

Vision

Published by the School of Philosophy (Auck.) Inc. for enjoyment and communication

Issue 19, Apr 2007

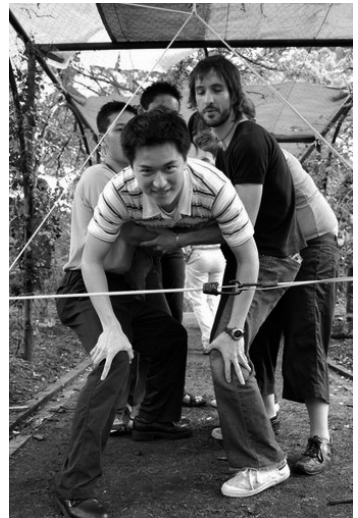
Lucca Leadership Course – Sydney 2007

by Samuel Ames

During early January I was accepted to participate in a week-long leadership course called 'Leadership Foundations' held at Mahratta, home of the Sydney Philosophy School. About 35 young people attended from around the world.

The course is designed to inspire the leadership potential of young people keen to address the needs of their communities. The event was co-coordinated by Mr Robert Mulhall from the School in Ireland. Both this course and its follow-up, 'Living Leadership', are held in Lucca, Italy every year.

The Sydney course was coached by various qualified and experienced people. It was directed at not only teaching and giving opportunities to activate 'transformational leadership' for the good of all, but also emphasized the importance of stillness of body and mind.



Getting through the 'spider's web" without touching the ropes

Everyone learned of and connected with different types of energy, which were called Swan, Tiger and Sloth (equivalent to the three Qualities of the Advaita Vedanta tradition: Sattva, Rajas and Tamas). Half an hour of 'quiet time' morning and evening was set aside as free time to simply fall still, meditate or reflect. These spiritual dimensions of the course awakened people to greater peace, the idea of 'personal mastery' and gave us greater self-awareness and opened our eyes to the need for strong, truthful leadership in the world today.

Most days consisted of several lectures on the topic of leadership with everyone

present, while for the practical tasks we were placed in a group of seven or eight people of roughly the same age for the entire week. These activities had set instructions and a time limit. Knowledge of how to lead was used to attempt the team tasks. After each task the teams would meet with their two coaches and discuss how the task went, what was realised in retrospect and what could be improved.

It became clear how easily you can feel confined to the set instructions and forget to explore other options. It is possible to stretch the rules without breaking them to achieve the desired result! We learnt that leadership can take many forms and it became clear to all that leadership is crucial for success.

One day was devoted to getting out and about in sunny Sydney, during which we were given a brief presentation by one of the coaches about the life of Caroline Chisholm, who lived in Australia in the 19th century. She is known for her involvement with female immigrant welfare in Australia and easing religious prejudice and racism. She might be considered an example of a transformational leader, with a clear vision and intent.

We also attended a lecture by a part-Aboriginal lawyer, Norman Laing, at Manly Surf club. He had been prepared to talk about his personal work in visiting Aboriginal schools, providing scholarships and getting students into a university to study what inspires them. But what really happened was that he abandoned his notes

and we asked him questions about what he did with the law regarding Aboriginals and the racial tension that still exists, and injustices in race legislation.

His talk was useful because it provided a very close-to-home example of an individual seeing a need and deciding to help, using his influence and earnings to provide for others via scholarships and mentoring. He was clearly a transformational leader with concrete results, and very generous with his time – he had to fly to Manly to be with us! He encouraged all of us to involve ourselves in what made us passionate, use the knowledge we have to inspire others, treat everyone as our teacher, and reassured us that everyone CAN make a difference.

The day finished with a lively meal at Manly beach.

Each participant on the course was encouraged to find a personal ‘intent’. It helped to write down what we loved, valued and believed was good in the world and each group met in the evening to explore how we could lead and take initiative to fulfill a need back home. It was beautiful to see each person voice how they would ‘lead for the need’. Examining the intent, forming a vision and meeting that need in a project was a helpful three-step process.

Being struck with such a big question made everyone remember how fortunate most of us are compared to others in the world. I found the Lucca course in Sydney to be inspiring, educational and great fun! Anybody aged between 16-27 is encouraged to apply.

He who has never learned to obey cannot be a good commander.

- Aristotle

The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.

- Martin Luther King, Jr

2007 Ficino School Fair

by Nicolette Farrelly

The second Ficino School Fair coincided with the 10th anniversary year of Ficino and was the first big event for this year. The School opened its gates to the public on February 17th and offered an array of interesting activities and entertainment.

