

PENTAGRAM

SPECIAL ISSUE

THE SPIRITUAL PROMISE OF EASTERN EUROPE

‘Eastern Europe is struggling to liberate itself from the bonds, which have chained the free spirit to the earth for so long. During that immense struggle,

East and West give each other the best of what they can achieve on a spiritual level. Many examples of selfless service, of compassion and charity appeal to every seeker.’ (p. 23)



Pegasus, Jacopo de' Barbari, around 1505.

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DIGGING UP THE TREASURE

A Russian legend tells that the hero Svjatogor, a giant, exclaims: 'If I were to find the earth's centre of gravity, I would attach a ring to heaven and pull heaven and earth towards each other with a chain and then link them by a bridge.' Shortly afterwards he met a wanderer with a small bag on his back. The latter greets him with the words: 'Illustrious Svjatogor, you are so immensely strong. Can you help me and carry this small bag?' Svjatogor tries to lift up the small bag, but cannot move it. 'What is in it?' he cries. 'And who are you?' « I am Mikoéla Seljáninivichi. In this small bag I keep the centre of the earth.' And calmly the farmer continues on his way. In another legend a king and his knights encounter the same Mikoéla Seljáninivichi, while he is working his land with a silver plough. The plough is drawn by an unsightly small horse. The knights try to lift up the silver plough, but none of them succeeds. Then Mikoéla takes the plough with one hand and puts it aside.

Seeking the centre of the earth and ploughing with a silver plough are mythical images that go far back into the history of Eastern Europe. As in almost every myth, these images involve a task and a promise. The farmer can be seen as the

symbol of the promise. The spiritual centre has been activated in him. He consciously carries it with him, allows himself to be changed by it and thus becomes one with the holy earth.

In the human being a divine principle lies hidden that corresponds to the spiritual centre of the earth. But no one, however strong he may be, can dig up this treasure for someone else. Everyone has to do it himself. In some stories from Eastern Europe this is accomplished by a silver plough, the symbol of the soul that has been cleansed and purified by inner struggle. Countless East European philosophers, authors, poets, artists and gnostics have tried to find that path and have testified of their experiences. They have shown many people how they could liberate the spiritual treasure in their heart right through the 'red sea' of their blood ties.

The nations of Eastern Europe have suffered much and experienced great hardship during their development. In East European literature and philosophy much is written and spoken about the humble soul that feels guilty in its earthly existence. Subjugation and bitter physical and spiritual hardship reinforced that feeling, but also the eternal question of the purpose of such a life. The Russian poetess Anna Achmatova testifies of this in a touching way. On the basis of a deeply moved soul she describes the tension between the shards of earthly existence and the eternal life she suspects.

IDEAL OF DEIFIED HUMANITY

As a seeker for the spirit man, the Ukrainian mystic Grigory Savvich Skovoroda rose as a lighthouse above all. Ukrainians called him 'our Pythagoras'. In a monumental way he testified of the new man that was born within him. *'The tree of life is right in our flesh.'* The true human being is 'the human heart', the newly awakened spiritual heart. A great-grandson of Skovoroda, the founder of symbolism, Vladimir Sergejevich Soloviev (1853-1900), is considered as one of the greatest Russian thinkers and philosophers of the nineteenth century. He saw 'the perfect ideal of deified humanity' as the highest goal of common striving. Soloviev strove after 'change from within', from the human spirit and heart. And in the twentieth century, the artist Kora Antarova testified of the 'power of eternity that resounds in our own heart'.

In this and the next issue of Pentagram we would also like to write about the titanic struggle of the authors Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy (1828-1910), Fjodor Michailovich Dostojevski (1821-1881) and the philosopher Nikolai Berdjajev (1874-1948). Berdjajev described 'freedom' as 'a spiritual principle in the human being'. The Grand Inquisitor in Dostojevski's story with the same title, threw into Jesus' face: *'You could have grasped the emperor's empire. Why did you reject it? You rejected the only effective means to force everyone to worship you without argument. And only for the sake of freedom!'*



The seed sown by so many deeply moved seekers for the Truth has germinated in human hearts all over the world. For many, the liberation of the soul may still seem unreal, but artificial borders and cultivated traditions will disappear as soon as people begin to perceive their own inner faculties. With the silver plough of the purest and most profound yearning of the soul they are seeking for the hidden treasure within themselves.

The editors

Ornament carved in stone in the wall of St. George's Church, Jourjeff-Polsky.

HE BELIEVED IN GOODNESS BUT LOVED ONLY HIMSELF

The 'Brief Story of the Antichrist' by the Russian writer Vladimir Soloviev can open the eyes of those searching deeply within themselves and wanting to penetrate to the causes of their existence separated from God. It is the apocalyptic unmasking of the I in its supreme illusion.

The 'Brief Story' is part of a larger work titled *'Three Conversations on War, Progress and the End of History, in which the brief tale of the antichrist is included'*. The story of the *antichrist* is set in a period of domestic and foreign wars and of political changes brought about by an Asiatic invasion of Europe. At the end of this period, Europe had become a federation of more or less democratic states, The United States of Europe. Culture could now be revived, but the questions of life and death, of the ultimate destiny of the world and of humanity, had not been answered yet.

In these times of reorientation, a remarkable person appears in the forefront, renowned as a philosopher and writer and because of his social activities. Soloviev depicts him as an ardent spiritualist, a man of great clarity of spirit which always points him to the truth, to goodness, God, the Messiah. *'That is what he believes in, but he loved only himself. He believed in God, but without wanting to and without*

it being clear to him, he chose Him in the depth of his soul. He believed in goodness but the all-seeing eye of eternity knew that this human being would bow before the power of evil, as soon as the latter would ensnare him, not by the illusions of the senses, by sordid passions or by fascination with power, but simply by his excessive self-love.'

'HE SAW HIMSELF AS CHRIST'

Frugal, altruistic and charitable, he indulged his tremendous self-love. He is convinced that God likes him and he considers himself as the second greatest being of the universe, the only Son of God. This extraordinary man is the antichrist: *'He saw himself as Christ. Christ's moral deed and His absolute uniqueness were incomprehensible for this spirit darkened by self-love.'* The antichrist justifies his behaviour with the words: *'Christ was only the reformer of humanity. However, I am called to be the benefactor of this improved, and partly not yet improved, humanity. I will give it everything it needs. As a moralist Christ distinguishes good from evil. I will unite both with the qualities that good and evil need. I will be the true representative of God, who makes his sun rise on the good and the evil and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.'*

A parallel to Soloviev's figure of the antichrist can be found in the story of *The Grand Inquisitor* by Dostoyevsky, in which the Grand Inquisitor says to Jesus:

'Opposite you we place first of all human happiness. We will construct a kingdom of peace and happiness for human beings. You have only a few elect ones, while we bring peace for all. We will provide a serene and peaceful happiness for all, happiness for the feeble creatures that humans have been created.'

The antichrist waits for a clear sign from God to embark on the new salvation of humanity, as an explicit confirmation that he is the elder son, the well-beloved, only-begotten Son of God. But nothing of the sort happens. When his presumption begins to be shaken he supposes that it is not him, but the Galilean who is truly

Tree of the
knowledge of
good and evil,
19th century.

the first and the last. He imagines what he should do and say if he were to find himself suddenly before Him. He, the brilliant genius, superman, should kneel before Him? No, he vows, I will never do that. A savage hatred bursts out within him. Full of rage, he leaves his house and goes out into the dark night, walking until he reaches the edge of a steep cliff. *'Should I call Him, ask Him what to do?'* A presence regards him with gentleness and sadness, but he dismisses him by saying: *'He pities me, no, he has not been resurrected.'* Then he jumps into the void, but he is caught by a being of hazy light, *'its eyes piercing his soul with an unbearably sharp look.'* A metallic voice, without soul – coming from inside or from outside? – says: *'You are my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.'* The antichrist feels himself filled with an icy force.

HE SHOWS HOW INGENIOUS HE IS

Soloviev changes the words from the Bible, *'This is my beloved Son'* in such a way that they mean the opposite. For the I of nature is not the Son of God. When the I, through insight, surrenders to the divine power, the new Soul is liberated. And when it is united with the Spirit, it can be said: *'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'* (Matth.3:17)

After this episode at the abyss, the antichrist relates his experience in a book that shows how brilliant he is, and that he knows how to combine the most sublime ideals with practical solutions. However, not the attempt to make such a synthesis is evil, but the way in which the

antichrist wants to accomplish it: *'All of this will be united and linked with such an ingenious artistry that it will be easy for anyone who thinks and acts in a one-sided way to see and accept all of this from his special, familiar point of view without having to sacrifice anything to the truth, without truly having to rise above his I, by indeed really turning away from his one-sidedness, without having to destroy the shortcomings of his insights and ambition or to require that their deficiencies be corrected.'*

'IMITATING' IS FAR FROM 'FOLLOWING'

The antichrist wants to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. Jan van Rijckenborgh writes: *'The entire nature-religious life of our time is nothing but an imitation, a most comprehensible though utterly naïve imitation, an imitation of the Imitatio Christi! But, however understandable and pardonable this may be, it nevertheless is the greatest treason imaginable we can commit. For "imitating" is far from "following"; and only the following of Christ leads to the liberating, integrating life! Imitation is at most a well-intentioned semblance; not a semblance – and this is the disastrous part of it – intended to imitate reality, to let semblance pass for reality!'*

