

# Vision



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## *Be still and know that I am God*

Psalm, 46:10.

This excerpt from the Psalms has long resonated on a personal level. The command is to 'Be still' as the first step to knowing – and knowing in this context is recognised as experiential knowledge, understood and internalized.

Throughout the ages the wise have directed us towards stillness

Keep silence for the most part, and speak only when you must, and then briefly.

Epictetus (c. 55 – 135 AD)

When there is silence one finds the anchor of the universe within oneself

Lao Tzu (c. 6th-century BC)

Wisdom comes with the ability to be still. Just look and listen. No more is needed.

Eckhart Tolle (1948 - )

This issue of Vision contains articles which link to this theme of 'Be still and know...'.<sup>1</sup>

In his article "The Heavenly Influences in the Chronicles of Narnia", Hamish Hudson highlights one of C.S.Lewis's hidden messages – to listen in stillness and heed the promptings of the quiet inner voice which ultimately leads to true satisfaction and surety.

When the mind is stilled, a sense of expansion, connectedness and peace has often been spoken of. In "The Cage" Rob Bree has shared one such occasion when he experienced freedom from what he observed as self-inflicted limitations and boundaries of attachments and desires.

In the articles "Let Sanskrit Work for You" and "Why I chant" both Lawrence Ames and Mark Rassie recognise not only spiritual insights but the beauty and purity of the sound of Sanskrit words and verses enhanced by attentive listening and careful articulation of sounds.

In his speech on Leadership for a gathering of School principals, Nicholas Clarke the head boy at Ficino School speaks of the value of falling still and listening, in the exercise of pausing as a skill for staying calm and keeping a 'cool head'.

A reaffirmation of his faith in meditation prompted Peter Crompton to share a review of the book "The Selfless Self" in which the author Laurence Freeman has provided a series of 'talks about silence' and their links to a system of mantra-based Christian meditation.

It is both a privilege and quite humbling to bring together a tribute to Digby Crompton, who passed away last November. In addition to all his other roles, Digby was a steadfast seeker after Truth and leader in the School of Philosophy for over 50 years. It is hoped that this article will stimulate memories and appreciation of the man and his qualities.

Closing this issue is the poem by Selwyn Daniels, a long serving member of the School, appropriately named The Voice of Silence.

## The Heavenly 'Influences' in the Chronicles of Narnia



Several years ago, I had the pleasure of delivering a presentation on *The Chronicles of Narnia* and some aspects of its underlying meaning to a group of students in the School of Philosophy in Auckland. I am very fortunate to have the chance to revisit these wonderful books every year, as I teach them to pupils at the school where I work. They were written by an Oxford Don called Clive Staples Lewis, although he preferred to be called 'Jack', by all accounts.



C.S. Lewis

They were quite a departure from his usual works, which were either academic treatises on Renaissance and Medieval literature, or works which outlined his ideas as a Christian apologist. According to his biographers he wrote *The Chronicles* in response to a resounding defeat in public debate with another Christian apologist, Elizabeth Anscombe. After this, as some have pointed out, he seems to have turned from rational argument, to appealing to the imagination.

In short, for those not familiar with *The Chronicles*, they are set around the adventures of a group of children in an imaginary land peopled by creatures from myth and legend, such as giants and witches, and a race of talking beasts. The stories were written primarily for children but they are not just for children, and are replete with profound ideas running hidden just below the surface. As a child these thrill with a sense of something wonderful and hidden, as adults they may provide a sense of revelation. There are many of these wonderful revelations that I could discuss time and space permitting, but as I have neither the time or space, I will look at one, which might be called the heavenly 'influences', or perhaps the workings of grace.

The final book in the series is called *The Last Battle*. I won't go into all the various details of plot and so on, but there is a passage in the book, among many others, which intrigued me, even as a child. The main character in the story is a youthful King called Tirian. Early in the book, he is speaking with a character called Roonwit – a centaur, a mythical creature, half-horse half man. This sort of figure often has two aspects. In one context they may represent unreason, or in another the wisdom of the teacher. (An example of the latter would be Chiron, the guide and teacher of Asclepius the healer. A

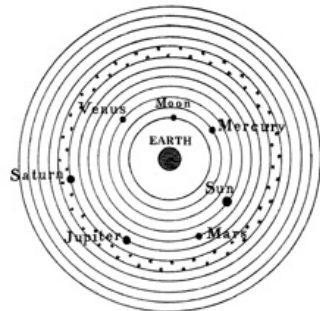
later manifestation of this idea is Firenze, the astrology teacher in the Harry Potter series.) In this story Roonwit is a noted astrologer, who has come to tell the King that the rumours of the coming of Aslan (a Christ like figure that appears in all the books) are untrue. (The underlined sentence in the following is especially important.)

***“ It was already in my mind to come and warn your Majesty that some great evil hangs over Narnia. But last night the rumour reached me that Aslan is abroad in Narnia. Sire, do not believe this tale. It cannot be. The stars never lie, but Men and Beasts do. If Aslan were really coming to Narnia the sky would have foretold it. If he were really come, all the most gracious stars would be assembled in his honour. It is a lie.”***

***The Last Battle, by C S Lewis, Chapter 2***

Intriguing. To paraphrase, the Centaur has told the King that the heavens say nothing of the coming of Aslan, and that by their nature they speak the truth of what is, and can do nothing else. (Hence, they are described as ‘fixed’ not just in position but in intent.) Importantly, Roonwit also reminds the King that the nature of ‘Men and Beasts’ is not fixed – we may speak truthfully or we may not. Men and Beasts have freedom of will. In a sense, we may abide by the Will expressed by the stars and planets or we may follow our own will. By implication, the Heavens express the ‘Will’ of God, for those that can read them.