The big thrill of the day came with one of the Class 2 parents, Sean Brickland – SHAMUS - who entertained and shocked an audience of children and adults with his many talents, including juggling fire, and sword swallowing. His son KID DYNAMITE added his own spice with some very impressive juggling acts as well.

There was something for everyone, including a variety of food ranging from Devonshire Teas to a great selection of Indian and Chinese food and of course the good old sausage sizzle. Children could enjoy jumping on one of three bouncy castles, or



create a picture out of coloured sand, make a badge, have their faces painted or knock a coconut off it's perch and take home the winnings.

The Children's Craft stall displayed an impressive variety of work produced by the children – cards, painted T-shirts, windmills, weather vanes, and much more. For those with a sweet tooth, the Cake Stall had many delights, all home baked by parents and teachers of the school; and lots of jams and preserves too. There was something for the Green Fingered and the Bookish amongst the crowd; and also a Bric-a-Brac stall – not for the faint-hearted!

The atmosphere was relaxed and inviting and everyone seemed to leave looking as if it was a day well spent.

As well as bringing Ficino School to the community, the Fair was of real benefit financially, generating several thousands of dollars for the school.



Sword Swallowing

A Weekend of

by Simon Laurent

Liberal Arts

"Whenever I hear the word 'culture', I reach for my pistol!"

- attributed to Hermann Goering

Rather facetious, yes, but this illustrates the pejorative view often held of cultural activities, being the pursuit of 'refinement'. However, to refine something is to remove the dross, or to render it more keen and sharp. 'Culture' is also closely related to 'cultivate' – that is, to promote growth or, in agricultural terms, to 'raise'.

Culture depends upon the human ability to assign to things and events meanings not graspable by the senses alone (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*), which of course is a function of mind. Thus, one may see culture as a means to raise the individual by refining the use of the mind.

Yet this is not the entire story. The theme material for the Cultural Weekend held from 19 – 21 January at West Tamaki Road was taken from James Armstrong's collection of lectures entitled *The Seven Liberal Arts*, entirely appropriate for students of music, art and dance. First the mind must be taught to think and communicate with lucidity, which then clears the way for understanding of the workings of natural law in the creation.

In Classical times such study enabled people "to comprehend everything they read, elevated their understanding to all things, and empowered them to cut through the knots of all problems possible of solution."

(John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*) But this is no godless pursuit of knowledge for the sake of vanity. Mr Armstrong cited Plato's view that the "true cultivation of humanity" consisted in the development of the Divine Virtues of Wisdom, Justice, Temperance and Courage. The study of rhetoric or geometry can only be worthwhile if it leads to an appreciation of the universal so that one may care for the particular. It is a moral task. "The essential work of schools and universities is to develop human talents, to equip us as members of the community of mankind, to discharge our duties as wise and statesmen-like rulers and guardians." (from the Introduction to *The Seven Liberal Arts*) As a participant in the Cultural Weekend the writer observed that many of those present caught a taste of that higher duty.

The choir under the direction of Frances Gore, with able assistance from Cathy Dean from Wellington, worked on pieces for performance at the close of the weekend ranging from rounds to madrigals. John Paul Bowman introduced the singers to the play of numbers in settings of J S Bach's anthems which proved, as all good challenges are, to be worth the effort of perseverance.

Through this work not only did one hear the rich beauty of pure harmony behind the physical sounds, but along with this the heart was made receptive to that beauty and to the fellowship of others.

Leon MacLaren's advice to the London artists many years ago was to "draw what you see." This deceptively simple sentence was the motivation behind the Auckland artists' work on the weekend, joined by new members and guests from Hamilton. Ngaire Bennett found that the experience during those days was well described by a quote in the London School's *Convivium* magazine: "somehow art can be the doorway into the beautiful motionless silence of the Self." And from *Yoga Vasistha*: "... it is the Consciousness alone that is the reality in all forms and experiences. The vital air brings about vision within and an object apparently outside. But the experiencing of sight (the seeing itself) is pure Consciousness."

Rosemary Auld for the Abhinaya dance group said, "The mark of the weekend seemed to be a natural ease and fine penetration of the value and purpose of the dance and enjoyment of the good company... it went exceedingly well in unexpected

ways." One aspect of their work was to provide objects of study in pose and movement for the art group. The dancers also worked on new compositions including one by Jenny Laird describing the present moment, and another more free-flowing piece by Carol George demonstrating in physical form the order of the universe.

The effort made by visitors from Hamilton and Wellington to make the journey to join the event must be saluted. The contribution of their talents and their goodwill was warmly welcomed, and bodes well for the success of future weekends. Such work is important and is available to all, since in the words of James Armstrong: "Learning is a process of developing innate knowledge, not the acquisition of more and more information."

