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# NewAcropolis

**Is There Life After Death?**

**Edward Bernays and the Management  
of Public Opinion**

*Light as the Foundation of Astrology*

**The "Great Simplification"**

**PHILOSOPHY  
CULTURE  
SOCIETY  
ESOTERICA  
ART  
AND MORE**



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## Editorial

### All we need is (to) love!

'Love' seems to be not only a very complex inner state but also a very confusing concept. Is love 'giving' or is it 'desiring'? Is it the ecstatic feeling of 'falling in love'? Is it the strength and warmth we feel when we are loved? Is it attraction? Is it the 'unconditional positive regard' we all wish to receive but is so difficult to give? Is it the essence of our being and of the universe and, according to Dante, that which 'moves the sun and the other stars'?

It seems that 'love' can mean all of these, even if they appear to be contradictory. If we try to group these different aspects together, we can see a complementary duality emerging. On the one hand, there is in love an element of attraction, desire and longing for something we don't have. And on the other hand, there is also an element of giving, emanating and radiating that has its own inner independent source. Maybe these are the two complementary sides of 'love': a lack or deficiency that makes us want to have something, and an inner abundance that makes us want to give something.

There is a myth in Plato's *Symposium*, which expresses the same truth. According to the priestess and prophetess Diotima, Love (*Eros*) was the offspring of *Penia* and of *Poros*. The mother *Penia* represents poverty and need, the father *Poros* represents wealth and resources. So, love is both the child of need and of abundance.

This myth explains beautifully the two aspects of love. We always love what we (think we) don't have - this is the love that is 'needy', that makes us want to be loved, appreciated and admired. In its positive form, this love inspires us to give our best to attain what we want, to live up to what we admire, to become worthy of what we love. In its lower form it is the love that wants to 'have' and to possess. Its worst form is obsession.

The other side of love is comparable to the sun that shines on everything without distinction. Its source is within, it is an abundance and an overflowing. There are two quotes by N. Sri

Ram that demonstrate this kind of love: "*Love is the outgoing force of the soul, the God-in-man.*" And: "*Love, compassion, altruism, are all aspects of the shining forth of the Light that is within.*" This kind of love is the child of wealth, where we already have everything we need within ourselves – if we are able to connect with our innermost essence.

I don't think that one side of love is 'good' and the other one 'bad' or selfish. If this is a real polarity, then both are interdependent. According to Plato, the love which is the desire for something we lack can become the ladder that enables us to ascend and get closer to our spiritual nature, which is this overflowing and blissful abundance within us. This implies that this form of love is the means to reach the other form of love.

We could all do with an education in love that would teach us how to choose the objects of our desire wisely. Plato said that "*there are three classes of men: lovers of wisdom, lovers of honour, and lovers of gain.*" Ideally, we should desire what is good, just, beautiful and true, so that the object of our love inspires us to develop the best in ourselves.

At the same time, we also need to develop and improve our inborn faculty of loving. Erich Fromm, the author of the classic *The Art of Loving*, speaks of love as an art: "*The first step to take is to become aware that love is an art, just as living is an art; if we want to learn how to love we must proceed in the same way we have to proceed if we want to learn any other art [...]*".

There is no doubt that most of our ills today are caused by a lack of love. We don't treat each other (and nature) the way we would like to be treated, and as a result more pain and more hatred are created every day... We need to become aware again of the importance and power of love... and of the Buddha's timeless teaching: "*Hatred does not cease by hatred, but only by love; this is the law eternal*".

*Sabine Leitner*

# Is There Life After Death?

Although the subject of life after death and 'near-death experiences' (NDEs) is not new in itself – we can find references in Plato, the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* and, in fact practically everywhere in the ancient world – it is enjoying a renaissance that began around 50 years ago, when Dr. Raymond Moody coined the term NDE in his best-selling book *Life after Life*. I think it would be wrong to say that 'life after death' can be proven scientifically, because being nearly dead will never be the same as being actually dead. But verified NDEs can perhaps prove, or at least strongly suggest, that the mind, or consciousness, can continue to exist without a functioning human brain.

In order to illustrate this, I am going to focus on some of the findings of a book entitled *Proof of Heaven*, written in 2012 by a top American neurosurgeon called Eben Alexander. I will also add some of Moody's key results from his analysis of hundreds of case studies.

Towards the end of 2008, Dr Alexander found himself suffering a sudden and inexplicable attack of severe pain which led to a seizure and subsequently a coma lasting around six days. After many tests, it was discovered that his condition was caused by *E. coli* bacterial meningitis, an extremely rare disease in adults – less than 1 in 10 million adults get it spontaneously (i.e. without



brain surgery or penetrating head trauma) and it is usually caused by some kind of immune deficiency such as HIV or AIDS, which he didn't have. Moreover, only ten percent of people who contract it survive and many of them spend the rest of their lives in a vegetative state. In short, it was an extremely rare case with a very high mortality rate and a minute chance of full recovery. A colleague of his told him that, going over the medical literature back to 1991, he couldn't find a single case of *E. coli* meningitis in adults who hadn't recently been through a neurological procedure.