Lewis being a good Medievalist was very familiar with the Ptolemaic model of the Cosmos (see the diagram below) and its implications in the Medieval mind. Narnia’s heavens appear to be modelled on a similar idea. To explain briefly, before the advent of telescopes, the view of the cosmos was somewhat different to that we have today. There were seven planets. Earth was at the centre, and not counted as one of the planets. Beyond Earth was the Moon followed by Mercury, Venus, Mars, the Sun (considered a planet), Jupiter, Saturn (the last of the planets) the fixed stars, the primum mobile (the first mover) and beyond this and encompassing all of it, God. Each of these, God excepted, was held within great spheres of crystal which turned about the heavens. The planets themselves rotated within these crystal spheres. In their turning they vibrated or ‘sang’. An idea that was still alive and well in the Renaissance despite the advent of Galileo. As Shakespeare puts it in *The Merchant of Venice*:



*‘ ....Look how the floor of heaven  
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold.  
There’s not the smallest orb which thou behold’st  
But in his motion like an angel sings,  
Still choiring to the young-eyed cherubins.’*

***Lorenzo, Merchant of Venice, Act 5.1***

In addition, these planets and stars were great entities, gods, as their names suggest - perhaps we

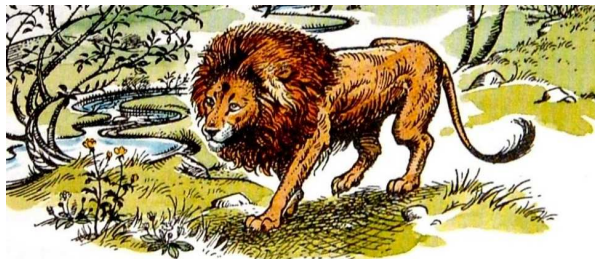
might think of them angelic beings. They were considered to be alive, not just great bodies of earth, ice and gas as we tend to think of them today. Each of them vibrated according to their particular power or quality. So, for example Mercury was the Lord of meaning, the god of language, the messenger, the translator between Heaven and the world below the Moon. The vibrations of these were felt in the mundane, or lower world, as 'influences'. (A fossil of this idea is held in the language. When we suffer from the 'flu' we have come under a malign planetary influence – hence we fall sick.)

Of course, this model no longer holds currency these days, as with finer levels of observation we have discovered a vast Universe. However, there is another way of looking at the model. It was also considered a way of viewing the inner world – the world of the mind and the soul – the Microcosm as opposed to the Macrocosm. To return to the next part of Lorenzo's speech given above...

*'Such harmony is in immortal souls,  
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay  
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.'*

*Merchant of Venice, Act 5.1*

Very broadly, in the writings of Plato and in Ficino these 'inner' planets were companion spirits or 'geniuses' that accompanied the soul when it descended into the material world. The balance of these inner planets and stars determined a person's potential talents, aptitudes and character. (These were bestowed according to the capacity of those receiving them. For example, there are very few who would be able to keep the unalloyed company of Mercury!)



*Aslan*

In the passage quoted from *The Merchant of Venice*, Lorenzo also refers to how these inner promptings of the soul become inaudible to us through being 'muddied' by the confusion and movement of the lower world<sup>1</sup>. This is alluded to elsewhere in *The Chronicles*. In *The Silver Chair*, Aslan warns the main character that she may no longer understand his will clearly when she reaches

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<sup>1</sup> According to the medieval model, the world below the sphere of the Moon, the mundane/earthly, is subject to change and movement, and is in a constant state of flux. It is under the 'influence' of the Moon. Beyond the Moon the planets are constant and unchanging in their nature, though they do wander. The Stars move across the heavens but do not move in relation to each other. The 'primum mobile' is the cause of all movement and is unmoving. God or Absolute is beyond and throughout all this – one, unmoving, unchanging, and causeless.

the 'lower world'. He tells her that she must repeat a series of instructions or 'signs' in her mind as often as possible, so that when she meets these prompts, they will speak to her clearly. Aslan also instructs her to trust them and follow them no matter how they might seem. To trust in that inner voice and do away with doubt.

***"Here on the mountain I have spoken to you clearly: I will not often do so down in Narnia. Here on the mountain the air is clear and your mind is clear; as you drop down into Narnia, the air will thicken. Take great care that it does not confuse your mind. And the signs which you have learned here will not look at all as you expect them to look, when you meet them there. That is why it is so important to know them by heart and pay no attention to appearances."***<sup>2</sup>

#### **The Silver Chair by C. S. Lewis, Chapter 2**

I think that Lewis is giving us an important message here. We are probably all familiar with this inner voice, although we may not think of it in these terms. It comes under many names in many traditions – the knower, our conscience, our guardian angel, our intuition or the quiet inner voice. It might be something as simple as an inner prompting to take the pot off the stove, or something as difficult as not moving on a position despite the opinion of all those around you. (Winston Churchill comes to mind. I highly recommend seeing *Darkest Hour* by the way. A truly splendid movie and, as a bonus, penned quite magnificently by a New Zealand script writer. See if you can spot the moment when he decides to abide by the promptings of his soul. It is not what you might think.) Of course, to hear that voice clearly requires an inner stillness and a willingness to follow what is spoken. In a sense, when we do that we put ourselves in the way of grace.

In *The Last Battle*, Tirian experiences this grace, and it marks a pivotal moment in the book and in the development of his character. Initially, Tirian is confused by the events that are taking place around him and he seems rather helpless in the face of the horror that is unfolding. There is a moment about a quarter of the way into the story when it appears all is lost. He has been captured by his enemies. He has lost his crown. The enemy, through trickery and lies, has taken his kingdom and enslaved his people. Tirian is tied to a tree and awaits execution. He waits a long time. In his suffering his mind turns to consider the workings of grace:

***'And Aslan had come into those stories a lot. He come into all the other stories too, as Tirian now remembered. "Aslan – and children from another world," thought Tirian. "They have always come in when things were at their worst. Oh, if only they could come now."***

***And he called out "Aslan! Aslan! Come and help us now."***

***But the darkness and the cold and the quietness went on just the same.***

***"Let me be killed, cried the King. "I ask nothing for myself. But come and save all Narnia."***

***And still there was no change in the night or the wood, but there began to be a kind of change inside Tirian. Without knowing why, he began to feel a faint hope. And he felt somehow stronger.***