** Dr Armstrong is a senior member of the School in London who has taught its Liberal Arts curriculum to young people for many years.*

Auckland School Cultural Groups

held on Sundays

Vedic Dance	8.30am	Rosemary Auld	412-8782
Art Group	1.00pm	Ngaire Bennett	445 3827
Shakespeare Study Group	6.00pm	Hamish Hudson	638 9667
Choir	7.30pm	Frances Gore	817 5060

**New members to these groups are welcome.
For enquiries, please phone the group tutors listed.**

Arete -

The Concept of Excellence

(The following has been condensed from a talk given by Lilian Beanland at the Cultural Day last month)

Arete (pronounced Ar-a-tay) was a concept of the greatest importance to the ancient Greeks, and meant excellence or virtue, goodness, valour, merit, distinction, fame.

For a man or woman, it was the idea of being the best one can be, or reaching your highest human potential.

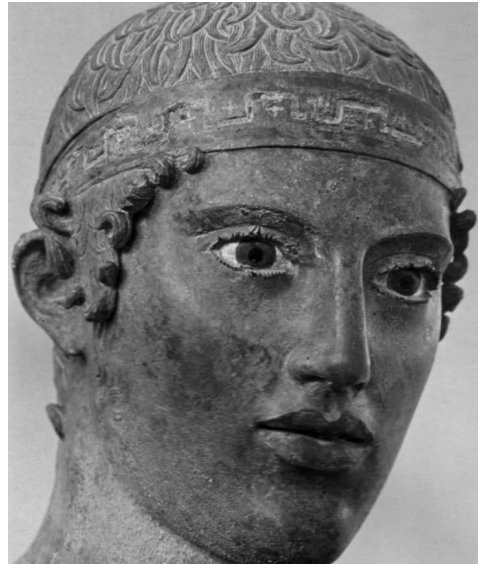
Socrates spoke of Arete as naturally in the context of a shoemaker as in speaking of the Arete of a great statesman or scholar. Each needed knowledge and effectiveness in their field. For example, the Arete of a sprinter is speed, of a Marathon runner endurance, of a rider horsemanship, of a soldier courage. It could apply to anyone or anything. The Arete of a chimney, for instance, is in its effectiveness to reflect the heat into a room and smoke out through the roof.

Plato asked many times: What is Arete? Can it be taught? Socrates had proposed that Arete is Knowledge. He also says that every species has a specific excellence, and the act of striving for that excellence is also Arete.

Socrates' maxim was 'an unexamined life is not worth living', so questioning the way we live our lives is of the utmost importance.

The Bible, which was of course translated from the Greek, gives Arete as Praise Virtue or Excellence. In Philippians 4.8 we read:

"... whatsoever is true, whatsoever is honourable, whatsoever is just, whatsoever is pure, whatsoever is lovely, whatsoever is gracious; if there be any excellence (arete), if there be anything worthy of praise, think on these things."



Head of the Charioteer

On February 14 of this year, Dr. David T. Porter, a prominent, award-winning tennis coach, and a Professor of Health Education, spoke of the significance of Arete in his McKay Lecture in Hawaii. He said that living in the 21st century, with its speed, pace and impatience as technology accelerates, the attraction of short cuts, and the willingness to accept the shallow and the superficial, is in sharp contrast to the wisdom of ancient Greece and the concept of Arete.

He said: "In its earliest appearance, this notion of excellence was found in the act of living up to one's true potential - strength, vigor, bravery, courage, aptness, capacity and worth - it did not require defeating or prevailing over others."

Dr. Porter said that Homer's Iliad and Odyssey are tributes to this code of excellence; we have the mythological Odysseus being more than an athlete and warrior. He overcame all obstacles and trials in developing honour, glory and excellence.

Dr Porter finished by saying 'Arete is in always preparing for the test, the battle, the competition. This is the message of the Greeks - the message of balance, the message of greatness, the message of Arête. So again we see it is the striving for excellence that is highlighted.

The concept of Arete was also reflected in ancient Greek sculpture, for example in the form of a Kouros, a nude male usually with clenched fists, and with the left foot forward.

"All these ways, when not tinted by the colour of personal desires, bear the fruit of liberation, for which the human race is designed."

Sri Shantananda Saraswati

The purpose of these Kouroi (plural) is unknown, though some believe they were dedications in temples, or grave markers for aristocrats (the long hair of the Kouroi is the mark of an aristocrat). There were also Korei, female statues, but they were always clothed.

