

# THE MYSTERY OF GRACE

**A Compilation of Articles from The Mystic's Vision**

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## **Enlightenment And Grace**

In his several books, the highly respected psychologist and philosopher, Ken Wilber, offers a detailed and well-thought-out conceptual framework for understanding and talking about the fundamental levels of experience: spiritual, mental and physical, corresponding to mystical, psychological, and scientific (empiric) knowledge. I wish to acknowledge Mr. Wilber's superior analytical vision and the very helpful framework of understanding which he has provided. However—and there is always a “however”—we are individuals with decidedly different personal proclivities, sensibilities, and styles, and there are bound to arise a number of areas in which we see things slightly differently.

Wilber stresses in most of his writings that the perennial vision of the mystics is of a hierarchic (or, more accurately, *holarchic*) reality, which he refers to as ‘the great Chain of Being’, in which each whole is nested in its higher (subtler) level of reality, with the non-dual One at its summit. The one absolute Source, being unqualified and indivisible, is the Ground and hierarchical whole (holon) of all that follows from It; but It is also the evolutionary Goal toward which all conscious beings are drawn. Thus, there is an involution of Spirit that can be described, in its simplest form, as a descent from Spirit to mind, to matter. And evolution is the process in reverse. We may regard this Spiritual paradigm as “the perennial philosophy”.

What, then, are the implications of the perennial philosophy (as derived from spiritual vision) for empirical science? In other words, how can we reconcile the data derived from the subtle vision of the mystics with the data of scientific theory? Is Einstein's Theory of Relativity compatible with the vision of the mystics? Is quantum theory? Or does Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle and the stochastic nature of quantum data preclude any possible comparison of ‘scientific’ theory with the data perceived in the mystical vision? Does the mystic's vision of the universe as a Thought-construct offer any useful insights into an explanation of

the four forces of nature? Does it offer any insights into the nature and behavior of wave/particles? At present, it yet remains to be seen whether or not all these theoretical ‘phenomena’ can be reconciled with the mystic’s vision.

One of the difficulties in reconciling observable phenomena and physical laws with the subtle universe described by the mystics is the fact that there are subtle “layers” of reality within the mystic’s universe which are not observable or verifiable in any way—such as the *soul* and *karma*; i.e., invisible causal factors (hidden variables) which are thought to largely determine space-time realities, but which themselves are unobservable, and therefore undemonstrable, and unverifiable. The empirical ‘laws’ of physics bear no recognizable relationship to the ‘laws’ of psychology—if there are any such laws; why then should the laws of physics bear any relationship to the laws of *Spirit*, which is a yet subtler holarchic level? Of course, they are all interrelated; the physical is nested in the mental, and the mental is nested in the Spiritual. The Spiritual world is the greater holon in which these other levels reside. So, it would seem that, ultimately, both the psychic (mentally perceived) and the physical (sensually perceived) worlds must be directly relatable to and consistent with the data obtained in the Spiritual vision.

Ultimately, science and gnosis *must* coincide in an, eventually formulated, *complete* model of reality! But empirical science can never succeed in formulating a ‘complete’ model of reality until it takes into account the mental and spiritual aspects of reality as a whole. Even if it comes up with a ‘Theory of Everything’, as it frequently does, it actually means by that term ‘a Theory of Everything Phenomenal’. And even if that Theory were to be empirically demonstrated to be accurate and consistent, it would then have to recognize that only a small part of the larger reality had been explained, and that an explanation must now be found for the existence of those phenomena and noumena existing in the higher (subtler) levels of psychic (mental) and Spiritual reality. For, the perceivable, phenomenal, universe is simply an epiphenomenon of the two subtler realms. Each is related to the other, holarchically, and none may be regarded as an isolated field of enquiry.

It’s a top-down universe, each level dependent on its holarchic precedent; and, ideally, knowledge of this universe must also be top-down. Ideally, we must first know the Source, the Cause; then the products, the effects, will become correctly known and understood. It is true, as Mr. Wilber points out, that the knowledge of the Source takes place, not on the sensual or mental levels, but on the spiritual level; and not with physical or psychic vision, but with spiritual vision. But there must be a means to correlate (on the mental level) the data obtained in these apparently disparate realms. If we start at the bottom, with the empirical data of

the phenomenal universe, and attempt to infer from it the higher holons of reality, the mental and the spiritual, we have no consistent and reliable clues by which to infer those higher realities. In other words, when we ignore or deny the Source, as many scientific materialists and materialistic scientists presently do, it is little wonder that the theories of empirical science often go so incredibly far astray of the truth of reality as perceived in the Spiritual vision. Our understanding of the manifest, phenomenal universe requires a context; and that context can only be found at the summit of the holarchic reality, i.e., in the Spiritual vision. With that as the starting point, one may then comprehend the phenomenal reality; without it, one is left with no contextual framework at all. And that epitomizes the state of confusion and alienation prevalent in the exclusively empirical view of the world currently embraced by contemporary science.

