

## India

MICHAEL COHEN

The soul seated on the same tree of Nature is absorbed and deluded and has sorrow because it is not the Lord, but when it sees and is in union with the other self and greatness of it which is the Lord, then sorrow passes away from it.

*(Swetaswatara Upanishad, IV, 7)*

From the Disneylandesque tribute to Bhagwan Swaminarayan in Dehli, to the shimmering Golden Sikh Temple in Arimitsar, to the sweet and gentle nontheism of the Dalai Lama in McLeod Ganj, to a meeting between Krishna and Christ through song and dance in Mathura, to the flawless unmortared Taj Mahal, to the polymorphously perverse carvings in Khajuraho, to the ghat on the Ganges at Varanasi with morning ablutions, mourning for the dead, whirlwind of foot traffic, and fiery sunset Arte

ritual, to the peace, wonderful peace in Bodghaya near the Bodhi Tree, up the tram at Rajgir to an eternal deep drum, where the Buddha meditated, to the Ellora and Ajunta Caves where art and spirit in community with thousands flourished more than 1,000 years ago, to a long sweaty pull up a mountain in Kerala where St. Thomas bore witness to his faith, to a calm canoe ride in a natural aviary in the southern backwaters, to the Mother's gold vision of world peace in Auroville, amidst environmental degradation, bus drivers playing chicken



(for them without stress, but not for me), horrific begging, incessant hawking, interminable early-morning wake-up calls, growling digestive systems, hacking coughs, hysterical laughter, sweet song and dance, prayer, deep reverence for all, Sophia smiling at my buckling knees, I saw in the unblinking eyes of the Indian the flame of spirit, ancient, immutable, reassuring, filling my own search for the grail cup with the inspiration to come home and ask the following question:

How can I see the Divine in the Other wherever I go?

## The Grail Goes East and Meets the Soul of India

ROBERT POWELL

The eighth pilgrimage of the Sophia Foundation – this time to India – took place from February 17 to March 12, 2008. In contrast to the previous seven pilgrimages, this pilgrimage was not to honor dormant temples of the ancient past or (mainly) Christian churches, but rather to visit temples where the living faith and devotional practices



of the ancient Hindu tradition are still taking place – in other words, to living temples of another tradition (other than the Christian tradition).<sup>1</sup> More often than not, tourists encounter these temples from a more superficial – purely observational

– level. Whereas our group experience, for the most part, bore all the subtleties of a more Sophianic encounter – an open-hearted spirit of appreciation and brotherhood/sisterhood and the awareness that we carry in our hearts the broadened perspective of humankind’s developing consciousness and the renewing aspects of change and resurrection. For, with our group a deeper level of encounter prevailed insofar as we carried the intention to plant a seed for something new to arise in the consciousness associated with these temples—in the spirit underlying the raising of the daughter of Jairus from the dead (an impulse of resurrection), as elucidated in the foregoing by Rudolf Steiner in connection with the Ancient Indian culture, and having to do also with the coming development of humankind in the future American culture.

First it has to be borne in mind that wherever

<sup>1</sup> Here we could also include the (practicing) Buddhist temples that we visited. (Hindus regard Buddhism as part of their tradition.)

rituals are celebrated, spiritual beings gather and are present. In some cases the temple rituals are thousands of years old, and through being present there in India at their celebration, one could become aware of the ancient consciousness associated with such rituals at the various temples.

In order to show respect and not to awaken – through our words – opposition from the consciousness that prevailed at the various Hindu and Buddhist temple sites, we generally did the prayer sequence in the sacred dance of eurythmy silently. Nevertheless, what we were doing in the temples was a definite reality in service of Christ and Sophia. One could experience the potent resonance of our prayers reverberating in the atmosphere around us on the temple grounds. Generally we did not perform this silent service when actual ritual celebrations were taking place. One exception, however, was at the Krishna temple in Mathura, the birthplace of Krishna, where we did the prayer eurythmy silently while the temple musicians sang and played, and there was a beautiful and harmonious convergence of our activities, such that the comment was made by someone watching our eurythmy that this was a “new dance in honour of Lord Krishna” – as was related to us afterwards by our tour guide. On a special note, there was one member of our group who worked with Rudolf Steiner’s *Foundation Stone Meditation* and other meditations in eurythmy at almost every site, regardless of whether a ritual was taking place or not, and in this way she performed a real service.

Our group had a subtle kind of experience in the (active) temples which is not easy to characterize. It can be understood that there was much light generated through our activity because of the level of conscious intent in our eurythmy prayers and singing (although, alas, often it was not possible for us to sing), and certain beings present at the temple rituals were attracted – one could say, “like moths to the light.” Here in the space of this brief report it is not possible to go into the complex nature of these

beings.<sup>2</sup> It suffices to say that it is helpful when participating in such rituals to call upon the healing, transforming presence of Christ and Sophia. On this account, participants in the pilgrimage were given at the outset a special meditation using the powerful protection of the Rosicrucian mantra: *Ex Deo nascimur, In Christo morimur, Per Spiritum Sanctum reviviscimus* – “From God we are born, In Christ we die, Through the Holy Spirit we resurrect again.”<sup>3</sup>

Now to come to the effect of our spiritual activity upon the guardian beings gathered at the temple sites where rituals are still being performed. For these beings the possibility of an *awakening* was opened up through the new level of consciousness that we introduced into the temples. Initially such an awakening can be preceded by a kind of upheaval. To grasp this, it is a matter of understanding the responsibility of the spiritual beings guarding a place and their possible response to something new entering into their space etherically (through our eurythmy) and also on the level of consciousness (through our thoughts, prayers and meditations). For them the new that our group brought into their space might sometimes – at least initially – have been perceived as a disturbing force. Beholding the spiritual space in the temples, seeing that something in the space was being altered through our activity there, the guardian spirits could have the perception of things being “stirred” – this being a recognizable prelude to awakening.