Kouroi were made with little alteration for approximately 150 years from about 650 BC. Approximately 200 examples have come down to us, but mostly as fragments. Sculpture and architecture at this time were often painted (such as The Parthenon and other great temples) and traces of paint remain on them all.

The artist is seldom named, but the Kouroi are silent witnesses to the Cultural Revolution Western society was about to undergo. They stand, with clenched fists, always looking forward, with a smile, as if they know that what was about to begin was the Greek Classical Period and the Golden Age of Greek Thought.

There is a beautiful sculpture called the Charioteer (or Heniochos) of Delphi. Its original location was in the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi, but it is now in the Archeological Museum in Delphi. Art expert J.J.Pollet says of this work: "Not only does it celebrate a victory won at the festival games, but the ethos which it conveys is a manifestation of ARETE - the innate excellence of noble natures which gives them proficiency and pride in their human endeavors before the gods."

Images of the Charioteer have been used extensively on Greek banknotes and coins. The Charioteer was produced in seven separate pieces by the sculptor Sotades. The left hand is missing and his four horses were

probably lost in an earthquake in the 4th century A.D.

The inscription on the base says it is dedicated to Apollo by Polipalos, the winner of the chariot race at the Pythian Games (a kind of Olympics) around 478 B.C. It is an example of the 'severe' Attic style, and a sublime example of the work of an Arete artist.

It was said by Scholiast that

"The most excellent maker of statues, was the first to open their eyelids, so that they appear to see, and the first to separate their feet, so that they appear to walk; and, because of this, he bound them, in order that they might not run away! as if they were living and breathing."

To conclude this discussion of Arete, or Excellence, I'd like to acknowledge the inspiration for this talk, Margot Camp, of the London School.

Summer Reflections

by Digby Crompton

Reflecting on the trouble-spots around the world in 2006, it was obvious that many were essentially based on fundamental religious differences.

A system of faith and worship of a divine power binds man into one or other religion or belief. At the core of each must be the acknowledgement of there being only one Creator and therefore the laws regulating man in creation must surely be uniform.

Through the master teachers of these various religions rules have been set out for human beings to discover a way of life leading towards freedom and happiness. What

these sets of ten laws It was certainly worth probing further.

Firstly, the Ten Commandments can, for most of us, be taken as read; however, less well known are the first two steps of Patanjali's Yogic system, which spell out very simply and in a relative order the following ten instructions: be clean, do not steal; be content, do not hoard; be disciplined, do not corrupt; study the scriptures, do not kill; surrender to the Will, do not lie. It was interesting that the text stated very clearly in these first two steps that Yama (restraints) and Niyama (duties) form the foundation of the yoga (meaning "union") system and that unless these steps were firmly laid, aspirants

"Of law there can be no less acknowledged than that her seat is the bosom of God, her voice the harmony of the world."

- Richard Hooker:

Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity

began to stir further enquiry while studying these laws was the reoccurrence of the number 10 connected with groups of rules written down and preserved within these various religions and traditions.

Firstly, one looked at the precepts which are probably most familiar, the Ten Commandments from the Judaic tradition, then the Yoga system of Patanjali, which lists ten duties and restraints expounded in the first two steps of that system. Thirdly, I was introduced to the ten Powers of God declared in the Corpus Hermeticum. Fourthly, there is the ten-fold law declared by Manu, considered to be the Father of Mankind. The question now remained: as there is only one Creator of the universe, is there any similarity or synergy within each of

in the third and fourth steps should not practise postures or breathing exercises.

In 1460 a monk named Leonardo of Pistoia brought a Greek manuscript back to Florence containing a codex, the nucleus of which contained the Corpus Hermeticum. The Florentine scholar and philosopher Marsilio Ficino was asked by his patron, Cosimo de Medici to leave aside all the translations of Plato he was working on, as this was a more significant work. In the 13th chapter, the Egyptian sage Hermes explains to his son Tat that there are 12 basic Tormentors, starting with ignorance and ending in treachery, anger, recklessness and malice, but that these are dispelled by the ten Powers of God: knowledge of God, experience of joy, self-control, steadfastness,

justice, generosity, truth, supreme good, life, and light.

In the Rig Veda, one of four in the Vedantic philosophy, there are repeated references to Father Manu. Being the Father of Mankind, he is naturally considered the founder of social and moral order. He is also regarded as the ancestor of kings and the author of legal maxims. Here are laws suitable to all humanity, as they are universally capable of bringing about prosperity and freedom to one and all. The ten-fold law (Book 6, verse 92, Laws of Manu) are as follows:

contentment, forgiveness, self-control, abstention from unrighteously appropriating anything, (obedience to the rules of) purification, coercion of the organs,* wisdom, knowledge (of the Supreme Soul), truthfulness, and abstention from anger.