Photo by Eberhard Grossgasteiger on Unsplash

These bacteria are extremely aggressive and attack the cerebral cortex, which is the part of the brain responsible for all our human functions, such as memory, language, emotion, hearing and logic. The reason these details are important is that some NDEs take place in a state of cardiac arrest, but the brain is still functioning. But in this case, the patient's brain had ceased to function in terms of consciousness. Only the more primitive parts of his brain continued to operate for all or most of his time in coma. "But when it came to the part of

my brain that every single brain scientist will tell you is responsible for the human side of me: well, that part was gone. I could see it on the scans, in the lab numbers, on my neurological exams – in all the data from my very closely recorded week in hospital. I quickly began to realize that mine was a technically near-impeccable near-death experience, perhaps one of the most convincing such cases in modern history. What really mattered about my case was not what happened to me personally, but the sheer, flat-out impossibility of arguing, from a medical standpoint, that it was all fantasy." And he adds: "While I was in the coma, my brain hadn't been working improperly. *It hadn't been working at all.*" Consequently, he should not have been aware of anything that happened to him in that state.

But what actually happened was that he became super-aware, and underwent a series of experiences which changed his entire mental outlook and caused him to say: "What I'd experienced was more real than the house I sat in, more real than the logs burning in the fireplace."

For reasons of space (and to encourage you to read the book for yourself), I cannot go into all the details of the experience he had. But to summarize, he began his journey in a dark place, rose to a level of human joy and beauty, and finally entered into contact with a 'divine' realm in which he "was able to instantly and effortlessly understand concepts that would have taken me years to fully grasp in my earthly life... Up there, a question would arise in my mind, and the answer would arise at the same time, like a flower coming up right next to it... These answers were not simple "yes" or "no" fare, either. They were vast conceptual edifices, staggering structures of living thoughts, as intricate as cities. Ideas so vast they would have taken me lifetimes to find my own way around if I had been confined to earthly thought."

After several days, when the doctors were about to let him die, his consciousness returned to his physical body and he began to have horrible and realistic nightmares – a common experience in

post-comatose patients, known as 'ICU psychosis'. What was interesting for Dr. Alexander was that, once he had recovered, he could clearly distinguish between this psychotic state, which was of a hallucinatory and delusional nature, and his hyper-conscious state while his body was in coma, which was totally different. As he comments in his book: "the place I went [during the coma] was real in a way that makes the life we are living here and now completely dreamlike by comparison."

All this led him to the conclusion that, contrary to the view of mainstream neuroscience at the time (his book was published in 2012), the brain itself doesn't produce consciousness... "it is, instead, a kind of reducing valve or filter, shifting the larger, nonphysical consciousness that we possess in the nonphysical world down into a more limited capacity for the duration of our mortal life..." He adds: "True thought is not the brain's affair. True thought is pre-physical.... A thinking that is not dependent on linear deduction, but that moves fast as lightning, making connections on different levels, bringing them together. In the face of this free, inner intelligence, our ordinary thought is hopelessly slow and fumbling."

It is interesting to read Raymond Moody's classic after Eben Alexander's more recent work. Moody analyzed the common features of NDEs into a number of stages, which feature, in particular, a dark tunnel or enclosure (as with Alexander), which is followed by a brilliant light - or, more specifically a 'being of light', who accompanies the person in a review of their life in a completely non-judgemental way, helping them to understand themselves and the nature and purpose of life. Two particular aspects are generally highlighted: the importance of loving others, and the importance of learning. As a result, most NDE experiencers return to life and immediately start trying to put these teachings into practice, i.e. to become more loving and to seek knowledge.

It is not necessary to have a near-death experience in order to come to these realizations, but reading about them is a good way of looking at our own lives and deciding to improve in certain ways.

To return to the question which is the title of this article, Melvin Morse, MD, who wrote the preface to the 2016 edition of *Life after Life*, declared: "I do not know of a single mainstream scientific researcher who has not reached similar conclusions" (to Moody's). In other words, those who do investigate end up convinced. And those who have the experience themselves even more so, to the point where, without developing a death-



wish, they lose their fear of death. Researching the subject ourselves could lead us back to the confidence of our ancestors, who, for hundreds of thousands of years "saw death as a natural part of life and have built their understanding of it into a comprehensive world view" (Eben Alexander).

*Julian Scott*

#### **Suggested further reading:**

Plato: *The Republic, Book Ten* (account of an NDE); *Phaedo* (on the immortality of the soul)

*The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (describes stages of the afterlife)

Raymond Moody: *Life after Life*

Dr Eben Alexander: *Proof of Heaven*

# Edward Bernays and the Management of Public Opinion

## The Father of Public Relations

The peculiar character that interests us is Edward Bernays, born in Vienna in 1891, but raised in the United States where his parents emigrated a year after his birth. His mother was the sister of Sigmund Freud and his father was a brother of Sigmund Freud's wife, which means that he was not called Freud by a miracle, and that, somehow,



Edward Bernays with Doris Fleischman, New York 1925. Image from Wikimedia.

contributed to him being practically unknown to the public. He died in 1995.