Thus it was important that we called upon the healing, transforming force which is the most powerful help offered directly by Christ, whose essence is Divine Love, and by Sophia, whose nature is Divine Wisdom. This we could all (with the exception of one participant who was ill) experience at our Sophia celebration in Benares

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2 A detailed study “Rudolf Steiner views Shiva” by David Tresemer is in preparation. David’s study, made independently of the Sophia Foundation pilgrimage to India, gathers together and comments upon Rudolf Steiner’s indications concerning Shiva.

3 Rudolf Steiner, *Esoteric Lessons 1904-1909* (Steiner Books: Gt. Barrington/MA, 2007), p. 444, where Rudolf Steiner describes the three Rosicrucian mantra in the context of the Grail initiation. In this sense the three Rosicrucian mantra represent the spiritual core or the essence of the Grail impulse underlying our pilgrimage to India.

(Varanasi), the “city of lights”. Immersing oneself in the stream of Divine Love is to become permeated by an imperishable force – the strongest force on the Earth and in the whole universe – and overseen by Divine Wisdom, we unite with the Divine Plan out of which streams guidance for our actions from the source of light-filled Wisdom.

Aligned with Christ and Sophia, our activities (eurythmy, singing, etc.) have a deeper purpose, and this in itself serves as a protection – enhanced by daily (especially morning and night) consciously immersing oneself in the stream of Divine Love and Divine Wisdom with the intention that one be cleansed through the healing in-streaming of Christ’s love and Sophia’s light.

How effective were our practices in India? Something very potent, which could perhaps be described as an expression of the power of the Holy Grail, is woven into the prayer sequence that we did silently at numerous places. It was a tangible experience that the potency of these prayers performed in eurythmy entered into the etheric realm of India, in turn potentially affecting the soul and the consciousness of the people. On some level our prayers, meditations, singing and dancing, were received by the Soul of India and are able to have a reverberating effect of a seed-bearing nature for the future. In this sense it is possible to say in connection with our pilgrimage that *the Grail went East and met the Soul of India*. The Soul of India – *Mother India* – is open and receptive. We were warmly welcomed and included everywhere we went. As far as we experienced this great and complex land, India seems to be a willing vessel for the Grail.<sup>4</sup>

With any meeting, there is always an exchange. Our meeting with the Soul of India was not simply a matter of bearing the Grail impulse there. It was also an encounter with the great stream of wisdom represented by the seven holy Rishis, the Buddha,

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4 In Albrecht von Scharfenberg’s Grail book *The Younger Titurel* he describes the withdrawal of the Grail from the West to India, where the Holy Grail is placed into the hands of the priest-king Prester John, the son of the Grail queen Repanse de Schoye and Feirefiz, the half-brother of the Grail king Parzival. This theme, alongside our consideration of the mysteries of the seven holy Rishis (see the following article) was central to our pilgrimage to India.

and other great spirits who brought the wisdom-filled light of their profound teachings to the people of India. By way of illustration of the consequences of such an encounter, when it is deep and sincere, let us consider the biography of the Catholic priest Henri Le Saux, who was born in France in the year 1910 and died in India in 1973. Henri Le Saux left his French Benedictine monastery in 1948, having received permission to travel to India, and joined there another French priest, Jules Monchanin, in founding the Saccidananda Ashram (Hermitage of the Holy Trinity) at Shantivanam in Tamil Nadu, south of Madras (Chennai).

The two assumed the lifestyle of Hindu *sannyasins* ("ones who have renounced the world") and they assumed new names – Le Saux's being Abhishikteshvarananda ("Bliss of the Anointed One, the Lord"), later shortened to Abhishiktananda. In 1968 Swami Abhishiktananda left the Saccidananda Ashram to be guided henceforth by his fellow Benedictine from England, Bede Griffiths (1906-1993). Abhishiktananda then went to live in a hermitage near Uttarkashi along the Ganges, from where he continued to travel about India for the last five years of his life until his death in 1973. Both Bede Griffiths and Swami Abhishiktananda are known and respected as Christian priests who entered deeply into Hindu spirituality in order to learn from it.

Abhishiktananda wrote: I am deeply attached to Christ Jesus and therefore to the *koinonia*<sup>5</sup> of the Church. It is in him that the "mystery," has been revealed to me ever since my awakening to myself and to the world. It is in his *image*, his *symbol*, that I know God and that I know myself and the world of human beings. Since I awoke here [in India] to new depths in myself (depths of the Self, of the *Atman*), this symbol was marvelously developed. Moreover I recognize this mystery, which I have always adored under the symbol of Christ, in the myths of Narayana, Prajapati, Shiva, Purusha, Krishna, Rama, etc. The same mystery. But for me, Jesus is my *satguru*. It is in him that God has appeared to me; it is in his mirror that I have recognized myself, in adoring him, loving him, consecrating myself to him. *Jesus* – not the founder-head of a religion; that came later. *Jesus* is the *guru* who announces the

<sup>5</sup> *Koinonia* is community which arises through participation.

mystery. (*Spiritual Diary*, July 22, 1971, pp. 331-332).