#### **The Last Battle, by C.S. Lewis, Chapter 4**

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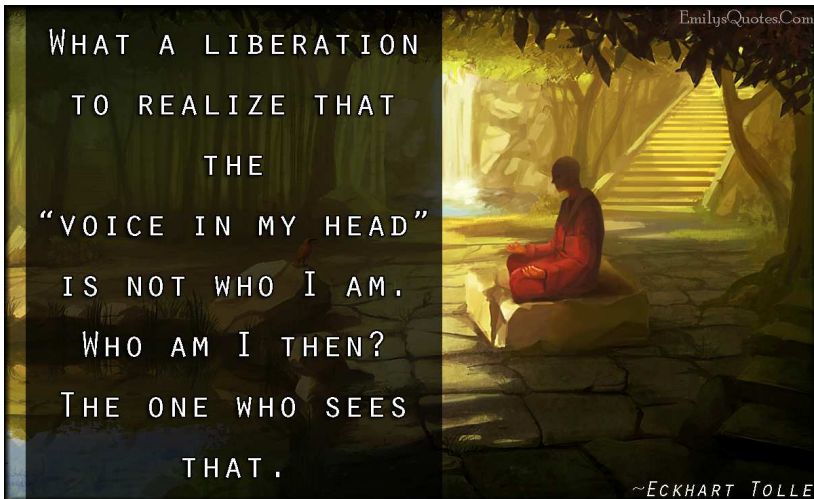
<sup>2</sup> The divine or higher realm represented as a 'high place' is a common trope in many traditions. Christ is often described as going to a 'high place' – in the Transfiguration for example. Tellingly, Elijah hears the 'small still voice' of God is just such a high place.

In this moment of sacrifice<sup>3</sup> Tirian finds his true inner strength. In a lovely way, heeding that voice gives us the strength and the means to do what we must. Thus fortified he is able to face the ‘adventure that Aslan would send them’, as he later puts it. Oh, and he does receive more tangible help, but what help that is I will leave you to find out when you read the story.

So, in conclusion, I heartily recommend reading The Chronicles of Narnia. I have only touched on one small aspect of the riches that are in the stories. The books are many faceted jewels that can be returned to over and over again. They may also lead on to further study of a multitude of things of great beauty from the Perennial Tradition. Lastly, I strongly believe it is worth taking note of Lewis’ hidden message – to listen, and heed the promptings of that quiet inner voice, which ultimately brings true satisfaction and surety.



Hamish Hudson



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<sup>3</sup> A sacrifice sanctifies and makes holy the action. So, consider - through heeding this inner voice we make 'holy' what we do.

## The Cage

I live in a cage. It is there when I wake in the morning. During the day, and at night before I sleep. The bars around me, below me, above me. They press in on me. They remind me I am a prisoner. They taunt me. The creature in the cage. They confine me. They suppress me. They confuse me. I am not very happy here in the cage.

Some days the cage is very small. So tight and confining it squeezes the very breath out of me. I am afraid to even move around inside the cage. Something might break, I might fall and smash against the bars. Will I even survive another day in this dreadful place?

Why am I here? Who put me here? What is wrong with me? Why can't I leave?

Some days the cage is bigger. It's not so bad really, is it? I have arranged my life inside the cage. I have everything I need in here, in my cage. I have my favourite things, my favourite memories. I have hopes, dreams, desires. My creature comforts. Who knows, one day I might see if I can get a better cage. A bigger cage. The very best cage money can buy. One day. Maybe.

Today is different. Today I see the cage very clearly. I see what the bars are made of. My worries, concerns, insecurities, anxieties. My regrets, resentments, disappointments, neuroses. This whole cage is made of my self-imposed limitations that I call mine. Who made the cage? I made it. I make it every day. I make it in the first few seconds of the day, every day. I see today that I am both creature, and the creator, of my own cage. The cage is ignorance. The cage is attachments. The cage has a name. The name is Me. I made it. It is mine. I am responsible for this cage. It is truly mine.

This cage, this cage of my own making, has a gate and a latch. I never knew this gate was here. Is it real? Was it there before? I don't remember it. I open the gate, step through and stand outside looking in. Where am I now, outside the cage? What is this place? Who am I now? Why am I here? And what is the nature of this cage? What keeps me locked up in there? What is this creature I call Me? A make-believe creature in a make-believe cage.

Today I don't believe in the creature or the cage. Today I can see clearly. Today I am free. I stand outside the cage. I don't want to go back in there. I won't go back in there. I promise myself. But I am afraid. Please help me. Lord help me.

I hear Him calling. He calls "Thou art That". He wants me to join Him.  
I turn towards the calling. I step towards Him. He calls me louder still.  
But wait, I have left some things in my cage. I might need them. Please wait.  
The cage isn't there. It feels like a dream. It is gone.  
Was it ever there?  
And I am still.  
Here.



Rob Bree

A student of the School since 1980, Rob is self-employed and has recently become involved with SOP marketing of Part One. As well as a love for the Tradition he also enjoys sports cars, craft beers and chardonnay. Hopefully not all at once.



## Let Sanskrit Work for You

संस्कृतम् भवते भवतु

(Samskr̥tam Bhavate Bhavatu)

The phrase 'Let Sanskrit Work for You' is the motto adopted by the Sanskrit Faculty of the Auckland School of Philosophy (SOP). Rather than being a barrier to progress, the value and effectiveness of Sanskrit as a most potent working tool on the philosophic path to freedom has been seen a little more clearly in recent times and this fresh experience has prompted what follows.

When we become interested in learning more about a subject or set out to learn a new skill we seek out the best teachers, tools and references to help us. The same applies to those of us who have become interested in the subject of philosophy and joined the SOP. Since the quite early stages of enquiring into philosophy we have been encouraged to study the Sanskrit language as an aid to our enquiries. For some students, including this writer, the challenge of learning Sanskrit was approached with the same ideas and attitudes as for learning any other 'foreign' language. Ideas such as, - not my strong suit, - not really interested, - this will be difficult. Why?

Early Sanskrit classes introduced concepts and topics such as declensions, conjugations, noun gender, cases endings, endless vocabulary, and countless cryptic Pāṇini sutras defining Sanskrit grammar. Mostly this served simply to confirm and entrench the ancient unhelpful ideas and attitudes about learning a new language.