However, in the past and in the present, Spiritual knowledge—*direct* Spiritual knowledge—has been, and it appears that it will continue indefinitely to remain, a kind of knowledge obtained by the very, very few. It is no doubt the ‘highest’ knowledge possible, providing a direct subjective apperception of the summit of the holarchy of knowledge, and doubtless represents the eventual summit of human evolution; but the *universal* human apperception of the spiritual reality is a culmination that remains a long, long way off. For now, the revelation of that direct unitive knowledge occurs only in isolated instances, and the recipients of that knowledge are nearly as culturally isolated as was Jesus and Philo Judaeus two thousand years ago; though there is possibly some increase in the *philosophical* (mental) interest in mysticism in today’s world.

As I stated earlier, there are some areas in which Mr. Wilber and I differ slightly. It is evident that his concern over the current emphasis in our society on the validity of empirical (scientific) knowledge to the complete exclusion of other areas of knowledge, and the failure of the representatives of empirical knowledge to acknowledge the validity of the transcendent knowledge of the mystics, is a concern that we both share. However, one of the differences between our views that comes to mind involves Mr. Wilber’s notion that there is a tried and true ‘scientific’ methodology for producing mystical experience, or ‘the vision of God’; namely, the practice of meditation or contemplation. In several of his books, Mr. Wilber makes the pertinent point that, just as an empirical scientist must perform an experiment in accordance with the scientific “injunction” to abide by the prescribed conditions of the experiment, so must a spiritual experimenter conform to the injunction setting out the conditions of the spiritual experiment, namely, the practice of meditation or contemplation, in order to obtain the experiential results; i.e., spiritual vision.

This analogy to scientific empirical experimentation provides a great corrective to those who might say, ‘I have not experienced spiritual vision’; whereupon one may counter, ‘Well, have you conformed to the conditions prescribed for obtaining spiritual vision? Have you practiced meditation?’ And if they cannot answer, ‘Yes’ to that question, then they simply have not fulfilled the conditions necessary for obtaining the desired results. This is all well and good. But I would like to suggest that the acquisition of spiritual knowledge through spiritual vision is not *entirely* analogous to the acquisition of empirical knowledge; and I would like to point out, in the interest of clarification, the ways in which they are different, so as to alleviate any misunderstandings resulting from the omission of this information.

What is wrong with the logic of the following statement? ‘All those who have experienced the unitive vision have done so while in a state of meditative or contemplative awareness; therefore, if you practice meditation or contemplation, you will experience the unitive vision.’? It should be clear to everyone that the concluding portion of this statement is a *non sequitur*. It just does not follow logically. It seems evident to me that if spiritual knowledge were simply a matter of fulfilling the conditions necessary for its occurrence, such as establishing a disciplined program of meditation, the world would already be filled with enlightened souls. But it is not simply a matter of fulfilling conditions, comparable to the requirement for obtaining empirical results. I do indeed wish it were true, Mr. Wilber; but it is not—and that’s been the fly in the ointment all along. Is spiritual knowledge really an objective obtainable, and “perfectly repeatable”, by anyone simply by setting up the prescribed conditions? Because I have ‘known’ God, the absolute Ground of all reality, does that mean that, by following my ‘methodology’ you also will come to know God? In other words, can anyone obtain the same resulting spiritual knowledge as another simply by following certain conditional injunctions, or is the acquisition of spiritual knowledge much more dependent upon a ‘Higher Will’ than upon our own determined will and actions?

Einstein knew the mathematical proof of the constancy of the speed of light, and the variability of the measurement of time relative to an observer; but can you also know what he knew? And the answer, it seems to me, is “Only if, by the grace of God, you have the same innate inclination and the same degree of mathematical training to investigate these matters, *and* you follow the necessary injunctions for obtaining that knowledge. Otherwise, you must simply take it on faith that the constancy of the speed of light is known.” What about Beethoven? He knew how to create extraordinary music; does that mean that you also know how to do that?