**mastery over sensory organs*

As regard for this ten-fold law is so high in the Vedantic tradition, being seen as universal and for humanity as a whole, it would be advantageous to look briefly at the foundation of our own system of law to perhaps find a connection.

New Zealand law is based in English law. In the introductory chapter on the Nature of Laws in General in his Commentaries on the Laws of England, the 18th century jurist Sir William Blackstone explains the principles by which the Roman Emperor Justinian reduced the whole doctrine of law to three general precepts: that we should live honestly, should hurt nobody, and should render to everyone his due. In the same chapter he stated that the Creator has

graciously reduced the rule of obedience to one precept, that man should pursue his own true and substantial happiness. He further states that this is the foundation of what we call ethics, or natural law.

The question remained as to whether it was firstly possible to synthesise these expressions of law, or rules, for life and whether it was possible to draw from them adequate wording in a more modern idiom. After studying the foregoing for some time, the following nine sentences formulated of themselves, lit by the study and reflection and the words of the masters from the various traditions. If these are recognised, then the prospect of freedom and prosperity must be available, as stated in the ancient doctrines.

- Appreciate what is offered by the provider of all, taking no more than is necessary.
- Be honest and true to one-self and seek the company of the good.
- Listen to and study the words of the wise.
- Seek, and speak the truth kindly and let not speech be wasteful or unkind.
- Be patient, and steadfast in self control of sensory appetites.
- Be not angry, but practise contentment.
- Kill not the joy in others, the mind of others, or harm any body.
- Be not proud or envious, but forgiving, rendering everyone their due.
- Seek your own true and substantial happiness.

“Law is that which holds everything together. There are numerous levels of things, so there are numerous levels of law. Small law for small things and situations and big law for bigger things, situations and beings. As many as there are types of things, so many are the laws to hold them.”

- Sri Shantananda Saraswati

Going South

by Jackie Bedford

The Wellington School of Philosophy has extended its activities into the South Island this year, with a tutor presenting the Introductory Course in Christchurch.

The Wellington leader Bruce Dean says the move is in response to considerable interest from people in Christchurch.

“We were contacted by a number of people who had attended the course previously, either in Wellington or elsewhere, and who were keen to do so again. They were happy to help with organisation and so on,” he explains.

The first class commenced on 15 February and is being held on Thursday evenings in a room at the Arts Centre in central Christchurch – a group of picturesque, historical buildings that originally housed Canterbury University.

On the first evening both Bruce and Cathy Dean went down to introduce the School and themselves, and Cathy has tutored the group since. She flies down on Thursday afternoons, stays with a former Wellington student and returns early Friday.

“Twenty-four students were enrolled on the first evening and three more enrolled the following week and attendances have been pretty consistent,” reports Cathy. “The conversations have been lively and enthusiastic with a strong level of input, practice and understanding from the students. Already we have been approached by a number of them to find out what our future plans are for Christchurch”

So, what is the plan? “No final decision has been made at this point, but we are exploring options for running Part 2 next term with a

view to offering the introductory course again in the third term,” says Mr Dean.

He says this is typically how branches start – that is, with a request from locals to offer a course in their area. The Wellington School has branches in Masterton and Palmerston North. Masterton has been running for just over 10 years and supplies all its own tutors under the guidance of Richard Pointon. He also looks after the Palmerston North branch which is still in its infancy and was started by Stephen and Cate Headey who moved there from Melbourne.

Bruce Dean says there is no specific policy in relation to setting up new branches: “Just meet the need and make sure we don't overstretch our resources.”

A member of the Wellington senior men's group, David Kelly, began studying philosophy in Christchurch when the Wellington School started a branch there in the late 1960's and is pleased to hear it's starting up again. A tutor, John Medley, moved down with his wife to run the branch back then.

Raised in Canterbury, David was at university just outside Christchurch at the time. “I'd been everywhere prior to that,” he recalls. “It was the only source of anything apart from Bible class.”

He attended on the first night that material was offered. The venue was the YMCA rooms in Latimer Square, he recalls. “That first night was a significant night. I came out saying, ‘This is what I want.’”

Rooms were hired in Hereford St, at least one group was offered meditation and there was a group of around 10 devoted students. However, when it had been going for about

five years, the Wellington School went through a difficult patch and the group was told that it was unable to keep the branch going. So, it's now been more than 30 years since the School has had activities in the South Island.

