar months per year. Tertiary progressions correspond to the emotional core, the ego. By examining these two factors, I believe that we bring into focus a yang-yin perspective that allows us to look at the total complexity of one human being. (Some astrologers may wonder why transits are not used. Transit activity corresponds to external events and factors. That's not a reflection of Grey's *vis a vis* the cosmos, so I do not include them in this analysis.)

I need to introduce Cosmobiology to those of you who have yet to encounter it. Basically, it's a lot like astrology, but it works...All kidding aside, Cosmobiology is an astrological discipline developed largely by Rheinhold Ebertin. His definition of



Cosmobiology suggests many worthwhile points of comparison between this discipline and Grey's artistic output:

Cosmobiology is a scientific discipline concerned with the possible correlations between the cosmos and organic life and the effects of cosmic rhythms and stellar motion on man, with all his potentials and dispositions, his character and the possible turns of fate; it also researches these correlations and effects as mirrored by earth's plant and animal life as a whole. In this endeavor, Cosmobiology utilizes modern-day methods of scientific research, such as statistics, analysis, and computer programming. It is of prime importance, however, in view of the scientific effort expended, not to overlook the macrocosmic and microcosmic interrelations incapable of measurement." (Ebertin, p. 11)

The emphasis on integrating science into a metaphysical tradition is reminiscent of Grey's anatomical realism amidst a vortex of psychic potencies. Cosmobiology provides a perfect mirror for the Shaman-Artist of the Scientific Age.

Key characteristics of Cosmobiology include:

- An initial natal chart or radix cast along the lines of sun sign astrology. (Generally, cosmobiologists use a tropical zodiac. Although there's no law I know of that forbids use of a sidereal zodiac.)
- No house system
- Angles, such as ascendant and Midheaven, evaluated
- 4th harmonic charts, cosmograms, as principle diagnostic tools. (Cosmograms are divided in thirds of 30 degrees each, incorporating groupings cardinal, fixed and mutable signs.)
- Only hard aspects
- Small orbs of influence
- The use of a graphic ephemeris
- Extensive use of midpoints

Midpoints merit definition. A midpoint exists equidistant between two planets on a 360-degree radius. It represents a unique sum of the energetic qualities of both planets. Both direct (indicating the shortest distance between the two points) and indirect (reflecting the longer distance) midpoints are used and weighed equally. A planetary body occupying a midpoint or related to it by hard aspect experiences its unique influence.

The standard reference for cosmobiological interpretation is Ebertin's *The Combination of Stellar Influences*. (I'm tempted to just call it the Astrologer's Bible.) Many of the word pictures in this analysis are based on that work. Initially, the reason



for referring to a standard work was to codify astrological principles so that astrology could be taken seriously as a science. (In other words, it has reproducible results, regardless of the interpreter.)

However, there are points in which my interpretation differs radically from Ebertin's.¹

I believe that Grey is a rare being for whom a more spiritual spin is necessary. (Ebertin advocated the need to examine other factors in a native's life when evaluating stellar influences. And he admitted that his word pictures were to be evaluated in context of synthesizing the weight of multiple cosmobiological and life factors.) There's ample evidence his life breaks rules. For instance, he makes the death axis of the Mars/Saturn midpoint a powerful focus for transformation and new life. It is almost always a positive force when it comes into play for Grey. That meaning is implicit in metaphysical interpretations of Death. For instance the Death card in Tarot often indicates rebirth. You are not going to find that interpretation in *The Combination of Stellar Influences*. I argue that Cosmobiology has proven itself time and again as a scientifically accurate tool of analysis. At this point I think we are free to integrate metaphysics into its remarkable database.

One more set of technical notes. Cosmobiology generally looks at the 10 planetary bodies, the Ascendant, Midheaven and Dragon's Head. I also look at the influence of the Part of Fate, the shadow moon Lilith, the asteroid Ceres, Transpluto and Chiron. I'm a bad astrologer in that I believe in doing what works. I have found these other factors aid in chart analysis.

Finally, I do not wish to put down any other system of astrology. If you can use Linda Goodman's book to cast accurate horoscopes, all the power to you. In my own experience, I have seen a lot of merit in qabalistic astrology, as used in my previous collaborative astrology article written with Bozana Antic on Aleister Crowley for this publication, the use of Arabic parts and Vedic astrology. Cosmobiology is an exquisite

¹ My insistence on recognizing *The Combination of Stellar Influences* as an interpretative key is motivated by other astrologers who fail to do so. There are many, many successful "sun-sign" astrologers who practically quote Ebertin's interpretations word for word. Many do not even state that they are using midpoints. It seems that in America, advances in Computer technology have concealed his work. Indeed, using of a cosmogram makes recognizing aspects much easier in non computerized astrology. Computers simplified this. So that astrologers who relied on cosmograms for rapid and accurate diagnoses no longer needed to use them. That made using Ebertin's hard-earned expertise easier to hide. Now, I respect any valid interpretative technique in astrology. But I'm Yoruba, and I believe in honouring our ancestors. And too many astrologers today fatten their wallets and illuminate their reputations blatantly manhandling Ebertin's work without acknowledging its profound influence!



fit for Grey, his life and work. I hope that other astrologers will apply their systems to Grey and other significant thinkers to help us all understand this world and its true spokespeople better!

Note. Planetary and midpoint relationships (aspects) are expressed by an = sign. This signifies all hard aspects. Standard International planet abbreviations are used.

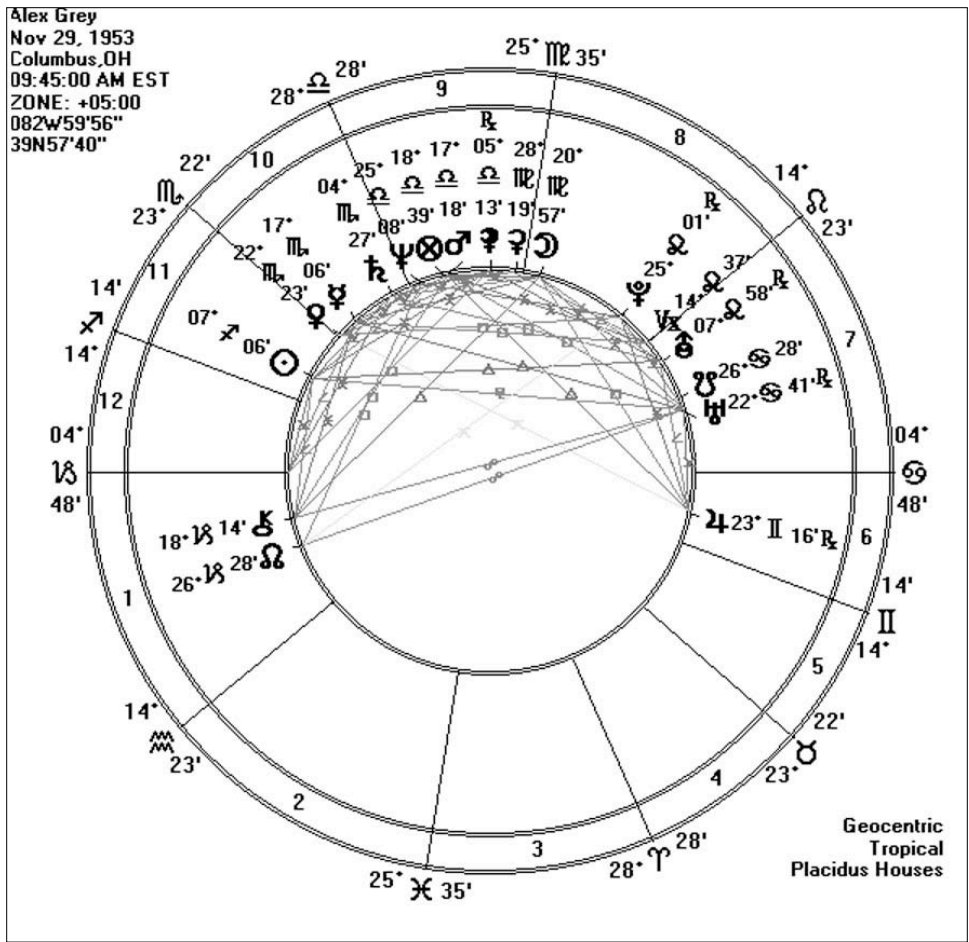
The Birth of Genius

Alex Grey was born Alex Velzy on November 29, 1953 in Columbus, Ohio.

Using traditional sun sign astrology, his chart does not reveal much. Most of the planets are clustered in the upper half of the chart. The traditional interpretation of this would be that the native has an outgoing personality. In fact, one might say the person is a little shallow in how they realize their potential, since he is so strongly connected to outside areas of influence. Furthermore, there is a relative absence of traditional chart patterns. Outside of maybe a couple stelliums, that is planets gathered in the same house, there exist virtually none to define Grey's chart. There are few hard aspects. This is surprising. Aleister Crowley has written that the great ones' charts are characterized by many tight aspects between the majority of planets in the radix. Given Grey's brilliance, one would expect that in his. It is only when one examines the numerous and rich midpoint structures in his chart, that one realizes how well integrated and complex Grey's chart is.

First I examine the personal points: Sun, Moon, Ascendant and Midheaven. These represent fundamental positive-negative polarities. It will be interesting to see how they interact with one another through Direction and Progression at key junctures in Grey's life. In light of these, it is also relevant to note Grey's reason for changing his birth name. In *Transfigurations*, Stephen Larsen explains: "Alex changed his name to Grey, as a way to balance his light and dark divided inner oppositional nature. Keeping Velzy as his middle name resulted in the initials AVG – Average. Grey's work integrates the common dualism of matter, spirit, science and religion" (p. 2)





Grey's natal sun lies in Sagittarius. It is a mutable fire sign. It characterizes alchemy. With the transformation of energies being a central theme of Grey's artwork, it is not surprising that his soul is identified this sign. Grey's art is to the point like an Archer's arrow. It achieves transcendence through its recognition of complex patterns of energy. In this way, it is honest. Honesty is considered a Sagittarius characteristic. The native's relationship to honesty may bring about depression. In Grey's case, depression brings him into Shadow realms. He transforms these shadows into arrows of light. He cuts through metaphysical vagary with direct and powerful images. He flies high. He is like Daedlus, rather than Icarus. He stays on the path. But, like the mythic father, whose flight to freedom brought about the death of his exuberant son, Grey is aware of the penalty for flying unbridled. There is recognition of loss and despair in works like "The



Nature of the Mind Series” and much of Grey’s earlier work. One cannot achieve genuine vision without seeing some pretty ugly things.

The sun makes aspects with Uranus and Neptune, the planets of occultism and mysticism respectively. Grey uses the energy generated through the Uranus contact to find in himself the revolutionary zeal to create provocative art. That is a type of sorcery. He creates powerful images that can enter and effect another consciousness. He uses mysticism (Neptune) to tap into the Universal Subconscious to discover his powerful subject matter.

There are a number of midpoint contacts with the sun that provide insight into Grey’s eventual work.

SU=DR/MA: This relates to comradeship and good fellowship as well as the will to unite with others as well as the union of the sexes. Grey work integrates humanity through demonstrating links between individual bodies and the cosmos. His identify the fundamental unity of human experience. His wife, Allyson, has become an essential part of Grey’s work and life. She is a frequent collaborator in his performance art, and a subject of many paintings.

Grey’s union with Allyson has a cosmic character. The recognition of negative and positive energy, Yin and Yang is essential to many metaphysical practitioners. That Grey would find a powerful female partner in his life’s work seem written in the stars so to speak. Many of the midpoint structure around his sun support this:

MO/VE: This is the grace of marital love and the ability to appreciate its expression on both profound personal and artistic level. In this structure the expression of love is art itself.

JU/VE: Here again, love is a joy. His own warm heart and ability to give love to other complete the native. This also indicates that he does so through the strength and health of his own body.

MO/PL: This indicates a delicate and sensitive being that will find unique experiences in union with his wife.

In addition to an erotic union, there is also a will to power and ability to overcome obstacles indicated by MC/MA. This provides the fuel necessary to overcome obstacles and well as provide the ambition to become important, a strong will. It is a sign of mania. Grey also has a solar midpoint that opposes this: NE/MA. This midpoint characterizes a weak individual. Grey is honest about his battles with depression, and that is a frequent component of artistic character. However, the midpoint also means the dissolution of the body. Grey does this through his ability to see through the skin. His art disperses the energy associated with the physical shell of the body (which can therefore integrate itself with cosmic energies). Perhaps it is a function of his fundamental despair to burn away



the external shell of the physical body in his work. Isn't depression often discussed in terms of looking into dark and hidden places?

The sun combined with the moon plays a seminal role in Grey's life and horoscope. On a natal level the moon is already integrated with the Sun in midpoint structures that are consistent in meaning with both the sun's midpoint structure and the eventual conditions of Grey's life and art.

First, let's look at the Moon itself in Virgo. Usually this talks about a mind that can rule the emotions. That is something of a struggle for Grey, but obviously it plays a key factor in his ability to illustrate dramatic tensions on a cosmic level. He masters chaotic forces to give them concrete expression. Virgo Moons frequently imply a love of tidiness, correct behavior, and simplicity. Perhaps this is illustrated by Grey's dedication to detail in his painting. He is a most realistic painter. Indeed, his ability to perceive light goes beyond most photo-realism in its accuracy and poignancy.

It forms aspects with both Jupiter and Saturn. These planets are the fundamental source of expansion and contraction. Together, these energies enable the birth process. The moon is the source of emotion. When these three elemental forces are factored, one may draw the conclusion that Grey's emotions enable him to give birth to new forms. Of course, this has all the attendant agony and ecstasy that a physical birth exerts on the mother. (It is useful to remember this when examining Grey's reflections on his daughter's birth later.)

A key midpoint seems to be MO=Asc/SU: This indicates fruitful activity in conjunction with the female sex. It also brings three of the four major personal points together. The fact that the sun has significant midpoint contact with the Midheaven gives Grey a powerful basis for bringing together and thus understanding the spectrum of existence through the mental lens of one being. Grey writes: "The integral vision brings together three domains of reality = the inner world of the "I"; the intersubjective world of culture, "we"; and the outer world of self, nature, and society, "it." None of those three can be reduced to the other, each is needed for a more comprehensive view." (p.199)

He realizes the possibility of integrating the various foundations of existence, which constantly intersect in his horoscope.

The other lunar midpoints reiterate the importance of Woman to Grey's life. As a rule, women are more naturally inclined to shamanistic activity than men are. For a man to be a shaman he must master aspects of the feminine within himself. Buddhism and its philosophy seem to play an informative role in Grey's work. Historically, sexual contact with shaman women played a significant role in Tibetan Buddhist education for a man, according to feminist scholar Vicki Noble. Grey's enthusiasm for his erotic relationship with woman reverberates on a spiritual level. He has painted numerous portraits of



himself with Allyson. Elements of femininity and the subconscious echo in these midpoint contacts.

=ME/NE: This enables the subconscious to become conscious and indicates a highly receptive mind. Sometimes it represents a deceptive woman. Quite obviously, when discovering any sort of complex truth, there is going to be an element of misunderstanding on some level so that there can be eventual discovery.

=PL/MA indicates a powerful woman and her possible injury, as well as daring and audacity. Certainly Grey pushes limits. Injury breaches the skin. Grey describes a seminal experience: “I cut off the head of a dead woman, then poured molten lead into her ear as a way to make a model of the delicate spiral labyrinth. It was a violent way to make contact with her spirit, so she would speak to my inner ear. I experienced the psychic repercussions later when her spirit angrily confronted me in a dream.”

ME/DR: Communication of ideas is ultimately a form of communion for Grey. It is no irony that this midpoint also indicates his strong desire for meaningful exchanges with women.

Grey’s Midheaven in Libra. This placement indicates a harmonious person who advances his career through reliance on others. Certainly any artist needs support in order to work. Simply put, if nobody buys your work, it is really tough to make a living. An artist like Grey benefits from the ability to develop good social skills that enable him to get other people to appreciate him and his work. This does not make an artist evil or a sellout. Indeed this type of Midheaven placement for Grey can really help bring the work of an important artist to the public.

The Midheaven is also conjunct Neptune. (Frankly this is a three-degree orb, which one of the widest used in this analysis. Traditionally, the maximum orb is allowed for the personal points.) This identifies mysticism as a critical component of Grey’s ego consciousness. Its mastery is essential if he is to know himself. Also Neptune rests on the Death Axis of MA/SA. We will see this midpoint throughout our exploration. In this instance, my interpretation is that the experience of death energy is part of self-understanding. Grey’s interest in death borders on mania at many points in his life in work. He’s pretty matter of fact, when talking about decapitating a corpse. Death is part of his territory. We will see how his relationship with it grows as he does, and ultimately paves the way for a profound appreciation of the subtleties of life energy on multiple levels.

The Midheaven structures reflect several those already developed by the Sun and Moon. Indeed, it is on the Sun/Moon midpoint, which brings about harmony of the soul and the potential to experience a very special marriage to another being. The Midheaven also brings the Ascendant into relationship with the other personal points. The AS/VE



midpoint accentuates qualities of affection, a sense of beauty and an appreciation of art. The other significant Midheaven midpoint is SA/UR, which makes the highest demands upon one's strength. It is a hallmark of rebellion and provocation. It helps set Grey apart.

His Ascendant in Capricorn brings with it a purposeful attitude. Vigorous self will is absolutely essential to the success of an artist. An artist must embrace the motto "Actions say more than words" if he has any hope of making a real statement with his work

Grey's ascendant semisquare both Mercury and Venus. This places it at the midpoint of both.

His Ascendant squares Lilith. Lilith is the shadow moon. It is a congregation of shattered particles loosely knit together that may have once composed earth's second moon. Lilith's qualities may be explained by the myths associated with Lilith. She was First woman, wife of Genesis' Adam. She dared to mount her husband, left (or was banished from) Eden and abandoned herself to sexual intercourse with a sea of demons. Although mentioned elsewhere in Hebrew literature, she is not mentioned in the Bible. Lilith represents that which we try to suppress. Grey's capacity to provoke is essential to the way he expresses himself. People may perceive him as an agent provocateur. He is edgy and dangerous, threatening complacency. He proves himself by entering secret places and illuminating them.

The VE/ME provides him the ability to create a beautiful environment. It also gives him a means to create important social contacts, which as previously stated are an essential component to an artist's success.

Mars helps spark his individualism through midpoint combinations in relationship to the Ascendant. The MA/JU midpoint helps him master his environment and gain advantage through other people. It is also an indicator of a beneficial marriage that results in procreation.

The MA/MO midpoint is another combination of masculine and feminine energies for Grey. It indicates that he is able to establish his position in the nuclear family hierarchy and have positive contact with women. The SU/SA midpoint helps him maintain individual focus through having an appreciation for himself alone and aloof from society. It is the hermetic quality necessary for meditation and reflection that is part of the creative process.

Grey's Mercury like Venus and Saturn lies in Scorpio. This sign was first thought to be ruled by Mars. Now popular assignation is Pluto. Mars is a warrior, and in a way so is Pluto. However, Mars attacks, whereas Pluto deters his adversaries through his sheer force of presence. He owns the underworld, and not too many folk seek to go there. This



is unlike Grey, whose mind seems to embrace dark, Scorpionic places. His art does not actually attack people or their minds. Rather, it does threaten the status quo, and it represents frightening subjects to ponder. Other Pluto associations also come into play for Grey's imagination. The planet represents the generational consciousness shaped by world war two. Awareness of atomic energy, Einstein's warping of the universe, and the Nazi death camps both shook the imagination. One of Grey's early paintings, "Nuclear Crucifixion," brings all three of these phenomena into perspective. Grey's intellect bears the force of Scorpionic advancement and treachery. It is also worth noting such events represent mankind carrying out once was God-like prerogative. Being a painter of secret cosmos, Grey does aspire to god-like manipulation.

To characterize the mind of a provocative artist like Grey with Scorpio is hardly surprising. Scorpio is also associated with genital expression, particularly that of the male. Grey's intimate painting demonstrates the functions of both lingham and yoni. He is keenly aware of sexuality as power, as the ability to harness the energies of the universe. This is evident in numerous paintings (not to mention his performance art.) Examples can be seen throughout *Transfigurations* in the paintings "Tantra," "Lingham," "Yoni," and the drawing "Fucking Dragons." Sex also represents transfer of God power to humanity through procreation. It is man's exhibition of creative force through his body.

Grey's Mercury midpoints draw on solar power. The midpoints SU/DR, SU/MC and SU/NE enhance Grey's communicative power as well as pepper his ability to see hidden truths and embrace the irrational.

Venus is also in Scorpio. Combined with Mercury, it accentuates Grey's erotic power and fuels his passionate disposition. It is not a little dangerous. It stokes the fires of sexual excess and can expose a native to dangers of illness acquired through intemperance. In Grey's work exists terrible beauty, the necessary infusion of the erotic and creative energies. Obviously, he is passionate about his work. Lunar energies inform Venus midpoint structures, just as the sun did Mercury. Again we see a balance and antagonism between yin and yang in the Grey's Scorpio placements. There is UR/MO, the revolution of love and Eros that lends revolutionary zeal to ancient lunar mysteries. This energy is given a ready means to expand through UR/JU. NE/MO provides a counterweight to Mercury's SU/NE. It represents strange tendencies and a seemingly perverse expression of love as parts of Grey's erotic and creative expression. Grey frequently employs his wife as a model, presenting her with the anatomical detail one associates with medical textbooks and autopsies. He has also given public performances in which they participate in tantric acts. This is not the typical way we are used to see someone express his love for his wife.



Mars in Libra facilitates collaboration for Grey. Mars is primal male force. Conjoint the Part of Fate, it generates sheer force. The part of fate is a sensitive point that realizes the complex relationship between solar and lunar expression. It illustrates how Grey realizes his purpose in existence. His use martial force reveals his courageous approach to life and art. He challenges both fiercely through an awareness of mortality. Visions of the intricate inner workings of the body that Grey depicts in his art are gained through autopsies. To recognize such intimate anatomical detail in a living subject reveals facts about the human body that it takes death to realize. In doing so, Grey wages war on the boundary we draw between life and death. He brings the intimacy of death to life.

It is interesting to note that Grey's Mars and Part of Fate rest on the MC/AS midpoint. This midpoint in represents the union of higher and lower selves. It is not a causative midpoint in the sense that it characterizes other points it contacts in the zodiac. Rather it receives the energy of contact points and thus characterizes the native. Grey's contact with Mars in Libra generates positive, aggressive communication for Grey. It makes him an action man for the world, bringing light, Martial fire, to the masses. It also necessitates a virile explosion of sexual energy.

The original fire stealer, Prometheus, plays a role in the myth of Mar's next significant aspect: Chiron. Chiron was a shaman centaur, both a diviner and healer, who traded his immortality to free the fire stealer Prometheus from his eternal torture. This shows the sacrifices a healer makes to spark other's healing processes. Mars contact with Chiron hints at the courage required of Grey to do his healing work. He betrays himself in his work. One looks at one of his early performance art works, Life, "Death and God" (1975). In it, a nude Grey he assumes the pose of the Hanged Man, balancing his weight, his life essence, against the weight of a cadaver. Between the two figures is the shape of the cross, the symbol of crossroads, the four elements, and a redeeming self-sacrifice.

Jupiter in Gemini further facilitates Grey's social skills. It brings exuberance to his work and expression. On a spiritual level it may represent growth through twinning. In other words, Grey finds a counterpart, presumably Allyson, and in doing so is able to expand his mental awareness. Gemini is under Mercury's dominion, and this finds reinforcement in the midpoint ME/MC. This provides Grey with enormous intellectual energy, as well as a very optimistic attitude toward it. It provides the necessary energy for self-expression. We see Venus also invigorated in Jupiter's expansive midpoint structures.

VE/NE indicates a love of beauty and the ability to both recognize and create artistic forms. One thinks of the jewel-like appearance of Grey's Mandalas. One only



has to look at “Oversoul” on the cover of *Transfigurations* to recognize the beguiling and expansive nature of Grey’s Creative vision. Featured is a very opulent mandala, wrought in gold. Its dazzling appearance evokes Tiphareth, the heart of the tree of life, and spiritual culmination of what it is to be human. Grey realizes this as gorgeous. The VE/NE midpoint indicates a need to acquire artistic objects or jewelry, a love of luxury, an appreciation of religious art. It is supported by VE/UR, which also makes Grey’s love of art an integral part of his growth process, as well bring with it the necessity of a powerful female partner or counterpart.

Saturn joins Mercury and Venus in Scorpio. For every characteristic of light, there is a shadow version. Certainly, Grey is not all love and light. His ability to perceive light and universal energy is largely based on work with the dead. He worked in a mortuary for five years. His knowledge of anatomy was gained through direct handling and observation of corpses. There is seriousness obvious to his quest. This saturnine quality is very intimate and a constant component of Grey’s works, especially his earlier work. Before he is able to realize his remarkable series of paintings with a birth theme, he had to do extensive studies of dead bodies and decomposition. Grey writes about his Secret dog, a study Grey made in 1973 of the decomposition of a roadkill dog: “While driving on the freeway, I hit a dog with my car. I picked up the dog, put it in a garbage bag and left it by a river. Over a period of six weeks I went back numerous times, pulled out the dog, and documented its decay”(p. 12)

Interestingly, Saturn is at the MA/VE midpoint. This is a hallmark of Ying/Yang energy, symbolic of sexual expression and the meeting point for the anima and animus. Often this midpoint contact is thought to bring about inhibitions in one’s love life, but in Grey’s case, it is hallmark of his knowledge of morbidity being part of sexual expression. After all, we are born to die, and the clock ticks the moment we draw breath. Death has long been a metaphor for the sexual act. As mentioned before, Grey recognizes the force of the universe in the sexual act. That force is both creative and destruction. The penis itself swells and bursts in the sexual act. It mimics a warrior slain in the heat of combat. Its sacrifice releases the seed of life.

Uranus is explosive, revolutionary force, in addition to occultism. Grey’s placement in Gemini gives further testament to his passionate intelligent, a tendency to take everything in leaps and bounds and have a truly restless questing nature. Its danger is a tendency to scatter one’s energy. Grey is keenly aware of all the pathways of energy relative to human beings. One need only look at breathing with its twins (Gemini) representing inhalation and exhalation. During a Palo ritual, a spirit guide once told me that inhalation and exhalation were the fundamental forces of the universe and that the purpose of magic was to direct these energies. They hung in balance with one another.



Being able to sense the precise vibrations of the balance was the key the palero (magus) used to open the door to a spiritual plane in which he makes his will action. Grey subtly portrays this energy exchange in Breathing. On contemplating the double leaf reproduction, I really feel the ribbons of energy moving away from the figure on the right who is exhaling, just as the figure seems to be drawing those same ribbons in on the left hand side. Grey writes:

Breathing makes visible one of the constant and essential polarities of life, but to which most of us pay little attention. Breathing shows the carbon dioxide and oxygen exchange cycle between the branching trees in our environment and the bronchial tree of our lungs. Breath has always been associated with the life spirit. The word inspiration means the taking of air and a rush of creative insight. Pneuma is the Greek word for “air” and the root of the word “numinous” The Hebrew word for “breath” shem, also means “the soul.” Control of breath through focused awareness or alteration of the breathing pattern is one of the primary methods of meditation.(p. 55)

Uranus conjunct the Dragon’s Head. Agent provocateur, who shares himself with the rest of humanity, Grey has rendered himself naked to audience countless times in his performance art. Frequently he has exposed his audience to nudity, blood, guts, putrefaction and sexual congress—aspects of existence most people hide. Grey permits the community to explore forbidden subject matter through his body as the medium. He continues to bring revolutionary subject matter to audiences.

In Uranus one sees Grey’s power and mastery of energy in JU/VE. Simply put this is the capacity for enjoyment, the ability to express love and grow. It is accentuated by

MA/MC, which gives Grey the seeds of ambition and the energy to conquer obstacles and achieve that ambition. He is able to share his revolutionary vision through DR/MA, in which he can actively share his insights with a community

Neptune is a favorite planet of mystic. Seemingly its placement in Libra seems mild. It provides Grey with a receptive faculty, and the ability to express the finer feelings of love and high ideals. Its peril is over romanticism which has long been identifies as a weakness of artists.