What Abhishiktananda describes could be considered a Hindu view on the experience of Christian initiation, drawing upon the teachings of the Vedas such as: *Aham Brahma Asmi* ("I am Brahman" from the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* of the *Yajurveda*) and *Ayam Atma Brahma* ("This Self is Brahman" from the *Mandukya Upanishad* of the *Atharvaveda*). The ultimate experience which helped Abhishiktananda to overcome the duality of his deeply lived encounter between Hinduism and Christianity is in both traditions the final and true "I" (*Aham*).

Many passages in Abhishiktananda's writings indicate that he viewed the Vedantic way as superior. He wrote that the spirituality of the East surpasses both Judaism and Christianity and that immersion in the Vedanta can help one to a more elevated understanding of Christ and his teachings. For Abhishiktananda, in the Vedanta there is a universality which no Jewish or Greek thought can equal. He understood through his encounter with Hinduism that it is not simply a matter of "entering into dialogue", but that there is a valuable treasure to be discovered within the Hindu tradition which can help overcome the profound crisis in which modern Christianity finds itself.

This perspective is supported by Rudolf Steiner, a modern Western Rishi, who speaks of the Christian mysteries in the Gospels being "refreshed" by the "original world wisdom" communicated by the seven holy Rishis of Ancient India:

The primeval wisdom...appeared in those ancient, holy Rishis, the great teachers of India, during our first epoch of civilisation. With these sublime Rishis the primeval wisdom expressed itself in a form which human beings of the present day can but little understand. The human capacities of feeling and thinking have greatly changed since the times when the great teachers of India taught in the first epoch of civilisation after Atlantis; and if the words which came from the Rishis were simply repeated as they were said, there would be hardly one soul on the whole earth who could hear anything more in them nowadays than just words and again words. One has need of other capabilities of feeling than those at present existing, in order to understand the wisdom which was given to humanity in the first epoch after Atlantis. For all that is found in the

best books regarding the primeval world-wisdom is but a faint echo of what this really is which in many ways is but a deceptive, obscured wisdom. However grand and sublime the Vedas appear to us, however beautiful the songs of Zarathustra sound, and however magnificent the language in which the ancient wisdom of Egypt speaks, so that we can never sufficiently admire it; still, all that has been written down gives us but a dim, dull reflection of the wisdom of Hermes, of the grand teaching of Zarathustra, or of the sublime knowledge which the ancient Rishis proclaimed...The original wisdom of the Rishis has never lost life. It permeated, like a fountain of youth, the age which we regard as the beginning of our era. The very holy wisdom which the Rishis gave to humanity was continued through *Zarathustra* and his pupils, through the Chaldean and Egyptian teachers. It also flowed in the words of *Moses*, and it came forth again with an altogether new impulse, as from the fountain of life, with the appearance of the Christ upon earth. It then became so deep, so intrinsically internal, that it could only gradually flow again into humanity. Thus we see that since the outward declaration of Christianity, the primeval world wisdom has penetrated but slowly and gradually into humanity from most elementary beginnings. Its messages are there, they are to be found in the Gospels and in other Christian writings which include the wisdom of the holy Rishis in a new form; like a new birth out of a new fountain. But how could these messages be understood at the beginning of the Christian era? Through the Gospels it was least of all understood; they only attained very gradually to further comprehension and in many ways to a still further obscuration, and today the Gospels are, in truth, the most sealed of all books for the larger part of humanity — books which will only be first understood by a future age which will have refreshed itself at the source of the original world-wisdom. But the treasures hidden in the Christian revelation have been preserved, treasures no other than those of the Eastern wisdom, but renewed by means of fresh forces. They have been guarded in narrow circles like the Brotherhood of the Holy Grail and the Brotherhood of the Rose Cross. These treasures of truth have been kept well hidden and have been accessible only to those who through severe trials had prepared themselves for the

living wisdom. Thus the treasures of the Eastern and Western wisdom, through all the centuries of evolution from the beginning of our era, were made almost inaccessible to the larger part of humanity... Since the last third of the nineteenth century or thereabouts one can speak of this world wisdom in a more or less unveiled form. It is only because certain things have taken place in the spiritual worlds that the Guardians of the Mysteries received permission to allow some of the ancient wisdom to penetrate to the outer world...The time has come when one can speak from those ever living sources of esotericism which have been faithfully treasured in the Mysteries of the Rose Cross. There is no wisdom of the East which has not streamed into Western esotericism and into the teaching and investigations of the Rose Cross; in them is to be found absolutely all that the great teachers of the East ever had in their keeping. Nothing, nothing whatever of that which is to be found in the Eastern wisdom is lacking in the wisdom of the West. The only difference — if it can be called a difference — is that Western esotericism has to include the whole of the Eastern wisdom and teaching and, without losing anything, to blend it with the light which has been kindled in humanity through the Christ Impulse. When one speaks of Western esotericism, of that which has its derivation from the hidden Western Rishis...it is impossible to say that in it is wanting one single iota, one single shred of the Eastern wisdom. Only it had all to be brought forth again fresh and new from the fountain-head of the Christ Impulse. All the great treasures of wisdom which were first revealed by the holy Rishis regarding superhuman worlds and supersensible existence, resound in the description we have to give of the spiritual hierarchies and their reflection in the physical world...Thus nothing is denied of the wisdom of the East, the wisdom which has brought down to us the teaching of the holy Rishis, and with it the primeval world-wisdom, which through such long epochs of time has ever been streaming into humanity.