He used his skills to advise corporations and celebrities, and managed, by the age of 26, to be part of the "Committee on Public Information" (an Orwellian name if ever there was one) of President Wilson, created to convince the American public of the need to enter the First World War.

## Contact with Freud's ideas

Bernays then accompanied President Wilson on his triumphal journey to Europe, where he was able to

come into indirect contact with his famous uncle. One of his colleagues had to pass through Vienna on his way to Czechoslovakia and Bernays took the opportunity to send his uncle Sigmund a box of cigars, a commodity that was difficult to find in those times. Freud in turn sent him a copy of one of his works, "Introduction to Psychoanalysis", recently published by the University of Vienna. Bernays was fascinated and his reading of it led him to the conviction that human beings have unconscious drives, which repress dark, dangerous, always threatening instincts. He concluded that if you handled this skilfully, there was money to be made from it.

He agreed with Walter Lippman, another member of the "Committee on Public Information", that most people are unable to make decisions, that they are mere spectators and should be guided by those with greater intelligence. In other words, that an intelligent minority must control the attitudes and beliefs of the majority by leading them to superficiality. To transform that majority into a mass, so that those instincts do not produce the worst catastrophes. To achieve that, it was necessary to find the techniques that optimized this management.

It was clear, however, that you must be subtle and mobilize desires and feelings in such a way that people would believe that they had made the decisions by themselves and that they had done so freely.

At the end of the Great War, industrial production had advanced enormously and could produce enormous quantities of goods, but the industrialists



found themselves in the situation that, except for the very rich, most people bought only the essentials, that is, only what they needed. In other words, there was huge supply of goods and very little demand. Therefore, this had to be created.

A change of mindset was needed to make desire more important than need. This is how Bernays created a new type of consumer, the compulsive consumer.

If women, for example, always wore the same type of clothes, he would place his products, in this case clothes, with movie stars, make them wear these clothes and organize discussions where the importance of clothes to make them feel good was explained. Then newspapers and magazines were responsible for disseminating it. The desire to be or feel like the movie stars did the rest. If men kept their car for too long, they should be made to feel that the car represented their masculine power, and therefore a new, bigger and more powerful car represented the driver. So it was necessary to exchange it for a better one, as soon as possible.

### Working with large companies

One of his first successes was to organize a tour of the United States by the great opera singer Enrico Caruso. People liked Bernays for his open and refined mannerisms, his culture and his approachable ways, which gave the impression of being more important and influential than he actually was.

In 1920, the American Tobacco Company realized it was losing half of its market because women couldn't smoke in public, so they hired Bernays to solve the problem. After consulting with a psychoanalyst, who told him that the most audacious people saw the act of smoking as a rebellion against machismo, he decided to invent a news story rather than design an advertising campaign. He hired a dozen girls who dared to smoke in public and decided to organize it on a significant date, placing them in key places in the middle of a big parade. At the appointed time they all began to smoke ostentatiously and called their cigarettes "torches of freedom". He ensured the presence of journalists so that their "torches"

appeared on the front page of all the newspapers. Goal achieved – women began to smoke in public and sales rose. The days when it was finally discovered how harmful tobacco could be were still far away, since at that time it was not only presented, but sold, as good for your health.

### In politics

Bernays understood that his mass manipulation tricks could be useful to society. He considered that democracy was a wonderful concept, but you could not trust the judgement of all the people, who might vote for the wrong person or want something that was not suitable, so you had to guide them without them noticing.



"Girl in Red" advertisement for Lucky Strike; shot by Nicholas Murray, a photographer enlisted by Bernays to help popularize feminine thinness and cigarette smoking

In 1923 he published his first book "Crystallizing Public Opinion" and in 1928 he published "Propaganda" where he clearly explains his method and objectives: "*The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element of democratic society. Those who manipulate this unknown mechanism of society constitute an invisible government that is the real power in our country... The intelligent minority needs to make continuous and systematic use of propaganda.*"

But the term propaganda acquired negative connotations due to the use made of it by the famous Ministry of Propaganda of Joseph Goebbels in Nazi Germany. That is why he changed it to

"Public Relations" for his activities and the "Engineering of Consent" for his theories. Walter Lippman, whom we have already mentioned, shared the idea, but called it "manufacturing consent." Both are quite clear and refer to the same thing: manipulating people to achieve their consent.

### **The famous case of Guatemala**

In 1948, Sam Zemurray, president of the United Fruit Company, hired Bernays to give a facelift to the bad image that his company had both in the United States and in Central America. A man of action, of few words and little culture, he came straight to the point: "I've come to hire you as



United fruit steamer "San Pablo". Havana 1921. Image from Wikimedia.

director of public relations of my company or, come to think of it, give yourself whatever title you like and, to save time, also fix your own salary". Bernays did it with his usual skill and energy, completely changing the perception of the company in the United States and linking it with the upper echelons of the country.