A tenuous contact with Sanskrit studies was maintained for many years for two reasons. Firstly, the statement from Śrī Śāntānanda Sarasvatī, *"The study of the Sanskrit language is essential."* (74:7.4) Such a clear statement from the महापुरुष (Mahāpuruṣa) acts as a constant 'call to arms' and should not be ignored, despite the resistance. Secondly, the initial helpful introduction, prior to Sanskrit classes, of 'Sound and Calligraphy' classes. Discovering and experiencing the mechanics of how the human being produces sounds, coupled with the precision of attention needed for calligraphy, gave rise to valuable personal insights. This included hearing the sound of my own voice for the first time. A quiet mind, careful articulation of sounds and attentive listening to the voice quickly gave a refined appreciation of sound and speech. Introduction to writing and sounding the vowels and consonants of the Sanskrit alphabet was natural and delightful.

The draw-card, the constant attraction to stay in touch with Sanskrit, was sounding the language, the beauty and purity of the sound of Sanskrit words and verses, even without always knowing or understanding the translated English meanings.

At least there has been a start with the sequence of discipline prescribed by Śrī Śāntānanda Sarasvatī,

*“The discipline starts with purification of sound, measure and proper understanding of the words and meanings and also a proper understanding of the construction of a sentence, which is the real cosmos, which alone matters.” (73:9.10)*

In recent months there has been some further valuable insight to enable a refreshed and perhaps more enlightened attitude towards the study of Sanskrit.

With my enthusiastic wife holding my hand, not quite dragging me, earlier this year we attended two Sanskrit residentials, a week in Sydney and a week-end in Auckland. The experience of being in the company of expert teachers with the best of tools and references, and associating with inspiring fellow students manifesting enthusiasm and love for the Sanskrit language was uplifting. The words of Śrī Sāntānanda Sarasvatī begin to have more meaning.

*“Sanskrit is the conscious language and all the others are articulated, losing their consciousness in course of time and also their formation.” (65:11.11)*

*“Sound is the causal form and words are created from sound.” (65:11.6)*

*“The Sanskrit language came with the creation.” (74:7.4)*

*“The creation came into being with that primordial Word ॐ and out of this Word came the vowels and then the consonants. . . . The combination of these two makes words.” (65:11.10)*

*“Sanskrit is the original language and it is known as Sanskrit because it is measured, refined and ordered. It must have all its words full of spiritual significance. In other languages, since the sounds have been distorted, the significance is lost.” (71:4.1)*

This entire creation originates from sound and is formed of language; the most refined manifest evidence of this language is Sanskrit. During a reflection practice the experience was not of walking on solid earth but rather of being supported on a soft roiling sea of language; various words being called to emerge into manifestation for a period, such as a tree, a chair, a city, the action of walking, and then the words subsiding into this unformed alphabet soup when no longer needed. It is clear in mind that as every word is ‘full of spiritual significance’ the very study of the language may reveal this spiritual significance, at a more atomic spiritual level, word by word, without the usual additional objective of gaining some fluency in a foreign language. These fine words from the महापुरुष (Mahāpuruṣa) give substance and significance to the occasional quiet unvoiced delight experienced in seeming minor efforts of Sanskrit study.

Studying Philosophy or Sanskrit using only the medium of the English language is to use an inferior tool while seeking to gain understanding or experience of a far finer realm. A finer tool is needed. The finest work needs the finest tools. While English is the best working tool for us to access some initial understanding and emotional refinement, the real unlearning,

the purification of the अन्तःकरण (antaḥkaraṇa) is available far more directly when coupled with some appreciation of the finesse that is Sanskrit grammar and with hearing the purity of Sanskrit sounds. Translation into English greatly assists understanding but it is not always necessary to digress into the less pure English language. This seems to be the indication given by Śrī Śāntānanda Sarasvatī in the following statements.

*“There are three levels concerned with this work: the words or sounds, the meanings or indications, and भव (bhāva), the essential emotional import. The emotional import is indicated by the meanings and this can be found by those who have the experience. . . . The pure words with pure sounds have the added capacity to create that extra spiritual significance apart from meanings.” (71:4.2)*

*“The natural words are not created, but only experienced and seen by those realised men.” (65:11.10)*

Śrī Śāntānanda Sarasvatī has emphasised the need for study of Sanskrit, not necessarily to gain fluency in the language, but rather to enable greater experience of this emotional refinement or spiritual significance. A developing facility with Sanskrit vocabulary is needed but it came as some relief to realise that the Sanskrit dictionary gives indications and suggested realms of relevance for words rather than specific meanings or definitions.

*“Most of the words would produce at least ten meanings and the special words would produce meanings in their hundreds and thousands.” (65:11.11)*

The mind is easily frustrated by the process of undertaking simple dictionary research in order to translate a very simple Sanskrit phrase. Why bother when there are several excellent translations already extant? Gradually, some light now begins to shine; every word studied is ‘full of spiritual significance’ and it is the study process itself that erodes the individual limit of ‘my understanding’ opening the heart to the experience of ever more universal भवना (bhāvanā), emotion. This is a powerful reminder of a fundamental lesson in philosophy that in the performance of an action the unmanifest inner attitude is more important than the manifest outcome.

We have had plenty of encouragement from Śrī Śāntānanda Sarasvatī.

*“[Sanskrit] is refined and truly natural, for it contains original laws and original sound and their combinations. Only through the proper study of this language could Truth emerge. Apart from this, the language of भवना (bhāvanā), emotions, is the medium of higher knowledge, or spiritual knowledge.” (73:7.2)*

*“. . . one should get closer to the realm of understanding. This is possible only through the study of language. I do not mean Sanskrit. I mean the Language. Of course Sanskrit alone is capable of leading one to that language. One should study it systematically.” (76:10.6)*

This ‘realm of understanding’ has also been described as ‘The experience that results from the

devoted practice of the spiritual disciplines'. The study of Sanskrit is one of those spiritual disciplines to be practised.

When Śrī Śāntānanda Sarasvatī says 'I do not mean Sanskrit. I mean the Language' perhaps this is pointing toward the language of emotions, भावना (bhāvanā), the natural words, 'the essential emotional import', 'not created, but only experienced and seen by those realised men'. Perhaps this direct experience or realisation is closer to the 'Language', the unknown tongue, the Secret Teaching, because it is unspoken.

