

Book Reviews

The Path to Higher States of Consciousness: A Collection of Esoteric Essays, by Iván Kovács, 200 pages, \$15.93, ISBN-10: 149960872. Available at: [http://: www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com).

The *Path to Higher States of Consciousness* is a collection of nine essays, previously published in either the *Beacon* or *The Esoteric Quarterly*, in which various aspects of the Ageless Wisdom are discussed. Bringing together the esoteric philosophy of east and west, with the teachings of Helena Blavatsky, Helena Roerich and Alice A. Bailey, Kovács presents a wide range of insightful and informative essays that invite deep reflection.

The title essay—*Esotericism and the Feminine Principle*—begins with an historical overview of the feminine principle showing how the perception of women has changed throughout the ages. The article demonstrates that while the feminine principle’s life-sustaining approach has fluctuated overtime, it has never ceased to exert a valuable and important influence on society. The article then singles out the lives of the three aforementioned women whose influence carried substantial weight in inaugurating the New Age.

The next article discusses *The Apu Trilogy*, a set of three films by the Indian filmmaker, Satyajit Ray. Kovács’ examination of the trilogy touches on the story from both the literal and metaphysical levels. On the surface, the trilogy traces the epic journey of Apu, from his impoverished beginnings to his marriage and fatherhood. On an esoteric level, as Kovács’ retelling shows, the three films contain many spiritual lessons. Ultimately, *The Apu Trilogy* depicts the initiatory journey toward simplicity and truth and the eternal existence of the human soul.

The third article in this series provides a selective historical overview of Christianity in which several of its obvious problems and flaws are discussed. The essay also posits an alternative or esoteric view of Christianity’s

development and looks forward to a “new theology.”

Another essay considers the three-fold relationship between the soul-infused personality, discipleship and the construction of the Antahkarana, while a fifth essay discusses language and mantra as causal forces with enormous creative and transformative power.

The sixth article in this collection explores the various incarnations of one of the ‘flowers of humanity’—the Master Rakoczi, one of the most mysterious and important members of the Planetary Hierarchy. The article examines the activities of the Master Rakoczi in his present role as the Lord of Civilization and head of the now incoming Seventh Ray, as well as his previous incarnations as Roger Bacon, Francis Bacon, Francis Rakozci II, and the Comte de St. Germain. In recounting the lives of these distinguished individuals and by establishing a clear link between them, Kovács gives us a fuller picture of some of the divine characteristics that constitute a perfected Soul, a Master of the Wisdom and senior member of the Spiritual Hierarchy.

Following Kovács’ informative essay on the Master Rakoczi, is an article that looks beyond the generally accepted rendering of “dharma” as it appears in the *Mahabharata*. The article provides some background on the text for those who might not be familiar with this sacred Sanskrit epic. After touching on the main narrative in the story, Kovács discusses the centrality of dharma from which many of the other values and principles in Hinduism flow. However, the author’s principle emphasis is on the symbolism and significance of dharma as it pertains to the “spiritual warrior” or striving Soul. In addition to his examination of the theme within the context of the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Dharma of Kings*, the author draws upon the writings of Alice A. Bailey and others to “illuminate these verses in such a way that they can be of practical use to the modern-day disciple.”

The second to last article in this collection, surveys the ways in which knowledge of the Seven Rays is being disseminated by individuals in the esoteric community, the psychological profession and elsewhere. Since the article is written for those who are relative newcomers to esoteric teachings and the Science of the Seven Rays, the article does not provide comprehensive information about each ray; rather, it examines the latest material written after Alice Bailey's pivotal exegesis on the theme. However, the article does include a concise introduction and description of the rays, followed by a discussion of the rays from Rosicrucian, Anthroposophical, Theosophical and Psychological perspectives. Kovács stresses the contributions of Kurt Abraham and Michael Robbins whose work serves as the most important adjunct to Bailey's teachings to date. The article concludes with some practical examples of how to think more creatively about the rays.

The Path to Higher States of Consciousness as Perceived in the Upanishads, the Yoga Sutras, and the books of Alice A. Bailey is Kovács final full length contribution to the book. In this article, Kovács presents an overview of the tiered and evolving levels of consciousness as they are understood in the Vedas, the works of Patanjali and the teachings of Alice A. Bailey. In order to familiarize the reader with the various degrees of consciousness as they are reflected from the macrocosmic whole into the human microcosm, the author opens with a discussion of the Human Constitution as it is presented in Bailey's work. The author also draws upon numerous passages from the Upanishads which focus on Self-realization and the relationship between the universal and individual Soul, as well as Bailey's commentaries on the Yoga Sutras and Raja Yoga. A section on the Antahkarana as a means of approach to the Spiritual Triad is included.