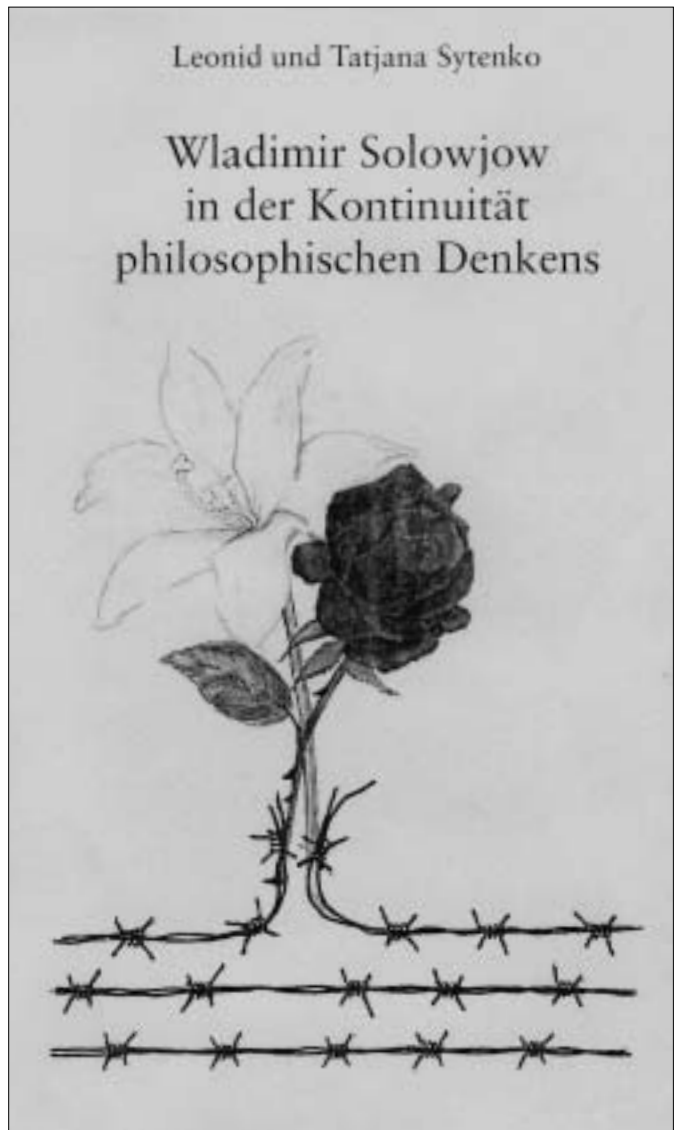
Soloviev describes the manner in which the antichrist achieves popularity. On the basis of his ideas, he becomes president and finally is elected emperor. He tries to convince the people and rally them to his cause by means of good deeds. After having solved the political and social problems, he turns to religion.

He has noticed that the false prophet that he has taken into his service has awakened fear and antipathy among the Christians. It is also apparent that the New Testament texts dealing with the lords of this world are being read more intensely and are more actively commented on.

‘TO US, CHRIST IS THE MOST PRECIOUS’

That is why he convenes an ecumenical council in Jerusalem. In his address to the Christians of all denominations he demands that they recognise him as their leader *‘not out of a sense of obligation but out of profound love.’* In addition he asks them what to them is the most precious thing in Christianity, *so that I can focus my efforts on it.* He calls on the Catholic Christians to recognise him as *‘their only intercessor and protector’*, on the Protestants as *‘their sovereign leader’* and he asks the orthodox Christians to call him *‘their true leader and lord.’* Those who agree can take their place beside him. A majority of the faithful do just that.

But a small group of believers and their leaders do not comply with his request. The antichrist asks them the same question and they respond: *‘To us, the most precious thing in Christianity is Christ Himself and everything that proceeds from Him. For we know that the entire plenitude of the deity is physically present in Him.’* And they unmask him as the antichrist. Thereupon the false prophet renders two of the leaders harmless by *‘fire that falls from heaven.’* And the emperor cries out that all his enemies will perish in the same way, by the hand of



his Father. Now the small group of Christians decides to sever all contact with the enemy of God. They depart for *‘the high wilderness of Jericho’* to fast and to pray. They understand that, as we can read in John 17:21, the time has come that the final prayer of Christ for his disciples is fulfilled and that they may all be one as He is one with the Father.

Soloviev hoped that all religions would unite to break the power of the antichrist. That is why he has the group flee to *‘a high place’*, while the antichrist and his followers are destroyed by flows of fire from a volcano.

WHAT WE SEE IS NOT ORIGINAL NATURE

Vladimir Soloviev was one of the most important philosophers and poets of the Silver Age of Russian culture, a period around the end of the nineteenth century, and a major turning point in time when traditional spiritual values lost their splendour. With his world view Soloviev inspired among others the symbolists in his country.

At the age of twenty he already had a well-defined idea of his calling. At that time he studied historic philology at Moscow University and was a member of the Spiritual Academy. To his niece Ekaterina Vladimirovna Romanova he wrote: *'The world of the spiritual has fallen apart. Christianity is the absolute truth, but it has attained a form, which lacks ratio. That is why it does not appeal to humanity of this time. East and west, content without form and form without content cannot develop further and are striving for a synthesis.'* During his inaugural address as a lector at Moscow University, he said: *'Visible reality is not serious, not true nature. It is only a mask, the veil of Isis.'* This insight dominated all his lectures. In order to search for deepening of his views he went to London for a year. In the British Museum he had a vision: a repetition, so to speak, of a vision from his early youth. In this vision he was allowed to behold the Sophia, the Divine Wisdom, and he received the inner command to go to

*'Oh, eternal friend,
only weakly sung of in my songs,
hear what my Muse dedicates to you:
the world is deception, its coarse matter
veils the stone of the beginning.
So I have been told.
The beauty of the one eternal Being
has been shown to me.
Thrice you have appeared to me.
Not a thought that created you,
no, I have experienced the most profound
reality.
You came as an answer
to the call of my heart.*

*I beheld the All and everything was one.
The charming image of my eternal friend
and the splendour of this heavenly light
filled my heart and everything around me.*

*The world is vain,
but the veil of matter
revealed the primordial stone to me.
Although time still controls me,
I beheld God's fullness,
eternal Being'*

Egypt, where the Sophia appeared to him for the third time.

In the year 1881 tsar Alexander II was murdered. The repressed wave of renewal in Russia came to the surface already at that time and the tsar went along as far as he was allowed to. He had already introduced liberal social

reforms and had abolished bondage in 1861. Vladimir Soloviev defended the murderer and pleaded for mercy and rehabilitation. In this respect he consistently followed his Christian views. To him, capital punishment deviated from God's ways. The new tsar did not comply with Soloviev's appeal and ordered him 'to refrain from public lectures for a certain time.' This caused Soloviev to resign. Convinced of his point of view he settled for a simpler life with irregular earnings. Although he was allowed to publish, he was isolated from the university and literature. However, he kept his cool and determinedly continued towards his goal. He showed church and state 'the perfect ideal of deified humanity as the highest aim of their combined activity' and openly showed in which respect both authorities deviated from this path.



THERE MUST BE ANOTHER, A TRUE LIFE

In a letter to his niece Ekaterina, Vladimir wrote: *'If that, which is considered true life is a lie, there must be another, a true life. The germ of this true life lies within ourselves. Because, if this were not the case, we would be satisfied with the lies surrounding us and not search for something better. [...] True life is within us, but it is suffocated, twisted by our limited personality, our egoism. We should wonder how this true life as such is in its purity, and by what means it can be attained. All these*

things have been revealed to humanity by true Christianity long ago.'

In another letter he wrote: *'Every change has to stem from the inner self, from the human mind and heart. [...] For most – except for elect minds – Christianity was a matter of simple semiconscious belief only, an undefinable feeling. However, it did not speak to the mind and did not take notice of the mind. [...] Its task is to pour its eternal content into a new form,*

corresponding to it. Whenever Christianity turns into a conviction, which is lived by human beings and which they will realise in their daily lives, everything will clearly change. Imagine,' he wrote to his cousin, *'that a certain, perhaps small part of humanity were to realise the teachings of unconditional love and self-sacrifice very seriously, with conscious and powerful conviction... would falsehood and malice then still be able to put up resistance for a long time? However,'* he added, *'that may still take some time.'*

Vladimir Soloviev saw reconciliation with God as the purpose of life, and hence he wanted to cooperate with it as well as possible. He spoke and wrote about the genesis of humanity, about liberation from coercion, about the human being as a rational entity within a physical personality, about cosmos and history, about the Divine human being as the centre of world history, about philosophy in Christianity and Christianity in philoso-

Archangel Michael, Museum of History and Art, Zagorsk. 15th century.

P. 10: Bronze statue of Aesclepius in the Medical Museum of Kiev.



phy. In all these topics he searched for a synthesis.

THE ETERNAL OR HEAVENLY FRIEND

In such a multifaceted approach the question arises from what source Soloviev has drawn. In his poems he answered this question. They show his understanding, his inner motives. In the poem *Three encounters* he wrote that the encounter with the Sophia, the Divine Wisdom, was the most important one in his life. To Wisdom, personified in a woman of unearthly beauty, his 'eternal' or 'heavenly friend', he gave all his love. Earthly, human love had no meaning for him.

'The holy Sophia was to our ancestors a heavenly entity, veiled in phenomena of the lower world. She was the shining Spirit of reborn humanity, the guardian angel of the earth, the future and ultimate manifestation of the Divine. [...] We now have to express rationally this true, national and absolutely universal idea, revealed to the religious feelings of our ancestors. The point is to formulate the living word, which can be received by the old Russia and has eloquence for the new Russia.'

Soloviev's ideas about the Sophia were not new in his time. The philosopher Sergey Bulgakov described the Sophia as the spiritual world soul, the divine thought, emanating from God and forming a bridge between the Creator and his world. Many cathedrals and temples have her name.