If readers know anyone in Christchurch or the surrounding area who would be

interested, they might like to let them know that the Wellington School is presenting material there.

One person helping in Christchurch is John Drew, who is known to many in the Auckland School because he was a member there for many years.



"First Night"

Happiness

by Jacquelyne Taylor

Happiness this year I've learnt..
Is not what I had thought!
Nor those with whom I've shared some..
As wisdom we have sought..
It isn't in the things we own..
Nor in the clothes we wear..
Nor is it in, what we desire..
It simply isn't there!

Happiness I've learnt you see
On Tuesdays every week..
With others at Ficino school,
Who came to learn and seek..
Is everywhere, within, without..
Ourselves and all around..
And if we simply 'are' and 'be'..
For sure it can be found..

Happiness comes gift wrapped..
It's in a small child's smile..
Is also in another's words..
Try listen for a while..
It's in the things we pass right by..
And sometimes cannot see..
It's in the very heart of all..
In you! and you and me..

For happiness like wisdom..
Is truly everywhere!
It simply waits to be revealed..
Is natural as fresh air..
So when you're sad or careworn,
Frustrated or hot-wired..
Whisper to yourself..."Not this"..
And please, be re-inspired!

The Way of the Mystics

This article has been extracted from a lecture given by Lorna Travis at the Cultural Day last month)

In historical terms, the western mystical journey begins with the coming of Christ, but this isn't to say that mystical beliefs did not exist before this time.

Each mystic can be likened to a frayed strand protruding from an infinite golden thread; each one appears separate, but in truth they all share the same origins, they are all bound by their divine insight and love of the Lord. How they choose to convey their experiences tends to reflect the cultural and religious traditions of their origin. This is why a desert father from Egypt may have a different point of reference from that of a Celtic mystic; the first having a Hermetical or Gnostic background and the second a Pagan one. For all intents and purposes they are both Christian, but their social and spiritual heritage may differ hugely, hence the difference in tone.

It is also true that the mystics endeavour to reveal the omniscient Spirit to us in the varying languages of human nature, each one having a particular temperament that conveys his message with utter clarity, the voice that is natural to him, individually. For although they speak of universal matters, their experiences can only be expressed within the realms of human understanding. And so it is that one mystic communicates his message through his artistic visions, another by sweet music, or educated intellect. Each one endeavours to create a symbolic suggestion of Reality, a Reality which is wholly beyond any earthly description.

How does one convey a glory that has no form? Or a full void? But try they do, so that we mortals can cross the canyon of our confusion without fear of falling. They are the bridge beneath our feet, guiding our

every step and providing us with safe passage to the other side. Obviously, the road that each person travels will vary because everyone starts from a different place, but like the spokes of a wheel they are all centred in the one hub. The hub has many names, depending on one's own preferences, Allah, Nirvana, God, the Absolute, but intrinsically they are the same; they all offer us salvation from the world, and direct contact with the divine.

This communion of spirit is the essence of the mystical experience, the secret that reveals itself in moments of utter clarity. Ironically, it is always there waiting in the wings, ready to take centre-stage in our lives, but in our ignorance we create our own performance, basking in the limelight of our own self-interest and thus keeping the Lord at bay. Sometimes however, when our ego is dropped, we have partial glimpses of this exalted state, and experience an overwhelming sense of deep appreciation. It may be a moment of awe at the splendour of the creation, or the love of a man or woman that wakes us from our slumber with such force that we feel more alive than ever before. When it passes we remember it well for its qualities are unknown to us in our day to day lives. Intuitively we recognise that the substance of this experience belongs to All, that at that moment we were in union with something bigger than ourselves. This is the world in which the mystic dwells, a world which is more real, radiant and blissful than we could ever imagine.

The Search for God

"It pleases God a great deal if the soul never ceases to search...and finding pleases the soul and fills it with joy". (Julian of Norwich, 1342 - after 1416).

To man, the universe appears incomprehensible. One knows that it exists because the light of distant suns shine down on us each evening, reminding us of the magnitude and splendour that surrounds our comparatively insignificant lives. It seems so remote and unfathomable that we often choose simply to turn away from that place of unknowing back to the familiar confines of our own world. However, some men are not content with this limited view. They long to understand the universe and are compelled to search for answers to their questions.

The search for God begins in much the same way. No longer content with our partial understanding of humanity, we ask questions and pursue an aspect of life that has previously been hidden from view. We acknowledge that we need something greater than ourselves to help us, and in doing so we embrace the concept of God.