(Rudolf Steiner, *The Spiritual Hierarchies*, Complete Works vol. 110, lecture of April 12, 1909, morning) – in the foregoing, Rudolf Steiner uses the expression “Western Rishis”, and the figure reproduced towards the end of the next contribution gives an overview of who these Western Rishis are.

## *The Seven Holy Rishis*

ROBERT POWELL

Approximately one quarter of the world's population lives in China, and about one fifth in India. On our pilgrimage to India the strongest impression was meeting multitudes of people in this extraordinary land – people with whom an immediate heart-to-heart connection was possible. Our meeting with the people of India was also coloured by our exposure to extreme poverty, suffering and illness. As Karen expressed it: we had something of the Buddha's experience, who grew up as a prince in the protected environment of the palace; one day, though, he left the palace and in the outside world experienced the reality of suffering and death – to which he was exposed through his encounter with the people, with the sick and the dying. Karen drew an analogy between the Buddha's experience and that of ourselves as westerners living within the "palace" of protection afforded by modern life. The many encounters on our tour of India with illness, poverty and suffering was a great awakening. Here it is not possible to go into detail about these experiences, since in the space of this short article the main focus is the great stream of India's spiritual wisdom – to which Buddha contributed – extending back to the seven holy Rishis who founded the ancient Indian culture some nine or ten thousand years ago. In turn, the seven holy Rishis were disciples of the Manu, the great Atlantean initiate, who led his followers away from Atlantis shortly before the deluge or flood that destroyed this great continent where now the Atlantic Ocean is found.

## *The Cultural Epochs and the Seven Holy Rishis*

VALENTIN TOMBERG

During the first cultural epoch (that of Ancient India) the Archai [majestic spiritual beings] spoke to the seven Rishis. From this arose hatha yoga as an echo of Ancient Saturn. The spiritual element streaming as warmth from the "I" became [transformed into] substance through breathing in. The Rishis taught that incarnation [in a physical body] came about on the path from spirit to matter, the final result of which is death. They also taught that the way back leads from matter to spirit. They taught concerning the development of the 8 petal lotus flower, the mystery of birth and death. This was the teaching of the *first Rishi*.

The teaching of the *second Rishi* embraced the period of the Ancient Sun. That which has arisen from the spiritual world, becoming an object, becomes visible. Seeing is the raying out of inner light externally. The human "I" rays out into the surrounding world. The abstract formulation of this teaching is *Tat tvam asi*<sup>1</sup>—the knowledge that the outer and the inner are one.

The *third Rishi's* teaching concerns Maya (illusion) and the wheel of rebirth—karma and dharma. These are the two ways which have to become re-united: the human being's earthly karma and his eternal mission

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<sup>1</sup> *Tat tvam asi* ("Thou art that") is from the *Chandogya Upanishad* of the *Samaveda*. Concerning *Tat tvam asi*, see Rudolf Steiner, *Esoteric Lessons 1904-1909* (Gt. Barrington, MA: Steiner Books, 2007) pp. 86, 228:

First we are to seek out the "I", the kernel within us. Then we will also recognize the not-"I"...The "I" is not just one point that has gradually united [with the physical body] through the growth of the front part of the brain and the entry of the etheric body into the area above the root of the nose; rather, there is a second point of it. The line connecting this point changes. The direction of this line points to the center point of the Sun. The more the human being develops, the more the two points approach one another. Humans who are evolving must place themselves in this point, that is, outside, and they must learn to look at their body as if looking at something physically external to themselves (*Tat tvam asi*)...

(dharma), which has to awaken in conscience. Karma is the destiny of the fallen human being. Dharma is the destiny of the non-fallen human being. The task of reincarnation is the uniting of the two.

The teaching of the *fourth Rishi* was the proclamation of the Sun as the heart of the cosmos, the mystery of Vishvakarman (Christ), who is the Word (Veda), and that love is the content of the Sun, also that the life of the world is oriented toward the Sun as its goal. He proclaimed the teaching of the Sun mystery of Christ, who is crucified [on the cross] of world destiny.

The *fifth Rishi* added [to the teaching of the other Rishis] that the human being is responsible for the three kingdoms – mineral, plant, and animal – and that it is the human being's task to redeem them. He awoke in human beings a sense of responsibility to liberate the fallen kingdoms of nature.

The *sixth Rishi* proclaimed the teaching of the three worlds – the physical, soul, and spiritual world – which one has to bring into balance, and he indicated ways of accomplishing this. Through this division into body, soul, spirit (and God) there arose in Ancient India the division of society into castes: Shudras [farmers, service providers, and some artisan groups], Vaishyas [traders], Kshatriyas [kings and warriors], (Brahmins). These castes are the social organism of these three worlds.

The same is envisaged for the sixth cultural epoch (Philadelphia): the threefold social order. The sixth cultural epoch is that of social justice – the establishing of balance in the social organism [by way] of the trichotomy of body, soul, and spirit.