Same answer: ‘Only if, by the grace of God, you have the same innate inclination and the same degree of musical training, *and* you follow the necessary injunctions for obtaining that knowledge.’ Darwin knew that various species were related, but evolved differently through the process of natural selection; but can you also discover previously unknown laws of nature? Only if, by the grace of God, you have the same innate inclination and the same degree of scientific training, *and* you follow the necessary injunctions for obtaining that knowledge. This same line of reasoning may be applied to Jesus, the Buddha, Plotinus, and all other seers of the ‘spiritual’ reality. You may know what they knew only if you have the same innate inclination and the same degree of spiritual training, *and* you follow the necessary injunctions for obtaining that knowledge, *and* it is God’s will.

It should be clear to everyone that we are not all equally capable of ‘knowing’ what has been known by uniquely extraordinary beings. Everything depends on our innate inclination and our specialized training, and of course the grace of God. By “innate inclination” I mean the soul-driven proclivities and talents constituting the karmic tendencies possessed by each soul. These ‘innate inclinations’ are wholly dependent upon the evolutionary development of our souls; which are, in turn, dependent upon, not only our own wills, but the grace of God. And so, we must acknowledge that the subtle spiritual knowledge that has been obtained by a few extraordinary men and women is not necessarily available to everyone; there must be a congruence of inclination, training, and God’s grace, along with the practice of meditation or contemplation. The assertion by many spiritual teachers that the realization of God, the knowledge of the Source and Goal of all existence, is available to everyone simply by following certain precepts and injunctions, is not at all an accurate assessment. One’s soul, which is itself a product of God’s grace, must contain an innate inclination to the acquisition of such knowledge, must follow a regimen of introspection, and, by the grace of God, be placed in the most timely and appropriate cosmic circumstances to receive such knowledge. Then, and only then, will it be able to ‘know’ God. Is God-realization available to everyone? Sorry, no. I think that, not only spiritual knowledge, but each kind of knowledge—sensory, mental, or spiritual—is available only to those whom God has made distinctly fit for it. It is misleadingly inaccurate to say that such knowledge is available to everyone.

The injunctions given by Jesus, “Seek and ye shall find,” “Knock, and the door shall be opened to you”, has inspired many followers to seek and to knock, and yet we must wonder, how many of those millions of followers were enlightened with the unitive vision of God after seeking and knocking? I can think of only a handful of Christians who seem to have obtained this vision over the past twenty centuries.

The injunctions given by the Buddha, “Meditation brings wisdom; therefore, choose the path of wisdom”, has drawn many to meditation; and some have become illumined—but only a small percent. My point is that there is no guaranteed means or methodology for obtaining the unitive vision. It seems to me to depend on many factors, not all of which are within the purview of one’s own will.

It would certainly be wonderful if one could truthfully and confidently say ‘Do this, and you will experience the unitive vision’, but in spiritual matters there is no direct causal relationship between voluntary acts and revelation such as there is between empirical injunctions, spelling out the conditions of the experiment, and the produced results. ‘Do this, and that will result’ is sound and dependable advice when we are advising “release the ball, and you will see that it falls to earth”; but not necessarily as truthfully predictive when we are advising “practice meditation, and you will become enlightened”. If it was an easily reproducible experience, it is likely that enlightenment would have been widely accepted as a readily obtainable and commonly repeatable experience by now—which is certainly not the case.

It is no doubt true that one living in an environment conducive to meditation has an advantage over one who is immersed in a turbulent and disturbing environment, but we must not leap to the conclusion that all the monks in the temple, monastery or ashram are therefore enlightened. The one thing we can say for certain is that they are exposing themselves to the lifestyle and practices conducive to the unitive vision. It is not because the Buddha sat down under a Bo tree to meditate that he became enlightened; it is not because Jesus went alone into the wilderness to pray and contemplate God that he became illumined; it is not because John of the Cross gave himself to introspection and prayer within his Toledo cell that he was united with God. All of these mystical seers found themselves drawn to conditions that were amenable to that experience, but the underlying Cause was the grace of the all-governing Spirit, which called each soul from within to evolve toward the egoless reception of that non-dual revelation; in other words, it was God’s singular grace which was the ultimate causative factor in that revelation. I am aware that this is an unpopular stance; but experience has taught me that the revelation of the unitive vision cannot be reduced to a causal act initiated by the individual.