In addition to the themes discussed above, the book contains appendices consisting of four brief informal papers. The first of these—*The Kundalini Syndrome*—investigates the traumatic and often misunderstood experience of kundalini arousal. In addition to examining the all-important requirements for a timely kundalini awakening, Kovács also outlines the numerous symptoms accompanying such an awakening.

The next paper, *Genius, Insanity and the Noble Middle Path*, is an intriguing commentary on the thin line between genius and insanity. The paper examines the lives of a number of individuals who exhibited qualities that are characteristic of both extremes. It also reflects upon genius in its purest form as seen in those who have learned to tread the path of balance or equilibrium between the pairs of opposites.

In another paper —*The Energy of Love*—Kovács attempts to probe the deeper meaning of Love as a “thing in itself” without necessarily linking it to a specific act of compassion or charity.

In the concluding paper, the author considers the genius of *Jan Smuts and the Concept of Holism*. The article touches upon Smuts' formative years, his years as statesman, scholar and a true spiritual visionary who developed the theory of “holism” in 1926 and a related theory of evolution. The paper concludes with a brief discussion about how Smuts' theories have been validated today.

In this interesting and accessible anthology of essays, Kovács shares his knowledge and insights into some of the many facets of the Ageless Wisdom teachings, making *The Path to Higher States of Consciousness* a valuable resource for all those who have set their foot on the spiritual path.

The Editorial Staff
The Esoteric Quarterly

Nicholas & Helena Roerich: The Spiritual Journey of Two Great Artists and Peacemakers, by Ruth A. Drayer, Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2003/2005, 360 pages. List price US\$21.95.

Nicholas and Helena Roerich are revered by millions of people for their contributions to modern esotericism. Along with Helena Blavatsky, Annie Besant, Alice Bailey, and a handful of others, they were selected by the Planetary Hierarchy to receive what we now call the Trans-Himalayan teachings, during that pivotal period in world history from 1875 to 1950. Nicholas is best-remembered for his legacy of spiritual art, though he did much more, while Helena served as amanuensis to the Master Morya to produce the Agni Yoga teachings.

Ruth Drayer's valuable—though in some ways disappointing—book was first published more than ten years ago, but a review at this time is appropriate in the light of recent attention on social media. Drayer's research, extending over fourteen years, is impressive. Much of the material she presents was not previously available, and original sources and private letters are quoted at length. Her writing style is lively, enabling her to hold the reader's attention.

Like Blavatsky, the Roerichs were Russian: Helena of noble birth, Nicholas from a wealthy family that played prominent roles in the professions, politics, and the military. They grew up in positions of privilege in the highly stratified society of Tsarist Russia, blessed with opportunities to travel, read, and learn. By any measure, they put those gifts to good use throughout their full lives together. The Roerichs had two sons: George, who became an expert in oriental languages; and Svetoslav, an artist and architect.

Nicholas & Helena Roerich focuses on Nicholas' art, his peacemaking efforts, and most importantly on the explorations of central and eastern Asia. Nicholas first established himself as an artist and was widely acclaimed in his native Russia and, after the Revolution of 1917, in the West. He conceived of the Master School of United Arts, which came to fruition in 1921, in New York City, with the backing of

wealthy supporters. It was to be an institution in which all the arts, along with their creators or performers, could be brought together in the service of world peace.

At the Masters', or Mahatmas', urging, however, the Roerichs were drawn to Asia, with another vision: "to establish and lead . . . the 'New Russia,' a Buddhist spiritual state in the areas surrounding the Altai Mountains, Mongolia, and the Gobi [Desert]" (p. 65). This second vision and the related quest to find the mythical Shamballa were the driving forces behind the expeditions that occupied the latter part of the 1920s. George Roerich accompanied his parents on the expeditions, and his knowledge of local languages was an enormous asset.

Drayer gives a good account of the hardships of the expeditions, on which Helena—whose health was always fragile—bravely accompanied her husband. They traversed frigid high mountain ranges, blistering deserts, and areas roamed by brigands or controlled by hostile warlords. In several instances, they were delayed for weeks or months by the petty bureaucracy of one country or another, and in one instance they nearly perished while confined over the winter months in a mountainous area on the border of Tibet because officials in the British Raj suspected that they were Bolshevik spies or revolutionaries (pp. 231ff).

Despite the hardships, the Roerich's experienced and recorded the beauty of Asia, made numerous archeological discoveries, and established lasting contacts with Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, and members of numerous ethnic groups. They were struck by the pervasiveness of legends, throughout Central Asia, of Jesus' travels to the Himalayas during the gospels' "silent years." And they learned much about Shamballa.