THE RIGHTEOUS PASS AWAY BUT THEIR LIGHT REMAINS

'The Grand Inquisitor' is a tale told by Ivan Karamazov, one of the main characters in the book 'The Brothers Karamazov' by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. He is deeply disappointed in the world in which he lives and he has turned away from established religion. This story shows the spectrum of human life, from its heights to its depths. All its passions, all the efforts of its highly developed intellect, the deep religious reflection and the surrender to a mystical life, are presented to the reader.

The narrator has left the church and is seeking a new, broader basis for life. Everything is possible! If there is a God – and this does not seem impossible to him – he firmly rejects Him because He allows so much suffering. The suffering of innocent children, the innumerable atrocities of which he has heard, lead Ivan to a radical conclusion: if there is salvation after death, it does not justify the inconceivable suffering the Russian people are exposed to.

Ivan relates the story of the Grand Inquisitor to his brother Alyosha, a faithful mystic. It is as if the topic is handed down to him; as if he is passing it on in order to lead the listener to reflection and awareness. There are sufficient indications that all dogmatic thinking can and must be broken. Humanity must

leave the limitations of this world behind.

The story of the Grand Inquisitor is set in 16th-century Spain. Jesus returns to earth and performs some miracles. The Grand Inquisitor takes him captive and locks him up in a prison. At night the Grand Inquisitor goes to speak to him. But Jesus does not say a word. *'You have despised the only way to make mankind happy,'* the Grand Inquisitor flings at him. *'The Great Spirit has spoken to you in the desert. He could not have asked you anything that contained more truth than those three questions that you rejected.'* The Grand Inquisitor was referring at that moment, to the three temptations in the desert. According to the Gospels, Jesus had fasted in the desert for forty days and Satan came to him and said: *'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread.'* Jesus refused and answered him: *'It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'* (Matth.4:3,4)

'ALL THESE THINGS WILL I GIVE YOU'

Then the devil sets him on a pinnacle of the temple, and says to him: *'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, He will give his angels charge of you, and on their hands they will bear you up lest you strike your foot against a stone.'* And Jesus answered him: *'Again it is writ-*

ten, You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’ (Matth.4:5-7)

Again the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, and he said to him: *‘These things will I give to you, if you will fall down and worship me.’* Then Jesus said to him: *‘Begone, Satan! For it is written, you shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.’* Then the devil left him and behold, angels came and ministered to him. (Matth.4:8-11)

HUMAN BEINGS ARE WEAKER THAN YOU THINK

In these three questions, the whole development of the human race is contained and prophesied. *‘But seest thou these stones in this parched and barren wilderness?’* the Grand Inquisitor asks, *‘Turn them into bread, and mankind will run after Thee like a flock of sheep, grateful and obedient. But thou didst not will to deprive man of freedom and didst reject the offer, thinking, what is that freedom worth, if obedience is bought with bread? You promised them the bread of heaven, but can it compare with earthly bread in the eyes of the weak, ever sinful and ignoble race of man? Thou didst reject the one infallible banner which was offered Thee to make all men bow down to Thee alone – the banner of earthly bread. And all in the name of freedom!’*

I tell thee that man is tormented by no greater anxiety than to find someone quickly to whom he can hand over that gift of freedom with which the ill-fated

creature is born. But only he will take possession of their freedom who can appease their conscience. And behold, instead of furnishing a firm foundation for setting the conscience of man at rest forever, Thou didst choose all that is extraordinary, vague, and conjectural; Thou didst choose everything that was utterly beyond the strength of men, acting as though Thou didst not love them at all! I swear, man is weaker and baser by nature than Thou hast believed him! Can he do what Thou didst?’

GUILTY OF THE SUFFERING OF HUMANITY

And finally he flings these words at Jesus: *‘But Thou mightest have taken even then the sword of Caesar. Why didst Thou reject that last gift? Hadst Thou accepted that last counsel of the mighty spirit, Thou wouldst have accomplished all that man seeks on earth – that is, someone to bow down to, someone to hand his conscience to.’* From the point of view of the Grand Inquisitor, Jesus not only failed, he became guilty of the suffering of humanity. He overestimated their capabilities. For this reason, the Grand Inquisitor predicts that humanity will turn away from his teachings because the burden is too heavy for them. *‘And how are the weak ones to blame, because they could not endure what the strong have endured? How is the weak soul to blame that it is unable to receive such terrible gifts? Canst Thou have simply come to the elect and for the elect? But if so, it is a mystery and we cannot understand it.’*

A bonafide spiritual school is faced with the same questions and reproaches. It also does not want to turn ‘stones into bread’, and calls on humanity to seek spiritual bread. It speaks about the freedom of the soul and for many who direct themselves exclusively at the world of matter, that is something incomprehensible. What does it mean to change stones into bread? The ultimate consequence is: reconciliation with this earthly life. People should not be tossed back and forth between inner and outer needs, but feel at home in this world. They must live together in brotherhood, united with and nourished by this nature. Also their conscience must be silent. The powers of the spiritual world must be bent to the earth, must confirm their kingship in this world. Is this not a beautiful aim? The Grand Inquisitor strains himself to the utmost to reach this goal.

Return of the prodigal son. Illustration from an anonymous 19th-century manuscript. Russia.

The Grand Inquisitor was of course a smooth talker. At that time the church was so powerful and its methods so mercilessly cruel that one had to think twice before openly professing the way of inner Christianity. Or, in terms of the church, of being a ‘heretic’. That was only for the most courageous! It was a time comparable to the reign of communism in many countries. The state controlled and pervaded everything to such an extent that personal freedom had become rare. Everyone spied on everyone – even children on their parents – in order not to be blamed or to ‘better’ themselves. Immense suffering was the result of this, and for many it was extremely difficult, if not impossible, to openly choose for inner spiritual freedom.



WERE ALL THOSE WARS NECESSARY?

Jesus rejected that way to reconciliation, according to the Grand Inquisitor. Why didn't he want to be a peacemaker? Then he could have prevented wars and as a result have prevented the suffering of millions of human beings. Yet Jesus acted as he had to. The Light does not bargain. It does not give itself away to improve the world, but to lift humanity up to a higher spiritual plane, so that it is taken up into God's Plan. Unfortunately there are too many religious leaders who want 'their kingdom' established on earth. And the Light has withdrawn from that striving, because the world we see around us is not humanity's original field of life. There are two fields of life: one divine and one human. Human beings – or at least the original human beings – must return to the divine field of life. Whoever discovers this path, experiences how much humanity is occupied with the outer appearance of things, and how long it has looked at and judged only the external aspect of things!

The 'I' does not know itself, nor can it really know the essence of another human being. Life and society consist of rapidly

changing forces which often cause fear and uncertainty. Matter, and the ideas and feelings it generates, form an almost impenetrable veil that separates the human being from divine reality. The Divine plan provides no reconciliation with this form of existence. Because a human being must help the seed of the soul develop through continual confrontation with a pitiless world of opposites, it is not in his interest to turn stones into bread. How callous this seems in the eyes of the Grand Inquisitor.

The Light constantly calls us to an awakening, to deep knowledge of our self and the world, and especially to return. But relatively few people are prepared to

It is possible that Dostoyevsky chose the character of the Grand Inquisitor to expose this conflict because the latter clearly represents the atrocious, authoritarian and dogmatic actions of the church. The dogmatic and authoritarian power of the official 'church' did not – and still does not – allow 'heresy'. The Grand Inquisitor – the eternal interrogator – however, is part of the human state. Once the 'I' has been formed to the extent that it cannot and will not give up anything of itself, it plays the same role, a role it shares with the auric being, which nourishes and supports it. Thus, the soul becomes a prisoner of the intellect, which questions it and attempts to keep it within the intellect's own limits. In this way the intellect destroys the unique regenerative power of the soul. The Grand Inquisitor is a clear example of the shrewd intellect, which knows only its own wisdom and cannot discern any other. One day, the intellect must step aside in order to give the soul its freedom again.

Cameo with a picture of Dostoyevsky in St. Petersburg.

go that path. The Grand Inquisitor latches on to this and flings out Jesus' lack of love for the masses of humanity. *'Contrary to you, we want the happiness of all people. We will bring a reign of peace and happiness for men. Thou hast only the elect, while we shall give rest to all. We shall give them the quiet humble happiness of weak creatures such as they are by nature.'*

THE GRAND INQUISITOR IS ALSO THE COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS

A lot of people are controlled by the impulses of the Grand Inquisitor. They strive for happiness, possessions, power, prestige and pleasure. The Grand Inquisitor is thus also a collective consciousness. It would like to triumph, but it does not, it cannot. Because when people suffer, it must suffer with them. In spite of all its, often tremendous, efforts it can bring no peace to the world. Its dreams of happiness, pleasure and fulfilment remain an illusion.

The Grand Inquisitor is unable to penetrate the mystery of the Divine Plan. He does not understand how this plan remains always relevant and that there are people who react to it. The secret lies hidden in the microcosm. The experiences of many incarnations are etched in that microcosm. And at a certain moment, they reach the point of maturity necessary to recognise and follow the path to Divine nature. Thus it appears that human beings are indeed called to higher freedom, a freedom based on a development through the many highs and lows of earthly life. The spirit of the world – of which the Grand Inquisitor is an aspect – does not know the divine nucleus of the microcosm, nor the divine Love that calls it and has been waiting for its response since time immemorial.

When the Grand Inquisitor had finished speaking, Jesus approached him in silence, kissed him on his bloodless lips and disappeared into the dark city. Bloodless lips! Powerless words spoken by authorities of a world groping in the dark. How old they are, how brilliant to the eye, how powerful in politics and economics, but yet bloodless they are if they lack the power of renewal. The pilgrim's soul overcomes all inner and outer obstacles. Jesus, the new soul, leaves the ancient prison of the personality and walks the 'dark streets and squares of the city,' to perform his work of salvation.