Indeed, we need to ask ourselves, “Who is this ‘I’ who thinks it can bring about the realization of the transcendent God by its own efforts?” It is well known that only when this false and limited ‘I’ vanishes is the revelation of God at all possible! And by whose grace do you suppose the death of that false ‘I’ is accomplished? Whose love wells up in the soul and draws it to that immolation? And whose ‘I’ is

revealed in the unitive vision as the Ground and essence of all 'I's? If you think you can bring this about by your own efforts, go right ahead. As Saint Nanak has said, eventually, 'suffering will teach you wisdom'.

The 'causes' of grace cannot be discussed, of course; because only the One is privy to the factors that go into its bestowal. However, I am of the opinion, based on my visionary experience, that, in His universe, "all things move together of one accord", and that many elements must come together in the production of the revelation of the soul's higher Identity. There is a coordinated unfoldment in the manifested world of one's mental, emotional, and karmic conditions along with the conditions of the physical environment, and the positions of the planets in the cosmic environment—all under the watchful and governing eye of the Spirit—to bring about that unitive vision. In other words, man purposes, but God disposes. None may deliberately, willfully transcend and supercede His unerring Will. When it is that soul's time for enlightenment, he will be drawn from within to seek it; he will be drawn to the conducive location; he will be drawn into spiritual communion, and he will be illumined in his soul by the Light of the one Spirit.

Innumerable saints and seers have declared their utter dependence upon God's grace in obtaining spiritual vision; here are just a couple: Saint Nanak, the *Adi* (original) *Guru* of the Sikh tradition (1469-1539 C.E.), who said, "By God's grace alone may God be grasped. All else is false, all else is vanity." In one of his songs, addressing God, he reiterates this conviction:

He whom Thou makest to know Thee, he knows Thee.  
 And his mouth shall forever be full of thy praises.  
 ... Liberation and bondage depends upon Thy will;  
 There is no one to gainsay it.  
 Should a fool wish to, suffering will teach him wisdom. <sup>1</sup>

Another seer, named Dadu (1544-1603 C.E.), was also eloquently unambiguous in declaring this truth:

Omniscient God, it is by Thy grace alone that I have been  
 blessed with vision of Thee.  
 Thou knowest all; what can I say? <sup>2</sup>

These examples could be multiplied extensively, and I would add my own declaration to the list. However, I think one could compile a much longer list of those who, having practiced meditation for many years, did *not* experience an

enlightening revelation, who, after their best efforts, did *not* obtain the unitive vision. So, I feel that the suggestion that enlightenment follows a cause-effect sequence that anyone may experientially prove to his or her own satisfaction simply by the practice of meditation is a useful tool for encouraging the search for enlightenment (which is no doubt its function), and it may indeed prove fruitful in specific instances. But it is also unrealistic and unreliable as an unqualified injunctive rule—unless, of course, we leave the time frame open-ended. I know of one spiritual teacher who used to tell his followers that, if they continued to practice meditation, they would be enlightened in eight, ten, or twelve lifetimes, depending on their effort. Looked at from that time frame, the guarantee appears much more plausible. The fact is, we are all, in our spiritual essence, identical with the one Spirit, the transcendent Lord of the universe; and one day all, by the grace of God, must come to know it. On that you may rely. Meanwhile, we remain as consciously aware of His presence within us as we are able and strive to become ever nearer to the clear realization of that one indivisible Self with every breath.

#### NOTES:

1. Singh, Trilochan, et al. [eds.], *Selections From The Sacred Writings Of The Sikhs*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1960; *Rag Asa*, pp. 57, 42 (or see Abhayananda, S., *History of Mysticism*, London, Watkins, 2002; pp. 335-344).
2. Orr, W.G., *A Sixteenth Century Indian Mystic*, London, Lutterworth Press, 1947; p. 142 (or see Abhayananda, Swami, *History of Mysticism*, London, Watkins, 2002; pp. 345-356).