Neptune conjunct Midheaven: When Neptune meets the Midheaven, ego conscious is stripped away. Just like Grey strips the obvious skin from his subjects. It is this type of depersonalization that frequently informs shamanic experience. A medium loses his ego in order to express oracular vision and allow a spirit to fill the shell of his body. The X-ray vision Grey brings to his work depersonalizes the subject at the same time it reveals the subject's most intimate details. The internal organs and networks of veins and arteries seem anonymous. They are what we expect to see in a medical textbook representing an anonymous cadaver. They are not what we expect to see in a portrait that traditionally depicts the subject's humanity and personality.

This submergence of ego is amplified by contact with MA/SA. The MA/SA midpoint is commonly called the death axis. In performing prognostication, it is one of the more sensitive positions to be examined. Quite frankly, it often plays a powerful role in identifying the moment the soul leaves the body. However, for Grey it consistently shows up at growth points in his life, including the birth of his daughter and meeting his wife. Grey intimately aquatinted himself with death throughout the 1970's. Even earlier, we see juvenile painting in "Transfigurations of Grim Reapers" and "Cemeteries." Through gaining knowledge of death, Grey has been able to realize a deep awareness of life. Esoterically, death represents union of the being with the universe. The physical body is no longer necessary to the spiritual energies that represent consciousness. In being a child of the universe and an interpreter of universal energy, Grey uses death force as a scalpel to reveal the microcosm to the macrocosm and help integrate the two. He unites higher and lower energies through revealing the pathways between them.

Note that the Dragonhead, symbol of karma in the horoscope, also makes midpoint contact with the Death Axis. Interestingly the Dragon's head is in Capricorn. That placement indicates the struggle to create a community. Grey has long taken part in workshops and collaborative artistic projects, as well as conduct spiritual gets together on key solstice dates. He is a driving force for bringing together metaphysical artists and helping the public at large develop through shamanistic art. The Dragon's head's contact with the death axis traditionally talks about communication with sick people. Grey views art as a healing medium. He works a great deal with healers. As earlier commented, his shamanic vision is that of a healer. It is no surprise that his karmic destiny as expressed by the dragon's head would be linked to association with the sick and infirm.

His Pluto in Leo empowers him to transcend the protoplasmic spheres of energy. He is a man of extraordinary force and accomplishment in his ability to recognize the forces present in the world and the body human. Pluto too has a karmic influence for Grey through its midpoint contacts DR/UR. This again gives him essential power to



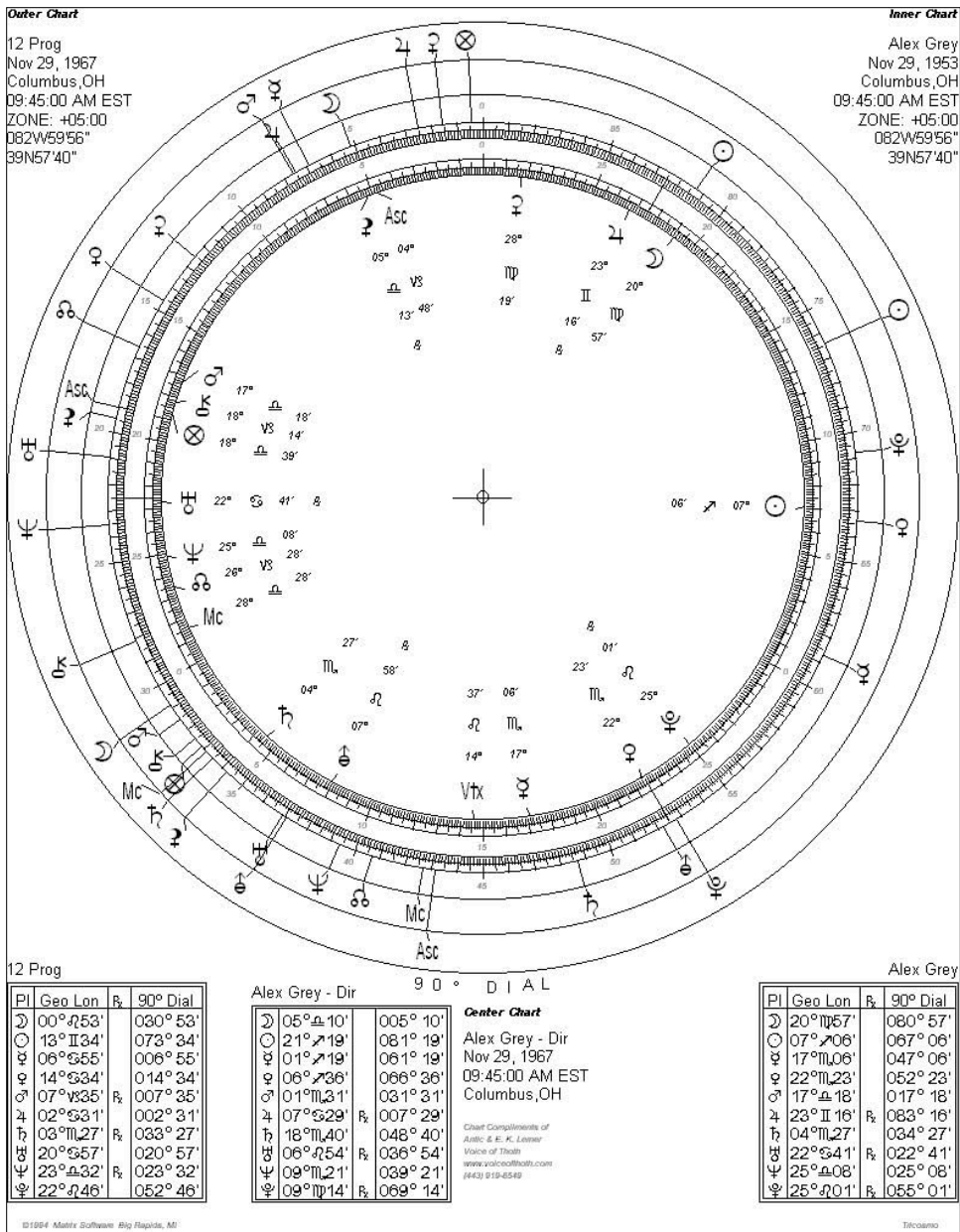
break through the veneer of complacency and genuine connect with other people, even though some might describe that experience as traumatic.

He also recognizes the feminine dimension in such groundbreaking work with the MC/MO contact. That indicates spiritual revolution through woman and the achievement of peculiar emotional and psychic states. All of this is very expansive for Grey as indicated by MC/JU, which brings forth a ready means of success.

Age 12

“The first time I hear of LSD was aback in 1967. I was 12 years old and in seventh grade. I read about LSD in Life magazine. Acid was not given a negative spin in those days. There were pictures of hippies, Allen Ginsberg and Timothy Leary in his guru mode. It all looked really cool, LSD was legal and the visionary and therapeutic “cosmic consciousness” aspect of the drug was emphasized. I did a seventh-grade science report on LSD-25. I hadn’t taken it but was very intrigued. Not a long time after that, I fell into a chronic adolescent depression, and some of my friends were listening to Hendrix and the Beatles and taking acid. Some of them got pretty freaked out. I was their “sitter” for them and tried to ease their panic. I didn’t take it during that time for fear it might make my depression worse.” —Alex Grey





Alex Grey 12 Year Progression



Connections between the cosmic pairings Ascendant/Midheaven, Sun/Moon and Mars/Venus are redundant factors throughout the key dates selected for Grey. This cannot be coincidence. They illustrate his quest to master the spectrum of energy and to give birth to new forms through a total integration of existing ones! A number of solar arc factors amplify this during Grey's twelfth year.

The directed planet or midpoint is listed first in the equation, with the affected natal point last.

Sun = Moon. This deals with the very balance of Nature. The directed sun is still in Grey's birth sign Sagittarius, heralding experimentation and transformation. The natal moon is in Virgo. Virgo is under Mercury (mind). Grey's soul challenges his outward personality through his intellectual growth. At Age Twelve, Grey experiences the dawning of cosmic awareness, as well as depression.

The solar arc moon also makes a powerful contact, Moon = Lilith. The directed moon comes into aspect with its shadow, Lilith. Emotions are brought into direct contact with fears. In order for Grey to grow emotionally he begins confronting his fears about aspects of existence that he has yet to understand. Here a seed is planted. Remember too that natal Lilith=Natal Ascendant. The Ascendant represents aspects of the ego.

Moon contacts to the Ascendant promote individuation, particularly when dealing with a sensitive personality. The solar moon is in Libra. Elementally, that is an air sign. Grey's natal ascendant is Capricorn. The contact lends itself to a word image of wind stirring up dust, earth scattering. This phenomenon enhances plant pollination at the same time it scatters foundations, even though the native is trying to achieve equilibrium.

Note too that Progressed Lilith (moved by Lunar progression, and thus key to Grey's emotional evolution), experiences the revolutionary and occult force through directed Uranus = progressed Lilith. The way his soul challenges authority and wields magic powers (Uranus) comes face to face with his emotional fears (Progressed Lilith).

Venus=Sun. Venus's role as erotic anima and creativity has already been established. At this juncture in Grey's life it is being illuminated at the onset of puberty.

Ascendant=Part of Fate. The Part of Fate is revealed by the following equation: Ascendant plus Moon minus Sun. The Part of fortune represents a moving index of the sun's relationship to the moon, and the moon's direct effect on development. It is the emotional tone of the personality. It characterizes the personality. It demonstrates how a unique individual receives life force. It is sensitive to transits and directions. Here the colorless ascendant meets the natal part of fate. Signage and aspects always define the ascendant itself, since it does not impart cosmic meaning on a point in contacts, but rather receives energy. (This is also true of the Midheaven. Don't scream that I have the chart wrong by having put it in the Masculine column. Both serve as signposts for unique



components of the individual that do have positive/negative correspondences.) The value of the contact here illustrates that this is a significant turning point for Grey. His natal Part of Fate is in Libra indicates a need for others to validate the native's experience by intimate spiritual contact. Dane Rudyhar writes of that placement "There is an eagerness to impersonate great ideals, or even God! As a result of psychological uncertainty when faced by society or oversensitiveness." (Rudhyar, p.82) It is interesting in light of this that Grey talks about witnessing other people's acid experiences, rather than having his own. Still it profoundly influences him. He manipulates the action by acting as baby sitter. (It is also interesting to reflect on the long range effects of his Part of Fate in light of his later work with the Secret Dog, and his gaining intimate knowledge of the body human through vivisection and thus assuming god-like dominion over other people's bodies.) He is honing his personality (Ascendant) through refining its pitch (Part of Fate) through contact with others

This critical dimension of this time is tolled more loudly by Solar Arc Midheaven = Progressed Ascendant. Midheaven (career, profession as well as his emotional expression) with meets Ascendant as shaped by its emotional growth. Yikes. Talk about a Mobius strip and everything turning in on itself. This period of time is really beginning to resemble a knot! One can envision the swirling energies surrounding the young artist as he begins to authentically realize the cosmic nature around him. He begins pursuing it. It is probably at this time that Grey begins to focus his ambition on becoming a successful artist and interpreter of the cosmos.

Venus, the warm fuzzy feminine element, also receives powerful solar arc directions.

Jupiter=Venus: The growing awareness of sexuality, love and artistic expression, which is further fueled by a contact with the emotional force of Mars. Note cosmic knot: Progressed Mars, Venus' male counterpart experiences the growth of its intuitive dimension through Directed Jupiter, expansion. Directed Jupiter=natal Venus=Progressed Mars. Both Yin and Yang receptors are being activated and cross-pollinated.

Directed Transpluto also makes contact here, making everything seem accelerated. Transpluto is like Pluto on Steroids. It intensifies the all energies.

A couple of quick word pictures for solar arc midpoint activity.

MO/PL=MO: Extreme emotions, inclination to sudden acts.

JU/UR=SU; Thank God! Good grasp on a situation.

SU/MC=MA: Strong individuality.

JU/PL=JU: Striving for Power!



UR/VE=JU: Love of art, inspiration.
ME/JU=SA: Inhibitions, withdrawal.
VE/PL=UR: Love at first sight.
JU/MC=NE: Dream of good fortune, weak dream.
ME/SA=PL: Brooding over destiny

Lunar Factors are expressed along the radius of tertiary progressions. In looking at the trifold cosmograms illustrating Grey's life achievements, I am reminded of a pattern of intertwined chalk circles which are drawn on the ground during some Yoruba healing rituals. Each circle represents a dimension of existence. The client is positioned in the center and must erase each circle with his foot. This symbolizes him integrating the various realms of existence in order to achieve physical-spiritual harmony and thus heal. The circles and their relationships to time and the patterns of the cosmos in a cosmogram are similar. They represent dimensions that have value relative to the center. Each represents a unique manifestation of the space time continuum. It is essential for the native to integrate these in order to realize his own truth. Planets animate one another's energies by making aspects between one another based on their positions on the corresponding dimensions of time represented by the difference circles. These are circuits of energy. They oscillate. If one visualizes the resulting patterns, one can identify them with the geometry of intertwined energetic strings that Grey uses to compose his mandalas.

Grey's Tertiary progressions frequently reverberate the harmonies expressed in his solar arc direction. There is constant music of the spheres sounding in Grey's cosmic journey.

Progressed Mars=Venus: Venus and Mars are the inner planetary expression of Yin/Yang, Yoni/lingham, creation and destruction. Intricate structures with these two planets have already been described in the analysis of solar arc directions. Further analysis at this point is perhaps best left to the reader

Lilith =Saturn. Grey's fears are being defined. Saturn constricts. It fixes things in a precise position. When planets come into contact with Saturn, their potential energy becomes concrete and recognizable! Grey's fears become real and he must respond to them. He is tantalized by the prospect of tripping. He cannot risk it because of his own vulnerability to depression. He does the next best thing. He witnesses the phenomena by seeing others do it. He needs to externalize his fear of the unknown and give it concrete forms.

Jupiter=Mercury recognizes the expansion of intellectual horizons.
There are a number of Progressed midpoint contacts.



UR/NE = Sun: Lifelines, illness.

SU/UR = ME: Mental progress, sudden flashes, young reformer

SU/MO=VE: Harmony between Spirit and emotion, male and female, attraction between sexes, marriage. Heterosexual individuation.

SA/AS=JU: Indifference, joy over separation, move. (Inwardness of adolescence)

NE/PL=JU: Love of humanity, peace, and religiosity.

NE/DR=SA: Demonstration of emotional inhibitions with others, emotional suffering through another.

MO/VE-UR: Sudden manifestation of sexual desire, fits of emotion.

SA/AS=UR: Self willedness.

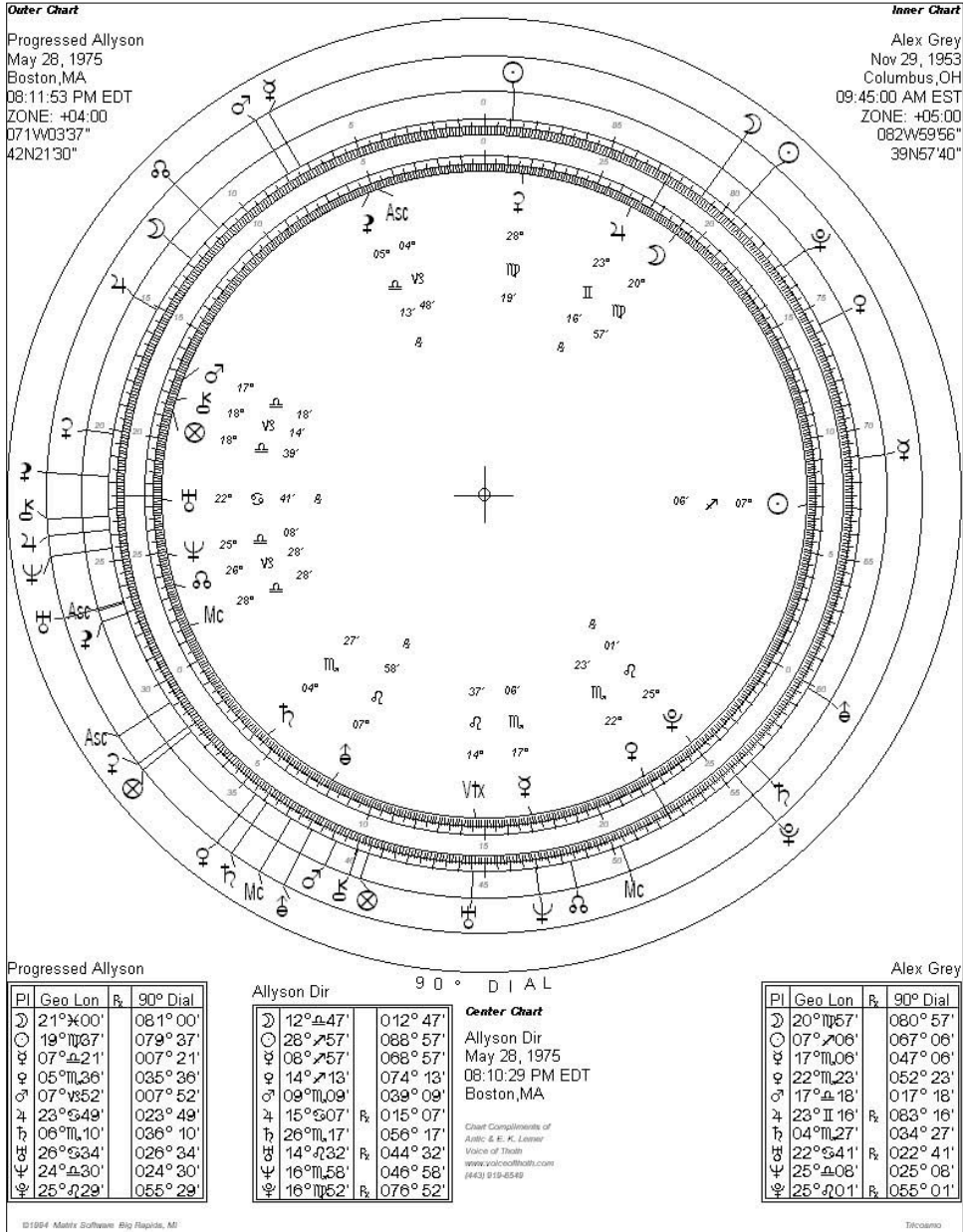
ME/AS=NE: Falsehood, deception. The midpoint also activates the Death axis for Grey as all Neptune contacts do.

Meeting Allyson and Trying Acid for the First Time May 28, 1975, Boston MA

In May, 1975, Grey met his eventual life partner and wife Allyson. Grey writes that this was the first time he experienced acid.(p.14) Note that when one examines directions and progressions in a horoscope the influences last a fair amount of time. For instance in solar directions, there is approximately only one degree of movement per year of life. Thus a planet or midpoint that is within one half of a degree of an applying aspect on January 1st of one year is roughly going to be within one half of a separating degree the following year. Its influence will be felt still. The timetable is different for progressions. Still there is often a fairly long period of influence, particularly for the slow outer planets. Grey felt many of these influences for a substantial period of time around this date. It is also during this time in his life when he is doing his groundbreaking anatomy studies through working in a mortuary.

Grey makes an interesting observation about a critical visionary experience around this time and the nature of couples. Both are relevant to the following analysis.





Grey Meets Allyson, May 1975



In 1976, Allyson and I had an experience which changed our lives and our art. We sacramentally ingested a large dose of LSD and lay in bed. Eventually, a heightened state of consciousness emerged where I was no longer aware of physical reality or my body in any conventional sense. I felt and saw my interconnectedness with all beings and things in a vast and brilliant Universal Mind Lattice. Every being and thing in the universe was a toroidal fountain and drain of self-illuminating love energy, a cellular node or jewel in a network which linked omnidirectionally without end. All duality of self and other was overcome in this infinite dimension of spiritual light. I felt I had been there before, or perhaps in some way was always there. This was the state beyond birth and death, beyond time, our true nature which seemed more real than any physical surrounding and more real even than my physical body. The clear light matrix arose out of a field of pure emptiness. As utterly convincing as it was, when the light receded, I opened my eyes to behold Allyson and our bedroom once again. I was somewhat shocked to learn that she had experienced the exact same transpersonal dimension at the same time, which we determined by our descriptive drawings and discussion of the awesome beauty of the state. This experience of the Infiniti net of spirit transformed our lives and gave us a subject which became the focus of our art and our mission.(p.36)

Here is our theory of how couples work: Each person's main psychological problem comes forward in a close relationship. Each can express his or her shadow and be healed in a context of love and support if the problems are complementary. Noncomplementary pathologies accelerate dysfunction and make both people worse.

My shadow specialty is depression, not exactly catatonic despair, but hopeless "what's the use" kind of abysmal moods. My moods can really darken an atmosphere of loving-not extinguish it, but like a black hole, suck and deplete it.(p.33)



Solar Influences

Neptune = Mercury. Neptune represents mysticism. Traditionally, Neptune contacts to Mercury represent states of confusion and clouded judgment. That is because that man of today is not trained to grasp spiritual energy. In Grey's case, he is a great shaman- artist. Neptune is going to have a somewhat different effect with this type of individual. A Neptune Mercury contact boils down to Mysticism=Mind. Also, remember that the death axis travels with Neptune in Solar arc directions. (That is not so with tertiary progression.) So MA/SA=ME. Traditionally, this is often interpreted as bereavement, but to Grey, death is the end of one life form and the beginning of another. Also, he understands the profound connection between Eros and death. He writes of his painting "Tantra":

Locked in an embrace of love with Allyson, I sensed the skin on the backs of our bodies dissolving into a field of deep blue fire fluid. The blue felt like an ocean of understanding permeated by love, a field of unbounded energy that was our essential nature and to which we briefly return during the ecstatic ego oblivion of sex. It seemed as if the skin on the front of our bodies was the surface tension of ego, a bounding line of flesh that we could use to merge and transcend energetically by becoming synchronous with the primal depth of our heart union, which is symbolized by the enveloping aura of the latticelike Mobius egg.(p. 66)

To leap ahead, it should be noted here that the Progressed MA/SA=both Uranus and the Sun. In fact, it is within four minute of the natal sun on that date. Again we have one of those intricate Mobius constructions. The Death Axis as it advances through time/space makes numerous, profound contacts at a significant junctures for Grey. He learns much during this time of life from the dead, as we soon will note. This relationship is examined in a critical light (sun) causing day to develop a deep spiritual appreciation for the life death continuum.

At the same time, the directed Midheaven contacts both the Ascendant and Lilith. This represents another phase of cosmic awareness for Grey. (Remember, both angles cannot impart characteristics but rather derive meaning from signage and aspects). The Midheaven contact with Lilith brings Grey's career in contact his own shadow.



In light of the death axis and angular contacts with Lilith, the following contemporaneous experience of Grey's stands out. Grey describes it:

I did a variety of artworks using cadavers. At the time I felt I was courageously exploring the realm of the ultimate polarity, that of life and death, but it seems that I was also uncovering my own confused values.....Around that time, I made a pointing entitled Necrophilia of myself lying on top of a dead woman. Not long after that an unusual and for me life-altering vision occurred: While sitting in my studies one night, an ominous courtroom appeared. Before a judge I could not see and an angry jury, I faced a woman who accused me of trespassing upon her body in my morgue work, I tried to explain that I was making art, but there was absolutely no forgiveness. The judge told me that from now on I must do more positive work, putting me on lifetime probation. This vision was a turning point for me. It helped me realize I could spend a lifetime in negativity and darkness or begin to uplift my focus. Fortunately, I was in a relationship with Allyson, and she provided the uplifting daily experience of love and acceptance that I needed to heal and reorient my distressed soul.....A respect for the activity of the body and sensitivity to the mystery of life and its impermanence began to take hold. I read the Tibetan book of the death. That changed my relationship with bodies as well. When accepting bodies, I would do a simplified bard ritual calling their names and encourage them to go toward the light.(p. 17)

This statement also marks his emergence as a more caring person. That is reflected by another critical solar arc contact.

Directed sun is within a degree to Ceres. Ceres, an asteroid, possesses a very feminine type of energy. She represents the ability to nurture and care. She is associated with mothers and mother figures. The directed sun illuminates this quality, a capacity for caring, for giving. Certainly Grey's relationship with Allyson helps him become a more thoughtful being.

The directed Ascendant (and its inevitable companion Lilith) contact the Dragon's Head and the Midheaven and are also midpoint both! Those Mobius structures keep



showing up in both Grey's horoscope and his art! This is a tight planetary configuration with all of the cross influences accentuating one another. The personality begins to find an expression that benefits humanity. Grey is beginning to bring forth knowledge of the shadow world (Lilith) for Human kind. Life begins to come into focus for Grey. In the next few years, he begins the seminal series of Life Size Paintings, "The Sacred Mirrors," in which his enhanced awareness of mankind in relationship to the universe is depicted. The series marks his emergence as a word-class artist.

Grey is also able to overcome his fears about taking Acid, which as we have already noted, will play an essential role in his vision quest.

A number of midpoints are also activated around this time.

They include:

MO=MO/SA: Self control versus emotions.

JU=NE/AC: Ironically, bad luck. Tendency to cheat.

JU=DR/AC: Happy unions, festivals.

Transpluto also making contact accentuates these two.

VE=SU/MO. Ebertin writes of this. "Harmonious coordination between spiritual and emotional as well as masculine and feminine dispositions, the power of attraction between the sexes, artistic interests. Friendship between lovers, a marriage of love, a harmonious marriage."

VE=SA/NE: Suffering in Love.

PL=SA/MC: Attainment of success in life only after great difficulties. A fateful struggle ordained by destiny.

PL=ME/MA: A fanatical critic, suffering attacks from others. (Note that around this time, Grey describes experiences the dead rebuking him for exploiting their bodies.)

MA=UR/SA: Violence, release of violent force.

Part of fate=MO/SA: Self-Control, awakening of consciousness.

SU=JU/SU: Health, recognition of Joy. Creative Power.

UR=SA/PL: A person unafraid of danger. The artist achieves transcendence, committing an act of bravery taking acid.

UR=JU/AS: Optimism, good fortune

UR=SU/UR: Revolutionary sprit. Tense inner life. Reform through will. Sudden turns carrying out innovations.

Solar Arc midpoints also activate natal planets.

JU/SA=MO: Changing relationship to women

UR/MC-ME: Realizations, excitement.

SA/DR=VE: Inhibitions in love life.



VE/MC=MA: A sex union.
 MC/AS=JU: Joy and success
 MO/SA=SA: Self-definition again.
 SU/NE=UR: Emotional crisis.

Lunar

The tertiary progressions represent an emotional blossoming for Grey.

Mars = Venus. Masculine and feminine potential come into balance.

By a wider orb also Mars=Mercury. Mars' conjunction to Mercury floods over from heart to mind. At the same time directed Mercury = Venus. Thoughts of love and a sense of beauty come to the forefront of mind and soul. Masculine and feminine are joined intellectually as well as spiritually over the next few years. He talks of his relationship with Allyson in terms of the two of them representing a third mind.

“Together we share a third mind that’s more effective and intelligent than either of us individually. Her aesthetic is seen through my eyes, my aesthetic is seen through her eyes, and our understanding and love emerges as a being of grater perception, a guardian angel that bridges us two, that can travel deeper into the visionary world where our inspiration comes from. This angelic fusion reflection our devotion to God through our devotion to each other, and help us in our artistic and life choices.”(p. 32)

Note also that the progressed Sun=MA/VE.

Saturn=Sun. Saturn connecting with the sun does not always represent restriction. It brings definition. Saturn is the essence of karma. At this point for Grey it sparks a fated moment. His encounter with Allyson will be registered in memory because of the forces of past-life memory. Saturn brings his long awaited partner. A relationship this powerful is often described by the participants as feeling predestined. Here karma is registered and becomes tangible.

Chiron=Uranus. The shaman of the zodiac comes into contact with the native force for revolution and change. Chiron Uranus contacts represent the challenge of healing this time through the lens of a blossoming of romance and the mental expansion afforded by Acid.

Saturn = Moon. Saturn and the moon combine to represent the principle of self-definition through control. Man’s emotional drama achieves definition through contact with the feminine (emotion). Saturn provides Grey with ground from which to express himself and his potential through the exercise of feeling and control simultaneously.

