

# *The Song of the Pearl*

## **PART 1**

*When I was a little child,  
And dwelling in my kingdom, in my Father's house,  
And in the wealth and the glories  
Of my nurturers had my pleasure,  
From the East<sup>1</sup>, our home,  
My Parents, having equipped me, sent me forth.*

*And of the wealth of our Treasury<sup>2</sup>  
They had tied up for me a load.  
Large it was, yet light,  
So that I might bear it unaided --*

*Gold of ...  
And silver of Gazzak the great,  
And rubies of India,  
And agate from the land of Kush,  
And they girded me with adamant<sup>3</sup>  
Which can crush iron.*

*And they took off from me the Bright Robe  
Which, in their love, they had wrought for me,  
And my Purple Toga,  
Which was measured and woven to my stature.*

*And they made a compact with me,  
And wrote it in my heart that it should not be forgotten:*

*"If thou goest down into Egypt<sup>4</sup>,  
And bringest the one Pearl<sup>5</sup>,  
Which is in the midst of the Sea<sup>6</sup>,  
Hard by the loud-breathing Serpent<sup>7</sup>,  
Then shalt thou put on the Bright Robe  
And thy Toga<sup>8</sup>, which is laid over it,  
And with thy Brother<sup>9</sup>, our next in rank<sup>10</sup>,  
Thou shalt be heir in our Kingdom."*

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<sup>1</sup> the Pleroma, "the Fullness", the spiritual realms

<sup>2</sup> the Treasury of Light

<sup>3</sup> Ancient form of the word "diamond" a symbol presumably for the Mind-Body

<sup>4</sup> the physical body

<sup>5</sup> The Gnosis

<sup>6</sup> of Matter, both gross and subtle

<sup>7</sup> perhaps the elemental or animal nature in Matter

<sup>8</sup> two of the higher vestures of the Self, of which there were three

<sup>9</sup> the Higher Ego, presumably

<sup>10</sup> next in rank to the Mother and the Father

*I quitted the East and went down,  
There being with me two Messengers<sup>11</sup>,  
For the way was dangerous and difficult,  
And I was young to tread it.*

*I passed the borders of Maishan,  
The meeting place of the merchants of the East,  
And I reached the land of Babel,  
And I entered the walls of...<sup>12</sup>*

*I went down into Egypt<sup>13</sup>,  
And my companions parted from me.  
I betook straight to the Serpent,  
Hard by his dwelling I abode,  
Waiting till he could slumber and sleep<sup>14</sup>,  
And I could take my Pearl from him.*

*And when I was single and alone,  
A stranger to those with whom I dwelt,  
One of my Race, a Free-born Man,  
From among the Easterns, I beheld there --  
A youth, fair and well-favored.  
And he came and attached himself to me.*

*And I made him my intimate,  
A comrade with whom I shared my merchandise.  
I warned him against the Egyptians  
And against consorting with the Unclean;  
And I put on a garb like theirs,  
Lest they should insult me because I had come from afar,  
To take away the Pearl,  
And lest they should arouse the Serpent against me.*

*But in some way or other,  
They perceived that I was not their countryman,  
So, they dealt with me treacherously.  
Moreover, they gave me their Food to eat.  
I forgot that I was a Son of Kings,  
And I served their king;*

*And I forgot the Pearl,  
For which my Parents had sent me,  
And by reason of the burden of their...  
I lay in a deep sleep.*

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<sup>11</sup> The Powers that compel to Rebirth, presumably

<sup>12</sup> These are apparently various planes or states

<sup>14</sup> The Serpent is presumably the Passions which are inherent in the elemental essence

## **PART 2**

*So, they wove a plan on my behalf,  
That I might not be left in Egypt,  
And they wrote to me a Letter,  
And every noble signed his name<sup>15</sup> thereto:*

*"From thy Father, the King of kings,  
And thy Mother, the Mistress of the East,  
And from thy Brother, our next in rank,  
To thee, our Son, who art in Egypt, greeting!  
Up and arise from thy sleep,  
And listen to the words of our Letter.*

*"Call to mind that thou art a Son of Kings!  
See the slavery -- whom thou servest!  
Remember the Pearl  
For which thou didst speed to Egypt!*