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**The Celestial Dynamics of Grace <sup>1</sup>**  
**(from *The Supreme Self*, 1984.)**

Nearly ten years had passed since my experience of enlightenment in the Santa Cruz mountains, when I began to be interested in the peculiar claims of astrology and came to have an understanding of the “celestial dynamics,” not only of my own personal characteristics, but of all the ordinary and extraordinary day-to-day transient conditions of the mind, the body, and the soul. There were, no doubt, some “celestial influences” accompanying that dawning interest in astrological correspondences, but I was unaware of them; all I knew was that, at this time, I had become fascinated with the clearly meaningful connections between my own natal planetary positions and my personal characteristics and fluctuating mental states; and as I eagerly consumed what literature I found on the subject, I became more and more convinced of the validity of the astrological principle of correspondence between the planetary positions and the varying conditions of my psyche.

According to the principles of astrology, one can discover the secrets of a soul’s unique characteristics (the psychology of a personality) by drawing a map of the heavens as it appeared at the exact moment and place of birth, which serves as a sort of blueprint of that particular soul. But how, when, and in what sequence the events of the person’s adventure on earth will take place is told in the *progressions* of the planets (one day in the ephemeris represents one year in the life), and by the daily *transits* (actual transitory positions) of the Sun, moon and planets as they pass through and relate to the natal map.

All of the planets move (transit) through the twelve signs of the zodiac which comprise the 360° of the ecliptic; some slowly, some more rapidly. The Sun moves approximately one degree per day, and the moon one degree approximately every two hours. The outer planets take weeks or months to move through a degree. But always the overall architecture of this “atom” which we call the solar system is altering the structure of its design moment by moment. And we, who are within the confines of this “atom” are continually experiencing the changes in our own energy-patterns according to, and corresponding with, the changes in the angles from which the various planets and stars relate to us.

This implies, of course, that *everything* that happens to us in our lives will be accompanied by a planetary arrangement, which, in its relationship to the positions of the planets at the moment of our birth, will symbolize that event. One day, it occurred to me that, if these principles were true, there would have to have been a configuration in the progressed and transiting positions of the planets on the night

of my “mystical experience” that was significantly extraordinary. In other words, that Divine experience which we refer to as “*grace*” must also have been signified in the planetary patterns in effect for me on that very night.

This was a mind-boggling concept that was to stand many of my most cherished presumptions on their heads. In order to explain why this should be so, let me take a moment to describe some of those presumptions regarding that mysterious thing called “*grace*,” which is, from the standpoint of its recipient, a new and radical change in consciousness, and, subsequently, in the personality, which arises seemingly from out of nowhere:

From the moment my soul first awakened with “spiritual” understanding, and the love and desire for God first entered my heart, I had attributed that awakening to God’s *grace*. And there was no question in my mind that my later, “mystical,” experience was the gift of *grace*, for there was absolutely no denying the fact that this experience had been *given* to me. I had not earned it; I had practiced no technique, no method; by no means could I be said to have produced it. There was no other word to describe this gift other than “*grace*.”

Traditionally, *grace*—the *grace* of God—was thought of as the freely-given intercession of God to a humbled soul, lifting it momentarily to mergence in the universal Consciousness. In this experience, the false, but insistent, illusion of a separate soul-identity, or ego, is dissolved, and the Divine Intelligence, which is the infinite and eternal Self of all, is revealed. How could the illusory, individual self imagine that it had accomplished this feat? Let those who think they can accomplish it do so. When the eternal Self is realized, that separate individual self is no longer even there! The eternal Self appears only at its demise. And it has not the ability to slay itself; it is only the divine revelation of God that, in an instant, dissolves that tenacious illusory ego. It is *grace*.

Listen to what that enlightened 15th-century monk, Thomas á Kempis, had to say about *grace*:

“When spiritual comfort is sent to you of God, take it meekly and give thanks humbly for it. But know for certain that it is of the great goodness of God that it is sent to you, and not of your deserving. And see that you are not lifted up therefore unto pride, nor that you joy much thereof, nor presume vainly therein, but rather that you be the more meek for so noble a gift, and the more watchful and fearful in all your works; for that time will pass away, and the time of temptation will shortly follow after. When

comfort is withdrawn, despair not therefore, but meekly and patiently await the visitation of God, for He is able and of sufficient power to give you more grace and more spiritual comfort than you had first. Such alteration of grace is no new thing, and no strange thing to those who have had experience in the way of God; for in all great saints and in all lovers of God similar alteration has often been found.