The *seventh Rishi* taught concerning the magical force which has to awaken in the human being so that he [she] is able to [act] not only [in relation to] Nature but also is able to fight against the bastion of evil in the Earth's interior. This is the magical transformation of evil into good.

The tasks of the seven Rishis correspond to the development of the seven lotus flowers (chakras) in the human being.

## Summary

The teaching of the first Rishi: being—non-being, life—death, relates to the 8 petal lotus flower.

The second Rishi taught the mystery of the 2 petal lotus flower: outer—inner, *Tat tvam asi* ["Thou art that"].

The third Rishi: karma—dharma, the 16 petal lotus flower in the region of the larynx.

The fourth Rishi: love—Christ, conscience, the 12 petal lotus flower in the region of the heart.

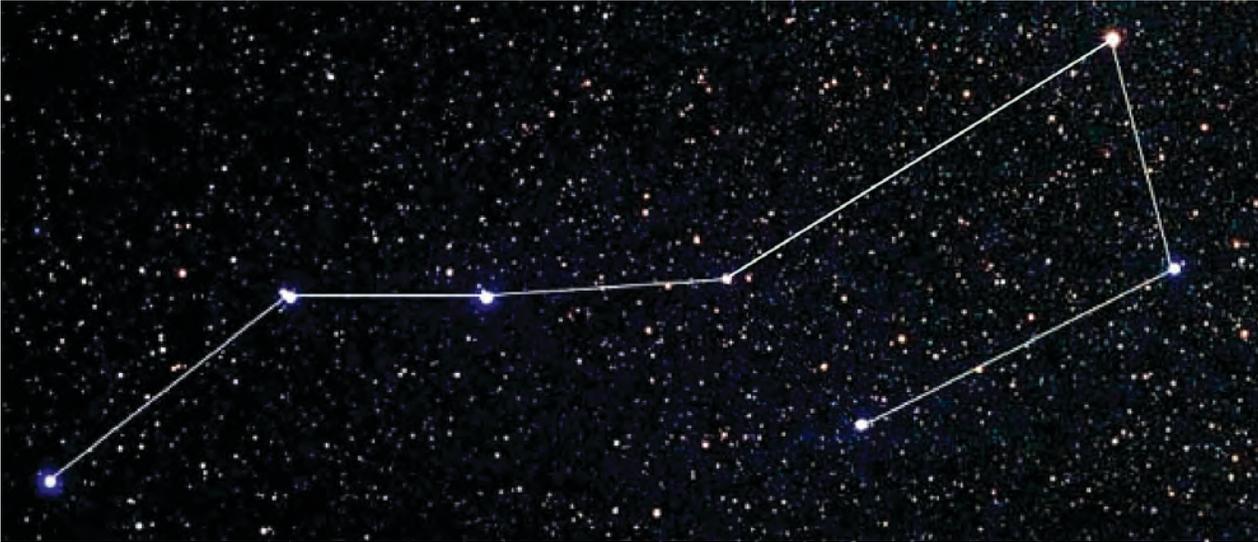
The fifth Rishi: responsibility toward the three kingdoms of nature, in relation to the development of the 10 petal lotus flower in the pit of the stomach.

The sixth Rishi: the balance of body, soul, and spirit (trichotomy), which is connected with the 6 petal lotus flower in the center of the body.

The seventh Rishi: the fight of [sacred] magic against evil, corresponding to the 4 petal lotus flower.

(Translated by Robert Powell from the German lecture notes of this lecture held by Valentin Tomberg on December 17, 1934. Translator's comments or additions are in brackets [...]. The above translation relating to the seven holy Rishis is only part of this lecture, which is the fifth in a series of six lectures held in Tallin, Estonia in 1934. The lecture notes were compiled by listeners and translated from Estonian into German by L. Paulsen.)

The lectures during the pilgrimage to India expanded upon the above notes by Valentin Tomberg, following the karma of the Rishis to the present time. Here it is not possible to go into all the intricacies of the various incarnations of the Rishis. However, the following indicates how the seven Rishis (in a modern understanding) are related to the seven lotus flowers and the seven stars of the Big Dipper (Great Bear).



### *The Seven Holy Rishis in Our Time*

Below is a *modern list* of the seven holy Rishis, each responsible for leading humanity in the development of one of the seven lotus flowers (chakras), in relation to the seven stars of the Big Dipper, beginning with the left-hand lowest star, (1) Alkaid, the star of the Maitreya, and proceeding in the figure according to the lines indicated from star to star. Initially – for the first five stars – the general direction is from left to right and then, after reaching the uppermost star (5) Dubhe, the star of Christian Rosenkreutz, descending down to (6) Merak, the star of Mani, and finally moving down from right to left to (7) Phad, the star of Scythianos. Alternative names for the stars are given in parentheses, and the Greek letter star catalog designation is italicized.