Venus=Moon. Feelings of love and beauty. The best of emotions. The positive expression of desire. The lingham is submerged in the yoni and becomes



indistinguishable; it is extinguished through the fulmination of desire and tenderness trickles from the torrent of lust.

Moon=Moon. The Cancerian hour. The dark night of the soul. The ancient mothers laugh knowingly amongst themselves. Emotion overflows. The Yoruba say that no man can be crowned king without the sanction of the ancient mothers. Grey is about to truly come into his own as a world class artist and visionary. Note that his partnership with a powerful woman facilitates this. On a profoundly personal level he is given sanction to gain vision into the infinite through primordial female power.

Midheaven=Jupiter: The aim in life expands consciousness.

Mars=JU/UR: This indicates great good fortune through fortunate decision.

Ceres=ME/MA: Caring becomes part of one's objectives.

UR=NE/MC: Confusion due to sudden inner experience.

UR=DR/MC: Deeply moving experience shared with others.

AS=SA/DR: Separation

VE/SA=MO: Inhibition in love expression

MO/JU=VE: Healthy love, love of enterprise.

MA/UR=MA: Sudden application of force, physical intervention

SU/PL=UR: Fanatic reforms, new circumstances.

MA/MC=UR: Becoming furious, desire to advance, setbacks.

JU/UR=NE: Unearned gains, gains through having experienced loss. Unexpected favorable circumstance after loss.

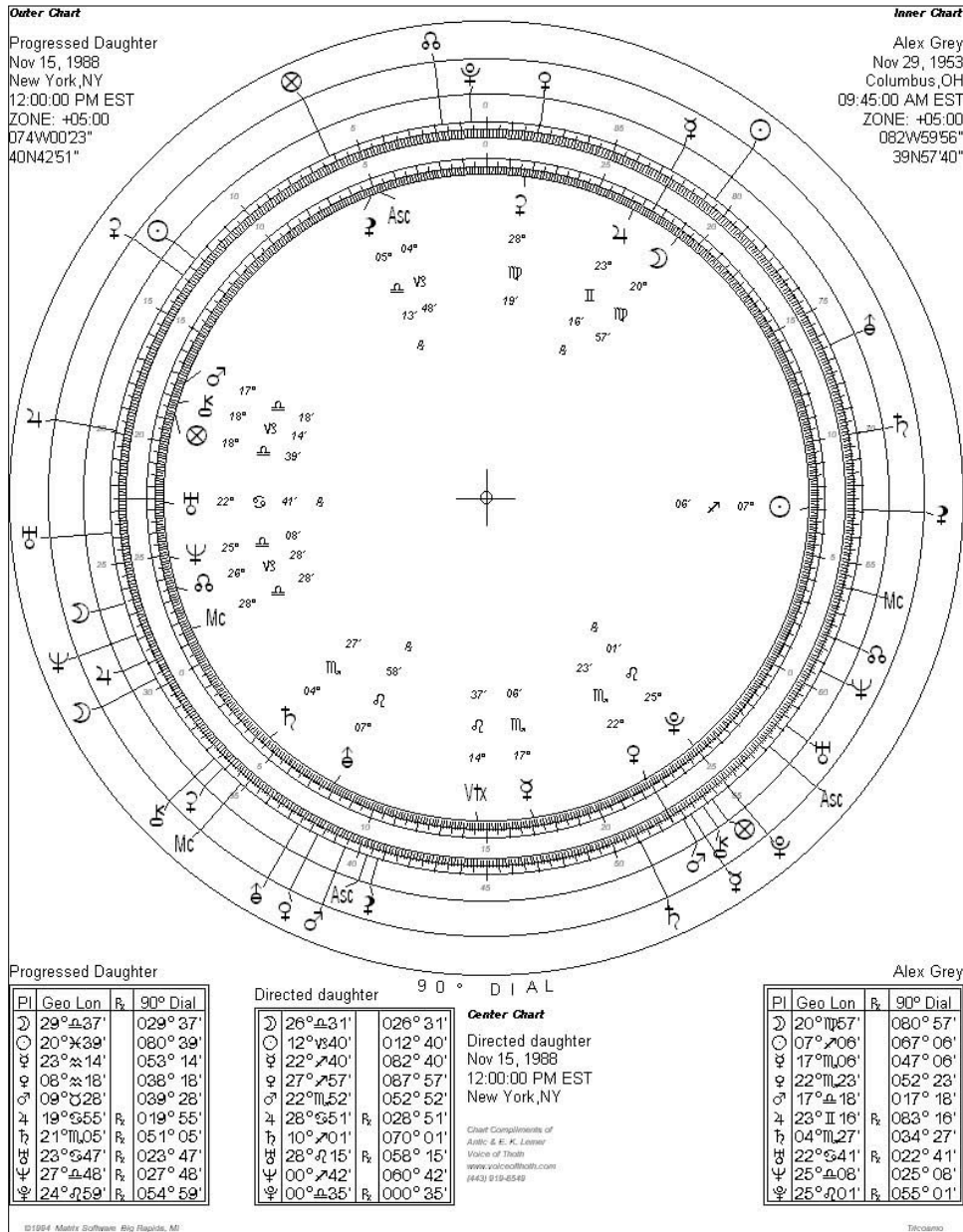
SU/AS=PL: Turn of destiny, desire to attain influence.

The Birth of Zena November 15, 1988

“Our daughter, Zena, was born November 15, 1988. Astrologically she is a Scorpio, very passionate and curious about scary things. In this painting she pulls from her center a rainbow sphere, a heartdrop of spiritual potentiality with the Tibetan syllable AH. The AH is used in the Dzogchen teachings as a symbol of primordial purity. Joyful children radiate this purity and spontaneity, free from conceptual thought, but it is not integrated or stabilized as true realization; that only comes after the conceptual minds has developed and been transcended by spiritual practice.” —Alex Grey (p. 84)

The configurations take place during a period in which Grey has achieved great success as an artist. His “Sacred Mirrors” has been recorded as a seminal work of both art and spirit. Certainly, he has tasted success. Many of the potential energies from his





natal chart have been realized. His relationship with Allyson has blossomed into a thriving life and creative partnership.

Previously, I quoted Grey discussing how he and Allyson combined to create a third intellectual character. Here they combine to create a whole new being: Zena.





Courtesy Inner Traditions

“Birth”



Many of the Solar directions point to the development of Grey as a caring and nurturing person. Before, the directions and progressions focused more on his growth. Now they illustrate his capacity to help make others grow.

Ceres=Saturn: The need to nurture finds definition. Grey's capacity for caring is identified by the birth of his daughter. It is interesting to note that Ceres is thought of as feminine. Grey's function as father is traditionally masculine. Yet in becoming one the feminine in his nature comes to the forefront. It is also interesting to note that at times Grey public image has been of slightly effeminate appearance. He has fine features, a cleanly shaven face and long hair. He is able to realize aspects of the feminine potential within him yet retain a traditionally masculine heterosexual expression.

As we've seen before in Grey's Horoscopes, a planet making significant contact with a natal planet through direction or progression also receive planetary energy through direction and/or progression, thus creating intricate patterns of energy. Ceres is no exception.

Venus=Ceres: The planet of love and creativity reaches the natal point associated with caring and nurturing. Grey's ability to create and to love now informs his ability to care for others. Interestingly, Progressed Ceres=Natal Venus. One again, we see planetary contact create intricate patterns of energy in Grey's horoscope. Directed Venus=Natal Ceres, and Progressed Ceres=Natal Venus.

Mars=Venus: What a shocker! Procreation and its fruit expressed. Given Grey's history, I will only comment that such consistency definitely makes him a child of the universe, someone who participates in its wholeness and whose very being is keenly attuned to its rhythms. Ebertin simply defines a Venus-Mars contact as "The impulse to love. Passion."

Chiron=Venus The zodiacal Shaman is also making a solar arc contact with Venus. Mind you that Chiron and Mars are in tight aspect, little over one degree apart in Grey's natal chart. Well the way they are positioned now, they are both less than a degree of orb in perfect aspect with Venus.

Moon=Node signifies Grey's spiritual link with the rest of humanity. The joy of birth marks a time when spirit is made manifest.

Also, Mars=Node: The desire for progeny, the result of cooperation.

Jupiter=MC: Grey further realizes his objective in life. The creator who has lovingly catalogued the forces of life, the awesome powers of nature, realizes the birth of another being through the congress with Allyson which began over ten years earlier.

Of course, Jupiter is on the receiving end as well.

Mercury=Jupiter: Sound common sense, a wealth of ideas, reflexes, successful speaking. One is reminded of mythical gods calling existence into being.



Saturn=Neptune=MA/SA: Suffering, renunciation, asceticism, sacrifices, taking care of others. The fruit of the death axis!!!!!! When a directed planet contacts a natal midpoint of which it is part, the effect is like an explosion. Here we are reminded that death is the inevitable result of birth. But both are on a continuum and Grey draws from that continuum to create. Grey writes of his painting "Birth":

"The pleasures and discomforts of pregnancy yield to the violent logic of birth. A tremendous flow of energy goes through the mother, who emits an orgasmic scream of pain that echoes from her own birth to her death..... portrayed as silhouettes on either side of her head. The letter symbols in the painting are Tibetan syllables, a white Om, red Ah, and blue Hum. When placed in the head, throat, and heart these letters are the seed syllables of all the Buddhas. Thus the mother is birthing a Buddha. The heart vajra in the screaming newborn is a symbol of the imperishable spirit. The umbilical chord will be cut, the child will remain connected to the mother with subtle heart chords...82

Pluto=Venus within a degree and a half. This is slightly greater orb than I have used elsewhere, but certainly it carries a significant weight. Love reaches a fanatic pitch. Indeed, the violence of birth is quite intense. The result is quite earth shattering. The equation of the husband wife relationship is forever altered.

The midpoint structures are also descriptive.

SU/MC=JU: Positive attitude, attainment of objective.

MA/JU=MO: Fortunate decision, successful wife, mother, birth.

SA/MC=SU: Insufficient defense, worry. Here, his soul mate is violently breached. Obviously Grey is going to be worried about his wife while giving birth.

MC/AS=VE: Sense of beauty. Relationship between the ego (higher self) and Lower self (personality). Again, it is the Venus connection that characterizes Grey, as the midpoint itself is neutral. It marks this as a signpost and lets Venus in tricky Scorpio characterize him. Note that Venus in Scorpio is subtle. She is not just overflowing beauty and bounty, but rather she has a slightly lewd and taunting character. Grey is able to realize very profound artistic vision through Zena's birth. His paintings of her are similar to those of Allyson in bearing his hallmark x-ray visioning. This is not the type of baby we are used to seeing, but one with a complex inner structure that has intricate connections with a dynamic universe. She is a source of creative inspiration for Grey. Plus Zena herself will have Scorpio as her sun sign.

Interestingly, the Progressed MC/AS=Directed Pluto: Power to influence environment, strong person.

NE/MC=MA: Metaphysical study, desire to harm others, act without clear understanding.

SU/MC=JU: A positive attitude. Attainment.



JU/AS=SA: Inhibition, separation departure.

Again, birth is not just about happiness. It brings about hardships and changes in the structure of the parents' relationships. For instance, Allyson recognizes the separation that took place between her and Grey as a result of Zena's birth: "We began to do many things separately. Originally we would never go places without each other.... The hen we had to be in separate places with a child. It was really good for us... We learned that we could operate in separate worlds and then come back together and work on our life..." (p. 34)

ME/MA=UR: Acting with lightning speed. An exciting surprise. The danger of catastrophe.

SA/AS+ PL Compulsory confinement. Suffering through violent or brutal suppression. Again an acknowledgement of the pain his life partner experiences through the physical act, and some of the ambivalence which must have resulted in him



Courtesy Inner Traditions

“Family”



Lunar influences through progression reach a crescendo. Most obvious is the Sun-Moon contact. Keep in mind this is the sun through the lens of the moon that is making contact with Grey's natal moon. SUN=MOON. Spirit and soul. Husband and wife The Progressed Sun is in Pisces, the mystic sign, while the moon is in Virgo. Mysticism finds an expression in earth. Pisces is the culmination of the tropical zodiac. In a way, giving birth can be described as the completion of a man-woman relationship, the ancient spiritual equation $1+1=3$. The sun moon blend is a little ill at ease. (This is my own natal sun moon blend, so I speak from experience.) One is challenged to make the balance between high spiritual goal and mundane concerns. It is difficult. It seems like the polarity expressed by sun and moon should be reversed to better reflect each planet's true character. Grey will need to redefine himself in light of this new person in his life. He will need to learn how to be father. Sometimes this will challenge his spiritual preoccupations. Face it there's nothing all that sacred feeling about changing diaper, however Kumbyah you want to describe life. And Grey does not practice or use that type of terminology. So once more we see a complex expression of the dynamic of the universe applied through a combination and integration of opposites. There is nothing half way about this. It is all or nothing because the spectrum of total possibility is being evoked.

Lilith=Sun: Inner fears the shadow meets the light of day. Grey's ultimate subject matter is integration. His is the gift of seeing the world as a whole, which all of its actors and elemental intertwined together by rhythms of energy. He is a cosmic being. Grey writes of his integration:

For artists like me, who are used to obsessing in one direction, it is a challenge to implement a more integrative attitude and lifestyle that include accessing, healing and developing our body, emotions, conceptual mind, and soul while finding a healthy balance of interaction with family and friends that serves the art world and world at large. It has to come naturally or it would seem forced. But the creative challenge to become a more integral artist, engaging each level of being and considering each quadrant of life, is an inspiring ideal.

(p. 101)

Mercury, which is midpoint directed Mars and Chiron, (Action and shamanism)
=Natal Venus: Again the appreciation of beauty and thought of love, a creative success.
Venus=Transpluto: Fanatic love.



Venus=Jupiter: The Joy of love becomes overwhelming.

Chiron=Saturn: Mysticism takes foot in an earthly expression. Interesting Directed Ceres is also part of this equation.

SU/ME=SU: Power of thought, SU/PL=SU: Attainment

MA/PL=ME: Realizing plans fanatically, excessive nervous irritation.

ME/SA=VE: Sober thinking, selfishness, considering separation in love or marriage.

MO/MA=SA: Inhibitions, suffering of separated wife, separation from wife.

SU/PL=UR: Sudden adjustment to new circumstance, carrying out reform.

SU/MO=PL: A soul torn by inner conflict, biased attitude or changed circumstances lead to critical phases of development in life or to separation from others.

Grey's work confronts the mystery of life's expression in the cosmos, and their reciprocal relationships. As we have just seen, his own Cosmobiology mirrors his artistic expression. Such precise harmony testifies to the accuracy of Grey's vision. From the moment of birth, powerful cosmic forces come into focus around Grey. Key moments in his development bring the essential elements of horoscopy into forceful exchange. Their ultimate effect is to empower and define a most eloquent visionary.

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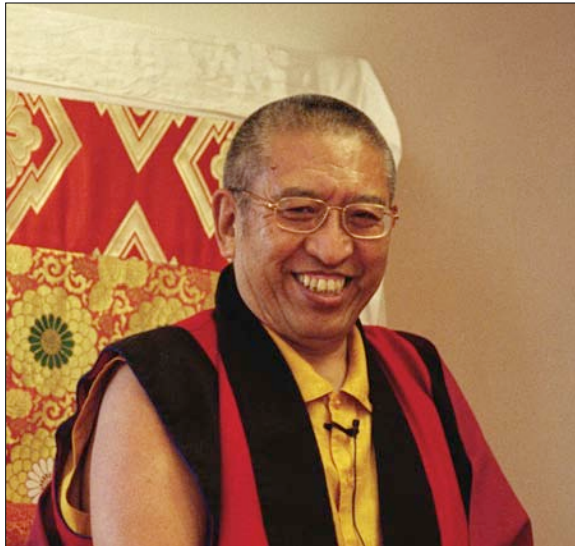
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The Four Noble Truths

The Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche Geshe Lharampa

When the Buddha taught, he was not teaching as a great scholar who wanted to demonstrate a particular philosophical point of view or to teach for its own sake. His desire was to present the very essence of the deep and vast teachings of Buddhism, and for that reason he gave teachings which suited the varying abilities of his disciples. All the teachings he gave, some long and some short, were a direct and appropriate response to the development of the disciples



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who came to listen to him. Of course, people have very different capacities and different levels of understanding. They also have very different wishes and desires to learn and understand the dharma. If the Buddha had taught only the very essence of his own understanding of those vast and far-reaching teachings, then, apart from a small number of disciples who had great intelligence and diligence, few people would have ever understood the Buddhist teachings. The Buddha taught whatever would enable a person to develop so he or she could progress gradually towards the very deep and vast teachings. When we analyze all the Buddha's teachings, we see that they fall into three main approaches or vehicles.

The Buddha's teachings helped each student in a way appropriate for his or her level. On the *relative level*¹ each student received some benefit from what the Buddha taught. On the *absolute level*, all of the Buddha's teachings have the same goal. When one analyzes the Buddha's teachings on the relative level, one finds that there are three

¹ The two truths are the relative or conventional truth which is the solid world that we as ordinary beings see around us and the ultimate truth which one perceives upon reaching enlightenment. For more see note 10.



levels. But, when one examines them from the absolute level, one sees there is only one level, or *yana*, because all beings are directed towards the same goal.

THE HINAYANA

Of the three vehicles or *yanas* in Sanskrit, the first is the *Hinayana*. *Hinayana* literally means “lesser vehicle,” but this term should in no way be a reproach or be construed to any way diminish the importance of the teachings. In fact, the teachings of the *Hinayana* are very important because they suit the capacities and development of a great number of students. If it weren’t for these teachings, which are particularly appropriate for those who have limited wisdom or diligence, many persons would never be able to travel the *Mahayana* path. Without the *Hinayana* teachings there would be no way for practitioners to progress in the *dharma*, because they would have never entered the path. The path is similar to a staircase: the lower step is the lower step. This doesn’t mean it is not important or should be ignored, because without this lower step one can never reach the top of the stairs. One can never gain access to the upper stories of a building without that lower step. It is very necessary. It should be very clear that this term “lesser” vehicle is in no way a pejorative term. It just puts the path into a realistic context.

The fundamental teachings of the *Hinayana* are the main subject matter of the first turning of the *wheel of dharma*. These teachings were given mainly in India in the town of Varanasi, which is now called Benares. The main subject matter of these teachings is the *four noble truths*.

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

If the Buddha had taught his disciples principally by using his miraculous abilities and various powers, it would not have been very effective in helping human beings on the path of liberation. The best way to show them that wisdom and liberation was to point out the very truth of things; to point out the way things really are. So this is what he did: he showed the truth through the four noble truths and the two truths (relative and absolute truth). By seeing the way things really are, the students learned how to eliminate their mistakes and their delusions. Eliminating one’s mistakes and delusions automatically destroys the causes of one’s suffering and hardships. This allows one to progressively reach the state of liberation and great wisdom. That is why the four noble truths and the two truths are the essence of the first teachings of the Buddha.



THE FIRST NOBLE TRUTH

The first noble truth is the full understanding of suffering. Of course, in an obvious way, people are aware of suffering, knowing when they have unpleasant sensations of hunger, cold, or sickness, and recognize these as things that they don't like. But the first noble truth includes awareness of all the ramifications of suffering, because it encompasses the very nature and essence of suffering. This includes knowledge of the subtle and the obvious aspects of suffering. The obvious aspect of suffering is immediate pain or difficulty in the moment. Subtle suffering is more difficult to understand, because it begins with happiness. But by its very nature this happiness must change because it can't go on forever. Because it must change into suffering, subtle suffering is the impermanence of pleasure.

For example, when Thrangu Rinpoche went to Bhutan with His Holiness *Karmapa*, he was invited to the palace of the king of Bhutan. When he arrived there, the palace was magnificent, the king's chambers were beautiful, there were many servants who showed complete respect and obedience. But he and Karmapa found that even though there was so much external beauty, the king himself was suffering a great deal mentally and had many difficulties. The king himself said that he was quite relieved that His Holiness had come and emphasized how much the visit meant to him because of the various difficulties with which he had been troubled. This is the subtle aspect of suffering.

We think that a particular situation will give us the most happiness we can ever imagine, but actually, within the situation, there is a tremendous amount of anguish. If we think of those who are really fortunate—those gods or human beings with a very rich and healthy life—it seems as though they have nothing but happiness. It is hard to understand that the very root, the very fiber of what is taking place is suffering, because the situation is subject to change.

What is happiness? By its very nature it can often mean that there will be suffering later on. There is no worldly happiness that lasts for a very long time. Worldly happiness includes an element of change, of built-in suffering. For that reason, the first noble truth of the awareness of suffering refers not just to immediate suffering, but also to the subtle elements of suffering. The Buddha taught the truth of suffering because everything that takes place on a worldly level is a form of suffering.

If we are suffering but are not aware of it, we will never have the motivation to eliminate this suffering and will continue to suffer. When we are aware of suffering, we are able to overcome it. With the more subtle forms of suffering, if we are happy and become aware that the happiness automatically includes the seed of suffering, then we



will be much less inclined to become involved in an attachment to this happiness. We will then think, “Oh, this seems to be happiness, but it has built-in suffering.” Then we will want to dissociate from it. The first truth is that one should be aware of suffering and once we have a very clear picture of the nature of suffering, we can really begin to avoid such suffering. Of course, everyone wants to avoid suffering and to emerge from suffering, but to accomplish this we need to be absolutely clear about its nature.

When we become aware that the nature of day-to-day existence is suffering, we don't have to be miserable with the thought that suffering will always be present. Suffering doesn't go on forever, because the Buddha entered the world, gave teachings, and demonstrated clearly what suffering is. He also taught the means by which suffering can be ended and described the state beyond suffering which is liberation. We do not have to endure suffering and can, in fact, be happy. Even though we cannot immediately emerge from suffering by practicing the Buddha's teachings, we can gradually eliminate suffering in this way, and move towards eventual liberation. This fact in itself can make us happy, even before we have actually completely emerged from suffering. Applying the Buddha's teachings, we can both be happy in the relative phase of our progress and then, at the end, we will gain wisdom and liberation and be happy in the ultimate sense, as well.

The first noble truth makes it clear that there is suffering. Once one knows what suffering is, one must eliminate that suffering. It is not a question of eliminating the suffering itself, but of eliminating the causes of suffering. Once one removes the causes of suffering, then automatically the effect, which is suffering, is no longer present. This is why, in order to eliminate this suffering, one becomes aware of the second noble truth, the truth of universal origination.

THE SECOND NOBLE TRUTH

The truth of universal origination is an English translation of the name Buddha himself gave to this noble truth. It means “that which is the cause or origin of absolutely everything.” The truth of universal origination indicates that the root cause of suffering is negative karma and the kleshas. Karma is a Sanskrit word which means “activity” and klesha in Sanskrit means “mental defilement” or “mental poison.” If one does not understand the Buddha's teachings, one would most likely attribute all happiness and suffering to some external cause. One might think that happiness and suffering come from the environment, or from the gods, and that everything that happens originates in some source outside of one's control. If one believes this, then it is extremely hard, if not impossible, to eliminate suffering and its causes. On the other hand, when one realizes



that the experience of suffering is a product of what one has done, that is, a result of one's karma, eliminating suffering becomes possible. Once one is aware of how suffering takes place, then one can begin to remove the causes of suffering. First, one must realize that what one experiences is not dependent on external forces, but on what one has done previously. This is the understanding of karma. Negative karma produces suffering and is driven by the defilements. The term "defilement" refers mainly to one's negative motivation and negative thoughts, which produce negative actions.

THE THIRD NOBLE TRUTH

The third noble truth is the cessation of suffering through which it is explained that the causes of karma and the defilements can be removed. We have control over suffering, because karma and the defilements take place within us—we create them, we experience them. For that reason we don't need to depend on anyone else to remove the cause of suffering. The truth of *interdependent origination* means that if we do unvirtuous actions, we are creating suffering. It also means if we abandon unvirtuous actions, we remove the possibility of experiencing suffering in the future. What we experience is entirely in our hands. Therefore, the Buddha has said that we should give up the causes of negative karma and the defilements. Virtuous actions result in the external state of happiness and unvirtuous actions result in suffering. This idea is not particularly easy to grasp, because one can't see the whole process take place from beginning to end.

There are three kinds of actions: mental, verbal, and physical. These are subdivided into virtuous and unvirtuous physical actions, virtuous and unvirtuous verbal actions, and virtuous and unvirtuous mental actions. If one abandons these three types of unvirtuous actions, then one's actions become automatically virtuous.

There are three unvirtuous physical actions: the harming of life, sexual misconduct, and stealing. The results of these three unvirtuous actions can be observed immediately. For example, when there is a virtuous relationship between a man and woman they care about each other, protect each other, and have a great deal of love and affection for each other, so they will be happy because they look after each other. Their wealth will usually increase, and if they have children, their love and care will bring mutual love in the family. In the ordinary sense, happiness develops out of this deep commitment and bond they have promised to keep. Whereas, when there is an absence of commitment, there is also little care or love, and sexual misconduct arises. This is not the ground out of which love arises, or upon which a nice home can be built in which children can develop happiness. One can readily see that from the lack of commitment to sexual fidelity, many kinds of difficulties will arise.



One can also see the immediate consequences of other unvirtuous physical actions. One can see that those who steal have difficulties and suffer; those who don't steal experience happiness and have a good state of mind. Likewise, those who kill create many problems and unhappiness for themselves, while those who protect life are happy.

The same applies to our speech although it is not so obvious. But on closer examination, we can also see how happiness develops out of virtuous speech and unhappiness from unvirtuous kinds of speech. At first lying may seem to be useful because we might think that one can deceive others through lies and gain some advantage. But *Sakya Pandita* said that this is not true. If we lie to our enemies or persons we don't get along with very well, because they do not like us they are not going to believe us anyway. It will be very hard to deceive them. If they are our friends, we might be able to deceive them at first by telling a lie. But after the first time, they won't trust us any more and may think that we have been a hypocrite. So we see that lying doesn't really work. Then if we look at the opposite, a person who takes pains to speak the truth will develop a reputation of being a truthful person who can be relied on. Out of this trust, many good things will emerge.

Once we have considered the consequences of lying, we can think of similar consequences relating to other kinds of damaging speech: slander and coarse, aggressive, and useless speech. Except for the immediate and the short-term consequences virtuous speech produces happiness and unvirtuous speech produces suffering.

When we say useless speech, we mean speech that is really useless, not just conversational. If we want someone to relax and feel comfortable it is all right to talk without the conversation having great meaning as long as our intentions are to benefit that person. However, if we just chatter for no reason, that is "useless speech." Worse than that is "chatter rooted in the defilements" when one is saying bad things about other people because of dislike or jealousy of them or when one sets people against each other. When one just gossips about the character of people, that is really useless speech. Besides being useless, this very often causes trouble, because it sets people against each other and causes bad feelings.

The same applies to "harmful speech." If there is really a loving and beneficial reason for scolding, for example, a child when he is doing something dangerous or not studying in school, that is not harmful speech because it is devoid of the defilements. Rather it is a skillful way of helping someone. If there is a genuine, beneficial attitude and love behind what one says, it is not harmful speech. But if speech is related to the defilements such as aggression or jealousy, then it is harmful speech and is something to give up.



We can go on to examine the various states of mind and see that a virtuous mind produces happiness and unvirtuous states of mind create unhappiness. For instance, strong aggression will cause us to lose our friends. Because of our aggressiveness, our enemies will become even worse enemies and the situation will become inflamed. If we are aggressive and hurt others and they have friends, then eventually those friends will also become our enemies. On the other hand, if we wish to benefit others, goodness will come out of it through the power of caring for our loved ones and then through wishing to help them develop goodness. Through this they will become close and helpful friends. Through the power of our love and care, our enemies and people we don't get along with will improve their behavior and those enemies may eventually become friends. If we have companions and wish to benefit others, we can end up with very good friends and all the benefits which that brings. In this way, we can see how cause and effect operate, how a virtuous mind brings about happiness and how a unvirtuous mind brings about suffering and problems.