“... If almighty God has done thus with holy saints, it is not for us, weak and feeble persons, to despair, though we sometimes have fervor of spirit, and are sometimes left cold and void of devotion. *The Spirit comes and goes according to His pleasure*, and therefore Job said: ‘Lord, Thou graciously visitest Thy lover in the morning, that is to say, in the time of comfort; and suddenly Thou provest him in withdrawing such comforts from him.’

“...He who knows the comforts that come through the gift of grace and knows also how sharp and painful the absenting of grace is, shall not dare think that any goodness comes of himself; but he shall openly confess that of himself he is very poor and naked of all virtue.”<sup>2</sup>

What Thomas said conformed to my own experience. The fervor of devotion was not always the same; it came and went, apparently according to its own pleasure. Likewise, the clarity of understanding was sometimes absent, and at other times inspiration seemed to flood my mind with the wisdom of God. One day I might be filled with love and fervor; another day I might be dry or lethargic, or physically energetic, or contemplative. One day I might be bubbling with creative energy; another day I would be dry as a bone. There was no telling what kind of inner state each day would bring.

The experience of union, or Unity, had come to me only once. Why on that day, at that time? I could only explain it, as Thomas á Kempis did, as God’s inexplicable grace. But now I was beginning to understand something of the celestial dynamics of grace, i.e., the principles of astrological correspondence. And so, I drew up a chart for that night of November 18, 1966.

What a revelation it was when I beheld that chart! The correspondence was undeniable. Here before my eyes was clear and unequivocal proof of the “science” of astral correspondences. Any impartial astrologer viewing the progressions and transits to my natal chart which occurred on that evening would have to acknowledge that this was indeed a night of destiny, an undeniably magical night

of mystical vision, a once-in-a-lifetime night of incredible potential for the meeting with God. The extraordinary emphasis on the planetary position of Neptune (known as the planet of mystical experience) at that particular time is eloquently conclusive.

If—as many people think—there is really no correlation between the planets and the human psyche, then what an extraordinarily grand coincidence it was, what a marvelous accident of nature, that at the same moment that I was experiencing the Godhead, the planets were proclaiming it in the heavens! I think any reasonable person with even a little astrological acumen, on viewing the “influences” in effect for me that night, would have to acknowledge that the significant planetary picture at the time of my “enlightenment experience” does, in fact, seem to provide evidence of the validity of the contents of that experience, confirming that all things do indeed “move together of one accord,” that nothing happens that is not ordained to happen, that the universe is one coordinated Whole. (*For details on the Astrological conditions existing at the time of my “Enlightenment,” see the Appendix at the back of The Supreme Self, or you can view the charts at “The Celestial Dynamics of Grace” on my companion website at: [www.theastrologersvision.weebly.com](http://www.theastrologersvision.weebly.com).*)

But, along with the excitement of discovery and validation which I felt on viewing this chart, there was a nagging question that left me baffled and confused: If this “mystical experience” was described in the heavens since the beginning of time, and therefore entirely predestined, where was “grace”? Where was the freely given gift of God that I had experienced as occurring at just that moment? If everything was strictly predetermined, where was grace and free will and the possibility of spiritual endeavor?

Where was choice or merit or virtue? Where was blame or culpability? And where was the hope or possibility of “spiritual experience” for those in whose astrological forecast the prerequisite planetary conditions were *not* present? If God’s universe is merely the mechanistic unfolding of an undeviating script, then are we all merely mechanical pawns, and our trials and triumphs, our perseverings and defeats, merely dramatic plot-twists in a story that’s already written, typeset and published?

It is important to emphasize at this time that the planets, in themselves, do not have the power to *cause* either good or ill-fortune, though many (including myself) habitually speak of “planetary influences” as though they were *independent causes* determining our fate. In ancient times, of course, as planetary configurations were

seen to correspond to definite kinds of psychological and behavioral effects, the naive supposed that planets were therefore independent forces, responsible for the destiny of man. Each planet was fitted out with its own individual personality and was assumed to have independent power to affect events on earth. This was the basis for the myths of the “gods.”