1. Abraham (Maitreya Bodhisattva – “Bearer of the Good”)  
Alkaid (Benetnash, Benetnasch, Elkeid): Tip of the Tail, *Eta Ursæ Majoris*  
8 petal lotus flower (Saturn)
2. Moses (“Bodhisattva of Wisdom” – at the right-side of Christ)  
Mizar (Mizat; Mirza): Girdle, *Zeta Ursæ Majoris*  
2 petal lotus flower (Jupiter)
3. Elijah (“Bodhisattva of Strength” – Adam – at the left-side of Christ)  
Alioth (Aliath): Tail, *Epsilon Ursæ Majoris*  
16 petal lotus flower (Mars)
4. Zarathustra (Master Jesus – “Friend of God/Friend of All”)  
Megrez: The Root (of the Bear’s tail), *Delta Ursæ Majoris*  
12 petal lotus flower (Sun)
5. Christian Rosenkreutz (“Guiding Initiate of Humanity”)  
Dubhe (Dubb): Bear, *Alpha Ursæ Majoris*  
10 petal lotus flower (Mercury)
6. Mani (“Buddha of Light” – future Manu)  
Merak (Mirak): Loin (of the Bear), *Beta Ursæ Majoris*  
6 petal lotus flower (Venus)
7. Scythianos (“Great Initiate of the West”)  
Phad (Phaed; Phekda; Phegda; Phekha; Phacd): Thigh, *Gamma Ursæ Majoris*  
4 petal lotus flower (Moon)

Concerning the incarnations of the three Rishis (Bodhisattvas) – 1, 2, 3 – in our time, see pages 100-148 (“The Three Spiritual Teachers of the Twentieth Century”) of *The Most Holy Trinosophia and the New Revelation of the Divine Feminine* (Gt. Barrington, MA: Anthroposophic Press, 2000). Regarding the four Masters – 4, 5, 6, 7 – see Rudolf Steiner, *The East in the Light of the West* (Complete Works vol. 113, lecture of August 31, 1909), where he describes the founding of the Rosicrucian School, centered around Christian Rosenkreutz, by Mani, Zarathustra and Scythianos, with the help of the Buddha working from spiritual realms. See also Rudolf Steiner’s lectures, *The Principle of Spiritual Economy* (Complete Works vol. 109, lectures of May 25 and May 31, 1909) and his notebook entry relating to these lectures: “Zarathustra was the favorite disciple of the Manu...He was initiated by the Manu into the Christ-Sun mystery.”

In the course of the lectures in India, during the discussion on this representation of the seven Rishis in a modern sense, it was emphasized that the above figure, while being extremely helpful in forming a relationship with these “Western Rishis” (Rudolf Steiner’s term), is of a schematic nature and should be treated as such rather than as something absolute. It was pointed out that as the Big Dipper comprises a triangle and a square, there is an inner connection with the spiritual figure underlying the Lord’s prayer, discussed by Rudolf Steiner in his lecture *The Structure of the Lord’s Prayer* (Complete Works vol. 97, lecture of February 4, 1907).

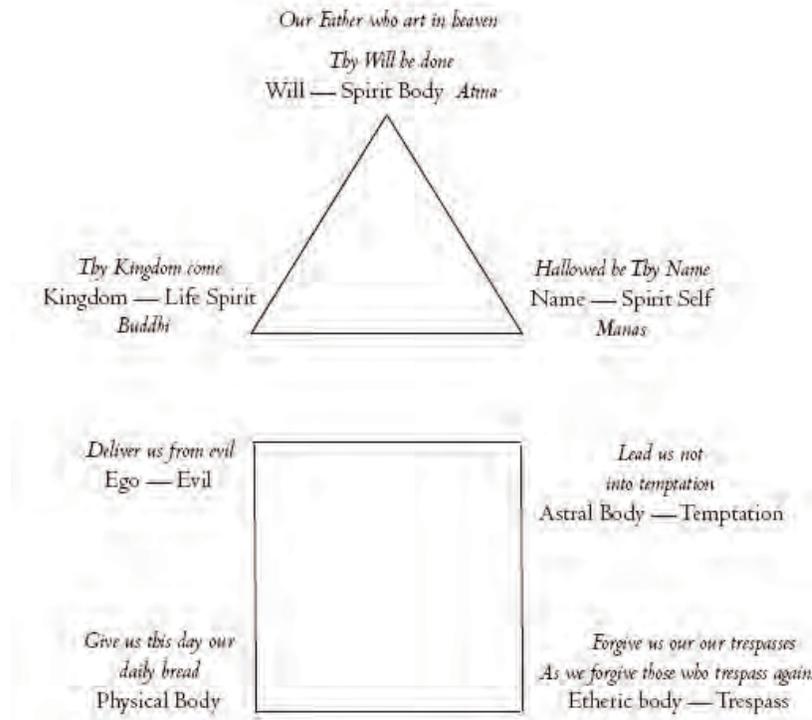
O  
Great She Bear  
in our Earth Night Sky

Your seven bright stars  
SING to us  
representing multitudes  
Your shadow cast on Earth  
Keeps us warm  
First learned as child  
Always with us in the night  
You carry us on your back  
to the other stars...  
the other galaxies  
You open the Way.  
Great thanks and admiration

Ho!