Ever promoting peace among nations, ethnic groups, and religions, Nicholas Roerich was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1929. The following year he proposed an international treaty, the Roerich Peace Pact, to protect art treasures and scientific discovery in the event of war. The treaty was signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt and twenty-two

other world leaders (p. xiii). Thirty-two countries were represented at the Second International Peace Banner Conference in 1932 (pp. 272-281).

The Great Depression struck in 1929, followed in 1934 by the Dust Bowl in the American and Canadian prairies. U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace, who at that time admired Roerich, devised a plan to send him to East Asia to bring back samples of drought-tolerant grass which might restore fertility to the affected areas. Nicholas agreed, seeing the expedition not just in terms of its botanical objectives but also as a fresh opportunity to promote his vision of a New Russia. But the expedition was doomed almost from the outset. It became caught up in the political standoff between China and Japanese-occupied Manchuria (Manchukuo). Japan—which the U.S. distrusted—was accommodating of the Roerichs and their mission. But the Chinese authorities were even more obstructive than they had been during the earlier expeditions.

Suspicious about his alleged ties with Bolshevism also surfaced again among U.S. officials, Wallace turned against his former friend, and the expedition was terminated (pp. 290-302). In a climate of accusations and outright lies, the Roerichs became *persona non grata* in America. Helena Roerich who had corresponded with Roosevelt, was forbidden to continue doing so.

Louis Horch, who had been a close friend and financial supporter, and to whom operation of the Master School of United Arts had been entrusted, also turned against the Roerichs, accusing Nicholas of being “an imposter and a cheat,” and “a dangerous person who mixed “politics with art and would be a troublemaker wherever he went” (p. 319). Horch even managed to oust Nicholas Roerich as a trustee of the School—the very institution that Nicholas had conceived of and founded. Priceless works of art and Helena’s private diaries were seized. Drayer quotes a harsh but accurate judgment by one of the Roerich’s loyal disciples: “[T]he entire Museum was stolen by criminals, people without any scruples, people who deliberately ousted the rightful shareholders and trustees

from the Institutions and who succeeded in winning the courts and the judges over to their side.”

These were just some of the setbacks and disappointments that plagued the last years of the Roerichs’ lives. Nicholas never reached Lhasa, the capital of Tibet; he never found Shambhalla, at least on the dense physical plane; and his vision of a Buddhist state—which he firmly believed had the support of the Mahatmas—was unrealized. Betrayed by friends and governments, the Roerichs retired to northern India, to live in relative seclusion. There they remained during World War II. They lived to see India and Pakistan win their long-sought independence from British rule. But Nicholas, who had worked so hard to bring people together, did not live to see peace in his adopted country. He made his transition in December 1947, as the two new nations went to war against each other. Helena continued her work for another eight years, at the urging of the Masters, before she too passed away.

Like many world disciples, the Roerichs faced many challenges, not least from some of their closest disciples. But their legacy speaks for itself. Drayer sums up their achievement thus: “Spiritual pioneers, searching for something greater than themselves, the Roerichs cut a path through the darkness for all of us” (p. 336).

A new Roerich Museum was chartered in New York City in 1958, containing 200 of Nicholas’s paintings and an extensive archive of his and Helena’s writings. It flourishes today and is visited by pilgrims from every part of the world. The Roerichs’ work also found favor in the Soviet Union in the 1980s, under the new political climate of *perestroika*. Svestoslav Roerich met with Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev and his wife Raisa, herself a student of Agni Yoga (pp. 339-340). Many of Nicholas’s paintings are now on permanent exhibition at museums in Russia, including the Nicholas Roerich Museum in Moscow. Other paintings found their way to museums around the world.

Ruth Drayer’s *Nicholas & Helena Roerich* makes a valuable contribution to the literature, and this reviewer has no hesitation in recom-

mending it to readers of *The Esoteric Quarterly*. But readers need to be aware that the book's title, subtitle and dedication do not accurately describe what it achieves. The book is a biography of *Nicholas* Roerich, rather than Nicholas and Helena. Moreover, its subtitle speaks of a "spiritual journey." The expeditions certainly merit that description, but Nicholas' inner journey is not discussed at any length. More attention is paid to political matters, and to interactions with friends and foes, than to the spiritual message of his paintings or to his writings.

The book, we are told, is "[d]edicated to Helena Ivanovna Roerich, Urusvati, the Light of the Star of the Morning, who foresaw the 'Era of the Woman' as a time requiring great courage,

cooperation, and compassion" (frontispiece). Helena is at Nicholas' side throughout the story, and certainly her courage and cooperation with her husband comes across. But little is said about her other than the brief account of her childhood, in the first chapter, and an equally brief account of her life after Nicholas' death. Even a single chapter would have been welcome, recalling her work with the Master Morya, the development of the Agni Yoga teachings, and her contribution to modern esotericism. As it is, we must turn elsewhere to find out why she could be called "Light of the Star of the Morning."

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