When, in Guatemala, first President Arévalo (1945-1950) and then President Arbenz (1951-1954) began to propose reforms that included the use of unused agricultural land, the payment of taxes and the legalization of unions for workers among others, the alarms went off for United Fruit. Bernays was tasked with identifying and solving the problem. He first travelled to Guatemala for several weeks to see for himself and assess the situation and on his return launched a disinformation

campaign in the United States about an alleged communist danger in Guatemala, using a vast network of politicians and lawyers linked to United Fruit, as well as journalists for whom the news had to be created. Many discovered that Guatemala existed and, when newspapers sent correspondents to the country, the reception mechanism was prepared to make them see what they "had" to see. Everything worked perfectly, and Jacobo Arbenz and his government, who had nothing to do with communists, were accused of being agents of international communism, which is why the CIA, and the State Department supported the overthrow of the Guatemalan government in 1954.

Edward Bernays never denied his involvement in this deplorable operation and commented on it in a matter-of-fact way.

### **Aftermath**

It is worth reflecting on the work of this individual and others who, like him, have shaped our way of life. Accustoming several generations to the constant exercise of satisfying their desires, whether natural or imposed, has created, in the first part of the 21st century, especially in countries with greater economic capacity, an infantilization of society. We are talking about people who think little, feel a lot, get bored most of the time and need to be entertained at all costs. If someone has a lot of something, they simply want more. If they don't get it, they can't understand what's wrong with them. They love to have new toys and, if possible, to party all the time. The real damage is done.

*Alfredo Aguilar*

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Edward Bernays ¿genio de las relaciones públicas o villano de la ingeniería social? Revista Historia y Vida. March 2021

# Light and the Foundation of Astrology

Since time immemorial, one of the human being's primary needs has always been that of finding order in existence. The history of both Astronomy and Astrology can confirm this truth. In fact, by observing and studying the sky and its celestial phenomena, human beings have always expressed this longing for *kosmos* ('the order of the universe'), for a realm of peace, harmony and *light*. This approach to existence is also apparent when we look into Traditional Astrology, a discipline which is slowly regaining popularity. Unfortunately today,

because of our modern way of living, we have lost this observational element and the various considerations born from it. And by removing ourselves from contemplating and experiencing some primary 'facts' of Nature, like the experience of the night-sky, modern astrology has become over-intellectualised and psychologised.

This 'return to the roots' of astrology shouldn't surprise us, especially if we consider the state of chaotic living in which we find ourselves today. It is precisely these concepts of *light*, *luminosity*, *visibility*,



Roman mosaic of the Sun-god surrounded by the signs of the zodiac. Photo by Peter/Flicker.com

Alchemical illustration in the "Basilica Philosophica" section of Opus Medico-Chymicum

*light-reflection*, their physical and metaphysical implications, that Traditional Astrology can emphasise, and this is what I want to highlight in this short article.

In antiquity light was understood as the original source of creative and divine power<sup>1</sup> and therefore it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that the whole foundation of astrology is nothing but *a story of light*. "What astrology studies is the articulation and differentiation of light relationships as can be observed in the sky and in the birth chart". (M.Ofek) Astronomers-astrologers from the past were all in tune with this sort of thinking. In Egypt personal fate and destiny were believed to be intertwined with the cosmic order and the movement of celestial bodies. While in ancient India, Hindu Astrology was called *jyotisha* from the root  *jyót*  (light).

It is very curious indeed that all the ancient names of the five traditional planets, before becoming connected to various gods, were known by words that have to do with light. Thus we have: Saturn or *Phaenon*, 'the shining one', Jupiter or *Phaethon*, 'the radiant one', Mars or *Pyroeis*, 'the fiery one', Venus or *Phosphoros*, 'the light-bearer' and Mercury or *Stilbon*, 'the gleaming one'. The astrological language finds its basis in the study of those moving or fixed dots of light (i.e. planets or stars) which appear to us in the night sky. Their regular and predictable motion together with their shining quality brought to ancient man that sense of order and harmony which he still longs for.

Astrological concepts and techniques are strongly rooted in the powerful symbolism of the Sun, with its light and energy which constantly gives birth to the daily and yearly cycles. Because of this special emphasis on the concept of light, the Sun and the Moon (called *Lights* or *Luminaries* in Ancient Astrology), the brightest 'objects' in the sky, played a most prominent role in any astrological interpretation. The classical planets themselves were

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1. In the cosmology of the ancients, light is linked to the 'intellectual' world of divine *Ideas* (from the Greek *Eidos*, 'that which is seen', i.e. an image or form). Light is so self-evident that we can easily forget how essential it is in the way we experience reality. Without light there would be no life (human or cosmic), no vision (physical or metaphysical) and no *knowledge* from the Sanskrit root *vid*, to 'know' and to 'see'. Notice the constant reference to the concepts of 'vision' and 'light'.

divided into two separate "sects" or "factions:" a diurnal or daytime sect and a nocturnal or nighttime sect<sup>2</sup>. The diurnal sect is in power during the daytime when the Sun is above the horizon, and the nocturnal sect is said to be in power when the Sun is below the horizon. When the diurnal sect is in power in a chart, astrologers will call it a "daytime chart;" when the nocturnal sect is in power, a "nighttime chart."