'IF YOU WERE SINLESS, YOU WOULD BE ABLE TO BE A SHINING EXAMPLE FOR THE EVILDOER'

Dostoyevsky has never solved the secret of this legend. He showed the gnawing wound of human existence and sought for the heart of that which links all of humanity. He speaks through a monk: *'Act tirelessly. Take upon you the ills caused by wickedness. Endure them, and your heart will find peace. You will then understand that you yourself are guilty. If you were sinless, you would be able to be a shining example for the evildoer. You have not done this. If you had given him Light, this Light would have illuminated the way for others. And he, who would commit a misdeed, could avoid it thanks to your light. And even if you see that the one you have illuminated is not seeking salvation, remain firm and do not doubt the power of the heavenly Light. Know that he will find salvation, if not now, then later. And if this is not the case, then his children will find it, because your light will never die, even after your death. The righteous pass away, but their Light remains.'*

THE SPIRITUAL PROMISE OF EASTERN EUROPE

‘There is a steep, thorny road, leading to the heart of the universe. I can tell you how to find those, who will show you the only secret passage that leads inwards. For those who proceed, a reward defying all description is waiting: the power to be a blessing to humanity and to save it. For those who fail, there are subsequent lives that will perhaps lead to success.’ Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, 12 August 1831 – 8 May 1891

So much has already been written about the new developments in Eastern Europe! The Slav race is sometimes seen as an example of the new era, in which the heart will collaborate with the intellect, inspired by the source that opens up when the heart surrenders to the love sacrifice of the Christ. That is the essence of the new development, which is becoming more and more visible in Eastern Europe too. By deep suffering and a deep longing for freedom, this reality starts to blossom in the hearts of human beings, who have found a solution for the painful conflict between time and eternity. Precisely here East and West can meet, because Eastern Europe has produced many great ideas, full of human understanding and full of intuition and possibilities. It has been said: *‘In the West they know things through reason and the senses. But how can one learn to know a person?’* The answer of the person living from the heart is:

through the heart. After all, whatever a human being is, he is through his heart. A Russian in Paris added to that: *‘You read the same texts as we do, but you read them with your head, whereas we read them with our heart.’*

Eastern Europe came under the influence of the Christian Church at a later stage than the West. The first signs of spiritual development date back to the tenth century, largely under the influence of Greek texts. In the eleventh century, legends and stories about the life of Saint Theodosius appeared. From the fourteenth century originate testimonies of devoted lay brothers, who led a strict



Karl von
Eckartshausen,
Rudomino
Library, Moscow.

Christian life in seclusion from the world. Although their lives were coloured by local cultures, their asceticism differed little from that practised in the rest of Europe.

THE PRAYER FROM THE HEART

The heart as described in the Bible is attuned to the feeling and the identity of the East-European. Especially the Russians live *po serdtsu*, from the heart. And the 'prayer from the heart' has a unique position. In the heart the human being resides. That is where all threads come together. That is where human individuality operates most strongly, which is strange, seeing that the West assumes that individuality specifically in the head. *'The heart,'* Theophanes the Hermit says, *'maintains the energy of all the forces of the soul, both animal and physical. To love God "with all your heart" means to seek him "with all your soul and all your mind."*'

A statement of the Christ, which particularly appeals to the Slav soul is: *'Without Me you can do nothing.'* Because people are not capable of an act that lasts for ever, they lead a dangerous life. What, then, can they do to free their soul from its imprisonment in matter? The fathers of Russian spirituality considered liberation as a 'state of the heart'. In a culture regarding praying often more important than eating, they talked about 'the state of prayer' (*katastasis*). That is to say that



a permanent bond with the spiritual world must exist in addition to the mode of life. 'The state of prayer' is synonymous with spiritual life. It is a permanent state of the heart.

The human heart remains a deep mystery; it is the hidden part of the human being, known only to God. *'When asked how a human being can learn to know the state of his heart, the Church fathers answered: the measure of his purity determines his direct insight into himself, that is, an emotional understanding of his own heart and also that of others. This defines exactly the cardiognosia of the startzi, of the spiritual fathers. They read the heart of others like an open book and do not marvel at this, but regard it as a normal state of a soul purified by love.'*

Russian edition of the works of Plato. 1780. Russian Library, Moscow.



The Russian sphinx, portrait of H P Blavatsky in *The Phoenix* by Manly P Hall.

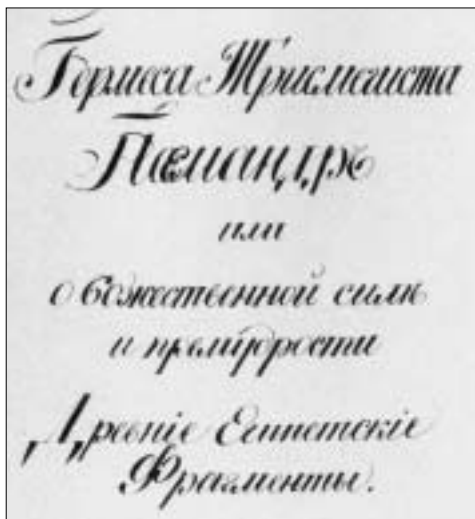
Russian edition of the works of Hermes Trismegistus. Around 1810-1820. Vielhgorsky Collection.

THE MODERN HUMAN BEING CAN NO LONGER LISTEN

This is rather the opposite of the Western way of life. The modern Western human being is bombarded by outside impressions. He can no longer listen to inspiration coming from the heart. He seeks his inspiration outside of himself. He listens to all possible voices, except to the voice of his heart, the only voice of real importance. To those people the staretz

says: *‘When the Master says: give me your heart, he means: My son, give me that, which is in your innermost depth, which is your origin, the leading principle of your life, all of your senses, affections and intelligence. Return to the source.’*

This premise is found for example with the Duchobors (Duchobor = fighter for the spirit), followers of a movement appearing in the seventeenth century in the Ukraine. Because of their pacifist, strictly vegan mode of life, denouncing all interference by the state, they have been persecuted for decades. They moved from the Ukraine to the Caucasus. In their striving for peace and truth, they gave away their possessions and destroyed their weapons in order not to violate the commandment ‘Thou shalt not kill’. Due to mediation by Tolstoy, a group of 9,000 Duchobors could leave Russia in 1898 and emigrate to the unspoiled parts of Canada; 12,000 of them remained in the Caucasus. The Duchobors, or Tolstoyans as they were called in Canada, came to Quebec, settled near the Saskatchewan River and later in British Columbia. They worked and lived in communities. They did not have



churches and they considered the Bible less important than the 'living book,' which everyone carries within himself, because the law written in the heart is a stronger and better compass than all external rules. They believed that, whoever submits to this law, approaches step by step spiritual perfection and brings the Kingdom to earth. As all people are in principle children of God, they also professed that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. His wisdom was and is from the Spirit, which they refer to as Spirit-God. His life, death and resurrection become meaningful only if they become a reality in the heart of every pupil-human being. For everyone who really seeks Him, will hear the same voice. To follow Him means: to vivify God!

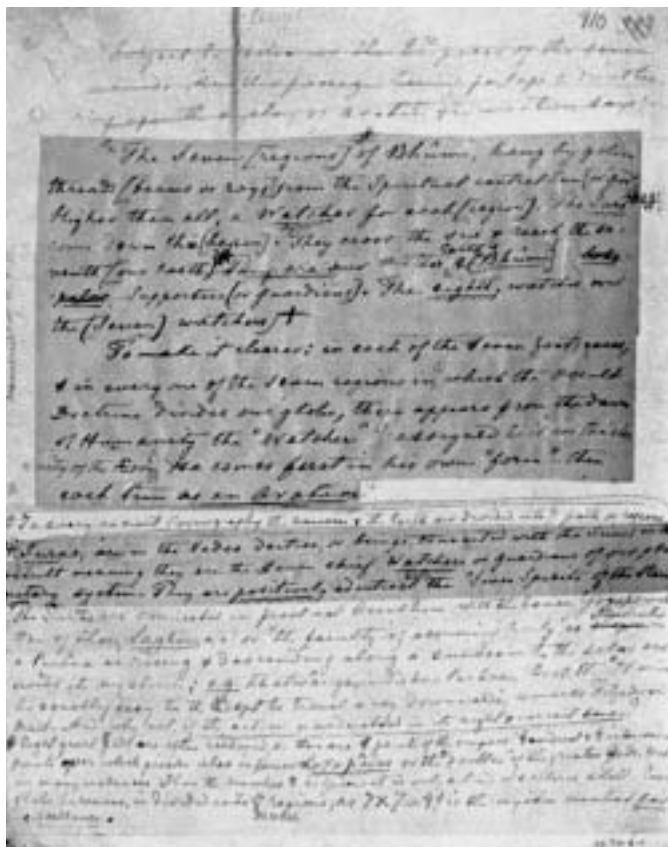
The Duchobors represented an original, spiritual Christianity with Gnostic aspects. They pointed at the inner light that is close to everyone and they regarded purified thinking as the mirror of truth. Mikhail Gorbachev rehabilitated them and gave them land near the town of Tula, about 180 kilometres south of Moscow.