Further reflection gives greater meaning to the words of the महापुरुष (Mahāpuruṣa); remembering that the aim of human life is liberation, मोक्ष (mokṣa), Śrī Śāntānanda Sarasvatī has told us that "the individual is free in भावना (bhāvanā)," (74:6.4) and Śrī Vāsudevānanda Sarasvatī has told us "अद्वैत (advaita) must be understood through भावना (bhāvanā)." (15:2.1)<sup>ii</sup>

We are told that even today there are ब्रह्मना (Brahmanā) who continually recite the वेद (Veda) and cross-check between themselves in a variety of ways to ensure that the sounds of the वेद manifest in creation remain accurate and pure. Surely, among these great men, there must also be a common unspoken experience of the वेद, of Myself. Only when the वेद need to be written down in the creation, and subsequently translated from the purity of Sanskrit, does variation of interpretation, meaning and understanding occur, dependent upon the experience and भावना (bhāvanā) of the translator.

The encouragement to 'Let Sanskrit Work for You' is an excellent, effective motto. Sanskrit does the work, we simply remain watchful and hold fast to साधना (sādhanā), the spiritual disciplines. Like the words of a current promotion for a spray-on cleaning agent designed to remove mould and grime from surfaces, "It does the work, you don't".

*"The Sanskrit language is there, pure and clean, unhampered or distorted by anyone; and it can mirror the laws of the universe to anyone. This is the good companion, the good guide and the great friend. Journey with it and then वेद is simple and sure." (74:7.4)*

For this writer the study of the Sanskrit language still remains more a discipline than a natural inclination or skill. However, for us all, the devoted practice of the spiritual disciplines, including the study of Sanskrit, remains a matter for the present with no need to impose any pressure of expectations.

*"Nothing is very certain about the existence of the universe therefore there is no need to bind the future. It is good to leave the future for the future." (10:4.7)*

Note:

- (i) Answers given in conversation with Śrī Śāntānanda Sarasvatī.  
(Year:Day.Question)
- (ii) After 1993, conversations were held with Śrī Vāsudevānanda Sarasvatī.

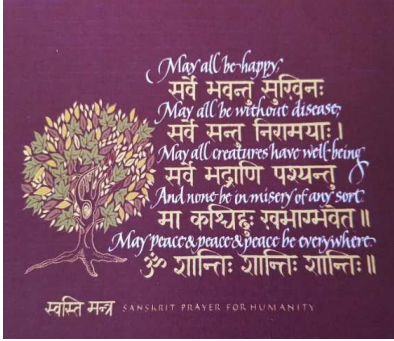


Lawrence Ames

## Why do I chant?

Mornings feel incomplete without a period of chanting.

Mostly it is Sanskrit prayers, such as the ever beautiful morning prayer "Sarve Bhavantu", but sometimes the Isha Upanishad gets an airing – and a sounding.



What's the attraction? After all most of us find Sanskrit challenging, not only forming the sounds, but also trying to make sense of what it all means.

For me, the attraction is primarily found in the beauty of the sound, and the fineness which sounding can bring to the day. The peace and stillness sounding can bring to the mind and the whole system, is great preparation for meditation.

Early in the day, the vocal chords do not always provide what most would consider a pleasing sound. But after "AAAing" for a few minutes and some work on the alphabet, the sound becomes almost pleasant (well to me anyway). Follow this with 10 minutes of sounding the beautiful verses from the Nine Vedic Prayers book, and any sleepiness in the system has passed.

The English translation of the verses is also sounded. After listening to the Sanskrit, the mind is clearer and the listening finer, so flat vowels or incomplete consonants are heard more clearly; a benefit for my speech and for those listening to me!

It's not just the sounding that I have found valuable. Some effort to commit the verses to memory and the level of attention that brings, can set the tone for the rest of the day. As the mind ages, it is a great feeling when a prayer can be committed to memory – maybe I'm not slipping into senility as fast as it seems!

Once verses and their translations are committed to memory, I find it far easier to work on improving pronunciation of the Sanskrit. That seems obvious, but what I did not expect was the sounding of the translation often illuminates words I have read many times, in a far more practical way – "May you Lord be ever before my eyes" (Aitareya Upanishad). Heard well, these words can support a day.

So...

Why I Chant!



Mark Rassie

## A Very Special Time and Place

I recently had the privilege of attending an extraordinary event in the Australian Outback, at the foot of Uluru. Also known as Ayers Rock, Uluru is not just a rock. A UNESCO World Heritage site, it is a very special and spiritual place. For the Pitjantjatjara Anangu, the Australian Aboriginal people who have lived in the area for at least 10,000 years this vast Red Centre is much more than just a unique geological landscape. Uluru means Earth Mother in the Pitjantjatjara language and each feature of the rock has a meaning in 'Tjukurpa' or Dreamtime, the traditional Anangu law that explains how the world was created.

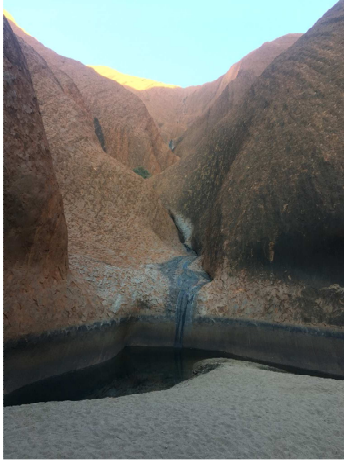
Geologists tell us that Uluru was formed some 500 million years ago, having once sat at the bottom of a sea. Today, it stands at 348 meters above ground. More impressively, some 2.5 kilometers of its bulk is underground. Here's a photo of Uluru taken from my helicopter flight:



*Uluru from the air*

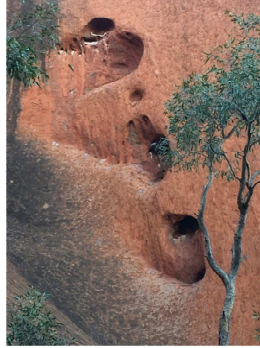
Just being in the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park was special enough. But, for me, the walk at the foot of Uluru herself felt very special. There was a very strong sense you were among other beings and they were happy for you to be there. It's hard to explain, but I had not experienced that sort of feeling before. As I was returning from the walk towards the vehicle that took us to Uluru, I found myself unable to walk in a straight line... I was not feeling disoriented at such, nor had I been drinking! No, I was fully aware of this effect on me and someone said it was the energy of the place that was affecting my being.