There are two main aspects of karma: one related to experience and one related to conditioning. The experience of karma has already been discussed. Through unvirtuous physical actions, one will experience problems and unhappiness. Likewise, through unvirtuous speech such as lying, one experiences unhappiness and sorrow. Through unvirtuous states of mind, one also experiences unhappiness. This was demonstrated by the example of an aggressive attitude. All of this is related to the understanding that any unvirtuous activity produces unpleasantness or unhappiness.

The second aspect of karma relates to conditioning. By being unvirtuous with our body, speech, or mind we habituate ourselves to a certain style of behavior. Unvirtuous physical or verbal behaviors add to the habit of doing things. For example, each time we kill, we are conditioned to kill again. If we lie, that increases the habit of lying. An aggressive mind conditions our state of mind so we become more aggressive. In later lives, then, that conditioning will emerge so that we will be reborn with a great tendency to kill, to lie, to engage in sexual misconduct, and so on. These are two aspects to karma. One is the direct consequence of an act and the other is the conditioning that creates a tendency to engage in behavior of that kind. Through these two aspects, karma produces the happiness and the suffering in life.

Even though we may recognize that unvirtuous karma gives rise to suffering and virtuous karma gives rise to happiness, it is hard for us to give up unvirtuous actions and practice virtuous actions because the defilements exercise a powerful influence on us. We realize that suffering is caused by unvirtuous karma, but we can't give up the karma itself. We need to give up the defilements because they are the root of unvirtuous actions. To give up the defilements means to give up unvirtuous actions of body (such as killing,



stealing, and sexual misconduct), the unvirtuous actions of speech (such as lying, slander and harmful and useless speech), and the unvirtuous aspects of mind (such as aggressive, covetous, or ignorant mind). Just wanting to give up the defilements does not remove them. However, the Buddha in his great kindness and wisdom has given us a very skillful way to eliminate the very root of all the defilements through the examination of the belief in the existence of self or ego.

We cannot easily understand this belief in a self because it is very deep-rooted. First of all, we have to search for this self that we believe in, and through this search we can discover that the self does not exist. Then we will be able gradually to eliminate the belief in a self. When this is done, the defilements are also eliminated because with an elimination of the belief in self, unvirtuous karma is also eliminated.

This belief in a self is a mistaken perception. It's an illusion. For example, if one had a flower and were to interrogate one hundred people about it, they would all come to the same conclusion that it is indeed a flower. So one could be pretty sure that it is a flower. But, if one asked a person "Is this me?" he would say, "No, it's you." A second person would say, "It's you." One would end up with one hundred persons who say this as "you" and only oneself would consider it as "me." So statistically one's self is on very wobbly ground.

We also tend to think of "me" as one thing, as a unity. When we examine what we think of as ourselves, we find it is made up of many different components: the various parts of the body, the different organs, and the different elements. There are so many of them, yet we have this feeling of a single thing, which is "me." When we examine any of those components and try to find something that is the essence of self, the self cannot be found in any of these bits and pieces. By contemplating this and working through it very thoroughly, we begin to see how this "I" is really an incorrect perception.

Once we have eliminated this wrong way of thinking, the idea of an "I" becomes easy to get rid of. So, all of the desire rooted in thinking, "I must be made happy," can be eliminated as well as all the aversion rooted in the idea of "this difficulty must be eliminated." Through the elimination of the idea of "I," we can annihilate the defilements. Once the defilements are gone, then unvirtuous karma that is rooted in the defilements can go. Once the unvirtuous karma is gone, suffering will no longer take place. This is why Buddha says that the root of suffering needs to be abandoned.

To summarize, once we recognize what suffering really is, then we begin by removing its causes. We stop doing unvirtuous actions that create suffering. To stop these unvirtuous activities, we dig out their root, which are the defilements and the various unhealthy attitudes. To eradicate the defilements we need to remove their heart, which is the belief in a self. If we do that, then we will eventually come to realize the wisdom of



non-self. Through understanding the absence of a self, we no longer create the defilements and negative actions and this brings an end to that whole process. This outcome is certain, thus this is the third Noble Truth of Cessation.

The very essence and nature of cessation is peace. Sometimes people think of Buddhahood in terms of brilliant insights or something very fantastic. In fact, the peace one obtains from the cessation of everything unhealthy is the deepest happiness, bliss, and well being. Its very nature is lasting, in contrast to worldly happiness, which is exciting for a time, but then changes. In contrast, the ultimate liberation and omniscience of cessation is the most deeply moving peace. Within that peace all the powers of liberation and wisdom are developed. It is a very definitive release from both suffering and its result, and is a definitive release from the defilements, which are the cause of suffering. There are four main qualities of this truth of cessation. First, it is the cessation of suffering. Second, it is peace. Third, it is the deepest liberation and wisdom. Fourth, it is a very definitive release. Cessation is a product of practicing the path shown to us by the Most Perfect One, the Buddha. The actual nature of that path is the topic of the fourth noble truth, which is called the truth of the path, because it describes the path that leads to liberation.

THE FOURTH NOBLE TRUTH

The truth of the path is called “the truth of the path” because a path leads one to the ultimate goal. One does this step by step, stage by stage, progressively completing one’s journey. The main stages of Buddhism are called “the five paths” because by progressively traversing them, one eventually reaches one’s destination which is cessation. This path of the Buddha can be analyzed through its five main stages which are called the *five paths*. The names of the five paths are the stage of accumulation, the stage of junction, the stage of insight, the stage of cultivation, and the final stage of no more learning. Properly speaking, the first four of these are the path, with the fifth one being the effect.

The first path is called the “path of accumulation” because on this path we accumulate all the positive factors one to progress. We try to cultivate diligence, good qualities, and wisdom which penetrates more deeply into the meaning of things. We commit ourselves to accumulating all the positive aspects of practice. We gather the positive elements into our being while at the same time working on many different ways to remove all the unwanted elements from our life. We also apply various techniques to eliminate the blockages and obstacles that are holding us back. This is called the stage of



accumulation because we engage in this manifold activity and gather all of these new things into our life.

In ordinary life we are caught up in worldliness. Even though we don't want to be, we are still operating on a level of conditioned existence (Skt. *samsara*) because we are still under the influence of the defilements. They have a very strong habitual grip on our existence. We need to get rid of these defilements in order to find our way out of *samsara*. Of course, we want to find happiness and peace and we know it is possible. But even with the strongest will in the world, we cannot do it overnight. It is like trying to dye a large cloth, in that one needs to bring many different elements together to change the color.

So, first of all, in order to gain good qualities, we need to work on creating all the different conditions which will make those qualities emerge. To develop the various insights of meditation and real wisdom, we need to develop great faith and confidence in the validity and usefulness of that wisdom. Once we are convinced of its value, we need to change our habits so that we have the diligence to do all the things necessary to make insight and wisdom emerge. Therefore, there are many factors and conditions we must generate within our life that will bring about our happiness.

To remove all the unwholesome factors binding us in *samsara*, we must uproot belief in a self, eliminate the various defilements which are hindering us, and bring together the many different conditions that make this transformation and purification possible. We talk about accumulation because we are assembling all the different conditions for this transformation. We won't be able to progress in a significant manner until we have gathered all these causes and conditions in a proper and completely perfect way within ourselves. For that reason, the purpose of this stage of accumulation is to complete all the necessary conditions by gathering them into our existence.

Eventually, because of the complete gathering of favorable conditions, we will reach the third stage which is the "path of insight." This is the stage during which insight into the way things actually are is developed, beyond the veil of delusion. Linking the path of accumulation and the stage of insight is the second path of junction. Here our inner realization, the very way we can perceive things, begins to link up with the truth of the actual nature of phenomena, because we are gathering all the favorable circumstances that will eventually lead us to the actual insight itself. When we attain insight into the way things really are and this insight develops beyond the level of delusion and mistaken views, we realize that there is no self. Once there is no longer a belief in self, there are no longer any root defilements of attachment, aggression, or mental darkness associated with the idea of self. Once there are no longer any defilements, one does nothing unvirtuous and has no more suffering.



Now, it is true that once we have that insight, all suffering is immediately removed, but in another way, that is not true. This is because the delusion of self is a habit which has been built up for such a long time and is very, very hard to remove. For example, when we believe in the self and we hit our finger with a hammer, it hurts. Even when we have realized that an unchanging self is just a delusion fabricated by our minds, still when we hit our finger with a hammer it hurts. We still have the feeling, “I am suffering,” because there is an enduring built-up association of “I” with the flesh of our body. Removal of that long established conditioning of self is carried out through a long process of accustoming oneself to the truth of non-self. This is the fourth stage of the cultivation of insight.

The fourth stage is called the path of cultivation. The word *gom* is usually translated as “meditation” but actually means “to get used to something” or “to accustom oneself.”² This is why it is translated here as “the path of cultivation,” while other texts translate it as “the path of meditation.” But this stage is the idea of getting used to the insight into the nature of things. Through becoming more and more familiar with the truth of things,³ we can remove the very fine traces of defilements and subconscious conditioning that still exist. Through gradual working on these, the goal of Buddhahood will be attained.

Through the cultivation of insight, we eventually reach the goal of the fifth path that is called “the path of no more learning.” Through cultivation, we remove even the most subtle causes of suffering. Once this is completed we have reached the highest state and there are no more new paths to go along making this “the path of no more study” or “the path of no more learning.”

The Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche was born in Kham, Tibet, in 1933. At the age of five, he was recognized by His Holiness the Sixteenth Karmapa and Tai Situpa as the ninth incarnation of the great Thrangu tulku. He fled Chinese occupied Tibet in 1959. Thrangu Rinpoche recently completed a large monastery in Sarnath, India, named Vajra Vidya. It is now the seat for the annual Kagyu conference led by His Holiness the Seventeenth Karmapa. Website: <http://www.rinpoche.com>

² The word for meditation in Tibetan is *sgom* pronounced “gom” and the word for “getting used to” or “habituated” or “cultivating” is *goms* pronounced “khom.” One can see the words are very similar.

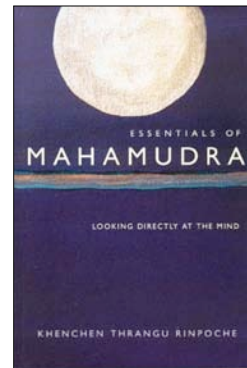
³ The deer park in which the Buddha gave his first sermon in which he explained the four noble truths is located in modern day Sarnath which is located four miles north of the city of Varanasi in India. The deer park actually comes from a story of the Buddha who was a Banyan deer in a previous life. Thrangu Rinpoche has built a monastery overlooking this park.



Thrangu Rinpoche In Print

The Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche is one of the few remaining living Tibetan Buddhist teachers who was born in a free Tibet. He continues tirelessly to travel the world and give teachings on diverse Buddhist topics. He is the leading living teacher in the Kagyu tradition and tutor to His Holiness the Seventeenth Karmapa. He has established his own retreat center in Crestone, Colorado. An increasing number of Thrangu Rinpoche's teachings and commentaries are being collected and presented in book format, allowing a larger audience may share in his wisdom.

Between 1990 and 1995, Thrangu Rinpoche conducted five retreats at Big Bear Lake, California where he taught on Mahamudra. These lectures have been edited by Clark Johnson into *Essentials of Mahamudra: Looking Directly At the Mind* (Wisdom Publications). During these talks, Thrangu Rinpoche presented a comprehensive introduction to the mahamudra path, an integral component of the Kagyu lineage. These teachings form a commentary on Tashi Namgyal's *Moonlight of Mahamudra*. The practice of mahamudra is considered a means of obtaining profound libratory realization. Similar to the practice of Dzogchen, mahramudra is a direct and powerful practice. There are two central meditative practices peaceful abiding, *shamatha*, and insight, *vipashyana*. This work discusses these two corollary meditative approaches in great detail, moving back and forth between the two. As always, Rinpoche's instructions are beautifully.



One of the better-known images of Buddha is the blue Medicine Buddha. Given that most people are suffering the type of illness that spiritual practice may assuage, the Medicine Buddha is a popular and powerful image. Despite this, there are not a great many books available in English that focus exclusively on the nature of this Buddha manifestation and the actual practice of working with this cosmic healer. *Medicine Buddha Teachings* (Snow Lion Publications), edited and introduced by Lama Tashi Namgyal, provides an impressively thorough presentation. The book collects Thrangu Rinpoche's teachings on the Medicine Buddha delivered during an eight day retreat at Cascade Mountain, Washington. Additionally, the work includes translations of 'The Medicine

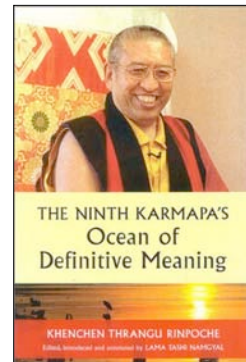


Buddha Sadhana,’ detailed commentary on the Medicine Buddha Sutra and associated practices, and ‘The Twelve Great Aspirations of the Medicine Buddha.’



This spring, Namu Buddha Publications released a new translation of the *Uttaratantra: A Treatise on Buddha-Nature* with commentary by Thrangu Rinpoche. The *Uttaratantra* is one of the five books of the Maitreya Buddha. This classic work presents a complete description of Buddha-nature and Buddha-essence at the heart of all beings. This edition includes all 404 verses in their entirety in Tibetan and English. Thrangu Rinpoche’s commentary on this text runs to almost 300 pages. The book also includes a glossary and index. The Twelfth Kenting Tai Situpa provides a forward. This impressive 488-page book is well worth the \$20.95 cover price. It would make an invaluable addition to any practitioner’s library.

Two books from Snow Lion reproduce Thrangu Rinpoche’s teachings and commentaries on the work of the Ninth Karmapa (1556-1603). The heart of mahamudra practice is the ability to look directly at the nature of the mind. Wangchuk Dorje, the Ninth Karmapa, is considered the master of this method. He wrote three great handbooks. In *The Ninth Karmapa’s Ocean of Definitive Meaning* Thrangu Rinpoche comments on one of these. *Ocean of Definitive Meaning* presents very direct instructions for the practice. The Karmapa’s original text has recently been translated and



published by Nitartha. This work presents Thrangu Rinpoche’s extensive, detailed and revealing commentary on the source work. Historically this instructional treatise has been limited to only advanced students. Now with the separately available translation and this commentary it is available to all Western students. The work is not necessarily suited for beginners, but the publication is an extremely important event in the movement of Tibetan Buddhism into the English-speaking world. *Pointing Out the Dharmakaya* (Snow Lion) is as a companion volume to *Ocean of Definitive Meaning*. This work, another by the Ninth Karmapa, presents a clear and detailed explication of vipasyana (‘insight’) meditation one of the key facets of the Great Seal (mahamudra).



Hair Grows on Wide Teeth

Zen Master Seung Sahn

Zen Master Jun Kang always posed the following kong-an to his students: “A long time ago, someone asked Zen Master Joju, ‘Why did Bodhidharma come to China?’ Joju replied, ‘Hair grows on wide teeth.’ If you attain this, you can see Bodhidharma’s true face. If you don’t understand this, you don’t know Joju or Bodhidharma.”

That’s a famous story. Jun Kang Zen Master always used this kong-an. This is a 270 degree style kong-an. We sometimes use a circle to explain Zen. The circle can be separated into 0 degrees, 90 degrees, 180 degrees, 270 degrees and 360 degrees. Each of these four points has a meaning. At 0 degrees people are attached to name and form. That means they are attached to their bodies, attached to I-my-me, attached to everything. If you are attached to something, then you will suffer because everything is always changing, changing, changing. So if I am attached to somebody, attached to my house, attached to money or attached to fame, then when these things change my attached mind will suffer. Oh.... I lose everything! So that’s 0 degrees.

90 degrees means form is emptiness, emptiness form. Mountain is water, water is mountain. Everything is always changing, changing. So Buddha teaches us that everything is impermanent. Around and around changing, changing, changing. But sometimes a Western mind thinks, “I am here and something is there. I think, therefore I am. I think so I am.” But, if you are not thinking, then what? Not there? So thinking makes I. This is thinking I. “I” means thinking I. If I’m not thinking, then what? Nothing I appears<nothing, no word. If you open your mouth, it’s already a mistake. Any action is also a big mistake. What’s “nothing I?” In a kong-an interview, maybe someone will ask you, “What is nothing I?” That’s a very important point. That’s 180 degrees.

Next is 270 degrees; we say “magic.” Magic means you can do anything. You can change, no problem. So any kind of thinking, no problem. That’s 270 degrees.

So today’s kong-an is a 270 degree kong-an. Hair grows on wide teeth. What are wide teeth? If you go to China or India, they have enshrined Buddha’s teeth. But when Buddha died they cremated him, so how can we have Buddha’s teeth? That’s not correct! That means a mistake. Actually, that’s Buddha’s magic teeth. We are Zen students, not so attached to name and form. Also, “hair grows on teeth” not possible! But possible, very possible.

That’s 270 degree style; it’s like a child’s mind or a cartoon, anything is possible. A child’s mind is very wide, not so attached to time and space. But when we grow up, time is very important<space too, is very important. Time and space start to control us;



that's adult style thinking. But originally, time and space do not control us. Who makes time and space? Our thinking makes time and space. If you cut off thinking, then there is no time and no space. So everything is impermanent. Everything's impermanent means time and space go by non-stop, always around, around, changing, changing. Non-stop means not existent. Not existent means: you can't catch it, OK? That's our thinking.

Take for example, "now." If you say "now," it has already passed. So you have no "now." The Diamond Sutra says, present mind cannot get enlightenment, past mind cannot get enlightenment, and future mind also cannot get enlightenment, right? That's what gave Dok Sahn Zen Master such a big problem. So past mind, present mind, future mind cannot get enlightenment. Original mind doesn't have present, past or future. Our thinking makes present, past and future. If you cut off thinking, then there's no time or space. We have just this moment. This moment means infinite time, infinite space <one point. If you get this one point, you get everything. If you get everything, then you can do anything. That's the point.

Why did Bodhidharma come to China? Joju said, "Hair grows on wide teeth." But when someone else asked Joju the same question he said, "The cypress tree in the garden." Why are the answers different? Joju, like any great Zen Master, gets many different kinds of students. Because of this there are different kinds of teaching. It's the same with taste <everybody has slightly different taste. Some like ko chi chang, some catsup; some like sweet and some like salty. That's our tongue; our tongues decide. Everyone is a little bit different. When thinking appears, then like and dislike appear. When like and dislike appear, action appears. So, if you cut off all thinking, then everything is no problem. But if you are attached to your thinking, then you are attached to like and dislike. I like this, I don't like that. Then you will have a problem. Then suffering will appear. Originally there is no suffering, but you make like and dislike so... suffering. Your thinking makes that. So, if you cut off your thinking, then any place, any time...no problem! Try that, put it all down. Only action is very important. Most people are only thinking, thinking, thinking, but Zen means not attached to name and form. Completely put it down, everything, then... Boom! One point appears. Then correct function appears. Correct function is a correct human being.

Zen Master Seung Sahn is a Korean Zen Master and the Founding Teacher of the Kwan Um Zen School. He is the 78th Patriarch in his line of Dharma Transmission in the Chogye order of Korean Buddhism. In 1972 he came to the United States and started what became the Providence Zen Center. His books include *Ten Gates*, *The Compass of Zen*, *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha*, *Only Don't Know* and *The Whole World is a Single Flower: 365 Kong-ans for Everyday Life*. <http://kwanumzen.com>



Shape of a Buddha

Dharma Discourse by John Daido Looi, Roshi

Master Dogen's 300 Koan Shobogenzo,¹ Case 172**Dongshan's "Three Pounds of Flax"****The Main Case**

Dongshan was asked by a monastic, "What is Buddha?"² Dongshan said, "Three pounds of flax."³ The monastic had a realization and bowed.⁴

The Commentary

This is an old case that's been echoing in the halls of Zen monasteries for centuries, and yet there have been only a handful of students who have been able to penetrate its meaning. People immediately rush to the words to understand, not realizing that words and speech are just vessels to convey the truth, not yet the truth itself. If



¹ *300 Koan Shobogenzo* is a collection of koans gathered by Master Dogen during his study in China. The koans from this collection, often called the *Chinese Shobogenzo*, appear extensively in the essays of Dogen's *Japanese Shobogenzo*. These koans have not been available in English translation but are currently being translated and prepared for publication by Kazuaki Tanahashi and Abbot John Daido Looi. Abbot Looi has added a commentary, capping verse, and footnotes to each koan.

² From amid the forest of brambles, a voice calls out.

³ Like a bell, when struck the sound immediately appears.

⁴ I wonder about this. What did he realize?



you take Dongshan's "three pounds of flax" to mean that this is, in and of itself, Buddha, then you have missed his intent by 100,000 miles. We should understand at the outset that "three pounds of flax" is not just a reply to the question about Buddha, and cannot be understood in terms of Buddha. This being the case, you tell me, "What is Buddha?"

The Capping Verse

*Seeing the gap opening up in the monastic's question,
The old master moved quickly to stuff it with flax.
Those who accept words are lost.
Those who linger in phrases are deluded.*

This case appears in The Gateless Gate and The Blue Cliff Record koan collections. On the surface, it seems like a very straightforward and simple koan. As a result, most of the commentaries on it are very superficial, not addressing its deeper levels. This koan is not about Buddha. It is not about the flax being Buddha. So what is it about?

Dongshan in this case is not the Dongshan who was the founder of the Soto school. This particular Dongshan was a disciple of Yunmen. We encounter him in The Gateless Gate in another koan, during his first meeting with Yunmen. Yunmen asked Dongshan, "Where did you come from?" Dongshan replied, "From Shado, Master." Yunmen continued, "Where did you spend the summer ago?" Dongshan said, "At Baoshi Temple in Hunen." Yunmen asked, "When did you leave there?" Dongshan said, "On the 25th day of the eighth month." And Yunmen said, "I spare you thirty blows of the staff," and walked away. The next morning, seeing Yunmen, Dongshan inquired about the previous day's conversation: "Yesterday you said that you would spare me thirty blows of the staff. I don't know what mistake I made." Yunmen yelled, "Rice-bag! Will you go on like this throughout Jinyang and Hyuneng?" At these words Dongshan experienced great enlightenment. He said, "From this time forward I forsake any abode. I will not store a grain of rice, nor plant even a stalk of vegetable. Receiving what comes from the ten directions, I'll use it to pull out nails and draw out wedges. Taking off the greasy hat and smelly shirt, I'll spread the teaching freely." This was his vow to use everything available to him to liberate people, abandoning worldly ideas and doctrines.

Dongshan began teaching on East Mountain. He addressed his monastics by saying, "Language doesn't help matters; speech doesn't bring forth the truth. Those burdened by language are lost; those held up by words are deluded. Do you understand? You patch-robed monastics should be clear about it. If you come here, you must start



using the dharma eye. It's just like what I've said, but I've erred about one thing. What error is there in the words I've spoken?"

Another time a monastic asked him, "What do the ancient holy ones do?" Dongshan replied, "Enter the mud; enter the water." The monastic inquired, "What is Buddha?" Dongshan said, "Three pounds of flax," the substance matter of this koan. When another monastic probed, "What is Buddha?" Dongshan responded, "The crystal clear truth." There are many answers to this basic question, a question that comes up frequently in Zen koans. When someone asked Yunmen, "What is Buddha?" he said, "A shitstick." Mazu said, "Mind is Buddha," and at another time, "No mind, no Buddha." Zhaozhou exclaimed, "It's the one in the shrine." Another teacher elaborated with, "Thirty-two auspicious marks." What does all of this mean? What is Buddha?

There are all kinds of definitions of Buddha. There are the three fundamental bodies of the Buddha: pure Dharmakaya Vairochana Buddha, complete Sambhogakaya Vairochana Buddha, and numerous Nirmanakaya Shakyamuni Buddhas — the absolute body, the body of bliss, and the body that appears in the world. But these are also the three bodies of all beings. "All buddhas throughout space and time" — the words we chant in our liturgical dedication — are beings who manifest great wisdom and compassion with the way they live their lives. They have numberless manifestations: Manjushri Bodhisattva, Samantabhadra Bodhisattva, Avolekiteshvara Bodhisattva. There's a Chinese sutra that lists hundreds of names of the Buddha. Buddha also means the great spirits, people who enlighten themselves through their own effort, and thousands of monastics and lay practitioners who follow the example of the historical Buddha. It's also the name for you and for me. All Buddhas includes the universe itself, which is teaching constantly. What is Buddha?

When the question "What is Buddha?" comes up, I don't think of all the words that are used to describe buddhas. I reflect on the deeds of buddhas. And these days, following the events of September 11th, there is much to reflect on. Myotai Sensei began doing pastoral counseling in New York City and she related a story about her first trip to Ground Zero with the family members of the people killed in the attack. She noticed that as soon as these grieving relatives reached the site, all the workmen stopped what they were doing and turned to face the families. They didn't do anything else, just silently faced the grief. You can just imagine the power of eye contact between these two groups of people. Isn't that the manifestation of a buddha?

Former President Clinton and Bob Dole, who ran for president and was defeated by Clinton, have teamed up. They've started a scholarship fundraising program to raise \$100,000,000 dollars for the surviving children of the victims. They figured that those kids would have had an opportunity to go to college and to give something back to the



world. Because their families lost a major breadwinner, they may not be able to do that. The scholarship fund is going to assure that these kids get the education they want. Another shape of a buddha.

I was also reading about the underground movement of Islamic women in Afghanistan who are resisting the Taliban by educating themselves and teaching other women, something that is currently prohibited by law. The penalty for doing this is to be beheaded. These women are willingly risking their lives just to be educated and to help educate others. Buddha once again.

When practitioners encounter great difficulties, when the very fiber of their lives and their lives' meaning are being challenged, when the world descends into turmoil and chaos, I frequently hear the question, "What am I doing here sitting zazen?" or "What does practice — bowing, chanting, care taking — have to do with the insanity of our lives?" How do the 84,000 subtle gestures, the details of how we study and practice each moment, relate to the big picture?

When we first became aware of the events of September 11th, within hours of the attack we gathered in the zendo as a sangha and the first thing that came to my mind was, "This is why we practice. This is the question of life and death." A number of people came away from that service thinking that I was talking about how practice can make us feel better, or allow us to work with our fear, anger and despair. I wasn't talking about that. I was emphasizing that this practice is about helping others in their fear, anger and despair. As we engage this path, we should always remember that giving and receiving are one. In giving and receiving two people are united, bonded, and in the healing of others we heal the self.

In 1986, a group of Monastery students came with me to Japan for my empowerment ceremony as the abbot. After the event we traveled around Japan, visiting temples and friends. One of the places we went to was a monastery in Kyoto, which is the seat of Japanese Tendai Buddhism. The monastery's abbot was over a hundred years old at the time. We arrived around seven o'clock in the morning and were ushered into a guest room. We were told that the abbot would see us in about an hour. Apparently, he'd been up since four o'clock doing zazen and a series of Tantric services that he still needed to complete. He showed up precisely at eight. He looked no older than sixty, vibrant and animated, warm and welcoming. My teacher, Maezumi Roshi, introduced all the people in our party. A number of them were professors with PhD's, so Roshi referred to them as doctors. The abbot must have construed that they were physicians because he proceeded to talk about healing, an important aspect of the Tantric teachings. And one of the points he kept reiterating was that when you're ill, don't worry about your illness; just



take care of others. When you heal others, you heal yourself. When you take care of the world, you take care of yourself.

This equation was beautifully exemplified in one story emerging from the heap of destruction in Manhattan. A group of firemen were in one of the towers, heading up, when they came upon an old woman who had an injured leg. She could not walk down and was stumbling, barely able to remain upright. They stopped her and, to help her get down, strapped her in a full-body support. It took six firemen to carry the woman. As they were heading down, the entire tower collapsed right on top of them. When the building started coming down they put her down and covered her with their bodies. She got hit with pieces of plaster and had a few abrasions, but miraculously they were all alive, stuck in a stairwell. They were there for about a day and a half. There was no way to make contact with people outside as their radio signals could not get past all the crumbled metal and concrete. Finally, one of them remembered that he had a cell-phone and after a hundred attempts he managed to get through to his wife in New Jersey. It took sometime for her to collect herself and take down the information she needed to initiate the rescue effort. The firemen knew precisely where they were in the building so they were able to guide the rescue workers to them. When they were located, they were all in good shape, precariously suspended in a pocket of space within the rubble, three stories off the ground. They had to balance their way out across I-beams, carrying the woman through a forest of jagged spikes of steel. They all got out safely.