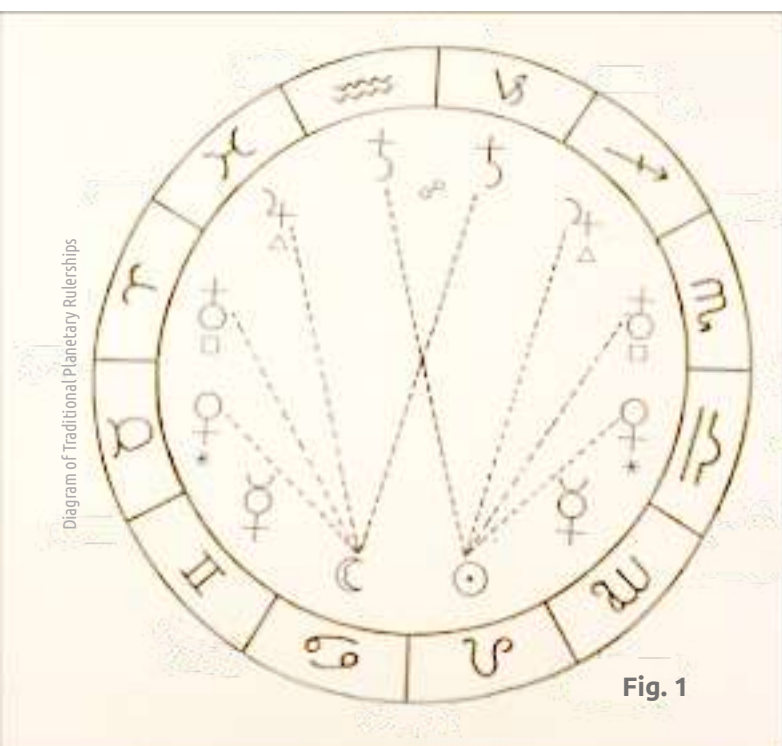
This ancient *doctrine of sects* reveals the ever-recurring interplay of the masculine and feminine polarities: light and darkness, day and night, visible and invisible, conscious and unconscious, objective and subjective, activity and receptivity, rationality and imagination, etc.

For an astrologer, it can be revealing to look at a birth-chart and its corresponding astronomical picture in terms of light relationships. To understand, for instance, which planets are invisible (below the horizon), which planets are visible (above the horizon), rising, culminating or setting, adds life to a chart interpretation. Let's look now at a few more astrological concepts and see how they all relate to this paradigm of *light*.

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2. To the diurnal sect belong the Sun, Jupiter and Saturn, and to the nocturnal sect belong the Moon, Venus and Mars. Mercury, as an androgynous planet, can switch sect.

The tropical Zodiac can be said to be the foundation of Western Astrology. But what is the Zodiac essentially? It is the relationship between the Sun and the Earth, a repeating relationship in which different degrees of solar light are emphasised. Twelve different qualities of solar light which unfold within the yearly cycle, bringing various existential conditions to the biosphere and its inhabitants. In a philosophical sense, the sun through its light carries all the potential seeds of life to the whole solar system, Earth included. The



planets become the ambassadors, messengers and channels of this solar light. By studying the planetary configurations (i.e. astrological aspects) the astrologer can see how this solar potentiality can become actualised in life.

The Sun is everything: it is the ruler of all. But every other planet, to a certain degree, either cooperates or opposes its work. The planets can reflect, mediate, but can also obstruct the life-engendering power of this light. When we look at the traditional zodiacal rulerships (fig.1) we see how the two *lights* (ruling the signs of Leo and Cancer respectively) are found in opposition to Saturn (ruling the wintry signs of Capricorn and Aquarius). Saturn, 'born' in the coldest months of

the year, being the antagonist (he who 'takes away life') of the solar light, which is born in the warmest time of the year. Interestingly, to the naked eye, Saturn seems to emit an ashy, greyish light, while Mars reflects a reddish light. These simple observational facts must have also contributed to the negative attributes that were given by the ancients to those two planets, called the greater and the lesser malefic<sup>3</sup>.

I have spoken of the Zodiac, the luminaries and planetary aspects in relation to solar light. But what about the astrological houses? Well, the whole system of *domification* also relates to light. As the earth rotates on its axis it brings about a changing relationship with the sun-light. The *Ascendant*, which gives rise to the division of the entire house system, is the place where the sun rises. As we wake up we become conscious of our surroundings. The MC (*Medium Coeli*) is the place where the sun-power and our internal power culminate and can become noticeable. The *Descendant* is the place where the sun sets and our individual power wanes and becomes involved in the 'other'. Finally the *Imum Coeli* is the lowest point below the horizon in which both self-awareness and the power of the sun (symbol of consciousness) go as it were to sleep.

In conclusion, understanding the importance of light in ancient astrology provides a glimpse into the intricate web of symbolism and cosmic philosophy that shaped the foundations of this ancient practice. And that celestial luminosity not only illuminated the night sky but also illuminated the path of human destiny.