—Marnie Muller  
from *Ode to Gaian Wain*

### THE LORD’S PRAYER



## Images of India

CHRISTINE HOLMSTROM



India overwhelms the senses, pulling the traveler out of a Mahabharata-inspired reverie into a kaleidoscope of images rotating to the rhythm of truck horns and bicycle bells, brass gongs and chanting worshippers, howling street dogs and persistent hawkers cajoling the passing tourist, "Only 100 rupees. Morning special for you, madam. Look! Look!" Graceful café au lait women in swirling jewel-tone saris nod and bend, a flock of birds gathered under the bright Hindustan sun. Smoke rises from the cremation ghats, a blackened corpse curls up from the heat, wood crackles, sending orange sparks and burning flesh skyward. A leper staggers forward, extending an oozing stump in supplication, then gestures towards her steel alms bowl, empty as her stomach. Most tourists recoil, unsure whether to drop

a few rupees in the bowl or turn away, pretending not to see the woman's imploring eyes. A regiment of uniformed school children glance with hesitant smiles at passing tourists; two or three softly say "Hi!" A friendly response unleashes a cyclone of enthusiasm, the children rush forward, waving frantically, reaching for a handshake. "What's your name? Where are you from? Will you take my picture?"

The majesty of Krishna revealing himself in his celestial glory to the warrior Prince Arjuna is nowhere apparent in modern India. The grey brown dome of a toxic sky hangs low over crowded streets jammed with packed buses, careening cars, black and yellow auto rickshaws, brightly painted trucks whose rear gate reads "Horn please", placid cows and wily street dogs. Stunted trees shrouded in powdery grime cling miserably to life. Piles of trash and puddles of urine litter the broken sidewalks. Goats and cows browse in rubbish heaps, ingesting plastic bags along with fetid scraps of vegetation and household waste. The stench of excrement and rotting garbage competes with the enticing smell of frying *pakor*as and hot *masala chai* (spiced tea) wafting from street side stalls. My senses are fully engaged in a disorienting cycle of



attraction and repulsion. I wonder - where I will find the divine?

India has a surfeit of gods – over 330 million Hindu deities alone. Saints and sages abound. Aside from the dominant Hindu religion, India is home to Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Parsis (Zoroastrians), Jains and a tiny remnant of a once thriving Jewish population. Prince Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha) attained enlightenment near Bodhgaya. His holiness, the Dalai Lama presides over Dharamsala, the seat of exiled Tibetan Buddhism, dispensing wisdom and compassion. There are temples on nearly every street corner, deities painted in exuberant colors, draped in garlands of fresh marigolds and frangipani. The monkey king Hanuman, splashed in day-glow orange, lurks behind the barred gates of closet-sized shrines, presiding over streets from Chennai to Mumbai. Krishna temples resound with the refrain of pale-skinned saffron-robed monks, “Hare Krishna, hare Krishna, Krishna, Krishna, hare, hare.” Worshippers bow before the stone lingam that penetrates the grooved yoni within the inner sanctum of temples dedicated to Shiva, destroyer and transformer, god of re-creation.



Saint Thomas, the doubting disciple, arrived in the first century with the good news, converting southern Indians to the new religion of Christianity. We visited several churches in areas where St. Thomas once preached, meditated or performed miracles. The cave where Thomas prayed has become a chapel, but the grotto’s shiny espresso-dark rocks remain exposed. When I pressed the top of my head against the low cave ceiling, a dizzying energy pulsated through my crown chakra. I felt slightly woozy, as if standing on the deck of a pitching sailboat, instead of solid rock.

In Mumbai, Malti, our local guide herded us into a Shiva temple to participate in the annual Mahashivarastri festival. After removing our shoes, we joined the throng of worshippers pushing towards the inner sanctum. Sari-clad women glided like dancing jewels across the wet marble floors, fathers and uncles hoisted small children onto their shoulders, young girls in shiny sequined dresses pirouetted beside aunts and grandmothers bearing baskets of flowers and plastic bags brimming with creamy coconut milk. An attendant handed each of us a steel container of water. Like waves crashing on the shore, each group bowed before the stone lingam and yoni, anointing the lingam with water, milk and flowers. The lingam (phallus) and yoni (vulva) symbolize the essential male and female forces that unite in the ongoing act of creation. I was captivated by the joy, familial love, devotion and energetic enthusiasm of the worshippers, and bathed in the purest essence of India – a rare perfume whose scent still lingers in my memory.

The Indian kaleidoscope rotates from the beauty of the Taj Mahal (“a teardrop of love, frozen in marble, on the cheek of eternity”) to garbage clogged cities and chemical-laden skies, from oppressive tradition (dowry requirements and remnants of the caste system) to burgeoning opportunity in engineering and information technology, from extreme materialism (opulent weddings where the groom rides in on an elephant) to spiritual devotion (devotees performing *puja*, ritual prayer, in the multitude of Hindu temples), from abject poverty and horrifying diseases to top-flight hospitals catering to medical tourists, from religious tolerance to sectarian riots and killings.

Where does one find the soul of India? It's said that the eyes are the window to the soul, yet if I look into the imploring eyes of a filthy beggar child or a disfigured leper, I am pulled into an existential crisis. How can I help? Will giving 100 rupees to one person make a difference? What about the rings of criminals who allegedly run the begging industry? If I put a 10 rupee note in the gnarled hands of the bowed women in the tattered sari, will a dozen others rush over, demanding the same? If I give money to the crippled boy with a twisted pelvis and splayed-out legs, lurching ahead of me on his hands, am I indirectly supporting a ruthless gang that maims children to make them more effective beggars?