When the reporters interviewed the firemen, the firemen went on and on about the woman, and how she saved their lives. They were convinced that if it wasn't for her, they would have been another fifteen or twenty stories higher where they wouldn't have survived the collapse, or if she hadn't slowed them down, they would have been down another floor and they would have been crushed. She was their guardian angel, they said. The woman went on and on about them, and about what they did and how selfless they were. As the stories unfolded, the margins between the giver and the receiver got blurred more and more. There were just people supporting each other. And there must be 100,000 stories like that in the city, of buddhas and bodhisattvas going about their work.

Being in New York City, Myotai Sensei and Jimon volunteered with the Red Cross to see how they could help. They completed all the necessary paperwork and went through a series of interviews. They were told that the only areas where the Red Cross needed assistance were data entry and kitchen work. So, wanting to help, they did data entry and served food in the Red Cross cafeterias. Then they found out that to do pastoral counseling, which they're qualified to do, they needed to go to another Red Cross site. They went there and were sent to yet another place. Red Cross clearly didn't realize that they were dealing with two Zen monastics fueled by incredible perseverance, weathered



by repeated rejections in dokusan, always coming back. Once through the door, Myotai and Jimon had to do the Red Cross course in pastoral counseling and then were sent into the trenches. This meant working with the family members who were receiving death certificates, and just being with them amidst the tumult of emotions or the tense absence of emotions.

Later on Myotai was asked to supervise trips to the Ground Zero site with the relatives of the victims who wanted to go there. After returning from the first tour, she said to me, “I never thought that all the hundred little things that we’ve been doing through all these years of practice that I have taken for granted would come into play in a place like this.” All of it was familiar territory, the matter of life and death she has been taking care of throughout her training. So, when you ask me, “Why practice? What has this got to do with my life? What do these ancient koans have to do with anything?” The answer is always right in the middle of all the twists of your life.

The important thing is to not intellectualize practice. Attaching to linear, sequential thinking kills our practice. Putting ourselves on the edge of what we think we can do and then going beyond that makes a buddha. Forget the definitions! The commentary to the koan says: If you take Dongshan’s “three pounds of flax” to mean that this is, in and of itself, Buddha, then you have missed his intent by 100,000 miles. If you think that “three pounds of flax” is just a reply to the question about Buddha, you have also missed it. It cannot be understood in terms of Buddha. Why is that? And if that’s the case, then what is Buddha? Why are there so many apparently different replies to this question? Are they different? What is the point of this koan? People immediately rush to the words to understand, not realizing that words and speech are just vessels to convey the truth, not yet the truth itself. The truth itself resides in our own bodies and minds. All the words, all of the devices, are just the vehicle for uncovering that which is already there. Some people conclude that because Dongshan was weighing out flax when the monastic asked him about Buddha; his activity was Buddha. Wrong. That, too, doesn’t reach it. And the reason people miss it is because they’re going to the words.

I’ve added footnotes to this koan. Dongshan was asked by a monk, “What is Buddha?” The footnote says, “From amid the forest of brambles, a voice calls out.” If someone poses a question like that, they’re asking for help. There’s something stirring inside them; they need to know. Dongshan said, “Three pounds of flax.” Footnote to that says, “Like a bell, when struck the sound immediately appears.” There’s no delay. Strike; sound. Ask; answer. The monastic had a realization and bowed. The footnote to that says, “I wonder about this. What did he realize?”

From the outset, we should understand that “three pounds of flax” is not just a reply to the question about buddhas. What is Dongshan responding to, answering this



way? What is he addressing? He's answering all of those questions that people keep bringing up about practice: "Where am I going? What is the goal? What do I get?" Isn't that how we approach our undertakings? How much does it cost? How much do I get? Can you imagine doing this practice simply because of being called to it, without intent? And to be able to practice that calling with great excitement and great energy?

People think that the rigor and encouragement in Zen training are designed to drive people deeper into their realization. We need to be careful though not to make our zazen goal oriented. To practice as if putting out a fire on top of your head is one way of practicing, still goal oriented. It's people who practice just for the sake of practice that touch my heart. It's the ones who wash the dishes just to wash the dishes, not to have clean dishes, that touch my heart. It's the artists that create art just for the sake of creation, not to sell paintings or impress anybody or to get rich. There's no goal; there's no reward; there's no place to go. The dharma journey is always right where you are. Ten years from now, it will be right where you are. One hundred years from now, right where you are. The sooner we acknowledge that fact, the sooner we realize it, the sooner we are able to be where we are, rather than ten miles ahead.

In "What is Buddha?" is a bit of "Is this it? Am I enlightened?" — the cry from the forest of brambles. Coming into practice with that kind of a goal is in and of itself spreading out your zabuton and zafu in the midst of confusion and complications. Dongshan's answer was going well beyond all the definitions, words and ideas that describe buddhas. It was even going beyond the deeds that define buddhas.

The Capping Verse:

Seeing the gap opening up in the monastic's question,
The old master moved quickly to stuff it with flax.
Those who accept words are lost.
Those who linger in phrases are deluded.

The instant you start asking the kind of question the monastic brought up, you reveal the gap. Gap means separation; gap means this and that: life and death, good and bad, enlightenment and delusion, me and Buddha. When there's a gap you become a person of this and that, and from that perspective it's very difficult to heal yourself or others. Dongshan knew that and he tried to stuff the gap with the "three pounds of flax."

Those who accept words are lost. Those who linger in phrases are deluded. This is pointing to practice itself. Practice is the immediate physical experience that's beyond definitions. We can discuss zazen and what it is; we give zazen instruction. We explain



samadhi and enlightenment. We talk about buddhas. But all that pales compared to what is happening on your cushion. Nobody knows what's going on in your head — if you are practicing the edge or indulging another self-serving scenario. You are the only one who has access to your body and mind. What is your real intention? Is it self-centered or selfless? So please don't ask me, "What good is practice? What does it have to do with my life? Why am I here? What do these koans have to do with my life?" Let go of the goal. You don't need a goal to practice. The Way reaches everywhere. When you've let go of all goals, you're on the Way, and it reaches everywhere. Do you understand?

During these difficult days when you are pressed against your limits — physically, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually — keep your practice strong. Trust yourself. Trust the process. Let go of the goals, and no question about it, sooner or later, you will manifest the life of a Buddha in everything you do. Nobody can do it for us. Each one of us has to do it for ourselves. Make it a vow: not to regress, not to ignore, not to forget. Use the energy of your practice to not only go deeply into yourselves and touch the ground of being, but also to bring that clarity out into the world and to touch the lives of others.

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The Busboy at Busters

Trebor Healey

Everything about him is long
The indian nose,
the long sling of his chin
cradling the infant soul
He's got spider legs
and monkey's arms
and something constant
and stable as stone
in his eyes
of long ago
brown
Long are his lips
twin bridges
cataracts of teeth
the living river inside him
I'm all wet with it

To be with him
would be to be in mountains
a long way away
To travel the river
bending and turning
back
through the steeping stones
where everything changes
to waterfalls
and great swaths
of dizzying flashing brightness
of snow
to the precipitation of him:
Great tears,
beyond emotional correlations



a rain of sparks
from those same eyes
Are they brown and stone
of planets?
Is he the whole universe after all?
I am inside him then
forever
and he in me
Some young man
I've never touched
but seen
and seen beyond
and long back behind
all these pictures
kaleidoscoping this coffee,
this red brick shop, these cars, sycamore trees, voices,
suns and moons in infinitude, mirrors facing mirrors and the long roads born of them

And so to sleep naked in his arms
would be as if to gather all the light of the sun
spread all over and bouncing about
It would be to record the memories
of all the stars
That's how improbable
the consummation of this love
How comic
when I've found—
traveling as I've done
the towering pine-treed forests within him
the length of their shadows
echoing his eyelashes
and the ever-changing horizon
mimicked by his mouth—
that we are one inside the other
forever
and inseparable
as the brown is within his eyes



as water and stone
 The universe is love made
 and making
 so why do I lust for him
 as if we don't share that already?
 There is no need for introductions then
 I set him free
 for we are in love regardless
 of what we may either believe
 and all my longing draws
 a big circle
 like a comet orbiting
 I'd love to see him again sometime too
 in a hundred years or a million
 or tomorrow even
 For now,
 I sing—
 for him and for me
 and for all who see what I see
 —this song

Trebor Healey is a gifted poet. He recently received The Ferro-Grumley Award for Fiction for his novel *Through It Came Bright Colors*. In addition to being a regular contributor to Ashé, his work has appeared in *Velvet Mafia*, *Blithe House Review*, *Lodestar Quarterly* and numerous anthologies including *Queer Dharma*, *Law of Desire*, *Best Gay Erotica 2004*, *Bend Don't Shatter* among others.
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No Dharma

Zen Master Dae Kwang

In China during the Seventh Century, Zen Buddhism was divided into two schools. The sudden school of the south gathered around the Sixth Patriarch Hui Neng at T'sao Ch'i mountain just north of Canton. The gradual school of the north followed the monk Shen Hsiu. As the fame of the Sixth Patriarch spread, Shen Hsiu became concerned and decided to send one of his disciples as a spy to the south.

Upon entering Hui Neng's assembly, the spy-monk asked, "What kind of Dharma do you teach here?"

The Patriarch replied, "If I said I had a Dharma to give people that would be a lie. I only untie the bonds of each according to their needs so that their original nature can appear."

Zen is unique in that it promotes no teaching and no techniques. When you go to a Zen center you never have to take an oath, study a catechism or recite a creed. Rather you are always told to find out what you really are--to find your true self. Zen Master Seung Sahn many times says, "I only teach 'don't know'." If you keep a don't know mind already your true nature has appeared. This is the teaching of the sudden school, Hui Neng's lineage.

The Third Patriarch Seng Tsang said, "The great way is not difficult, simply cut off all thought of good and bad." The Sixth Patriarch taught that one "...who treads the path in earnest sees not the mistakes of the world. If we find fault with others we too are in the wrong. Restlessly we will pass our days and in the end we will be disappointed." Our school, too, says, "Don't check!" Cutting off your checking mind reveals your true self. Strong medicine.



Zen Master Ko Bong composed a poem:

If you want to understand,
You don't understand.
If you attain don't-know,
That is your true nature.

If you attain don't know, that is your true nature. What does that mean?

Zen Master Dae Kwang is the abbot of the Kwan Um School of Zen. He is the guiding teacher of Providence Zen Center in Cumberland, Rhode Island, the head temple of our international School. He is also the teacher for Zen centers in Wisconsin, Delaware, Alaska and British Columbia,. Zen Master Dae Kwang travels widely, leading retreats throughout North America, Europe, and Asia. <http://kwanumzen.com>





Courtesy Snow Lion Publications

Ogyan Trinley Dorje the 17th Gyalwa Karmapa



A New Arising of My Homeland, the Snow Land of Tibet

Ogyan Trinley Dorje the 17th Gyalwa Karamapa

Amid a healing grove of refreshing sala trees,
We discuss this time of the year two thousand.
From the lakeshore, the melting white moon of merit is seen;
Its rays illuminating like the body of the Buddha with all its signs.

Bodhichitta is a band of lamplight in the dusky horizon
Bringing joy to the weary mind.
Freedom from harm, like the fragrance of perfect joy,
Permeates the wide reach of this world.

White flowers of snow lightly fall like honeyed rain,
The glory of the mind comes softly to the ear.
The young, flawless sun is a good friend of the opening lotus;
The joyful amrita of benefiting others brings delight.

With a resonant song of long life, the drums of summer thunder fill the world,
Arousing the play of myriad songs and dances of great bliss.
Flowers from a golden age fill the celestial path of the sky...
Fill the celestial path of the sky.

Reprinted from *Music In the Sky: The Life, Art & Teachings of the 17th Karamapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje*, by Michele Martin (Snow Lion Publications, 2003). See review later in this issue.



Nirvana To Rasananda: 'From Zero To Ecstasy'

Q&A with Swami B.V. Tripurari.

“Buddhism leads us from negative numbers to the peace of zero, while bhakti leads to the ecstasy of positive numbers. Try to understand the gift of Sri Caitanya. Buddha is one of his avatars.”

Q. Since the Absolute is unlimited and has seen fit to provide us with numerous paths by which to realize our true natures, how is it possible to say that this way - or any way - is best or better than others?

A. One should feel that his or her path is best, at least for oneself personally. However, objectively speaking, one path may also offer more than another, even while each leads to enlightenment. For example, within Vaisnavism itself, one path leads to the plane of reverential love of God and another to intimate love of God (in which all that is involved in reverential love, and more, is experienced). While Buddhism leads us from the negative numbers of karmic implication to the peace of zero (prakṛti nirvana), bhakti leads to the ecstasy of positive numbers in transcendental life (rasananda).

There may be aspects of Buddhism that are emphasized, ones that appeal to you, such as sitting, introspection, and stilling the mind, that are often not emphasized as much in the present day bhakti lineages. However, under scrutiny, one will find that such practices are also important in the culture of bhakti. Try to understand the gift of Sri Caitanya. Buddha is one of his avatars.

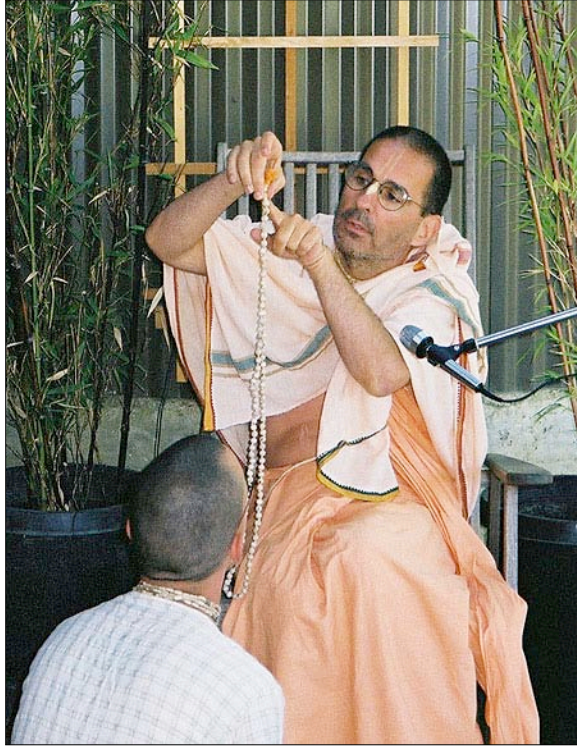


Photo by Rama Keshava Das



Q. Is the Gaudiya Vaisnava tradition anti-Buddhist?

A. Some opposition has developed over the centuries owing to the fact that traditionally Buddhism has denied the existence of God, the eternality of the soul, and the revelatory nature of the Upanisads, all of which are embraced by Gaudiya Vaisnavism. Differences have also arisen due to members of both traditions being unclear about each others doctrines, particularly in the past, when communication and information was not as readily available as it is today. Relations could improve.

Q. There is a contemporary Buddhist saying: ‘Any attempt to change is a form of aggression on the self.’ Yet, regarding spiritual life in general, I have heard you say, ‘It’s all about change.’

A. I don’t think these two statements conflict with one another as it may appear at first. Although I am not sure what the Buddhist means by the ‘self,’ Vedanta teaches that the self is changeless. As the world of seasons changes around us, we remain the same. However, in order to realize this we will have to change the way we think about life. The idea is that we are viewing the world incorrectly. It is perfect, as are we, yet we cannot see that. If we try to change the world without changing our angle of vision, we will never know perfection. I think this is what the Buddhist saying means.

Vedanta teaches that attempts to change the world that fall short of changing how we view it, enabling us to realize our changeless status, constitute acts of aggression on the self. Spiritual life is about change - changing the way we look at things. If we learn to look at the world through the eyes of the Bhagavad-gita, our lives will change radically for the better. We will know the eternal nature of the changeless self. As the Gita teaches, ‘Physician cure thyself.’

Q. Before realizing the form of Krsna, does a devotee first go through the brahmajyoti?

A. Self realization is contained within God realization. The former precedes the latter. Within the culture of loving Krsna, one attains self realization and then pure love of God. This is discussed in Caitanya Caritamrita:

*upajiya bade lata ‘brahmanda’ bhedi’ yaya
‘viraja’ ‘brahma-loka’ bhedi’ ‘para-vyoma paya
tabe yaya tad-upari ‘goloka-vrndavana’
‘krsna-carana’-kalpa-vrkse kare arohana*



“The creeper of devotion is born and grows to pierce the universe. It then crosses the Viraja and realizes Brahman. From there it goes to Vaikuntha. Then it grows to reach Goloka Vrindavan, at last reaching the embrace of the wish fulfilling tree of Krsna’s lotus feet.”

Bhagavad-gita also says that after attaining Brahman (brahma-bhutat), one attains bhakti proper (mad bhaktim labhate param). Only a spark of fire can enter the fire and flourish. Similarly only a liberated soul can enter the liberated lila of God.

Q. Where does love start?

A. Love starts with you. You should think like this. Start loving God and all souls in relation to God and you will realize the eternal, beginningless nature of love.

Q. How do you find your spiritual master?

A. Sincerity, proper association, and scriptural study will aid us in this, and the search is not one sided. Sri guru also searches for us. Approach those who are serving in this capacity and hear from them, asking relevant questions. When your heart is captured by a particular saint’s example and instruction, capture him by affectionately insisting that he accept you as a disciple.

Q. What is false renunciation and what is genuine renunciation?

A. The purification leading to renunciation that involves selfless action amounts to indirect spiritual culture culminating in the resolve for spiritual life. One who does not undergo this purification, yet attempts to renounce the world for a life of contemplation, is involved in false renunciation. Genuine renunciation is possible after one’s heart is sufficiently free from the influences of the ignorance that leads one to believe that sense indulgence brings happiness (tamo guna), and the passion involving the pursuit of material advancement (raja guna).

Renunciation is a status from which one can directly culture internal spiritual life. Selfless action is the subject of the third chapter of Bhagavad-gita, whereas renunciation of the action leading to purification is discussed in chapter five. In between the two one



experiences the ingress of knowledge (sattva guna), which is discussed in chapter four of the Gita. All of this has its application in devotional life.

Before inner awakenment of self knowledge occurs, the devotee should either offer the fruits of his or her work to Krsna, or if possible, do only Krsna's work (plant tulasi, deity worship, etc.). As purification develops, one can successfully engage in concentrating the mind on Krsna for long periods of time and enter a renounced life of reflection and meditation.

It is also false renunciation to renounce that which is favorable for Krsna's service, genuine renunciation involves renouncing that which is unfavorable to the culture of devotional life. One who can renounce everything unfavorable to devotional culture has true standing in a life involving the utilization of so-called worldly things in Krsna's service.

Q. Why is Krsna blue?

A. Krsna's complexion is not exactly blue. It is the color 'syama' (bluish black), which according to Indian aesthetic theory is the color of conjugal love. Krsna is the God of love and conjugal love in particular. Thus he is the presiding deity of this color as well. According to Rupa Goswami's Bhaktirasamrita-sindhu, each of the twelve rasas are represented by corresponding colors.

Q. Does the soul have a color?

A. Souls are colored by dint of their association, just as a crystal when placed next to red rose turns red. When we associate with great souls who love Krsna in a particular way, generally the color of their soul colors our soul. For example, a soul colored by friendly love of Krsna is reddish brown (aruna), like the sun peaking above the eastern horizon in West Bengal at dawn. Whereas the color of conjugal love is bluish black (syama), like a dark blue sapphire. Each liberated soul in Krsna lila has a particular bodily complexion, attire, service, residence, name, group leader, etc.

Q. I read where you are developing a rural community. What is that and how is it going?

A. I am pleased to report that things are going well at Audarya, our beautiful hermitage in the redwood hills of Northern California. We have completed a long marathon to finish the first phase of construction, and now have heat and electricity to all of our dwellings. We are using propane heaters in each yurt which we installed just as the season changed



from summer to fall with temperatures dropping considerably at night. It is absolutely beautiful here this time of year.

This morning I woke to a Kartika harvest-moon-lit pre-dawn morning and bathed in cold well water from our shower in a cluster of redwoods on the top of the ridge. The bright moonlight was more than sufficient to see by, and dim enough to afford privacy while the other monks waited nearby for their morning ablutions. Before bathing I was able to write for two hours answering long overdue questions from the Sanga.

The season here continues to change with occasional rain. Grass is sprouting here and there without our planting any seeds. It reminds me of the sadhakas who have cultured devotion in their previous life, and in conjunction with the rain of Sri Guru's mercy are sprouting and growing, and nothing will stop them. I also threw a lot of new grass seeds on the terraces. They are struggling to survive, praying for rain, just as most sadhakas must struggle with the mental field and pray for the rain of Sri Guru's mercy, a drop of which makes all of their effort worth while.

We have harvested a good portion of the terraced gardens. By the end of this month it should be finished producing and we will prepare a new one with winter crops. The summer harvest was big success. We have not had to buy any vegetables for the last three months, and were able to experience the purport of Krsna's words in Bhagavad-gita, 'patram puspam phalam toyam yo me bhaktya prayacchati', "If anyone offers me with devotion and purity a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or water, I accept that offering of devotion."

We expect to proceed with the construction of the bath house next week. This is important not only for the residents, but for facilitating guests as well. Many people have written requesting to visit. I have not felt entirely comfortable hosting guests with such simple facilities. Once the bath house is finished, I would like to open the doors for weekend visits from all of our friends.

Swami B.V. Tripurari has spent over 30 years as a Hindu monastic. Awarded the sannyasa order in 1975, Swami Tripurari has studied under several spiritual masters in the Gaudiya lineage, notably AC Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada and Bhakti Raksaka Sridhara Maharaja. Noted as the 'Thomas Merton of the modern bhakti tradition,' Swami Tripurari has authored a number of ground-breaking works.

Website: <http://www.swami.org>



Faith Is Our Real Wealth

Shrila B.R. Sridhar Maharaj

Why does our consciousness come down and cannot have a higher conception of higher spiritual existence, but our attention is drawn to some material thing? We think some medicine, or some intoxication can help us. When I cannot raise my consciousness to the fine and higher conscious substance, then we come to seek help in the material world. “These substances will help me.” It is suicidal.

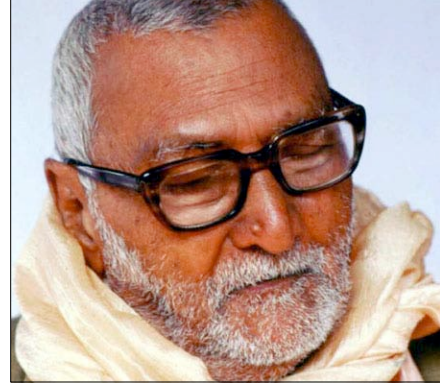
We cannot manage to have a connection directly with the higher conscious substance then we come to seek some means in the lower. “With the help of that I will make advancement towards the finer consciousness. The matter will help me to understand, to acquire consciousness.” We are thus faithless in the agents of that Absolute Truth, the Vaisnavas. It is due to vaishnava-aparadha, losing faith in the conscious agents of the Supreme, that we go to the material substance, “Help me!” I lose faith in the spiritual agency and the long and the short is this – we seek shelter in a material thing and we lose our faith in the higher agency. We can’t see their Grace.

So, that is the underlying position of an intoxication monger. No faith in the higher agent, that which is spiritual which is soul in character, but more aspiration to get help from the lower substance.

The scientific conception is also like that, degrading. Degrading, losing faith in the spiritual efficacy, their grace or their position, we come below standard. No faith. We cannot put faith in the devotee, the scripture, or the acharya. Disappointed we go to seek help from some atom of matter, “That will give me everything.”

*abhyarthitas tada tasmai stanani kalaye dadau
dhyutam panam striyah suna yatradharmas catur vidhah
punas ca yacamanaya jata-rupam adat prabhuh
tato 'nrtam madam kamam rajo vairam ca pancamam*

Charm for the material world, dhyutam to get money very cheaply, not in the ordinary constitutional way, but by a cheating process, this is dhyutam. Panam is also like



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that intoxication. That is earned by black marketing, panam. The energy I can collect in an ordinary sense, I am not satisfied with that but in some black way I want to amass some energy by panam. This is the meaning of Panam. I want to get energy by unfair means. Striyah, that is raso vai sah. He is the center of all ecstasy, but we go to collect that experience of ecstasy in a very cheap way from material things. Suna is also a cheap way to develop the body. The flesh, mamsa, can be more easily utilized for the flesh in me that other vegetables.

So it is all very easy, not in a regular and proper way to preserve oneself, but in a cheapway, by cheating, we want to aggrandize ourselves.

Gold is such a substance that if one can get control over gold, he can have control over all material prosperity, the dollar, the pound, the rupee, rice, everything. If I can possess gold, I can easily get everything. This is cheating. With a small thing like gold, jata-rupam I can control the entire food chain. I can control all the necessities of the human beings. Cheap marketing, not a regular life, but in a cheating process. By these five cheating processes we can become great, so they must be given up. We must be plain, simple and truthful and live here as a bonafide and sincere member, where we are. You are put in the jail don't try any other black things to help yourself, but sincerely give your labour as it is ruled and you will be free very soon.

When you are a criminal be a good criminal then you will be able to acquire freedom. Already you are a criminal and in the prison you are cheating others. So, lead a simple life. Do not incur any further debt, but try to pay the debt you have already incurred. With this process you will be free very soon. Not by any artificial process, but if you adopt a sincere and simple process not by diplomacy or any other thing. Simply, "I am the greatest criminal. Oh my Lord, please forgive me. Take me out. Please be gracious over me." This is the way to adopt, not any artificial means.

It is only our love for artificial things that has brought us here. In the highest ideal there is no place for diplomacy, cheating or any of these things. This is the fashion of this mayic world of misconception. To acquire anything too easily means to deceive others, but you cannot deceive God. Simply go to Him and pray that, "I am a culprit. I am so and so. Forgive me and accept me." This is a plain, simple way. Your knowledge also cannot help you, it is jnana-sunya-bhakti, pure surrender, wholesale surrender. Don't use any reason there. Don't go to plead for your own cause. Complete surrender. Don't plead in favour of yourself, rather if you have to plead, plead to the Lord that you are the most heinous. That will be more effective. This is the way.

Love Divine. It is against the conception of the ontology of love that a particular material atom may give love, prema, heart's feelings. The heart can be purchased by a chemical, by using medicine I can get God?" Use this medicine and God will come to



please and serve you. I am super-super God and I am giving this medicine.” Never! The simple way is ‘love for love.’ Give yourself and you will get Him. It is simple and pure. Surrender to the High and the High will come down to welcome you.

*sarva-dharman parityaja mam ekam saranam vraja
aham tvam sarva papebhyo moksaisyami ma suca*

How comprehensive, reasonable and natural this is. “Give up everything, all engagements, and come to Me freely. I am ready to accept you anytime, at any moment. Accept that all obligation to any other thing is stopped and come to Me. I shall welcome and embrace you. All obligations are stopped. Whatsoever obligations you incur or think to possess in this world are discontinued. Only My obligation remains. Your obligation to Me is absolute and these others are all relative and temporary. They are artificial and concocted. Your obligation to Me is wholesale, pure and clear. Try to realize that.”

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Shrila B.R. Sridhar Maharaj is the Founder Acharya of the Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math in Nabadwip, West Bengal, India. He was born in 1895. He received sannyas initiation in 1930 from his guru Shrila Bhakti Siddhanta Saraswati Goswami Prabhupad. He composed commentaries and devotional prayers eloquently in Sankrit, Bengali and English. He passed from the Earth in 1988.



The Private Life of Divinity

Gopakumar das

I believe Divinity has a private life of its own. This private life operates at very high levels of intimacy and exchanges of love. The intensity of these exchanges of love show it to be Divinity's most authentic self in the same way our own private lives, with the exchanges of love they facilitate, represent our most authentic self. If this were so, then the highest possibility of reciprocation of love would be found in this private life of Divinity. Love reaches its apex when directed towards individuals in which it can be completely assimilated, experienced and reciprocated. In Divinity all forms of love can find full expression and full satisfaction. Divinity is unlimited and unrestricted. Since love requires both a lover and a beloved we must assume that in exchanges of love with Divinity both must exist. The implication here being that if I can love Divinity and Divinity can love me, then Divinity must be a person. If Divinity is a person, or persons, then how would this person appear?