THERE IS NO RELIGION HIGHER THAN TRUTH

When Madame Blavatsky founded the Theosophical Society in 1875, she made a breach in materialism. In addition to the church with its heaven and its hereafter, the fearless and sharp Russian woman, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, stated the science of the hidden side of things. The motto of *The Secret Doctrine* (1888) is: *There is no religion higher than Truth*. Around 1850, Madame Blavatsky met an Indian Master who subsequently greatly

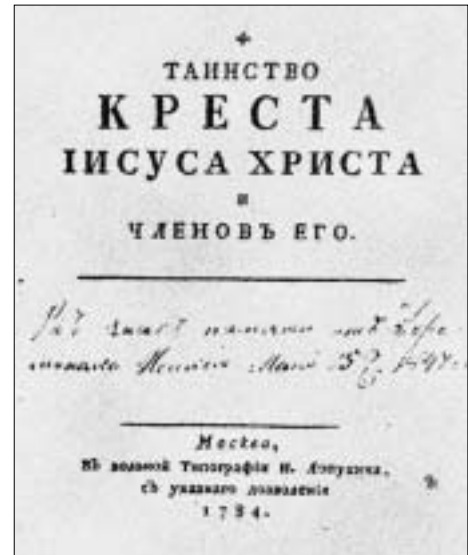
influenced her. He brought her into contact with an ancient culture deeply rooted in Buddhism and Hinduism. In these ancient sources she encountered the term 'Brahma Vidya': theosophy. However, she did not intend to introduce the Hindu teachings into the West. She wrote: *'It is my intention to show that nature is not "a coincidental joining of atoms" and to point out to humanity its proper place in the world plan, to rescue from its degeneration the archaic truths, which constitute the foundation of all religions, to unveil to some extent the basic unity from which they all originate and finally, to show that present-day civilisation has never approached the occult (hidden) side of nature.'*

Manuscript by P Blavatsky.



LOVERS OF THE TRUTH

She paid attention to Gnostic movements of the first centuries of our era and provided an incredible amount of profound information about them. According to her, the word theosophy was already in use in the third century AD with the Philaletes or 'lovers of the Truth', a group of Alexandrian philosophers. H P Blavatsky showed that Gnostic teachings and texts largely stem from pre-



It is tempting to see the great Russia as separate from the rest of Europe, but both are not unconnected. Since the tenth century the wild tribes populating the endless Russian planes, mountains and river basins, become christianised. It is an eastern Christianity, a colourful and chequered Christianity, European in its Roman origin, but Byzantine through Constantinople. Church fathers and monks strove for a higher spiral of life, for clarity and space and, whenever possible, for aspiration and purity in a population infested and driven by demons.

There has always been an active interaction between East and West. The Tsars, through blood relations, belonged to the European dynasties. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century the official language at the Russian court was French. The soldiers of Napoleon and the armies of Tsar Alexander wore virtually identical uniforms. A large part of what is now Poland still belonged to Russia and the customs union of the Germans, and the Holy Alliance (middle of the nineteenth century) extended deep into Russia. Spiritual life in the East experienced the same influences as in other parts of Europe. In the eighteenth century the expansion of humanism, individual freedom and spiritual

thinking was especially propagated by the Masonic Lodges, which were popular at that time. During the reign of Catharine the Great enlightened people like the publisher Nicola Novikov and the Rosicrucian Johann Schwarz exerted themselves to elevate the people. Their ideal was the inwardly free human being. The first step was openness and education. All important works of European thinking became available in the East to large sections of the population. Novikov and his people published 440 titles, established schools, institutions, universities and hospitals; everything to the highest standards. In 1781, the periodical Red Dawn appeared in Saint Petersburg, from Novikov's printing presses. It was a reference to Aurora, the masterpiece by Jacob Boehme. In countless ways people were informed of the two natures in the cosmos and in the human being. On book markets the works of Arnold, Gichtel, Saint-Martin and many others were sold. The most influential mystic was Karl von Eckartshausen, who enjoyed unprecedented popularity amongst the free thinkers, Rosicrucians and Freemasons. His work The Cloud upon the Sanctuary made such an impression on Tsar Alexander I that the latter instantaneously became mystically

Christian sources. Their content has been revealed by Jesus, but had been known already long before and had been taught in the Mystery Schools of all times. She did not regard Jesus as an external God with human traits. To her, Christ Jesus was the prototype of the inner, immortal human being.

In *The Secret Doctrine* she wrote: '*The Pistis Sophia is an extremely important document, a true Gnostic Gospel, that has been arbitrarily attributed to Valentinus,*

but is more likely a pre-Christian work originally.' And about the content: '*The Soul was always the one and only subject and the science of the Soul the only purpose of the ancient Mysteries. In the Fall of the Pistis Sophia and her rescue by her Syzygy, that is Jesus, we see the ever returning drama of the suffering of the ignorant personality, which can only be rescued by the Immortal Human Being (Individuality or the Self), or rather, by its intense longing for IT.*'

inclined. In his turn von Eckartshausen became strongly influenced by the work on the characteristics of the inner Church, by the Russian colonel and mystic Lopukhin. Both felt an affinity with the inner Church for those people who had recognised the Light and continued to long for it. In reactionary times and under the pressure of the great wars, the revolution and the turmoil in Europe, these impulses disappeared into the background. At the end of the nineteenth century, a revival of spirituality occurred with musicians like Scriabin and artists like Jacek Malszewski, Carl Hlavacek and Jan Preisler, who allowed themselves to be carried along on the wave of symbolism stirring in Europe. They attempted to approach the universal truth of a higher life of the soul. Since the fall of the Wall and the Communist regime, Western Europe, hemmed in between the internet and rationality, with a new wind coming from the always profound European East, is looking forward to new spiritual impulses. Impulses that will erase an imagined separation and that will help the European to finally find his true, inner foundation: the living and liberated soul.





‘SHE IS THE ONLY ONE AVAILABLE’

H P Blavatsky built a bridge between the ancient Eastern wisdom and the emerging materialism of the West. She showed the West that there is more to life than mere possessions, power and business. With her enormous dynamism and her indefatigable pen she could sometimes appear objectionable. A complaint inquiring if there was nobody else who could do her work, was answered by one of her Masters with: ‘She is the only one available.’

In her days of complacent orthodoxy, conventional ways of thinking, hackneyed and empty generalities, she appeared to be extremely out of place. Like an old-time prophet, impetuous like Elijah, grand like Isaiah, mysterious like Ezekiel, she flung her scathing judgements at the childish and hypocritical pseudo-scientific approaches to the great mystery of life. Her message stemmed from the mighty past and she did not bring it in the first place to the present, but directed herself at the future of all of humanity, be-

cause the present was cloaked in the darkness of materialism, and the only light came from a distant past ... She brought her message unwaveringly. She testified of the Gnosis in a century that had become agnostic.

IMPORTANT DESTROYERS OF COMPLACENCY

Pupils of Blavatsky, such as Helena and Nicholas Roerich, have in their own way given shape to the task of the new era: the formation of a fire church on earth. And in the turbulent times before the Russian revolution Gurdieff and Ouspensky worked, who later on both moved to the West. For many seekers in both East and West they were important destroyers of intellectual complacency.

‘The human being is a microcosm,’ Ouspensky said. This small copy of the great miracle of the macrosystem is connected with the energy of the universe. That is its source of nourishment. The Galaxy consists of 50,000 million stars and the human brain of virtually the same number of cells. Yet, are we aware of being the image of this gigantic system? Do we notice anything of those universal forces, which apparently pour into us? *‘Every brain cell has a small thinking nucleus and every cell is linked with three or four other brain cells,’* is another of Ouspensky’s thoughts. *‘The human being uses only a very small part of his brain. All mechanical associations develop through bad connections between the cells. Should all those millions of brain cells be linked correctly, the human being would be able to experience a higher consciousness and approach the level of consciousness of the sun.’* Then we can speak of a state of connectedness. That state is called ‘awareness’. And that awareness extends very far; it can expand through the

Translations of
the Fama
Fraternitatis by
Turgenyev (1796-
1818). Russian
Library, Moscow
& Central State
Archives of
Ancient Acts.
Collection FF
Mazurin.

entire universe. The highest state is reached when that consciousness flows through our veins and thus becomes true nourishment, so that the higher, nourishing ethers can be truly tasted.

WHAT IS THE ESSENCE OF FREEDOM?

Eastern Europe is struggling to liberate itself from the bonds, which have chained the free spirit to the earth for so long. During that immense struggle, East and West give each other the best of what they can achieve on a spiritual level. Many examples of selfless service, of compassion and charity appeal to every seeker.

T. Spidlik said in 2001 in a lecture about the current state of Russian spirituality: *Freedom is also irrational, it is above logic. The philosophers of the En-*

lightenment believed that the human being acted in a certain way, simply because he had a mind. But according to Dostoyevsky, the human being does not follow the logic of the mind, he prefers to be crazy, if only he may be free. Freedom is demonic. All those, who wanted to follow the path of unlimited freedom, had to experience that their life was inclined to rise above the level of mortal beings and to become like "demons". And they found a tragic ending. In the history of the Karamazov family, from Dostoyevsky's famous novel, the father refuses to put a limit to his sexual life and is ultimately killed by his own son. The son Ivan does not want to limit his fantasies and becomes deranged. Dimi-tri, dragged along by his unbridled passion, finishes up in jail. That is the result of the demon of freedom. He frees the human being, only to destroy him. Could there not be another, more positive vision? With Alyosya, the youngest of the brothers Karamazov, things turned out differently. As the only truly free human being amongst beings addicted to each other and imprisoned within themselves, he enters freedom in a way totally his own.

NOT HUMAN, BUT DIVINE-HUMAN

Certainly, nature needs to be overcome, the human being must be totally free. This becomes possible, when he is no longer human, but divine-human; when he gives the essence of the Christ – that is, being omnipresent and filling all space – all the space available in the human heart, for in every heart, whether it be eastern or western, the divine aspect of the human being lies hidden as a seed.