In the first instance we have to take an exploratory approach, not unlike that of the scientist, to find out what the relationship between the individual self and God is. This is the way that the mystics recommend. In essence they observe and experience what the relationship between the infinite Lord and the finite self is, and through this practical knowledge they begin to recognise what actions, thoughts and practices draw them closer to experiencing the Divine. It is a process which is completely devoid of guesswork or theorising because, like the scientist, the mystic has observable evidence from which he can then map out his route and rationally plan his next experiment, and most significantly it will be based on what he has already learnt. Similarly, spiritual knowledge is never lost: each step of the search, when founded in experience, naturally forms the basis for the next move. One can begin to think of one's life as a pilgrimage, each day bringing with it an opportunity to find God.

Praise

"O Lord, O God of Gods, how wonderful Thou

art in all Thy thoughts, beyond our understanding, how profound in all Thy purposes, Almighty in the works of Thy Hands!"
(Brother Lawrence, 1666-1691).

The Psalmist in speaking of the Lord said, "In you is my song forever" [Psalms 71:6], thus he acknowledges that all the joy and goodness that we experience in life emanates from the symphony of God's loving hand. Music speaks directly to our innermost soul, and without 'doing' anything we can find ourselves responding to the harmonies held there, enraptured by the beauty of our true Self, a "heavenly melody".

The Benedictine nun, poet and musician, Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179), is famous for her many devotional songs. Some were offered in praise to the Creator, others to revered saints and many to her Father.

The English Hermit Richard Rolle was also an advocate of heavenly praise. He explains this very clearly in his work *The Fire of Love*. His experience of the delectable "symphony of song", through which he found his connection with the Lord, can be found throughout his writings. He speaks not so much of the outward song, but more of the inner harmonising song; sweet sounds that "pertain to the song of eternal praise...sounds which cannot be known or heard save by him who has received it". Songs that suffuse the whole being with joy and gratitude, and "confirms our hope in the beauty of the unseen life in the loving soul".

It is this quality of harmonisation with the Divine Peace that is sought through praise. The individual in praise is drawn out of the separate sphere of the ego and united, through participation, with the very Being it is praising, the 'Source', as Dionysius states, 'of all mutual attraction'.

Discretion

Progressing in the search for God one can begin to use an aspect of devotion called discretion. Discretion simply means to use

one's own judgement. For the novice this stage is crucial because one has to discriminate between divine truth and false ideas. The difference between the two can be so close that it is necessary to return frequently to sacred texts to ensure that the mind does not mistake the shadow for the substance. One is not required to learn the scriptures by rote, one merely has to allow the Truth to enter the being and trust that in time the essence of what we have read will purify our heart.

This is the wonder of discretion; it helps us to rise above the bonds of our individual doubts and passions. By inquiring into the true nature of our thoughts our limited knowledge becomes refined. What we may have taken to be an absolute truth may be revealed as only a partial glimpse. In short, we can no longer deceive ourselves. The scales will repeatedly tip in favour of the Sovereign Truth.

Humility

The mark of this stage is the awakening of the desire to give and want nothing in return. The mystic does not wish to gain special favour, to gain the power of healing, or move within the heavenly realms. For such a man, seeking God is not an accumulative act, it is rather a relinquishing of all else but God. It no longer seems a choice so much as a necessity to turn to Christ. The novice strikes out on the journey because he feels that he must; there is no choice to be made in the mind, the heart has already left. The conviction is so strong that there comes with it a sense of duty, a duty to ascend to the summit of man's potential, to be in the likeness of our Father. One does not know if one will attain such a goal, but nonetheless he seeks humbly, serving without recognition or praise, knowing only that he is happy to do so if it pleases the Lord.

Another aspect of humility is self-sacrifice. An inward acknowledgement of the true magnitude of God enabled the mystics to relinquish the heavy burden of the ego. At this stage humility arises because one starts to fully respect the will of God before one's own will. It is not an easy task and demands a great deal of trust, but as Evagrius said, "To go against self is the beginning of salvation." We have to realise, as did Isaiah, that our hearts and minds are mere pinpricks of illumination when compared with the omnipotent will of God. When he saw a vision of the Lord he said, "Woe is me! for I am undone" (Isaiah 6:5). He knew only that he was 'a man of unclean lips' in comparison to the spotless Lord within his sight.

Worship

"The first of all commandments is, Hear O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength...."