Our guided walk included visiting the Mutitjulu Waterhole, which was a very sacred place to the Anangu and an ideal spot for bit of meditation!



*Mutitjula waterhole*

We learned of the Creation stories of Liru (poisonous snake) and Kuniya (python) and our guide pointed out some of the many scars they left on Uluru of their battle, as seen in the illustration below



The event I attended was organized by Catherine Austin Fitts and Jason Bawden-Smith and advertised to Solari subscribers. Catherine will be known to many of you, as she gave a talk three years ago in Auckland for the Ficino Educational Foundation on the Global Rebalancing. She is an American and the publisher of the Solari Report <sup>4</sup>. Jason is an Australian entrepreneur and the author of two books, including *In the Dark*, which aims to bring greater awareness to the adverse effects that modern technology can have on our health.

When you're in the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, you're closer to the orbiting Space Station than to any major city. So, it was the perfect place for talks by Richard Dolan the invited guest speaker at the event.

Richard is a leading researcher and writer on the subject of UFOs. He is the author of the two volume history, *UFOs and the National Security State*, both ground breaking works which together provide the most factually complete and accessible narrative of the UFO subject anywhere. Richard has also co-authored a speculative book about the future, *A.D. After Disclosure*, the first-ever analysis not only of how UFO secrecy might end, but of the all-important question: what happens next? It's hard to imagine what reaction such a revelation, if it came from our elected officials, would have on humanity as a whole, including our way of life and widely held beliefs.

Perhaps, it is not too farfetched to imagine the effect would be akin to when it was officially recognised that our planet was round, and not flat, or that the sun did not revolve around the Earth but that it was the other way around. False beliefs, if they persist too long, are very dangerous to human progress, as Mr. MacLaren wrote in his book 'Nature of Society'.

It's easy to dismiss UFOs as just some theoretical "what if we're not alone?" type of question. The phenomenon is extremely down-to-earth and affects everyone on the planet. Not simply in terms of the obvious philosophical implications, but in terms of the heavy-handed secrecy and control

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<sup>4</sup> Available at <https://home.solari.com/>

systems that have actively been in place for over seventy years now.

To keep what is going on secret is expensive. Richard Dolan gave an outstanding presentation <sup>5</sup> on the growing costs of secrecy – from money to mind control – and how we can maintain our clarity, integrity and courage, while inspiring others to also seek the truth.

Richard also gave a talk on false flags, a subject he has researched in depth and made available as a series of videos <sup>6</sup> explaining how to identify the phenomenon when it manifests. This too is becoming more and more important for us to understand, if we are to make any sense of the world we live in today.

Unfortunately, it appears we now have to question more than ever some of the information we are provided by the news media. Our ability, as a society, to discern what is true from what is not true is being challenged on a whole spectrum of issues vital to our health, wealth, well-being, security and freedom. Fortunately, there are courageous souls who have taken it upon themselves to challenge the narratives we're presented as the 'official reality' and to help us decide for ourselves whether to believe it or not.

Richard Dolan and Catherine Austin Fitts are two such motivated, highly articulate and daring individuals and I felt privileged to be in their company in Uluru during this special event last month. Below is a photo of me standing between Richard and Catherine, with Uluru behind us as the sun was setting on another wonderfully beautiful day in the desert!



Louis Boulanger

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<sup>5</sup> Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkGHX4M5whU>

<sup>6</sup> Available at <https://www.gaia.com/series/false-flags>



## News from Ficino School

### Year 6 Metaphor Poems

Our Year 6 students recently presented a selection of metaphor poems at assembly to students and parents alike. It is especially engaging to see the world they have painted through their poems about everyday items:

#### Carrots

Orange earthworms  
Newly lit fire embedded in the ground  
A gardener's colourful pick up sticks  
Snowman's sense of smell

Sophie Clarke

#### Stars

The moon's nightlights  
Watchful eyes observing earth at sleep  
Concealed, nocturnal faces  
The sky's pointillism

Erana Johnson

#### Pencils

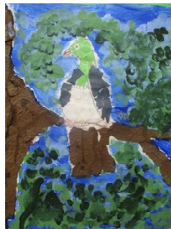
Students' chew sticks  
The downgrade of pens  
A friend of paper  
A writer's weapon

Isabel Norris-Clark

### Tiritiri Matangi

I had a marvellous time at Tiri. We all met at the wharf before splitting into groups. My group was extremely lucky because we saw a blue and grey kokako. It had orange and green tags on its skinny black legs. It hopped away about ten seconds later. We went on and the gravel trail turned into a wet wooden track. At the end of the path one of the guides talked about littering and what it did to the animals. She also talked about pests of New Zealand. I loved watching the birds because they made me feel so great. It was a wonderful day.

*James Cullen, Year 3*



## Leadership

Our Head Boy Nicholas Clarke has been selected to speak at the Independent Schools of NZ Conference later this month. He will be addressing a large room of Principals, Bursars and Board Members about leadership from a students' perspective. He recently read his speech to our school assembly. He described three key aspects of leadership as being calmness, fairness and kindness, and gave clear descriptions of why these are important and how they manifest themselves at Ficino.