*Think of thy Bright Robe,  
And remember thy glorious Toga,  
Which thou shalt put on as thine adornment,  
When thy name hath been read out in the List of the Valiant,  
And with thy Brother, our next in rank,  
Thou shalt be King in our Kingdom."*

*And my letter was a Letter  
Which the King sealed with his right hand,  
To keep it from the Wicked Ones, the Children of Babel,  
And from the savage demons of ...*

*It flew in the likeness of an eagle,  
The king of all birds<sup>16</sup>.  
It flew and alighted by me,  
And became all speech.*

*And its voice and the sound of its rustling,  
I started and arose from my sleep.  
I took it up and kissed it,  
And loosed its seal, and read;*

*And according to what was traced on my Heart  
Were the words of my Letter written.  
I remembered that I was the Son of Kings,  
And my Free Soul longed for its natural state.*

*I remembered the Pearl,  
For which I had been sent to Egypt,  
And I began to charm him,  
The terrible, loud-breathing Serpent.*

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<sup>15</sup> Names are powers, or qualities

<sup>16</sup> The descent of the Holy Seven-Spirit, or spiritual consciousness

*I hushed him to sleep and lulled him to slumber;  
 For my Father's name I named over him,  
 And the name of our next-in-rank,  
 And of my Mother, the Queen of the East<sup>17</sup>.  
 And I snatched away the Pearl,  
 And I turned to go back to my Father's house.*

*And their filthy and unclean garb  
 I stripped off, and left it in their country<sup>18</sup>,  
 And I took my way straight to come  
 to the light of our home, the East.*

*And my Letter, my Awakener,  
 I found before me on the road,  
 And as with its voice it had awakened me,  
 So too with its Light it was leading me.*

*Shone before me with its form,  
 And with its voice and guidance,  
 It also encouraged me to speed,  
 And with his Love was drawing me on.*

*I went forth, passed by...  
 I left Babel on my left hand<sup>19</sup>,  
 And reached Maishan the Great,  
 The haven of the merchants, that sitteth on the shore of the Sea<sup>20</sup>.*

*And my Bright Robe, which I had stripped off,  
 And the Toga wherein it was wrapped,  
 From the heights of Hyrcania  
 My parents sent thither,  
 By the hand of their Treasurers,  
 Who in their faithfulness could be trusted therewith.*

*And because I remembered not its fashion --  
 For in my childhood, I had left it in my Father's house --  
 On a sudden as I faced it,  
 The Garment seemed to me as a mirror of myself.*

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<sup>17</sup> The names of the Father, Mother, and Holy-Spirit. The immortal principles in Man

<sup>18</sup> Symbolizing purification of the subtle bodies

<sup>19</sup> He goes to the Right, like all the initiates in the Orphic and other mysteries

<sup>20</sup> He ascends – with the Pearl - through the planes of the Physical World

## **PART 3**

*I saw in it my Whole Self,  
Moreover, I faced my Whole Self in facing it,  
For we were two in distinction,  
And yet again one in one likeness.*

*And the Treasurers also,  
Who brought it to me,  
I saw in like manner,  
That they were in twain, yet one likeness.*

*For one Kingly sign was graven on them,  
Of His hand that restored to me  
My Treasure and my wealth by means of them.*

*My Bright embroidered Robe,  
Which ... with glorious colors;  
With gold and with beryls,  
And rubies and agates  
And sardonyxes varied in color,*

*It was also made ready in its Home on high  
And with stones of adamant  
All its seams were fastened,  
And the image of the King of kings  
Was depicted in full all over it.*

*And like the sapphire stone also were its manifold hues,  
Again, I saw that all over It  
The motions of Knowledge<sup>21</sup> were stirring  
And as if to speak  
I saw It also making Itself ready.*

*I heard the sound of Its tones,  
Which It uttered to those who brought It down<sup>22</sup>  
Saying, "I ..."<sup>23</sup>  
Whom they reared for him in the presence of my fathers.*

*And I also perceived in myself  
That my stature was growing according to his labors<sup>24</sup>.  
And in Its Kingly motions  
It was sprawling Itself out towards me<sup>25</sup>,  
And in the hands of Its Givers  
It hastened that I may take It.*

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<sup>21</sup> Gnosis; "the robe" in the *Pistis Sophia* contains all Knowledge