The great Roman mystic, Plotinus, writing in the 3rd century C.E. on the subject of *Are The Stars Causes?* noted that a belief in the independent power of the planets is “tenable only by minds ignorant of the [true] nature of a Universe which has a ruling Principle and a First Cause operative downward through every member.”<sup>3</sup> He explained:

“Each [planetary] entity takes its origin from one Principle and, therefore, while executing its own function, works in with every other member of that All. ... And there is nothing undesigned, nothing of chance, in all the process: all is one scheme of differentiation, starting from the First Cause and working itself out in a continuous progression of effects.”<sup>4</sup>

This perfectly unfolding progression of effects from the one all-ruling Cause is clearly seen by all who have been graced with “the vision of God.” It is that “vision” which is the experiential basis for the assertion that “all things move together of one accord”; that “assent is given throughout the universe to every falling grain.” Still, the question of *how* the transiting “planetary influences” operate, i.e., by what process Neptune or any other planet transmits to individual souls its effects, is a legitimate one. And the matter of how *progressions* operate (which are not even present-time events, but “symbols” of planetary events already past) is even more perplexing. These questions cannot be answered by present-day knowledge, but many astrologers guess that something like the following is the case:

As the planets of the solar system change their angles to one another and thus rearrange the structural design of the entire system and its relationship to the design at one’s nativity, there is a corresponding change in the pattern of conscious energy (*Shakti*) which makes up our psychic and phenomenal reality. The energy-pattern (produced by the angular positions of the Sun, Moon and planets), which exists at the time of an individual’s birth, corresponds to the conscious energy-pattern, or aggregation of qualities, of that individual soul. And the subsequent alterations of the planetary positions after that moment spell out in decipherable terms his or her destiny.

It seems to me, however, that the search for a *cause-effect* relationship between the transits and progressions of planets and the lives of individual souls on earth is indicative of humanity's long-standing mistaken view of reality. Plotinus saw in the 2nd century what is true eternally—that there is *one* Cause, and all else is Its effects. The planets do not focus beneficent or malevolent rays or forces in our direction; they do not put forth any fields of influence that impinge on us at all. In short, they are not causes at all, but merely *signs* of the activity of the one Cause, which is God, revealed to those who can read them.

I believe it is very important to understand that, although the planets *signal* psychic and physical events experienced on earth, they are not themselves responsible; they are not the *cause* but are only coincident effects that serve as 'markers', and are synchronous with the perceived effects upon our earthly lives. In short, the "influences" of the planets are really the influences of the unbroken Whole, manifesting locally as specific patterns of relationships. The planets do not determine our fate; they merely reveal it. Our lives are determined by the One in whom the planets move. This is a view consistent with the view of Plotinus, and I believe it will be consistent with the enlightened understanding of the future.

The evolution of the soul occurs over many lifetimes, with its summit being the full openness to self-surrender in the Love of God, and the subsequent realization of its supreme Identity. And because the evolution of the universe reflects the evolution of each soul, the stellar and planetary positions, which signal that soul's enlightenment, will coincide perfectly with that moment in the soul's evolutionary summit. And the question of whether it is the soul's evolutionary struggle or the planetary alignments, which brings about enlightenment must be answered, "Neither." They are coordinated events in the unfolding of God's cosmic drama; both events are simultaneous effects of the one Cause, occurring in Himself in the ordered unfoldment of His will. All is one coordinated whole, and all that occurs within it is a manifestation of His grace.

The complexity of such a universe—a universe in which the destiny of each succeeding manifestation of a soul on earth is in synchronization with the ongoing motions of planetary bodies—is indeed beyond our present ability to conceive or visualize. Nonetheless, we must acknowledge that it is impossible to separate the birth of any individual from the cosmic conditions in which it occurs. For the universe is an integral Whole, and every event in it is in interlocking agreement with every other; not even the tiniest, most seemingly insignificant, event may be considered as an isolated phenomenon.

Within this Whole, where “all things move together of one accord,” the division of small-scale events into categories of *cause* and *effect* is imaginary and has no real meaning. For it is the Lord, God, *Shiva*, Self—call Him what you will—who, by means of His Power of Will (*Shakti*), is the sole Cause of the entire manifested array of the cosmos and therefore of every single event which takes place within it. This truth is seen clearly and unmistakably in the unitive experience of the mystic.

#### NOTES:

1. This article is a compilation of excerpts from my book, *The Supreme Self*, London, O Books, 2005. I have omitted here the astrological charts drawn for the time of my mystical experience. Anyone interested in seeing these charts may find them on my website in the PDF version of *The Supreme Self* available there.
2. Abhayananda, Swami., *Thomas á Kempis: On The Love of God*, Olympia, Wash., Atma Books, 1992; pp. 74-75, 78
3. Plotinus, *Enneads*, II:3:6
4. *Ibid.*, II:3:7

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