His speech:

*“Nelson Mandela, Charles Upham, Winston Churchill, Queen Elizabeth the second; what do all these great people have in common? Leadership. They are or were great leaders and therefore exhibit some of the finest qualities known to man. I have chosen three of these qualities which I believe are important: Calm, Fairness, kindness.*

*First of all, I believe that a good leader should be calm and keep a cool head at all times. This is important for making the right decision. You will not be stressed about anything and so will not rush or make a hasty decision. A good example of this is Charles Upham. He kept a cool head on the battlefield, which allowed him to see things that others didn't. One time, his unit was surrounded and he climbed on top of a truck to see what was happening. His comrades shouted at him to get down or else he'd be shot, but he had noticed something that the others hadn't. The Nazis were not looking up there. They thought no-one would be dumb (or smart) enough to climb up there. This allowed him a good view and the ability to escape. My school, Ficino, helps us stay calm by teaching us the Pause, an exercise where we fall still and just listen. Even our year ones are taught this, and so it becomes a skill that they can use all throughout their life. Another great thing Ficino does is offer meditation from class six. All these techniques help when it comes to exams and making tough decisions.*

*Secondly, a good leader should be fair. They should not favour their friends over their enemies. Sometimes, power can corrupt people and turn them into tyrants who make sure that they and their friends are rich and well off, whilst some people in their kingdom are living in poverty or starving. A good leader would not allow this to happen. Nelson Mandela, the famous first Black president of South Africa, during his time with the African National Congress, was arrested and sentenced to prison. In trial, he said that he had opposed the dominance of Whites, but also the dominance of Blacks. His dream was for a world that lived in equality and justice. He wanted fairness. Our school does this by encouraging students to let everyone join in their games and encouraging students to sit with different people at lunchtime, not just their friends. At Ficino we sit for half an hour at lunchtime, where we get cooked food. During lunch, we also sit in houses, which means that we are spread out among juniors and seniors.*

*Last, but certainly not least, kindness is one of the most important qualities a leader should possess. However, while a good leader is kind, they cannot let kindness get in the way of doing what is right. What separates Martin Luther King Jr. and Hitler? They were both brilliant speakers, but Martin Luther King was kind and fair to everyone. Hitler was not. At Ficino, the students in class 7 do duties*

with the younger students. They sit at their tables at lunchtime and look after their classes during wet play. Other students are involved in buddy reading, an exercise where older students are paired with younger ones to share books. This makes them kinder, as they learn to treat everyone with kindness.

*These are the three most important qualities that I believe a leader should have: calmness, fairness and kindness. These will allow people to go far in leadership roles and help people to look up to them."*

### **Perceptual drawing**

The Year 8 students have been working on perceptual drawings lately. Though seen as a simple and practical way of drawing, it requires students to really focus their attention on both the tool they are using and the object they are drawing. This ability to detach from distraction and hone their sensory awareness is one that supports Ficino School's goal of teaching children how to build focus and attention skills.



**The Ficino Primary School exists to provide a philosophically inspired education that promotes excellence and strength of character.**

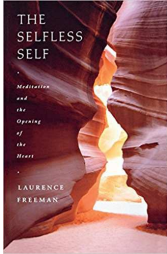
For further information please look at our website at [www.ficino.school.nz](http://www.ficino.school.nz) or contact the school for a hard copy prospectus.



Information evening    Wednesday 10 August

School tour    Friday 10 August

## A New Look at Meditation: The Selfless Self



Every now and again we read or experience something that seems to cause the cogs of existence to slip and shift into a new gear. After thirty years or more of mantra-based meditation, reading “The Selfless Self” was one such provocateur. It reaffirmed my faith in meditation and re-established that core attribute of all philosophical journeys – the desire for freedom.

Laurence Freeman, author of *The Selfless Self*, is a Benedictine monk and director of the World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM). The book is a series of ‘talks about silence’ which the author acknowledges has an inherent contradiction. The WCCM meditation sessions involve meeting together to hear a talk on silence which leads naturally into half an hour of mantra-based meditation; followed by an opportunity for conversation. Meetings are held weekly in over one hundred countries and have an open-door policy, ‘welcoming anyone sincerely seeking silence’. Each chapter of the *Selfless Self* is based on one such talk.

What the talks inevitably remind us is that meditation has nothing to do with the ego. Our egoic self is obsessed with success and failure and everything is measured in these terms by it. The purpose of meditation is to experience a different realm, where freedom is the outcome not success. This inevitably requires the death of the ego, a complete rejection of our usual methods of assessment.

In Christian terms Christ’s surrender, death and resurrection offer an example of the journey the individual takes in meditation. Whatever the mind presents, no matter how gorgeous, enlightened or spiritually worthwhile must be given up, and what Laurence Freeman does so beautifully is to remind us that this is not an easy task for any of us, and that this continual giving up is central to the process of meditation. There seem to be two necessary attributes to achieving this. The first is faith. Faith that the meditation will lead to freedom and faith that freedom is always accessible and is ours by right. The second is the strength of our desire for that freedom. As long as we value something other we cannot sincerely seek freedom. If we can believe that Freedom is full and all-encompassing and surpasses in value anything the mind presents, then in theory at least, we will happily give up all else.

Each chapter in the book gently reminds us that the ego is not the source of meaning by exposing all the common ego-centric tendencies that prevent us experiencing the simplicity of meditation. Laurence Freeman shows these to be not personal, but universal in nature, which is a great freedom in itself. Furthermore, by exposing them so articulately, they become acceptable and can therefore be more easily given up.

Laurence Freeman acknowledges that meditation ‘is as challenging as it is attractive.’ Throughout the book, he regularly reminds us of the importance of the discipline of the two half hour periods, nothing more, nothing less, and of the necessity for the presence of the mantra; it is the vehicle, and although it is tempting to stop off on the journey, the mantra is the heart of it and not the destination or the experience. Meditation addresses that universal sense of incompleteness that is the realm of the ego and its life of successes and failures. This book enlarges the picture of what meditation offers and why it is so worthwhile.



Peter Crompton

## **Background information - The World Community of Christian Meditation.**

The World Community of Christian Meditation (WCCM ) began with John Main. Before becoming a Benedictine monk while serving in the British Colonial Service in Malaysia in 1955, John Main met a Hindu monk Swami Satyananda . He was deeply impressed by the holiness, peacefulness and calm wisdom of the Swami and questioned his understanding.

Swami Satyananda was a disciple of Sri Brahmananda Saraswati the Shankaracharya of North India and practiced and taught Advaita Vedanta . He also started and ran an orphanage and headed the Pure Life Society.

Swami Satyananda suggested mantra meditation would make anyone a better Christian and taught John Main using a Christian word. They practiced together and discoursed regularly for 18 months. Returning to England John Main joined a Benedictine monastery but was asked by his abbot to not meditate "as it was not true prayer ". He obeyed.