Agostino Dominici

### Further reading:

*The Pulse of Life* by Dane Rudhyar

*The Lunation Cycle* by Dane Rudhyar

*Tetrabiblos*, by Ptolemy

*The Role of Light in Astrology*, Michael Ofek, Kepler College Audio Recording

3. There are some other reasons why these two planets have this evil reputation. Mars as ruler of Scorpio is in a square aspect with the Sun (ruler of Leo) and as ruler of Aries is in square to the Moon (ruler of Cancer). Saturn, as I mentioned before, is making an aspect of opposition to both the Sun and the Moon. See Fig.1

# Art, Morality and Divine Ways of Seeing

'When encountering works of art we often limit ourselves to quite literal ways of perceiving and understanding them. We ask ourselves who did it, what is it made of, what did they believe about it, etc., but is there more to it? The philosophers of antiquity understood different kinds of interpretation to be possible, going from physical and external aspects but also further towards inner and spiritual kinds of perception. Knowledge of these different levels was seen as a valid path and

method for moving from knowledge of the 'visibles' to knowledge of the 'invisibles'...

In medieval Christianity there was a process of reading scripture called 'Lectio Divina' meaning 'Divine Reading'. In brief, this required initial reading of the text with pauses for prayer before a focused meditation in order to realise the full understanding. From this brief description we can see that the experience would be quite different to ordinary 'reading'. The Neoplatonic philosopher



Proclus explained the different levels in relation to statues, which in antiquity were widely accepted as revealing certain spiritual energies under the right conditions. First, the statue was understood literally, i.e. as made of marble, metal or wood. Second, the statue was understood to represent something, a particular belief, deity or virtue. Thirdly and most crucially the statue was understood to become a reflection of something. Finally, at the fourth level,



Statue of Venus. <http://www.getty.edu/about/opencontent.html>

the statue became identified as directly participating in divinity itself. At this level the viewer might encounter such miraculous visions as have been reported at various times in history.

At the first literal level we get to know the material nature of a work of art, its size, shape or colour. Second, we come to know the beliefs and opinions held about it, such as the figure shown represents the Goddess Venus, who expressed an ideal of Love and Beauty for the Romans. The level of being able to grasp that the thing we are looking at can represent something else is called allegory and an allegorical level of understanding. What is important to note here is that both the literal and

allegorical ways of understanding remain external and as philosophers we recognise that inner and more subtle dimensions of life are also important; which begs the question, what next?

At the third level something of an entirely different register occurs, which the philosophers of antiquity called the 'moral' sense. At this point what we are looking at begins to mean something to us, it reflects something that we resonate with. The symbolic threshold arises and symbolic literacy is important at this level. Seeking this kind of understanding means allowing the work of art or object to become vital to us, allowing it to reveal its meaning to us. When we allow works of art to 'dialogue' in this way, there often occurs some kind of realisation, usually of change... The moral level is the turning point from which the fourth – the most mystical and remote for us today – can spring and leap into the fullness of illumination. In antiquity this level was called the intuitive or anagogic.

Literal and allegorical levels of understanding are useful because they give structure and ground our interpretations, informing and directing our moral insights. However, moving to encounters beyond the external, we must allow something of ourselves to participate during the moment of viewing. To enter the moral sense we must allow a part of ourselves to be called forth by the work of art or object. This requires courage because it usually invites us to an inner message of transformation. In more universal terms, perhaps any moral understanding of life is chiefly traversed by this kind of courage. A popular medieval verse said "The letter teaches you the facts, allegory what you should believe, morality how you should act and anagoge what to hope for..." May our encounters with art give us some courage for moral action and inspire in us once more images of Goodness and Divinity to hope for.

*Siobhan Farrar*

# Our (In)ability to Read in the Digital Era

(Check if you can read this article in one go!)

Have you ever experienced that you no longer find it easy to read lengthy novels like you used to? Or even go through a long article online without being distracted by checking your e-mails, Facebook account, or Insta profile? Well, you are not alone with this problem.

Before the dawn of the digital era, reading was only an offline activity and the physical connection with the texts was essential. Even to get a text needed effort, for example, by going to the bookshop to buy a book or to a library to borrow one. And the connection of the reader and the text were different too. People had time to engage with a text or to

turn over the pages of the book, and they read more slowly. Since computers and especially smartphones became part of our every day life, the way we read, think and process information is changing. To look for a specific piece of information may now take seconds, while 20 years ago, it took hours to get it. Similarly, to find a sentence or an interesting quote within a long text is not a problem any more, we just launch the search function. But alongside the bright sides of reading on the internet, there are dark spots as well. Information overwhelms us and it is very difficult to select what is important and what is not. Pop-up messages, advertisements, and constantly changing web sites are vying for our





attention and we feel that if we don't keep scrolling, we may miss something important or funny. We may have looked at our mailbox five minutes ago, but we keep going back to check it, in case anything has changed since then. It's like when we go back to our fridge in the kitchen from time to time just to check what is inside. This might lead at some point to internet addiction, when we can't live without checking our smartphone, resulting in a lack of sleep, narrowed social circle, etc. This is an issue we have to tackle, if need be, with the help of a professional.