Popular academic opinion states that humanity projects self-images onto Divinity. This is how academia attempts to explain anthropomorphic images of Divinity often behaving similarly to human beings. An alternate opinion states the possibility that humanity is modeled after chosen expressions of Divinity. This would mean that this human form and our human identity could be a form of Divine self-expression. This belief is not uncommon. We find it in the Bible as well as many other spiritual traditions. In the Bible the famous albeit underdeveloped idea is that 'man was created in the image of God.' It is just as possible that rather than humanity asserting itself onto Divinity; Divinity is expressing itself in us. If this is so, then we can also speculate that the structures of our interpersonal relationships may be a reflection of relationships expressed in the life of Divinity. This may afford us some insight into the identities of Divinity as reflected in human identities.

Any given individual has many identities with which they operate in their lives. These identities are not completely distinct and separate selves. They often interact with

PH

one another and are understood as different facets of the same unified self. However, there are also clear boundaries between certain identities. Two prominent self-expressions exist in the human identity of the *Professional* and the human identity of the *Intimate*. Almost every person can relate to the differences between their personality when functioning in a professional context and their personality at home. The way we interact with people in a professional context may also be different from the way we interact with people in our private lives. If something of Divinity can be seen in our experiences and relationships then we can assume that in our identities there may also be some correlation. With this insight we may be able to distinguish between the *Professional* identity of Divinity and the *Intimate* identity of Divinity; the public life and private life of God.

In our own lives we find that the *Professional* identity is performing the duties of the world for which he is the best suited. He organizes things, creates things, completes projects and supervises people. This requires strict boundaries between the people with whom he works and himself. There are many rules that govern the workplace and a breach in these rules can create a lapse in the functioning of the *Professional*. A professional does not talk about the same kinds of things in a professional setting as he would with people at home. He must punch in, punch out, follow guidelines, establish procedures and conduct structured meetings. The exchanges of love involved in the life of the *Professional* are of a neutral quality and are often characterized as exchanges between supervisor and subordinate. At best they can be exchanges of friendship in a more sober mood of mutual respect. They can border on affectionate exchanges, but it is well known in the professional world that these affectionate exchanges have rules and boundaries. There is even terminology to define their transgression. Words like ‘inappropriate,’ ‘harassment’ and ‘unprofessional’ are symptoms of these rules and boundaries. The relationships of the *Professional* rarely mix with the relationships of the *Intimate*. If ever they do mix, there are new rules that will govern these relationships. Those interactions will sometimes feel forced and uncomfortable, as they tend to feel at company picnics and other professional social gatherings.

In the identity of the *Intimate* the exchanges are based on affection. In other words, these exchanges are based on a reciprocation of friendly love. The nature of such affectionate exchanges is that they are comfortable and loving. The object of one’s affection is accessible and reciprocal. The relationship develops a natural identity of its own. This identity manifests as a friendship, a caretaker (such as parent or other guardian) or a romantic lover. Although there are guidelines for the functioning of these relationships too, it is apparent that they are not bound by these guidelines. If a friend says something unkind or behaves cruelly it is generally understood that this



transgression will be forgiven out of love. If the romantic lover is taken for granted and becomes upset it only requires a smile and an embrace to return things to their natural state. The *Intimate* self is comfortable in these exchanges. They have developed naturally and they involve an intimacy that is not motivated by duty but rather by love. These relationships of the *Intimate* are spontaneous. Like all relationships based on love they are not bound by reason. They have a reason of their own. There is an inherent knowledge in such loving exchanges. As if saying, “in love one knows what to do”.

I have known many people who find more value in their identity as the *Professional*. Their sense of self is more closely related to what role they play in the functioning of the world. They also find great comfort in their relationships as the *Professional*. The boundaries and sober exchanges of emotion are what best suits them. Most people however, place more value on the comfortable and affectionate exchanges of the *Intimate* than on the respectful, duty-bound exchanges of the *Professional*. So when interacting with their close friends in a professional setting they may find themselves uncomfortable and preoccupied with rules and boundaries for which they are not inclined to conform. For this reason they become less interested in the professional life of their friend. They will recognize that professional facet of their friend’s life as important and authentic but will have no interest in entering there. They do not wish to develop their relationship based on duties, boundaries and rules. They wish to have exchanges that will facilitate intimacy and exchanges that are affection bound.

It is my proposition that Divinity also operates through different identities. These identities are necessary in order to facilitate as many exchanges of love as possible with humanity. It is these Divine expressions of identity that define the way our relationship with Divinity will naturally develop. They are all valuable and authentic Divine expressions; whether they be *Professional* or *Intimate* in appearance. Divinity, understood as absolute and unlimited, will be able to express itself in these variegated and natural ways. In any expression of identity Divinity will inherently possess the other identities as well. Their presence however may not be so overt. Therefore, one might wonder, “In the life of Divinity, who lives the life of the *Professional* and who lives the life of the *Intimate*?” There may be many answers to this question depending on which worldview we are approaching from. From the Christian worldview we can say that the God of Abraham is the *Professional* who functions as creator and for whom exchanges of love are bound by rules and boundaries. From this worldview the Divine life of the *Intimate* would then be expressed through the person Jesus Christ who entered into the life of the people, taking a tangible form in order to facilitate intimate exchanges. This is no doubt true from this perspective. Other examples of these identities can be found in different theistic traditions and cultures.



From the Vaisnava Hindu perspective one can say that the *Professional* identity of Divinity is expressed through the person Visnu-Narayana. His exchanges are characterized by the qualities described in the life of the *Professional*. He performs the same Universal functions as the God of Abraham does in the Bible. He is the God of the Cosmos and presides over it. Relationships with him are bound by rules and boundaries. They develop between the superior and the subordinate. He is God being God. There are many people who are undoubtedly motivated to serve and worship Divinity in its manifestation as the *Professional*. His overt Godliness, awe-inspiring and powerful as it is, is naturally attractive.

For a smaller portion of people in the world this has proven undesirable. They tend towards a different exchange of love with Divinity. For these individuals there is pastoral Krishna. Krishna, who is often viewed as an expression of Visnu-Narayana, can also be seen as the source of Visnu-Narayana. This pastoral Krishna is characterized by his diverse expressions of love. In the Divine play of his life he facilitates all expressions of love seen in the world of our experience. For this reason one can say that in the life of Divinity pastoral Krishna is the identity of the *Intimate*. In the life of pastoral Krishna he takes the role of a cowherder. He is surrounded by loving parents, friends and girlfriends. His life is completely a life of playfulness as are the lives of those around him. His pleasure is distributed to and experienced by all those who he loves. If there is any work to be done it is work for his pleasure and hence your own pleasure vicariously. Being ‘God at play’ every moment with him is complete ecstasy and utter bliss. Every word in his play is a song and every movement a dance. Furthermore, being an expression of Divinity, Krishna can fully reciprocate the affection directed towards him. This distinguishes a relationship with pastoral Krishna from the relationships experienced in this world. In this world we find that sometimes our affections cannot be reciprocated properly by others or at least not to our satisfaction. We may love a person with all our heart as our lover and friend only to find, to our dismay, that these affections are not reciprocated. Krishna is not subject to such affectionate shortcomings. He is the perfect reservoir for our affections. However he is approached, he will reciprocate. If you take the trouble to cultivate affection for him it will be assimilated, experienced and reciprocated. In other words, he will love you back; such a love that one has never known. He can grant you a natural relationship with him. If love for him is cultivated then this relationship will naturally and spontaneously develop. You may find yourself simultaneously participating in your own life and the life of Divinity.

For the spiritual seeker this may be of interest. Finding a form and expression of Divinity with whom they can cultivate exchanges of love and find these expressions of love reciprocated is a goldmine. Whether this expression of Divinity is the highest form



or the source of Divinity is subjective. However, if we rank expressions of Divinity from the perspective of *feeling* or intimacy and expressions of love, pastoral Krishna ranks at the very top as the supreme personality of Divinity. If feeling, intimacy, and expressions of love are subordinate to the awe-inspiring and powerful expression of the professional Godhood, then worshipping God in more traditional forms may be one's subjective preference. What matters most is to recognize the reality and authenticity of diverse expressions of Divinity. Which expressions we choose to value most in our lives, cultivate affection for, and regard as supreme depends on what qualities we find most valuable in our lives. For some there are good reasons to believe that their chosen form of Divinity is the source of others. What has been described here is how Krishna can be seen as the source of and supreme expression of Divinity according to some. This position is based on the value of intimacy and affection. This may be difficult to prove objectively, but most people will agree that subjective experience reigns king in our lives. Many people will admit that our private life, filled with the joy and pain its intimate relationships afford us, is the closest we come to our authentic identity. In the private life of Divinity one can presume it is the same. If we cultivate the feelings of love facilitated in pastoral Krishna we may find a relationship with God we never thought was possible.

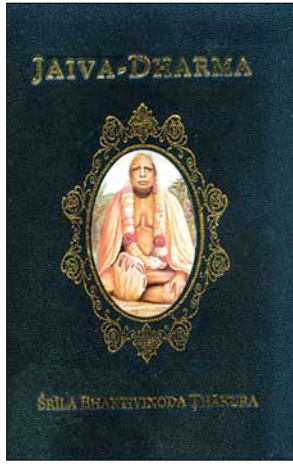
Gopakumar das lives in California. B.V. Tripurari Swami is his guru and Sridhara Maharaja is his param guru.



Jaiva Dharma

Reviewed by Sven Davisson

Jaiva-Dharma: The Essential Function of the Soul, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura
(Gaudiya Vedanta Publications, 2001)



In the early 16th century, Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu launched the modern Gaudiya Vaisnava current with his teaching, public kirtanas and civil disobedience. Lord Caitanya is considered to be an incarnation of Lord Krsna himself. His six principle followers were known as the Six Goswamis. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura is often referred to as the ‘seventh goswami.’

Bhaktivinoda Thakura (nee Kedarnatha Datta) was born in 1838 in an area of India that is now Bengal. His father was a very devout follower of Lord Nityananda. The family was prosperous until his father died in 1849.

At 18 Kedarnatha went to college. After graduating he established an English school. Later he moved to Puri where he eventually became headmaster of another school. He settled down and began to establish a family. In 1861, he took a government position and, thus, began his career as a public servant.

While holding civil positions, he also lectured extensively on philosophical topics including the *Srimad Bhagavatam*. Fluent in several languages, he also wrote extensively on spirituality in Bengali, Sanskrit and English.

After raising 10 children with two wives, he entered sannyas renunciation in 1908. He wandered, wrote and preached for another two years before health forced him into seclusion. He entered maha samadhi in 1914. His children and godchildren included many respected Vaisnava devotees. His spiritual successors include both A.C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada, found of International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), and Srila Narayana Maharaja.

Jaiva-Dharma is perhaps his greatest achievement. The book is actually a lengthy novel containing numerous dialogues on various topics. The book begins with a wondering mendicant coming across a Vaisnava scholar, Sri Premadasa Babaji. The young renunciate hears instructions from the devotee and eventually takes shelter of him.



The translation is entitled “The Essential Function of the Soul.” The work is truly that and more. The first several chapters provide extensive and detailed discussions of the various *dharmas* of the *jiva* (humans) moving from the temporary/ephemeral to the spiritual Vaisnava-dharma.

The work proceeds with extended discussions of *Nitya-Dharma*, ‘eternal constitutional function,’ and its relation to race, caste, material existence, history, civilization and Vaisnava behavior.

The book continues with a detailed, multi-chapter discussion of *prameya*, the various objects of knowledge. This is followed by an equally detailed explication of *rasa*, the various loving relations with Krisna. The latter is unique to this English translation. Earlier English language editions of this work reprinted only the first two portions of Bhaktivinoda’s text, at the exclusion of the more intimate *rasa* portions.

Jaiva-Dharma is one of the treasures of Vaisnava literature. It’s translation is as important an event as A.C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada’s publication of *The Bhagavad-gita As It Is*. This new English edition released by Gaudiya Vedanta Publications (GVP) is a loving presentation of the monumental work. The book is a small hardcover edition printed on bible paper, allowing for the over a thousand pages to be rather compact. The book includes two ribbon markers to assist the reader. A detailed glossary of terms and names proves tremendously helpful. Introductory material and index are also included.

The format of the work, being a novel, makes the text extremely accessible. It’s almost deceiving, as Bhaktivinoda does not shy away from the many technical concepts that underlie Vaisnava philosophy. This is where the glossary proves invaluable. The work is multi-layered and the reader will get out of it a blossoming understanding consistent with their relative experiential/cognitive level.

I’ve been told that one should read the *Jaiva-Dharma* a minimum of three times, and I can well see why. The book’s wealth can only be revealed to any extent through successive encounters.

A devotee recently described the book to me as a ‘Pandora’s box.’ This is a fitting description as there is simply an unfathomable amount of spiritual wealth within its pages. Opening the book and approaching it with an absorptive mind will certainly unleash incalculable benefit.

Printed and PDF copies are available direct from www.bhaktistore.com



St. Columba Mission

Ruth Moore

Miss Peterson seemed stranger and more eccentric as she grew older. Perhaps she was. Solitude and loneliness do queer things sometimes. It didn't occur to us that it might have been these which were responsible for her last and most outrageous piece of stubbornness. Her everlastin' pigheadedness, we called it.

The church on the island was Methodist—a small, cold little building, with straight-backed seats and a naked pulpit rearing at the front. The organ was of the pedal variety which laments rather than plays. There we were accustomed to hear, on one Sunday a month, which was as often as the Methodist Conference could spare a minister, sermons of hellfire and brimstone. It was, all in all, a pretty bleak proposition, except I do remember that the bell in the belfry had a singularly sweet mellow tone.

The oldsters in the village were proud of this church, for in their young days they had worked hard to get it. Our grandfathers sometimes took us up into the belfry and showed us the nails that they had hammered with their own hands into the timbers. It seems a pity that their young could not have shared their pride, for their church was a symbol of a fine thing, a kind of unity that held the village together. Perhaps the times were already changing and our religious constitutions were not so tough as theirs. As for me, I know the sermons scared me.



Methodist Episcopal Church, Gotts Island,
c. 1910 (courtesy M.T. Davisson)

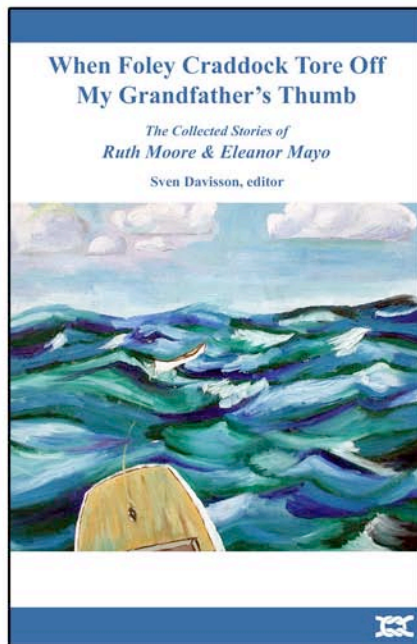
RB

“In the rugged company
of Faulkner, Caldwell and Steinbeck,
Ruth Moore holds her own”

—*The Saturday Review*

“The very feel of seaboard
New England...”

—*The Saturday Review*
on Eleanor Mayo



**When Foley Craddock Tore
Off My Grandfather's Thumb**
The Collected Stories of
Ruth Moore & Eleanor Mayo

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women writers who shared a literary
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Miss Peterson had always gone to the Methodist church; and so the village was incredulous and mad when she came right out one summer and said her own people had always been Episcopalian. She said she needed something more now than the Methodists had to offer; she said she was going to build an Episcopal chapel.

“Well!” we said to each other. “The Methodist’s always been good enough for *us*” and “What can you expect of them summer people?” (Miss Peterson had then lived among us for twenty years.)

Nobody believed her. We knew that outside of her living expenses she didn’t have two cents to rub together. “Aunt Pete’s as crazy’s a loon,” we said. We should have known better.

For two years she scraped and she scrounged. She wrote to Episcopalians in the mainland summer resorts. She talked people into giving a penny here and a dollar there, and somehow, by hook and by crook, she got a Movement started. The wealthy summer people in the resorts, all at once, thought it would be lovely to give a little church to the fisherfolk on the remote island. A neighbor of ours, with his tongue in his cheek, sold miss Peterson a half-acre of land near the main road in the village. And one summer morning we were thunderstruck when a lumber scow delivered a load at the island and carpenters came to start building.

We were still fairly easy-going about it. Our minister wrote the Episcopalian rector on the mainland and offered him the use of the Methodist church for his services; it seemed a waste, he said, two churches in a town of fifty people. Might not the money be better used for Missions?

The rector wrote back and said, a little coolly, that no, he was sorry, but a place where Episcopal services were held had to be consecrated to them alone. And as for Missions, why, the new church was to be called St. Columba Mission.

And the fat was in the fire.

So our church wasn’t good enough for them; so they were so darned holy that they had to be all by themselves. So we were no better than a lot of naked heathens, to be sent a mission to. Well, then, let them build their church and let their so-and-so missionary come. He’d see how many people he had to preach to. Nobody was impolite to Miss Peterson, but some of the elderly people were pretty cool.

We would have been all right if somebody hadn’t started the argument as to whether it was idolatrous to get up and kneel down during a service. It stood to reason it was, some said, it was the next thing to the Catholics. Honest wholesome worship was sitting down to a good sermon, maybe standing up once or twice to sing a hymn. All that bobbin’ up and down was conspicuous in the sight of God. Church warn’t no place t’ make a holy show of yourself.



People took sides and tempers rose. The Bible was quoted—“Thou shalt set up no graven images,” for such, some contended, the furnishings of an Episcopal altar were. It was surprising that good Methodists should know so much about the Episcopalian service, but many seemed to.

My father said it wasn't as if the Methodists *or* the Episcopalians amounted to a damn as long as it was religion; it was just that we hadn't had a good row for years and were ready for it. But that didn't prevent old friends from passing on the other side of the road with their noses in the air, half for the Methodists and half for the Episcopalians.



St. Columba Mission, Gots Island, c. 1918
Photo by T.C. Moon (*courtesy M.T. Davisson*)

The day the new church was consecrated, a crowd of summer people came over from the mainland, and they had three bishops.

“*Three* bishops!” we said, knowing that the Methodists couldn't have raked up that many to save their lives. “Now ain't that some old holy for you?”

Some of the Methodist faction went to the ceremony out of curiosity. I was dying to go, for it looked pretty colorful, but my grandmother put on her oldest housedress and took me cranberrying. She did, however, peek from the bushes to watch the bishops make a procession down the road in full regalia from the neighbor's house where they had dressed. She sniffed and muttered, “Idolaters!” but I thought they looked lovely.

Miss Peterson was in a seventh heaven for weeks after her church was built. When the novelty wore off and the summerpeople went away, she had very little congregation. Often, when the rector could get over from the mainland, which wasn't



often, he and she held services alone. Then, one by one, the children began to go, out of curiosity, and because, on the island, there was nothing else to go to.

The little girls, alas, generally appeared without their hats. Their mothers didn't insist on their dressing up for the Episcopal services the way they did for the Methodist. We sneered a little, too, at the seemingly unbreakable rule of the Episcopal Church that ladies couldn't come before the altar without a hat. We wore hats quite automatically to our own services, but we didn't doubt that if we appeared without them, the minister would let us in. The rector, it seemed, wouldn't.

So Miss Peterson kept a box of paper napkins and some pins on a shelf by the chapel door. As each hatless child appeared, she would patiently pin a napkin to the top of her head. I can see now that row of kneeling little girls, with the ruffled paper askew on their bowed heads like so many drunken white butterflies.

After a time, one or two of the children and finally a few younger grown-ups were baptized by the rector, and the Episcopalians were in. But the Methodist diehards never forgave Miss Peterson. They said they hoped God would strike them dead if they ever set foot inside her church door. They never did; but God has struck them dead, long since, just the same.

Miss Peterson's church was, in the beginning, quite an ugly little building, rather like a new garage. Inside it was raw with new yellow wood. The day the carpenters moved out, she moved in. She spent her daylight hours planting cuttings from her rose bushes along the foundations, and in front of them bulbs and sets from her own magnificent garden. She wheeled her lawnmower across the island and cut the stiff fieldgrass again and again until the lawn came up fine and green. For three years she worked to make a hooked rug out of silk scraps in tiny delicate loops. It made a rich stream of color up the middle aisle of the church and across in front of the altar. In some curious way it brought mellowness out of the wood and out of the thin, amber-stained glass of the windows. Over the altar she laid lengths of colored cloth embroidered with millions of perfect stitches.

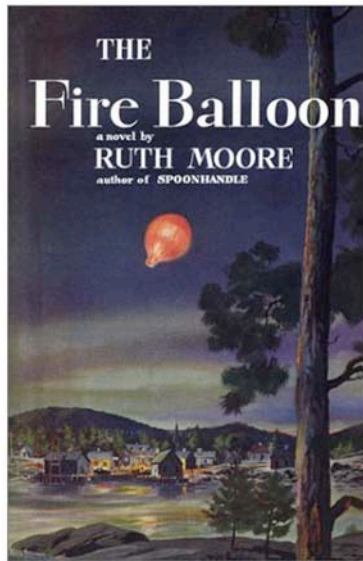
It took her years to finish the church. The new wood darkened in time into a pleasant background. The whole had dignity and quietude, but more than anything else, warmth.

Even now, twenty years after, with the door collapsed on its hinges and the floor rotting away, it is a pleasant place to go. The rug, rainstained, is still on the floor; one of Miss Peterson's priceless embroideries, faded almost white lies across the crumbling altar. Not even the souvenir hunters among the summer people have ever taken any of these things away. The lovely colors are gone, but you can still see the perfection of the work. Spruces have choked out the rosebushes that once grew level with the window



sills, and the swallows who live in the rafters make a quiet twittering on a summer afternoon.

Through those years we said Aunt Pete had gone fanatic on religion. Why, we knew for a fact, she spent three-quarters of her time on her knees. At Easter time, so said our neighbor who seemed to know, she fasted and prayed from Good Friday until the next Monday morning. She'd wasted all her money on that church, and the reason she was so thin was because she couldn't afford enough to eat. If that ain't fanatic, went the talk on the sewing afternoons, we didn't know what was.



The Fire Balloon
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A novel rich with a knowledge of life - telling of a kind of people, and of one particular American family, who seem timeless and enduring as the rocks and tides of their own Maine country. The tang of salt water is strong in the women as in the men, and the sea itself is the solid, ever-changing background for... *The Fire Balloon*

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Ruth Moore described herself as the “eyes that watch from the underbrush.” She was a best-selling author of the 50’s and 60’s. Described as “New England’s only answer to Faulkner,” Ms. Moore published 14 novels, 2 collections of poetry and an anthology of ballads. Her short story “A Soldier Shows His Medal” was published in *The New Yorker* in 1942 and her novel *Spoonhandle* was made into the Oscar nominated, 1952 MGM film *Deep Waters*. The collection *When Foley Craddock Tore Off My Grandfather’s Thumb: The Collected Stories of Ruth Moore and Eleanor Mayo*, edited by Sven Davisson, will be published summer 2004 by Blackberry Books of Maine.



From Mormon Idaho to Shallow Shangri-L.A.

Review by Sven Davisson

Latter Days, written and directed by C. Jay Cox
(TLA Releasing/Funny Boy Films, 2003)

The action of *Latter Days* rests on a plot that by now is at least one step beyond Hollywood cliché. The movie runs the ubiquitous ride from boy goes after girl for all the wrong reasons, time a bet with friends—think Ryan Phillippe in *Cruel Intentions* or Freddie Prinze, Jr. in *She's All That*. What happens next, of course, boy ends up falling love with girl and everything blows up when girls finds out about the bet. Think you can guess the climax and the inevitable denouement?

I will give writer/director C. Jay Fox credit for choosing such a worn cinematic formula and warping it in a glorious and ingenious manner that makes for a thoroughly enjoyable, inventive and just plain wonderful film. The girl in the case of *Latter Days* is



Left to right: Aaron (Steve Sandvoss) and Ryder (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) explain the mission of the Church of Latter Day Saints. (Photo: Carl Bartels.)





Aaron (Sandvoss) learns that there's more to life than laundry with Christian (Ramsey) in C. Jay Cox's *Latter Days*. (Photo: Carl Bartels)

a guy—an innocent newcomer to L.A. What's more he a young Mormon on his year of missionary work.

My suspicion is that Cox very intentionally chose a Hollywood saw upon which to hang his action. The very familiarity of the plots works in artful opposition to the story it tells. This has the affect of highlighting the unexpected twists predicated on the various characters' cultural baggage.

Christian, played by Wes Ramsey (*Guiding Light*), is a typical urban, young gay man living in an apartment complex with his roommate and best friend Julie (Rebekah Jordan). Yes, he's a waiter. A group of clean-cut young men move into a nearby apartment. Christian and his friends make a bet that he can seduce one of his new neighbors.

The newcomers turn out to be a group of Mormons on their required year of missionary work. Christian does not let this deter him from pursuing Elder Aaron Davis.

Davis is played by Steve Sandvoss who makes his film debut in *Latter Days*. Sandvoss is a perfect fit for his character with his boy-next-door good looks and the aura of mid-western innocence.

PS

Christian's pursuit of Aaron soon unearths the young missionary's secret sexuality. Aaron, however, is quickly turned off by Christian's non-serious view of sex and relationships.

When Aaron's fellow missionaries also stumble upon his homosexuality, he is immediately sent back to his Idaho hometown. His parents are unsympathetic and incapable of comprehending their son's homosexuality. He is excommunicated from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and seemingly sentenced to live in a dark space of shame in his boyhood home.

Ramsey rises above his soap opera roots to give a solid performance as Christian. He adeptly manages to walk the thin line between typical and stereotypical. Rebekah Jordan is quite believable as the aspiring singer—not surprising as she herself released an album “Remember to Breathe” in 1998. She handles the three songs she sings on the soundtrack quite well—which helps the movie exceedingly as a pivotal moment turns on one of her songs.

Jacqueline Bisset and Mary Kay Place both deliver superb supporting performances as Christian's boss and Aaron's mother respectively. Their talent and experience lifts the film, but does not detract from the newer talents that actually carry it.

It is with Sandvoss's performance that the film goes from good to great. Despite his relative inexperience, this being his first feature-length performance, one could not wish for more from his performance of Elder Davis. Sandvoss is perfectly cast as the conflicted Aaron. He places innocence, humor and tension in all the right places. Kudos to Sandvoss for taking on a potentially controversial first role.

Joseph Gordon-Levitt, who some may remember as the young son from “Roseanne” or from his reoccurring role on “3rd Rock from the Sun,” delivers a surprisingly strong supporting performance as Aaron's fellow missionary Ryder.



Aaron (Sandvoss) must confront his parents. (Photo: Carl Bartels)

CB

Mr. Cox, whose previous screenwriting credits include *Sweet Home Alabama*, has created a benchmark in the next way of gay film. He has created a film that possesses a novel maturity. *Latter Days* critiques both religious bigotry and the unanchored frivolous tendency of modern gay life.

Drawing on his Hollywood experience, Cox delivers a movie that is markedly different from the standard independent film. Above all else, *Latter Days* is a enjoyable film—fun in that truly Hollywood way. I suspect it may be criticized by some for lacking depth, but it is this very resistance to the weight of iconoclastic meaning and hermetic symbolism that makes it work.

In this age of political correctness and ecumenical pluralism, Cox's decision to tackle the oft' avoided subject of the pain that can arise out of rigid adherence to religion. In their realm of psychological influence, religions—old and organized or modern as with LDS—have a much potential for damage as they do for benefit.