A few years later while teaching in Washington he discovered the writings of the Christian Desert Fathers and Mothers. In particular John Cassian's Conferences (AD 420 ) which describe using a prayer word or 'formula ' as a means of becoming centred in God . John Main realised meditation was practiced by the early Christian communities and its reintroduction would be of immense benefit. He began a meditation group back in England, passing on the knowledge of meditation he had received from Swami Satyananda , using an Aramaic word Maranatha from the Bible.

The Archbishop of Montreal invited him to start a monastic priory in Quebec with meditation as its centre. From these beginnings the organisation grew worldwide under his direction until his death in 1982. His closest assistant Father Laurence Freeman took over and still leads the community today.

Source : Dr. Stefan Reynolds : Hindu Mantra Meditation and Christian Contemplative Prayer.  
Dr Stefan Reynolds: John Main Biography ( WCCM )

The background information above has been provided by Tim Auld who has had a long association and membership of the School of Philosophy here in Auckland. Tim is a practicing Benedictine Oblate within the World Community of Christian Meditation and suggests that the NZ branch of the WCCM website <http://christianmeditationnz.org.nz/> is a good starting point for anyone interested in their teachings.

The meditation sessions mentioned in the above article are weekly group meetings which include 20 - 30 minutes of mantra meditation , a spoken message or audio recording from Lawrence Freeman, and opportunity for questions and observations.



Tim Auld

*Be still and know that I am God*

Psalm 46:10

## Digby Crompton

Digby Crompton passed away on 25 November, 2017 just short of his 79<sup>th</sup> birthday. Digby was a man of many parts, and the attendance at his funeral service and the tributes that flowed evidenced the love, admiration and respect that he gave and received in his roles as a father, husband, successful businessman and employer, philanthropist, and seeker after Truth. It is this latter role we wish to acknowledge here and it is both a privilege and quite humbling to attempt to encapsulate some flavour of the essence of this man.



Digby and his wife Elizabeth started in the Auckland branch of the School of Philosophy in the early 1960s just as the School was getting underway. For over 50 years he manifested the concept of service. He willingly undertook various responsibilities in the School including Tutor, Head of Level, Treasurer and Chairman of the Executive Committee. He was subsequently appointed by Mr McLaren as an initiator into the practice of meditation and he continued in that role until his passing.

As a businessman he was renowned for exercising the “Art of the Deal”, which he would laughingly attribute to the Lebanese line in his background. He exercised this art on many occasions for the good of the School, particularly in playing a very influential part in the School’s acquisition of property for residential purposes and for group meetings. His financial acumen was instrumental in putting the School in a position to afford the properties in Mt Eden where the Ficino School operates and Glendowie where for the last 28 years our residential activities have been held.

In his role for some years as the School Principal he delivered many End of Term lectures to the membership at large. The depth of his knowledge and insights, seemingly “off the cuff” delivery and ability to answer whatever questions were raised at these times, often left me in awe – little did I know that he prepared very carefully for each of these lectures.

Dedication to his work, and responsibilities in the School of Philosophy as well as his own spiritual journey undoubtedly meant time away from his wife and five children, and their support was valued by him. Digby did, however, have a wonderful capacity to relax, and enjoy ‘the present moment’. Family and friends have many happy memories of shared gatherings and beach holidays, exemplified by one memory of Digby sitting on a chair on the beach house deck in a totally relaxed manner, observing what was happening, with a smile on his face radiating a sense of “the world is good”.

Memories abound of this big hearted man who went out of his way to help friends and colleagues, especially when they fell on hard times.

A long time interest in economics in general and taxation in particular, resulted in his book “An enquiry into the Truth of Economical Taxation” being published in 2008. Other study interests

included Vedic Mathematics and Plato.

He loved Shakespeare and Mozart, especially the Magic Flute, and inherited a love of Gilbert and Sullivan from his mother – he reputedly knew many of the songs off by heart.

He was a Patron of the Arts – the sponsoring of the statue “Aspiration” at the top of Lorne St is a glowing example, as is the bust of Kate Sheppard in the Auckland Town Hall.

For many of us, the most abiding memory is that big smile which seemed to come from his whole body, reaching out and encompassing you with light and love. When he spoke to you personally or in a group there was a real sense of connection, that one friend described as reflecting joy and peace in who he was and whatever was happening.

As members of the School of Philosophy, we are regularly reminded that this is a practical philosophy. Study and knowledge on their own are not enough, disciplined application in the life leads to true understanding. Digby steadfastly upheld the Teaching and the tradition as provided to the School, resolutely and joyfully applying his study and knowledge in his daily life. The following quotation, which he held dear, seems to capture the essence of the man.

*“Rama, there are four gate keepers at the entrance to the Realm of Freedom (Moksha). They are self-control, spirit of enquiry, contentment and good company. The wise seeker should diligently cultivate the friendship of these, or at least one of them.”*  
*The Supreme Yoga – Vol 1, p. 32.*

As friends, colleagues and fellow travellers on this inward journey we sorely feel his loss.



Applying the principle of fine attention to the task in hand, is one way in which philosophy is so very practical. For Digby service days and weekends clearly included laughter and good humour.

## The Voice of Silence

Silence spoke,  
Then the world awoke.  
What did silence say  
As the world started on its way?  
Silence replied, "Just listen."  
To everyone unspoken love is given.  
Listen to God's inner sound,  
That place where Truth is found.  
Can silence really be described?  
Or the inexpressible be denied?  
Just listen; do not reply,  
There will be an answer  
Not to deny.  
Silence said, "I do have a voice."  
This we can hear,  
We all have this inner ear.  
In stillness we become aware  
Of who we really are  
By going there.  
Let that unspoken love  
Be behind our actions.  
Love has no form,  
Cannot be seen,  
In our life it has always been.  
Ever since creation has begun,  
You and I were one.  
The words of this poem  
Are the portal to point the way  
To what Truth in silence can convey.  
Silence is always present  
An inner strength, never absent.  
Hear that inner silence  
Where freedom and bliss abound,  
In no other place can they be found.  
It is that unspoken love,  
Everywhere, below and above.  
Listen in silence and rejoice,  
Silence says, "I do have a voice."

Selwyn Daniels

**This issue of Vision has been edited by Liz Godfrey. Contributions and suggestions for articles of interest for further issues are most welcome.  
It should be noted that the views expressed in this document are not necessarily those of the School of Philosophy Auckland.**