Experts say we tend to skim information and our reading process has become more fragmented. 15 years ago, journalist Nicholas Carr wrote an article entitled "Is Google making us stupid?", where he analyzes his reading ability after using the internet for a decade. He found that his concentration became weaker, he could hardly follow the thread of a book, and he could be easily distracted. In this way, a five-minute article becomes an hour-long process, and to read a short book no longer takes an afternoon, but a whole weekend or several weekends. We do not become immersed in texts like before, but just look at the surface and briefly try to grasp the important message. No time for reflecting on what we have just read, no time to forget other things around us. And thanks to online shopping services, we have forgotten about printed books or give them lower value. Books are expensive, they need space, and when we move



somewhere else, packed boxes are heavy. And most books are online anyway, so why would we need them? Many people sell their books for this reason and just leave a few books on the shelves for decoration. So is this the end of the traditional book and the death of reading? Are we unable to read the classics?

Not at all. If we learnt in our childhood how to read books, we will not forget it, we just need to practise it again. It is like riding a bike or speaking a foreign language. We may forget some skills temporarily, because we don't use them, but not forever. Reading is important, as important as breathing. With the digital era, we learnt to read in a different way, a non-linear, information-centered, distracted way. But there is a road back to the traditional way of reading. There are still printed books available in bookshops and libraries. And if we want, we can slow down to re-read Orwell's 1984 or Tolstoy's War and Peace, and just let ourselves fall under the influence of these masterpieces. Books, like great works of cinema, take us to a different world, and as we read these stories, our mind builds their images in our brain. Reading the Lord of the Rings by Tolkien or One Hundred Years of Solitude by Márquez can be a unique inner experience for our whole life.

*Istvan Orban*



Photo by Aaron Burden on Unsplash

# The “Great Simplification”

## We are energy blind

In his thirty-minute video<sup>1</sup> Nate Hagens begins by succinctly telling the story of life on Earth and of mankind, whose growth and evolution, from an economic and technological point of view, were barely noticeable from one generation to the next – until we approached the Renaissance and created new technologies that allowed humans to explore the world and develop new trade routes. Then came the Industrial Revolution with new machines and, finally, the age of oil, with untold power and wealth. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we had multiplied our growth rate by thirty times compared to a thousand years ago, giving us resources and a level of comfort never seen before.

We created machines that work for us like the equivalent of more than five hundred billion human

workers, which Jean-Marc Jancovici<sup>2</sup> refers to as “Energy Slaves<sup>3</sup>”. As we plunged into the consumption of fossil fuels, we slowly disconnected ourselves from the natural flows of Earth. We regarded the main inputs of our economies as free, as we only paid for the cost of labour and extraction, but didn’t pay for their creation, true worth and pollution.

We attributed this newfound wealth and progress solely to our ingenuity. We had become energy blind.

## Humanity has become a superorganism

As Nate Hagens puts it: “Energy is and always will be the currency of life”. It is an essential component of our physical world that allows for the transformation of matter. Without it nothing

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-xr9rIQxwj4>

2. YouTube video interview between J-M Jancovici and Nate Hagens (in English) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-EHCguJp9eQ>

3. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Energy\\_slave](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Energy_slave)



changes, nothing moves, nothing lives. We are currently living through what he calls a “carbon pulse”, with the overuse of fossil fuels, and as the definition suggests, it won't last forever. As the best pockets of fossil fuel have mostly been depleted, their extraction will become more costly, up to a point when it won't make sense to even extract the remaining resources.

Over the last few centuries we have created a more and more complex global network of goods and services which today requires the energy equivalent of one hundred and seventy billion lightbulbs just



Photo by Riccardo Annandale on Unsplash

to keep running, mostly using fossil fuels. Our financial system is based on perpetual growth, with the need to print more money, aka energy, that will eventually be used to transform our environment. According to Hagens “The system is no longer in anyone's control. The human species, at least to this point, has become a mindless, insatiable, energy hungry superorganism”.

### What makes us human

Humans are very social beings, but most of us have remained tribal in our mindsets and behaviour. In a culture of vast material wealth, information overload and social media, it's increasingly difficult for us to separate fantasy from reality. We have

created systems and algorithms optimised for profits that are reducing our attention spans, accelerating addiction, polarization, apathy and mistrust of science.

We are creatures with finite lifespans, making the future not a priority for us. Instead, we are focused on more short-term needs and our promises for change keep being postponed for tomorrow. These desires, coupled with the carbon pulse, have led us to create this superorganism. But this is not predestined. The predicament we are in will define what we are capable of becoming.

### The inevitable great simplification

The technological and economic lens through which we are looking at the future is energy blind. The transition to renewable energies won't solve the issue. We need what Hagens calls “a system lens”, a lens that encompasses energy awareness and all the knowledge and sciences of humanity combined. As we need to learn to use energy differently, we will experience what he calls “A Great Simplification”.

As we will need to work with less available energy, our complex, energy-hungry superorganism will starve and die, leading to turbulence, economic contraction and the diminishing of our current lifestyles. Some economists and scientists call this phenomenon Degrowth.

As Hagens puts it beautifully: “There are many pathways wending through a Great Simplification. Some are wise, humane, and even preferable to what we have now. Some are so dark as to be nearly unthinkable. Yet, it is precisely ‘thinking about’ these pathways, and actively choosing among them, which offers the only realistic hope for a long and meaningful human future. Nature has gifted us with a productive and beautiful home, the ability to understand how we got here, and the creativity to imagine which paths are possible. The future need not be dystopian, but cleverness alone will no longer suffice for the next leg of our journey. We will need imagination, foresight, empathy and above all wisdom to navigate the path to the future that is arriving – The Great Simplification.”