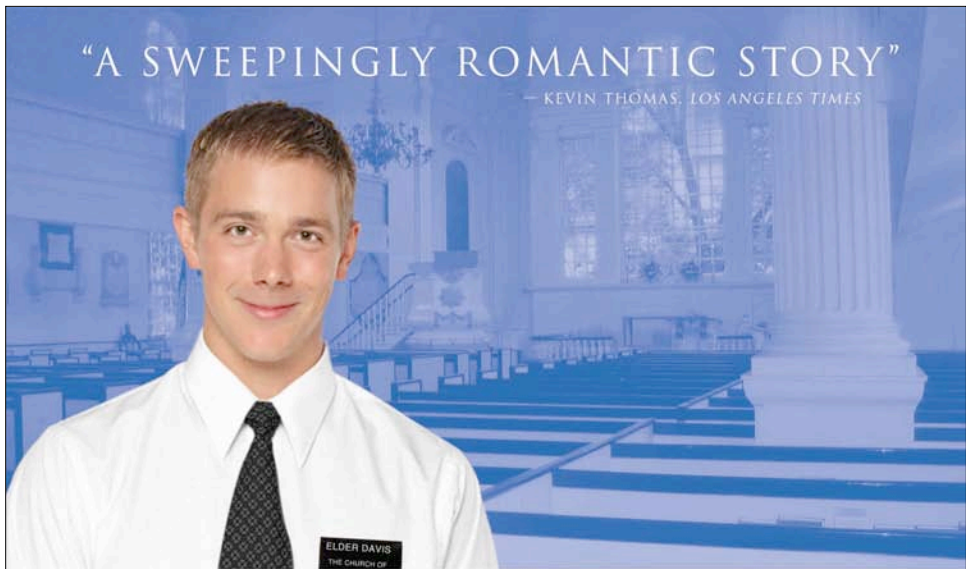
One can easily see why *Latter Days* has been a audience favorite at numerous film festivals across the country.

If you have not yet seen *Latter Days*, it is still playing in a few theaters around the country (some dates are available at <http://www.latterdaysmovie.com>). If it's playing at an arthouse near you, take the opportunity. If not, it will be released on DVD on September 7th.



Latter Days writer/director
C. Jay Cox





“A SWEEPINGLY ROMANTIC STORY”
 — KEVIN THOMAS, LOS ANGELES TIMES

AARON PRAYS, CHRISTIAN PLAYS... OPPOSITES ATTRACT.



From the screenwriter of *Sweet Home Alabama*

LATTER DAYS

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Tarot Review

I Ching Oracle

(Lo Scarabeo/Llewellyn, 2004, \$19.95)

I have used the I Ching for almost two decades. During this time, several attempts at combining the Chinese oracle with the format-presentation of a traditional tarot deck have come and gone. Until now, none of the various attempts have produced deck, which captured the beauty of the I Ching, while avoiding warping it into something else.

The new deck released by Lo Scarabeo, *I Ching Oracle*, is the first to come close to distilling the I Ching into the deck format. It does so by keeping its approach simple. The deck bucks the trend of littering the cards face with too much information, symbols and explicit ‘esoteric’ correspondences. Each card consists of only the hexagram, a Chinese-style monochrome drawing, simple border and number.

The drawings on each card are more background than iconographic. The images are subtle and the consistent, antiqued parchment look helps them to recede even farther back. The individual hexagrams are set boldly in the top third of each card offset by a brush-like swath of dark black pigment.



The deck works because the hexagrams are set foremost. They are the heart of the I Ching and this deck preserves that primacy, avoiding the tendency to visually interpret their meaning. The background drawings at times appear to have a direct relation to the hexagram and other times the connection is more elusive. The only other piece of information on the card face, the small number set along the lower edge, is immensely useful in quickly finding the hexagram’s section in *The Book of Changes*

Like most decks the accompanying booklet is useless. The author includes several tarot-like layouts and short encapsulated, reductive definitions drawn from the traditional meanings.



I question the usefulness of the multi-card spreads, as the beauty of the I Ching lies in the meditative simplicity of fathoming meaning out of the text relating to a hexagram. If one uses the multi-card approach with provided definitions, they may prove helpful. There is however a dearth of information as to the ways the various placements relate to one another. This makes the interpretations of a layout somewhat problematic.

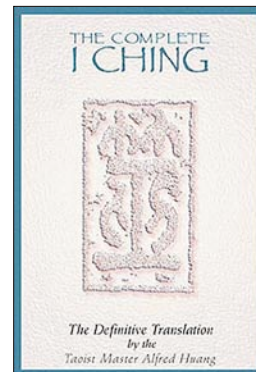
There is also no mention in the book of moving lines. This is the logical system for interpreting progressive meanings built into the traditional I Ching's numeric manipulations. This seems to be completely lacking from the accompanying text. Given a little time and some practical experience with the oracle, one could develop one's own system for determining 'young' or 'moving' lines.

So my advice is to chuck the booklet—but isn't that what one does anyway? If you don't already have a personal favorite translation of *The Book of Changes*, buy yourself one. An appropriate book and these cards could prove a very useful and fulfilling meditation tool and divinatory system.

There are numerous editions of *The Book of Changes* available in English. Stephen Larsen's *I-Ching* (Vega Press) is one that comes to mind. In addition to the tradition Chinese text, it provides a complete concordance and detailed analyses. Richard Wilhelm's translation, *Understanding the I Ching* (Princeton University Press), has long been a standard.

Inner Traditions has just released a new translation by the Taoist master Alfred Huang, *The Complete I Ching*. Huang's book also includes translations of the 'Ten Wings,' commentaries by Confucius useful in understanding the I Ching's insights. Which looks very promising. Aleister Crowley also did his own verse 'translation' that is widely available online (link below).

Crowley's 'Yi Jhing' <http://www.hermetic.com/crowley/libers/lib216.html>



Reviews

Wild Awakening: The Heart of Mahamudra and Dzogchen, Dzogchen Ponlop
(Shambhala Publications, 2003, 300pp. \$18.95)



Within Tibetan Buddhism, there are two practice traditions that are generally considered to be powerful, fast-tracks to liberation. Mahamudra, ‘the great seal,’ is considered the culmination of the New Translation School of Tibetan Buddhism and the Kagyu tradition. Dzogchen, ‘the great perfection,’ is the ultimate teaching of the older Nyingma tradition.

Dzogchen Ponlop is a master of both wisdom lineages. This makes him uniquely suited to write a work that presents both these traditions side-by-side. There have been several works on both Mahamudra and Dzogchen practices released in English over the past few years—not least of which is H.H. the Dalai Lama’s own *Dzogchen*. These works, if they go into any amount of detail, focus on only one practice or the other. Dzogchen Ponlop’s book is unique in that he goes into great detail about both practices. This dual presentation allows one practice to inform the other. Where one is lacking in detail regarding a particular stage or experience, the other provides a more nuanced analysis.

The author is one of the foremost scholars of both the Nyingma and Kagyu traditions. He was recognized by both the Dalai Lama and the Sixteenth Karmapa as the seventh in the line of the Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoches. In addition to his extensive religious training, Dzogchen Ponlop is also well versed in Western technology. He is publisher of *Bodhi* magazine and the web architect for the various Nalandabodhi/Nitartha websites.

The book begins with a brief introduction to the Buddhist path focusing primarily on the groundwork of Mahamudra and Dzogchen practices. He places the two practices into their historic contexts and provides a general outline of how the two interrelate.

Dzogchen Ponlop then proceeds with a systematic discussion of the path of Mahamudra. He begins with a more detailed history of the tradition and its lineage. After this introduction he embarks on a discussion of the groundwork and preliminary practices that begin the path. He presents the Mahamudra practice in the traditional approach, ‘Four Common Preliminaries,’ ‘Four Reminders,’ etc. He then brings the path through the intermediary stages through to ‘Fruition.’



Of note, is the way Dzogchen Ponlop draws the three ‘yanas’—Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana—together into a cohesive linear practice. Very soon after one enters the path, one encounters the notion of the greater and lesser vehicles, the Mahayana and Hinayana paths. Quite often there is a preferencing of one and a pejorative attitude toward the other. Dzogchen Ponlop artfully describes how the various yanass are just different meta-paths on one larger path toward liberation.

The third part of *Wild Awakening* focuses on the path of Dzogchen. Dzogchen Ponlop highlights how the two practices differ in their conceptualization of the path. He focuses on their similarities however—adeptly using one to flesh out the other. He discusses the practice of Dzogchen from the preliminary ‘Great Exhaustion’ through to the ‘Final Breakthrough.’ Along the way he provides a superb introduction to the Vajrayana, or active, tantric path.

At the end of the work, he draws the two paths back together again. He provides, through a simple contrast of their leading teachers Nagarjuna and Asanga, a powerful demonstration of how the two may work even better together than they do independently. He imagines the two providing very different maps to the same territory and how each includes the necessary corollary information that the other’s map leaves off.

Dzogchen Ponlop’s familiarity with modern Western society and its technology means that the illustrative examples he employs throughout the work are immediately graspable by the Western reader. He also utilizes all the traditional Tibetan Buddhist technical language—yanas, mantra, kayas, etc.—as well as their fascination with numeric labeling. If the reader is unfamiliar with these terms, it might be helpful to have a pad handy for note-taking. Dzogchen Ponlop defines all his terms clearly within the text and provides a glossary as well.

The book is not a replacement for direct contact with a lineage guru. Dzogchen Ponlop stresses this throughout and emphasizes the benefit of a guru eloquently. He does not allow the notion of guru and the guru’s teachings to get in the way of providing detailed examinations of the paths from preliminary stages to their ends.

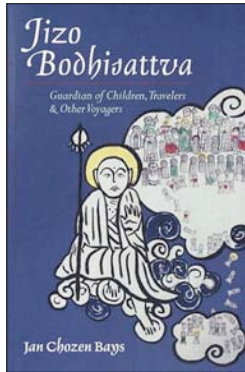
The book is ideally suited for both the newcomer to Buddhism, as he presents nothing so esoteric that one could not understand it simply by relying on the text. The work would also be beneficial for any practitioner already on either the Mahamudra or Dzogchen paths or considering beginning with either.



Jizo Bodhisattva: Guardian of Children, Travelers & Other Voyagers,

Jan Chozen Bays

(Shambhala Publications, 2003, 280pp. \$16.95)



Jizo is an important Buddhist saint, or ‘bodhisattva.’ Jizo observance is most common in Japanese Zen. Jizo is understood to be a protector of children and voyagers. In Japan and increasingly in the USA, small shrines and Jizo garden statues are common, often dressed in children’s clothes.

Jan Chozen Bays is a transmission holder in the lineage of the late master Taizan Maezumi Roshi, legendary founder of the Zen Center of Los Angeles. She currently serves as the resident teacher at the Jizo Mountain-Great Vow Zen Monastery in Clatskanie, Oregon. She is also a pediatrician who specializes

in abused and neglected children.

Known as *Kshitigarbha*, in Sanskrit, Jizo’s name translates as “Earth Store.” The story of the bodhisattva was brought from India to China in the 8th century by the translator Shikshananda. He translated the Sutra *Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva* for Chinese Empress Wu Zetien. Thus began the tradition of Jizo narratives centering around “heroic women,” “courageous children” and “fearless sacrifices.”

Bays begins her book with the relatively recent emergence of Jizo reverence in the Americas. She then moves backwards to an analysis of Jizo practice in contemporary and historic Japan. She provides a detailed discussion of Jizo’s protection of women and children. She relates the connection between Jizo and the female bodhisattva Kwan Yin.

Bays then proceeds backwards further to China and preceding that India. She relates the various fragments that form the early tales of Jizo Bodhisattva’s pilgrimage. Bays provides an interesting discussion of how the bodhisattva’s attributes changed with the immediate needs of the people turning to him in devotion and supplication.

Bays provides a detail analysis of Jizo’s symbolism. She devotes a chapter to his ring staff, symbol of the six realms, while another she focuses on the Cintamani jewel that he holds. Bays then uses these to jump to a discussion of the six realms—the human, hell, animal, hungry ghost, asura (demi-god) and heavenly realms.

In addition to the wealth of cultural and historical background Bays provides, she also brings the devotion to Jizo down to the level of practice. She provides interpretative analysis throughout and brings this together in her discussion in the final chapters. She discusses in detail the meaning of the Earth Store Bodhisattva. She follows with a



chapter on actually practicing with Jizo. Finally she culminates the book with a “Simple Ceremony Of Remembrance For Children Who Have Died.”

In addition to the discussion and analysis, *Jizo Bodhisattva* also provides additional resources in her appendix. This material includes discussions of Jizo by several notable Zen teachers, Nagarjuna on the Cintamani jewel and a hymn to Jizo Bodhisattva.

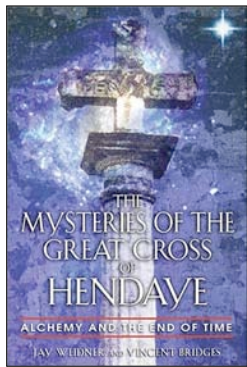
Jan Chozen Bays has done a beautiful service to Jizo in delivering such a full and rounded presentation of the bodhisattva. As a pediatrician, Bays is uniquely suited to her subject as protector of children abused, neglected and deceased. It is obvious that she understands and appreciates the import of her subject at a very deep level.

The Mysteries of the Great Cross of Hendaye: Alchemy and the End of Time,

Jay Weidner and Vincent Bridges

(Destiny Books, 2003, 384pp, \$22.95)

Reviewed by Eric K. Lerner



The Mysteries of the Great Cross of Hendaye: Alchemy and the End of Time by Jay Weidner and Vincent Bridges is a contemporary evaluation of *Le Mystere des Cathedrales* by Fulcanelli. Fulcanelli's tome is probably the sole masterpiece of practical alchemy written during the twentieth century. Fulcanelli's actual identity is shrouded in mystery. Speculation about who he is/was include notions ranging from fraud to his being a centenarian hermit and a woman! Such musings are beyond the scope of this review. In fact you are probably asking yourself, what the heck is Lerner doing writing about a book on alchemy for a publication devoted to Yoruba culture?

Of course that is a more than fair question which requires a good answer before I write further.

Let's start with a definition of alchemy. Alchemy is the ancient science that ostensibly focused on the transformation of base metals into gold. Of course, on a spiritual level, this process is entirely metaphoric. Successful alchemists were never noted for their wealth. Their pursuit was spiritual. Alchemy is the pursuit of transformation and transmutation of man. Ideally both the alchemist and his primary material were both altered by alchemical experiments.



As Weidener and Bridges point out, the principle of alchemy is revealed in a three-fold pattern: revelation, demonstration and transmutation. When reading this, I thought: “Gee, isn’t this what happens to someone when she makes *ocha*?” This type of trinity forms the basis of esoteric initiation worldwide and throughout history. Whether someone is becoming an Inuit shaman, an alchemist or a Santero, he undergoes a three-fold process of becoming. The principles of alchemy lie close to the heart of the mystery traditions of the Yoruba. I believe that by examining or understanding alchemy, one gains valuable insight into our own tradition.

So far, the relationship between alchemy and Yoruba spirituality has not received much attention. With the notable exception of Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka’s divinely inspired epic *Idanre* (which uses the similarity as an extended metaphor), the resemblance between the two disciplines has been overlooked. I believe doing so is not to anyone’s benefit. Orisha consciousness is at the core of human perception and experience. We should be able to perceive it through different terminology in other esoteric traditions for it to be valid as a universal truth.

Reading *The Mysteries of the Great Cross of Hendaye* encouraged me to do so. Indeed, my copy of the book is full of notations. They highlight sections in which I could see the parallels between alchemy and orisha. For instance, the following passage contains sacred knowledge we associate with the King, Shango:

The Tree can also become a stone when the lightning flash from which it is formed strikes the ground. These Zebedee stones, so-called from the sons of thunder, John and James, in the New Testament, are crystallizations of a subtle energy, electricity, lightning, grounded into matter. Along with meteorites, these thunderstones, called fulgarites after the thunderbolts forged by Vulcan, have always been considered sacred, as in the Kaaba of Mecca and the ben-ben of Heliopolis. (pp. 254-5)

I identified this passage by opening the book to a random page and skimming a few pages until recognized one of my notes: “Ka Wo Kabeiseli!” My copy is chock full of similar exclamations far too numerous to list.

I am reminded of the saying, “All roads to truth lead to and from the same center.” That principle increasingly dominates my spiritual studies in the present. I hope that by this point, the reader appreciates why I chose to share this particular title with the Yoruba community. I believe as seekers of truth that we should examine and discuss matters of



profound knowledge regardless of source. In doing so, we increase our own awareness and get closer to understanding and participating in Universal Truth. Remember that the Fourth Alafin of Oyo, the historical Shango, kept at least one Christian cleric among his group of advisors. (This demonstrates that historically the Yoruba have long recognized the observations of other belief systems as beneficial. My point here must give appropriate credit: the under-appreciated Warrior-Educator orisha Oba includes the principles of navigation and world exploration among those she bestows on her initiates.)

Now, let's examine what more there is for us to learn from the Weidener/Bridges book. First, it is an excellent introduction to alchemy. The authors explain and examine its roots, history and contributions to Western Culture. They weave together a colorful tale. Its actors include: Egyptian gods, crusaders, the Knights Templar, Popes, Moslem philosophers, qabalists, Knights of the Round Table, Merovingians, Gnostics, and Popes. If you enjoy books like *The Davinci Code* this should prove quite entertaining, as well as educational for you.

In recounting the history of alchemy, they provide us with the insight that not all white people were assholes. This is actually important to remember. I know that as a Yoruba initiate it took me a good three and a half years as a priest before I could face the fact that my own European ancestors had been capable of profound thought and revelation. Many of us white folk in the religion do a good job of recognizing the worthy contributions that our mostly black spiritual ancestors have made. However, we very often skim over the gifts of our own racial ancestors. (The Germanic gave the world Agrippa, Goethe, Durer and Luxembourg long before Hitler was a specter in anyone's eye.) Examining the history of Alchemy reminds us that some Europeans (as well as Arabs, incidentally) sought to realize alignment between the gross body and higher consciousness, which Yoruba actualize through seating Orisha.

In writing this history lesson, the authors demonstrate keen knowledge of how to shape a narrative. They structure *The Great Cross* as a detective story. The payoff is how does *The Great Cross* at Hedaye reveal when the world will end and the location of a safe harbor. However, the gist of the book analyzes Fulcanelli's masterpiece on the great Cathedrals.

Fulcanelli's thesis was that the architects of gothic cathedrals, such as Notre Dame de Paris, codified knowledge about alchemy into the buildings' designs. The cathedrals became books in stone. They preserved esoteric knowledge for the ages. This was critical since during the dark ages many alchemists died at the hands of Christian zealots. Of course, many essential manuscripts were burned as well. (Ironically, one of the ways alchemical philosophy has endured is through the church's rite of the holy Eucharist.) The buildings represent a non-literary expression of knowledge.



This reminds me of the achievements of Yoruba sculptors and architects. The most obvious example is the Oshun Grove created by Obatala Priest Suzanne Wegner and her apprentices. The grove features exquisite sculpture and architecture. These celebrate Orisha by bringing the observer into direct contact with hewn stone representations. Experiencing the grove and its wonders must have an impact similar to what the cathedrals had for their visitors. Of course the more subtly minded Europeans would be able to intuit the deeper significance of the tutelary expression of cathedral design. A similar phenomenon occurs today in the context of Yoruba faith. Enlightened travelers commune with Oshun, Ajalere and company at Oshogbo through figures of stone. Also, remember the Yoruba were no novices themselves when it came to architecture. Buildings like Oke Tae shrine in Ile Ife and the Shango's palace in Oyo are inspired examples of architecture in service of faith.

The like-mindedness shared by alchemical adherents and Yoruba are underscored by another example of alchemical expression identified by Fulcanelli and expanded on by Weidner and Bridges. That is the use of "green language." Fulcanelli described green language as being a type of "spoken cabala" or "language of the birds." Weidner and Bridges write "This punning, multilingual wordplay can be used to reveal unusual and...meaningful association between ideas. 'What unsuspected marvels we should find, if we knew how to dissect words, to strip them of their bark and liberate the spirit, the divine light which is within...'" (p.14)

Alchemists were well known to engage in such a use of language, hence the difficulty in interpreting alchemical literature. But does not such a use of language describe Ifa Divination verse and Ijale chants? Furthermore, our oriki are full of puns and sophisticated wordplay, hence the great difficulty in translating even the simplest of praise songs into English. I argue that such linguistic facility and imagination are defining characters of truly enlightened minds. Breaking their codes (and learning how to make our own word play) leads to the attainment of wisdom.

"The language of birds" in our own culture is the special tongue of the Osayinistas, which is being lost to history unless some of us decide to document the few remaining elderly practitioners in Cuba (and perhaps study with them?) But grasping the concept fo "green language" is just one more key for us to unlock the door. Behind it lies the suggestion that we may apply knowledge gained through the study of alchemy to our own journey. Weidner and Bridges lead us in theirs to The Great Cross of Hendaye.

Their interest in it was aroused by the inclusion of a chapter on the "Cyclic Cross of Hendaye" included in a second printing of *Le Mystere* in 1957. (The first edition was published in 1927.) Fulcanelli identified it to hold the mystery of the world's end and a possible key to salvation and safe harbor. Weidner and Bridges analyze this at great



length and come to definite conclusions. In doing so, they draw wisdom from places as diverse as Tibet and Peru. Of course, I'm shaking my head saying, "What about West Afrika?" The point I wish to make is that they look for the truth by comparing the sacred teachings of multiple and diverse cultures.

I will not elaborate on what conclusions they make on when and how the world will end. After all, finding that out is part of the fun of reading their book. Incidentally, this should be a reminder that spiritual exploration can be a thing of joy. To me that has always been a salient characteristic of Yourba religion, and one that we never should overlook! In their search for answers, they come to the conclusion that the secret of alchemy is one of time itself.

This makes a great deal of sense in the context of their arguments. It should raise some very important issues for us Yoruba folk to address. What is our sense of time and the future?

Most lineages have very specific creation stories. Many of these reflect the latest scientific advances, reflecting the foresight and depth of knowledge at the heart of Yoruba cosmology. However, unlike many other cultures, Yoruba does not seem to have a clearly developed concept of the world's end. I have encountered only a few such stories. Individual priests told them to me in confidence. I am inclined to believe that these were their own opinions and visions. I think that we as Yoruba should examine this issue. One of the great strengths of our theology is that it is dynamic and always evolving. Our deities are very much alive and can give us immediate edification. So we don't have to resort to 2,000-year-old texts when we seek a solution to a problem. However, this means that we can examine and entertain issues of a universal nature. We are not limited to interacting with Orisha in order to determine whether or not we should take a certain job or trust a prospective lover.

Another issue that this raises is what exactly is the Yoruba concept of time. Many people when they are first exposed to our faith are maddened by the apparent absence of a linear notion of time reflected by our mythology (not to mention the inability of many elders, now including babies like myself, to look at a watch occasionally.) Indeed, I have often seen and heard the Yoruba sense of time termed as cyclical, rather than linear. There is a famous saying: "Eshu gives an order tomorrow so that it can be heard Yesterday." Once one has lived this religion for a time, the sense of that saying becomes crystal clear.

To bring these concepts back into the focus of this review, reading *The Great Cross of Hendaye* made me ask these important questions. That's a heck of a lot more than many books that were explicitly about our religion have done. Furthermore, it has motivated me to seriously examine the ties between Alchemy and Yoruba and to look for



a common source. It also inspired me to write a comic book addressing the apocalypse through the Orisha.

Originally, I was going to write a comparison between oracles and the philosopher's stone for this month's column. This review was to have been included as gesture of respect for the inspiration for such a work. However, the subject has proved to be so fruitful that it demands more substantial research than this month's deadline permits. So I hope to have that piece ready for next month's column. In the meantime, I think that this is one of the highest compliments that I can pay a book. It has really made me want to write my own, and one in service of the Orisha we venerate.

Tankhem: Meditations on Seth Magick. Mogg Morgan

(Mandrake of Oxford, 2003, 184pp., £10.99)

Reviewed by Jan Fries



I was delighted to read this book. Its author, Mogg Morgan aka Katon Shual is not only one of my favourite magickal writers but also a good friend. Perhaps it doesn't sound very convincing when one friend sets out to praise the work of another (it looks like a conspiracy) but then, *Tankhem* is such an important contribution to the continuous development of magick that I simply had to write this review. Mogg Morgan likes to call his personal approach to magick Tankhem, but in this book you are treated to much more than that. To begin with, *Tankhem* is not a single magical system but many, and the essays that make up the book cover a wide range of exciting subjects.

The main emphasis is on the hidden and half forgotten side of Egyptian magic, on the long pre-dynastic periods when Seth was a respectable, though dangerous god and ritual was closely concerned with stellar worship. When I say emphasis I am talking about more than inspired theory and good scholarship: you are invited to experience what the author is talking about. *Tankhem* offers much that is highly practical, such as a detailed description of the temple of Sety I which is well worth visiting by dreamers, visionaries and astral travellers. But *Tankhem* also offers a modern perspective, we learn of Crowley's incorporation of Sethian lore in Thelema, including some errors made by the Great Beast, and even of the recent revival of Seth in a number of supposedly 'satanic' cults, most of which got things dead wrong. What I like best about these chapters is, apart from their factual content, the way of thinking that lies behind them.



Even for those who do not care much about ancient Egypt this is worth exploring. Here magick is discussed as an experiment in thought and belief, there is much on the nature of the gods and all reflects the lifelong dedication of the author to the hidden realm of inspiration and true insight. In these issues, *Tankhem* is one of the most open-minded, provoking and refreshing works I have ever encountered. I would only wish for two things to improve it: a more thorough proof-reader (there is a bit of misspelling in the text, some of it quite creative) and a lot more pages. This book is so good, it should go on for longer.

What we have in *Tankhem* is of course more than just Egyptian magick. It is more to the point that pre-dynastic Egypt with its Sethian worship is an expression of a current that informs many other traditions, such as the Tantric lore of India, in which the author is highly competent, and the so-called Western occult tradition, which incorporated a lot of Indian and Egyptian lore in original and syncretistic form.

There is a long chapter on sexual magick that is well worth reading, especially when you have enjoyed the author's earlier opus *Sexual Magick*, perhaps the most lucid and straight-from-the-heart treatment of the subject I have ever come upon. Mogg Morgan does without the silly secrecy that usually sticks to the subject and offers a highly personal, readable and humorous view. In *Tankhem* you can find him celebrating the genitals in an *Ode to the Cock and the Fanny* which is not only good Tantric poetry (someone should translate it into Sanskrit and fake a few hundred pages of initiated commentary) but also reminds me of the final chapter of Joyce's *Ulysses* (YES!). There are practical hints on how to celebrate multiple orgasms, how to perceive the power within the landscape by seeing it as an erotic body, and how to include playfulness, flirtation and seduction in the divine game of making love. Real sexual magick is a lot more than just technique, it is an attitude, a point of view and one (or several) ways of life. In the industrial world, result orientation is such an obsessive delusion that few are aware that lovemaking does not have to be something that starts in bed and ends when both partners have come. A more organic approach is suggested by Mogg Morgan, who proposes that we are dealing with at least two trance states, pre-orgasmic and post orgasmic, and *Both can be moments in which ancestral memories, dreams, meditations and archaic god forms can break through into your sensitised body. That is sexual magick.*

I'm really glad this point has been made at last. Too many books on sexual magick are focused on relatively minor issues such as 'results magic' (i.e. visualising your desire while you come). Just look at the frequency of Crowley's experiments to attract money, popularity and exploitable friends, and consider how often they failed. Where many people see orgasm as the dramatic climax and end of the fun, Mogg Morgan



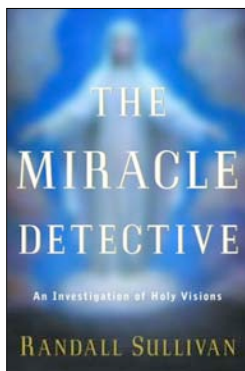
celebrates lovemaking as continuous. This is much like the difference between European rituals of the Hermetic Tradition, where energy is built up and released at a dramatic moment, and say, public Indian rituals where the energy moves in waves, the profane and sacred alternate, just as the human and the divine do, and there is no precise beginning and end of anything. For those who want to find perspectives that go beyond simple male-female role-play and a simple journey 'from here to there', this chapter is a must.