Jesus Christ said, "Inasmuch as ye have done unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done unto me." (Matthew 25:40). In India, these words are a continual challenge. At home, I can sit in a comfortable armchair, write a check to a charity and feel that I'm helping others. In India, the precarious nature of existence slaps you in the face. Like Prince Siddhartha leaving his palace, I am stunned when confronted directly with debilitating disease, disfigurement and poverty. Questions flood my mind. What is the proper response? Can I see the god within each wretched leper and imploring beggar? Do I respond with money to an old woman hunched on the sidewalk or somehow try to connect with her heart as I hurry past?



In the United States and other wealthy countries, we are shielded from death and extreme poverty. The occasional urban panhandler standing forlorn on the street corner, his scrawled plea for money or food on a scrap of cardboard, doesn't elicit the same visceral reaction as a scrawny crippled child or disfigured leper in India. We can imagine that the panhandler could get a free meal at the local gospel mission and treatment from a social service agency. In India, such illusions are quickly dispelled. The struggle for survival confronts the visitor at every street corner. Death stares you in the face in India. In the United States, pristine mortuaries discreetly advertise "pre-need" specials; along the Ganges shriveled corpses hiss and crackle inside flaming piles of wood.

Despite the poverty and pollution, India has wealth of a different kind. A multitude of religions and sects co-exist peaceably, for the most part. Our primary guide, Sumit Bhattacharya, who joined us in a Sophia celebration and also participated in the eurythmy on a couple of occasions, was interested in and respectful of another spiritual tradition. Extended families remain close – physically and emotionally. Sumit left for his family home in Kolkata to preside over the annual ceremony to honor his grandfather's passing. As the oldest male relative, this was both his duty and his pleasure. Children are coddled – little girls, dressed like princesses in rainbow colored satin and silk, bask in the adoring smiles of aunts and grannies. Visitors are treated with remarkable kindness ("the guest is a god in one's home"). Schoolchildren, in starched white and blue uniforms, bubble with enthusiasm and energy. Many sit outside on mats, taking their lessons in the open air, focused intently on their primers. Local and unofficial guides point with pride to the glorious bas-reliefs of battles and of gods and goddesses entwined in love's intimate embrace in the Khajuraho temple complex or to the slivers of carnelian and jade that form a garland of stone flowers inside the upper chamber of the Taj Mahal.

India has left me with a multitude of memories, both splendid and disconcerting. Images of the pilgrimage – the glorious colors, welcoming people, magnificent monuments and exuberant religious ceremonies - are embedded in my heart like jewels in the marble of the Taj. Most of all, the journey awakened an awareness of the blessing of the privileged life I've been born into and a commitment to use my good fortune in service of humanity and the divine. I've been given so much, what can I do in return?



—Michael Choy

### *A Precious Human Life*

*Every day, think as you wake up: today I am fortunate to have woken up.*

*I am alive, I have a precious human life. I am not going to waste it.*

*I am going to use all my energies to develop myself, to expand my heart out to others,  
to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all beings.*

*I am going to have kind thoughts towards others.*

*I am not going to get angry, or think badly about others.*

*I am going to benefit others as much as I can.*

—His Holiness the XIVth Dalai Lama

*It was dawn at the Ganges, the river considered sacred by the the Hindus. We each purchased flat-bottomed bowls made out of pressed leaves and filled with marigolds and roses and each holding a squat white candle. We each lit the candle in our bowl, said a prayer, and pushed them into the river where they floated for about thirty minutes before disintegrating leaving the flowers floating on the surface.*

*Nearby two young Asian men were swimming in the Ganges. An older woman in a sari washed clothes and then modestly bathed and washed her hair. Some Indian men bathed in the sacred water. In the other direction two different groups of men carried flower-covered corpses of family members to wash in the Ganges for purification before cremation.*

*I noticed our guide, Sumit, bend down and take some of the water to bless himself. An overwhelming desire came over me to do the same. I hesitated waiting for the feeling to pass. I planned on waiting it out but it only got more intense and I realized I would regret it if I did not act on it. I went over to Sumit and told him I wanted to bless myself too. He took me to the water's edge and showed me which finger of the right hand to dip in and how to wet the top of my head, my forehead, and the base of my throat. When I did this it seemed the most natural thing in the world to do. A feeling of peace came over me.*

— Suzanne Janzen

The following poem by Heinrich Heine is interesting in view of Rudolf Steiner's karma research:

In comparatively early times, not long before the founding of Christianity, a certain initiate was incarnated in the East, in the Indian civilization.

In his earthly life this individuality had poor eyesight – in describing karmic relationships one must go into details of this kind – and his perceptions remained more or less superficial. This life which was characterized by the mystical outlook typical of Indian culture, was followed by other, less important incarnations...

In the nineteenth century this individuality appeared again as a somewhat complex personality—namely, Heinrich Heine.

(Rudolf Steiner, *Karmic Relationships*, vol. VII, p. 44).

On wings of song, my darling,  
I'll carry you off, and we'll go  
Where the plains of the Ganges are calling,  
To the sweetest place I know.

Red flowers are twining and plaiting  
There in the still moonlight:  
The lotus flowers are awaiting  
Their sister acolyte.

The violets whisper caresses  
And gaze to the stars on high;  
The rose in secret confesses  
Her sweet-scented tales with a sigh.

Around them, listening and blushing,  
Dance gentle, subtle gazelles;  
And in the distance rushing  
The holy river swells.

From *The Complete Poems of Heinrich Heine: A Modern English Version* by Hal Draper, Suhrkamp/Insel: Oxford, 1982, p. 54)