*Florimond Krins*

# The Myth of SHAMBHALA



Photo by Rohan Reddy on Unsplash

According to Tibetan Buddhist tradition, Shambhala is a mystical and hidden kingdom. Its location has been hypothesised especially since the 19th Century by writers including Ossendowski, Gurdjieff, Müller and Blavatsky, and ranges from the snowy peaks of the Himalayas, to the Syr Darya river in Khazakhstan, to the Gobi desert. It is spoken of in various ancient texts including the Sanskrit *Kalachakra* tantra with its Tibetan translations, the Hindu *Vishnu Purana* of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century BCE, texts of the Zhang Zhung culture which pre-date Tibetan

Buddhism in western Tibet, and also the Tibetan Bon scriptures which speak of a very similar mythical and mystical place called Olmolungring. Shambhala (in Tibetan “bde ’byung”) is a Sanskrit term meaning “place of peace/ tranquillity/happiness”.

Shambhala is a society of enlightened inhabitants, where war and injustice are unknown. It doesn't belong to any culture, religion, to the East or West, and people of all faiths can aspire to and reach it. Some sources indicate it was formed in the 9<sup>th</sup> Century BCE and its capital city

is Kalapa. There are 32 kings who have ruled and will rule Shambhala: the first 7 were Truth Kings, or Chogyal/Dharmarajas in Tibetan/Sanskrit respectively. King Suchandra was the first of these kings, and he requested teachings from the Buddha that would allow him to practice the dharma (universal law) on earth.

Buddha prophesized that all who received the Kalachakra empowerment would be reborn in the Shambhala's mandala of consciousness and therefore “live”, or more accurately “be” there. The path to this is described as the practice of warriorship and secular sacredness - the former by meeting fear and transcending aggression, and the latter by joining the wisdom of the past and one's own culture with the present.

At that time there was the Indian system of castes, which had been distorted in its intention and divided the population. Once the Buddha's teachings (the Kalachakra tantra) were brought back to Shambhala, the king's role was to uphold the integrity of the

Kalachakra tantra, which became its religion and central text.

After the first 7 kings came the Wisdom Holders - or Ridgen/ Kalki in Tibetan/Sanskrit respectively, and Kalki actually means “the unifier or holder of the castes”. It may be that the Ridgen King figure derived from the Hindu myth of the Kalki avatar - who is the 10th incarnation of Lord Vishnu (two other widely accepted incarnations before that of Kalki are Krishna and Buddha). The first Kalki king predicts that there will be an invasion in the future, caused by society being



Kalki, avatar of Vishnu. Image from Wikimedia

divided into castes, not cooperating and rejecting each other. He said that in order to have peace in the land, there must be unification of all people into one caste. He brought them all together in what is called an initiation, or empowerment, into the Kalachakra meditation system. According to the text, when the world declines into war and greed and humanity is on its knees, it will be the time of the 25th Ridgen King’s incarnation and he will emerge from Shambhala with

an enormous army to destroy the corrupt world leaders and bring on a global Golden Age.

Interestingly, the word Kalachakra means “wheel of time” or “cycles of time”, suggesting the cyclical nature of human dharma with its peaks, declines, its renewal and regeneration.

The great Kalachakra commentary Vimala-prabha (“Stainless Light”) described the Shambhala in detail, and Tibetan painters at that time presented it exactly in their paintings or “thangkas” according to this description, as they were not allowed to use their imagination or other inspirations when depicting this sacred place. The text describes it as a large kingdom with 8 divisions or sections, which could be taken literally or symbolically since we cannot actually see the kingdom with our physical eyes; just like we cannot see the chakras and energy centres of our subtle bodies as described in Sanskrit texts. These too have been depicted by artists according to their descriptions.

The Kalachakra teaching has at its centre the correspondence between macrocosm and microcosm, as well as a correspondence between these and the ideal archetype of the Kalachakra mandala - a cosmic blueprint or cosmogram. In the West, this cosmogram has been known through the principle attributed to Hermes “as above, so below”. There is an archetypal pattern behind the microcosm and macrocosm, expressed in the Kalachakra as an ‘outer,’ ‘inner,’ and ‘secret’ or ‘other’; or according



Details from the Kalachakra Mandala. Photo by Guillaume Baviere/flickrcommons

to other perspectives, essentially there are 3 Shambhalas. The first Shambhala or outer meaning refers to the physical place described above, although only individuals with the appropriate karma and initiation can reach it. The inner and secret/other meanings refer to more subtle understandings of what Shambhala represents, and are also referred to as the etheric and spiritual Shambhalas which are generally passed on orally. This is all depicted in a 3-dimensional mandala hidden and protected at the centre of Shambhala, which Initiates must learn to visualise with its intricate detail and meaning. According to this mythical and mystical tradition, Shambhala therefore is the custodian society of the cosmic blueprint of our planet.

It is important to point out that many tried to find Shambhala, including unfortunately some who misunderstood and misused some of its concepts and symbols for their own ideologies and agendas.

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