But there is more to *Tankhem*. I was delighted and highly impressed by the chapter on the personal magic of W. B. Yeats, whom I had hitherto assumed to be a rather uninteresting and hesitant sorcerer. Assuredly the younger Yeats was not a very original magus, and honestly his early poetry bores me to tears. But after his dull years (specifically the period when messing around in the Golden Dawn) and well into his fifties, he transformed like a larvae crawling out of the morass to become a scintillating dragonfly. This is what marriage can do to a shy and somewhat prude fellow, all of a sudden he finds that he has a sex life and begins to produce thousands of pages of automatic writing with his wife (nick-named 'George' for mysterious reasons) that transformed the magic of both and turned Yeats, at long last, into a fine and inspired poet. Mogg Morgan gives a brilliant account of this transformation and adds a ritual for the consecration of a dream talisman that is well worth trying out. There is more to *Tankhem* yet. But as I know that the more determined magickians will devour it anyway, it simply remains to say: buy your copy and enjoy.

The Miracle Detective: An Investigation of Holy Visions, Randall Sullivan

(Atlantic Monthly Press, 2004, 450pp. \$25.00)

Review by Joseph Gelfer



The miraculous is out of fashion. The contemporary reader can find all manner of astral planes, psychedelic realms and esoteric paths credible, yet find the notion of the miraculous rather silly. This is due in part to miracles being considered a chiefly Christian phenomenon and therefore being subject to various historical, social, dogmatic and aesthetic prejudices. Some of these prejudices are valid, others are not; whichever way any modern exploration of miracles is going to be subject to this double standard and it is in this context that Randall Sullivan has written *The Miracle Detective*.

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Sullivan, a contributing editor at *Rolling Stone* and *Men's Journal* was set on his path after hearing of a young woman in Oregon who experienced a vision of the Virgin Mary in 1994. Perhaps intrigued as much by the social and media attention to the vision and subsequent pilgrims as the 'miracle' itself, Sullivan decided to find out what exactly constitutes a miracle and the process involved in its official acknowledgement.

After Oregon Sullivan journeys to the Vatican where, despite the exhaustive investigative processes involved, acknowledgment of miracles is a sensitive business. Few, such as the visions of Fatima, are considered valid while the rest seem to instill a certain political dread into Vatican officials. These 'miracle detectives' appear to be fearful of making positive statements and being labeled fundamentalist but also fearful of making negative statements and being labeled as lacking in faith. Consequently Sullivan depicts a Vatican of tight-lipped, off the record comments given by high-flying monsignors looking over their collective shoulder to make sure no one else is listening. Continuing the political model, it seems only the Pope is in a position to make definitive public statements, whether reasonable or outlandish. From Oregon to the Vatican Sullivan wears his journalistic hat, providing the traditionally objective point of view. It is his during his subsequent visit to the village of Medjugorje in Bosnia-Herzegovina that the story becomes more personal.

From the mid-eighties onwards visions of the Virgin Mary came to a group of six young folk in Medjugorje. The visionaries were given insights into various Secrets, some of which Our Lady authorized them to make public while others were to remain secret until a later time. The dramatic and repeated nature of the visions brought hundreds of thousands of pilgrims to the tiny village until the outbreak of war. It is during this bloody conflict that Sullivan arrives, to spend seven weeks among the visionaries and a disparate collection of Mary devotees.

Sullivan's initially skeptical stance begins to weaken as he meets the visionaries in person, hears the many stories of pilgrims who have come to Medjugorje and left (while some stay) transformed and healed. Sullivan even has what he describes as a religious experience upon the top of the local holy mountain. It is common to say that seekers find what they are looking for, but Sullivan appears to be genuinely surprised at his leaning towards accepting the miraculous nature of the visions. When he expresses doubt to people he meets he receives a resounding, "you're here for a reason" response and it becomes hard to ignore. Furthermore the book could easily be read as an ode to synchronicity, with many parts of the puzzle falling into place quite 'coincidentally;' for example when flying to Split with visa concerns he ends up sat next to the wife of the Rome representative of Croatia Airlines, "who introduced me to the commanding officer



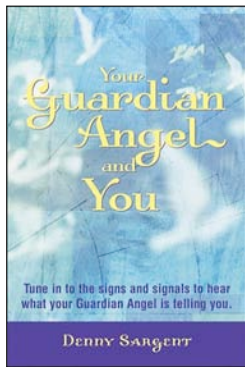
at the airport, secured my visa, arranged the exchange of dollars to kunas at a reasonable rate, and put me on the bus to the center of Split.”

Sullivan’s journey is certainly rocky, but all the more personal and interesting for it. It could also be argued that this personal journey is more intriguing than the evidence for miracles, both for and against, that he catalogues. Whichever way the Miracle Detective can be seen as a small part of what Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar refers to in relation to Medjugorje as, “Theodramatik... the drama of love being played out between God and the world.”

Your Guardian Angel and You, Denny Sargent

(Weiser Books, 2004, 176pp. \$16.95)

Review by Ron Adams (Sunwolf)



I believe everything happens for a reason. After reading Aion’s (Denny Sargent) book I am convinced. There is a lot of good information in this book, for anyone starting out on the quest of contacting their Holy Guardian Angel. Also there is a lot of great stuff in there for those of us who have already had such an experience.

It is always great to be reminded of things one has been neglecting. I enjoyed reading Denny Sargent’s Brief History of the Holy Guardian Angel, seeing how every culture from every time in history has had some sort of belief about this. It is interesting to see how so many diverse cultures have similar myths surrounding Divine Guidance.

And I like Denny Sargent’s approach to preparing, contacting and then nurturing one’s connection to the Holy Guardian Angel. This is a good reminder that it isn’t just a one time thing and that one has to get prepared to meet such a major part/major playing in one’s spiritual growth.

I enjoyed reading his personal stories, especially the life-changing story of his future wife being protected and guided by her guardian angel when she was but 18.

The unseen hand seems to always be guiding our lives, and paying attention to the clues might be the first step.

Denny Sargent has some wonderful meditations, journal exercises and full-fledged rituals in this book, that can help anyone meet their Holy Guardian Angel; if they are ready. There are traditional rituals of meeting one’s Holy Guardian Angel and modern

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rites of Knowledge and Conversion of the Holy Guardian Angel. There is even Buddha and your HGA section. Also a New Orleans Voodoo vision of meeting one's HGA.

Great poetry too. I enjoyed Shade Oroboros Coment on the New Ascension of the Rite of the Bornless One.

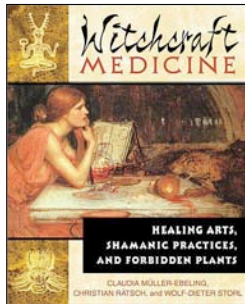
So if you want to brush up on your connection with your Holy Guardian Angel, nurture it a little more, find your path and True Will, purpose in life, or just want to contact your HGA for the first time, this is a primer book for you. It will assist you on your journey, probably the most important step you'll ever make.

Witchcraft Medicine: Healing Arts, Shamanic Practices and Forbidden Plants,

Claudia Müller-Ebeling, Christian Ratsch and Wolf-Dieter Storl

(Inner Traditions, 2003, 272pp, \$24.95)

Reviewed by Eric K. Lerner



Reading *Witchcraft Medicine* proved a pleasant surprise. I had half expected a compendium of herb recipes dubiously accredited to long dead witches, who failed to leave concrete records of their practices. Frankly, if I am looking for a Moon Goddess restorative for a hangnail, I will turn to practitioners of a living tradition, not someone trying to reclaim an ancient religion that left no clear directives. Fortunately, *Witchcraft Medicine* does not go there. Through concrete scholarship, it documents the roles women played in Medieval Europe as healers. Its writers examine contemporaneous literature and art to identify their festivals, their ethnobotany, and relationships to nature and divinity.

There is much to be learned from such a clear-eyed analysis. The Burning Times resulted in loss of the history of shaman women in Europe. We know that women who were versed in the lore of nature and the old ways were systematically slaughtered. Their religion was destroyed. Woman-power had little positive expression in the resulting culture.

The only tomes of esoteric knowledge that have endured through the Renaissance to the present time are those left by men, mostly alchemists. Virtually, all of them lived on the edge. They maintained their studies by seeking the protection of royalty and rich patrons whom they served as doctors and astrologers. Often they still fell victim to court intrigues and themselves ended up fodder for the furnace of propriety.



These men had the best university educations available at the time. They were from privileged classes and could write. Their sister shamans did not have those opportunities. Typically, they belonged to the peasant class. They were healers and sages for rural communities. They maintained the relationship of the community with the sacred earth on which it was built. They administered medicines obtained through their knowledge of the natural world. They understood the healing potential of plants because they could communicate with plant spirits. The primordial world sustained advocacy through them. It was not until men began to practice medicine, and collect fees for it, that they were systematically rooted out.

Just what did these women practice? Storl provides a definition of *Witchcraft Medicine* in the book's introduction:

Witchcraft medicine is based on the understanding of the healing powers of our inner and outer natures. Witchcraft medicine is more than a factual understanding of medicinal herbs, poisonous plants, psychedelic compounds, or gynecological preparation. It is the ability to converse with the animal and plant spirits and to gorge friendships with them, an ability that has been suppressed in most people. It is the ability to achieve the ecstasy that makes communion with these beings possible. (p.VI)

In the texts that follow, each author writes individual essays on aspects of women's healing practices. Individual authorship maintains the clarity of logic expressed in each section. The book is well organized. It begins with Storl's exploration of how community festivals reflected seasonal changes, and women's roles in them. He then explains the shamanic nature of witchcraft and how women served as guides to major life transitions of birth, fertility and death. Christian Rätsch analyses medieval witches in terms of how they reflect ancient goddess archetypes. Claudia Muller-Ebeline provides extensive analysis of how literary and artistic depictions of witches serve as means of stereotyping, and brings to light what valid information can still be drawn from them. Finally Ratch, thoughtfully evaluates the present state of medicine in light of *Witchcraft Medicine*. He makes valid arguments for how the current state of medicine suppresses enlightenment as much as it seeks to fight disease. He recognizes the contributions of ethnobotany. However, he challenges the wisdom of the use of chemical agents over natural compounds. Once more, we see a patriarchal structure, this time embodied by pharmaceutical companies and the medical establishment, attempting to overwhelm



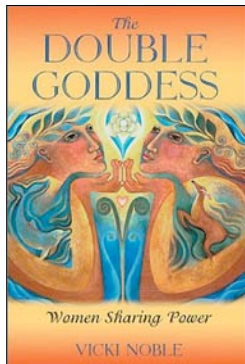
natural wisdom in the pursuit of a false god: money. The book concludes with a useful appendix of plants used in *Witchcraft Medicine* that provides scientific, European and English names for the plants mentioned in the study.

Overall, this is a lively thought provoking reading. The authors are accomplished scholars with expertise in ethnobotany, anthropology and art history. Their backgrounds uniquely qualify them to explore their subject matter. Translator Annabel Lee renders their observations in clear terminology for the layperson. The book is well illustrated with both reproductions of historical art and color photographs of plants. *Witchcraft Medicine* should prove a welcome addition to the library of anyone with an interest in ethnobotany, women's studies, and the well-being and mankind and the earth itself.

The Double Goddess: Women Sharing Power, Vicki Noble

(Bear & Company, 2003, 288pp. \$18.00)

Reviewed by Eric K. Lerner



Noble's *Double Goddess* explores the phenomena of ancient artistic representations of two women in intimate relationship to one another. Her task in analyzing these proves far more difficult than the one faced by the authors of *Witchcraft Medicine*. While those authors dealt with scant written and artistic records of their subject matter, Noble has virtually no contemporaneous testimony with which to work. The relics she studies contain no written explanations. Noble must analyze literary material written by men thousands of years after the events described. There is substantial room for conjecture, and she must employ intuitive faculties to derive meaning. Fortunately, Noble is intelligent and does recognize some of the limitations she is confronting. Her thesis is that there once existed powerful matrilineal societies that were frequently ruled by dual queen. One governed agricultural development, the other the protection of the community. It is an intriguing notion. She supports her argument with relics found worldwide. Her work builds on that of Marija Gimbutas, who was the first major archeologist to recognize the importance of goddess worship in analyzing copper age art in Europe. (Gimbutas work has greatly influence my own artwork. Noble's obvious admiration for her accomplishment went a long way to making me more receptive to *Double Goddess*.)

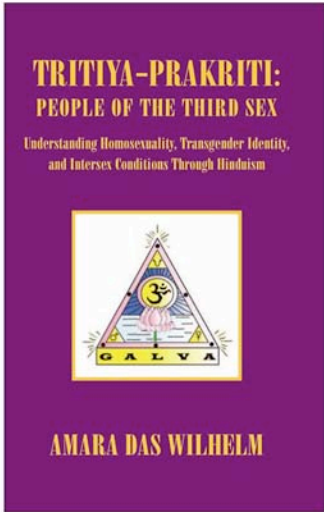


Does Noble fully succeed or fail in her theory? I am not sure. She has a lot of prejudice to overcome. There are obvious limitations in the lack of any written documentation. The relics she contemplates bear silent witness to the identities and goals of their cultures. They cannot testify directly. The history of women has been exclusive from the history of men, mostly through its exclusion. We have plenty of data about ancient emperor and their conquests. There are few records of the women who tended the hearths and were also victims of military atrocities. Archeology is a field that has been dominated by men. Interpretation of its data has been highly patriarchal. The idea that powerful women ruled communities and fought to protect them has long been regarded as subject for marginalized myths.

Noble brings a model of matriarchal society to the forefront. Behind her are countless figurines, jewelry and bas-reliefs that definitely depict female subjects. Kimberly Eve eloquently renders them in pen and ink illustrations in *Double Goddess*. Frequently the subjects are conjoined. It is possible to dispute the gender assignments of some of these. However, given the large number of examples that Noble cites, the majority of these are certainly female.

Why are they conjoined? Are they lovers? Siblings? Dual aspects? Noble at times embraces all these definitions. She explains how these relationships empower their

"In India there is a system where such people (the third sex) have their own society, and whenever there is some good occasion like marriage or childbirth, they go there and pray to God that this child may be very long living."
 - A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, Founding Acharya ISKCON



Tritiya-Prakriti: People of the Third Sex
 Understanding Homosexuality, Transgender Identity and Intersex Conditions Through Hinduism
 By Amara Das Wilhelm
 ISBN: 1-4134-3534-3 / 263 pages – \$18.69
 RELIGION / Hinduism
 SOCIAL SCIENCE / Gay Studies

"Gay and lesbian people have always been a part of society from Vedic times to our postmodern times."
 - B.V. Tripurari Swami



subjects and demonstrate the exercise of female power in ancient time. Perhaps she is correct. My feeling is that there was a time when the majority of human communities were matriarchal. This is based on my own understanding of myth, and my view is a highly idiosyncratic one. She may not fully prove her point in *Double Goddess*, because all of the evidence is not assembled. Truthfully, not too many folk have even tried to look for it. It is priggishness at best, misogyny at worse, to dismiss Noble's work. She makes enough of a case that we need to pay attention to what she says.

Why don't we see any of these cultures survive into written historical times. Noble tackles this question. She notes that the masculine response to violence has been fight or flee. The female response is difference. When confronted with violence, women tend to try to reason out the situation. They look to compromise and maintain the integrity of life. This reminds me of a famous Yoruba myth in which women once ruled the world. Savage invaders attack them. The men argue that they need to take arms, and the female rulers argue that they should try to negotiate. It is not rocket science to figure who prevails in that situation. Noble recognizes that there was a time of incursion and invasion. Matriarchal communities did not withstand external brute force. Just who were these invaders? Nobody, including Noble, seems to know exactly. What does this imply about women's role in the future of mankind? How can feminists who often embrace holistic and peaceful values deal with conquest? There are no easy answers. Noble explores the question and recommends some answers. As she wisely points out, the state of affairs in the world is frightening, and it is the result of an ancient system of patrimony. It is hard to imagine women doing a worse job of managing affairs.

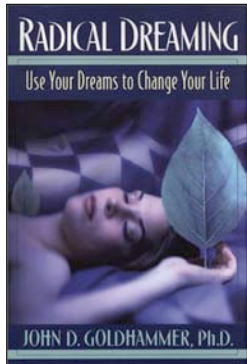
As stated earlier, Noble is a groundbreaker. In *Double Goddess* she has set up a cornerstone on which future archeologists need to build. It is worth noting that archeology is not Noble's primary discipline. Yet she analyses data here that with the notable exception of Gimbutas, no well-know archeologists has tackled. She has assembled a wealth data in her study. There is more to be unearthed. If we are to understand the nature of our existence and its continuity with the past, we require a thorough analysis of primitive female images to progress.



Radical Dreaming, John D. Goldhammer, Ph.D.

(Citadel Press, 2003, 324pp. \$15.95)

Reviewed by Ron Adams (Sunwolf)



Have you ever dreamed of torching your boss's desk at work and stand there laughing, while it burns? Don't worry, it doesn't mean you need psychiatric help; your dreams are revealing something important to you about your Authentic Self. Use your dream to change your life. John D. Goldhammer has written an excellent book that goes beyond dream symbolism and how-to books. Yes, he uses some great quotes from dream teachers such as Carl Jung, Joseph Campbell, and James Hillman. But most of the material in this book is hands-on experiences from his clients and people he has worked with in his dream workshops. This book is about an inner revolution, using the dream process to find out what the Authentic Self is showing us in our dreams.

The first step is believing that dreams are giving us important messages. John Goldhammer shows us how to interpret our own dream symbols, by going into each dream symbol, and role playing, finding out what each symbol means to us, if we were that symbol; what is it saying to us?

This is much better than reading someone else's symbols. There are a number of great dreams in this book, even a few from the author, where dreams came and changed people's lives.

Dreams hold a great treasure for us. If you have ever considered starting a dream journal, learning more about lucid dreaming, or even thought of joining the fast-growing dream groups on the internet and in most major cities, this is a resource book for you.

This is a radical book. It is about using dreams to slay your dragons, face your fears and making a difference in your life.

If you want to use your dreams on a journey of self-discovery, Dr. Goldhammer's program will help you "pull the sword from the stone". The book includes studies, exercises, and research based on over 20,000 dreams. Navigate your dream's multiple layers of meaning by using this innovative program that includes a more personalized method to dream interpretation.

I must admit, I find John D. Goldhammer's book very insightful and I've been interested in dreams all my life, and even have been a dream team moderator over at Sea Life, based in Australia.



2004, Alamantra



The Birmingham based Alamantra is a trio consisting of bassist Andrew Reid and the Shiflett brothers, Kenny, drums, and Bobby, guitar and vocals. Their new CD titled simply *2004* hit the internet in March.

Though the band Alamantra has only been around since 2001, the trio has long been a fixture of Birmingham's independent music scene; performing together since 1993.

Previous incarnations have included the name Poor Richard's Almanack, ON and Every Little Flower.

Bobby Shiflett is better known to cyber travelers by the internet moniker he shares with the band. As Alamantra, Shiflett's essays and commentaries are familiar to many in the overlapping occult and fringe political milieus. He is one of the principle organizers behind the Greater Thelema society and his writings may be found at their website www.greaterthelema.org.

At first listening *2004* reminds one of Stiv Bator and early Lords of the New Church. We're talking Lords when they were good, edgy and morbidly angry--i.e. pre-Madonna covers and singing about sex. There is also a strong feeling of old school punk bands such as The Dead Kennedys, 7 Seconds or, maybe, Spahn Ranch unplugged.

On repeated listening, one can readily detect the three's varied musical interests and backgrounds lurking at the back. Jazz, 70's psychedelic rock, Jimmy Page all make their influence known in subtle ways. But saying Alamantra sounds like any of these or even a combination would be too simplistic. The sound is intrinsically their own, refreshingly original and avoids the derivative at all turns.

The lyrics, written by Bobby Shiflett are as pointed as his online commentaries and as wide-ranging in their breadth and cultural allusions. While avoiding the didactic, they are also as uncompromising. There are influences of both Aleister Crowley ("OSIS: One Star In Sight" references Crowley's esoteric poem of the same name) and older pagan gods ("Dance of Shiva" and "Out on the Downs").

In true punk form, Alamantra also does not shy away from the controversial. "Out in the Downs" in full pagan revelry encourages the listener to "put down your cross and follow me" and leave the "monkey god." Shiflett sings in "Dance of Shiva" "When Shiva does the dance; gonna bring my temples down/She wails for a lover, don't want to mess around/Went to Pandora's chest; opened at looked down/Just a worn out prayer-book was all that I found."



2004 is a solid album both musically and thematically. It holds together as a whole, which is an accomplishment in this age of downloaded music and the much talked of demise of the album as a format.

Band's official website: www.alamantra.org

CD available from: www.cdbaby.com

A Midnight At a Time, Tommy Raniszewski
(Star 19 Records, 2003)



Thomas Raniszewski's debut album *A Midnight At a Time* is a notable first recording foray. The music throughout is pleasant and the original compositions are artfully crafted. The album is eclectic, but that is not the worst that can be said of a first album. "Dreams of Summertime" and the title song are both standout songs, beautifully performed by Kathy Fowler (joined by Paul Jost on "Midnight"). My favorite track on the disc, however, is the lighter "At Dorothy's Fantastic Seaside Arcade" which playfully evokes summer on the Jersey shore. With time, Raniszewski may well become a truly accomplished composer as *A Midnight At a Time* has a lot of promise. Once he defines his own particular style, he will be a powerful (and powerfully moving) artist. According to sources, Raniszewski is a disciple of Osho and thus should have some good spiritual inspiration from which to draw. I hear that the album he is currently working on will have a more spiritual tone, which is definitely something to look forward to. The production quality is high, which should not be surprising considering it was produced by George Mesterhazy whose work includes the Grammy nominated 'N Sync album *Celebrity*.

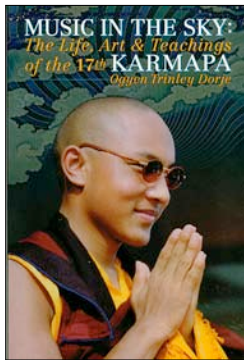
Star 19 Records: www.star19records.com

CD Available from: www.cdbaby.com



If you are interested in joining a lucid dreaming group, join Sunwolf's Dolphin Dreaming group on Yahoo, part of the Star Foundation, at Sea Life: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/earthfirstdreamingschool/>

Music In the Sky: The Life, Art & Teachings of the 17th Karmapa, Michele Martin
(Snow Lion, 2003, 351pp. \$18.95)



The 17th incarnation of the Gyalwa Karmapa, head of the Kagyu sect of Tibetan Buddhism, was born 1985 in China-occupied Tibet. The Karmapa captivated people around the world, when the young boy of 14 made the dangerous trek over the Himalayas from Tibet to India. He soon resumed his studies under the tutelage of Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche. He has quickly proved himself to be every part the inheritor to the vast spiritual lineage of the Kagyu school.

This unique book was produced when the Karmapa was still only 17 years old. His creative capacity and spiritual wisdom would be significant for one of any age, let alone one so comparatively young.

Michele Martin, an experienced Tibetan translator and Buddhist practitioner, provides a strong introductory biographical sketch of the Karmapa. She begins with the often mysterious process of 'discovery' and moves through his early training in Tibet and eventual escape into exile.

The collection provides teachings by the 17th Karmapa, as well as poetry (see poem reprinted earlier in this issue) and calligraphy. The book also has several sections of color photos depicting the young life of the Karmapa and his predecessor the 16th Karmapa.

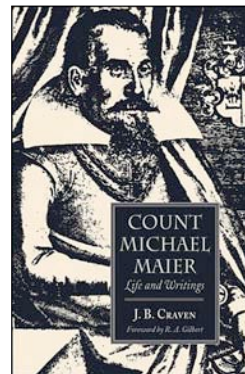
The book concludes with a wealth of material regarding the history of the Karmapa lineage. Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche provides a short history of the preceding sixteen Karmapas.



New & Notable

Ibis Press, an imprint of Nicolas-Hays, that focuses on esoteric reprints have released a number of interesting works recently. *The Paradoxes of the Highest Science* by Eliphas Levi originally appeared in 1883 in Calcutta as a pamphlet in the Theosophical Miscellanies series. In it, Levi makes an appeal for a balance between science and religion by addressing seven paradoxical statements including “Religion is magic sanctioned by authority,” “liberty is obedience to the Law,” and “reason is God.” This edition includes an extensive introduction by R.A. Gilbert, a widely respected scholar of esoterica.

Count Michael Maier (1568-1622) was one of the greats of the 17th century alchemical Renaissance. J.B. Craven’s *Count Michael Maier: Life and Writings* (Ibis Books) includes an overview of the essential writing of the man considered to be one of the first proponents of alchemy as a spiritual endeavor. *Atalanta Fugiens* and *Themis Aurea* transcend their era and continue to inspire alchemical students today. His other works are relatively obscure today. This collection first appeared in 1910. Craven provides a biography, his connection to his contemporaries, and a catalog of Maier’s most important works.

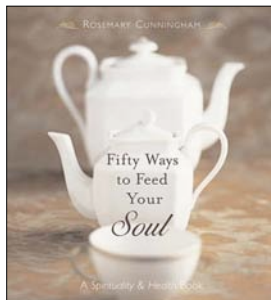
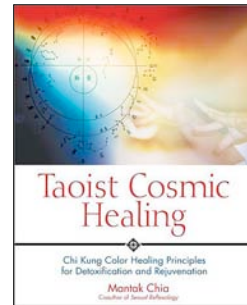


Earlier this year, Ibis Books also released a new edition of a classic work by noted Egyptologist E.A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Mysteries of the Heavens and the Earth*. The book is a collection of important writings by Bakhayla Mika’el (Zosimas). The later texts of the Coptic Church are remain obscure and virtually unknown today. This is even more true of their Ethiopian versions. One of the strangest of these is the complex, apocalyptic *Mysteries of the Heavens and the Earth* that is believed to have come from the Archangel Gabriel in the 15th century. This edition is a reprint of Budge’s 1935 book and includes an interpretation of St. John’s apocalyptic vision, a discourse on the Godhead and the Trinity and a discourse on the birth of Enoch. Also included is a new introduction by R.A. Gilbert.



As baby boomers are now experiencing mid-life, Janice Brewi and Anne Brennan, directors of Mid-Life, have authored *Mid-Life Psychological and Spiritual Perspectives* (Nicolas-Hays). Using Jungian personality therapy and the Christian doctrines of creation and incarnation, this book integrates theories from adult developmental psychology with the ancient wisdom and modern methods of theological reflection. The book explores ways of recognizing and naming the ongoing stories that form the structure of our lives, for narrative can sustain one through the hiatus between the first and second halves of one's life.

Taoist Cosmic Healing (Inner Traditions) by Mantak Chia presents the details of chi kung color therapy for the first time in the West. In the beautifully color illustrated oversize textbook, Chia reveals chi king techniques that develop and strengthen awareness of the forces and energetic principles of the universe and the earthly six directions, allowing the reader to draw upon these forces for healing themselves and others. Includes are practices for cleansing the blood of toxins, relieving pain, using sexual energy for healing and other tolls for the prevention and treatment of disease.



New York writer Rosemary Cunningham is known for her writing about her spiritual experiences in *Spirituality & Health* magazine. She asked the magazine's readers to reflect on their daily lives and invited them to share the simple actions that nourish their souls. Fifty of those responses make up this small hardcover, *Fifty Ways to Feed Your Soul* (Red Wheel). Illustrated with black-and-white photographs throughout, this book makes a sweet and inspirational gift.

Another unique book that came into our offices recently bore the quirky title *The Beginner's Guide for the Recently Deceased* (Llewellyn). The book by David Staume is billed as "essential reading for the predeceased" and is subtitled "A Comprehensive Travel Guide to the Only Inevitable Destination." It is certainly not the one-of-a-kind work that it purports, I think the Tibetans and the Egyptians did have their say, nevertheless Staume does appear to present some helpful insights. The style is light and it would make a good summer read and be helpful prep for heading to the summerland.



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- or to **EVER** have your relationship considered equal

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- Yes, I'll sit by while the Constitution is used to take away my rights.
- No, I'll stand with the Human Rights Campaigns to defeat discriminatory constitutional amendments. Whether or not I want to get married, that should be my choice to make, not the President's.

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SELECTIONS FROM THE JOURNAL OF EXPERIMENTAL SPIRITUALITY



EDITED BY SVEN DAVISSON

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