It is ... an eager dynamic love that becomes central to the life of the devotee. The mystics had this zeal, this tenacious drive; there was certainly nothing half-hearted about their efforts. Even in times of extreme suffering the mystics displayed a courageous, unwavering and spontaneous outpouring of worship. For mystics like Margery Kempe (1373-1440), no obstacle or hardship would weaken their resolve to love the Lord. A vicar, Master Richard Caister, once commented to Margery "I am amazed how you can be so merry, when you have had such great troubles and travelled so far." To which she responded, "Sir it is because I have great cause to be merry and rejoice in our Lord, who has helped me and succoured me and brought me home again in safety - blessed and worshipped may he be."

Prayer

The act of prayer ... instantly connects us with the divine, heals our deficiencies and provides rest for the weary. Prayer can be spontaneous or prescribed, but when and where we pray is not of great significance; what needs to be remembered is that when we do pray we are addressing the subtle form of God present within us.

It must be noted ... that when we pray we must do so with a pure intention, or as the unknown author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* describes it, "a full heart". Prayer enables the mystic to establish a relationship with God; communicating with Him as if He were present. We do not always know seemingly 'how to pray', but just by starting the conversation "the Spirit himself intercedes for us" (Romans 8:26). We should, as St. Teresa of Avila, a great proponent of prayer, reminds us, speak simply as if having a "friendly intercourse and frequent solitary conversation with Him who, as we know, loves us".

The form of prayer known as contemplation or meditation, ... draws the attention of the Supreme Spirit towards one's self, but, whereas previously one may have recited a prayer toward an external God, in meditation the prayer is aimed at the internal God. It is prayer pared down to its simplest form; a prayer of companionable silence. Evelyn Underhill wrote that "the act of contemplation is for the mystic a psychic gateway; a method of going from one level of consciousness to another".

A Servant of God

At this stage it is clear to the devotee that the Lord is All and everything. It is possible to serve Him at all times because He prevails in all forms. When the devotee looks through the eyes he sees only His Lord, when he hears through the ears he hears only the Lord's voice, when the devotee breathes he breathes the breath of Life. With the Lord as his constant companion the devotee becomes

His servant. All that he thinks, says or does will embody his love of God. This elevated state was a constant living experience for many mystics.

In the company of God

With the Lord as his constant companion the servant becomes familiar with his master. His actions have become so refined and he has pleased the Lord to such an extent that the relationship between them becomes more like that of friends. Their relationship is so close that the devotee imbibes the qualities of his dear friend. He exhibits the qualities attributed to the Heavenly Father. He adheres to the truth, is wise, compassionate, strong and healthy. His heart is pure and tender, his soul is unperturbed, and his thoughts rest in the still peace of God's wisdom. He is always in the company of God.

Union with God

When the devotee has offered himself in complete surrender to the Lord the final stage in his life of devotion is complete. He is a perfected soul, he is in union with God. Knowing only God, he has become one with God.

Many mystics have tried to convey this indescribable meeting of God and man, the peak of Self revelation, in a bid to let it be known that our world, our humanity, rests in that Pure Being. In stillness and in love, they reveal that man is no other than God, unified in perfect harmony. Ultimately their words tell us of the same fundamental experience, for when man transcends the identification with the individual, what 'I' could remain but the I am?

This is the dominant feature of mystical metaphors to which all the grace-filled mystics allude, that there is only One; to believe oneself as separate from God is an error. No matter what their language, their representations or explanations, they speak of this truth: that an undivided Being exists, is All that exists.

Practical Philosophy

An introductory course of 12 lectures is offered for those who seek an understanding of the nature of human existence and the world in which we live.

The lectures show how great philosophic ideas of past and present, put into practice, lead to clear thought, reduction of stress, and effective action in work, study and every aspect of daily life.

The course, which includes the opportunity for discussion, is given on Tuesday and Thursday (7.45 to 10pm) and Tuesday morning (9.45 to 11.45am) and you may, if you wish, vary your day of attendance each week. A refreshment break is provided at each session.

The fee for this course is \$150 for adults, \$75 for non-earning students. Enrol on the night from 30 minutes prior to your first attendance, or visit our website: www.philosophy.school.nz

When

Tuesday am or pm, 15th May and
Thursday pm, 17th May 2007.

Where

27 Esplanade Road, Mt Eden.

Enquiries welcome phone: 0800 610-539

School of Philosophy (Auckland) Inc

A registered charitable organisation. Established 1960

www.philosophy.school.nz

Also in Hamilton. Phone (07) 856-7174

"Every man's life lies within the present; for the past is spent and done with, and the future is uncertain."

- Marcus Aurelius

For Enquiries/Contributions contact **Marilyn Marshall**
Ph 579-8646 Fax 579-7854 Email marilyn.marshall@xtra.co.nz