‘THE WORLD HAS PURSUED ME, BUT DID NOT SUCCEED IN TAKING ME CAPTIVE’

Grigory Savvich Skovoroda (1722-1794) was a Ukrainian philosopher and mystic. As a guest of one of his pupils, the 72-year old philosopher one evening suddenly took a spade and began to dig a narrow ditch. ‘It is time to end the pilgrimage,’ he said. ‘Here I would like to be buried. Write on my tombstone that the world has pursued me, but did not succeed in taking me captive.’ The next morning Skovoroda was found dead in his room. His hands were crossed over his chest and his head rested on scrolls of his own writings. One hundred years after his death they were finally published. Skovoroda was a legendary figure. Leo Tolstoy and other thinkers of that time highly appreciated him. A few years ago, the University of Char-kov, the capital of one of the Ukrainian provinces, has been named after him.

Grigory Skovoroda was a profound believer who at the same time possessed a free mind. Undaunted he unmasked the wrongs of his time. He who originally wanted to become a priest, opposed in courageous, sometimes audacious statements the traditional teachings of the Church. In his passionate striving for Truth he feared nothing.

In 1765 Skovoroda resigned from teaching. A period of wandering began and until the end of his life he no longer

Skovoroda emphatically denied the literal interpretation of the biblical events. ‘It is better not to read and not to listen, than to read without eyes, to hear without ears and to learn in vain.’

had a permanent place of residence. ‘What is life?’ he wrote. ‘It is the dream of a Turk fuddled by opium, a terrible dream that hurts the head and numbs the heart. What is life? It is a pilgrimage: one clears a road for oneself without knowing why and where to.’ Skovoroda set out on his pilgrimage almost as a beggar. On his back he carried a pouch containing the Bible in Hebrew. Apart from that, he carried a flute and a cane. He often stayed for a long time with one of his many friends. Then again he took leave of his friends unexpectedly. On markets and in the houses of the poor he sang and told fables, and gave lectures for his friends. He devoted a lot of time to prayer. He followed his path as if he were guided by an invisible hand.

‘THE WHOLE WORLD IS ASLEEP!’

In the years of his wanderings, Skovoroda’s philosophical creativity blossomed. While underway, he wrote his *Dialogues*. On the basis of his inner experiences he tried to gain insight into the world and humanity. He often felt himself lifted up above his limitations spiritually. In a letter he wrote about such a mystical experience. ‘I went for a

walk in the garden. The first feeling I noticed in my heart was inner detachment, freedom and new strength. I experienced an extraordinary touch that filled me with an unknown power. A sudden, unspeakably sweet outpouring filled my soul and everything in me began to burn like a fire. The world disappeared, and only a feeling of love, peace and eternity pervaded me. Tears ran from my eyes and spread a heart-warming harmony throughout my whole body.'

His inner and outer life led Skovoroda to the insight, that *'the whole world is asleep'* and that this sleep is tormenting it. In his songs we find many remarks about the hidden life that can only be experienced. He sensed the unknown grief and the unknown tears in the world around him. *'This world looks attractive, but it hides a restless worm in its heart. O world, you show me laughter, but within you are secretly sobbing.'*

RECOGNISING DIVINE FOOTPRINTS

To Skovoroda, life in this world is manifested on two levels. There is a life on the surface and one in the depth. They coincide with the insight that the first one passes by, while the second one is *'in God'*. *'If you want to know something in truth, first look in the flesh, that is, look at its outside, and you will discover on it the footprints of God which reveal an unknown and secret wisdom.'* This higher insight, the perception of the *'divine footprints'*, comes about by the illumination of the



spirit, and can be approached by everyone who is able to detach himself from his senses. *'When the spirit of God [has entered our heart], when our eyes have been illuminated by the spirit of truth, then you will see the duality of everything, then every creature appears to be dual. [...] When you have seen God with these new eyes, you will see everything as if in a mirror in Him, everything that has always been in Him already but which you have never seen before.'*

Such a perception shows first of all one's own self. Self-knowledge opens up two *'levels'* of being in us. It discovers also the spiritual life behind the physical and mental life. Therefore, self-knowledge is the beginning of wisdom. *'If we haven't*

Skovoroda, 1794.

primarily assessed our own selves, what benefit should we derive from applying this yardstick to other creatures? The seed of all science is hidden within us. There is its secret source.' He writes: 'I know that my body is based on the eternal plan. We only see the physical body, but not the spiritual body. To know oneself and to understand God is the same. Whoever knows himself correctly recognises Christ with the same view.'

Skovoroda discovered that good and evil as concepts complement each other. 'These two halves make a whole; the Lord has created life and death, good and evil, poor and rich, and merged them into one.' In order for the 'power of salvation' to be manifested in the world of evil, we must leave the power of dialectics behind and overcome it through the spirit. That is the path of transformation. 'Try to let the Divine Truth flash forth from the untruthful, so that in its depth its eternal aspect can unfold. Whoever adheres to that, will be liberated from empirical life and thus enter the path of transformation.'

'ALL FLESH IS YOUR SHADOW AND YOUR COVER'

'I do not love life that is determined by death,' Skovoroda once cried out and he added: 'Our daily "life" is death itself.' His soul sought transformation, and the premonition of that experience gave him new strength. 'Leave physical putrefaction and pass on from earth to heaven, from this transient world to the original world. [...] I do not need the visible sun, I go to a better sun. [...] It satisfies and nourishes me, my centre, the abyss of my heart! You, the sweetest part of me! You are my secret

and all flesh is your shadow and your cover.'

In our daily vegetative existence, the human being lacks the 'whole' being. He has only a 'dream' of the true human being. Deep inside there are the 'kingdom of God' and the 'kingdom of Evil'. 'These two kingdoms,' Skovoroda wrote, 'cause an eternal battle in every human being.' He can either surrender to the divine love or surrender to the divine wrath. What is 'true' is manifested to the human spirit 'in Christ only', in the mysterious life that is born by being in Christ.

About the heart he wrote: 'The highest aspect of a human being is his heart. That is the true human being... There are also two hearts... The spiritual heart is the chasm that contains and encompasses everything. However, it cannot be encompassed by anything itself.' For Skovoroda it is especially important that human beings do not seek God outside themselves, but that they experience him in their hearts as their inner essence, as thoughts of God concerning them. Once the outer being changes into the inner being, we recognise the essence of existence and of God. Skovoroda emphasises that the inner human being is not an abstract idea, but a new human being into which the old one has changed. This new human being must be liberated by all of us, as it exists in all of us.

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‘TRUE RELIGION IS NOT WHAT ONE KNOWS BUT WHAT ONE DOES’

*Blessed is he who walks the path.
He goes through darkness on the narrow road,
and lightens it with the flame of his heart.
Blessed is he who keeps his heart pure,
since divine joy and love accompany him.*

In Eastern Europe, the time of transition between the nineteenth and the twentieth century is called the Silver Age. Many renowned artists, composers, writers and thinkers – who were often inspired by Western influences – are associated with this period, although only a few of them became known in Western Europe. Many of them lost their lives during the bloody revolution of 1917. Others were banished or killed by the communist regime. Their published works were either destroyed or adjusted to fit the system of socialist realism. This was done so thoroughly that people did no longer even remember these special personalities. Between 1953 and 1964 and after perestroika began in 1986, some of those purged were rehabilitated and the few works that had been saved were published. Thus in 1993 the book *Two Lives* by Konkordiya Yevgenyevna Antarova was published.

It is virtually impossible to describe the depth and the wide range of topics that K Y Antarova deals with in the four volumes of her book *Two Lives*. All the more so because the manuscript has not been edited and is therefore not easy to read. However, let us try to convey something of the spirit of her book and dwell on some of her ideas. The book reads like

*K Y Antarova was born in Warsaw on 13 April 1886 (large parts of modern Poland belonged to Russia at that time). Her father died when she was eleven, her mother died three years later. Although she was virtually penniless, she continued her studies at the gymnasium by giving private lessons for a living. After graduation, she entered a monastic order. Very soon she realised that retreating from the world was not her way and she decided to take up studies in St. Petersburg. There she enrolled at the historical and philological faculty that offered the highest academic programme for women at that time. In 1904, she finished her studies successfully. She was offered a chair of philosophy, but instead dreamed of becoming an actress and singer. Therefore, she took singing lessons at the St. Petersburg Conservatory and worked as a teacher in a factory school. The talented and attractive 19-year old young woman was hospitalised several times because of hunger and exhaustion. In the spring of 1907, she was invited to have an audition with the Mariinsky Theatre. One year later, she went to the Bolshoy Theatre where she was immediately given important roles. Illness forced her to retire from her career and she started writing. ‘My teacher Stanislavsky made me to be born again, so to speak. ... Now that I have learned to produce creative work independently, he is the ray of light that enlightens my path as an artist,’ she wrote in her book *On the Creative Path*. This book and *Two Lives* have not been printed until a few years ago.*

Like Atlas, Adam carries the struggle of human life. 19th century.

a fascinating adventure novel. The story is set alternately in Russia, Central and Western Europe, India and America. The numerous heroes love, suffer, die, struggle, win and lose. However, the story has a 'main character' – a central element – that is the axis about which everything turns: universal life and the 'eternally living and forever free Divine spark' within the human being. Everybody is searching for this hero, and all serve him. *'The path of liberation is hard for everyone. One should not judge others but learn from them in order to discover one's own flaws and weaknesses. The pursuit of happiness should be focused on nothing else but the power of eternity that resounds in our own hearts. Humans are unable [...] to*

enter the sphere of harmony and wisdom just like that. Yet all of us can, by loving our neighbours, remember the glory of the Light in ourselves and honour this Light in the people we meet.' The author lets a teacher in her book say: *'The only true religion is not what we know and understand but what we do in our practical everyday lives. [...] Do not think of us as higher*

'Perestroika' actually means reform and refers to the radical economic, social and cultural reform initiated by President Mikhail Gorbachev of the Soviet Union. The related concept of 'glasnost' refers to the openness necessary to achieve more freedom in the former Soviet Union.