<sup>22</sup> The Treasurers of the Light, the messengers

<sup>23</sup> "I am the active in deeds" (Wright)

<sup>24</sup> The "causal" body or vesture that constitutes the Higher Ego

<sup>25</sup> "It poured Itself entirely over me"

*And me, too, my Love urged on  
That I should run to meet It and receive It;  
And I stretched forward and received It,  
With the beauty of Its colors, I adorned myself*

*And my Toga of brilliant colors  
I cast around me, in Its whole breadth.  
I clothed myself therewith, and ascended  
To the Gate of Salutation and Homage,  
To the Majesty of my Father who had sent It to me,*

*For I had done His commandments,  
And He, too, had done what He promised,  
And at the Gate of His princes  
I mingled with His nobles.*

*For He rejoiced in me and received me,  
And I was with Him in His Kingdom.  
And with the voice...  
All His servants glorify Him.*

*And He promised that also to the Gate  
Of the King of kings I should speed with him,  
And bringing my Gift and my Pearl  
I should appear with Him before the King.*

*“The Hymn of the Robe of Glory” by the 3rd century gnostic, Bardaisan (also known as “The Hymn of the Soul”)*

## BARDAISAN

Bardesian was the "last of the Gnostics," in the sense of being the last who attempted to make any propaganda of the phase of the Gnosis we are dealing with, among the ranks of Common Christianity; for the Gnosis was still studied in secret for centuries, and often reappeared in the pages of history in other guises, *e.g.*, the so-called Manichean movement.

Bardesian, or *Bar-daisan* (so called from the river Daisan (the Leaper), on the banks of which he was born), was born at Edessa, on July 11th, 155 A.D., and died, most probably in the same city, in 233, at the age of 78. His parents, Nuhamā and Nahashirama, were rich and noble; and young Bardesian not only received the best education in manners and learning which was procurable, but was brought up with a prince who afterwards succeeded to the throne as one of the Abgars; he not only shared the young prince's martial exercises, but in his youth won great fame for his skill in archery. He married and had a son, Harmonius.

At what age he embraced Gnostic Christianity is uncertain; but his eager spirit not only speedily converted his royal friend and patron but induced the Abgar to make it the state religion, and thus (it is said) Bardesian must have the credit of indirectly establishing the first Christian state. When Caracalla dethroned the Abgar Bar-Manu in 216, Bardesian made manful defence of the Christian faith before the representative of the Roman Emperor.

Subsequently he went for a time to Armenia, where he composed a history based on the temple chronicles, which he found in the fortress of Ani, and translated it into Syriac. This Armenian history of Bardesian was the basis of the subsequent history of Moses of Chorēnē. Bardesian was also a great student of Indian religion, and wrote a book on the subject, from which the Platonist Porphyry subsequently quoted. But it was as a poet and writer on Christian theology and theosophy that Bardesian gained so wide a reputation; he wrote many books in Syriac and also Greek, of which he was said to be master, but even the titles of most of them are now lost.

His most famous work was a collection of 150 Hymns or Psalms on the model of the Psalm-collection of the second temple, as still preserved in the Old Covenant documents. He was the first to adapt the Syriac tongue to metrical forms and set the words to music; these hymns became immensely popular, not only in the Edessene kingdom but wherever the Syriac tongue was spoken. Of the rest of his works, we hear of such titles as *Dialogues against the Marcionites*, *The Light and the Darkness*, *The Spiritual Nature of Truth*, *The Stable and Unstable*, and *Concerning Fate*. Nothing of these has come down to us.

By a strange chance, however, one of the hymns of the great poet of Gnosticism has been preserved to us, "**The Hymn of the Soul**". It is now generally admitted that the beautiful "Hymn of the Soul," as it has been called, imbedded in the Syriac form of the apocryphal *Acts of Judas Thomas*, preserved in the British Museum codex, is almost undoubtedly from the stylus of Bardesian.

Some of Bardesian's beliefs:

- (1) he denied the resurrection and regarded the separation of the soul from the body as a blessing.
- (2) he held the theory of a divine 'Mother' who in conjunction with 'the Father of Life' gave birth to a being called 'the Son of the Living'
- (3) he believed in a number of lesser 'gods,' that is to say, eternal beings subordinate to the supreme God.