Bridge in St. Petersburg, represented on a cameo from the collection of Pyotr Salzman.

beings, we have also walked the same path as you go now. In pain and grief our hearts have developed, in turmoil and distress our consciousness expanded! [...] I do not stand still. Tirelessly I follow those who stretch out their hands of compassion and love to me. My faithfulness follows their faithfulness like their faithfulness follows the celestial beings. And in this eternal and continuous progress toward perfection the law of the whole universe is contained. If your heart takes delight in joining this eternally active cycle, and your thinking is happy and knows the Light... follow me with all your faithfulness until the last moment.'

BELIEVING AND ACTING ACCORDINGLY

Two words 'faithfulness' and 'until the last moment' are constantly repeated. Faithfulness, i.e. believing and acting accordingly, is an essential prerequisite for advancing on the path of liberation. Faithfulness is necessary as long as there is no insight. However, *'by faithfulness, we will achieve love'. 'Until the last moment' –*

this is an even higher degree of faithfulness: the candidate surrenders to the path that lies before him, without any reservations.

Antarova confronts the pupils of the masters in her book with certain requirements: self-control, fearlessness and tact. These also include vegetarianism and the solemn vow of voluntary obedience. This vow can prevent the candidate from unwittingly taking up obligations that could hamper or even stop his progress. *'Once you will have acquired these faculties, you may wander into the world again to work and to serve humanity.'* These three faculties are not accomplished by upbringing but by releasing the 'living love' that lies hidden in everyone. *'The earth is a workshop. The work that has to be done may seem idleness to others. However, this is not important. What matters is the inner light that is released by the work of a human being.'* However, be careful! *'The body and its environment are not the result of the present incarnation, but of the karma of thousands of years. We cannot escape from a single outward situation by a deliberate act of our will. It is the power of Love that can open up the outer and the inner path. Only this Love can turn the hopeless day into glorious joy. [...] The creative activity of the heart is manifested in everyday life. It also accepts that all conditions are inevitable, one's own, and that we can only be purified by love, mercy and compassion. Yet, this does not mean that you allow evil to have a hold on you, and put its foot on the neck of others, but rather that you struggle, learn, have self-control, fall down and get up again, overcome obstacles. Above all, overcome everything inwardly with Love.'*

LEO TOLSTOY — THE PATH OF A SEEKER

The Russian author Leo Tolstoy was the prototype of a seeker. He was an inhabitant of the border. Although his living conditions need not worry him — yes, he could even have lived in luxury — he could not come to terms with existence. Tormented by a sensitive social conscience, hurt by religious strife, he tried to fathom the purpose of humanity.

Tolstoy was a deep thinker, a philosopher of religion and a lay theologian who has during his life continuously expressed the tormenting questions of human existence. He felt imprisoned in the contradictions of life, entangled in the dilemma between his social views and the desire for a simple rustic life, between sensual pleasure and the suppression of it, between responsibility for his family and the need for solitude and seclusion, between heresy and deep piety. Was there a way out? For all his life he has been seeking for it!

Despite his difficult character many people adored him. His publications were disseminated all over the world, and they are still read and appreciated. Some of his novels became well-known by their cinema version.

Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy was born on 28 April 1828 as the one but youngest of five children. His mother, Princess Volkonskaya, died when he was two years old, and his father, Count N. I. Tolstoy, when he was nine. Lev Nikolayevich and his brothers and sisters were brought up

by an aunt. She was a gentle woman and an excellent educator who, as he said later, ‘infected him with love for humanity, so to speak’. He grew up on his father’s estate in the atmosphere of the wealthy Russian aristocracy.

After graduation and three years of study at the university he returned to his estate and devoted himself to managing it. Already in 1851 he strove for the abolition of the serfdom of his farmers, but his ideas were not understood. In order to establish direct contact with the agricultural population he travelled across the Caucasus. He lived together with the Cossacks, because they were so different from the ‘civilised’ representatives of his own social environment and lived close to nature.

HE DOUBTED EVERYTHING

In September 1851, *Childhood* was published, his first story and part of a trilogy. Soon *Boyhood* and *Youth* followed. As an adolescent he kept a diary. In it he described the complicated, often confusing situations he encountered. In this way he tried to approach the ‘man, know yourself’. During those years he was very introverted. He questioned everything, even himself. In the beginning of his diary he described not only his unsteady character very candidly, but also the awakening of his sensuality. Sometimes he moralised and reproached himself severely. He constantly tried to improve his character.

In *Boyhood* (1854) he wrote: ‘During



Tolstoy ploughing.
Ilya Repin (1844 -
1930).

the year in which I led a lonely, self-centred virtuous life, I already dealt with abstract questions concerning the human destination, the life to come, the immortality of the soul. My weak, childlike mind in its callow ardour was busy with the solution of questions that can only be answered by persons who have achieved the highest level of human existence.'

Tolstoy took part in the Crimean war. The hostilities touched him deeply. He detested the crimes and horror of the war and condemned them sharply. In 1856 he

left the army, and a year earlier he wrote: 'Yesterday, a conversation about the Divine and the faith gave me the amazing idea that I should devote my life to the realisation of it. This concerned the idea to establish a religion corresponding to the present level of human development, the religion of Christ, purified from dogmas and mysticism, a practical religion.' Life and its purpose were the questions that constantly occupied him. The central issue for him was: How can human beings live in the right way?

HE ESTABLISHED A SCHOOL

Gradually his literary qualities developed. In 1856 he started with the biography of a horse. It was a story about the behaviour of a herd, shortly before the animals were led to the slaughter. In this story Tolstoy demonstrated his empathy with and understanding of animals and the grief that is inflicted on them. It is not very surprising that he later became a vegetarian.

In the meantime wealthy Russians became interested in foreign countries. They wanted to become acquainted with western progress in culture and technology. With this purpose in mind, Tolstoy travelled to Switzerland, France and Germany in 1857. Back on his estate he started an extensive educational program for the children of his farmers. He established a school, taught there and wrote the so-called popular abecedarium, an elementary textbook in three parts. Later this book was disseminated throughout Russia. In 1860 he travelled abroad in order to expand his pedagogical insights.

In 1862 – at the age of 34 – Leo Tolstoy married the 17-year old Sophia An-

dreyevna Behrs, his indispensable partner and assistant. Together they got eight children. When Lev Nikolayevich later increasingly questioned his style of living, the relationship between the spouses became more strained. While he initially focused on writing stories, he now worked on extensive novels as *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina* and *Resurrection*. All no-

vels contain autobiographical elements, and they deal with social issues. But first of all they dealt with the question how human beings should live, a question that constantly occupied him.

IDEAL CLASHED WITH INNER CHAOS

The older he grew the more he was occupied with religious questions. He now defined them as three duties: the duty to himself, the duty to his fellow human beings and the duty to God. This ideal clashed with his feeling of inner strife: *'Why is everything so beautiful in my mind, while on paper and in my life it appears so ugly?'*

Anonymous drawing of Tolstoy as a student at Kazan University, Russia.

*What is your name, I am asked.
They think that I commit myself to a name,
but I do not do so.
I have liberated myself from everything,
have neither name nor place nor
fatherland.
Totally nothing.*

What my name is? Man!

*How old I am?
Years I do not count, I cannot count them,
because I always was and will always be.*

*Who is your father?
I have neither father nor mother.
God is my father and the earth my mother.*

Alas! There is no talking with you.

*I do not even ask you to talk with me.
You torment me with your talking.*

Where are you going?

Where God takes me.

(From: Leo Tolstoy, Resurrection)





Page from *Youth*,
autobiographical
novel by Tolstoy,
1857.

In order to communicate his conviction to others he published shortly after each other: *My confession* (1879), *Criticism of dogmatic religion* (1880), *Concordance and translation of the four Gospels* (1880) and *What I believe* (1883). *My confession* tells about the inner struggle of detaching himself from the church. He attacked the dogmatism of the Orthodox Church head-on. This demanded a lot of courage at the time, because the church in Russia was a state church. The publication of the writings mentioned above was finally prohibited, and then Tolstoy himself made copies for dissemination. In *My con-*

fession he writes: 'I reminded myself that I only lived when I believed in God. It was now the same as before: I only needed to think of God and I revived, but I only had to forget Him and life disappeared. To know God is the same as living. God is life.'

I BELIEVE THAT HE IS WITHIN ME

Tolstoy defines his faith as follows: 'I believe in God, in whom I see the spirit and the love and the principle of everything existing. I believe that He is within me as I am in Him. I believe that God's will is never expressed more clearly than in the

teachings of the Christ human being. I believe that the purpose of life for all of us consists in making our love for Him increase.' In *What I believe* we can read: *'Christ does not state life after death as the opposite of our personal life, but a general life in tune with the present, past and future of the whole of humanity, the life of the Son of Man. Any effort to give meaning to personal life is a delusion if it is not based on giving up the I for the benefit of the service to the human being, to humanity, to the Son of Man.'*

And further: *'Christ does not call us to something that is worse, but to a world that is better than this one [...]. He teaches about a life in which, apart from the salvation through the loss of our personal life, there will be less grief and more joy here in this world than by a personal life. Christ who reveals his teachings says that the true worldly benefit lies in not remembering our worldly life.'* With this idea Tolstoy came very close to the insight that the I cannot gain salvation. The human being has to seek a path that does not demand anything for the I. Only on this path liberation is possible. Tolstoy strove for the realisation of this insight by acting free from impurities.

When he grew older Lev Nikolayevich led a secluded and modest life which was, according to him, suitable for a believer. To a large extent he distanced himself from his possessions and became a vegetarian. He did stay in contact with his family, but from time to time he withdrew to live in a house without any conveniences near his estate. Due to his religious views he attracted many like-minded people. They called themselves Tolstoyans. They established communities, refused any co-operation with the state and did not pay taxes. Many of them were prosecuted and imprisoned.

However, because of his popularity Tolstoy himself was spared by the Czars. Soon after the coup by the Bolsheviks such 'opposition groups' as those of Tolstoy were exterminated. Later also in Purleigh and in Whiteways in England Tolstoyan communities have been established which tried to practice pure communism.

‘...WHAT GOD WROTE IN THE HUMAN HEART’

His religious ideas have been clearly stated in the novel *Resurrection*. He wrote: *'Such confusion stems from the fact that people accept as law what is not true law. But what God himself wrote in the human heart they do not accept as law.'* This novel was the reason for the church to excommunicate Lev Nikolayevich in 1901. In the same year he refused the Nobel Prize for literature.

In his last days Tolstoy only wanted to be God's servant. He was surrounded by many followers, but still regarded himself as a seeker. In April 1910 he wrote to a farmer: *'Life only gives me satisfaction to the extent that I am able to fulfil the heritage of Christ as long as my powers last. That means to love God and my neighbours. To love God means: loving all human beings just as one loves one's brother and sister. This and only this is my intention.'*

Tolstoy increasingly withdrew from society. At the end of his life he left his estate and left family, culture and followers behind. On 7 November 1910 he died as a result of pneumonia. In his farewell letter we read: *'I can no longer live in luxury and I do what old people of my age use to do: they leave the worldly life in order to spend the last days of their lives in solitude and peace.'*

‘EVERY HUMAN SOUL IS A PART OF GOD’

When the Rebbe tells a story

It was dark and candles were lit. Then Rebbe Joseph said: ‘Jehir Or, let there be light. But what is light? It is becoming light and I feel lighter. But the darkness rests heavily on us, binds us to the world of evil, for example by a worldview that only accepts as truth what can be perceived by the senses. Thus it can be light in the room, but very dark within us. But if eternity shines in someone’s life, it may even be dark in the room, but the Light of the world is a lamp to him.’

Zaddik is the Hassidic term for the spiritual leader of a group of Hassidim. When a zaddik told a story, he liked to take daily life as a starting point in order to demonstrate its relationship to eternity and to show the meaning of life. In this way, countless Hassidic legends, which reflected the wisdom of the zaddikim and the wealth of Jewish life, originated in the middle of the eighteenth century in the Ukraine, Byelo Russia and Poland. Hassidism arose on the basis of the Hebrew religion as a great renewal movement that led to the spiritual experience of the divine. This movement developed against rigid formalism. Especially for the lower classes, often living in difficult circumstances, Hassidism gave the possibility of direct religious experience. The author and philosopher Martin Buber (1878-1965) called the Hassidic teachings a *'hint to a life of enthusiasm, of enthusiastic joy.'* Buber described the origin of Hassidism and tried to revivify it again. Through him, Hassidism became a living concept also for many non-Jews.

THE DIVINE SPARK EXPERIENCES ITS EXILE

The founder of Hassidism was Israel ben Eliezer, who became known as the Baal Shem Tov (the Master of the Good Name). Prayer arising from the depth of the heart was for him the answer to the call of God. He taught that everything, both the above and the below, is a unity. In this way he expressed the same as the Tabula Smaragdina: *'That which is below is equal to that which is above, and that which is above is equal to that which is below.'* For the Baal Shem, human beings are responsible for creation and its redemption. The divine spark or Shekinah experiences the agony of its continuous exile in all things and in every human being. *'All human beings are the abodes of wandering souls that have gone astray.*

They live in many beings and strive for perfection in form after form. However, whoever is unable to purify himself is ensnared by the world of confusion.' This purely Gnostic statement corresponds with the words of Paul in his letter to the Romans (8:19): *'For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.'*

The Baal Shem did not leave any writings behind, nor was there any formal 'training' for his rapidly growing group of followers. Important were the general instructions, and especially *the way of life* of the Baal Shem and his co-workers. Those were the guidelines for all who wanted to go the path. They showed their followers that the heart should be ignited *'in surrender to God'*, in order to neutralise time and truly to be able to live in the here and now. *'Consecration of everyday life'* Martin Buber called this typical Hassidic attitude.

ACCEPTING SUFFERING IN JOY

Hassidism was only concerned with activity. In that way, everyone who truly strove could break through to the Light and behold it directly. *'God withdrew from His creation in order to create the possibility to be loved, encompassed and grasped by it in conscious longing.'* 'Fallen creation' contains sparks of the divine (the

The Baal Shem returns. H N Werkman (1882-1945). Stedelijk Museum (City Museum), Amsterdam.

The early Christians and for example also the Cathars, practised complete equality of men and women. In Hassidism this was and still isn't the case. A woman is not allowed to study the sacred texts, and she is totally subjected to the man. There are movies (e.g. Yentl) and books (e.g. Abraham Pearl, Joy of the Law) dealing with this aspect of Hassidism.



Shekinah), and by focusing his life on God, the human being can always be linked with his creator. Through this experience in his daily life, the Hassid knew great inner joy. Despite illness, distress and loss of loved ones, he could accept his suffering in joy. *'How can I explain this to you, when I have never experienced sorrow in my life,'* a zaddik said to his students. But they knew that also his life consisted of much distress and grief and they understood his words.

This joy of life, this conscious acceptance was also expressed in dance. Hassidim danced in joy and in sadness, for they knew – as the Psalms of David also testify – that every step can be not only a prayer of entreaty or gratitude, but also a mighty, light-filled secret with magical power. *'When you speak a word of God, then enter into that word with all your limbs,'* Rabbi Moshe of Kobryn taught. And when a student asked: *'How is it possible that a big human being could enter into a small word?'* he answered: *'Whoever thinks himself greater than the word, is not the kind of person we are referring to.'*

THEN THE STUDENT UNDERSTOOD

The Word elevated in the Spirit thus

becomes Noah's Ark, which receives the serving human being and takes him along on his path. One day, Rabbi Shmelke of Nikolsburg sent a student, who did not know how to prepare for this service, to an innkeeper in a remote city. For several weeks, the student observed the silent innkeeper who, sunk in prayer, diligently cleaned his implements and his dishes. Then the student understood. And Rabbi Shmelke explained to his students that human beings should be like a vessel that willingly receives what is meant for it, be it wine or vinegar. In the following words the clear teachings of the Baal Shem are expressed: *'Remember that you are only a vessel; that your thoughts and your words are worlds that expand... And when you have drawn the light of God into your thoughts and your words, then let this be your prayer: that the fullness of blessing pours out from the world of thought over the world of the word... for nothing of the world is placed outside of the unity of God.'*

Love is the highest good for the Hassidim. The love for God and – how could it be otherwise – the love for every creature. This spiritual knowledge runs as a thread through the stories that were told to help the seeker. One day, a father came to the Baal Shem, complaining that his son was corrupted and deviated from his father's insights. The answer of the Baal Shem was: *'Love more!'*

'Only undifferentiated sanctification of all activity, only dedicating one's ordinary life just as it is, with its ins and outs, to God, only the dedication of the natural link with the world has redeeming power. Only from the redemption of everyday life arises the highest day of salvation.'

Samson and the
Lion, Skorina,
Byelo Russia.

EVERY SOUL IS A SPARK OF THE ORIGINAL SOUL

When Rabbi Shmelke was asked how someone could fulfil the commandment of love for one's neighbour, when he had been wronged, the answer was: *'You have to correctly understand the words: Love your neighbour as something that you yourself are. For all souls are one. Each soul is only a spark of the original souls, which is entirely in all of them, just as your soul is in all parts of your body. It may happen that your hand makes a mistake and strikes you. Will you then take a stick and chastise your hand because it lacked understanding and thus increase your pain? It is the same when your neighbour, who is one soul with you, wrongs you from lack of insight. If you punish him, you only hurt yourself.'* *'But when I see a human being who is wicked before God, how can I love him?'* the student asks. *'Do you not know,'* Rabbi Shmelke said, *'that the original soul came forth from the essence of God and that every human soul is a part of God? And will you not have compassion, when you see how one of His holy sparks has become entangled and is suffocating?'*

The way back to the original life is a process for which patience, surrender and unwavering certainty of faith are necessary. A Hassid who complained to a Rebbe that he constantly studied, prayed and tried to be good, but did not notice any progress, was answered with this parable: *'We have been taught in the name of Elijah that the human being takes the Torah upon himself like an ox his yoke and a donkey his burden. See how in the morning the ox goes from the stable into the field and ploughs and then is led home again, day after day, and nothing changes for it, but the ploughed field yields its fruit!'* True faith must be supported and strengthened by the holy flame of

The zaddikim were the leaders of Hassidic communities. The word zaddik is usually translated as 'righteous one', but means 'the one found to be just', 'the one deemed good'. The word Hassidim was taken from a group of Jews in Palestine (3rd and 2nd century BC) who opposed Hellenism. There was also a group of mystical Hassidim in mediaeval Germany. Around 1700, a messianic-cabalistic movement existed in Poland, which called itself Hassidim. This group had links with the mystical-religious Jewish popular movement of Israel ben Eliezer, better known as the Baal Shem Tov, 'Master of the miraculous Name of God' or 'possessor of the good Name'.

longing, and especially by humility. The following parable deals with this: *'A man who was apprenticed to a blacksmith wanted to be independent. He bought an anvil, a hammer and bellows and began to work, but nothing was achieved. Then the old blacksmith told him: "You have everything you need, only the spark is missing!"'*

All human activity requires a goal. The Baal Shem taught his followers which goal surpasses one's own salvation, and what directedness is required to achieve it. Martin Buber summarised those teachings: *'Every human being determines the fate of the world by his deeds to an extent unknown to him and everyone else. The world is concerned with him, with that perfect human being, that true helper. It is longingly waiting for him. It is always longingly waiting for him.'*

